



The reflective principle

Plan for the future

IT'S IN OUR BEST INTERESTS AS SCHOOL LEADERS TO CONSIDER A WIDE RANGE OF POSSIBLE FUTURES AND PREPARE FOR THEM, SAYS DAVID LOADER.

I bet few of us predicted the various flood and fire disasters that have beset many of us in the last few months, let alone prepared for them, despite the fact that we all know such events are always possibilities.

The fact is, most of us assume that tomorrow will pretty much be like today. The result? We're unprepared when a radically different future presents itself, despite the fact that it's in our best interests to consider a wide range of possible futures and prepare for them. The truth of the matter is that the way forward is rarely linear, some extension of what we're now doing.

Turning our attention to schools, we school leaders cannot rely on others to ask the questions that will identify the possible ways forward, nor can we expect the answers to be delivered from on high, engraved as it were on stone tablets to stand forever into the future. David Hargreaves encourages school leaders to think that no one person will get it right and that everyone has a responsibility to play their creative part in looking for answers. For Hargreaves, in *Education Epidemic*, the way forward is 'constructed at an incredible pace by a community resembling a babbling bazaar (with different agendas and approaches.'

Preparing for our possible futures is not simply about looking around for someone else's best practice. That practice may be good for today, but tomorrow will bring new challenges that require new answers. All of us need to be looking for new practices.

Planning in a changing environment calls for consideration of alternative strategies for securing success, several of which may involve major change to the prevailing approach to schooling. This may be in curriculum, pedagogy or school structures.

So school leaders need to develop their personal capacities, including creativity, imagination, agility and courage.

School leaders need to understand patterns and trends in society in order to be able to better plan for their students' future. The success of the Open University and other online institutions is challenging the post-compulsory education sector. How long before this happens in schools? We should not underestimate the power of the online environment for both knowledge and social learning.

Parents, and students themselves, want schooling to be a personalised pathway, yet the reality in many schools is that the individual student still has to fit into a class. The challenge *today* is to deliver individual pathways in learning for every student.

Given that school students learn from a wide variety of sources, formal education being only one of them, school leaders need to be thinking about how to contribute to, and gain from, the learning experiences students have at home, in the community and during leisure time. Increasingly success is the result of what educational researchers now call complementary learning.

Schools need to pay more attention to the social development of students by using teams, networks, clusters, partnerships and collaborative forms of learning in the school. The Battle of Waterloo may have been won by leaders who developed their skills in co-curricular ways on the playing fields of Eton, but today's and tomorrow's problems can be solved by leaders who develop their skills in curricular ways in the classroom.

We also need to be considering new forms of assessment. We like competitive, norm-referenced testing – how else do we

know who is best or who ought to go to university? – but criterion-referenced assessment may be more appropriate, especially to assess skills and knowledge that must be known. Then there's ipsative assessment, which is the practice of assessing present performance against the prior performance of the person being assessed. Ipsative assessment – aka personal bests – fits beautifully with the idea of personalised learning.

Preparing for uncertain futures, whether in society or in schools, needs to be a priority for all school leaders. Professional development that assists in developing personal and collaborative skills, and provides assistance with futures thinking and planning is critical. Look out for masterclasses, undertake more reading, but above all, begin thinking about your next practice that will lead to better-prepared students. **T**

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David Loader and Brian Caldwell invite you to their two-day 'Masters of strategy in education' masterclass for school leaders in Melbourne on 31 March and 1 April. For details, visit www.educationaltransformations.com.au

REFERENCES

Hargreaves, D (2003) Education Epidemic: Transforming secondary schools through innovation networks. London: Demos.