Rethinking School Leadership

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IT’S AN URGENT MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION AT OASIS ACADEMY SHIRLEY PARK!
PREJUDICES

1. Just as germs eventually evolve to counteract even the most powerful antibiotic, so education systems are becoming immune to school improvement. This does not invalidate the strategy, there are still many situations in which it will work and for which it is appropriate – just as many antibiotics still work. However, in many contexts school improvement is not working – working harder and with greater vigour do not seem to improve its limited efficacy given the profound changes in the context in which schools are operating

[John West-Burnham, 2009, Rethinking Educational Leadership: From improvement to transformation]
2. Perhaps we have been improving the wrong thing ... It seems to be the case that school improvement has worked best in contexts where socio-economic factors have been positive ... After two generations of policy initiatives, research and incredible professional commitment, there are still enormous problems in securing equity across most education systems .. The highest performing school systems are those with the lowest levels of child poverty .. It might be that rather than improve schools we should have been trying to improve the family

[John West-Burnham, 2009]
EVIDENCE

- 53% of the schools previously judged outstanding and re-inspected on the basis of risk were no longer outstanding in their inspection year.

- The slow progress of many satisfactory schools is a concern: less than one third of those monitored had made good progress since their previous inspection.

EVIDENCE

Complex issues that won’t go away and may block the further raising of standards:

- making schools authentic ‘learning organisations’
- primary to secondary transition
- personalising learning
- turning round the long ‘tail of underachievement’
Further complex issues:

- impact of applied technologies (incl. ICT) on learning
- evaluating and celebrating wider student outcomes
- planning for schools of the future and implementing new models
- engagement with parents/carers and the school’s community
- phases of the school improvement journey and implications for leadership

[Any of these issues, if unresolved, may continue to block further improvement and may leave us with inappropriate schools for the future]
The reason why the transformation of the education system is so vital is that schools are manifestations of the industrial age in an information society – they are increasingly dysfunctional and potentially irrelevant. Schools are preparing young people for the world inhabited by their parents and teachers – not the world they will have to create and inhabit. Schools have changed the lives of many for the good, they have provided stability, safety and hope, but often in spite of, rather than because of, the system.

[Note: many young people quote the ‘extra-curricular’ experiences at school as their most memorable!]

[John West-Burnham, 2009]
PROPOSITIONS FOR THE FUTURE

- The primary purpose of education is to develop the learning capacity of every individual.
- The curriculum is defined by the learner as his or her total learning experience: cognitive, social, spiritual, moral, artistic and academic.
- Schools work in federal relationships to serve a community, and are primarily accountable to the community.
- Teachers coordinate and support learning; information and assessment are managed through ICT; schools are networked learning communities.
- Education is vertically integrated from nursery to FE/HE.
- Education services are integrated with health, social services, housing and the police service.
CLARITY ABOUT VALUES

You don’t have to be a Mother Theresa to have moral purpose ... Whatever one’s style, every leader, to be effective, must have and work on improving his or her moral purpose ... Moral purpose is about both ends and means. In education, an important end is to make a difference in the lives of students. But the means of getting to that end are also crucial. If you don’t treat others (for example, teachers) well and fairly, you will be a leader without followers.

DEVELOPING LEARNING CAPACITY

- The need for a shared language about learning
- Leaders modelling the behaviour of a ‘leader of learning’
  
  *School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning*


- Accessing tacit knowledge
  
  *There is a crucial distinction between explicit knowledge (words and numbers that can be communicated in the form of data and information) and tacit knowledge (skills, beliefs, and understanding that are below the level of awareness) ... Successful organisations access tacit knowledge*

DEVELOPING LEARNING CAPACITY

- **Reconceptualising CPD**

  Most organisations have invested heavily in technology and possibly training, but hardly at all in knowledge sharing and creation ... Take the seemingly obvious notion of sharing best practices ... Identifying the practices usually goes reasonably well, but when it comes to transferring and using the knowledge, the organisation often flounders


- **Winning the ‘middle ground’**

  Teachers in the middle ground, neither enthusiastic nor cynical, are the key battle ground. Win them over and a project gathers momentum and a new strategy becomes embedded

  [Mike Hughes, 2002, *Tweak to Transform: Improving teaching - a practical handbook for school leaders*]
Many head teachers recognise that they are struggling to create sufficient time to engage effectively in the various strategic issues they are required to deal with. Part of this is driven by the sheer volume of operational delivery issues. However, there was also a sense in which the data suggested some school leaders were more comfortable with an operational role rather than a strategic one.

[PricewaterhouseCoopers for the DfES, 2007, Independent Study into School Leadership]
BEING CIRCUMSPECT

Beware of leaders who are always sure of themselves. Effective leaders listen attentively ... Ineffective leaders make up their minds prematurely and, by definition, listen less thereafter ... Paradoxically, ‘slow knowing’ doesn’t have to take a long time ... It is more of a disposition, for example, effective leaders see the bigger picture; they don’t panic when things go wrong in the early stages of a major change initiative ... they know it takes time for things to gel

[Michael Fullan, 2001, Leading in a Culture of Change]

Learning and leading together, in context, over time, to know of the unknowable, manage within the unmanageable, and organise within the unorganisable ... the argument of complexity theory casts doubt over the claims of traditional strategic planners

[Robert Flood, 1999, Rethinking the Fifth Discipline]
DEALING WITH COMPLEXITY

A systemic model of leadership is needed – beyond the individual, beyond collective groups and teams, to the organisational system .... For many managers the system is a blind spot in their education, vocabulary and way of seeing things .... The old strategy of relying on strong and wise leaders doesn’t work with today’s complex, adaptive systems. There are few wise and heroic leaders who can overcome the resistance of a system that closes ranks to protect the status quo .... Systems take time and patience to fix

[William Tate, 2010, Think, manage and lead systemically. Business Strategy Review, p. 48 on]

[Note: distinction between current educational use of ‘system leaders’ and this broader model of ‘systemic leadership’]
Using systems thinking: Organising schools for improvement in Chicago

Overall goal: student well-being and learning in community

Theoretical framework: schools are complex organisations consisting of multiple interacting subsystems. Each subsystem involves a mix of human and social factors that shape the actual activities that occur ... Almost everything interacts with everything else

The essential support processes in schools are: First, leadership as the driver for change, with Principals as catalytic agents for systemic improvement. These leaders build agency for change at community level, nurturing the leadership of others through a shared vision for local reform, and they provide guidance over time to sustain a coherent programme of 4 key school wide developments:

- Encouraging new relationships with parents and community
- Enhancing teachers’ professional capacity
- Creating a student-centred learning environment
- Providing guidance about pedagogy and supports for teaching & learning

Using systems thinking: School-based education reform in South Australia

Following are among the key precepts used in the design of this successful reform initiative, ‘Learning to Learn’:

- **Transformation rather than incremental improvement is needed**
- **Meta-learning skills are increasingly important to society and business as a basis for knowledge and should be a focal point for education**
- **A catalyst or leader is needed to trigger the development of partnerships between stakeholders as a basis for achieving a change in how learning is approached through schooling**
- **Complex problems need complex solutions (and a complex systems perspective) and these can come from those who are confronting the problems at a local level**

The qualities of leadership required were not among typical selection criteria for Principals and included: *a level of modesty and circumspection and a capacity to question one’s own deepest assumptions ... (plus) leadership as a process of inviting others to participate in critical enquiry*

[Chris Goldspink, 2007, *Transforming education: evidential support for a complex systems approach*]
Building capacity for a learning community

The kind of learning that we have described implies a deep change in the view of professional practice, of people, and of school organisations. The (new) view holds continual learning for students and for educators at the heart of everything that goes on in and about a school. It holds knowledge and skill gaps as natural aspects of the human condition and as opportunities to grow and develop. It holds learning as natural and organic and deeply connected to the lives and realities and mysteries of the people who are part of the community – students, teachers, parents, administrators. This view of professional practice asks educators to open their practices to their own critical scrutiny and to the scrutiny of others. It asks them to invite others into their professional spaces, to try out new ideas and be not afraid to make mistakes. It recognises the deep emotion that new learning involves, and it asks all people in the community to make the emotional investment in their own learning and in the learning of other community members.

[Coral Mitchell & Larry Sackney, 2000, Profound Improvement: Building capacity for a learning community]
THE SCHOOL AS A LEARNING COMMUNITY

Leadership Learning

Systems Thinking & Processes

Student Learning

Teacher Learning

Learning in, from & with Community (especially Parents/Carers)
TWO QUESTIONS: THE SEARCH FOR A NEW PARADIGM?

1. How do schools become more effective learning-focused organisations, so that all embark on the journey of transformation into places of education fit for the middle of the 21st Century?

2. What are the implications for school leadership and the development of leaders for the future?
A NEW PARADIGM FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP?

Current paradigm:

- **reductionist and managerial**, with sets of competencies and behaviours for leadership (National Standards, sub-sets for urban leadership, Academy leadership, etc)
- designed primarily to meet the needs of **short term, target-driven approaches to change and incremental improvement** (not the whole answer to raising standards)
- **undervalues** importance of dealing with **complex issues** and **capacity building**, both vital for raising standards further and creating more outstanding schools
A NEW PARADIGM FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP?

Evidence that current paradigm **only gets us so far:**

- Improvement is ‘plateauing’ in many schools: they reach ‘satis’, then get stuck
- Potentially negative impact of coercive and pace-setting leadership styles, driven by narrow targets, and without the four styles that have more sustained, positive impact
- Complex issues often remain unresolved

Need for something broader and deeper that enables leaders to address the current agendas (national and local) and provides ways to address some of the complex issues, so creating more outstanding schools, fit for purpose in the mid-20th C – **going beyond improvement to transformation**
WHAT MIGHT A NEW PARADIGM LOOK LIKE?

- An example of a new paradigm that aims to develop school leadership by focusing on **5 key dimensions and 5 actions** that will support the sustained raising of standards and the transformation of schools.

- This paradigm describes the key dimensions as 5 ‘minds’ for thinking, relating and behaving as a school leader and the actions as 5 essentials for leadership development.

A NEW PARADIGM?
5 ‘MINDS’ FOR THE FUTURE

Cognitive Minds:

1. **Disciplined Mind**: knowing our ‘discipline’ well, i.e., learning & teaching; educational leadership & management; school improvement & transformation; keeping up-to-date with other relevant fields, e.g. neuroscience, ICT

2. **Synthesising Mind**: understanding the complexity of the leadership challenge; seeing the ‘levers’ for change in a holistic way; joining things up, internally and externally, incl. all educational stakeholders; developing interdisciplinary perspectives; applying systems thinking

3. **Creating Mind**: using freedoms and opportunities; listening, especially to ‘dissenters’; innovativeness; risk-taking; creating learning organisations and high-achieving schools for all students
A NEW PARADIGM?
5 ‘MINDS’ FOR THE FUTURE

Relational Minds:

4. **Respectful Mind**: emotional and spiritual intelligences; being trustworthy and developing trust; establishing behavioural boundaries and ‘norms’; support through coaching & mentoring; celebrating success through learning and personal growth

5. **Ethical and Spiritual Mind**: personal beliefs/values; moral leadership; understanding and respecting different world views; servant leadership (by leaders, staff & pupils); working for sustainability; physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual renewal
BEING SPIRITUALLY AS WELL AS EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT

Going beyond Emotional Intelligence (EI) [self-awareness; self-management; social awareness; relationship management] to develop Spiritual Intelligence (SI)

Qualities of a spiritually intelligent leader:

- Asks ‘Why?’ and ‘What if..?’ questions; seeks fundamental answers
- Is inspired by vision and values; is determined* to achieve long term goals
- Is able to work against convention; is flexible
- Sees the connections between diverse things; is holistic
BEING SPIRITUALLY AS WELL AS EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT

- Has an ethical life-style; has a deep sense of commitment to community; is trustworthy
- Shows a high degree of self-awareness; puts ego aside; is humble*
- Makes sacrifices; is resilient
- Has a capacity to face, use and transcend suffering and pain; is courageous; is reluctant to cause unnecessary harm

_Courage is not simply one of the virtues but the form of every virtue at the testing point_
[C S Lewis]

[Based on Danah Zohar & Ian Marshall, 2000, Spiritual Intelligence]
[Howard Gardner, 1993, also recognised 'spiritual intelligence' as a possible additional 'multiple intelligence' in Frames of Mind: The theory of multiple intelligences]
[* Also characteristics of Level 5 leaders, see Jim Collins, 2001, Good to Great]
5 ESSENTIALS FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT?

1. Developing professional knowledge and understanding: drawing from the best of current approaches & programmes; developing self-awareness and personalising learning through direct experience; effective use of data & self-review tools; study at Masters’ level

2. Developing interpersonal skills: particularly critical skills, like clarifying & articulating beliefs & values (valuing & respecting everyone); listening & reflection; creating a climate of trust; using humour & celebration to best effect

3. Developing key qualities: aspirational attitude (‘everyone can reach for the stars’); courage & persistence for the long haul; ability to challenge under-performance & have difficult conversations; humility to hold the mirror up (360 appraisal) & keep learning; appetite to take on the big questions & complex issues and for change; shared leadership

4. Developing deeper learning: through collaborative enquiry (in-school and cross-school/phase) about learning & teaching, to create networked learning communities; engaging with intellectually challenging ideas; applying systems thinking and processes

5. Being supported: coaching for personal learning & performance; space & activities to ‘recharge the batteries’ and provide balance
Have no illusions – transformation is hard work!