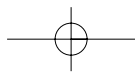
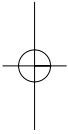
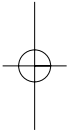




# Getting to the Heart of Leadership





# Getting to the heart of leadership

Emotional and Educational Leadership

*Megan Crawford*



Los Angeles • London • New Delhi • Singapore

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First published 2009

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SAGE Publications Ltd  
1 Oliver's Yard  
55 City Road  
London EC1Y 1SP

SAGE Publications Inc.  
2455 Teller Road  
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd  
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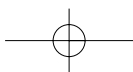
**Library of Congress Control Number: 20089227371**

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication data**

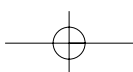
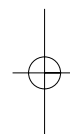
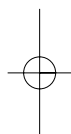
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-84787-169-5  
ISBN 978-1-84787-170-1 (pbk)

Typeset by Dorwyn, Wells, Somerset  
Printed in Great Britain by  
Printed on paper from sustainable resources

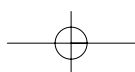
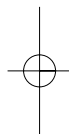
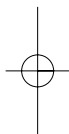


for Philip with much love





*The unstoppable humming of the most universal of  
melodies that only dies down when we go to sleep.*  
(Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza*, 2004)



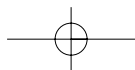
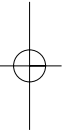
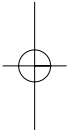
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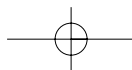
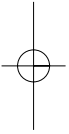
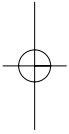
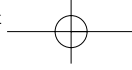


## Acknowledgements

This book would not have happened without my own emotional coherence, both in the process of writing, in the research work I did, and in encouraging me to become involved in academic life. I would like to thank: Marianne Coleman, for all her help with the thinking; my colleagues at the Institute of Education, especially Peter Earley, Derek Glover and Louise Stoll for supporting the writing process; Ron Glatter, for getting me started and encouraging me to continue; and my family for their support.

I also want to thank Matthew Waters at Sage who has been so helpful throughout.

Finally, I would like to thank all the headteachers who shared their time, their lives and their thoughts on headship with me. Some are included in depth in this book, but without all of you this book would not have been written.



# Chapter 1

## An Emotional Journey

### Introduction

This book is about people who become leaders in educational settings, and how understanding the emotional journey they make as leaders can help them progress in that journey. You may already be one of those leaders, or aspire to become one. I hope to make you more aware of the various debates around emotion and leadership, and inspire you to read more. As well as this, the book gives suggestions for reading if you wish to follow up particular areas for more personal understanding. The book draws on my own deep professional interest in how the headteacher's emotional geography (Hargreaves, 2000: 152) can profoundly influence the emotional climate of the school, which has been reflected in my earlier writings (Crawford, 2002; 2003; 2004). My personal background in counselling and psychology means that I am concerned with emotional reality and the construction of the self and, how headteachers, as people, function in leadership roles. How does personal emotional reality shape their view and practice of leadership? What influence does emotion have on the ways that educational leaders view and recall leadership situations? To begin to answer these questions, I will be stressing the interplay between leadership, emotion, and the organisation and how growing understandings of emotion can enhance and even challenge some of the prevailing orthodoxies in regard to educational leadership.

First, this book is both the story of emotion and leadership, and also the stories of individual headteachers told in order to help others reflect on their own journeys through leadership. I draw on research (conducted between summer 2004 and summer 2005) with 11 primary and secondary headteachers based on their own reflections on emotions as well as the influence of their life history, and school context. The concept of a 'personal leadership narrative' will be outlined to show not only that an individual's complexity is not adequately served by competency approaches to emotion, but also that school leadership, and in particular, headship is a complex synergy of emotion and leadership. As we go through, I will be sharing some of those examples so you as a leader can reflect on their similarities and differences. As a book, it is a journey both through and about the stories that people tell to each other and to themselves that shape the meaning of the work they do, and the leadership that they carry out.

Second, this book is being written at a time when the very sustainability of headship is being discussed, researched and debated at policy and personal levels. Some of the concepts, such as system leadership, federated leadership, and non-teacher leadership, have an emotional dimension that currently remains unexplored. This book will suggest what some of these might be, and how this could affect leadership practice in the future.

### **Layers of meaning in leadership**

When researching in education, I have always adopted as a basic principle that social reality is made up of many layers. These layers include the uniqueness of every person: their personality and life history, the place where they work, and the people they work with. The stance taken in this book is

that these layers are woven together, and given their meaning, by the affective aspects of social reality. In education today, more than ever before, there is an emphasis on the importance of extending knowledge of the affective domain for practitioners. This is reflected in the field of educational leadership studies.

In the book, I'll explore literature about emotion that is not explicitly concerned with educational leadership, with the aim of stimulating your interest so you might want to go away and read more. I also seek to value the personal voice and life stories of educational leaders as a way of exploring leadership issues. My aim in writing is to refocus attention on the individuals who become leaders in schools and in particular those who choose headship. This is because their individuality is far less considered in the literature, although the nature of educational leadership is already well explored. In much of the current work on educational leadership, the contested nature of leadership stands out. This is reflected in the emphasis on multiple ways of describing and analysing it. This trend has been described by Leithwood as 'adjectival leadership', where the description somehow becomes more important than the meaning. I want to explore individual lives in order to discuss their leadership against research more generally into emotion, and place people within their organisations. The book is framed, to paraphrase Bottery (2004: 2), to help headteachers deal better with the emotions which surround them, emotions which affect the realisation of their visions of educational purpose.

## My background

I was a teacher and a deputy headteacher. Later, I became a governor of primary and secondary schools. From this experience came my interest in professional support

(Crawford, Edwards and Kydd, 1998), and later, leading in difficult circumstances (Crawford, 2002; 2003). My research carried out in primary schools in special measures emphasised the part that the headteacher can play in empowering staff in order to achieve transformational effects:

As followers internalise the leader's vision, and trust and confidence in the leader are high, followers feel more confident and they develop a sense of working together as a team. (Crawford, 2002: 279)

In that research I also noted the emotional strain on those in leadership positions in difficult contexts. One headteacher stated:

It's very tiring, the paperwork and the waking up at 5:15 am and thinking about things. It takes a huge amount out of you, and there is only so much energy and amount of time you can put in. (ibid.: 280)

This viewpoint made me consider what emotional strain might be like for other heads in different contexts. Headteachers, it seemed, could unwittingly support the idea of headteachers being of central importance in the school, and that ideal 'professional' behaviour is rational and carefully emotionally controlled. Both of these concepts were often held at great personal cost by headteachers. My earlier research had suggested that a rational ideal is an illusion, not just in terms of desirability but also in practice. These developing interests in headteachers as people lead to this book.

## Emotion

Why then is emotion so important, and why should it be important to headteachers in particular? The English school

leader is held very accountable for the success or failure of their school through such markers as Ofsted and league tables. Other countries have a similar policy agenda that emphasises accountability. This accountability can be felt, as we saw above, as a very personal responsibility. Parents and the community may view the headteacher as the most important person in the school, responsible for their child's progress or lack of it. Because of such accountability, headship is an ever more demanding role. Gronn views the current climate for educational leadership as 'greedy work' (2003: 147), as it asks more and more of headteachers. As Shields aptly describes it:

Educational leadership is widely recognised as complex and challenging. Educational leaders are expected to develop learning communities, build the professional capacity of teachers, take advice from parents, engage in collaborative and consultative discussion making, resolve conflicts, engage in educative instructional leadership, and attend respectfully, immediately, and appropriately to the needs and requests of families with diverse cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Increasingly, educational leaders are faced with tremendous pressure to demonstrate that every child for whom they are responsible is achieving success. (Shields, 2004: 109)

James describes how leading effective schools is facilitated by the headteacher's recognition and understanding of the environment created by emotions and the power of often subconscious emotion (James, 2000). A very helpful starting point for focusing on this area is that made by Denzin, who suggests why emotion is so important. He proposes that:

Emotions cut to the core of people. Within and through emotion, people come to define the surface and essential, or core, meanings of who they are. (Denzin, 1984: 2

This places a firm emphasis on emotion at the centre of personal understanding of self. Understanding of self can also be the key to understanding others and the relationships those others have with the headteacher. This can include staff, but also parents, students and the wider school environment. When thinking of the importance of emotion in relationships, I like the idea that:

Our feelings signal to us, sometimes clearly, sometimes inchoately, something of the quality of our interactions, performances, and involvement in the world around us. (Newton, Handy and Fineman, 1995: 122)

In other words, how these feelings are embodied in personal practice is very important. Halpin talks of the operational image of the headteacher which echoes this. He notes 'the important psychological function that communicating positive invitational messages has for enabling individuals and groups to build and act on a shared vision of enhanced learning experiences for pupils' (2003: 77). I talk in more depth about this later in the book.

## What is emotion?

A difficulty that arises when working in the area of emotion and educational leadership is that terms such as 'emotion', 'emotional' and 'feelings' are used different ways by different writers, depending on their perspective. Gerrod Parrot (2001) suggests that everyone knows what emotion is until they are asked to define it. The fluidity of this area is implicit in the usage of terms such as 'emotion' itself and the related words 'affect', 'emotionality', 'mood' and 'feeling'. The dilemma is also reflected in the broad characterisation of emotions as either positive or negative elements of



organisational culture. Oatley and Jenkins explain this in a way that I find useful when they note that emotions:

often have aspects that we do not completely understand. They can be mere beginnings of something vague and unformed, with meanings that only become clear as we express them to others. At the same time, we sense that emotions lie close to our most authentic selves. (2003: 350)

The power of emotion may be concerned with incompleteness or leading when we do not know the answer (Oatley and Jenkins, 2003: 282). Oatley and Jenkins suggest that emotions have two aspects that have a substantial effect on other mental processes – an informational, conscious part which understands the object of our emotions and a second controlling part that has been constrained by evolution for coping with situations such as threats. An example of this is one of the comments made by a head in the study about classroom observation:

Judging classroom performance can be up to 75 per cent emotional, and it's a subjective thing and subject to feeling. You have a sense of things when you walk into a classroom. You look at the kids and the eyes. It's like when you are a teacher; you can see when the light is switched on. I have concerns about teachers who just deliver but you can't fault them for it. I would rather see a connection to certain children – to find the key to that child. It's all about making connections, and not just thinking it is a job. They may go on to other paths in life from something that happened when you taught them – so it is a huge responsibility.

'Making connections' is all about emotion. In the psychological literature, the term 'affect' is often used to indicate this area, and I use it when a generic point is being made

about emotional aspects of behaviour. So for a working definition, affect in schools is made up of:

- feelings (what we experience internally)
- emotions (feelings that we show)
- moods (feelings that persist over time).

Most of this book's focus will be on emotion, although feelings will play a part in the discussions. As one of the headteachers I talked to put it: 'Emotions are all about feelings. You get vibes. I can smell a rat at 50 yards.' However emotion is conceptualised, affect has a real and vital role to play not only in personal effectiveness as a headteacher/leader, but also in understanding leadership itself. This is because working together in groups has both a biological and a social component.

## Getting to the heart of school leadership

Relationships with staff, pupils and parents, are quite literally at the *heart of* education (Sergiovanni, 2003). The headteacher is at the centre of these professional emotional relationships. Their *heart for* education sets the context for all the other important relationships in the school. This view resonates with the concept of the head as tribal leader, or carrier of culture suggested by Sergiovanni (1995), and his or her role as a social or moral agent (Murphy and Beck, 1994).

Such a focus on the headteacher might at first seem to be going against the grain of current educational leadership thinking, when there is so much emphasis in both research and policy-making on distributed leadership, and most recently, system leadership. Knowledge of emotion and leadership is relevant to all forms of leadership, because of the social aspect of the role, and the importance of

influence. I would still argue that headship is a crucial factor in schools, where an effective headteacher may enable leadership in its distributed form. If their heart for education sets the context for all other personal relationships within schools, then the personal, emotional side of headship becomes one that is worth exploring further. Getting to the heart of leadership is therefore multifaceted, with the position of leader a crucial one in enabling leadership to be most effective for the educational purposes of schools.

Getting to the heart of leadership is an area, which has become more popular in recent years. Emotional intelligence (EI), for example, has had a strong influence in schools (Goleman, 1995). EI, however, has inherent dangers for the practitioner in education – there are dangers of oversimplification in converting complex concepts into bite-sized competences. Fineman (2000: 277–8) argues that emotion can easily become just another topic, whilst emotionalising organisations means that we are more able to look for new understandings of situations. ‘Emotionalizing organisations’ is part of the overall aim of this book. Bringing out new interpretations and understandings by understanding emotion is not just a competence of leaders, but is a lens through which to view leadership. In other words, I see emotion as inherent to the practice of leadership rather than separate from it. All organising actions are inseparable from and influenced by emotion.

### **Reclaiming leadership as a social and organisational process**

Reading writings on leadership, you are often left with the idea that leaders act apart from the organisation.

Leadership is a social process (Bell and Harrison, 1995; Duke, 1998). It depends on the relationships that are built both within the school, and also in the wider community. From this social viewpoint, I feel it is insufficient to concentrate attention on either 'emotion' or 'leadership'. To understand school leadership more fully, the phrase 'emotion and leadership' as two separate terms, don't really help. As Francesca, an experienced headteacher put it: 'Emotion is crucial to being able to interact with and understand other human beings. If you didn't have emotion it would make life incredibly difficult.'

Although the experience of work is drenched with emotion, it is often viewed as tangential rather than fundamental to leadership, but leadership cannot function without emotion. One head, Laura, told me:

I class myself as an emotional person, because feelings are an important part of my leadership style. Emotion management in school is not about control. I aim to be positive and can control the raw stuff. I use that to move out of that feeling, and try to orchestrate those feelings towards something positive. I really believe that if you talk up, you feel up, and can talk yourself and others into becoming positive and buoyant.

In Chapter Nine I consider positive management.

Headship is framed within various contexts: the local and national context, the school context and the personal context – all of which influences the personal emotional response of the headteacher. Emotion is at once a personal quality of the headteacher, and at the same time a quality of the social relationships in the school. This book concentrates on the interplay between the two. Although the focus will often be on headteachers, I hope that the discussion will also interest those in any leadership position in schools.

### Think points

Each chapter includes some think points to help you engage in greater detail with the ideas that are suggested. They focus on the relevance of what each chapter discusses to your leadership context. Before you read the rest of the book, you may like to try and unpick your own views on this sometimes sensitive and difficult area.

- 1 What is your current view of emotion and its relationship to leadership?
- 2 What has influenced this view? Be as specific as you can, recalling particular incidents.
- 3 Who has had the greatest impact on you emotionally in a work setting? Why?

