

WORK...AND THE INNER

For over 30 years of my life in Education, the latihan and testing have had a major influence on my work. They have given me, firstly direction, then specific guidance in my practice and even the qualities of personality I have needed to carry them out. I began as a nervous young man handicapped by lack of confidence, especially in the company of any adult audience: I ended as a Headteacher used to talking and performing in front of large audiences of parents, colleagues and educationalists. What a transformation! I turn the pages of my journal to find the first steps...

Not long after my H.M.I inspection, I began to feel that I should be doing something different at my school. I could not work out what this might be so I did some testing with my close friend as I often did. This testing could not have been clearer but the only trouble was I could just not see how it could possibly be correct! The testing said I should “act as if I was the Head of the place!” and to my mind this just could not be right. If I were Head of a school, surely the last thing I would want would be a Deputy, such as myself, acting as if he was in charge! That would seem to be overstepping the mark, to say the least. Perplexed, I did nothing consciously about the testing, except I was aware of feeling more confident and energised about the school afterwards. Then, two weeks later, my Head came to me and said he had would be out of school for a term doing research which would take him into a number of schools, working closely with the Cambridge Institute of Education. Then he asked whether I would be prepared to stand in for him as **ACTING HEAD** for the term he was absent! Now the testing made sense! And I had a very positive term as acting head so that I began my Christmas holidays that year with a term of meetings with various adults and a generally successful school term behind me. This was to stand me in good stead for a further shock that awaited me soon after my head returned when he announced he had secured promotion and was leaving the school permanently.

The question arose as to whether I should apply for the Headship he was leaving. I was told that it was unusual at that time for a deputy to be promoted to the Headship of the school he had been deputy of: it was more usual for deputies to go

to a school where they were not known in an inferior role. At first, I was unsure, therefore, what to do. I knew I could do the job because I had run the school alongside my Head anyway as well as having the experience of doing so on my own for a term. As is so often the case with me, the Outer gave me an unexpected prompt: I found myself talking informally to my Chair of Governors. There was nothing unusual in this; we knew each other well and often spoke in this way. She knew I was not ambitious and, looking back, I think that she was a bit worried about this. Anyway, as we talked this time I became aware of “something in the air”; there was a tension, a something that was not usually there when we spoke. I then realised that the questions she was asking me were rather more formal than usual; in fact, it was a bit like she was already interviewing me, or, at least, she was trying to find out, in a more serious way than ever before, what my ideas on education and for the school were. At the end she remarked that I seemed much more confident, much more sure of myself and with such a lot of good and exciting ideas for the school, than she had realised! I felt good about that, of course, but I was also impressed by the spontaneous way it had happened and how assured I did, in fact, feel. As a result of this, I decided to do some testing about the whole issue:

I began by asking what my attitude to applying for this Headship should be and was completely surprised by my receiving: “Say “Yes!” to this with all of your personality...Let there be no turning away but rather a loud and complete “Yes!”” I then felt that the interviewing panel (of which my Chair of Governors would be an influential member) would be “friendly” to me and not hostile as I imagined. This was encouraging to say the least: a feeling of complete rightness about applying for the job stayed with me afterwards.

Testing about the headship interview was amazing and so specific! In those days, interviews for Headship were whole day affairs, beginning with a brief welcome and a tour round the school, followed by a question and answer time altogether, then lunch (with each candidate changing places after each course and so sitting and talking with a different member of the interviewing panel each time), then came the interviews proper. I tested about each different part of the day and was really glad I did!

My attitude to the whole thing was to see it as “a splendid social occasion, enlivening and happy!” That is not how I would normally see such a situation!

Normally I would be a bag of nerves...Once again, I received that I should say a complete “Yes!” to the whole occasion! “How then should I be in the morning of the interview?” I should be “jokey and friendly!” “What about lunch time?” Then I should be serious and personally strong”- there was no doubt that this was where the interview *really* began. Then came the interview itself: **THEN** I had to give the **Performance** of my life! My friend received it was as if I was having to field dozens of balls being thrown at me at once and I must not let one go passed me! That seemed a bit of a tall order, to say the least!

Finally, the day of the interview came and, amazingly, I began by hardly feeling nervous at all! I had a new thought which carried a lot of weight with me: this was THE DAY when my career had reached its peak; to get this far was an achievement, especially for someone like me. Why, this might be the only interview for Headship that I would get and so I determined to enjoy it and try to get the most out of it I could. I drove slowly into school trying to savour everything about the day---the sunshine across the fields around me, the feeling of well-being that I had, the thought that a day like this might never come to me again...There was a huge feeling of expectancy in the school as I stepped inside: the appointment of a Head is perhaps the most important appointment a school can make and the teaching staff are particularly affected by it so they tend to have all sorts of uncertainties and anxieties about it. So, unsurprisingly, the school was full of life and and expectancy and, of course, with so many visitors present for the day, it was also trying to be on its best behaviour. Some of the candidates were already there when I arrived and sat, well- dressed and somewhat sheepishly, in the staffroom waiting for the proceedings to begin properly.

At last, we were called to order and, after our initial welcome to the County and the school, we were led around the school. One or two of the candidates tried very hard to impress at this point by almost non-stop talking and asking intensely serious questions. I was not anxious to be part of this but I did remember my testing and I think I made good job of socialising in a fairly relaxed and “jokey” way. Then came the “trial by lunch.” Again, the over-talkers tried ever so hard to impress, so there was still a sense of strain in the room but, again, very surprisingly, I felt almost completely at ease and found myself curtailing any casual or flippant remarks (as the testing had said) and I spoke easily enough to whoever I found myself next to. I actually enjoyed the meal and the conversations.

Not all that long ago, these people- educationalists and “dignatories”- would have made me feel (through no fault of their own) extremely nervous and ill-at-ease. Not so today!

Then it was time for the personal interview itself...Now I did feel nervous as I remembered I had to give the “performance of my life.” This I was not at all sure I could do. I started badly and I know I did not give a convincing answer to the first question. As I sat there bumbling on, I swear I actually heard a swishing sound by my left ear: the sound that is of a ball whizzing passed me. I had missed that one! Already I had let one ball go by and I knew I could not afford to do so with another, so.... I sat upright in the chair, put all my wits around me and “caught” all the rest as they were thrown at me from all directions of the room. I left the interview room feeling tall and strong! If I had not got the job now it was not for want of trying!

I did get the job. “I am really glad,” said the Chair of Governors “I never thought you would pull it off. Well done! I have to tell you that the Chair of the Education Committee (whom I had been told, before the interview, was “a fierce, no-nonsense interviewer!”) was really taken with you...