

Professional School Leadership: Dealing with dilemmas

D. Murphy

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Reviewer: Mike Cowie

Danny Murphy is now in his third headship and he uses this experience well in this helpful, instructive book to provide a toolkit that provides practical guidance in dealing with the dilemmas that are now characteristic features of contemporary school leadership.

Dealing with dilemmas effectively requires good judgement. Murphy draws on his experience of headship and on an impressive range of philosophical work, to explore the nature of dilemmas through three complementary lenses, and show that judgment requires more than intellect and instinct. Insights gained from an exploration of the emotional dimension, the complex social and political context of schools and the ethical perspective are used to offer a model process for dealing with dilemmas that considers common underlying themes and outlines a sequential process that facilitates decision making and action.

This is a short book (there are only 86 pages) and the concise nature of the book is both a strength and a weakness. Its brevity is a strength because the limited space afforded the authors in this series means that they must be clear and succinct, which Murphy is, and also because professionals busy grappling with dilemmas are more likely to read the book and benefit from the guidance offered. The limited space available, however, is inhibiting and important issues about building trust within school communities, and the range of policy and practice implications concerning the nature of headship, accountability and school governance and the nature of democratic society that are discussed in the final chapter deserve deeper consideration.

Given the multiple accountabilities of head teachers, the demands of headship and concern about recruitment and retention, this book is helpful at different levels. Both new and experienced head teachers will find much contained within it to help them get to grips with the dilemmas that characterise headship, but it would be good if policy makers would also take time to read this

book. It might help them develop a less naïve view of the implications of policy making and implementation and gain a better understanding of what school leadership means in practice.