

# **Researching the Characteristics of Effective Primary School Principals in Cyprus**

## **A Qualitative Approach**

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### **Abstract**

This article reports on a study which sought to identify the characteristics and behaviours of effective primary school principals in Cyprus. Forty-nine principals were identified by a panel of inspectors from the Ministry as excellent in their jobs. The researcher spent between 10 and 15 hours with each of these principals. Preliminary findings from the interview data he collected indicate that effective principals in Cyprus: (1) have a great love and ambition for their profession; (2) have pride in the national heritage and traditions of their country; (3) are deep thinkers and constant learners; (4) are good administrators; (5) will often take risks by opposing the will of the Ministry; and, (6) are good managers of time.

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## INTRODUCTION

This piece of research is part of a larger research project on the effective principalship which is currently under way at the University of Cyprus. Research is already being carried out on what constitutes an effective school (in Europe, in Australia and in the U.S.A.) and, subsequently, what kind of behaviors an educational leader of such a school should exhibit (Brookover and Lezotte, 1977; Brookover and others, 1979; Edmonds, 1979; Edmonds and Fredericksen, 1978; Fuller, 1987; Levine and Lezotte, 1990; Lezotte, 1989; Mortimore et al, 1988; Reynolds and Cuttance, 1992; Rutter et al, 1979; Walberg, 1991).

Based on findings of the effective schools research so far, a semi-structured interview questionnaire was constructed in order to be used with this part of the project. Even though observational and survey data were collected, this particular article is based solely on interview data gathered from the principals who participated in the project. Therefore, the main aim of this article was to present the characteristics and qualities (both personal and professional) of an effective principal as these principals **perceive** them. The views presented here are the perceptions of these primary school principals about their job in the hope that, through content analysis of the interview data, the qualities and behaviors that made these principals effective would be uncovered.

However, before proceeding any further, some statistics about the educational system and some demographic characteristics of primary school principals in Cyprus will be presented. There are about 364 primary schools in Cyprus with a total of 62,039 students (Ministry of Finance, Education Statistics, 1994). There are also about 90 secondary schools with a total of about 52,000 students. In terms of pre-primary education, there are about 430 kindergartens (both public and private) with a total of about 16,000 students.

Most of primary school principals in Cyprus are in their late 50s and nearing retirement (which is age 60). This is so because of the way the Cyprus educational system works. Teachers are promoted to principals based, primarily, on their age (more or less) after having served for about 25 years in the classroom. In theory, the promotion is supposedly based on evaluations of their performance as teachers, however, there is an inflation of points earned through these evaluations (almost all teachers are rated as excellent), and, therefore, the only

important factor for promotion becomes experience which is translated into age. By the time these teachers reach administrative positions (assistant principals, principals), they are already burned out. The vast majority, about 88% have graduated from the Pedagogical Academy of Cyprus (which until 1992 used to be the Teachers' Training Institution on the island)<sup>1</sup>. A very small percentage (about 10%) has a first University degree and the rest (about 2.2%) have a Masters. This distribution of degrees is not unusual for Cyprus since the only teacher institution on the island was the Pedagogical Academy of Cyprus (a non-university institution) and no other degree is required for someone to be promoted to administrative positions within the system (therefore, there is no incentive for someone to earn a higher degree). The only requirement is that to become an Inspector of Primary Education, one needs to have at least a first University degree (not necessarily in Educational Management, however, the degree should be related to Education in general).

### **The Leaders in this Study**

A total of 49 principals were interviewed and observed in the context of this study: thirty-six male and 13 female principals. The great majority of these principals are aged between 50 and 59 years<sup>2</sup>. Another sample characteristic is that the majority were educated only at the level of the Pedagogical Academy of Cyprus (the Teachers' Training Institute), and only a few hold a Bachelor's or a Master's degree. Thus, this sample of principals is very similar to the whole population of primary school principals in Cyprus in terms of age and level of education. What is different about this sample is that it was chosen by a panel of inspectors of the Cyprus educational system on the basis of their perceived effectiveness. Thus, these principals are regarded as being the most effective primary school principals in Cyprus.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

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<sup>1</sup>As of 1992, the University of Cyprus opened its doors and accepted the first students in the newly created Department of Education which now has the responsibility for the preparation of pre-primary, primary and secondary school teachers in Cyprus.

<sup>2</sup> As mentioned earlier, this is not a surprising figure for the Cyprus educational system since teachers are promoted to the post of principal after having served for an average of about 25-30 years in the classroom. This is one of the greatest shortcomings of the whole system because almost nobody gets an opportunity to serve from the post of principal except when one is close to retirement, which is age 60.

The case study method (in combination with other qualitative techniques such as life history and shadowing) was chosen. The researcher spent between 10 and 15 hours with each one of those principals characterized as effective, observing, interviewing, and shadowing them. Most of the time was spent interviewing the principals using the semi-structured interview method (Burgess, 1982; Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). The principals were also prompted to tell their professional life history and to recall important key dates during their professional life. In this way, a more accurate profile of the principal could be constructed and their professional career path could be observed.

It was assumed that the case study methodology (semi-structured interviews, life histories, observation and shadowing) would provide rich information because the principals were being observed and interviewed in their actual work places, thus providing a more authentic environment for a more realistic description of the characteristics which prompted the panel of school inspectors to characterize them as effective. The visits at the school and the interviewing and shadowing took place from September 1994 to December 1995. As mentioned earlier, it should be borne in mind that this article is based solely on the interview data, the principals' narrative and their perceptions about their job and not on the observational or quantitative data which were gathered. Another interesting fact which should be noted here is that almost all the interviews with female principals would begin with something like this: **"Only about 20% of women teachers in Cyprus are principals. Gender does count in Cyprus. Only it counts from the opposite side. Who you know and who you are friends with is what really counts"**. Obviously, female primary school principals in Cyprus are very conscious of the fact that they are indeed very few and constitute only a small proportion of the total number of principals in comparison with their male counterparts. This fact (women's under-representation in leadership positions), has been explained by research and can be summarized as follows: (1) discrimination in promotion practices; (2) socialization patterns that do not provide women with the skills and behaviors needed for administrative success; (3) women's lack of networking as males do; (4) lack of mentorship and training; and (5) pure avoidance of the job because of possible conflicts the principalship may produce with their other important roles such as being a wife and a mother

(Edson, 1988; Fauth, 1984; Biklen, 1980).

### **Sample School Demographics**

The schools visited are situated all over the island of Cyprus. The SES in these schools ranges from middle to upper middle income persons. A percentage of the student population in all the schools visited are refugees<sup>3</sup>. Most of the schools had an average of about 200 students and about 10 teachers who taught all grades. Moreover, the majority of the schools were urban or suburban and a few were situated in the countryside. It must be stressed that the schools are similar in many ways and at least in terms of student and personnel numbers, thus, making comparisons and generalizations about the principal's role in the school more meaningful.

### **PRESENTATION OF RESULTS**

The general information which was presented above sets the stage for a closer examination of the perceptions of the primary school principals involved in this piece of research. When the interview data were examined, certain themes kept coming up and patterns began to form. It is these recurrent themes that will be presented in the form of characteristics that these principals indicated as part of their daily routine in the school. Therefore, the sections and sub-sections which follow are those that emerged from the data based on the principals' narrative. Overall, it seems that the data could be divided into three main sections or dimensions: The first section deals with the more general perceptions of these principals about their job and their own career paths. The second section deals with the principals' perceptions on the professional aspects of their job. The third section is a collection of these principals' personal beliefs on being an effective principal. Thus, the results are presented under the following three dimensions: (A) The *career dimension* which includes the following sub-sections: (1) important tasks of the principal, (2) career paths: on becoming a teacher and a principal, and (3) the apprenticeship model of advancement to the

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<sup>3</sup> After the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, one third of the Greek population (about 200,000 persons) were uprooted from their homes and villages in the northern part of the island and were forced to resettle in the southern areas which are controlled by the government of the Republic of Cyprus. Therefore, most of our schools have indigenous student populations as well as refugee students from the occupied areas.

principalship.

(B) The *professional dimension* which includes the following sub-sections: (1) leadership philosophy, (2) teacher supervision and (3) school-parents relations.

(C) The *personal dimension* which includes the following sub-sections: (1) concern for students, (2) being a risk taker, (3) having national standards, and (4) keeping abreast of new developments.

## **A. Career Dimension**

### **Important Tasks of the principal**

First, the principals were asked what they thought their most important duties or tasks were. In what follows, a principal tried to describe what she considers to be the most important tasks of the principalship:

Organizing (getting organized) so that the school can function in a normal fashion. I want to have all audiovisual aids, classrooms, teachers and students ready. Then, I look at my teachers and think: What kind of people are they? What are their strengths and their weaknesses? I ask them to tell me what kind of class (grade) and/or subjects they prefer to teach and I always try to take into account their wishes and personal feelings. I cannot always succeed in that, but I try.

The above comments are representative of most principals interviewed. It seems that this principal would make every effort to create an effective and well-functioning school. She tried to have the school building and other necessary supplies ready for use so that time was not wasted and was mostly devoted to instruction. Effective schools research indicates that when instructional time is maximized a school becomes more effective (Edmonds, 1979). At the same time, she tries to be well-informed about the human-power in her school. The above comments indicate that organizing the school as a learning center and then being able to communicate effectively are two of the most important tasks of the principalship. It is interesting to note here that most of the principals indicated that they preferred verbal and face-to-face communication with their staff. They mentioned with emphasis that they disliked and avoided written communication. It must be stressed, however, that, on the average, these principals had about 10-12 teachers to deal with and, thus, verbal communication was not a problem. The qualities mentioned above are characteristics of

effective educational leaders as other research indicates (Acker, 1990; Adler et al., 1993; Buell, 1992).

### **Career paths: on becoming a teacher and a principal**

Next, the principals were asked to give the reason for which they entered the teaching profession in the first place: Here is what one principal said:

Since the times I was little, I wanted to become a teacher and I guess I was influenced by my family environment. Before myself, I had three other brothers and sisters who became teachers. My grandfather also was the first village teacher. So my environment really pushed me to become a teacher. Since the times I was little, I remember playing teachers with my friends. I used to take pieces of chalk from school and I would teach them at home.

The reasons stated above were again characteristic of most principals in the sample. The principals were also asked to recount key-dates and critical stages in their careers. After the analysis of their career paths, it seemed that they all had **varied, diverse** and very **strong experiences** and **took chances** with their careers. They all made strong efforts to further their education in order to enhance their options for advancement in the educational system. Some of them went to the Cyprus Educational Mission in the U.K., others were placed in the Curriculum Development Unit or in special positions in other Ministries of the Republic for a number of years before returning to the schools. Others earned scholarships and traveled abroad to further their studies. At any rate, they all went through different positions and experiences and they had usually spent about 15-20 years in the classroom and then moved into the principal's role. Very similar are also the reasons for which they wanted to get into the principalship: (a) ambition, (b) higher salary, (c) the feeling of being able to give more, (d) prestige. Here is what a principal said:

There are many factors for wanting to get into the principalship. One reason is salary and that goes without saying. However, what is most important is that if you stay as a teacher you worry on a daily basis for a specific classroom at specific time intervals. This is not the ideal situation. When I want to give something that comes right out of me, from my inner self, I want to give it to many people and influence several teachers and students and that makes me feel good. Yes, you can influence from this position and this is good.

However, wanting to become a principal was not enough as almost all of the principals

interviewed mentioned. Most principals expressed the idea that one needs to be borne a leader and to really want it (the principalship) in order to achieve it. With these kind of remarks it is easy to realize that most of these effective principals believed in the trait theory of leadership (Stogdill, 1974). Even when they were asked specifically about being trained for leadership positions, they suggested that this is a good idea but, "if you do not have it (leadership ability) when you are born, then no training and no education can do it for you". This could be viewed as a strange and unexpected remark, however, one possible explanation is that all of these principals entered the principalship without any training and mainly because they had the drive and the ambition to do it. In essence, they were not aware of what is out there, in terms of educational leadership training, that would enhance their chances of being an excellent leader.

It is also interesting to note that all the principals interviewed said that they loved being teachers at the beginning of their careers and then getting into the principalship, and that, if they had the chance to start from the beginning, they would do it exactly the same way. They seemed to be genuinely in love with the teaching profession. Most of them seemed to be nostalgic for the times when they were teachers. Two of them even said that they regretted leaving the classroom. Based on these comments, one could assume that in order to become an effective principal, one needs to have been an effective **teacher** in the first place.

## **B. Professional Dimension**

### **Leadership Philosophy**

Most of the principals had a clear view of their leadership philosophy and, therefore, some of their ideas are presented verbatim. The following is a representative sample of what most of them quoted as their leadership philosophy. Here is what a female principal said:

I wanted to become a principal because as a principal you can offer so much more. When I was a teacher, my principals delegated a lot of responsibilities to me for different things that needed to be done at school. In this way, I enhanced my self-esteem and started believing in myself and I wasn't afraid to express myself. I do exactly the same thing for my young teachers now if they are interested. I listen to teachers' views and, if I agree, they can proceed without any further delay. However, if I disagree, I think about it for a while and then I produce alternatives with them. I am the leader type. I am also democratic. I accept suggestions and other peoples' views, however, I do not go far away from my own views. I accept what the majority has to say. However, I do have a way to do my own thing without being seen as forcing my opinions on to everybody else. I am not afraid to speak the truth and, without intending to hurt anyone on a personal basis, I speak out my opinion.

From her own words, it follows that this principal could be characterized as a consultative autocratic leader (Likert, 1967). She is a consultative leader because she listens to other opinions before making a decision. She is also autocratic because it is mostly her own decision and nobody else's, after some consultation has taken place. However, her autocratic style is benevolent in nature because she consults with fellow teachers and takes other persons' feelings into account when trying to make a decision. Most of the principals interviewed had similar views on this matter. Even though they would describe their leadership style as democratic, they gave the impression that they wanted most powers concentrated on them and they were not very eager to let others share some of their power.

At the same time, she indicated some of the main characteristics of effective educational leaders that were found in similar pieces of research (Acker, 1990; Adler et al., 1993; Buell, 1992). She was a leader who listened attentively, even though she had her own ideas and her own vision; she knew where she was heading and found ways to weave her thinking through. She tried to create a positive environment and to build collaboration with her teachers in planning activities for the school. As research has shown, an excellent school leader is usually the principal who can effectively convey the school's mission to teachers,

students, parents, and the community at large. Furthermore, high quality school management exists when expectations are made clear to the staff involved (Kimbrough and Burkett, 1990; Poplin, 1992; Sapra, 1993).

### **Teacher Supervision**

Furthermore, most principals in this study indicated that they were keen on evaluating their staff constantly in an effort to share teaching methodologies with them and also in an effort to become the instructional leader in the school, which is one of the major characteristics of effective educational leaders as other research has indicated (Caldwell, 1992; Hallinger, 1992; Johnson, 1993; Kerry and Murdoch, 1992a; 1992b; 1993) The principals were also asked to comment on the current status of teacher supervision in Cyprus today. The following excerpts are representative of what most of them thought. One principal said:

I disagree with the way teacher supervision is done today<sup>4</sup>. The inspectors can offer very little or nothing to teachers. On the contrary, the inspectors I know don't say anything to teachers and just rely on what I tell them about them. They come, watch teachers teaching and say nothing to them. However, teachers want to know. I believe that when the principal is well-educated and knowledgeable and has some esteem among teachers is in a better position to assist a teacher than the inspector, and in this way the principal becomes the change agent.

Here is how another principal viewed teacher supervision as a form of coaching:

I take initiatives in this regard by assisting young teachers and by indicating to them what the right ways of teaching are. The new comers have the tendency to put children down and do their lesson from the teacher's desk, whereas, I believe that the teacher should become a baby, an actor. The way I do it is by getting into a classroom, I take up a lesson and do it, and then I watch the teacher teach and make comments. In general, I consult teachers in an honest, genuine and friendly manner and I mainly tell them that they should love children.

The above comments are indicative of a principal who is forthcoming and honest with teachers and who is eager to see them improve through a developmental and formative approach to teacher supervision (Harris, 1986; Pashiardis, 1994). At the same time, most of

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<sup>4</sup> It must be mentioned that her views on teacher supervision in Cyprus are very representative of the views of most teachers and principals in Cyprus. This is why the Ministry of Education is currently in dialogue with the Teachers' Unions and University Professors to produce a new Teacher Supervision scheme for the island.

the principals interviewed mentioned that they do not have enough time to be the kind of instructional leader they want because of the many unimportant tasks they need to perform on a daily basis (such as fix broken windows, type letters, make payments, etc.) and also due to the fact that they have to teach part of the day.<sup>5</sup> The combination of the above factors take up most of their time leaving them with little time to make classroom visits.

### **Apprenticeship Model of Advancement to the Principalship**

All the principals interviewed seemed to be very **keen observers** of behavior as it became obvious with what they said above about classroom observations. In essence, what follows is indicative of what the majority of them believes about how they were prepared to become principals without ever going through any formal training (almost no principal in Cyprus has any form of preparation for the principalship. As mentioned before, advancement to the principalship is mainly through seniority). When the question was posed whether they felt they were well prepared to become a principal, here is what one principal said:

I think I was (well prepared), because I kept watching my previous principals and kept learning from them. I learned what to do and what to avoid. Therefore, I felt quite comfortable and didn't have to ask for many opinions on how to do things. Once I became a principal myself, I had ideas and I organized the school the way I wanted.

The above comments (which are representative of the whole group) indicate that the principals interviewed learned how to be a principal through the apprenticeship model. They had an excellent role model with whom they identified and learned from, since there was no formal training before their advancement to the principalship. Moreover, they observed and analysed the behaviours of their principals and decided what qualities they liked and what they did not. In this way, they had already built the ideal model of the principal they wanted to become.

### **School-Parents Relations**

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<sup>5</sup> It must be mentioned that the government does not pay to have school secretaries. Wherever there is one, she/he is paid by the Parents' Association and primarily serves them. Only if there is free time will the secretary help the principal.

Another important aspect of a principal's job is dealing with parents. This fact came up several times during the course of discussions with most of the principals in this sample. All of them stressed the fact that dealing with parents was a very difficult task but one that the principal needed to win because otherwise he/she would not be able to function. They all invited parents at least 3 or 4 times a year to have refreshments together and discuss about issues of mutual concern. Their impression was that parents were responsive if they realized that the principal did not call them only when it was time to ask for money for the school. They also stressed the fact that if parents knew what we were doing in the schools, they would be our best advocates and supporters when it was time to ask for pay raises or other professional benefits that the teachers' union might demand from the government. This is what one principal said:

I create the circumstances for parents to visit the school. I will bring them in and show teachers that they are not here to interfere or as antagonists to our work but they are here to cooperate for the mutual benefit of our students and the school in general. I try to succeed in creating this atmosphere through daily organized visits of parents, through lectures to them, and by, subtly, indicating to them where they can interfere and where they cannot. I also act as the buffer zone between my teachers and the parents of their students.

This principal was able to create a positive environment and was sensitive to parents' thoughts and emotions. In other words, he had the ability to create a warm, positive climate between parents and the school which was conducive to learning. When a principal creates this kind of climate, a warm self-image of the school is generated. Also, other pieces of school/parents relations research have indicated that a close collaboration between parents and the school has very beneficial results on student achievement and the overall climate (Golding, 1990; 1993). It seems that the principals interviewed were well-aware of this and they stressed the fact that children, in general, improved their behavior (especially if they had discipline problems) in school once they sensed that their parents had a close interaction with their teachers and the school principal.

### **C. Personal Dimension**

### **Concern for Students**

Furthermore, all principals seemed to be knowledgeable of learning and instructional problems around the school and were well-informed about students' progress. They all had a personal feeling of responsibility for school results and they were aware of the impact the school had on their students. They all seemed to be results-oriented and pushed to make things happen. This is again one of the strongest indications of an effective educational leader as other research indicates (Fauth, 1984; Ferguson, 1984). The feeling of being personally involved with children who are failing in an almost motherly way comes out in the following quotation:

I am sensitive both with teacher and students (especially those that are weak in their academic achievements). I feel sorry for these children and I often bring them into my office and talk with them and try to assist them because I always have a feeling of anxiety for these children and of what will become of them in the future. I am always with them even for their personal and family problems.

Furthermore, most principals seemed to be eager to find ways to reward students and encourage good behavior, special talents, etc. They had a deep conviction that rewards of any kind are needed in order to promote and sustain high standards and achievement. One principal said that every Christmas they have a competition among students at school to prepare the best Christmas card. The card which was chosen was printed and became the official card for the school and was sold during the Christmas bazaar. Children loved this competition and the reward was that they saw their idea in print. The principal concluded by saying that, "we need more of these kind of rewards, i.e., not material but moral and intrinsic rewards which are so few in our society. Most students get used to material rewards from both the parents and the school and are easily distracted from what it really means to feel good on the inside".

### **Risk taker**

All of the principals interviewed indicated that they would be willing to take risks if they felt it was for the improvement of their school, their teaching staff and their students, even against the directives from the Ministry of Education. One principal said:

I have never ordered anyone to do anything. I even have their birthdates and always give a little present to the teacher who is celebrating. Also, with my responsibility, I give permission to teachers (who have stayed at school longer at other times) to take time off without being afraid to do it.

From her first statements, (I take initiative, I give permission to teachers to leave), it became obvious that she had an attitude that dangers were there so that one took risks and that they were not to be avoided. Giving teachers permission to leave the school before the day was over in a highly centralized system such as Cyprus' is very risky business. The principal risked his/her credibility with the bureaucracy and this could jeopardize his/her chances for further advancement. Another principal told me an interesting story of defiance towards the bureaucracy:

Before I became a principal, when I was a teacher, my wife got a scholarship (note: she is also a teacher), to study in America. I went for one month to visit her and since she was busy I looked around some of their schools. I saw some ideas that I liked. When I returned to Cyprus I was placed at a small two-teacher school. I was the oldest of the two in the service and I became an acting principal. I decided to implement the idea of the open school, the school without classrooms (note: the story happened in the early 70s). All the children were in one room and we had activity corners according to the kids' interests without any fixed or rigid schedules and a lot of flexibility. I didn't think to ask for permission from any one even though this was a major move on my part. Somehow, they found out in the Ministry of Education what was happening and one month later three inspectors came in and asked what I was doing. I explained, I gave some valid reasons and I convinced them even though they came prepared to reprimand me. They gave me permission to work on this experiment for one year. The results were excellent and they gave me permission for another year. Our 6th grade students were very successful at the exams to enter high school and everybody congratulated us.

This principal was definitely a risk-taker which is another one of the characteristics of effective educational leaders. Most of the teachers I interviewed had many similar stories to tell. They all had some ideas which differed from those of the Ministry and went ahead and implemented some of them even since the times they were teachers. They were forceful, innovative, and liked experimentation. Listen to this principal:

We have a young teacher at our school who is willing and knowledgeable enough to

teach computers<sup>6</sup>. He started teaching the other teachers at the school during their free time and everybody loved it. We even tried teaching our 6th grade students and we reworked the school schedule to accommodate that since there is no computer course in the primary school curriculum. Thank god nobody from the bureaucracy of the Ministry interfered and now we have a small Computer Lab with 8 computers that were bought with the assistance of the parents in our school.

The above was indeed a very bold action on the part of the principal because the centralized system in Cyprus prohibits initiatives such as this one unless they have been ordered from above by the hierarchy. However, most of the principals interviewed indicated that they would take initiatives for innovations and experimentation and that they expected their teachers to do this as well. The principals often mentioned that they would even create an atmosphere for experimentation and innovation in their schools.

### **Having Comparable National Standards**

Cyprus doesn't have any standardized exams and, therefore, teachers and principals don't really know if they are doing a good job. It is basically through intuition and through conversations they had with colleagues in other schools that they knew. It is interesting to note that **all** of the principals interviewed indicated that they wanted to have standardized exams and to be compared with other schools. As one principal put it:

I want to be able to say if I am satisfied or not with the work that is being done at my school. I make my own tests which I don't think are absolutely valid, but they give me an indication as to where I stand. If I find that my students are not good at comprehension, then we will give more emphasis on comprehension. Now we give emphasis on what we think is important for the school inspector. This is not right. Whereas, if I have some scientific results I can say that this is the area we need to improve.

### **Keeping abreast of new developments**

In another question about reading new research and subscribing to journals on

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<sup>6</sup> This is a rare quality for an elementary school teacher in Cyprus because computers and computer literacy is just beginning to get into the primary schools of Cyprus. Introduction of computers at schools is still at an experimental stage and most teachers are afraid of them. A computer literacy course is compulsory in the Teacher Preparation Program of the University of Cyprus which prepares teachers now. The first graduates went in the schools in September 1996. It is expected that their knowledge will help the Ministry of Education expand this pilot program on computer literacy.

Educational Administration in order to keep abreast of new developments, as well as disseminating this information to their staff, here is what one principal said:

I follow any in-service course that the Pedagogical Institute offers for principals or teachers. I want to keep abreast of new developments and I will spare my free time to do this. Unfortunately, there isn't always the time I need to do this on a regular basis, but I try. I also try to have book or article presentations by teachers during faculty meetings and we have a short discussion on what was presented. In this way, the staff keeps informed and we all benefit instead of having those boring faculty meetings where we only read directives that come from the Ministry.

The above comments were in accordance with other research findings which indicated that effective principals have high expectations first of themselves and then of others in terms of keeping abreast of new research in their field (U.S. Department of Education, 1987). Effective principals are life-long learners. In general, the teaching staff of an effective school was never satisfied with their school's achievement and always tried for something better through the incorporation of more research findings into their everyday practice. As mentioned by Johnson and Johnson (1989), "experience is not something gained and enjoyed for ever. It is a continuous process" (p. 7). Through some of the above remarks, it can be seen that these principals were searching for something new, they were restless and tried to keep informed, albeit, in a haphazard and non-systematic way. This was true of most principals in Cyprus who do not have many ways of getting research reports or new ideas mostly because they are not aware of what exists. It has been my experience, that once these principals are made aware of existing journals or other resources, they would subscribe to at least one source and they would try to keep updated because the drive for constant improvement was there. However, there is also a more realistic reason as to why principals in Cyprus should keep abreast of new developments: A great number of young Cypriot teachers earn Bachelors' and Masters' degrees because there are more opportunities available than there used to be. Thus, the principalship is being shaken due to the lack of academic and other credentials that older principals do not possess. Therefore, it is a matter of survival for them to keep current.

## Concluding Remarks

In summarizing some of the main points that came out of the analysis of the interview data of this project, one could argue that effective primary school educational leaders in Cyprus:

(1) Have great **love and ambition** for their profession which they regard as a sacred and holy duty. In fact, all of them mentioned that they always wanted to become teachers and/or school principals and never felt tired of the profession. Furthermore, they insisted that if they had to choose from the beginning, they would again become teachers.

(2) Are **deep thinkers and constant learners** (they participated in any in-service course which was available). They would read any journal or magazine with topics related to their profession once they became aware of their existence.

(3) Have the deep conviction that they could **influence** much more from a position of leadership such as the principalship than any other position in the school system. This was a major reason why they wanted to enter the principalship in the first place. In addition, they wanted the challenge and the opportunity to assist people.

(4) Are **risk-takers** and are not afraid to "express their inner thoughts freely". They were definitely not a "yes" person. Sometimes, they would take risks even against the will of the ministry of Education (which is considered a heresy since the whole system in Cyprus is centralized). They were strong-willed and decisive in this respect and ready to act.

(5) View competition with confidence and wanted their schools to be compared with other schools both in Cyprus and abroad. This was so because they were **self-confident** and knew that they were doing a good job and, therefore, were not afraid to be compared with others.

(6) Are **honest and truth lovers**. They insisted on telling the truth to parents about their children and they told the truth to their teachers about their own performance without trying to "beautify" the situation as most teachers tried to do in Cyprus in order to be liked by parents. They were forthcoming and bold with their ideas.

(7) Find **innovative ways to reward** both their teachers and their students because they strongly believed that rewards (especially not material ones) were an important motivator for

people to act.

(8) Are **ambitious** and have the drive for constant improvement and advancement to positions of authority and influence for both personal and professional reasons.

(9) Are very keen on **creating and maintaining good school-parent relations**; they knew how to use parents in constructive ways and had an open-door policy in their schools.

(10) Mostly **believe in trait-leadership theory** even though they acknowledge that they should learn some leadership theories in order to improve their management style. The belief though, was that, "if you don't have it (i.e., leadership ability) you will not get it".

Finally, a theme that kept coming up through all the conversations was that these principals were almost impulsive in their leadership style and, as most of them said, they used their emotions a lot. As one principal put it, "I am an emotional person. I try to lead the school through my feelings and try to make teachers and parents volunteer for things that need to be done instead of me ordering someone to do it. I try to behave as an equal to all of them and have warm personal relations with my staff". This quote (which, by the way, was made by a male principal) was representative for most of the principals interviewed. The effort of the principal to be seen as an equal with the rest of the teachers in the school was evident in the majority of the principals. The feeling was that all the staff was there for a purpose and everybody had to try and do everything. Nobody espoused the idea that the principal would just sit in his/her office and merely observe what was going on in the school.

The use of their emotions, feelings and sense of egalitarianism in their management style was a recurrent quality which was evident in all the interviews with these principals. Therefore, one would be tempted to say that MBFE was their philosophy: Management By Feelings and Emotions. Actually, it was interesting that what we call "female" qualities (such as caring, sharing, showing emotions and feelings), was evident in all forty-nine principals (both male and female) interviewed. In any case, the word "leadership" in Greek (ηγέσια-igesia) is female and, therefore, one would be correct in arguing that *leadership* is a term which could be described with (mostly) what are regarded as "female" qualities in our society. It seems that one characteristic that these principals had in common was the exaggerated *humane* and *emotional* characteristics that they exhibited. Perhaps, more

research is needed in this particular area in order to uncover more information about the validity of these findings. In case they are validated, then, some rethinking of our courses in Educational Management programs should take place. The preparation of principals is very important business or, as one principal put it, "the principal is the beginning and the end or the Alpha and the Omega for a school".

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