horizon:

thought leadership

bastow

ISSUE #07

What's Inside:

Contributors

Principled leadership in challenging times

Steve Munby recently retired as Chief Executive of Education Development Trust, an international education charity working in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe. Before that he was CEO of the National College for School Leadership in England. He is now a consultant and speaker on leadership and system reform and a facilitator of events and conferences. His most recent publication was a think piece written jointly with Michael Fullan: *Inside-out and downside-up: How leading from the middle has the power to transform education systems.* Steve is also the facilitator for the Atlantic Rim Collaboratory and Visiting Professor at University College London. Steve will be speaking at a Bastow Horizon forum in October (details below).

Horizon: Power and love in teaching and in leadership

Putting the heart back into the classroom and our system

Reflect on your leadership style to prepare for future growth and be inspired for the next school year.

In this forum Steve Munby will explore what it is that makes a great leader and how we can lead from a place of passion and purpose.

Steve will discuss:

- how we balance high expectations, pace and relentlessness with compassion, inclusivity and collaboration
- power and love within the context of teaching, professional development, school and system leadership
- the idea that whole-system improvement requires not only top-down leadership, nor just bottom-up leadership, but leadership in the middle.

Date: Tuesday 17 October 2017
Session: 5:00 pm to 6.30 pm
Nibbles and networking: to follow discussion
Venue: Bastow, 603–615 Queensberry St, North Melbourne
Cost: $35

Register to attend

At Bastow | Via Video Conferencing

Intense moral purpose

Dr Judy Halbert and Dr Linda Kaser lead the Transformative Educational Leadership Program at the University of British Columbia, the Networks of Inquiry, and the Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network in British Columbia, Canada.

In addition to working with leadership groups in British Columbia and the Yukon, Judy and Linda collaborate with educators in many parts of the world, including Australia, New Zealand, England, Wales and the USA. They are deeply committed to achieving equity and quality for all learners, and to networking for innovation and improvement both in Canada and abroad.

Judy and Linda have served as teachers, principals, district leaders and policy advisors with British Columbia's Ministry of Education in the areas of innovative leadership, district change, rural education, literacy and Indigenous education.

Judy and Linda recently visited Bastow to run a workshop and a seminar introducing the spiral of enquiry. They drew on real-world examples to develop participants' understanding of this evidence-informed inquiry framework for professional learning that is making big gains for learners around the world.

A message from the Director

Strong leadership enables and encourages excellence in schools, and it has a special place at the heart of Bastow. Through our work we are fortunate enough to meet and engage deeply with educational leaders from around Victoria and from further afield. Participants at Bastow bring with them a range of experience and perspectives, and there is enormous value in this diversity. But there's something that really great leaders all have in common: they lead purposefully and from a strong ethical base.

In this, our final edition of Horizon for 2017, I'm pleased to present extracts from international educational leaders Steve Munby (UK) and Dr Judy Halbert and Dr Linda Kaser (Canada), who are upcoming and recent visitors to Bastow. All three examine what it means to lead using clearly defined and articulated principles and moral purpose, particularly at a time when the role of school leader is more complex than ever before.

Steve Munby of Munby Education has extensive experience in school improvement and system leadership in the United Kingdom and internationally. In this extract from his speech 'Principled leadership in challenging times' he reflects on the overriding principles and behaviours he has used to guide his decision-making over the years.

Judy and Linda's progression in the education sector, from teachers to system leaders and policy advisors in British Columbia, has seen them work with many education leadership groups in Canada and abroad. Their deep commitment to achieving equity and quality for all learners is reflected in the extract 'Intense moral purpose' from their publication *Leadership Mindsets*.

School leaders will have a chance to see Steve at a Bastow Horizon forum on Tuesday 17 October (click here for details and to register).

As we come towards the end of the school year, I invite you to take a moment to reflect on your leadership experience and style, and envision the kind of the leader you want to be in 2018.

Neil Barker
Director

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Principled leadership in challenging times

Author: Steve Munby

Many writers have tried to pin down the key elements of principled leadership.

In the UK, the seven principles of public life–known as the Nolan Principles–were set up in 1995 to apply to anyone holding public office.

1. Selflessness
2. Integrity
3. Objectivity (being impartial and fair)
4. Accountability
5. Openness (transparency)
6. Honesty
7. Leadership (behaving in a way that demonstrates these principles)

As general virtues, it is hard to argue with this list. But are there some principles that apply particularly to schools and to school leaders?

Professions such as law or medicine have their own code of conduct which is regulated by the profession itself. Should we have a similar code specifically for educators?

I personally think that the profession should take responsibility, as other professions do, for setting out guidance on matters of conduct.

But, for us as individual leaders, will a list of principles, however well defined, be sufficient to guide our behaviour? Maybe not.

They are a basis for reflection, but we need to grapple with the issues ourselves. Before I suggest ways we might do that, I want to explain why unexamined principles are not enough. For me, there are three pitfalls here.

It is possible to be principled … but prejudiced

Many of the most appalling leaders of the last hundred years were of course highly principled. Think: Hitler in Germany; Pol Pot in Cambodia; and one of the world's more recent monsters, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the self-styled caliph of the Islamic State.

In a much milder way we can probably all think of leaders we know today who combine principle with prejudice.

Principles are fluid and are affected by culture and context

Surely, you might think, certain principles are set in stone—timeless. For example, isn't it always right to respect others and to treat all individuals equally? Well, at a general level these principles may well be timeless, but in terms of their application they change over time.

Two hundred and fifty years ago many so-called principled people found the slave trade acceptable.

One hundred years ago being sent to prison for practising homosexuality was generally accepted by the British public.

Sixty years ago children with some special educational needs were described as uneducable and 'retarded' and weren't even allowed to go to school.

What is right and what is wrong, what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, seems to change over time and according to context.

When I started teaching in the 1970s corporal punishment was legal and widely accepted, and indeed expected in schools. Now it is unthinkable that schools should beat children.

And of course once you start looking at principles and ethics in other countries your sense of what is 'right' can be even more challenged.

So what is right and what is wrong, what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, seems to change over time and according to context.

Looking back in 20 years' time, what will we see as the ethical shortcomings of today's educators? What do we currently tolerate or accept that in 20 years' time will be seen as abhorrent—just as we now see corporal punishment as abhorrent? I don't know. Will we be ashamed and embarrassed in 2037 that in 2017 we didn't take children's mental health and wellbeing as seriously as we took their physical health?

A clear set of principles and values is not enough: we need to be principled and effective

Ethical behaviour is an essential precondition for trust. But leaders must also be competent at doing the job. Some of the weakest school leaders I have ever come across have been principled; acting ethically but letting the staff and children down by failing in their core responsibility to make things better for those they serve.

You may have read about the recent study 'How to turn around a failing school' by the Centre for High Performance. The researchers tracked leadership styles and educational outcomes in 160 secondary academies in England. They asked two interesting questions: What do headteachers (principals) do to bring about rapid school improvement? And what happens in an improving school after the departure of the headteacher?

They called one group of headteachers 'the philosophers'. Teachers are very excited when the philosopher first arrives, as she or he tells them how important their work is and how much value they add to society. They start going on trips to observe other teachers and invite teachers to their school, to share ideas and approaches. But fundamentally, nothing changes. Students carry on misbehaving, parents are still not engaged, and the school's outcomes stay the same. When asked why performance hasn't improved, the philosopher says, 'These things take time. Teaching is an art and it can't be transformed overnight'.

This is principled but ineffective leadership.

The researchers were also unimpressed by the work of specialist 'super heads'—they called them 'the surgeons'. The surgeons typically took tough action but did not stick around very long. They could be ruthless in the way that they dealt with staff and were keen on excluding students in order to maximise exam results. They were skilled at the quick fix. They focused not so much on the children and their learning but on what is needed to do well in the accountability system—whatever it takes. While they usually brought about an immediate improvement in results, these results were not sustained after their departure.

So here we have leadership that is not principled and, in the long run, isn't even effective.

The most successful approach came from a group of heads the researchers called 'the architects'. The architects took a more holistic view of what it takes to move a school in the right direction. They focused on teaching and leadership, by introducing coaching, mentoring and development programmes. But they did other things too: bringing in systems to improve student behaviour, and collaborating with other organisations to open up opportunities and to build sustainable solutions.

Interestingly, the surgeons—the super heads—were typically paid much more than the architects. The surgeons were also more likely to have received a government honour, such as a knighthood or damehood.

Shortly after the so-called surgeons left, the schools' results dropped by an average of six per cent. In contrast, the improvement continued in the schools led by the architects in the three years after their departure.

This is ethical and effective leadership, and it is sustainable. You are just not very likely to get a knighthood or a damehood for it!

The researchers asked two interesting questions: What do headteachers (principals) do to bring about rapid school improvement? And what happens in an improving school after the departure of the headteacher?

So leading with principles is desirable, but not as straightforward as it first seems. Not all principles are 'good'; principles are relative and change over time; and being principled on its own is not enough—we need to combine principles with the ability to lead and manage effectively.

I believe that we each have to make our own personal choices about values and principles in our leadership. This is very much a personal thing. I want to go a little further than the Nolan Principles and share a few of the overriding principles that I have tried to use to guide my decisions and behaviour over the years.

Keep the focus on moral purpose and social justice

One of the recurrent themes for me has been the centrality of moral purpose to great school leadership.

And perhaps the greatest moral imperative for educators is the need to fight against the corrosive impact of poverty. It is not just about economic poverty. It is also a question of helping children to escape from a poverty of ambition. And to escape from a poverty of experience in terms of life-enhancing opportunities in areas such as the arts and sport and travel. All my experience—nationally and internationally—tells me that this is fundamental to what we are trying to do.

There is a lot of talk just now in the UK about social mobility, particularly in the context of grammar schools. I have no problem with social mobility, but in terms of moral purpose the focus for me is too narrow.

Social mobility means increasing the extent to which clever poor children can get top jobs. That is a good thing, but the bigger prize is social justice. In a socially just society all children, whether they are poor or rich, whether or not they are gifted, whether or not their parents push them forward, get a fair chance to learn and to thrive.

And, in spite of much progress over the years, this is under threat at the moment. The more that we on the one hand give school leaders responsibility for leading the whole system, for sorting out admissions and for supporting school improvement in other schools as well as their own—and on the other hand judge their whole career success on how their own individual school performs—the bigger the social equity challenge becomes.

I have no problem with social mobility, but in terms of moral purpose the focus for me is too narrow.

Who, under a school-led system, picks up responsibility for every child across that system? Who has the lead role for social equity?

If we are to address this issue properly in a school-led system, it will require a huge amount of selflessness, generosity and collective moral purpose across a group of schools. It will require principled leadership in challenging times.

Be constantly aware of leadership's power for good or ill

In the 1970s there were two leaders of resistance against unjust apartheid in their countries: Nelson Mandela and Robert Mugabe. Both were lauded by some as honourable men fighting for justice and were dismissed by others as terrorists. Both leaders later became presidents of their free, independent countries. They faced huge challenges but their countries had great potential to be successful. Both made decisions on how they were going to lead. One led in a selfless, principled way to unite the country, heal wounds and break down barriers. The other encouraged corruption, violence and hate, leading to economic disaster. Their stories demonstrate the power of leadership for good or for ill.

Looking back at my years as the leader of three different organisations, I know that I have wrestled with many ethical issues. Sometimes, perhaps, I have not wrestled hard enough. I am clear that there have been occasions when I have made mistakes; times when my judgement, in retrospect, was too narrow. I have not in every case navigated my way through the grey areas well, or, indeed, even identified what the grey areas were.

What I am saying is that we need to reflect upon and review our own personal principles. And that we need to be very aware of how our behaviour as leaders can have unintended consequences and have a negative impact on the culture.

We need to be very aware of how our behaviour as leaders can have unintended consequences

I remember many years ago when I worked in a local authority. One of my senior team was a very likeable person. Always seemed enthusiastic and professional. Seemed to be pretty good at his job. When one of my finance team said that they had some concerns something was not quite right about his budget, I was absolutely convinced that it would be nothing. Just a minor glitch in the system. But of course I said to go ahead and investigate.

It turned out that this polite, professional member of my senior team had been paying his own mortgage out of public funds. I was shocked.

Now, of course he ended up in prison, but I had to ask myself as a leader how come the operating systems under my leadership weren't strong enough to prevent that happening, or to at least allow us to spot it more quickly. And what was it about my style of leadership that made him think that he could possibly get away with it?

I was so focused on the outward-facing aspect of the role—school improvement—that I had neglected to do enough to incentivise good internal financial management. My behaviours had unintended consequences. I became much more robust in my approach to financial matters after that!

In the 1990s the management at Sears Roebuck gave car mechanics a big increase in dollars per hour if they completed more car repairs at a faster rate. The employees responded to the incentive by repairing things that weren't even broken. The management had helped to turn the workforce into liars and fraudsters.

When colleagues in our organisations behave in undesirable ways it is a good idea to ask ourselves as leaders whether our own behaviours or systems are actually encouraging them to do so.

I have had the privilege of visiting large numbers of schools all over England and seeing how different leaders operate. More recently, I've visited schools and education systems all over the world, too. I have seen at first hand the difference good, effective and principled leadership makes—and the impact of weak or poor leadership. I have had my own assumptions challenged by that experience and have had to ask myself some hard questions about morality and principles. I have been shocked by what I have seen internationally in terms of corruption, abuse and complacency but I have also been moved to tears by the moral courage that I have observed from leaders in schools and across whole systems in different places around the world.

We should never, ever, ever underestimate the power we have as leaders to either do good or to do damage, and we should always be sensitive to unintended consequences of our leadership.

Foster trust as the basis for successful leadership

Unless we actively demonstrate that we are principled professionals, we will fail to win and retain the trust of parents, teachers and young people.

You don't need me to tell you that parental trust is gold dust. Think about a parent who, for whatever reason, does not trust you or does not trust the school. How much of your professional time is spent on this parent? How much harder is it to educate this child well?

Winning trust from teachers through principled leadership is also extremely important. People don't expect leaders to be their friends or to take their side in some unconditional way when things go wrong. But people will choose to follow your lead because you have earned their respect through your demonstrable competence and your integrity. In their well-known book Why should anyone be led by you?, Gareth Jones and Robert Goffee show that 'authenticity'—honesty and integrity—are the keys to effective leadership and the reason why people will want to follow you.

And it is also important that the children and young people in our care trust us and trust teachers. It is vital that we role-model the values that we promote, and that as leaders we create an environment where young people can grow up to develop their own set of principles and become good citizens and humane adults. This is at the heart of what schools should be about. Not just the curriculum taught but the curriculum lived. That is ultimately down to the culture that leaders create in their schools and is influenced by their own behaviour as leaders.

A particular challenge we face in the UK just now is how to establish trust between schools when accountability and resourcing pressures are conspiring to make us look inwards. I believe there is a simple way for principled leaders to catalyse a change here. Trust and reciprocity are integrally linked, so I would challenge any of you who are struggling to establish better partnerships, to make the first move. Commit an act of kindness.

I was told recently by a head about how the parents of an 11-year-old boy were desperate to get their son into the school next door to hers. But they lost their appeal and the boy came to her school instead. The boy was extremely bright and had strong parental support, so the chances of a whole string of A's was very high. However, the child had a stunning singing voice and the school's music department didn't cater for choral singing—though the school next door was very strong on that.

What did the head do? It was better for the school if the boy remained but probably better for the child if he went to the school next door. In this instance, the head wrote to the appeals panel and asked to get the boy admitted to the school next door. The head was modelling principled decision-making in the interests of the child, not putting her own school first. And the knock-on effect? The other heads she worked with began to behave in a more principled way themselves towards student exchange, managed moves and admissions.

Acts of kindness and principled leadership are not only good in themselves; they can have positive consequences for the system, too.

Be open and welcome challenge

Here is what Barack Obama said in his last ever speech as President of the United States, in January 2017:

> *For too many of us, it's become safer to retreat into our own bubbles, whether in our neighborhoods … or our social media feeds, surrounded by people who look like us and share the same political outlook and never challenge our assumptions … And increasingly, we become so secure in our bubbles that we accept only information, whether true or not, that fits our opinions, instead of basing our opinions on the evidence that's out there.*

I think the Brexit referendum was a good example of this. Whole swathes of Remainers only had contact with other Remainers—either face to face or on social media—and the same was true for whole swathes of Leave voters. We increasingly live and work in atomised and divided groupings where we choose whose views we listen to and can, more easily than ever, cut ourselves off from those who disagree with us. If we don't like them or don't agree with them, we simply 'unfriend' them on Facebook or block them on Twitter.

This is increasingly true in education too. The often vitriolic debate on social media between affirmed Traditionalists and Progressives provides a striking example. This drawing of battle lines and accusing each other of lying just cannot be right. Not because I shy away from robust discussion of the evidence, but because this polarisation and forming of cliques inevitably makes us less likely to consider all the available evidence rationally and objectively.

Are we prepared to change our minds and to openly admit it when we get things wrong?

Agatha Christie said that the secret to solving a crime is keeping an open mind as long as possible. The moment you make up your mind as to who committed the crime you only see the evidence that fits your thinking or, even worse, you make the evidence fit your assumptions.

I also think we should be slightly wary of 'groupthink'—those with a single closed mindset, who believe that there is only one way to see the world, that only certain beliefs are acceptable, and who don't genuinely open themselves up to the wider evidence base.

And it is important to welcome different perspectives within our own organisations. Are our colleagues encouraged to 'speak truth to power' or do they just say whatever they think it is we want to hear? Are we prepared to change our minds and to openly admit it when we get things wrong?

Today lots of organisations build into their culture an 'obligation to dissent'. This term comes from the management consulting firm McKinsey, but it is common across the worlds of both business and public services. When there is complete agreement on an important decision, for example, this could be seen as a sign that more time is needed for debate. In any given meeting, the most senior manager should actively invite contrary opinions from others. To do this well, leaders must show humility and real trust in their colleagues.

And where this dissent is absent, problems quickly emerge. Malcom Gladwell in his book Outliers describes the Korean air disasters, where over-deference and the inability of inferior officers in the aircraft to challenge leadership decisions led to several air disasters. Mathew Syed's book Black Box Thinking tells how the inability of nurses to challenge consultants can lead to unnecessary patient deaths. Being open and welcoming challenge from others prevents mistakes being made and enables an inclusive, problem-solving and empowering culture to develop.

But, of course, when we do ask for feedback and open ourselves up to challenge, sometimes the response can be a little bit over the top. Here is a child's response to a request for feedback about her teacher.

> *Things my teacher can do better:*
>
> *Not use collective punishment as it is not fair on the many people who did nothing wrong and under the Geneva Convention it is a war crime.*

Once you have listened to others carefully, listen to your inner voice and exercise your ethical muscle

There is a real danger that the more successful we are the more likely we are not to ask others for advice, to fail to exercise our ethical muscle and to fail to listen to our own conscience.

A clinical study illustrates that when charisma overlaps with narcissism, leaders tend to abuse their power and take advantage of their followers. Leaders who have a lot of success can start to believe in themselves too much. They start to believe that the rules don't really apply to them. Instead of talking things through with others, they go ahead assuming that they are right. They believe so much in their own judgement that they flout the procurement process, they give a job to a relative without due process, they take additional money for themselves that should go to their school, they exclude lots of children from their school but refuse to take any in from other schools because their school needs to be the best.

There are two things that can help to prevent this. The first is good, robust governance. And the second is a wise mentor. Instead, too often all charismatic leaders get is an echo chamber of their own views coming back at them.

But even if we are not charismatic leaders, many of us can start off full of moral purpose and determination to change the world but can get ground down, become overly pragmatic and lose that idealistic perspective and that passion. And we may not even realise that we are not the people we once were.

As George Eliot says in *Middlemarch*:

> *For in the multitude … there is always a good number who once meant to shape their own deeds and alter the world a little. The story of their coming to be shapen after the average is hardly ever told even in their consciousness … till one day their earlier self walked like a ghost in its old home.*

Are we still trying to alter the world a little or does our earlier, more noble self walk like a ghost amongst us? Are we still as principled and as enthusiastic as we once were?

In the final analysis I think most of us possess a pretty good internal moral compass as a guide to our actions. But we must listen to it rather than ignore it. I like the way Marc Le Menestral suggests some quick tests to see if we are possibly stepping over that line:

1. The Sleeping Test. If I do this can I sleep at night?
2. The Newspaper Test. Would I still do this if it was published in a newspaper?
3. The Mirror Test. If I do this can I feel comfortable looking at myself in the mirror
4. The Teenager Test. Would I mind my children knowing about this?

It is worth exercising our ethical muscle by revisiting our organisation's statement of values. Not necessarily with an eye to changing them, but really challenging ourselves to consider how we apply these values, how we live them day to day. Ask ourselves:

- What is the best recent example we have seen of our values in action?
- Is there anything we have seen or done recently which contradicts our values?
- What more could we do to use our values to promote better outcomes for all children?

I think that the four questions for any leader leaving the role to reflect upon are these:

1. Did I leave the organisation in better shape than when I started?
2. Having experienced my leadership, were colleagues more likely to want to be leaders themselves and more equipped to do so?
3. Did I make more of a positive than a negative difference to the lives of those I came into contact with? Are they better or worse people for having worked with me?
4. Have I shown authenticity and integrity in my leadership? Have I led with moral purpose?

A few months ago I was in Jordan where the Education Development Trust is working in schools where most of the children are Syrian refugees. Jordan is a poor country. It does not have oil like some of its neighbours. Around 2.7 million of Jordan's total population of 9.5 million are refugees. That is more than one in four. Queen Rania, who I met during my visit, is a passionate advocate for refugees and the same view came from all the everyday Jordanians that I spoke with. They said to me: 'These are our neighbours, how can we turn them away.' 'These are children, how can we not try to give them an education.'

Queen Rania said:

> *Does my husband order his soldiers to close the borders? How is he going to sleep at night? It was never a question of yes or no, it was always a question of how are we going to make it work.*

Principled leadership in challenging times.

You don't have to be an extraordinary person like Mother Teresa or Martin Luther King, Jr to show principled leadership or to be a hero. The policeman who walked into danger on Westminster Bridge in March 2017 and died protecting society from violence was not an extraordinary person, but he was a hero. When the bomb exploded inside the Manchester Arena in May of the same year, those who, instead of running away, ran inside to help and comfort the victims were ordinary people—and they are heroes. Every person can be a hero, by choosing the right thing over the wrong thing.

My strong view is that day after day and hour after hour school leaders are demonstrating principled leadership and moral courage—all over the country and, indeed, all over the world. They may not be the famous headteachers—though some of them are. They don't appear in the national media. They may never make it to a list on a minister's desk and they may not have multitudes of followers on Twitter. They are hidden heroes. Ordinary people doing extraordinary things. They are givers of love to the adults and children in their care throughout their careers.

So we need to see things from others' points of view and open up our beliefs to challenge. We need to exercise our ethical muscle through reflection and dialogue.

And then we need to remind ourselves of our power as leaders to do good, connect with our best selves, renew our sense of moral purpose and do the right things to the best of our ability.

Steve Munby delivered his keynote 'Principled Leadership in Challenging Times' at the Inspiring Leadership Conference in Birmingham, UK, on 8 June 2017. This extract is published with the kind permission of the author.

Intense moral purpose

Authors: Linda Kaser and Judy Halbert

Leadership in schools is about making a difference in the lives of all learners regardless of their family background, socioeconomic status, race, gender, sexual orientation, or geographic location. School leadership involves increasing the learning of all students as well as closing any 'gap' between groups of students.

A quick glance at the PISA results shows that Canada is one of the top performing countries in terms of both quality and equity. There is more to this story, however. Despite some recent improvements, there is still a significant gap across Canada in the success of Aboriginal learners and increasingly there is concern about how newcomers from some parts of the world are faring in Canadian secondary schools. In the province of British Columbia, focused attention is beginning to be paid to the learning needs of children in care – a population that was virtually invisible, until a determined child advocate (Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, Representative for Children and Youth) began examining the performance evidence and identifying the discrepancies.

Advocates for children would agree with Fullan (2003) who contends that these learners need school leaders who are:

> *immersed in disciplined, informed professional inquiry and action that results in raising the bar and closing the gap by engaging all students in learning. There is no greater moral imperative than revamping the principal's role as part and parcel of changing the context within which teachers teach and students learn.*
>
> *(p.11)*

Our strongest leaders are working hard to close any gaps in performance and are deeply concerned about the needs of their most vulnerable learners. They are persistent in their efforts to create more even learning 'playing fields' so that every young person can do well. Vulnerability, a term first used by Doug Willms (2003), implies that circumstances for individual learners can improve through learner and educator effort, with school and community support.

School leaders with intense moral purpose for quality and equity, must be informed by an honest appraisal of how well the school is serving the needs of vulnerable learners.

School leaders with intense moral purpose for quality and equity, must be informed by an honest appraisal of how well the school is serving the needs of vulnerable learners. Leaders look critically at the available evidence of learning, especially as it connects with underserved groups and learners from challenging circumstances. Ignoring some of the more 'brutal' realities for learners is not an option. Listening deeply to learners about their experiences with poverty, racism, homophobia or sexism not only builds respect and understanding, it also fuels the fire of moral purpose. Honestly confronting our areas of weakness and failure, as well as understanding and building on our current strengths, are essential.

Despite the rhetoric about caring about learner success, not all schools place the needs of their learners at the heart of their work. Sometimes through history, a lack of awareness or a lack of courage, schools and whole systems have developed cultures more attuned to the desires of the adults than the learning needs of the young people attending school. Changing cultures that have been developed for the convenience of the adults, rather than for the imperative of creating positive life chances for every learner, requires leaders with passion, intensity, persistence and ethical drive.

Ethical practice, passion and purpose

Robert Starratt (2004), after considering the nature of ethical leadership for many years across a range of settings, has concluded that ethical educators need to combine three key virtues – the virtues of responsibility, presence and authenticity. Starratt claims:

> *What differentiates exceptional educational leaders from their colleagues is the intensity and depth with which they exercise these virtues in their work. Their role as educators necessarily involves their humanity as well as their role as citizens. The work of education is a deeply human work and it is intrinsically a work of citizenship as well. The authentic and responsible educator is one whose own authenticity is channeled and poured out in authentic relationships with learners, in authentic relationship to the activity of learning itself and in authentic relationship to the human, academic and civic curriculum that constitutes the joint work with student-learners.*
>
> *(2004, p.106)*

The ethical qualities that Starratt describes are what make the work of school leadership simultaneously so challenging and so rewarding. Leaders face dilemmas every day in their pursuit of a higher quality and more equitable learning world. They balance the tensions between applying an ethic of care and an ethic of justice as they work with individual learners and the school community as a whole. They bring to life an ethic of critique as they engage in interactions with staff, learners and families, making sure that the vulnerable learners get fair treatment and that the needs and wants of more privileged learners do not automatically prevail.

The strongest leaders model a strong ethic of professionalism with an intense and practical focus on what is best for individual learners as well as what is best for the community of learners. Considering and understanding varied ethical perspectives demands leaders who have strong cognitive skills as well as a clear sense of personal values. A well-developed sense of personal identity can help school leaders when they are confronting difficult ethical decisions. The development of a strong school identity gives meaning and direction to the lives of faculty, learners and their families.

Developing a school identity

School leaders have long been exhorted to create a strong school vision or mission. We have seen too many schools spend an inordinate amount of time developing lofty mission statements and compelling vision statements that all too frequently have become not worth much more than the glossy paper on which they have been written. The notion of school identity is more action-oriented and tangible.

James Spillane, Emily Benz and Elisa Mandel (2004) provide some useful perspectives on the role of the leader in creating strong and unique school identities. In The Stories Schools Live By, Spillane and his colleagues describe school identity as an internalized cognitive structure of what the school stands for and where it intends to go:

> *[I]dentity is especially relevant when it comes to an organization's capacity to learn and innovate. Scholars argue that while organizations can engage in minor changes to their existing routines without changing their identity, fundamental change in an organization's routines necessitates changes in organizational identity*
>
> *(2004, p.4)*

As schools move from a sorting orientation to deep learning for all, a fundamental change in the identity of the school is required. A relatively simple identity-oriented question for any school leader is to consider the entrance and interior organization of their school building. Is there consistency between what the school

says it values and what can be seen in the school? Is the first impression given to learners, families and visitors entering the school one of an intense focus on learning? Are there displays of student learning connected with this focus and are at least some of the displays at the eye level of the learners? What does the allocation of learning spaces say about what the school values? Are new teachers relegated to the most unappealing spaces until they outlive or outlast teachers with the 'best' classrooms? Are learners with special needs in attractive learning spaces or are they hidden away in some dark corner of the building? Are display cases gathering dust with relics of a bygone era?

School identity, as we conceptualize it, is not focused primarily on choice or competition. It is about every school creating a positive distinctiveness that builds pride for learners and their communities. We expect all leaders to be able to talk with pride about the identity of their own school – and of all other schools in their district or community. Parents want to have confidence in their children's school and in the system as a whole. We have been influenced by the thinking of Darrell Bricker and Edward Greenspon (2002), in their book Searching for Certainty: Inside the New Canadian Mindset as they claim that Canadians are much less interested in the ranking of schools than in knowing that every school is a good school.

A relatively simple identity-oriented question for any school leader is to consider the entrance and interior organization of their school building. Is there consistency between what the school says it values and what can be seen in the school?

It is our observation that schools that develop a strong learning identity regarding the growth of both the intellect and character of their learners also seem to have secured the confidence of their local community. We have seen a small rural school combine its skills in filmmaking and cross-country skiing to forge a unique identity and to generate considerable interest and support from residents and families in neighboring villages. At a middle school serving a large immigrant community, it has become a tradition for every student to research and prepare a multi-media presentation on a topic of special interest to their parents and accessible to them in their own language. Topics include requirements for a driving licence, understanding the tax system, obtaining health benefits, or preparing a CV. Schools that have made service learning a way of life as a result are positively changing the interactions between community members and adolescents. School leaders sometimes use their own passions and talents to create a stronger school identity. We admire the experienced principal who was able to take her own love of dance and music and create a robust performing arts identity in a remote community. Other urban school leaders have built on the strength of their technology resources to create innovative and responsive programmes that shape the school's identity. Many schools have embraced environmental education and healthy living and are strengthening their school's identity as a result.

Whether it is a focus on healthy living, technological innovation, the arts, science, the environment, oral story telling, service learning, or outdoor recreation – the possibilities are numerous and are limited only by the imagination of the school leader and the staff. Once a strong identity has been established, it also must be sustained until it truly becomes 'a way of life' that leads to changes in learning and in the experiences of the learners. Once the visible change in learning becomes part of a new school story, the new identity creates a sense of renewed purpose. Spillane and colleagues note in their paper:

> *School reformers often dwell on how new structures, routines and tools can enable schools to learn and change in order to prove student achievement. We argue that while structures, routines and tools are critical, they are unlikely to be sufficient on their own; they need a compass, a sense of purpose. We suggest based on our analysis that organizational identity as embodied in the story that teachers and administrators tell about their school may serve as that compass.*
>
> *(p.38)*

If school identity provides a moral compass as Spillane suggests, then leaders must also be concerned with issues of sustainability. What will happen when the formal leader leaves? Will the work continue? Will the identity of the school continue to provide a sense of purpose and direction?

Sustainability and purpose

Part of a leader's responsibility is to develop a clear direction for the school. As part of direction-setting, leaders pay attention to the unique and positive identity for the school and they exercise their leadership in such a way that the momentum is sustained over time. As leaders with moral purpose they consider the issues of sustainability from their first moments in their schools. Will the improvements and the changes they have initiated continue after they leave? Will their schools become genuinely transformed centres of learning?

From personal experience, we can appreciate the disappointment and cynicism that arises when initiatives are not sustained after a change in formal leadership. A staff can only hold a course or direction for so long, without the support and involvement of the formal leader. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) spent many years researching reform implementation in a number of Canadian and American schools and from this study they developed seven principles for sustainable leadership that are directly connected to moral purpose. They suggest that school leaders need to ensure that leadership lasts by creating meaningful changes and planning for the future. They talk about the importance of breadth when they say that leadership spreads by developing the identity and direction of the school collectively and by distributing leadership. They emphasize the need to be socially just so that all students and other schools benefit. Further, they recommend that leaders exercise resourcefulness by providing intrinsic rewards and extrinsic incentives, allow time and opportunity for professional learning development, be cost effective without being cheap and carefully handle resources to support all learners. From their perspective, leaders promote diversity to enable educators and families to adapt and prosper in increasingly complex environments by learning from one another's diverse practices. Leaders are activists in engaging assertively with the educational environment in a pattern of mutual influence, activating personal and professional networks and forming strategic alliances. Their final principle is that leaders ensure school and system support for sustainable leadership by developing improvements that last over time – by distributing leadership and responsibility to others and by sustaining themselves so that they can persist with their vision and avoid burning out (adapted from 2006, pp. 1–7).

Taking seriously the principles of sustainability as described by Hargreaves and Fink (2006) is work that frequently goes beyond the scope of the individual principal. District, provincial, state and national leaders need to be very careful that in their enthusiasm for new initiatives or in their desire to respond to a variety of demands, they do not work against sustainability by moving school leaders too quickly. We have seen in our case study schools the churn that occurs when leaders are shuffled too frequently. Rapid turnover works directly against moral purpose. Moving schools to deep learning requires sustained effort.

Conclusion

Leading the shift away from a sorting system where there is success for some towards a learning system where there is deep learning for all is at the heart of moral purpose. School leaders committed to this new work understand that they must build on the existing quality of their school, create new forms of quality and be persistent in their drive for equity. Leaders help to build a strong sense of school identity, are brutally honest in their appraisal of their school's strengths, create a sense of direction and pay attention to the importance of sustainability.

In addition to an individual leader's mindset of intense moral purpose, this is work that also requires cooperation, collaboration and teamwork. Individual teachers working in isolation cannot be expected to meet the needs of every learner. The work is simply too hard and a team approach is required. The same case can be made for schools and for school leaders. School leaders who are passionate about learning and improvement know that they must build a strong team both within and outside the school. This requires high levels of trust and emotional intelligence.

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