



Exhilarating leadership

Brian J Caldwell

January 2006

With a foreword by Steve Marshall, Director of Education and Lifelong Learning for Wales and former Chief Executive of Education and Children's Services for South Australia



Specialist Schools
and Academies Trust
EXCELLENCE AND DIVERSITY

Exhilarating leadership

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iNet

iNet (international networking for educational transformation) is the international arm of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust. Its mission is to create powerful and innovative networks of schools that have achieved or have committed themselves to achieving systematic, significant and sustained change that ensures outstanding outcomes for all students in all settings.

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SSAT, with iNet, is at the heart of a growing international network of nearly 3,000 schools in 27 countries. We believe it represents the largest network of its kind in the world.

This publication

Audience

Teachers and leaders at all levels in education.

Aim

To demonstrate how school leaders can find transformation to be an exhilarating experience, despite the challenges

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Foreword

Education is a public good that is fundamental to the building of a robust democracy. It has a profound impact not only on the individual and the family but also on the social, cultural and economic wellbeing of society. Further, it significantly contributes to the future of local and global communities. It is therefore timely that Brian Calwell again reminds us of the importance of leadership and provides us with an opportunity to deepen our understanding of exhilarating leadership.

While research clearly indicates that quality teachers make the major difference to improving student learning outcomes, it also identifies the centrality of educational leadership in this endeavour. Educational leaders bring about reform. They create the culture, conditions and supports to enable teachers to do their best.

I have always found the challenge and opportunity of being an educational leader to be exhilarating. A successful educational leader has great impact on the future wellbeing of society; but it is not for the faint hearted. It contains risks, and requires the capacity to put yourself on the line, to be accountable and open to public scrutiny.

This book contains powerful stories of exhilarating leadership – which can transform an organisation whether it be at system, school, district, or unit level. Such leaders exhibit a powerful and compelling personal commitment to improving the outcomes and wellbeing for students and staff. They are unwavering in their focus despite environmental complexities and challenges. At heart they have a set of beliefs and values that enable them to transcend the status quo.

What strikes me in the examples contained in this book is the willingness these leaders have to be driven by the potential of the future and their quest to create a preferred future. Remember, we are not our past but the future we choose to be. The future we can choose is limitless and exciting for all and undeniably we are responsible for that choice. Leaders demonstrating exhilarating leadership have a deeper sense of resilience in facing adversity or obstacles that challenge this preferred future.

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When leaders accept that they have a responsibility for setting the emotional tone of their organisation, they can strategically and deliberately set about modelling the behaviours and attitudes they want to establish across the organisation. This is evidenced by the master class leaders referred to in this book, who all demonstrated an inner drive, a deep sense of purpose and a readiness to take on the responsibilities of leadership.

Interestingly, a key characteristic of exhilarating leadership is synergy: the broader connections between people, groups and agencies and the interdependent nature of effort. This is more than being part of a team; it is a commitment to working with others for improvement. Traditional insular boundaries are replaced by strategic networks and alliances. The collaboration does not diminish the inner drive, rather it nourishes and extends it.

This is an important book which mixes inspiration with practical levers to change. It provides a new lens on leadership in situations where successful transformation and reform has occurred. I am taken by the profound sense in which the leaders in this book demonstrate self-respect combined with courage. They exhibit personal maturity by working for the benefit of all rather than for individual glorification.

Exhilarating leadership in large part lies in the hands of the leaders where pride and humility co-exist.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Marshall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Steve Marshall,
Director of Education and Lifelong Learning for Wales
and former Chief Executive of Education and Children's
Services for South Australia

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Preface

There is a paradox about principalship. A 2004 MORI poll in England found that headteachers more than any other profession provide good examples of leadership. Yet the media are full of accounts of how stressful the work is, and how difficult it is to attract and retain good people. This book is intended to shift the balance in how the work of the principal is described so that it is more consistent with its public esteem.

The idea for the publication came from a series of master classes in the inaugural programme for the Master of School Leadership degree at the University of Melbourne in August 2004. Most participants were young leaders with between five and ten years of experience as teachers. Seven principals who had achieved dramatic transformation in their schools under the most challenging of circumstances presented the classes. Participants could not help but be persuaded about the role: it was exhilarating rather than boring, depressing, discouraging or dispiriting. These leaders transcended the problems encountered along the way.

The idea that leadership could be exhilarating was reinforced in the nine workshops conducted over nine weeks in four countries in early 2005 that led to the publication of the previous book in this series entitled *The new enterprise logic of schools*. Each workshop featured a presentation by leaders who had worked with their colleagues to transform their schools. All seemed exhilarated by the experience. Why not then redress the balance in accounts of school leadership by highlighting the positive rather than the negative, and discover the strategies that could shift the balance toward the former?

The result was a further series of five workshops over 12 weeks in two states of Australia, and careful analysis of more than 1400 responses to questions about the leadership experience. The pages that follow include the findings and reports of the master classes.

I express my deep appreciation to those who led the master classes, especially John Fleming, Bella Irlicht, Gabrielle Leigh and Jan Shrimpton, who gave permission for their experiences to be recounted in this publication. I also acknowledge the contributions of 185 leaders who participated in the workshops. Special thanks are extended to Gilbert Choy, CEO of the Sun Wah Education Foundation, for hosting our visit to the 3e International Kindergarten in Beijing.

I am especially indebted to three leaders whom I consider 'master strategists' and whose leadership is exhilarating to all who have observed it. Two of these helped me interpret the responses of participants in the workshops: Steve Marshall, Director of Education and Lifelong Learning for Wales and former Chief Executive of the Department of Education and Children's Services in South Australia; and Jim Spinks, formerly an outstanding school principal, now a consultant, and my co-author in the self-managing school series. The third was Sir Iain Hall, former head at Parrs Wood High School in Manchester and now also a consultant, who shared his insights on leadership that is exhilarating.

Jessica Harris, director of research at Educational Transformations, gave valuable assistance in the analysis of material from the master classes and conversations with the master strategists. She also had the patience to read the manuscript and make valuable suggestions.

This publication is dedicated to Bella Irlicht, principal of Port Phillip Specialist School in Port Melbourne who received the Equity Trustees Not for Profit Chief Executive Officer Award for 2005. She epitomises exhilarating leadership that can transform. There can be few counterparts to one who has achieved such dramatic and successful change, from a special school in a two-

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room ant-infested house to another site, initially an abandoned and contaminated 19th century school building, now a world-class full-service school with state-of-the art facilities in the performing arts, enjoyed by 140 students with moderate to severe disabilities. She is an inspiration!

Brian Caldwell
November 2005

1 Bad news ... good news

There are many international reports that fewer people are seeking to be principals / headteachers, that an increasing number of those who are appointed are falling by the wayside, and that stress, work intensification and complexity are at an all-time high. Yet there are many school leaders for whom these trends do not apply: they find the work exhilarating.

Their leadership is exhilarating in all senses of the word, as reflected in the synonyms provided by Roget's *New millennium thesaurus*: animating, bracing, breathtaking, electric, elevating, enlivening, exalting, exciting, eye-popping, gladdening, inspiring, intoxicating, invigorating, quickening, rousing, stimulating, stirring, thrilling, uplifting, vitalising.

The antonyms of exhilarating from the same source are boring, depressing, discouraging, dispiriting. Leaders who are exhilarated may encounter such moments but they have found ways to work around them, or if they cannot do so, their sense of exhilaration overrides them. They acknowledge that there are challenges to be addressed and problems to be overcome, but dealing with them is an aspect of the work they find exhilarating.

This book is about such leaders, and about achieving such an approach to the challenges of leadership in schools. It explores the circumstances under which the balance can be changed to achieve that exhilaration. It exhorts policymakers to create an environment in which this can occur without giving up the agenda for transformation – that is, change that ensures high levels of achievement for all students in all settings. Transformation is especially important under challenging circumstances, as it contributes to the wellbeing of the individual and the nation.

The story so far

A sense that leadership in schools could be exhilarating was reaffirmed in August 2004 in a series of seven master classes in the Master of School Leadership programme at the University of Melbourne, Australia. These master classes were presented by principals of schools that had been transformed in one way or another.

A glimpse of exhilaration in leadership was also revealed in the first in this series of publications. In *Re-imagining the self-managing school* (Caldwell, 2004) we described how the best practice of self-management had far outstripped its initial conception (as presented in Caldwell and Spinks, 1988; 1992; 1998). We sensed that a remarkable change was under way and this was the subject of nine workshops in early 2005 in Australia (1), Chile (2), England (5) and New Zealand (1). Conducting such workshops was itself an exhilarating experience and the outcomes were reported in *The new enterprise logic of schools* (Caldwell, 2005).

The main features of the new enterprise logic are:

- The student is the most important unit of organisation – not the classroom, not the school, and not the school system
- Schools cannot achieve transformation by acting alone or operating in a line of support from the centre of a school system to the level of the school, classroom or student. The success of a school depends on its capacity to join networks to share knowledge, address problems and pool resources
- Leadership is distributed across schools in networks as well as within schools
- Networks involve a variety of people, agencies and organisations; in public and private sectors; and in educational and non-educational settings. Personnel and other resources are allocated to energise and sustain them
- New approaches to resource allocation are required. These take account of developments in the personalising of learning and the networking of expertise and support

- Intellectual and social capital are as important as other forms of capital

In each of the nine workshops, school leaders described a transformation involving one or more of these six characteristics. A striking impression was that these leaders were exhilarated, despite the challenges and the problems, even though aspects of the work were boring, depressing, discouraging or dispiriting.

This publication draws from the seven master classes and the five workshops that followed the publication of *The new enterprise logic of schools*. These were conducted in Queensland and Victoria from July to October 2005.

Creativity and the new enterprise logic of schools

The new enterprise logic of schools is consistent with the needs of nations that seek to build capacity for creativity. The importance of ‘the creative class’ in successful economies has been well documented by Richard Florida. He reported in *The flight of the creative class* that there is ‘broad agreement among economists and business forecasters that the growth of the overall economy will come in the creativity or knowledge-based occupations and in the service sector’ (Florida, 2005, p29). He documented the growth in the creative sector, especially, and also the service sector, compared to sharp declines in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors, and reported that ‘nearly all of the growth in jobs [in the United States] has come in two fields: expert thinking and complex communications’ (p31).

Florida compares the performance of nations as far as creativity is concerned.

- The creative class accounts for more than 40% of the workforce in nine countries: Netherlands (47%), Australia (43%); Sweden, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway (all 42%); Belgium, Finland (both 41%); and Germany (40%) (p137).
- The global talent index has two dimensions: human capital and scientific talent. On the human capital index, measured by the percentage of the population with a bachelor’s or professional degree, the top-ranked nations are United

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States, Norway, Denmark, Netherlands and Canada. On the scientific talent index, measured by the number of research scientists and engineers per million people, the top ranked nations are Finland, Japan, Sweden, Norway, United States, Switzerland and Denmark. When the two indices are combined, the top ranked nations are Finland, Japan, Norway, Australia, Iceland, Netherlands, Sweden and Canada. The United States ranked 9th, United Kingdom 13th, Germany 18th and France 22nd (pp144-145).

- Along with technology and talent, tolerance is one of three factors in economic growth in the 21st century. The global tolerance index has two dimensions: values and self-expression. Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, Japan, Germany, Switzerland, Iceland, Finland and New Zealand are the leaders (p151).
- The global creativity index provides a measure of national competitiveness based on the three factors accounting for economic growth: technology, talent and tolerance. The 12 top ranked nations are Sweden, Japan, Finland, United States, Switzerland, Denmark, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Germany, Canada and Australia, ahead of the United Kingdom (15th), France (17th) and New Zealand (18th) (p156).
- Nations can be ‘talent magnets’ in respect to the proportion of university students who come from other countries. Top ranked countries are Australia, Switzerland, Austria, Belgium, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Sweden, Denmark, New Zealand, Ireland and the United States (p148) (The United States has the highest number of foreign students in absolute terms, accounting for 36% of the world total (p147).

‘America will continue to be squeezed between the global talent magnets of Canada, Australia and the Scandinavian countries,’ Florida contends, because they are ‘developing their technological capabilities, becoming more open and tolerant, and competing effectively for creative people; and the large emerging economies of India and China, who rake in a greater share of low-cost production and are now competing more effectively for their own talent’ (Florida, 2005, p238). He argues

that reform at the school level is critical to long-term economic success. Writing of the United States, he contends that ‘we can no longer succeed – or even tread water – with an education system handed down to us from the industrial age, since what we no longer need is assembly-line workers. We need one that instead reflects and reinforces the values, priorities and requirements of the creative age. At its core, education reform must make schools into places where human creativity is cultivated and can flourish.’ (Florida, 2005, p254).

Two observations can be made about Florida’s work. First, that schools must be given much of the credit for the capacity for creativity in nations ranked highly in the comparisons above. It is fair to say that schools overall have done astonishingly well, given that so many still operate according to the old enterprise logic, or 19th century imaginary, of which Florida is so critical. Second, it is likely that efforts to build capacity for creativity will be enhanced if a new enterprise logic shapes the operation of schools.

The new logic of leadership

The depressing scene for headship as summarised in the opening lines of this chapter has been well documented and it is not intended to traverse this ground yet again. We suggest that this dispiriting state of affairs is very much a consequence of efforts to sustain an ‘old enterprise logic of schools’ when it is no longer appropriate. To use the language of David Hargreaves, it is a consequence of sustaining a ‘19th century imaginary’ when it is a ‘21st century imaginary’ that should be shaping the role of the leader (Hargreaves, 2004a). The ‘new enterprise logic’ is driving the ‘21st century imaginary’.

The old and the new enterprise logic of schools can also be described in terms of scenarios generated in the OECD’s Schooling for Tomorrow project (OECD, 2001). Six scenarios described the possible directions for schools over 10-15 years, with two maintaining the status quo, two involving re-schooling, and two resulting in de-schooling. The following are brief accounts of the major features of one of the status quo scenarios considered by stakeholders to be the most likely, and

two that are most preferred by stakeholders (these accounts are mainly drawn from Istance, 2003).

The most likely scenario is that 'bureaucratic school systems continue'. According to David Istance, a leader in the project, 'this scenario is built on the continuation of powerful bureaucratic systems, strong pressures towards uniformity and resistance to radical change. Schools are highly distinct institutions, knitted together within complex administrative arrangements. Political and media commentaries are frequently critical in tone; despite the criticisms, radical change is resisted' (Istance, 2003, p645). Management and governance are along the following lines: 'priority is given to administration and capacity to handle accountability pressures, with strong emphasis on efficiency. The nation (state/ province in federal systems) remains central, but faces tensions due, for example, to decentralisation, corporate interests in learning markets and globalisation' (Istance, 2003, p646).

No matter how well such a scenario is implemented it is, in Hargreaves' terms, a continuation of a '19th century imaginary' or, in the terms of our last publication in this series, a manifestation of the 'old enterprise logic'. The depressing trends in headship reported at the outset come as no surprise.

For the two preferred 're-schooling' scenarios, the first is known as the 'schools as core social centres' scenario and it would see the school playing an important role in building a sense of community and creating social capital. A range of cooperative arrangements between schools and other agencies, institutions and organisations would be evident. There would be a broadening of the curriculum and more non-formal learning. Management of such enterprises would be more complex, and leadership would be widely dispersed. Local decision-making would be important, but support frameworks would be national and international. Additional resources would be secured to upgrade facilities. A core of teachers would enjoy high status, but a range of people from other professions would support schools in different contractual arrangements. In this scenario 'management is complex as the school is in dynamic

interplay with diverse community interests and formal and informal programmes. Leadership is widely distributed and often collective. There is a strong local dimension of decision making while well-developed national / international support frameworks are drawn on, particularly where social infrastructure is weakest' (Istance, 2003, p647).

Characteristics of the new enterprise logic of schools are evident in this scenario, as they are in the second of the preferred scenarios. This sees a strengthening of schools as 'focused learning organisations', with emphasis on a knowledge rather than a social agenda. Specialisations and diversity would flourish, as would research into different pedagogies. There would be high investment in infrastructure, especially in disadvantaged settings. Extensive use of ICT and partnerships with tertiary education and other institutions would help to create and disseminate knowledge. Teachers would enjoy high status as professionals, with substantial engagement in research and development as well as continuous professional learning. Much of the latter would be in networks, including international networks. Employment arrangements would be diverse and mobile. Istance describes management and governance like this:

'Learning organisation schools' are characterised by 'flat hierarchical structures, using teams, networks and diverse sources of expertise. Quality norms typically replace regulatory and punitive approaches. Decision making is rooted strongly within schools and the profession, with the close involvement of parents, organisations and tertiary education and with well-developed guiding frameworks and support systems' (Istance, 2003, p648).

It seems that the schools described in *The new enterprise logic of schools* were already developing along the lines of the two preferred scenarios – and their leaders are finding the experience exhilarating. One possible implication is that working towards these scenarios makes headship more attractive.

Hedley Beare, author of *Creating the future school* (Beare, 2001) wrote the foreword to *The new enterprise logic of schools*. He began with the following words: 'I have just thrown into the recycling bin a heap of textbooks on bureaucracy, structure, corporate culture, organisational behaviour, change theory, and the like. They are all good. I studied them in graduate school [at Harvard], as a chief executive I applied their theories in setting up and leading school systems, I have taught them to principals, lectured and given addresses on them, and supervised research on their topics. Their ideas have been very constructive. I could discard them because they no longer apply. Their frameworks were good but the world has changed radically and they simply do not fit 21st century conditions. There is a new world ahead of us' (Beare in Caldwell, 2005, p1).

I had a similar experience in mid-2004 as I concluded two terms as dean of education at the University of Melbourne. I had a personal professional library of about 900 books, mainly on leadership, management and policy in education. I decided to keep those books that would be most relevant to my continuing work as an education consultant and lecturer in leadership. I kept only about 70 books or about 8%. Most of those I kept were published in the last five years.

If these independent acts by two professors of education are a guide, much of what is in print about leadership and management in education does not fit the present or short-term future, let alone the longer term of 10-15 years and beyond. What we were doing was culling books that were relevant to the status quo scenario described above; those that reflected the old enterprise logic of schools.

This is in no way intended to be a reflection on recent or current research on school leadership. On the contrary, such research is more robust than ever, and it confirms the links between leadership and learning. Kenneth Leithwood and Ben Levin summarised those links in a recent report on the effects of school leadership on student learning for the Department for Education and Skills in England (Leithwood and Levin, 2004). There is more to be done, of course, and they mapped the terrain for further research. Halia Silins and Bill Mulford (2004)

have also illuminated the connections between leadership and learning, based on research in Australia. Brent Davies drew on an international panel of researchers in the field to compile *The essentials of school leadership* (Davies, 2005). Attention is now turning to how leadership that makes these connections and contributes to transformation can be sustained (see Fullan, 2005; Hargreaves, 2005).

However, much of the research is dealing with leadership as it is exercised in the context of the old enterprise logic under a status quo scenario. Fullan captures key elements of the new enterprise logic in *Leadership sustainability* (Fullan, 2005), including the building of lateral capacity through networks and networking, but assumes a continuation of a tri-level bureaucratic system (system, district, school). Peter Gronn's comprehensive account of *The new work of educational leaders* (Gronn, 2003) describes the challenges faced and the problems encountered by leaders who are working within the 'bureaucratic systems continue' scenario; there are no accounts of leaders whose work reflects the new enterprise logic.

The story that follows

Chapters 2 (Master class) and 3 (Leader voice) provide the bookends of knowledge about exhilarating leadership. Chapter 2 reports what was learnt in four of the master classes conducted at the University of Melbourne in August 2004. The focus in each instance is on how leadership is exercised when transformation occurs. Chapter 3 reports the outcomes of five workshops conducted in two states of Australia from July to October 2005. In each instance, participants were invited to describe aspects of leadership they found exhilarating; aspects they found boring, discouraging, depressing or dispiriting; and to propose courses of action by themselves or others that would help shift the balance to exhilaration. Chapter 4 (Master strategy) is inspired by Ketan Patel's *Master strategist* (Patel, 2005). It draws on the insights of three people who can be fairly described as 'master strategists' to reflect on what was reported in chapters 2 and 3. The chapter concludes with a brief reflection on efforts to specify standards for leadership. Chapter 5 (Going global . . . going faster) describes and

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illustrates education in a world that is now ‘flat’ in terms of capacities to network locally, nationally and internationally. The inspiration for this chapter is the book by triple Pulitzer prize-winning journalist Thomas Friedman entitled *The world is flat* (Friedman, 2005).

This publication on exhilarating leadership is like its predecessors in this iNet series. In the spirit of *Re-imagining the self-managing school* and *The new enterprise logic of schools*, *Exhilarating leadership* does not claim to offer the final word on the topic. While these publications draw to some extent on research, they are more appropriately described as being based on observations and self-reports by leaders in schools that are being transformed. They are a combination of reporting, advocacy, speculation and challenge. They invite debate. They provide a starting point for research and policy analysis.

Starting a strategic conversation

In what way is your school making a contribution to building capacities for creativity of a kind described by Richard Florida?

What are the benefits and what are the pitfalls of highlighting the problems of leadership such as stress and difficulties in attracting and retaining leaders in schools?

Make an assessment of the value of your professional library on leadership. How valuable was it in the past? How helpful do you expect it to be in shaping and supporting your leadership in the future?



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