

# Headteachers (School Principals) as System Leaders: *Understandings, provocations and propositions*

22 November 2023



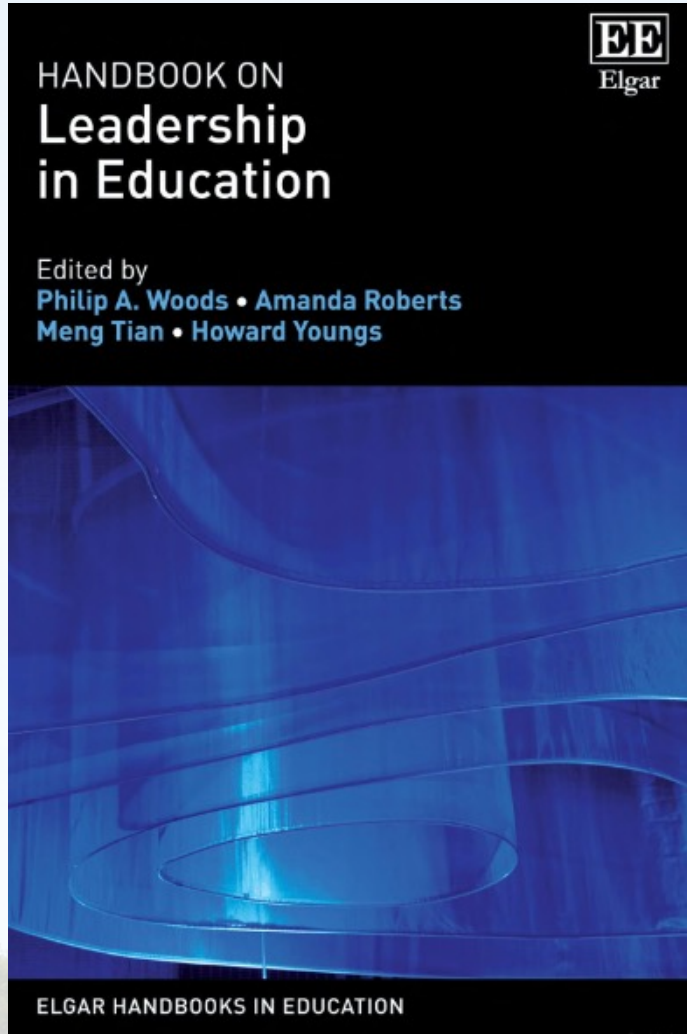
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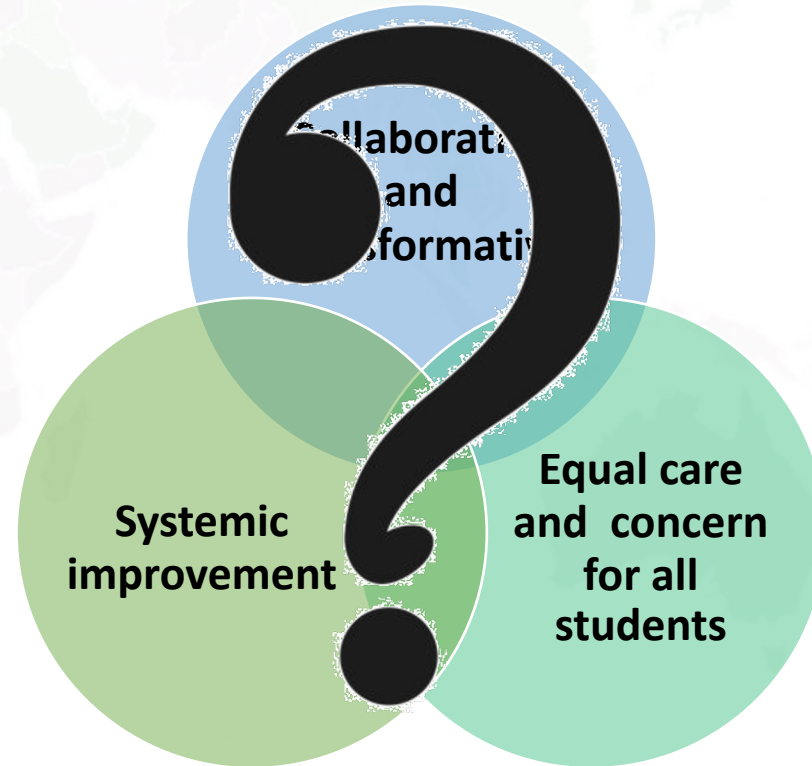


[Mitchell, A.](#), [Torrance, D.](#), [Harvie, J.](#), [Forde, C.](#) and [McMahon, M.](#) (2023) Developing leadership for school education: constructions of system leadership. In: Woods, P. A., Roberts, A., Tian, M. and Youngs, H. (eds.) [Handbook on Leadership in Education](#). Series: Elgar handbooks in education. Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 474-490. ISBN 9781800880412



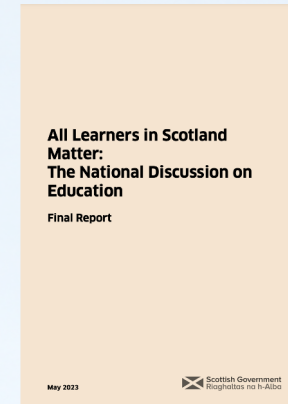
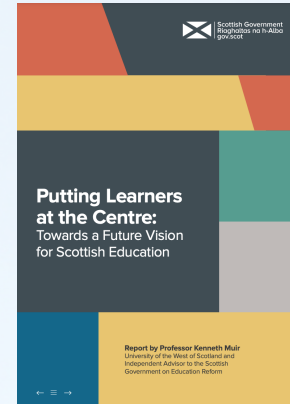
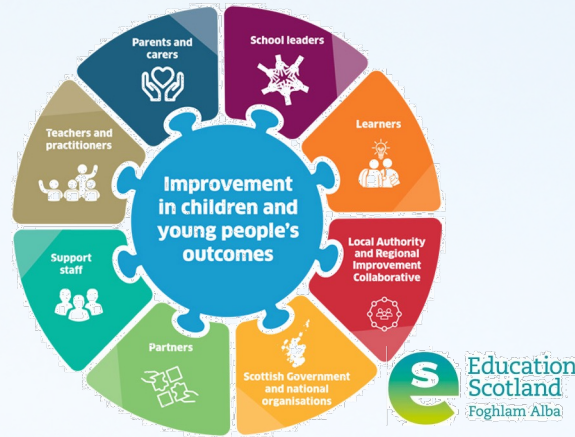
# Headship (Principalship) as System Leadership

## *A compelling objective for school leaders?*



**What?  
Who?  
Why?  
For whom/what?**

## Being a Headteacher in Scotland



## Headteacher Recruitment and Retention Working Group

- Attractiveness and appeal of the role (workload)
- Career Journeys
- Data sharing
- System Resilience
- Wellbeing
- Diversity in the profession

## Achieving Excellence and Equity

### 2023 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan



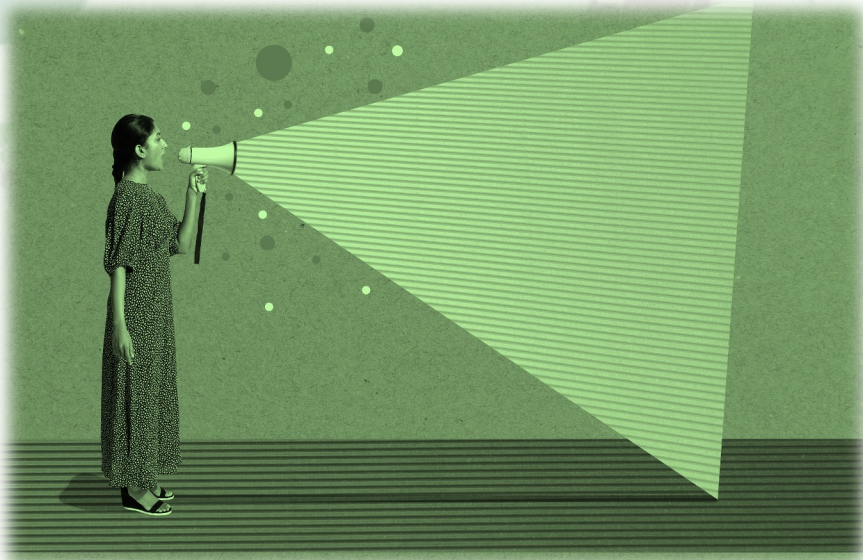


## The role of the headteacher as a system leader in Scotland

<p><b>A Headteachers' Charter for School Empowerment (SG, 2019)</b></p>	<p>Headship as a distinct leadership position:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A senior officer of the Local Authority (district)</li> <li>• A leader of collaborative, evidence-based decision-making</li> <li>• An active participant in the wider corporate work of the local authority</li> </ul>
<p><b>The GTCS (2021) Standard for Headship</b></p>	<p>The lead professional who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proactively contributes to leadership at system level</li> <li>• Has responsibility and capacity to enable and empower individuals and teams</li> </ul>



# Amplification of Principals' Voices: *A Life History Narrative (LHN) Approach*



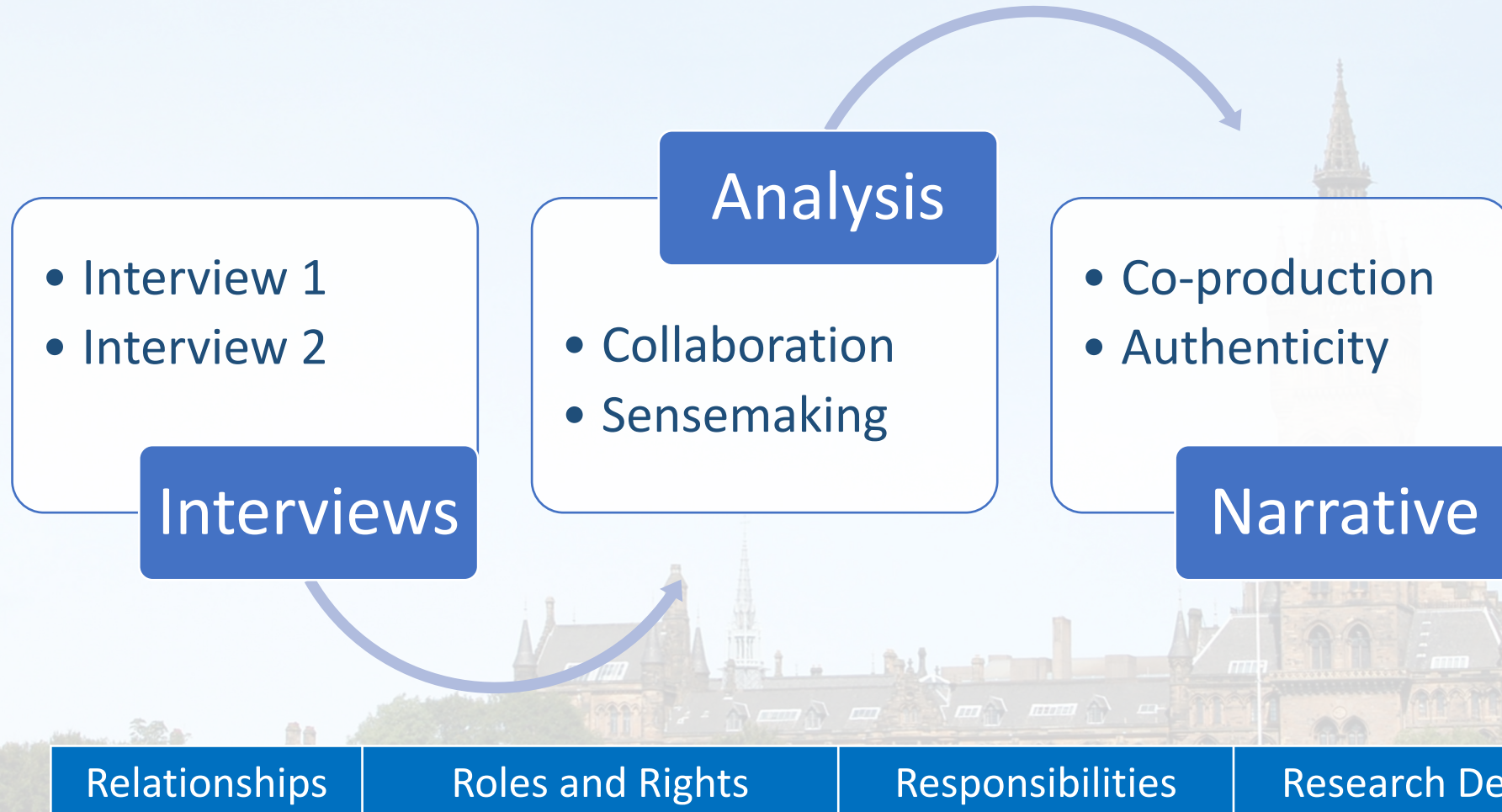
Source: Microsoft 365 stock image (*University of Glasgow subscription*)

How can we understand the lived experiences of school principals as school and system leaders?

What are the implications from the LHNs for leadership development during current and future global and societal complexities, conflicts and uncertainties?

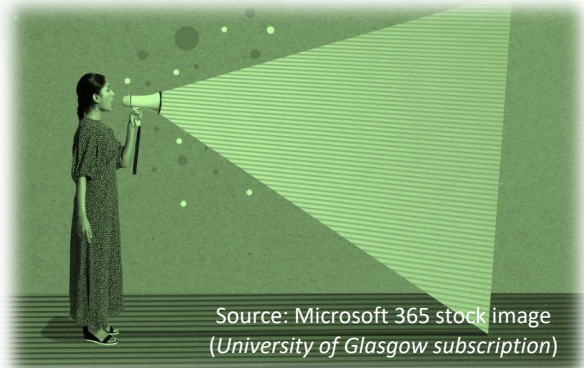
Vigo-Arrazola and Beach (2020); Danaher et al. (2013)





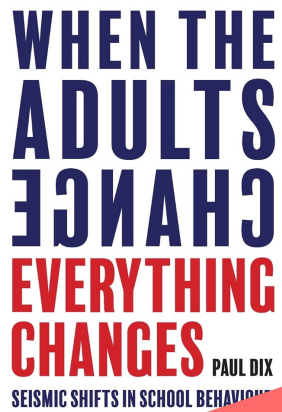


## Scottish headteachers' experiences of system leadership in their journey to headship



System Level	System level role, prior to headship
Local Authority (LA)	Curriculum Development
	Quality Improvement Officer
	Human Rights / Children's Rights Education
	Curriculum for Excellence Development Officer
	ICT Coordinator
	Inclusion Officer
University	Teaching Fellow
	Leading Children's Rights
Scottish Government	Evolving Systems Thinking (Leadership Development)
HMIE (His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education)	Associate Assessor






**WHEN THE  
ADULTS  
CHANGE  
EVERYTHING  
CHANGES** PAUL DIX  
SEISMIC SHIFTS IN SCHOOL BEHAVIOUR



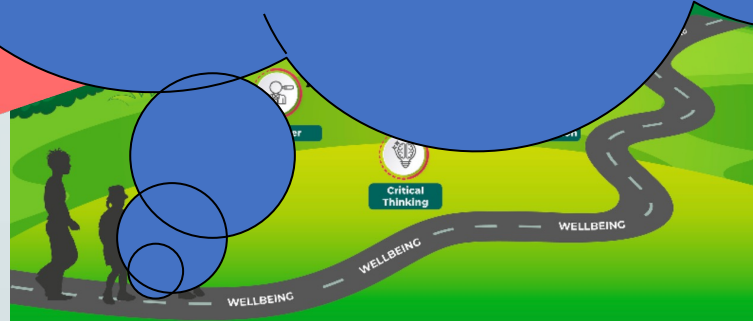
R News Scottish News

## Emergence amid shock

Teachers, council officials  
classroom incidents.



How do we create  
unity, through  
diversity, to move our  
education system  
forward?



...oring of



...Y'S GUIDE TO BEHAVIOUR



# Provocation One

Education systems constrain  
influence and innovation that  
challenge the status quo



Source: Harvard Business Review [online] 2019



## Provocation Two

Access to system leadership, as a means of leadership development and progression, is currently inequitable



Source: Adobe Stock [online]



## Headship as System Leadership in Scotland: sites of practice

(Levels: Priestley et al., 2021)

Headship in Scotland	Micro Level: <i>All Headteachers (HTs)</i>	Meso Level: <i>Some HTs</i>	Macro Level: <i>Few HTs</i>
<b>Who</b> are system leaders in Scotland?	Every GTCS (2021) registered HT	Experienced and/or highly successful HTs (although, in policy, an expectation of all HTs (GTCS, 2021; SG, 2019))	Minority of HTs in Scotland
<b>How</b> do they become a system leader?	A prescribed role in the <i>Standard for Headship</i> (GTCS, 2021) and in Scottish Government Policy (SG, 2019)	Formal roles by invite or application, based on service, reputation, or previous engagement at Meso level.	Through application, invitation, or previous engagement/experience at Macro level, or opportunity offered through word of mouth.
<b>What</b> do they do as system leaders?	Professional collaboration to support improvement and success in their own and other school communities	Support/mentoring of other schools/HTs, or leadership of a regional policy priority through a local authority role.  Networking and engagement beyond their school or LA e.g., through RICS (SG, 2021)	Contribution (and arguably, influence) at an elite level e.g., in Scottish Government policy initiation and formulation stages (Doherty, 2011)



## Provocation Three

System leadership both develops  
and undermines the practice of  
schools within the system



Source: Pikbest Images [online Google Access]



# Headteachers (School Principals) as System Leaders

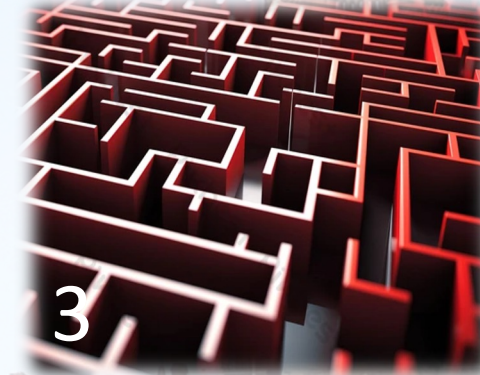
## Propositions for Leadership development



**Political Literacy**  
**Professional Courage**



**Formal SL Opportunities**  
**Anti-discrimination**



**Ethical Leadership**  
**Genuine Collaboration**





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