

I first met John West Burnham through his involvement with LDS and was immediately taken by his breath of knowledge of schooling and education. Soon after becoming Principal I invited John to conduct two workshops over a number of months for our staff. While I thought he was superb, staff were less convinced that his take on education was all that relevant for them. One teacher summarised: "we don't want a helicopter view of education; we need ideas to take into our classrooms".

Sheepishly, I contacted John to tell him this to tell him that there would not be a third invite to Dún Laoghaire. He wasn't remotely upset. "I know exactly what they're saying - they want people like Mike Hughes and Paul Ginnis".

So off I went in search of Mike, who agreed to come across and begin to work with our staff the following September. Unfortunately Mike had to cancel and then I soon became swamped in the daily duties of the school - managing the minutiae and the demands of the present moment. While we made some progress, teaching and learning quietly slipped down the agenda. It was only when I retired and had time to explore issues around leading learning that NAPD managed to get Mike and Paul to work in Ireland.

And so, while it took some years, John did us some service.

The Principal's lot then: getting bogged down in the urgent and not having enough time for the important. Which are we? fire-fighters or air-traffic controllers? Some would describe the inadequacy felt in even beginning to think about becoming strategic leaders and leaders of learning.

If ever there was a book to help address this, then here it is. Given that it provides a way to create dialogue across a number of leadership issues, it is impossible to fairly review it at this time. That task will fall to someone in a year or two's time after working through the exercises (reviews to Derek West in 2017, please). I have little doubt that when they do they will give this book their strongest recommendation.

The book provides a methodology to explore 40 themes under a range of headings which include effective leadership, thinking strategically, leading innovation and change, leading teaching and learning, leading and managing resources, leading people, collaboration and engaging with students, parents and community.

Each theme can then be explored by the school's leadership team within the clear, structured methodology provided. Material on each theme is provided on an accompanying CD, to be printed off and issued in advance of discussions. Most of the material is generic but you could easily tweak it to meet the school's context. The authors suggest different ways of using the book, such as setting aside half of every meeting to cover a particular theme or to dedicate one meeting per month to a theme. Themes can be chosen in any sequence and at any time to meet the needs of the school.

This book is about creating dialogues (remember Mike Hughes's take on CPD to mean *creating professional dialogue*) among the leadership team in order to address the important things in the school's development. I recently mentioned to a current Deputy that I was reviewing this book and she asked for a quick look. Two weeks later, she doggedly resisted returning it.

I strongly recommend this book. Knowing John West Burnham and what he stands for, I have no doubt that this book will be a significant resource for Irish Principals and Deputies in their roles as school leaders.

Before the end of this school year, I suggest you treat yourself to a copy and begin using it from next September. At around €30, it might just be the best buy of your career.