



Developing as an
EDUCATIONAL LEADER
and **MANAGER**

MEGAN CRAWFORD



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I would like to dedicate this book to my friend and mentor Marianne Coleman, without whose support this book would never have been finished. Her wise comments were greatly appreciated.

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Preface

This book is woven around the idea of a personal narrative. My own narrative is based, as yours will be, on a unique set of experiences in particular contexts. I have been involved in educational leadership in universities and in primary and secondary schools. If I were to tell you the complete story and engage in autobiography, this would engulf the entire first chapter of this book. Instead, I will concentrate on my own leadership narrative, a concept that I will explain more fully in Chapter 1. The story of how I have moved from working in schools to working in universities relates to how I have come to understand the relationship between theory in practice and educational leadership, which was the motivation to write this book. My story can be seen as the underlying narrative of this book. I started my career as a primary teacher and moved into the higher education sector after eleven years but retained my interest in schools by becoming a governor. In schools, I rapidly (in retrospect too rapidly) moved from being a classroom teacher to a year group leader, to a deputy head teacher. When my children were small, I pragmatically took a part-time administrative post in higher education, having recently finished a Masters degree, in order to spend more time with my family. This moving in and out of jobs reflects what is known about many women's career patterns. I was encouraged by a valued mentor to move into writing and lecturing, and became part of a highly motivated team of people whose experience, warmth and intelligence made me want to continue with this new career, something that I had never planned to do. When I reflect back upon it, the need to stay true to my values as a teacher was at the heart of this move. Whether in primary schools or in university, I have always wanted to teach and discover more about working with others in organisations. Ex colleagues might suggest that 'nosey' would be a better description. At the same time, I was keen to keep up with the daily realities in primary schools, so in 1990 I became a school governor, a role which I thought would be short term but has continued up to now. Over 20 years I have had the privilege of being involved in five different schools in England, with age ranges from 4 to 18. A unique part of my leadership narrative is that I have been able to be involved in starting three new schools from the very beginning (Crawford, 2007). All these governing body experiences were diverse: from being asked to chair a school board in

severe difficulties, to a tiny village primary, to setting up a large secondary school from a greenfield site. This has enabled me to see the way that theory and practice work together in leadership, and perhaps become more adept at understanding the viewpoints of other governors whose backgrounds are not in education. The role of governors in England is 'complicated, demanding, and goes on largely unnoticed' (James et al., 2010: 1), but I have found it particularly useful as an academic to be able to continually reflect on the reality of schools and understand the impact policy changes have in particular contexts. I have also spent parts of my life living in other countries. Eagle-eyed readers will spot references to life in the USA. Within the university sector, I have been privileged to teach leaders and potential leaders from around the world, and have learnt a great deal from those Master's and Doctoral students, not only about context in leadership, but also about their personal commitment to reflective practice (Schön, 1983) and the future of young people in those countries. All these instances make up my narrative and, as I examine it, several threads become apparent to me that concern people, values and a love of teaching. There are, of course, many more, and more of my own story will become apparent as you read on. Reflecting on my career as a narrative allows me to own difficult periods where certain critical events either changed my story entirely or took me in a new direction. My personal journey has caused me to reflect on the interface between research and practice in education, and particularly in educational leadership. In a sense, then, this book aims to bridge some of the gap between what academics write about and what practitioners 'do'. It draws upon both theory and practice. There is a firm emphasis throughout that the best educational leaders are dynamic and adaptable and are most effective when they draw upon understandings developed from theory. Your own narrative forms a very particular story which, I will argue, you can use to inform lived lives in schools and other educational organisations. My narrative and examples of the stories of others, discussed in this book, are there to help you develop as a leader and manager, by allowing you space to think more clearly about yourself as a leader and manager.

The author

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Section 1

Evolving as an
educational leader and
manager

1

Becoming and staying an educational leader

In this chapter I will:

- explain the structure of the book;
- discuss and define the idea of a leadership narrative and how it could be useful to you;
- suggest that you may wish to consider a reflective journal, or companion, as a tool for development so that you can continually reflect as you read through the book.

Near and far

This book is about educational leaders, and specifically about those who lead schools, both in England where I live and in other countries and international contexts. There are also, I hope, aspects of the book which offer useful insights for those of you who work in educational settings other than schools. This book is based around the idea of a reflective journey into your own development and aims to make you think about how your past learning as a leader relates to your present needs as a professional. Inevitably, I will draw upon my own experiences, which will be contextually and time bounded. However, you will also be offered many opportunities to compare and contrast my experiences, and those included in the vignettes, with your own professional learning journey. This journey is captured for me in the phrase ‘personal leadership narrative’.

The book is divided into five sections. The first three sections and the final one, focus on the ideas and issues that concern educational leaders,

and the fourth reframes the role of the leader within the context of research. Throughout the book, but especially in Section 4, I will discuss some of the dilemmas and discussions that educational leaders have around theory and practice, touching on definitions, debates and controversies. I will discuss the extent to which leaders can use their experience to work with theory and vice versa, covering areas that I think leaders and potential leaders will find most useful and sometimes difficult. The book thus differs from others that are about leadership development generally, as it adopts the individual perspective so that the leadership roles in the organisation can be examined more clearly. In that, the perspective I adopt is rooted in the organisational, in both social and psychological aspects. Chapter 17 goes into more detail about my own personal approach.

Other perspectives are also introduced and examined because I will argue that very capable leaders can articulate their own perspectives clearly and know that research and practice are intermingled. Although there will be reference to practical processes that leaders may have to deal with, this is not the main focus of the book. Instead, the book is more akin to an inner, intellectual journey to illuminate leadership and management for you as a developing educational leader. Your written reflections in the companion will augment this journey.

The personal

In previous writing, I have noted that we should take as a starting point the fact that leaders lead from themselves as people, albeit within particular organisational and policy contexts (Crawford, 2009). Educational leaders globally share many of the same dilemmas and challenges because they are all dealing with people while dealing with dilemmas and challenges specific to their own contexts. The commonalities of those who choose to take up leadership roles all over the globe are often to do with their own values such as concern for young people and the life-enhancing side of education. Three different aspects of leadership – the person, the place and the policy context – make up a narrative that is woven together over time. As in all good stories, there are times when the plot thickens and out of it may come an effective educational leader, while at other times an ineffective educational leader may appear. The complex issues involved are something that any aspiring educational leader needs to understand, because such understanding can determine whether a leader succeeds at the task in hand, but is also able to sustain themselves and their organisation over time.

Policy context

Any policy context for education has its challenges, as changes and external mandates bring with them difficult choices for educational leaders as well as new opportunities. It may be going too far to suggest that policy-makers in some countries seem to assume that school leaders can change course, make policy implementation quickly and without strain, and have a work ethic which puts students, parents and the community ahead of the leader's own family. Leaders can be offered leadership courses but few clear opportunities to sustain themselves as they try to balance their life and work. I argue that educational leaders need to sustain themselves before they can help others to work together creatively, and need to grasp this need for reinvigoration early in their careers before they are completely overtaken by the demands of the job. This is especially true of the job carried out by head teachers/principals. To give you an example, regular annual surveys have highlighted the decline in applications for senior posts in England and Wales, particularly in primary schools (Howson and Sprigade, 2011). The figures for your country may be similar or radically different. Whatever your context, there is no doubt that the woman or man at the top has many stakeholders holding them to account, with all the attendant pressures that brings. Inevitably this leads to what Gronn has called 'greedy work' (2003b: 147). MacBeath and Townsend (2011) quoted one school leader who articulated what many, certainly in England and Scotland, feel: 'We now seem to be responsible for a lot of society's well-being, as well as education issues, and in many ways it is becoming an impossible job' (p. 106). Leaders in schools are not responsible for the whole of society's well-being, but they do need to attend to their own well-being, and I will look at this more closely in Chapters 9 and 17.

Whenever a book on leadership comes out, it is usually in the midst of some educational change or other, whether you are in England, Scotland or elsewhere in the world. This makes it challenging to write a book on developing as an educational leader because of the importance of context in leadership. However, because my foremost intent is to write a book for and about the individual, I hope it will be relevant to any reader who is either thinking about or beginning to think of themselves in some kind of leadership role in an educational organisation. Parts of the book may also be relevant if you are a more experienced leader, but its key focus is on developing leaders. Instead of looking at the process of leadership as an individualist concept, the book is focused on working with others and challenges you to be dynamic as an individual leader enhancing your own practice by reflecting on your self-development at each stage of your career.

Leadership as a narrative

Why people become educational leaders and how they sustain that commitment and energy over months and years is of interest to both policy-makers and to individual schools intent on growing and sustaining their own leadership teams. In a fast-moving educational world, the challenges for leaders are great and the policies ever changing. This book does not intend to proselytise, suggesting everyone should aim to become a principal or head teacher, because there are many facets of leadership which are worthwhile in themselves and which may or may not lead to that particular 'top' post. Leadership is a term that will run through the book rather than leaders per se, because leadership should be seen, I will argue, as part of an understanding of organisations (Ogawa and Bossert, 1997) and not just as a personality trait of an exceptional individual. I regard leadership as an organisational quality but, at the same time, I ask each reader to consider the personal leadership qualities they can bring, or develop, so that their organisation is able to adapt and change over time in whatever their particular context. As you read through the book, you will see that the view promoted sees leadership and the organisation as woven together. A key assumption I make is that one of the roles of leaders is to see that the people that make up the organisation are valued and recognised. This assumption can be interpreted in many ways, some of which I will return to later, but it focuses on the centrality of people and the leadership of people to any well-run organisation. Valuing people could mean helping an individual towards promotion or, in a more difficult sense, helping them move with dignity out of their role if leadership is not for them. In this, the book takes a humanistic perspective on leaders and leadership. This comes from my own leadership narrative.

Your resource

This book can also be viewed as a resource that can be used at different times in an evolving leadership journey. In fact, my aim is to set out a book that prospective, developing and current educational leaders can dip in and out of. If there were a book to compare it with, my suggestion would be my one of my favourite fictional travel books, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams. If you have read this, you may remember that the Guide had inscribed on the back, 'Don't panic', and its alien guide, Ford Prefect, suggested you always carry a towel as well. This book agrees with the sentiment, but instead of asking you to bring along a towel for your journey, I will be asking you to instead take with you: an open mind, a questioning voice and the desire to learn

more about yourself as an educational leader. Like the Guide, the way you use this book will be different for each person, as life will be for you as a leader. If I were to be a coercive leader, I might suggest that you read this book from cover to cover but, realistically, parts of it will be used more at some times than others. So, read the first and second chapters and then plot your course through the chapters that are most relevant to you.

Narratives

This chapter highlights the centrality of your own narrative to your personal development and by thinking of your life as a story you can begin to examine more closely your own leadership style and your relationships with others. I will suggest that developing yourself over time involves you not only becoming more aware of your strengths through this kind of narrative, but also allows you to learn from critical incidents that take place in your life as you develop to your fullest potential as a leader. Developing such self-reflection is crucial to enriching your own leadership. This chapter, then, serves as an introduction, establishing the idea of your career as a story you tell to yourself and others, and which you can use to reflect on as you move forward – a leadership narrative. Initially it may seem strange to think of storytelling as something that can help with both personal development and organisational analysis, but storytelling is very powerful.

Many [accounts] ... are highly charged narratives, not merely recounting 'events', but interpreting them, enriching them, enhancing them, and infusing them with meaning ... such accounts can be seen as an attempt to re-create reality poetically. (Gabriel, 2000: 31)

School leadership takes place in a myriad of contexts around the globe and some of the examples in this book are drawn from that rich international context. There are many opportunities in the book to compare and contrast your experiences with that of others. Engaging with the personal meaning of your story – and, importantly, the stories of others – can be very useful for you in understanding more about how and why leaders make meaning for their organisations.

A view of leadership or management

For me, leadership is at once an organisational quality and a personal quality. This is true for leaders at whatever stage in their career they find themselves. As you read this, I have no idea whether you are an experienced

educational leader in Hong Kong looking for inspiration, a teacher in rural Canada or a newish year head in England wondering what the future may hold. Crucially, this book aims to promote critical thought and constructive analysis about what it means to be a leader in schools, over time, in different contexts and with radically different government accountability structures. Later in the book, I will look at whether there is any difference between being a leader or a manager, and if there is, why it may not matter. For now, I will be using the terms interchangeably because I see them as creatively entwined and complementary. Different terms are used at different times because of the recent emphasis by many policy-makers on leadership as a 'magic bullet'. This will be discussed in Chapter 3. For now, it is worth bearing in mind any differences that you see between the two and noting them down in a journal.

The importance of reflective writing

As a way to begin to understand your own narrative while reading the book, whether you read it through sequentially or in chunks, I suggest you start a companion for your travels in the form of a journal. This could be a notebook or a virtual space somewhere. Whatever you choose, there are specific activities in the book where I will suggest that you spend time, maybe even just a few moments, with your journal. I am assuming that you are reading this book in the first place because you see yourself as someone on a leadership journey, who is willing to be reflective in order to best benefit from the professional development opportunities that the book affords. To start you off, here is your first opportunity to tell your own story, in writing.

Activity 1

Briefly sketch out your educational journey, starting with your own schooling. Then, look back over your career so far and note down significant people, places and events. Note the nature of their significance to your leadership journey. Were they significant because they moved your ideas and career on positively, or were they difficult and/or traumatic and made you change your own thinking about leadership? At this early stage, try to identify one event of each kind, and what it taught you about yourself, as a person and professionally. In the following section, I will ask you to add to this activity.

I introduced the idea of a personal leadership narrative in a previous book (Crawford, 2009). This has also been called the 'personal interpretative

framework' (Kelchtermans et al., 2011). Both of these similar concepts invoke the way that leaders and their ideas develop over time: they take into account retrospective views of experiences as well as the importance of the here and now in personal development. Your identity as a leader is formed partly through such narratives. Just like schools as organisations use narratives to manage meaning, communicate core values and negotiate social order and identity (Armstrong, 2011), so leaders use them to do similar things at the personal level. Narratives can help express emotions and help the reader begin to understand the current organisational context or lived reality of schooling. At the same time, narratives help construct new ideas, not just for the leaders themselves but for those they work with.

Telling your story

Narrative is linked to leadership in many significant ways, through past events, through talk, through the personal sense of self, and in the culture of schools and schooling. For each person, this narrative will be different and personal. Roberts (2002) sums up this process of recalling events and putting them in a particular personal context:

In our own personal conceptions of our biographical time we are aware of our own mortality but not our actual end; we also remember the 'past' but cannot live it again except in the imagery of recollection. (p. 171)

In particular, he suggests that an individual life is full of events never completed – interpretations that lie within the consciousness of the interpreter. Interpretation and consciousness together make up a key frame for the way leaders see their own narrative. This will inevitably be full of ambiguity about the past, present and future.

Recognising the role of memory is important to this book because the personal *leadership* narrative involves what Briner (1999) calls 'our history, present and anticipated future', and memory will be shaped by other forces. So leadership narratives are not memories per se, but much more about the stories that people use to make sense of situations. Several authors (Pascal and Ribbins, 1998; Southworth, 1995) have over time given very clear accounts of leaders in action, speaking in their own words. You might like to read some of these accounts yourself.

Sparrowe (2005) has a useful idea to think about, which relates to the activity that you have just completed. He suggests that using the idea of a narrative crystallises the fact that the self changes and moves through time and events. 'The narrative self is not a constant self, identical through time, but the subject that experiences change, reversal, and surprise' (p. 426). Change, reversal and surprise are very important parts of the educational

leadership narrative. Sparrowe also usefully outlines how a narrative works in practice. To make sense of our lives we use different kinds of stories to tell others about events and to relate each event in our lives to the ones that have preceded it and will come after. He notes:

One way to do that is to recognize an event as the outcome of an intention – this happened because I intended it to. Another way is to construe the event as the effect of the intentions of some other individual, entity, or contextual factor. Put another way, when we think about ourselves in relation to our actions, we often do so in small plot segments [...] Plot is the organizing theme of a narrative. It weaves together a complex set of events into a single story.

It could be argued that recognising the plotline becomes easier as you become an experienced leader, partly because there are only so many plots, but also your self-awareness will be more developed. Sparrowe suggests that self-awareness can be aided in many ways, and work, such as writing your own life story and keeping journals, can be seen as the most common form of accessing narrative (Bush and Glover, 2003; Crawford, 2004). It also offers a space to reflect. Sparrowe suggests that writing your own obituary can help you see the plot of your life, but perhaps this should only be attempted when you are in the right frame of mind! Other activities build on the basic reflection in Activity 1. One such is 'The Reflective Best Self Portrait' (Dutton et al., 2006) where people get feedback on their unique strengths as individuals from significant others, not just by listing them but by relating three stories of when they feel they were at their best. Sparrowe calls this 'the narrative construction of an esteemed self'. Adding this idea to your journal could be a useful extra exercise. He also advocates engaging leaders in understanding what Luthans and Avolio (2003) refer to as trigger events. In Activity 1, consideration of these may have informed your understanding. These events, like a denouement in a soap opera, represent transitions in the plot of your narrative identity. He notes: 'Enriching the variety of alternative but positive plot lines enables developing leaders to find in others new ways of being.' For me this is important. A book that was totally introspective about the leader and his/her own narrative would not be very useful, I believe. The leadership narrative should not be viewed in isolation, as others are very much engaged in the process, from students, to staff, to the wider community. Later in the book I will look more closely at the role of the wider community in such engagement.

Writing or telling a narrative is all about reframing situations in order to understand them better. The reframing process is ongoing in a career. One of the theoretical structures that you may find useful in your leadership development is to frame your choices and opportunities in different ways, using some of the resources given in the book. When I work with education leaders on postgraduate courses, I have found that

the concept of reframing has proved very useful to students of leadership, especially when applied to organisations (Bolman and Deal, 2003) as well as to your own narrative. I will return to Bolman and Deal's conception of framing later (in Chapter 5), because frames are a useful starting point for analysing any particular management problem that is concerning you, perhaps starting with the one of the four frames that you feel you use least often in order to give yourself a new viewpoint. You may want to briefly scan that part of the book now.

The idea of story and narratives is one that most of us are familiar with, and the personal leadership narrative is complex, many layered and ever evolving. It chimes in with much of contemporary leadership theory and practice that describes authenticity. Although authenticity can be seen as a contested concept (Fineman, 2000), as an idea it can be useful if it is viewed in relation to self-awareness of one's fundamental values and purpose rather than what others judge to be authentic. Leaders' sense of self will be framed by government policy, parents and the community, students and teachers and their own life experiences. Awareness that this is so is vital, and one of the most helpful aspects of personal leadership development to understand from the start if educational leaders are to become more resilient and less reluctant to take up challenging leadership positions. In terms of narrative, the plot of your leadership story may be at the beginning, or at the end of Act Two. Wherever you are in the plotline, this book will endeavour to help you make sense of your narrative, and look at ways of enhancing your knowledge of both theory and practice.

Of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning is at the heart of all that education is about and should be central to why you want to lead and manage effectively. Your personal leadership narrative will draw upon both your own experiences as a learner at school and beyond, and on your ability to work with others. The book will discuss how school leaders can develop and nurture talent in curriculum leadership, and foster a climate for professional development for all staff whether they are teachers or not. There is not a specific section in this book that deals with leading teaching and learning. That is because my own core values assume that the educational leader is a leader of teaching and learning, and this is the key core function of a school leader. I take this for granted because I believe that the best educational leaders come from a background that is enriched by their own work with young people on teaching and learning. This experience offers them real pedagogical insight, which makes them able to identify and tackle key learning and teaching aspects of schools. This