

## **THE ROOTS AND WINGS INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP – CYCLE 2**

This cycle followed the first which was held in Gwbert (Ceredigion) where between 20<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 2002 and in the schools of Welsh Headteachers between the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> a trio of Headteachers from Wales / Italy / Denmark had been formed. The Danish Headteacher (Lisa Holmen) the Italian Headteacher (Matteo Martelli) and I had completed the HERMAN MODEL of Leadership Styles before the commencement of the project. The results were very interesting as all within our trio (Trio H) had identical profiles which demonstrated that we all possessed strengths in the same quadrants A (Problem Solving) B (Organisational Planning) and D (Holistic / Conceptualising). We all fell into the Intermediate Section for C (Interpersonal) and we therefore agreed to work on this area during our period on the programme. However, we all felt that we possessed strength in this quadrant C.

The three of us saw the programme as a means of learning about other schools and systems, leadership styles and were prepared to use our experiences as a means of acquiring tools to improve our leadership and management competencies. There was much interaction and dialogue but there were some difficulties for the Italians who found some of the terminology difficult to understand. However by the end of the first cycle, which we had found to be very beneficial, we had agreed to improve our own knowledge of the Italian language in order that our stay in Italy be very beneficial.

We had set ourselves a framework within which to work during the first and second year. There were difficulties with communication on the Roots and Wings Web Site which meant that we had to resort to sending one another E-mails / parcels for our documents or even telephoning on a regular basis. We even brought documentation with us to the second conference.

The second cycle was held between March 7<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> 2003 with the conference from Friday to Monday at Florence before moving onto our Italian school at Sansepolcro. We had expressed our concerns at the end of the first cycle that more time was needed to carry out discussions amongst members of the trios and that the inputs from conference deliveries should be more focused. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cycle the conference began well with time being allocated for trios to renew their objectivities and review them in the light of our experiences. We spent a fair amount of the morning session examining how our experiences had enabled us to deal with our Management / Leadership issues. (Developing our Management teams, exchanging job descriptions and implementing supportive strategies for our new members in the team).

Before we continued to explore our other issues we received an interesting input on the differences in Headteacher Roles comparing Italy with Wales / Denmark. The management issue was extended further where it was clear that due to lack of finance in Italy there were no serious organisational structures at middle management. There was substantial dialogue amongst members regarding the absence of Heads of Department and the lack of unity amongst "so called" departments where there was little support or dialogue amongst similar subject teachers.

There was little transparency with regards to salaries of Headteachers or teaching staff whose teaching commitment varied from 10 – 18/30 hours per week. In order that the Italian System be improved it was important that there be a clear recognition that the structures had to change to raise standards and that staff be rewarded financially for agreeing to take an additional responsibilities. The members of our trio accepted that Leadership and Management posed major problems in Italian Schools – the issues were in need of being remedied quickly in order that standards and morale be raised substantially. We were to examine these concerns when we visited the school.

The session on building clarity through dialogue was useful as it provided some guidelines for probing and drawing conclusions without falling into the trap of adopting wrong assumptions. We explored the ladder of inference which emphasises the need to listen, consult, and come to conclusions after having researched issues carefully. We then went into larger groups to

discuss identified issues but had to make statements which were not assumptions but based on known fact. The exercise was beneficial as each Headteacher from each country had the opportunity of enacting the roles of (1) Observer, (2) Coach, (3) Deliverer. The items which had been selected for discussion included:

- (a) The ways of improving the employability of pupils.
- (b) Improving the Community.
- (c) Ensuring that pupils want to go to school.

The activity on identifying the stakeholders of the school proved to be very enlightening as we had been sub – divided into group of 9 people, all of whom had differing views on whom should be the stakeholders and what each would regard as being the basic or strategic entitlement of the pupil, as each Headteachers school was based in a difference sociological and industrialised region the two categories of requirement varied considerably from country to country. Ultimately there was a consensus to which we all agreed as a way forward.

Another activity which proved to be beneficial focused on each Headteachers' vision for his / her school in 2005. The request had been to focus the vision on 3 areas: -

- (1) Whole school teams.
- (2) The individual.
- (3) The school.

When the posters were displayed on the walls the visions which appeared were very similar in nature / desirable, realistic but achievable only, in some cases with additional resources.

The final morning was spent planning the programme for the visit to the Italian School with the associated activities. All members of Trio H felt that there had been advantages to the deliveries which had been presented to us at one stage of the proceedings there had been some difficulties. This was discussed and alterations had been made. However, we were of the opinion that more time should have been given to members (trios) in the conference to discuss the objectives, which had been agreed at the end of Cycle 1.

The visit to the Italian School(s) in Sansepolcro was very beneficial and enlightening as we were able to experience the ethos / climate of the school and its environment in "the real world". It was only when we actually visited and experienced this life that we could and did appreciate the difficulties being experienced by an Italian Headteacher.

The following were some of the activities / experiences I sampled at the school.

- The school was sub divided into 3 blocks each of which was 10 minutes walking distance from one another.
- There was an atmosphere of calm during lesson change over as only staff moved.
- The number of staff to pupils was extremely generous 10 / 11: 1 with teaching hours limited to 18 / 30 hours per week (Disadvantage – pay was low).
- Although pupils were out of uniform 14 – 19 they were very polite and sociable. (Discussions with School Council and in classroom visits).
- Staff were more than helpful but from further discussions there was little cooperation or interest in staff helping staff in terms of C.P.D or sharing of workloads.
- Watching and delivering a lesson on Economics to 14 / 15 year old pupils.
- Attending a full Governing body Meeting and a Senior Management meeting.
- Meeting local dignitaries / Mayor and Educationalists.

I have found working with Headteachers from two other countries to be very beneficial as it has enabled me to share and understand the difficulties and achievements experienced by us all. Having visited Italy I am fully aware that their problems are far greater than ours but I have gained valuable experience by observing the way in which they are masters at interpersonal skills. Even though there are serious leadership issues to be addressed (no middle management) they are able to relate well to their staff and they are prepared to help in any way which is beneficial to the Headteacher.

Furthermore, the Cycle 2 visit has confirmed that practices undertaken by myself such as classroom observation, P.M, monitoring of pupil performance, assessment, are placing Welsh Headteachers in the forefront of raising overall standards. There are practices which ought to be going on in Italy but they are not. We have agreed as a Trio that we will work closely in

improving the climate to develop a team culture within the school, this in time will assist in raising standards.

It was surprising to see that in spite of an abundance of IT resources in some areas, there was a distinct absence of it in instances where it would be most beneficial.

There was much emphasis on the didactic approach with little checking to see if work had been understood or copied accurately from the board, especially diagrams! It was surprising to see that the full attention of the pupils was not evident, yet nothing was done to correct this lack of attention. The classroom observations confirmed that the system we have in our country does much to improve standards. The Italian Headteachers want to raise standards by using modern technology in the classroom. They also wish to establish Management structures, which are conducive to developing good, strong, management teams with defined management roles. At present the Senior Roles within the school are purely administrative, whilst the absence of a Middle Management structure does nothing to encourage teamwork or ensure accountability. They were also disadvantaged by the fact that they were not allowed to choose the staff who would be teaching at their schools.

The comparison with Denmark will shed another viewpoint in October but already, if only in terms of pupils' assessment, Italy is was behind as comparisons are not readily made!

I feel that this last (Cycle 2) activity has been very beneficial to myself and will be to the school as I will share my findings with my leadership team.

It has highlighted how good practice needs to be shared not only within the boundaries of my own school but further a field, including other schools in Europe.

Working with and dealing with issues which are important to individuals will prove to be of major importance in the future. Staff are a major source of investment, an investment which is becoming scarce each year. Professional Development is not widespread in Italy and this issue will impact upon standards within all schools.

The friendship established between myself and the other two Headteachers is very good. We are all so taken by the ease with which we have bonded, and the interest which we wish to develop has resulted in the three of us agreeing to continue the partnership well beyond the cycle, visiting to deliver Inset and coaching one another to ensure that standards are raised. We all have something to offer and are benefiting substantially from this professional development. Long may it continue with other Headteachers being given similar opportunities.

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