Revolutionary leadership, education systems and new times:

More of the same or time for real change?

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This article seeks to raise debate about issues of leadership, strategy, structure and culture of many of our education systems in these new times of rapid and discontinuous change. It argues that, in the main, the plethora of past reforms and restructures of education systems, schools and schooling have failed to deliver the needed changes for these times. It posits that a revolutionary leadership approach to change at the centre, not an evolutionary one, is needed, characterised by new mind-sets in educational leaders that fundamentally challenge and change the culture, the principles, the values and the power relationships in how education systems have been conceptualised and organised in the past. While acknowledging that change must also occur in many other areas and aspects of the education milieu – these are not considered here - the article is deliberately provocative in its approach in an endeavour to encourage debate about many issues that have in a sense remained "undiscussable". It does not offer a recipe of solutions to the challenges it raises. Rather, hopefully it catalyses the application of new mind-sets to these challenges and the generation of ideas that lead to new ways of doing things that see the teaching and learning of young people as the dominating driver of the strategy, structure and culture of education systems.

bureaucracies ... (are) bloated public services, staffed by indolent bureaucrats, motivated by insular status acquisition, and organised by hierarchic order. Power and status ... related to the size of the empire established. Numbers of staff ... taken as a measure of the importance of a particular department or authority. (O'Faircheallaigh, Wanna & Weller, 1999, p. 25)

We must break the chains of the old mind-set if we are to grapple successfully with the task of managing adaptive organisations. ... The enemy 'within ourselves' is the old mindset. (Pascale, 1990, p. 88).

Real strategic change requires inventing new categories, not rearranging old ones. (Mintzberg, 1994, p. 109)

INTRODUCTION - WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

There is little doubt that education, schools and schooling are at a critical time in their history, subject to unprecedented pressures and changing expectations. While the raft of reforms and restructuring over the past decades have been variable in their success to respond to past challenges, the change agenda required now and in the future is neither predictable nor simple. And that change agenda is required to penetrate universally throughout the education enterprise, from classrooms – eg. how we conceive them and the nature of technologically driven curricula – through to the strategy, structure and culture of our large education systems. In considering this change agenda, this paper limits its discussions in the main to the 'centre' of large education systems and how they might need to respond. Thus, while acknowledging the following discussion is but part of the necessary agenda for debate, by so limiting the focus it is hoped that the issues raised might be more readily debated, become more clearly defined leading to identification of potential ways forward. There is also an acknowledgment that the following discussion needs to be grounded in consideration of the changing social, political and economic contexts within which schools operate.

The earlier quotes capture in many ways what this paper is about. That is, commonly held conceptions of large education systems such as public sector bureaucracies and the leadership of those systems, need to be challenged, debated and changed if such organisations are to deliver the necessary education services in these new times of the new millennium. In part, this need is driven by the increasing inappropriateness of an approach to the delivery of educational services where the centre or central bureaucracy retains, or endeavours to retain, significant control over schools, often in what are structurally highly decentralised and complex systems. The need also derives from the rapid and discontinuous changes globally now increasingly impacting on education and schools

Historically, the development of the bureaucracy in education in a sense paralleled the development of mass compulsory education and the developing notions of bureaucracy in other organisations as a result of the spread of capitalism (Dawkins, 1991, p. 23). What is significant now, and will become more so in the future is that never before in its history has the context in which the bureaucracy and schools operated been so challenging. Does current thinking in education bureaucracies accommodate the notions proposed by writers such as Beare (2001) who contend that schools will need to remake themselves into shapes which bear little resemblance to the patterns of the traditional school? Or those of Ohmae (2000) who having "moved on" from his ideas of the 'borderless world' endeavours to capture the sweeping transformation of society with his notions of the invisible continent in which he sees education as the most fundamental lever for success, arguing that preparing youngsters to comprehend the invisible

continent and compete in its endeavours and explorations is the best investment that a government can make (pp. 227-229). Are the ideas and principles of the 'third way' and the notions of a changing 'contract' between government and the people as proposed by Botsman and Latham (2001) for example, being considered? Are they appropriate?

Are our typically large, essentially conservative bureaucracies in the best position to be making so many decisions for those in schools dealing first-hand with the challenges of these new times? Will educational funding and resources continue to be directed to supporting a potentially increasingly irrelevant bureaucracy away from schools, reverting to a sameness, rather than moving to a learning-centred future characterised by innovation and difference? Responding to these questions requires something more than fiddling with institutional structures and shuffling resources" (Latham, 2001, p. 7) and going beyond a revisiting of the earlier critics of bureaucracies such as Ferguson (1984) among many others.

Such challenges, perhaps unfortunately, arise at a time when educational reform of some form or another has been almost endemic across education systems in past decades - when many in education are hoping for some stability and no more change. In a sense, they are suffering from reform fatigue. Unfortunately for some, as Latham (2001) points out the reality is that change and reform will not stop. "In fact, we are at the beginning, not the end, of a major period of change" (p.4).

Solutions to the challenges arising from the issues discussed here are not easy to identify. They may well be even less easy to implement. In part, this results from the fact that the values, ideals and possibly the very positions of those currently leading such organisations need to be challenged if real change is to be effected (Sturgess, 2000). These are significant barriers but they must be tested. Prevailing assumptions and cultures will need to be challenged and new mind-sets that look to the future for ideas not the past will need to be encouraged and developed. Realistically, perhaps the most we might hope for is to encourage debate and begin a move towards a different future.

Panaceas to the challenges offered in the past (and for some, the present) such as school-based management, retain too much 'old thinking' and not enough of the 'new'. Fundamental to this 'old thinking', it could be argued, is the retention by central bureaucracies of the fundamental power and control tools of any large organisation, viz. policy, decision-making and resourcing. The old mind-sets inherent in such organisations condition the nature of administration of the bureaucracy, establish prescribed arrangements under which people are employed, and generate a set of logics which justify bureaucratic practice (O'Faircheallaigh, 1999, p. 74). In education, they are frequently seen to be inflexible, low in responsiveness and time consuming by those at the direct site of service delivery, that is schools.

It is necessary to acknowledge that, despite some successful developments in recent times, many of the current strategies, structures and means of organisational delivery of schooling through large education systems are not much different from where we have been for decades. This is despite the myriad reforms and restructurings most bureaucracies and schools have endured across these times. To move forward, what

needs to be injected are new mind-sets, new cultures, new approaches and new ways of doing things - not a revisiting of the old. In short, it may not simply be evolutionary, but rather revolutionary leadership that is required!

ATTEMPTS TO CHANGE - WHAT HAVE WE TRIED?

There is general agreement that education systems are not unique and like almost all other organisations, now operate in a rapidly discontinuously changing global world (Clarke & Clegg, 1998; Limerick, Cunnington & Crowther, 1998; Education Queensland, 1999; Power, 2000). But how successfully have the organisational strategies, structure, culture and values of those systems and the principles that underpin their operation fundamentally changed in response to this increasingly dynamic operational context? The answer to this might be "not very", as Caldwell (2001, p. 1), for example, observes that "(e)ducation in Australia has been in a state of continuous change for several decades. ... There is a widely held view, however, that there has been much change but little reform".

While their seems to be a continuing search for the next iterations of school-based management/self governing school models (see for example the review of recent developments noted by Bush and Gamage, 2001), do they go far enough in challenging the fundamental principles upon which the relationships between schools and the centre are based, or at least as they are evidenced in many large educational bureaucracies around the world? Even the language of the school-based management literature, such as devolution, assumes the centre giving away responsibilities (and accountabilities) to schools. Should not the discourse reflect notions of schools first, bureaucracies second?

To date, attempts, or pretences at devolution by many education systems might better be described as "pseudo-devolution" (Limerick et al, p. 85). Despite being accompanied by powerful and positive rhetoric, devolution (or pseudo-devolution) has resulted for people in many systems to decreased job satisfaction as the centre introduces policies and processes intended to ensure that the operating units (eg schools) are making the right decisions and doing the right things - sanctions such as performance management often plays a role in this. And this is often where tensions between the centre (the steady, stable, slow moving bureaucracy) and schools (the dynamic "pointy end" of educational delivery) become significant. It is also the boundary where often the central bureaucracy will not permit schools to cross. Questions like "can we trust them (ie. schools)?" are raised by the holders of power at the centre. Are these the wrong questions of the wrong voices? Alternatively, schools might legitimately ask of the centre questions such as "what are you doing to help us deliver quality educational services for our school community?" and "how can you help us to do our job better".

Perhaps we need to reflect on whether any serious and radical alternatives to the status quo have been contemplated by key decision-makers. Such alternatives might think about the system as not simply comprising a central bureaucracy, secondary bureaucracies (eg, regions) and schools as well-ordered and clearly structured

organisations, but adopting a much more realistic and potentially responsive model that sees the system as a loosely coupled networked organisations. That is, where the organisation is characterised by autonomous distinctiveness, interdependence and responsiveness where organisational units (eg. schools) and those 'bodies' external to the units (eg. to the wider community) are responsive to each other and collaborate from time to time with each other (Limerick et al, p. 46).

Autonomy, synergies and alliances, and empowerment are key concepts to be considered in these different models. While rhetoric about such ideas might well be evident in education systems, the reality is likely to be something quite different. Clusters of schools working in alliances with other community organisations (government, non-government and commercial) in meaningful synergetic relationships are much more likely to develop responsive and effective solutions to emerging challenges and problems than another policy developed at the bureaucratic centre with potentially only passing relevance to the specific delivery site. The notion of individual schools may need to be replaced by notions of community learning centres that facilitate a range of learning opportunities for the community from traditional P-12 curricula through to a myriad of other desired learning opportunities about, for example effective parenting.

Almost a decade ago, (then) progressive writers such as Osborne and Gaebler (1993) argued for the notion of community-owned government, or what might be described as the "insistence of ordinary citizens on having their say "(O'Faircheallaigh et al, 1999, p. 69). Using examples of successfully managed community service delivery activities they identified a number of useful notions to raise questions about the appropriate roles of central bureaucracies, school communities and wider communities in the schooling enterprise. They include concepts such as (p. 66-70):

- Communities have more commitment to their members than central bureaucracies have to their clients;
- Communities understand their problems better than the bureaucracy;
- Communities are more flexible and creative than large service bureaucracies;
- Communities are cheaper than bureaucrats, leaving more dollars for actual service delivery.

In short, these concepts suggest schools are more highly 'connected' with their communities than with their organisational centre. Schlechty (1997), for example, might see this state as characterised by a reduced central bureaucracy and greater community participation. Arguably, almost a decade later, there is little evidence that such discourse has resulted in significant changed practice, at least not in Australia. This situation needs to be debated. What can we learn from the charter schools in the United States that have addressed some of these community-driven agendas (Botsman, 2001)? Is it that Osborne and Gaebler are wrong? Or is that such ideas challenge fundamentally the prevailing principles, mind-sets and culture upon which our current systems are constituted. And

as a result, make those in positions of power uncomfortable as they contemplate alternative futures in which they may play a much lesser, or in some cases, no part?

THINGS HAVE CHANGED - HAVEN'T THEY?

So, despite the fact that educational (eg. Beare, 1995, 2001; Caldwell & Hayward, 1998; Caldwell & Spinks, 1998) as well as non-educational writers (Clarke and Clegg, 1998; Limerick, Cunnington & Crowther, 1998) have been arguing for a number of years for new ways of thinking about organisations (schools, school systems) and how they might be structured, organised and characterised in these new times, the nature and scope of what has been achieved has been slow and perhaps best described as modest, reflecting the observation of Hargreaves (1994) that professional and institutional structures are resilient: they withstand many an assault and have powerful capacities to maintain and reproduce themselves despite surface changes.

So, despite the seemingly endless policy changes, developments and so-called major innovations, education systems continue to look much the same as they did ten, twenty years ago. That is, the centre (central office, head office, corporate office - whatever title is popular at the time) controls the education policy agenda, the centre controls major budgeting processes, the centre in large part dictates what schools should do. Coupled with regressive industrial relations constraints over the utilisation of the system's human resources, the outcome is usually just "more of the same". Within the bounds of such restructuring and reform efforts, many principals and teachers take up the new challenges absorbed in the promises embedded in the policy rhetoric. Others continue to be less enthusiastic. Despite the mixed reception by those at the point of delivery of services and the failure to be able to demonstrate educational improvements, resource dollars continue to support such change agendas, drawing well needed funding away from the core business of schools, learning and teaching.

What this reflects is a lack of appreciation of the complexities of change processes (Kirkbride, Durcan & Obeng, 1994). The essentially linear roll out model of ideas from the system centre (sometimes through districts, regions or other local education authorities) eventually to schools has been replicated over and over again. The conduct of lengthy consultation processes with key stakeholders, seemingly with the implication that the system is listening, does not hide the view of many that the centre has the answers even before asking the questions of the stakeholders! This model invariably presupposes that the central bureaucracy generates the 'new ideas and ways of doing things' and holds overall leadership for change. In so doing, the centre seems to secure its budget first, other secondary bureaucracies in the system secure their budgets second with the remainder distributed, usually by a complex formula, to schools last. Paradoxically, the overt accountabilities for the outcomes of such change, however, typically traverse the opposite route.

What is lost in a plethora of new jargon to market the latest idea or model is serious debate about questions such as:

- What are the fundamental principles and values underpinning the changes?
- Is there wider and local school community interest in, and commitment to the proposed changes that is, have the changes been driven by a perceived need by those practitioners at the site of delivery of education, viz. schools?
- Whose interests (students?) will be served by the changes can this be demonstrated?
- Who will really hold the accountability for achieving the goals of the change?
- Where will the dollars funding the changes really be spent, viz. in schools for students?
- Are the changes fundamental shifts in thinking and pedagogy for example, or are they in reality nothing more than a re-badging of current or earlier practices?

Typically it seems, such questions are ignored or given scant attention and the old assumptions of 'how to do it' remain. The centre retains control over the key funding resources of the system, re-inventing itself (but never disappearing) to accommodate the latest new idea. Often additional and highly paid staff are appointed to head-up this unit or that to 'make it all happen' and the life of the bureaucracy goes on. Through all this, many schools ignore the machinations of the bureaucracy and innovate and make real changes to improve learning for their students. While the names of the department's senior officers are unknown to many in schools and the system's latest idea a hoped-for passing fad, principals and teachers struggle to work within systemic constraints maybe superficially different from a decade ago, but in reality not that much more facilitative or less-constraining than those of earlier times.

What schools most want is greater control over their own resources, human and physical. What they probably most need, were this wish granted, is the capacity to develop a genuine learning community. What they have in reality approaches the description offered by Osborne and Gaebler (p. 314):

Traditional public education is a classic example of a bureaucratic model. It is centralized, top-down and rule driven; each school is a monopoly; customers have little choice; and no one's job depends on their performance. It is a system that guarantees stability not change.

Limerick et al sum-up the often unrecognised predicament in which many large education systems find themselves. That is, where despite the public rhetoric to the contrary, they argue that senior managers are not preparing their organisations for the

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challenges and contradictions of these new times. On the contrary, they are potentially ensuring that they are in fact significantly underprepared: Many managers ... are plagued by problems of accountability and are reluctant to let go of the apparent certainty of hierarchical control. So they have developed an uneasy hybrid form of organisation in which hierarchy is retained but which attempts to implement some of the precepts of postcorporate organisation. The result is ... the neo (new) corporate bureaucracy, ... it is still based on the corporate mindset. (p. 22).

Is the current state a result of governments, through their public sector bureaucracies, not trusting the capacities of their communities (who after all are the 'employers of the governments)? Obviously, elected governments retain the overall responsibility (and accountability) for major policies through expenditure of taxpayers dollars and support or otherwise of their decisions at the ballot box. However, the fundamental assumption that the current way of doing things is the best or only way for implementation of those policies is rarely questioned. Is it not a time for some vigorous debates about what changes in thinking and practice might need to be made and how to drive those changes? This may require revolutionary leadership, that is leadership that rejects current notions of 'how it is done' and 'how it has been done', seeks radically different alternatives to address the social, economic and technological challenges of the new times and that literally, and not just symbolically, places schools at the vanguard of what education systems ought really be about. With such mind-sets the education centre becomes subservient to schools and their communities.

CHANGING THE UNCHANGEABLE?

In an endeavour to catalyse debate about some of the challenges raised here, a number of principles and practices have been identified, focusing on leadership and culture, policy issues, centre-school relationships, budgeting and funding, and resourcing and accountability. These are summarised in the following table. While in no way claiming to be complete nor suggestive of a hierarchy, they contrast 'how we do it now' (traditional) with how we might do it from an alternative (revolutionary) perspective. [In the table, the 'centre' refers to the central bureaucracy, for example the central office and possibly secondary bureaucracies, such as district offices.]

Traditional	Revolutionary
Leadership & culture	
status quo valued and influences future	only successes from the now and past retained
 teachers' attitudes and values determine what constitute a 'good student' 	school community attitudes and values determine what is best for all their students
centre drives leadership throughout the system	 leadership focus in school and wider communities holds priority, with multiple (shared) leadership encouraged
 criticism by school communities of centrally developed policies strongly discouraged 	 vigorous debate of all policies, particularly by those implementing same, encouraged and valued
 promotion is the reward of those who 'look' and 'sound' like their superiors 	 difference and diversity in thinking, attitudes and ideas are valued and rewarded
 gender, 'old boys clubs', favours, like mindedness and old mind-sets characterise the culture 	 quality, intellect, leadership, challenge, forward thinking and new mind- sets pervade the culture
 radical ideas that depart from past practices discouraged 	 radical ideas that depart from past practices that improve student learning sought and acted upon
Policy issues	
centre engages in multi-level policy development which generate a plethora of priorities for schools to implement	 centre engages in strategic policy development around government and essential priorities only; local school community developed policies responding to students' needs take precedence
school follow the centre's policies	schools challenge the centre's policies if they are inappropriate for their community
centre interferes in operational matters for schools	school communities determine all operational matters that affect them

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Traditional	Revolutionary	
Policy issues continued		
significant policy lag in conception (at the centre) and implementation (in schools)	 more rapid implementation of policy priorities as school communities are significant players in policy process 	
centre's policies often assume a 'one-size-fits-all' approach	 every school community has its differences which must be accommodated in policy development 	
Centre-school relationships		
centre has a life of their own; it could exist and operate without schools	 centre exists only if it can demonstrate that it value-adds to the work of schools 	
centre is the source of innovative ideas	innovative ideas are welcomed and supported from everywhere, especially schools and their communities	
centre points the accountability 'finger' at schools while retaining control over critical resourcing matters	schools hold clear accountabilities for student outcomes, because they have control over the resources that matter	
centrally determined policies 'solve' social justice and equity challenges	community determined social justice and equity priorities are embraced and funded	
centre proclaims to hold accountabilities for public funding of schools	communities hold accountability for public funding of schools	
centre determines accountability responsibilities	school communities in collaboration with the centre determine appropriate accountabilities	

Traditional	Revolutionary	
Budgeting & funding		
centre proscribes a top-down approach to budgeting	bottom-up global approach to budgeting is adopted system-wide	
centre is funded first; funding for schools with what is left	schools are funded first; funding for the bureaucracy follows	
Resourcing & accountability		
centre, in response to political pressures, supports the continued operation of inefficient and ineffective schools	communities determine the on-going viability and operation of schools	
centre holds overall control for critical resources, such as human resources	schools (individual and clusters) hold control (and accountability) for their human resources	
centre senior bureaucrats attract premium salaries	principals, other school administrators, senior teachers attract premium salaries	
 human resources (staffing) characterised by tenure 	human resources characterised by performance and quality	

CAN WE SHIFT FROM THE 'TRADITIONAL' TO THE 'REVOLUTIONARY'?

The first and major issue to be addressed in any such shift from 'traditional' to 'revolutionary' are the mind-sets of those who currently hold and exercise power in the central bureaucracy. The proposed changes outlined here are a fundamental challenge to their exiting positions, authority and their futures. The mind-set changes transcend cultural and operational changes. Many senior bureaucrats have attained their current positions because of their commitment and dedication (and in some cases even excellence) to the way things have been, and still are done in their organisation. Typically they have been rewarded, via promotion, for accepting the 'traditional' approach with greater power and influence over policy, decision-making and resourcing in their system. As a result, whether the required changes in mind-set are possible with incumbent central office personnel then, may be highly problematic. Sturgess (2000) alerts us to the magnitude of seeking such radical change in the bureaucracy, noting that it survives because it delivers and that its identified weaknesses on one hand are the very things that

give it strength on the other (p. 11). It might be that 'new faces' will be needed to bring the new mind-sets if the challenges of change are not understood by current senior officers.

Importantly, shifting from the 'traditional' to the 'revolutionary' also implies significant challenges for those in educational leadership positions in schools. That is, change will be required of principals, other school leaders, teachers and those in school communities and the wider community if the ideas of the 'revolutionary' are to gain momentum. This flow-on effect will result, for example, from changes in their roles and responsibilities as those of central office colleagues change.

UNRESOLVED TENSIONS?

There is clearly no easy path from the 'traditional' to the 'revolutionary'. In fact, many significant and unresolved tensions can be identified as arising from any such change or attempt at such change. Among many, included are:

Democratic societies require that the government of the day sets educational
policy directions - for education delivery across large systems this means that
there must be some similarities in priorities for all schools to work towards. (Of
course, this assumes that all schools are committed to, and enact such priorities
in any case which is clearly not always evident in practice.)

The tension here then is one of 'control' by the centre versus 'freedom' for individual schools to respond to local needs.

 There are considerable benefits and economies of scale to be gained by certain tasks being undertaken once by one group and then disseminated among several communities.

A tension of central unitary decision-making versus diverse and dispersed local decision-making is evident here.

- Most governments proclaim commitment to social justice and equity.
 A tension of maintaining a focus on these principles while schools may move into more competitive markets needs to be considered.
- Many in education see potential difficulties in empowering school communities in that they fear powerful minority groups may "high-jack" the education agenda.

While such concerns may be well-founded, they do grow out of a mind-set of the centre knowing what is best for schools and a fear that they may lose control of what schools do.

Schools have traditionally been hierarchically structured with a principal the
designated leader. The changes posed here will rely increasingly on shared or
distributed leadership notions - multiple leadership will replace singular
leadership.

Like many other changes identified here, a major mind-set change will be required. Governance models for schools will clearly need to be reconceptualised to fit the new times.

These are not straight-forward matters and require considerable debate about power, accountability and purpose.

The complexities and magnitude of the challenges facing education systems are enormous if schools are to be positioned to respond adequately to a discontinuously changing globalised world. These challenges affect everyone and every part of the system, from the teacher to the director-general, from the school to the system's centre. This paper has endeavoured, perhaps rather simplistically, to look at where debates about the centre (ie. the central bureaucracy) might begin. But the debates must begin somewhere, and they must be fundamentally challenging of our current values, principles and practices. Can we even contemplate a time when schools no longer "belong" to bureaucratically ordered systems but rather may be loosely coupled with other community organisations both local and international with leaders emerging with a variety of backgrounds and experiences?

This paper did not set out to offer a recipe of solutions to the challenges impacting on education and schools. Rather, what it has suggested is that those in leadership positions in our education systems need to engage in debate and serious questioning about how to position schools to meet those challenges. It argues for a radical futures-oriented response to both the challenges and the potential solutions to those challenges. Pascale (1990) argued for mind-set changes, Mintzberg (1994) for real and new strategic change. Perhaps some of the ideas emerging from the wider literature that addresses changes in government, bureaucracy and community and the relationships among these for new times (see for example, Considine & Painter, 1997; Botsman & Latham, 2001; Mawson, 2001) might make a worthy contribution in debating these new mind-set and strategic changes.

This paper calls for revolutionary leadership and perspectives to emerge that challenge the current mind-sets of those in positions capable of effecting change. Catalysing debate about these issues is necessary sooner rather than later. Beare (2001) has recently written about "creating the future school". For those in large education system, the subtitle might well have been "by revolutionising the systems". A close look at the 'centre' of such systems might be a useful starting point.

FINAL COMMENT

A chilling reminder of the failure of systems to change over past decades is highlighted wonderfully in the 1987 Yes, Prime Minister episode titled "The National Education Service". With total confidence and assurance, Sir Humphrey Appelby informs the prime minister that parents are not the best judges of schools. Rather, it is the bureaucracy that knows about these things. They are the ones to make the important educational decisions. It is the bureaucracy, and the way it has always operated that must be protected first and foremost he reminds the prime minister. Surely this is not the mind-set of the new millennium educational leader!

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