Deputy and Assistant Heads: Building leadership potential

Full Report | Summer 2003

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NCSL National College for School Leadership

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Introduction

The purpose of this review is to provide the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) with a synthesis of the literature pertaining to deputy and assistant headteachers in secondary, primary and special schools. The literature in both cases is substantially smaller than that relating to headteachers or principals but this review maps the existing empirical base in order to highlight key themes, issues and challenges relating to this important leadership group.

The role

Role and responsibilities

- Role tensions exist for deputy or assistant heads as the responsibilities often overlap with those of the headteacher. In some cases, deputies are expected to fulfil all the responsibilities of the headteacher and to deputise fully when the headteacher is away from the school.
- Within most schools assistant and deputy headteachers are given particular areas of responsibility such as discipline, staff development data-management or attendance.
- The main role of the assistant or deputy headteacher is considered to be one of ensuring stability and order in the school. They view the role as having a maintenance rather than a developmental or leadership function.
- The leadership potential of assistant and deputy headteachers in many schools is not being fully released or exploited. The leadership capabilities of deputy and assistant headteachers are not being developed in the role.

Preparation for headship

- The experience of being a deputy or assistant headteacher is not always helpful preparation for headship because of the lack of direct leadership experience some deputy or assistant headteachers encounter in this role.

- The absence of targeted professional training and leadership development for assistant or deputy headteachers is considered to be a major drawback in preparing for headship.

Contemporary changes in role

- There is increased pressure on assistant and deputy headteachers within schools to meet the many demands and requirements imposed externally upon schools and generated internally within schools.

- This expanded set of responsibilities inevitably places an additional demand on the time of deputy and assistant headteachers. In most cases, extra time has not been allocated and more 'personal' time is being taken to complete the tasks required.

- In primary schools there is a particular tension between the teaching and management roles of the deputy and a great pressure upon the time available to fulfil both roles.

- The influence and involvement of the assistant or deputy headteacher in leadership and development activities differs considerably across schools.

- In some schools assistant and deputy headteachers remain a central part of the discussion and decision-making process while in other schools the decisions are still made by the headteacher with little real consultation.
- Where assistant and deputy principals build up strong relationships with principals the possibility for broadening leadership responsibilities and extending responsibility for developing the school is increased.

Access and career progression

Professional development

- Assistant and deputy headteachers often experience a lack of professional support in their role. The support of the headteacher and other members of the leadership team is a key contributor to feeling valued and motivated in the role.
- Where deputy and assistant headteachers are given leadership responsibilities within the school, higher levels of job satisfaction follow.
- There are currently limited opportunities for formal leadership training for assistant and deputy headteachers. This is felt to be a major drawback in preparing for headship and becoming more effective in the role.

Gender issues

- There are more men who are deputy headteachers, assistant headteachers and headteachers in the UK. Arguably, this sends out a negative message to women who aspire to such roles.
- There is evidence to suggest that women are less likely to seek promotion to headship than men irrespective of experience or capability.
- The responsibilities allocated to men and women in deputy or assistant headship positions differ considerably. Women are more likely to deal with pastoral matters and men with discipline and curriculum matters.
- Women feel under more pressure to 'prove themselves' than men in roles as assistant and deputy headteachers. This is even more strongly the case for women from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Ethnicity

- Being a school leader from an ethnic minority group presents significant personal and professional challenges.
- Assistant and deputy headteachers from ethnic minority groups have reported feeling that they feel they have to work harder and are allowed to fail less than their white peers.
- Black teachers are less likely to be encouraged to apply for promotion to senior roles than their white counterparts and are more likely to be made to teach subjects for which they were not qualified.
- Ethnic minority teachers are less satisfied with teaching as a career than their white counterparts and are more likely to be working outside teaching in five years time.

Distributed leadership

- A distributed form of leadership suggests an emergent leadership role for deputy and assistant headteachers where they are centrally involved in building culture and leading change within the school.
- An emergent leadership role for an assistant or deputy headteacher would necessitate communicating and developing vision, promoting shared understanding amongst staff, working as a change agent (understanding change processes, initiating programmes and encouraging participation).
- An emergent leadership role will entail more responsibility for planning and co-ordinating change within the school and it is important that assistant and deputy headteachers are fully prepared for the demands of this leadership role.

Implications for future professional development and training

- There is a need for specialist training for those who see assistant and deputy headship as a career choice rather than a step towards headship.
- People skills, communication skills, knowledge of leadership theory, techniques for improving curriculum and instruction and working with teams are considered by deputy and assistant headteachers to be important elements in any future professional development programmes.
- The research highlights a need for professional development programmes that focus specifically on leadership skills, knowledge and understanding for assistant and deputy headteachers.
- To attract deputies and assistant headteachers of ethnic minority backgrounds, there needs to be an acknowledgement of the difficulties that they face and specific introductory and support programmes for those who are considering such a career move.
- More research into the particular development needs of these groups is required to ensure that future provision is relevant, appropriate and ultimately effective.

1. Introduction

> "Remarkably little is known or published about deputy heads"
>
> Southworth (1998: 89)

The purpose of this review is to provide NCSL with a synthesis of the literature pertaining to deputy and assistant headteachers in secondary, primary and special schools. The literature in both cases is substantially smaller than that relating to headteachers or principals but this review maps the existing empirical base in order to highlight key themes, issues and challenges facing this important group of school leaders. Every attempt has been made to relate findings from the international literature to the contemporary educational context in England. It will be inevitable that some studies undertaken in other countries will not be directly useful or relevant to school leaders here. Consequently, only those studies that make a contribution to knowledge about deputy and assistant headteachers and inform future research and development have been included.

1.1 Identification and selection of studies for the review

Any attempt to integrate a body of research into a coherent conceptual framework that analyses conceptual, substantive and methodological issues must acknowledge any limitations at the outset. The knowledge base on deputy and assistant headteachers is diverse and by comparison to other formal leadership positions in school (ie head, head of department) its empirical base is thin. A quick perusal of the literature of the 1980s and 1990s would suggest that the field is gaining more knowledge about the assistant or deputy headteacher's role particularly in relation to organisational development. However, this review took a critical and cautious stance to the literature and scrutinised the efficacy of conclusions drawn and findings proposed.

The literature review was conducted using a range of electronic databases, eg ERIC, BEI, the CJIE, BIDS service and Psyclit. These databases covered the UK and other English speaking countries especially the USA, Canada and Australia. A number of different keywords were used to interrogate the literature including 'deputy head', 'assistant head', deputy principal', 'assistant principal', 'school leadership' and 'leadership'. Consequently, the review includes journal articles, dissertation studies and papers presented at peer reviewed conferences. Every effort was made to ensure that the review was undertaken systematically although the lack of good quality literature presented some particular barriers and challenges. To assist the selection process, criteria in the form of questions were used to evaluate and systematically assess the quality of the research outputs before including them in the final review. These questions are as follows:

- Is the study clearly within the scope and domain of the review?
- Is the study empirically based with a robust design and methodology?
- Is the validity of the evidential base clear from the study?
- Are the findings generalisable beyond the context of the study?
- Are there implications for future research and development?

A previous small-scale trawl of the literature on deputy and assistant headteachers highlighted the paucity of research evidence in this area and consequently every effort was made to include as much relevant material as possible (Muijs and Harris, 2002). However, a significant number of studies were rejected from the review on the basis of relevance and quality or because they

were descriptive rather than empirical accounts of leadership at deputy and assistant level. All other relevant studies of the quality and standard required were included in the review.

The main aim of the literature review was to produce a comprehensive and accessible account of what is known about deputy and assistant headteachers. The prime objectives of the review are to:

- systematically map the existing literature concerning assistant and deputy headship
- highlight what is known and identify what is still to be known about these two important leadership roles
- provide a summary of the key themes and issues emerging from the empirical base
- present research findings in a way that is useful and accessible for practitioners, NCSL and policy-makers
- offer a summary of the central themes that will assist NCSL in its ongoing development of support for school leaders at all levels

The review is based on a bibliography of a total of 70 papers, books or articles relating to deputy and assistant headship. Fifty per cent of the publications relate to education in the UK (primarily England). Most of the remainder were conducted in the USA, with a few publications from Australia completing the sample.

1.2. The review: rationale and structure

Leadership has long been established as a key factor in school effectiveness and school improvement (see Hallinger and Heck, 1996;1998). The evidence from the international literature demonstrates that effective leaders exercise an indirect but powerful influence on the effectiveness of the school and on the achievement of students (Leithwood et al, 1999). Whilst the quality of teaching strongly influences levels of pupil motivation and achievement, it has been consistently argued that the quality of leadership matters in determining the motivation of teachers and the quality of teaching in the classroom (Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 1999). In one of the most comprehensive studies of school effectiveness, the involvement of the deputy headteacher was found to be one of the most significant school factors affecting student achievement (Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis and Ecob, 1988). However, the research base on deputy and assistant headteachers is far from extensive despite the clear implication that leadership at this level can have a positive impact upon school development and student learning outcomes.

Most recently, the idea of distributed leadership has received renewed interest and enthusiasm within the leadership field (Gronn, 2000; Harris 2002;3 and Spillane et al, 2001). The shift away from the normative position of the dominant, single leader towards a more egalitarian, democratic model of leadership highlights the importance of those occupying formal and informal leadership roles within the school (Muijs and Harris, 2003). This point is reinforced by Hallinger and Heck (2003: 231) who state "in the year 2002 it is foolish to think that only principals provide leadership for school improvement", implying a need for empirical investigation and serious consideration of alternative sources of leadership in the school, particularly deputy and assistant headteachers.

It has been suggested that too much of the school leadership literature has relied upon the accounts of headteachers to define effective leadership in action (Rasik and Swanson, 2001; Owens, 2001; Morrison, 2002). By comparison, the concentration on other established school leaders, such as assistant or deputy headteachers, with certain exceptions, has not been forthcoming (Harvey and Sheridan 1995; Ribbins 1997). Yet in last decade the deputy and assistant headteacher's role has secured a much stronger institutional presence. Consequently,

this review considers the existing literature on these leadership positions within schools and considers the implications for professional development and future research.

The review is divided into four sections following this introduction. Section two outlines the research evidence concerning the role and responsibilities of deputy and assistant headteachers. Section three explores the research evidence concerning the type or form of leadership associated with deputy or assistant headship and explores issues of ethnicity and gender. Section four considers the implications for professional development arising from the research base and section five offers a brief commentary on the evidence from the review and offers suggestions for further research.

Section 2: The role

2.1 Role and responsibilities

A disproportionate amount of the literature in the review focused upon elements of the role and in particular, the responsibilities associated with deputy or assistant headship. This concentration upon the duties and responsibilities of assistant headteachers and deputy headteachers frequently raised issues of role demarcation and by association the relationship with the headteacher. The literature pointed unequivocally towards tensions concerning the exact role of the assistant or deputy headteachers in comparison with the headteacher. Often, in secondary schools, the deputy head role focused upon either pastoral or academic responsibilities, whereas in primariy schools the role often covered both areas. However, the degree to which some of these responsibilities clashed and overlapped with those of the headteacher remained an important tension for deputy and assistant headteachers. In some cases deputies and assistant heads were expected to fulfil all the responsibilities of the headteacher and to deputise fully when the headteacher was away from the school. In other cases, their role was clearly a subservient one to the headteacher and tasks were delegated to them without negotiation. A survey of over 400 deputy principals in Australia found that the majority of this group perceived a lack of clarity in their role which led to difficulties of role demarcation with the principal (Harvey, 1994). There was also a view that deputy principals needed a much stronger leadership role than they actually possessed and that the role was too reactive with little real scope for leading innovation and change. As a direct result, job dissatisfaction and low levels of motivation were prevalent in up to 20 per cent of those surveyed (Harvey, 1994).

Marshall (1992) similarly points to the lack of a 'real' leadership role for many assistant headteachers. This study illuminates how many assistant heads were required to undertake the routine administrative tasks not wanted by the headteacher. Koru (1993) reinforced this finding in a study which showed that routine record keeping and paperwork were tasks most often delegated to assistant principals by the principal (Koru, 1993). An earlier study revealed that the secondary assistant principal role was one largely preoccupied with timetabling and the management of student behaviour (Reed and Himmler, 1985). Later studies point towards the fact that assistant heads were most often given responsibility to look after discipline and attendance issues in the school. In summary, discipline and attendance were found to be the two most common responsibilities of assistant principals in America (Scoggins and Bishop 1993).

Nearly a decade later, discipline and attendance were still identified as being the main duties of assistant principals in the US for 77 per cent of those surveyed (Weller and Weller, 2002). This study showed that the main role of the assistant head was still considered to be one of ensuring stability and order in the school. In short, the assistants or deputy heads had a maintenance rather than a developmental function within the school and were not acting, in most cases, as leaders within the organisation (Weller and Weller, 2002). This absence of a 'real' leadership role amongst deputy and assistant heads is reiterated across many studies and countries (Mertz 2000).

Various research studies point to the fact that the lack of leadership responsibility is a major source of deep dissatisfaction for deputy and assistant headteachers (Harvey and Sheridan,1995). An American study found that assistant heads wanted to spend more time on curriculum development and instructional supervision and less time on routine tasks. It highlighted how this in-balance caused dissatisfaction with the role (Cantwell, 1993). A more recent American study similarly reported far higher levels of job satisfaction among deputy

principals who were less involved with pupil discipline matters and more actively engaged with teacher and organisational development (Chen, Blendinger and McGrath, 2000).

A survey in the US that specifically explored job satisfaction among assistant headteachers found that those who believed they were undertaking leadership responsibilities reported higher levels of job satisfaction (Sutter, 1996). Another study similarly found that assistant heads who had a stronger instructional leadership role demonstrated higher levels of motivation and self-efficacy (Pellicer, Anderson, Keefe, Kelley and McCleary, 1990). The research evidence would suggest that assistant heads want to take on a stronger instructional leadership role and to have a clearer demarcation between their leadership role and the leadership role of the headteacher (Pellicer, Anderson, et al, 1990).

Summary of key points

- Role tensions exist for deputy or assistant heads as the responsibilities often overlap with those of the headteacher. In some cases deputies are expected to fulfil all the responsibilities of the headteacher and to deputise fully when the headteacher is away from the school.
- Within most schools assistant and deputy heads are given particular areas of responsibility such as discipline, staff development, data-management or attendance.
- The main role of the assistant or deputy head is considered to be one of ensuring stability and order in the school. They view their role as being a maintenance rather than a developmental or leadership function.
- The leadership potential of assistant and deputy heads in many schools is not being fully released or exploited. Their leadership capabilities are not being developed in the role.

2.2 Preparation for headship

One key assumption about the deputy or assistant headteacher is that they aspire to headship and that their current role is an important stage in their development as a potential headteacher. West (1992) cites three possible roles for the deputy head: deputy as head's deputy (the traditional role), deputy as prospective head (preparation for headship) and the deputy as deputy-head-of-school (the emergent role), all of which are considered to shape practice in schools. The deputy as prospective headteacher implies that the time spent as a deputy offers a preparation and entry point to headship. While headship is certainly not an aspiration for all deputy or assistant headteachers, many deputy and assistant heads do seek promotion to headship.

A study by Ribbins (1997) demonstrated however that a large number of headteachers found their experience as a deputy particularly frustrating or disappointing because of the lack of leadership influence they felt they had within the school. Some interviewees felt that they had experienced more leadership influence as headteacher of department than as deputy headteacher. This negative view of time as a deputy often contrasted starkly with their current view of being a headteacher, which was generally much more positive because of their clear leadership role within the school. One study revealed that a group of deputies who had recently been appointed as headteachers felt that their previous role had left them very unprepared for the job because of their lack of leadership experience (Glanz, 1994).

Summary of key points

- The experience of being a deputy or assistant head is not always helpful preparation for headship because of the lack of direct leadership experience some deputy or assistant heads encounter in this role.
- The absence of targeted professional training and leadership development for assistant or deputy heads is considered to be a major drawback in preparing for headship.

2.3 Contemporary changes in role

Evidence would suggest that the growing workload of headteachers in the last decade, particularly resulting from the local management of schools, has contributed to an increase in the delegation of more responsibilities to assistant and deputy headteachers. In a large scale qualitative study of 50 primary schools, it was found that deputy heads felt that their role had expanded greatly during the early nineties (Campbell and Neill, 1994). The main consequences of this increase in responsibilities were reduced attention to the quality of their own teaching, difficulty keeping up with new developments and the feeling that if the headteacher were away for a longer period (more than one week), they would find it very hard to take over the headship role. They also felt they had insufficient time to develop financial and management skills they would need if they applied for headship. Similarly, in Australia and the USA, (Harvey and Sheridan, 1995) the increasing responsibilities upon the assistant or deputy principal, eg planning, policy-making and curriculum management had resulted in less time being available for professional development.

A lack of non-contact time for deputy and assistant heads has been found to be a major barrier to being successful in the role (Webb and Vulliamy, 1996). Lack of non-contact time was identified as a major impediment in Southworth's (1998) study of primary school deputy heads in Hertfordshire. This study illustrated the tension between the role of deputy head and classroom teacher. Another study of primary school deputies (Jayne, 1996) illustrated how the role had expanded to include monitoring and evaluation, external liaisons as well as more traditional administrative roles. This expanded set of responsibilities inevitably placed an additional demand on time. However, many studies showed that extra time was not allocated for the additional tasks required to be undertaken by deputy and assistant heads (Campbell and Neill, 1994; Helps, 1994). In primary schools, in particular, this resulted in a tension between the teaching and management roles of the deputy (Vulliamy and Webb, 1995).

More recently, the role of the assistant headteacher is understood as one of partnership alongside the headteacher within the leadership team. In particular, staff development, communications and resource management are cited as being new additional responsibilities. The assistant and deputy head is now expected to play a major role in formulating the aims and objectives of the school, establishing the policies through which they shall be achieved, providing additional support to schools in clarifying and strengthening roles, widening the pool of staff with defined leadership roles and establishing a clear career ladder (DfEE, 1998). However, it has been shown that the influence and involvement of the assistant or deputy head in such activities differs considerably across schools (Rutherford, 2002). In some schools assistant and deputy heads remain a central part of the discussion and decision-making process while in other schools the decisions are still made by the headteacher with little real consultation (Rutherford, 2002).

Despite a general shift towards increased responsibilities upon deputy and assistant headteachers, in most cases the role is still mainly concerned with maintenance rather than developmental functions. The deputy or assistant head is still seen as someone who ensures

the school functions properly and generally keeps things running on a day to day basis despite a willingness to engage in leadership activities. Evidence would suggest that deputies and assistant heads view their own influence as relatively small compared to that of the headteacher (Leonard and Leonard, 1999). Ribbins (1997) found that the view of the assistant head as a 'stand-in' for the headteacher remained prevalent. Yet, in only in a small number of cases was the deputy or assistant headteacher seen as being close to being a second headteacher or someone with leadership responsibilities.

The headteacher remains the main gatekeeper to leadership functions in the school and if the headteacher does not support a strong leadership role for the deputy or assistant headteacher, it is unlikely that this will happen (Southworth, 1995; Purvis and Dennison, 1993). Similarly in the USA, the principal decides upon the exact nature of the role of the assistant principal (Scoggins and Bishop, 1993) which for those in assistant or deputy roles is a constant frustration (Mertz, 2000). In a detailed case study of one US assistant principal, it was clear that most of her duties were determined by the principal rather than allocated through any fixed job definition (Mertz and McNeely, 1999).

Hartzell, Williams and Nelson (1995) suggest that one way around this difficulty is to build up a positive relationship with the headteacher. They suggest that assistant heads would be well advised to:

- know their headteacher, especially with regards to understanding the difficulties and role conflicts inherent to the position, the headteacher's working practices and character (eg employer v. sympathetic ear to staff, meeting multiple demands)
- understand the reciprocal nature of the superordinate (headteacher) – subordinate (assistant) relationship, in which the headteacher relies upon the assistant as well as vice versa
- clarify explicitly their role and what is expected from them
- take the initiative, and
- deliver solutions along with problems

Evidence would suggest that where assistant and deputy principals build up strong relationships with principals the possibility for broadening leadership responsibilities and extending responsibility for developing the school is increased (Marcoulides and Heck, 1993).

Summary of key points

- There are growing responsibilities and increased pressure on assistant and deputy heads.
- This expanded set of responsibilities inevitably places an additional demand on time but extra time has not been allocated for the additional tasks required.
- In primary schools there is a real tension between the teaching and management roles of the deputy, and the time available to fulfil both roles.
- The influence and involvement of the assistant or deputy head in leadership and development activities differs considerably across schools.
- In some schools assistant and deputy heads remain a central part of the discussion and decision-making process while in other schools the decisions are still made by the headteacher with little real consultation.

Section 3: Access and career progression

It is generally acknowledged that gender and ethnicity can prove to be covert barriers to promotion within a wide range of professional fields. Within the wider leadership literature issues of gender and ethnicity feature but there are relatively few studies that focus specifically upon these issues. The literature pertaining to deputy and assistant headteachers contains little serious consideration of gender and ethnicity issues. Consequently, this review focuses upon studies of gender and ethnicity within the wider context of school leadership that have implications for access and promotion to assistant or deputy headship.

In her seminal study of female headteachers Hall (1996) notes the main barrier to the advancement of women into leadership positions is the relative under-representation of women in senior leadership roles in schools. There are more men who are deputy headteachers, assistant headteachers and headteachers in England and this sends out a strong message to women who aspire to such roles that it is difficult to gain access. There is also some evidence to suggest that women are less likely to seek promotion to headship than men. A survey study found that in primary schools 40 per cent of female and 49 per cent of male deputy heads were either active or potential applicants to the headship. In secondary schools the difference was even more pronounced, with 17 per cent of women and 38 per cent of men being either active or potential applicants (James and Whiting, 1998).

The clear implication from the limited research base is that women are less likely to seek promotion to leadership positions that men irrespective of experience or capability (Draper, Fraser and Taylor, 1998) Family reasons were cited significantly more by women than men deputy heads as a reason not to seek headship (James and Whiting, 1998).

Research studies also point to the fact that when in positions of leadership the responsibilities allocated to men and women differs considerably. Davies and Gunawardena (1992), who studied gender roles in school management in a variety of countries (including the UK), found that there was a tendency for women to have pastoral responsibilities while men were given responsibility for 'harder' aspects such as discipline or data. Litawsksi (1992) (cited in Coleman, 2002) similarly found that female deputy headteachers in secondary schools tended to be assigned roles relating to the socio-emotional aspects of school leadership, which were seen as 'lower status' in schools. A more recent large-scale survey study in the UK partly reiterates that while both male and female deputy headteachers were more likely to have curricular rather than pastoral responsibilities, women deputy heads were more than 2.5 times more likely to have a primarily pastoral role than men (Coleman, 2002). This study also showed that women are increasingly rejecting the pastoral role in favour of more curricular responsibilities because of its limited influence on school development and lower status association.

A perception of which gender is most suited to leadership has been shown to lead to overt discrimination when applying for management posts. A view that women might be less 'up to the job' has been shown to lead to discriminatory practices (Coleman, 2002). Also, research indicates that women are more likely to secure a deputy post than to be offered headship (Huang, 2003). Coleman's (2002) study reported that women were under more pressure to 'prove themselves' than men in their leadership roles. This was even more strongly the case for women from ethnic minority backgrounds who felt a need to continually prove that they were as good as their male and female counterparts (Shakeshaft. 1989; Coleman, 2001). Interestingly, there is no evidence to suggest that there is a gender divide in the approaches to leadership in action. The research evidence that does exist dismisses the idea that there are 'male' and 'female' ways of leading (Evetts, 1994; Coleman, 2002). Instead, the evidence suggests that there is good or effective leadership practice and this is not gender specific (Vinkenburg, 2000)

Summary of key points

- There are more men who are deputy heads, assistant heads and heads in the UK. Arguably, this sends out a negative message to women who aspire to such roles.
- There is evidence to suggest that women are less likely to seek promotion to headship than men irrespective of experience or capability.
- The responsibilities allocated to men and women in deputy or assistant headship positions differ considerably. Women are more likely to deal with pastoral matters and men with discipline and curriculum matters.
- Women feel under more pressure to 'prove themselves' than men in roles as assistant and deputy heads. This is even more strongly the case for women from ethnic minority backgrounds.

The literature review was not able to find any UK studies on ethnic minority assistant and deputy headteachers. This reinforces the general findings from an NCSL study on black and ethnic minority leaders which reported a significant lack of research on ethnicity at the headship level (McKenley and Gordon, 2002). However, the literature that does exist offers some important messages about barriers to entry for ethnic minority groups to leadership positions in schools. In a study carried out in 1993, Walker looked at specific pressures for black women in senior positions. The study noted that in some schools, women in leadership positions rarely had the opportunity of working with another colleague of the same ethnicity.

The research evidence concurs that being a school leader from an ethnic minority group presents significant personal and professional challenges (McKenley and Gordon, 2002). In one study, ethnic minority leaders reported a 'ghettoisation' of job opportunities whereby jobs were only attainable in high ethnic minority population areas rather than the 'leafy white suburbs' (Quicho and Rios, 2000). They also noted a lack of recognition from LEAs, the feeling that they had to work harder and were allowed to fail less than their white peers. A recent USA review of ethnic minority teachers suggests that they face specific barriers to recruitment and advancement. One constant barrier was the reliance of many teachers on informal networks, of which ethnic minority teachers were not part (Quicho and Rios, 2000). A UK study of London schools found that black teachers were less likely to be encouraged to apply for promotion to senior roles than their white counterparts and were more likely to be made to teach subjects for which they were not qualified.

Research has shown that ethnic minority teachers are less satisfied with teaching as a career than their white counterparts, and are more likely to say they were likely to be working outside teaching in five years time (Ross, Dalgety and Maylor, 2003). Similarly, a US study indicates that teachers from ethnic minorities are less likely to stay in the profession, especially where the headteacher was not seen as supportive and where the cultural environment was seen as alien (Betancourt-Smith, Inman and Marlow, 1994). Research on effective schools with high levels of pupils from ethnic minority groups shows that the presence of teachers from the same ethnic group can provide pupils with role models and lead to higher achievement within these groups (Lindsay and Muijs, 2003). The representation of teachers from ethnic minority groupings has been shown to be an important factor in improving pupil achievement (Singer, Murphy and Singer, 1998). These findings highlight the need for increased representation of ethnic minority teachers within schools, particularly at senior leadership levels.

Summary of key points

- Being a school leader from an ethnic minority group presents significant persona and professional challenges.
- Assistant and deputy heads from ethnic minority groups have reported feeling that they feel they have to work harder and are allowed to fail less than their white peers.
- Black teachers are less likely to be encouraged to apply for promotion to senior roles than their white counterparts and are more likely to be made to teach subjects for which they were not qualified.
- Ethnic minority teachers are less satisfied with teaching as a career than their white counterparts and are more likely to be working outside teaching in five years time.

Section 4: Distributed leadership

Recent research findings have shown that effective leadership need not be located in the person of one leader but can be distributed within the school (MacBeath, 1998; Day, Harris et al, 2000; Harris, 2002; Harris and Muijs, 2002). These 'distributed' forms of leadership have been identified as crucial to improving schools and imply a redistribution of power and a realignment of authority within the organisation. The distributed perspective focuses on *how* leadership practice is shared among formal and informal leaders. As Bennett et al (2003; 3) note in their review of the literature for NCSL "distributed leadership is not something 'done' by an individual 'to' others ... rather it is an 'emergent property of a group or network of individuals' in which group members 'pool' their expertise".

Distributed leadership is a form of collective agency incorporating the activities of many individuals in a school who work at mobilising and guiding other teachers in the process of instructional change (Spillane et al, 2001). It extends the boundaries of leadership significantly as it is premised upon high levels of 'teacher involvement' and encompasses a wide variety of 'expertise, skill and input' (Harris and Lambert, 2003: 16). Engaging many people in leadership activity is at the core of distributed leadership in action. This would imply a much stronger leadership role for the deputy or assistant headteacher and some redefinition of core responsibilities.

This literature review suggests that the traditional role of the deputy or assistant headteacher is still prevalent in schools despite major changes in the 1990s. This traditional role consists largely of administrative and routine maintenance functions. In contrast, a distributed form of leadership suggests an emergent leadership role for deputy and assistant headteachers where they are centrally involved in building culture and managing change. In this emergent role, assistant/deputy heads clearly share responsibility for leadership with the headteacher and other teachers (Muijs and Harris, 2003).

A number of researchers (Calabrese, 1991; Williams, 1995; Kaplan and Owings, 1999) have suggested some key elements that would comprise an emergent role for an assistant or deputy headteacher:

- curriculum development and innovation
- promoting the school goals
- communicating and developing vision and promoting shared understanding amongst staff, taking advantage of the assistant head's intermediate and visible presence between staff and headteacher
- working as a change agent (understanding change processes, initiating programmes and encouraging participation)
- being a leading professional with a specialised knowledge base (eg on discipline)
- evaluating and coaching teaching staff
- being a community relations agent, developing community links

Essentially these elements point towards a significant shift in role and one, it is argued, that will require substantial support and training (Weller and Weller, 2002). However, this wider role will also entail more responsibility for planning and co-ordinating and it is important that assistant and deputy headteachers are fully prepared for this leadership role (Kaplan and Owings, 1999).

To allow the assistant and deputy headteacher more instructional leadership as opposed to routine administration and supervisory jobs possibly will entail some form of restructuring at the school level (Marshall, 1992). Kaplan and Owings (1999) suggest the hiring of administrative assistants to deal with a number of the administrative and discipline aspects of the job. This

highlights a need for training specifically for those assistant or deputy heads that consider assistant or deputy headship as a career choice rather than a step towards headship. The next section considers the implications of findings from this literature review for future professional development and training.

Summary of key points

- A distributed form of leadership suggests an emergent leadership role for deputy and assistant heads where they are centrally involved in building culture and leading change within the school.
- An emergent leadership role for an assistant or deputy head would necessitate communicating and developing vision, promoting shared understanding amongst staff, working as a change agent (understanding change processes, initiating programmes and encouraging participation).
- An emergent leadership role will entail more responsibility for planning and coordinating change within the school and it is important that assistant and deputy heads are fully prepared for the particular demands of this leadership role.

Section 5: Implications for professional development and future research

It is clear from the review of the literature that assistant and deputy headteachers have an enormous amount to contribute to school improvement yet within many schools they are currently underutilised as leaders. It is also clear that without proper investment in the training and development of these key leaders, motivation levels will continue to be variable as assistant headteachers and deputies continue to see themselves as only being concerned with low level maintenance activities. Long term sustained school improvement requires the leadership capabilities and capacities of the many rather than the few (Fullan, 2001) and consequently, established leaders within schools offer a leadership force that, to date, has not been fully exploited.

The evidence points towards a need for specialist training for those who see assistant and deputy headship as a career choice rather than a step towards headship. To achieve this will require action and support from the headteacher as well as training programmes that skill deputy and assistant headteachers to undertake a more substantial leadership role in schools (Mertz, 2000). Training and recognition for established leaders is therefore both necessary and desirable to ensure that leadership at this level is both enhanced and that the potential for school improvement is maximised.

In 1996, Jayne suggested that specific leadership programmes for assistant headteachers should be coupled to HEI involvement and focus on group and interpersonal skills as well as leadership skills (Michel, 1996). Assistant heads have indicated that people skills, communication skills, knowledge of leadership theory, techniques for improving curriculum and instruction and working with teams were the most important skills for them to function effectively (Weller and Weller, 2002). As well as attention to collegiality and people skills, techniques of role management to deflect the problem of being overburdened was identified as a key training need for deputy and assistant heads in one UK study (Morrison, 1995).

5.1 Implications for professional development

This survey of the existing research evidence has clearly shown that for deputy and assistant heads there are various gaps, in terms of issues such as gender and ethnicity, and significant omissions in terms of targeted professional development for assistant or deputy headteachers generally. This is considered not only to be a major drawback in preparing for headship, but can impact negatively upon their performance in the role. For 'career' deputies or assistant headteachers the absence of targeted leadership development programmes is especially acute, as increased leadership responsibilities at this level are linked directly to higher levels of job satisfaction. The research would suggest a need for professional development programmes that focus specifically on leadership skills, knowledge and understanding.

5.2 Implications for research

It is clear from this review that there is a dearth of research on assistant and deputy headteachers, and that most extant research is limited to either descriptions of their role, or normative prescriptions of what that role should/could be in a transformed school environment. While this research is useful, more research is needed that moves beyond description towards more explanatory studies, as the current research base leaves many questions unanswered.

One major omission in the current research base is any exploration of effectiveness in the deputy or assistant role. In the existing studies this dimension is rarely interrogated, which means that it is impossible at present to establish with any degree of certainty the differences between effective and ineffective assistant or deputy headteacher practices. The contribution of deputy and assistant heads to school improvement is likewise often advocated and stated, but there are no empirical studies of this relationship.

In general, the tenor of present research tends to be atheoretical and relatively unquestioning. The organisational structure of schools and the role of assistant/deputy headteachers is taken as a given, and where a theoretical context is presented (usually some form of distributed or shared leadership) the role of the assistant/deputy head is simply transposed within that. There is no interrogation of the wider literature on organisational effectiveness, and any notion of organisational re-engineering or restructuring is absent. Future research would benefit from exploring the relationship between types of leadership practice at the deputy or assistant headship level and organisational development and change.

Finally, there are virtually no research studies that explore gender and ethnicity in relation to assistant and deputy headship. This is possibly the most urgent research need, particularly in relation to the provision of professional support and the creation of new, targeted professional development programmes. Similarly, an in-depth study of effective deputy or assistant headteachers in different school contexts would seem to be particularly important for those responsible for thinking about programmes of professional development and training for this group of school leaders.

Summary of key points

- There is a need for specialist training for those who see assistant and deputy headship as a career choice rather than a step towards headship.
- People skills, communication skills, knowledge of leadership theory, techniques for improving curriculum and instruction and working with teams are considered by deputy and assistant heads to be important elements in any future professional development programmes.
- The research highlights a need for professional development programmes that focus specifically on leadership skills, knowledge and understanding for assistant and deputy heads.
- To attract deputies and assistant heads of ethnic minority backgrounds, there needs to be an acknowledgement of the difficulties that they face and specific introductory and support programmes for those who are considering such a career move.
- More research into the particular development needs of assistant and deputy heads is required to ensure that future provision is relevant, appropriate and ultimately effective.

Section 6: Conclusion

The implications of this review of the literature for those concerned with professional development in this area are quite clear. Firstly, there are many deputies who consider the role to be sufficient in terms of their career and as part of this long-term and developing role require ongoing professional development and support. Professional development for this group could be achieved through groups working online as part of a broader approach with targeted professional development opportunities and linked mentor support.

Secondly, on appointment to deputy or assistant headship there should be opportunities for the deputy or assistant headteacher to link with a programme focused on the specifics of this role. There may even be a need for more clearly defined professional development steps towards the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH). Thirdly, to attract deputies and assistant heads of ethnic minority backgrounds, there needs to be an acknowledgement of the difficulties that they face and specific support programmes for those who are considering such a career move.

In terms of gender and ethnicity, there are still stereotypes that prevail and future professional development provision has to address these issues carefully and sensitively. Any professional development programme for assistant or deputy headteachers will also need to have a keen awareness of the challenges that new appointees face and the particular barriers to promotion to headship that currently operate.

Finally, professional development is particularly challenging for this professional group as the research shows. More research into the particular development needs of these groups is required to ensure that future provision is relevant, appropriate and ultimately useful.

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Acknowledgements