Australian Principals Centre
Monograph Number 16

**PERSPECTIVES ON SCHOOL LEADERSHIP:
TAKING ANOTHER LOOK**
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This paper has been
developed from his
presentation to APC and
VASSP members, at
*An Afternoon with
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in Melbourne
on 6 June 2005

INTRODUCTION

I have been debating how I should start to share my ideas about leadership with you – in part, because my own views have changed, really quite dramatically.

I'm not quite the 'leadership fan' that I was. During the 1980s, I was going around the country doing leadership workshops of one sort or another. I look back on those days and say *"How could I have ever possibly have done that?"*. There isn't that much to know about leadership.

I would get up in front of a group with a microphone. We'd do some questioning on leadership styles and talk about what you should do, when and why, as if we really knew. The last time I did that was in Manila, with a large group of school administrators from a variety of countries; mostly from the US. We spent three days together.

On the long flight home there was the kind of drone that you get on long flights, when the lights finally go off and people are trying to sleep or watch a movie. During that drone period, all I could think of was one incident that had happened at the conference. From almost the first day until the very end, there was a fellow who kept on raising his hand and asking me a question that I couldn't answer. It was a simple one. He simply said,

"Well Tom, what do you mean when you say 'effective'?"

And of course when you're up in front of the audience with that big microphone, and you're prancing back and forth, there's a kind of power that you have. So my response was to 'punish' him, and I did. He was persistent. Every 20, 30 or 40 minutes, up went the hand and *"What do you mean by effectiveness?"* came again. And I would dismiss him again.

This went on for about three days. Then it occurred to me, quite suddenly, that if I couldn't answer this simple question, then there wasn't anything I had said over the course of those three days that was of very much use.

I haven't forgotten that. I think he was absolutely right. I had made a very important error. I was thinking about leadership as if it were some kind of a test, rather than being concerned with questions of substance.

In effect, I had been saying *"If you want to be effective, then do X. Then, if A happens, you might want to do Y."* That's about process. There actually isn't much in the literature about substance.

It took me a while to climb out of the hole where I found myself after this realisation. I felt down in the dumps. I had lost faith in a lot of things that I was doing.

I was a Faculty member at the University of Illinois in those days and I remember going to some of my students who had graduated from the university and sharing with them the experience and the disillusionment that I had.

I wasn't alone by the way. It was a period when many sociologists were having a paradigm shift and there was a sense of confusion across the field of social science.

I told my graduates my problem and asked them to help me. Their reaction was generally to put an arm around me and say *"Well now Tom, don't worry about it. We never believed the things that you told us anyway!"*

When I asked them to tell me about effective leadership – what it was – they had a hard time doing it, even though, in many cases, they were talented leaders themselves. Their feel for the practice of leadership was hard to articulate, in any kind of a meaningful way. I think that's still the case today. That is why so many trivialities are published under the guise of leadership.

A couple of years later I began to find myself again, by changing the way I thought about things. I decided that if leaders were obviously successful, but couldn't tell me **why** they were successful, then maybe I needed to go and follow them closely for a month. I began doing that, and I also had long conversations with them.

I think the defining point for me came when I was working with a group of 35 principal designates from Kansas City schools. They had been hired to be principals in the following year and had the luxury of meeting as a cohort once a month, or once every two weeks, for a whole day. At these meetings they talked about leadership and other issues that concerned them as they thought about taking over their schools.

At about 10 o'clock one morning, when the 30 were talking about leadership, I had an idea. I asked them to stop what they were doing and humour me by loosening up and playing a game. I asked each of them to write down the names of three enterprises in the city of Kansas City. They did that. They wrote down examples like the local major league baseball team, the local shopping mall, an African-American church, and a home owners association. One of the rules was that we would leave schools out of the conversation.

We had a really animated time and as things progressed, I walked around the room, circling particular items on their sheets of paper.

Then I asked them then to hold up a sheet where I had circled the name of an enterprise, so we could all see them. Once they had done that, I asked them to go and stand between two other people who were holding signs similar to theirs. So, they got up and moved to their new positions, with a lot of pushing and shoving. I am always amused at the behaviour of principals when no-one is looking – doing the very things they're getting angry about with kids!

I asked them to look at the sheets on either side of them. If they didn't feel comfortable where they were, they should move away. Some felt OK and stayed where they were. With others, suddenly there was a bit of tension. They would look at their neighbour's sheet of paper, have second thoughts and move away. We had a divide, into two groups.

We had obvious links, between say the Xerox Corporation, the Transit company, the Kansas City Royals, Hallmark Cards (which is headquartered in Kansas City), and the shopping mall. But new themes began to emerge, with links between a volunteer group, Mothers Against Drunk Driving and a small church. And somebody actually wrote down "the family".

I wasn't sure what it all meant. Then I remembered a book that I had read in the sixties, by Blau and Scott, two eminent sociologists, entitled *Formal Organizations: A Comparative Approach.*

Formal Organizations laid the foundation for the development of a social-science-based literature in educational administration. When the book was published we just swallowed it up. It seemed as though you could simply drop the word 'organizations' and put the word 'school' in. Everything was OK and you could run with it – except that somewhere along the way we forgot an important point. At the beginning of the book, the authors made some distinctions. They reminded the reader that there are several kinds of organisation, and that it makes a difference what kind of organisation you're dealing with, as to whether what you're doing is going to make sense or not.

This is what they say, under a subheading of *Social Organizations and Formal Organizations.*

Although a wide variety of organizations exist, when we speak of an organization it is generally quite clear what we mean and what we do not mean by this term. We would not call a family an organization. Nor would we so designate a friendship clique, nor a community. These are social organizations. Social organizations refer to the ways in which human conduct becomes socially organized. That is, to the observed regularities and the behaviour of people that are due to the social conditions in which they find themselves.

The social conditions that influence the conduct of people can be divided into two main types: one, the structure of social relations in a group or large collectivity of people; and two, the shared beliefs and orientations that unite the members of the collectivity and guide their conduct.

In effect the two dimensions of a social organisation are the networks and social relationships that exist and the shared orientations of the members.

(Blau and Scott, 1962, p 2)

Such is the distinction they make. In their book, which is about formal organisations, they never mention social organisations again, in its
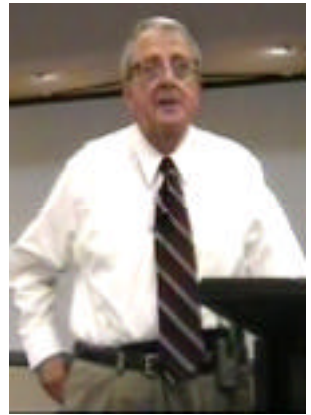
… there are several kinds of organisation. and … it makes a difference what kind of organisation you're dealing with, as to whether what you're doing is going to make sense or not.

400 pages, And remember, this book has been a foundation element in the development of the literature on organisational behaviour in schools. In many ways, it still influences how we think and what we do with respect to leadership.

What are the differences? The key to any organisation, be it social or formal, is how you put people together. Formal organisations tend to be concerned with bureaucratic connections, but social organisations tend to rely more on cultural connections, and people connect to each other because of norms. These norms often come from sharing ideas and beliefs of one kind or another. Implicitly, when we share ideas and beliefs, and commit to them, we are accepting the norms that define them in action.

Families and congregations are examples of social organisations; banks and shopping malls are examples of formal organisations. I think most of us would agree that schools should be more like families and congregations than banks and shopping malls.

That morning in Kansas City, I ended up by asking the participants where they would place schools. They asked whether I meant where they **wanted** schools to be or where schools **are**. I said to start with where they are. We agreed 100 per cent that schools were formal organisations. But what if we could recreate them? How would we do it?

Nearly all of us, with three or four exceptions, said that leadership in social organisations, in corporations, in the military, in the ministry and in schools, all share common characteristics, I don't deny that. But leadership is different too. Perhaps we've been looking at the wrong thing when we look for what's **common** among these various different kinds of organisation. Maybe it's what's **different** about them that's the critical question that should be asked.

DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES

Success in social organisations depends on the development of communities, It won't surprise you that I say that. However, we have overused the word 'communities' and taken away a lot of its meanings. The word has become hollow, just as happened with 'empowerment' a decade ago, through heavy and meaningless use.

The fact remains that communities help people get connected and find meaning. In a school context, communities help people see themselves as important to the school and success. When I talk about communities now, I mean digging deeper than mere using of language. A community requires far more loyalty, commitment, caring and sacrificing than is now the case in most schools.

Why is community important? Because it provides the glue that holds everything together. Community honours diversity, while at the same time bringing a strong sense of coherence to a school. Think, for example, of community as a mosaic – lots of different pieces held together by a common frame and glue.

That is the spirit behind schools as communities. There are differences, of course, but none the less they are held together by a commitment to a common framework of ideas and values.

Carey and Frohnen (1998) point out that the word 'community' has many meanings but its roots are in a couple of Latin words – *comunis*, which means common, and *comunitas*, which means fellowship. So, a true community is one in which members share something in common, something important enough to give rise to fellowship and to sustain it.

Communities must form around characteristics, experiences, practices and beliefs that are important enough to bind members to one another, such that they're willing to sacrifice for one another as sharers of a common faith. It's a tall order isn't it?

Picture this. When people are gathered together to share ideas and to commit to these ideas, their relationships change. They make promises to each other – implicitly perhaps, but promises nonetheless. And thus they are likely to feel morally obliged to keep their promises.

When we think about moral obligations and commitments as the source of authority for leadership, that is a significant change from the way in which we thought about it before. Community strives to embody something called 'civic virtue', which is the willingness of people to sacrifice their self interest for the common good.

So, effective communities create new sources of authority for leadership. In yesterday's world, schools functioned – and in many cases still function – as formal organisations. Most of us live in yesterday's world, where the sources of authority for leadership are bureaucratic and personal. Most of us would say that we don't much like the bureaucratic side, but isn't the personal side really the whole thing?

Perhaps we've been looking at the wrong thing when we look for what's common among these different kinds of organisation.

I mean, that's about me developing my own leadership potential skills, isn't it? It means I'm going to use my skills to influence people, to get them to do the things that I want them to do, and have them enjoy it at the same time.

In this scenario, the emphasis is on saying *"Follow me"*. Follow me because I'm the principal. Follow me because of my terrific personality, my niceness or my charm quotient. Follow me because of my ability to motivate you. But these are really the wrong reasons to follow. Maybe that's why teachers in particular often **don't** follow. Would you?

In effective communities and in other social organisations the emphasis is less on 'follow me' and more on following ideas. One of the most important jobs that leaders have is to help everyone in the school figure out what's the common good, and help them commit to it. Giving attention to the common good is an enduring responsibility of the principalship.

What are we about? What makes us unique? What are we responsible for? How can we embody our purposes and beliefs in what we do? If we can figure out the answers to questions like these, then we're creating substitutes for leadership – substitutes that apply to everyone from the superintendent/regional administrator to the teacher.

So, communities can be thought of as having centres that are repositories of shared values and ideas, which give direction, order and meaning to community life. These centres are the heart of community. If a school is calling itself a community but can't measure up to the benchmarks that I just reviewed, we know that. We know they may call themselves whatever they want, but certainly are not communities.

Winning the Cultural Wars

If we want to be successful in building a community of shared commitments we have to be serious about winning the 'cultural wars'. Winning the cultural wars is about domesticating the 'wild' cultures that typically exist in schools for both students and teachers.

Simply put, one purpose of leadership is to win the struggle over what the culture of a school will be like, and what meanings will be important. If we rely on culture to provide the order and norms that are needed to give us a sense of purpose and value, we have a chance, I think, of being successful.

Everybody needs culture, in all aspects of their lives. Teachers and students are no exception. And if we don't provide culture for them, what do you think happens?

Do they make their own? Sure. They make a culture for themselves. Pick up the newspaper and every day you can read about how disconnected kids are from schools, about kids and their delinquent habits of one sort or another, or behaviours that are questionable.

Article after article asks why kids would do things like that. Why would they do things that might harm them; things that are high risk behaviours?

In part, they're doing it because they have norms, which require them to do it if they want to maintain their membership in the group. Isn't that right? There's this thing called 'subculture', which is very strong. Student subculture sits opposite us, in many ways.

Give us the benefit of the doubt. Say that we have a sense of what the school should be, of what we want it to be; a sense of what the standards ought to be with respect to how we live our lives together, how we treat each other and what we're going to accomplish. But unless we pay attention to subcultural norms, then they're going to go wild and if they go wild then we're going to have a problem – our norms will lose, in other words, and their norms will prevail. Often, we really are in for a struggle.

We rely on culture to provide the order and norms that are needed to give us a sense of purpose and value. Everybody needs culture in all aspects of their lives; teachers and students are no exception. So, as has been pointed out, if we don't provide culture for them, they find it for themselves. We are in other words 'norm referenced'.

Let me say this once more; it's that important. Norms determine for us what we do, how we do it and what its value is. If there is no shared culture in a school, there is a cultural free-for-all, as everyone struggles to find a place where some meaning is found, even if that meaning works against what the school is trying to do. Are we 'on the same page', with respect to that idea? Reflect upon it.

What About Visions?

In an effective community, visions mean something important. 'Vision' is another word
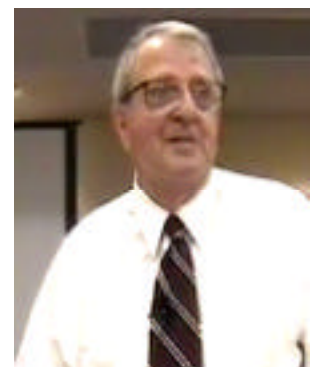
… communities can be thought of as having centres that are repositories of shared values and ideas, which give direction, order and meaning to community life.

The job of a vision is to help us make decisions and to help us evaluate the extent to which we're achieving our purposes.

that's beginning to lose its meaning, by the way. Most people haven't any idea whether they still have one ... and if they do, they certainly can't find it. However, visions do have a potential to be critical if understood and used properly. They are, or can become, critical sources of ideas. The job of a vision is to help us make decisions and to help us evaluate the extent to which we're achieving our purposes.

Too often, however, visions remain idealised statements, which only remotely resemble what's going on. This happens when vision statements are not working documents. If you want to move towards rejuvenating the culture in your school, and revisiting the question of norms, you want to be sure you're talking about a working document, not an emotional document that looks good.

Visions are not commonly used to help us make decisions, or to help us assess the decisions that are made – and we have to correct that. One reason that vision statements are often lots of show and not much tell is that they fail to provide the direction and fail to spell out the commitments that are needed for various constituent groups to make these visions work. They don't tell us what we need to do and they don't tell us what our responsibilities are in terms of implementation.

I have tried to help some schools do something about this. I'm not sure we've been all that successful really, but one of the things that is helpful is to ask each of the groups that are part of the school – the students, the teachers, the administrators, the parents, the central office ... the role groups, if you like – to spend some time in conversation and come up with what their responsibilities are with respect to the vision.

What do they need to fix and do? This is about providing visions with the policies and commitments that help move people to where it is that we want to go; towards what we think is important.

Effective visions obligate the people who share them. If you are unable to develop obligatory links, there is no basis for building a moral authority in the school – and one of the things that differentiates communities from other kinds of organisation is moral authority. This obligation ups the ante, from visions as management tools, to visions as moral statements.

I mentioned earlier that effective communities create new sources of authority for leadership. Instead of 'following me in leadership', for example, these sources rely on following ideas, values and purposes, a sense of goodness, the promises we make to each other, our students and the public, and the frameworks for practice to which we are committed. When a school has an ideas focus, this impacts on its structure, and a new hierarchy emerges, one that places ideas at the apex of the traditional pyramid, and places everyone else below, in service to those ideas.

In this case, there are just two levels: our ideas and us. Ideas are the great equaliser because they apply to everyone. When ideas are in place, a shared 'followership' is created. Perhaps, in order to build a strong, effective, morally oriented commitment in a school, we need to think more about leadership as a kind of followership, and see a shared followership as one of the major responsibilities that the principal has.

Building followership

How do you build a shared followership? Well for starters you've got to work on having something to follow. That takes us back to the question of ideas. If you haven't come across Howard Gardner and Emma Laskin's book *Leading Minds* (1995), it's really worth a read. The authors use biographies, studying various outstanding people of our times, to develop portraits of leadership. Invariably, these leaders – whoever they may be, and however different in temperament and style – share one thing in common. That is the ability to use ideas as a source of value for what we do.

So now you have it: the goal of leadership is to create a shared followership. But remember that you can't have this unless you have something to follow. That's why our slogan should be *"Don't follow me!"*

Isn't that an interesting concept? Could you stand up in front of your faculty and say *"Well folks, one of the things I'm going to ask is that you don't follow me"?*

I think it's about the healthiest statement you can make, so I suggest you try it, if you really mean it. Of course you'll need to put the next sentence in as well:

"Don't follow me, but instead meet your obligations to our shared sense of purpose and to your responsibilities."

It turns out that, despite a vast leadership literature to the contrary, it's cognitive leadership that counts the most, not personality-based leadership, and certainly not bureaucratic leadership. **What** you know, **what** you do and

what you are trying to accomplish are far more important than **how** you do those things – not that we should dismiss the 'how' question, but it's the 'what' question that is key.

Traditionally, we have been preparing generations of school administrators to be not 'what' leaders but 'how' leaders. The emphasis, for example, has been on how to accomplish goals. Somewhere along the way, what's worth accomplishing doesn't get mentioned. As a consequence, we have a lot of school administrators who, because of their interpersonal skills, are able to rally people around poor ideas – jeopardising the kids and jeopardising the process of schooling. We'd be better off with a person who was a little rough around the edges and a little awkward interpersonally, but who had some good and healthy sense of where we are, and what we ought to be doing.

The community, then, wouldn't ask us to measure up to certain interpersonal characteristics as leaders, but would ask us to measure up to certain cognitive characteristics. As a leader, you would need to have a good sense of what makes sense, and how we should come together to rally around those ideas.

Leading with ideas: making promises

There's no mystery to how leading with ideas works. Imagine a school, for example, that uses promises and examples of commitments as part of its structure. These promises and examples are listed on posters that are scattered throughout the school. They appear in classrooms, on corridor walls, in the cafeteria, the principal's office, the main foyer of the school, and elsewhere.

Different posters might contain, for instance, "The Five Promises that we make to students".

Why not make public the promises that we think are critical; that we really believe in; that we want to understand; that we are willing to have 'out there'. Because letting everybody know, then obligates us, doesn't it, to follow up on those promises; to try and achieve those ideas. If we don't have to let everybody know, and just keep it to ourselves, then we can change our minds, or just forget about doing it, because nobody will know whether we're following the ideas or not.

So, let's start with making public the five promises we made to students. And the five promises they made to us. I mean, after all, roles are reciprocal, aren't they? Student to teacher; teacher to student – that makes a nice set.

Add in five promises we make to each other. What would they be? Do you promise to be helpful to each other? To struggle to create a shared practice? What are the promises that we want to make to each other?

From time to time it would be worthwhile for us to review those promises, see how we are measuring up, and then decide whether to change them, if we're not doing it, or recommit to them.

What else would we put on our posters? How about five characteristics that you will see in our teaching? It doesn't matter whether you're teacher-centred, student-centred or any other kind of centred, when you come into a classroom and stay 20 minutes or longer, you're likely to see these five things, which are really important to us.

Another one: five examples of great student work. As teachers in schools, you are always fussed about standards. What better standards than to see the actual work that students do in school?

Five examples of great assignments that teachers give. You want to see where we're about, Mum? Take a look at the wall. This is what we're asking the kids to do. Here are some assignments.

Some of these displays we would probably want to hang on to, others we would plan to turn over. In other words we would change the five examples of student work on a regular basis, as we might change the five examples of great assignments that teachers give. But we would think twice about changing the five promises we made to each other.

What about five promises that we made to parents; five promises that parents made to us; five reasons why this is a good place to be a teacher; and so on? These are examples of the type of promise I'm suggesting. I obviously don't know what the specific promises might be, that you would want to use.

Organisational character

When we're successful at leading with ideas, we build the organisational character of our school. Organisational character is an interesting concept. It's just like the use of the word 'character' as applied to an individual – if we think John or Jane is a person with character, I think we pretty much know what that means. They can be counted on; they're fairly consistent; we know in general what they're about and what
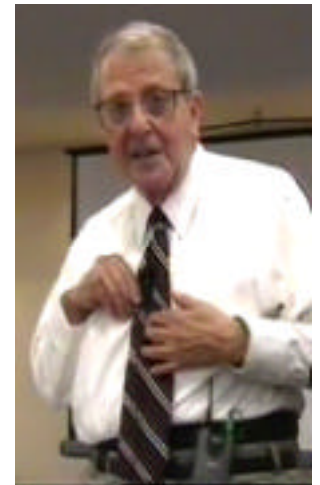
We have been preparing generations of school administrators to be not 'what' leaders but 'how' leaders ... Somewhere along the way, what's worth accomplishing doesn't get mentioned.

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they believe in. You can probably make your own list of things that come to mind when you figure out 'character' as applied to people.

Well, it's equally important, I would suggest, that we think about schools as having character, and try to discover what the list of dimensions might be.

Schools with character have unique cultures. In other words if you have a lot of standardisation, you're very likely to have character**less** schools, rather than schools with character. They will all look alike; there will be a certain routine that comes in — goals and values come from outside, and are implicit in the accountability and network that they're stuck with — rather than being something unique.

There's some truth to the idea behind the phrase, "he's a character" or "she's a character". By that we mean, in a loveable and delightful way, that this person is a little different and stands out. But being different and standing out may very well be a good thing – something that can help us rally around and switch where we are; where we want to go.

Schools with character have unique cultures, they know who they are and have developed a common understanding of their purposes. They have faith in their ability to celebrate their uniqueness as a powerful way to achieve their goals. As I keep reinforcing, key to their success is having developed distinctive norms and approaches for achieving those goals.

School character cannot develop in an environment where all schools look the same.

Recently, I was talking to a couple of people from the Catholic school system in Australia, and we were sharing thoughts about some of the worries my friends in the Catholic school system in the United States have – and how ambivalent they are about the question of funding of Catholic schools. They're torn between two shores: they want and need the money, but they feel that much of their success results from the fact that they are different. Goals and purposes that are important to them are used as a source of authority; they see these goals as a kind of a treasure that can be lost if you get government funding and are put under a government accountability system. I think they're right.

We learn from each other when schools are different. And we should try as best we can to encourage differences, rather than bring everybody into the same mould. Certainly we

don't want to take a "We don't care what you do" attitude. That isn't the point. But on the other hand we don't want to go to the other extreme of over-standardisation. Over-standardisation is the enemy of organisational character and we really can't have it both ways. Having the same identity as everyone else is tantamount to losing your identity. Nor can a school's character be left to chance.

Think about character in your own school. Have you ever had to write up the storyline of your school? Why don't you try that and share it?

Before I finish this paper, I do have one other principle I want to share with you, which has to do with social justice. I'm not sure how else I could describe it.

We now make the assumption that, when students aren't learning, it's the school's fault. The reaction then is to say *"Let's fix up the school"*, on the assumption that kids will then learn more. And sometimes that is the case. There's no question about that. However, there are lots of wonderful people working as hard as they possibly can, often creating small miracles, yet finding that their school still ranks, say, 843 out of 900 on some assessments that are being used. School failure is not the only factor, and may not be the most important factor in regard to learning.

It seems to me that you can divide the world of school leaders into two groups. First, there are the 'pep squad' leaders, who cheer us on. We have a lot of those in the US and I imagine you have some in Australia. Their motto might be summed up as *"It's simple: every child can learn, and no excuses"*, although I realise some of you might want to argue about that characterisation!

Moral leaders, by contrast, I think, have an enormous amount of courage in the sense that they are willing to face realities – to make everyone understand what the true situation is so often in schools – and who are willing to do something about it.

Moral leaders know it's not possible to address a problem while we don't think it exists, and we are in denial about at least one problem that we do need address. Until we do something about poverty and its dismal effects on children, they're not going to learn. No bull.

In this context, it doesn't really matter much whether you change the principal, adopt a new 'can do' curriculum, or try other similar things.

Now, I realise some of you will be saying that you know of schools where the kids are poor, and things aren't really working out very well, but the kids are learning. And that has happened from time to time, there's no question about it. But, as Rothstein (2005) points out, from time to time we find people who smoke ten packs of cigarettes a day yet never get cancer. Still, by and large, most of us would agree that there's a link between smoking and cancer. Is that not right?

Of course, you will find aberrations and exceptions. These might AC1 be due to a person who has unusual charismatic leadership powers of one sort or another, something that we will never be able to generalise in all schools, or anywhere else. We need to be in a place where ordinary people can be successful and not assume that everybody has to be this charismatic figure.

Let me share with you some more ideas from Richard Rothstein (2004, 2005), who is a researcher at the Economic Policy Institute in New York. He says Americans (and others, I would argue) usually conclude that the achievement gap must result from school failure. He argues that this ignores how social class characteristics influence academic performance.

For example, parents of different social class often have different styles of child rearing, which affect their children's learning. If middle class parents have jobs where they're expected to collaborate and create new solutions to problems, they're likely to talk to their children in ways that stimulate problem solving; not so with lower class parents, although they may use other language systems to describe such events.

Middle class students will, on average, have more inquisitive attitudes towards material presented by their teachers than will children raised by working class parents. There are also health differences, which I don't really want to get into in detail but, as an example, we know that there's a crisis in poor vision, in US schools. If they can't see they can't read. Asthma is another problem, particularly among schools populated by black Americans. And so on.

Rothstein concludes, as a result, that closing the achievement gap cannot be accomplished by school reform alone. It requires narrowing the social class differences with which children come to school. And this is a problem we seem unwilling to address.

I've never talked about this problem when people didn't feel uncomfortable. They'll make some remark like *"Here we go again"* and see me as some kind of a hopeless liberal. It's really interesting to see how we want to push the problem away, or why we go to the remedies that haven't worked in the past

"Shall we do 'train the trainer' with the principals again? Let's see now, in the last six years we've done that 11 times; why not do it a 12th time? And let's initiate a new training program, get a new list of things that they need to learn how to do and then the kids will learn to read."

But it hasn't happened. And it doesn't happen.

The literature on sustainable leadership provides a great example of what I'm talking about here. We're great at getting started, putting fresh initiatives in place in schools, of one kind or another. They may even be successful initially, but shortly after there is a tendency to retreat.

I think we need to look very seriously at the implications of the SES statistics for our school leadership. And, if the problem is not going to be solved using the methods that we use now, we need to ask ourselves what we might do instead.

Ask yourself this

What do you see as the implications of the following statistics (from Walberg, 2001)?

Psychologists routinely find that higher SES parents spend more minutes per hour interacting with their children and speak to them more frequently. On average, high-SES parents have been found to speak about 2,000 words in an hour to their children; welfare parents only about 500, by age four. Put these children in the same class. Whether the principal is charismatic or not, I don't think will make any difference. Something that might help, I'll look at in a moment.

An average child in a professional family accumulates experiences with almost 45 million words. An average child in a working class family accumulates experiences with 26 million words. For the average child in a welfare family, the figure is 13 million words.

There is the difference. That is why some schools are achieving and others aren't.

Should the difference in the numbers of words that children use make a difference in what their school is like? I think so. It is about more than the number; it is about more and different words; multi-level, multi-clause sentences; the use of

… closing the achievement gap cannot be accomplished by school reform alone. It requires narrowing the social class differences with which children come to school. And this is a problem we seem unwilling to address.
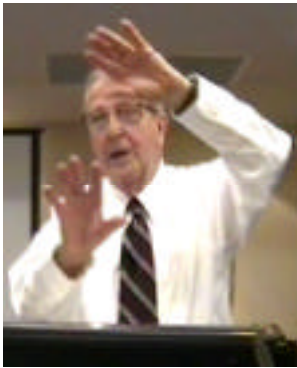
… if you haven't figured it out yet … I think in many respects leadership has failed us.

more past than future verb tenses; more declaratives; and more questions of all kinds. Researchers estimate that by age four professional parents encourage their children with positive feedback, 750,000 times – about six times as often as the welfare parents.

Welfare parents, on the other hand, discourage their children with negative feedback, about 275,000 times – about two and a half times the amount employed by professional parents.

Such parent behaviours predict about 60 per cent of the variation in the vocabulary and use of words of 3 year olds. And vocabulary is the most important single predictor of a school's success.

To reinforce this, recent research reported in the NSSE Yearbook (Schwarz et al, 2005) attributes half the gap in school readiness to differences in parenting. That gives us a good hint about what we need to pay attention to and work on.

Like it or not, there is a systematic correlation between test score results and the conditions I have been talking about. So, what can we do about it? Probably not much as long as we deny that we have a problem, and as long as we're afraid to say "I don't think all children can learn; not until we fix things". And do we really have the will to fix things?

It's interesting that we're doing a pretty good job on closing the social capital gap. That is, the amount of support that kids get. For example, in the US, we've got smaller schools now, we are developing caring communities, we have advisories in our high schools, and so on. Kids are getting a variety of support from the school, routinely. We have much to be proud of.

We are closing the social capital gap, but we're not closing the learning gap, the achievement gap. So in a way we're taking schools and we're trying to make them more family oriented. I think we're having a good deal of success, I think. But what we're not doing is the other half, which is to make families more school-like. That I think we need to think about.

FINAL COMMENTS

You might ask me why I'm talking about these things. As I intimated at the start, it's because I'm worried about the process and substance problem that plagues us.

We often think about leadership, not so much in terms of dealing with real content-oriented problems, but rather in terms of processes – asking ourselves 'how much more collegiality there is this year', for example, compared with previous years.

Well if you haven't figured it out yet, in this paper I'm trying to argue that I think in many respects leadership has failed us. Not that we should be overwhelmed by this. We just need to know, so we can work on it.

There are, I believe, three reasons for the failure of leadership.

First, we've come to view leadership as behaviour, rather than action; as something psychological rather than spiritual; as having to do with persons rather than ideas.

Second, in trying to understand what drives leadership, we've overemphasised bureaucratic and personal authority, neglecting professional and moral authority.

In the first reason we separated the hand of leadership from the head and the heart; and in the second reason we've separated the process of leadership from its substance. The result has been a leadership practice that often borders on being vacuous — a leadership practice that's based on the existing literature but may not be leadership at all.

The third reason is that in viewing schools as formal organisations – like banks and shopping malls, instead of social organisations like families and congregations – we're using the wrong theory. And the wrong theory equals the wrong practice.

As an aside, last semester I asked my principalship class to choose one word that best described leadership.

What do you think they came up with? They said "cleverness". I asked them why they chose that word and they explained that leadership is about keeping the six guys who hate your guts from meeting up with the six guys who haven't made up their minds yet. I can just hear one you saying *"At last this guy's given us some wisdom!"*

Be that as it may, in closing, I want to revisit the theme of organisational character. We might think of organisational character as the storylines, or perhaps the trademarks. There are many ways to get at it. But consider this. If a school has no character it's going to have weak connections to students, teachers and parents.

So, now take a little time to reflect on what I've said and how it might apply in your own school.

Does your school have a story line and, if so, what is it? In what ways do the principal, teachers and others communicate this storyline? How is it used to help you? Is the storyline communicated widely enough, so that it becomes your school's trademark.

If not, what do you do about it?

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... what do you do about it?

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