



AUSTRALIAN PRINCIPALS CENTRE Monograph Number 8

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LEADING AND MANAGING FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE by Professor John West-Burnham

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores some of the changing perceptions of leadership in education. I want to focus in particular on the issue of “performance”, which is at the heart of much educational reform. The emphasis that most government systems are placing on performance in education was evident in the presentations by the Victorian Ministers at the 2001 VPPA/VASSP Conference, where I first delivered this paper.

Performance is one of the key focal points for leadership; if we try to articulate what it is that leaders actually **do**, one of the central issues is their responsibility for the performance of their colleagues. This is multi-faceted. On the one hand it can be seen as a ‘top-down’ and ‘control’ issue; on the other hand, it can be seen as more to do with an extraordinarily complex set of human relationships. When we explore these issues and perspectives, we will need to try and understand what types of behaviour are appropriate to being an effective **Principal** and an effective **leader**, in education. The two words may not always be synonymous.

One of the problems we have is the way in which governments and school systems look at performance in a context of school improvement. In essence, I want to argue that the emphasis on school improvement, which has dominated educational thinking in terms of the reform movement for the last ten years or so, may well be approaching a situation where it becomes untenable. It may be that we cannot go on improving indefinitely.

If you think about the issue in terms of **personal** performance, you will recognise that one can input a high degree of energy and see a commensurate improvement in performance; that is comparatively easy. In the short term, high energy will produce high performance. Then, as we know, that level of performance is difficult to sustain and will begin to flatten out.

In Australia, as in the UK, an emerging symptom of the system is that professionals are working as hard as they ever were, but are finding it increasingly difficult to sustain the same levels of performance. You can’t work any more hours each week. You can’t do any more days in the year. So, how do we sustain performance over time, when we can’t work any harder? Similarly, how far will performance management be sustainable?

SUSTAINING PERFORMANCE OVER TIME

To sustain performance over time, we cannot simply use the same strategies and techniques that we have used previously. As many education systems are discovering, if we continue to apply pressure in terms of “more of the same”, and working harder, then a severe dysfunction emerges. This manifests itself through pressure on Principals; pressure on classroom teachers; and the institutional pressure of “*How do we break the barrier? How do we go on improving?*”

There comes a point where performance management has to move away from simply working harder to improve, in order to begin exploring what I will call the “next generation” in the process — focusing on **transforming** the way we look at how we work in schools. That is one of the biggest leaps it is possible to imagine.

In essence we are operating systems that are 150 years old. Most schools are still fundamentally as they were conceptualised in the middle of the nineteenth century. And any antiquated machine becomes more and more difficult to keep working at the same level of performance. Eventually we have to look for some radical change in the way in which we operate. In the context of education, we need to change from focusing on “school improvement” and move towards a focus on “transforming schools”.

This is one of the biggest challenges facing leadership in schools and educational systems.



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How do we go about achieving such a transition, in order to keep our promises to the students, the parents and the community, that we will maximise the opportunity for every child? Addressing this question may well lead us to think and work in very different ways than we have done historically.

As skilled and expert professionals, school Principals know the issues associated with managing the performance of colleagues. What we need to explore is how we can begin to reconceptualise the relationship between input in this context and transforming the way schools operate.

ISSUES FOR PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Let us consider some of the issues for performance management as we lay the foundations for a transformational approach. I suggest a list of seven:

1 Definition of terms

The first issue to face us — and it is still an issue, even after major levels of government intervention — is quite simply how performance is to be defined. We are still a long way from that. We still have, if you like, a “hard accountability” definition for level of performance, essentially expressed as quantitative outcomes — easy, simplistic, naïve, but nevertheless serving a purpose in terms of measurement and comparison of schools and of individual teachers. However, if we are to have a restricted and limited definition of performance, then eventually we will have restricted and limited schools.

In many education systems around the world we are moving further and further down the path where educational outcomes are expressed as the simple product of testing regimes. That leads to further issues, partly because it is so much easier to measure simple outcomes. It is much more difficult to measure the educational process that I believe most of want to see operating in schools.

There is a danger that if we do not begin to look at talking about performance with regard to **educationally significant** attributes, as opposed to simplistic outcomes, then the simplistic ones will take over. We will not have the vocabulary to talk about that which is significant, and therefore we will focus on that which is easier.

2 Accountability

The second issue has to do with the relationship between performance and models of accountability. Certainly in the UK the notion of **professional** accountability has been eroded significantly, into a model of formal, **political** accountability. We need to review and explore again the notion of professional, **educational** accountability.

Political control in education systems these days is characterised by a high degree of intervention. In this context, the notion of a **moral** accountability for the education of children — as opposed to a political accountability for demonstrating the adequate return on resources invested in it — is a very important omission. Again, I am not sure that we have the vocabulary at the moment to argue for a model of professional accountability based on educational outcomes. Again, it is simpler to talk about the crude model.

3 Roles

Third, there is the impact of the performance issue on how we perceive roles in schools. This is an area where I sometimes feel close to despair. In the performance management system in the UK, over the last 18 months or so, for example, there has been increasing reference to the notion of “line management”. I had thought that this had gone away, that we had stopped talking about “middle management”. Apparently not.

Can you imagine anything more insulting for a human being than to be called a “middle manager”? It is a stratification, a banding, that is inappropriate for describing a person who is responsible for a child’s learning, surely. It relates to concepts like “command” and “control”. It has the potential — in terms of denying our increasing awareness of the complexities of organisations — to take us back a generation, to the simplicities of “scientific management”, and the notion that if you put somebody into a job he will automatically be able to control other people.

It also raises the issue of the role of the Principal — particularly in terms of the relationship between Principal and classroom teachers. In England at the moment we are going through an interesting process, exploring perspectives on the development of a teacher. The National College of School Leadership, established around two years ago, is playing an increasingly significant role in this. One of the programs they manage is the Leadership Program for Serving Heads (LPSH).



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This program is based on a very complex and sophisticated model of leadership and encompasses a range of categories. The first research with LPSH participants shows that the English headteachers were at least as good as many industrial managers, in terms of comparison using international models. This was a major vindication of the quality of leadership and headship.

There were two areas, however, where English headteachers were found to be below international norms. The first was in holding people to account. This raised all sorts of issues about internal accountability. What it came down to was the reluctance of some heads to actually engage in the performance review of their teachers. The second area where there was less than effective performance, across the sample, was in developing their colleagues. Given the role of Principals in managing staff, it seems somewhat bizarre that these were the two areas where headteachers appeared to be underperforming.

In particular, the research suggested that the English headteachers seemed to resort to “dictatorship” when that seemed appropriate to them. In the UK system, of course, in some ways we do still work on the 19th century model, where a dictatorial approach was advocated, or at least seen as a good thing. It appears on the basis of this research that we still have tendencies in that direction.

4 Performance, culture and management

The fourth issue has to do with the complex relationships between performance, culture and motivation. We need to address questions such as “*What is a high performance culture, and how is it created?*” and “*What is the relationship between the culture of the organisation and the motivation of the individual?*”

5 Performance management

We are talking a lot in the UK at the moment about performance management. Is there a difference between “performance management” and “leading for performance”? If there is, how do they sit together? What are the implications for those in leadership roles in terms of achieving the appropriate balance between, on the one hand, the infrastructure of performance management and, on the other hand, the leadership that’s appropriate in that context?

6 The “high performance school”

We are still not sure what the characteristics of a high performance school are. There is still debate and lack of clarity about how we would characterise first what we mean by “high performance”, and then how we would isolate those factors so as to be able to describe with confidence the nature of the high performance school.

7 Monitoring

Finally, how on earth are we going to monitor and measure performance? If we are talking about simple outcomes, it’s easy to measure. However, as I said earlier, if we limit ourselves to doing that, we are denying some of the most significant components of what it means to be an educationalist. At the same time, however, we cannot say that this is an educational, professional process which is beyond the comprehension of the community, parents or taxpayers, and therefore is some kind of mystical process to which they have no access.

When my brother was training as a nurse — and enjoying the professional and social development attached to being one of a three male trainees in a cohort of forty — he used to wear a badge saying “*Trust me ... I’m a nurse*”. Should we be wearing badges saying “*Trust me ... I’m a teacher*”, or “*Trust me ... I’m a Principal*”?

Where is the accountability? Crucially, how are we going to give account? This relates to the concept of stewardship; we are in the public service. We are funded by tax dollars. We do have a responsibility to society. Politicians would prefer us to be measured in simplistic outcomes, but we know that is not enough as far as what education is about. How then should we talk — internally and externally to the profession — about the nature of what we do?

SOME RESPONSES TO THE ISSUES

The starting point for any discussion in this area is the performance of the individual. Historically, in education we have a fairly poor record of actually trying to achieve the balance between, on the one hand, personal and professional autonomy and, on the other hand, effective engagement with the organisation. At the moment we don’t have that right. There is a grey area, part of which has to do with the extent



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to which leaders are actually engaging with individuals in their schools for accountability.

What is the balance they need to achieve between respect for the individual and the imperatives of the organisation ... and how can they develop it? Between the two, surely, lies the moral responsibility towards the integrity of each child's experience. That is something that we sometimes fail to focus on.

I would suggest there are four components to consider with regard to individual performance. These are by no means exhaustive, but provide a starting point.

1 Capability

One of the issues we need to explore is how we define capability. What are we saying about the model by which we believe teachers should be able to function? If I were to join the staff in your school next term where would I get the notion of what levels of skills are required? Where is the inventory? Where are the strategies?

In other words, in your school, have you defined what the levels of skills for an effective school are? Because although there may be statewide materials or all kinds of commercial packages available, the key question to ask is *"What is the meaningful definition for performance in your school, in terms of the range of professional skills that you will want me to perform?"* Often we assume them. To assume them is surely dangerous.

2 Motivation

The whole area of motivation is immensely complex. What sort of motivation are we talking about? How does it relate to the whole question of how we will structure performance management, and how we are going to hold Principals and teachers accountable? What are the distinctions we draw between extrinsic, intrinsic and moral motivation?

A great deal of the language being used at the moment focuses on **extrinsic** motivation. This includes factors such as pay and reward systems. In 1976, we had a pay rise in England of about 30 per cent. This was backdated for nine or ten months, so I got a thousand pounds in back pay — a large sum in 1976. We bought a new carpet, had the car repaired and had a weekend away. The staffroom was ecstatic. People who had never spoken to each other were hugging. The students

were being smiled at. And it was generally agreed that the Head was a very nice person. Within a month it had disappeared — both the money and the good will. Extrinsic motivation can serve a purpose. It can help. But it is very short term and limited in its effects. Real improvement in performance has to be based, surely, on **intrinsic** motivation — *"I am doing this because it has value for me."*

If we are a profession, if we are concerned with the integrity of children's learning, then we have to focus in on **moral** motivation. This is overwhelmingly the basis both of high performance and of the integrity of the service. Again, it is not amenable to simplistic, formulaic structures. It will not respond to nice, neat packages.

What we are talking about is a complex process, at the heart of the work of the Principal, which involves working to fully engage the motivation — both intrinsic and moral — of every member of staff, all the time.

The reality of school life is that there will be variation — certainly in terms of varying levels of commitment on the part of colleagues. Well, in your school's statement of aims, or mission, do you actually reflect that? And what happens in practice? Take a statement, for instance, such as: *"We will be a caring community"*? In the case of England, is that apart from the 40 per cent of children who will occasionally experience bullying? Surely promises don't come with caveats?

If we are to sustain high levels of engagement, with every child, all of the time, we have to acknowledge the intrinsic and moral motivations of our colleagues. Anything else is compromise. Anything else is limiting. Are we really going to say to a parent *"Look, if we put our cards on the table, your child is probably going to have about 60 or 70 per cent really good teaching, and the other thirty or forty per cent is not going to be so good"*?

An English Headteacher colleague had a staff meeting and said to his staff, *"Using the new national key stage tests, how many of our children are not going to achieve the appropriate standard this coming year?"* The consensus of the school's teachers was that the figure would be about 20 per cent. And the Head said, *"Do we know who they are?"* *"Oh yes, absolutely; we can identify them now"*, said the staff. Then the Head said, *"Well, if we know who they are, and we know they are going to fail, shouldn't we tell them and their parents? Or should we begin to do*



*Surely promises
don't come with caveats?*

something about it? Are we actually saying that one fifth of the children in this school we know are to fail? Isn't that morally unacceptable?"

The issue of motivation has to be morally driven as well as pragmatically driven.

3 Working environment

The third element affecting individual performance is the whole issue of the working environment. I'll come back to this in more detail later but, in essence, the message is that you should listen to your staffroom. What do you hear? What is the language like? What are the metaphors? This is about cultures. Culture is the basis for so much of this area. Is the language of the staffroom positive and optimistic? Is it offensive? How much of the language is military in terms of metaphors? How much is hopeful or aspirational? That is the giveaway.

Practical Tip Number One for today is to get a pocket tape recorder with a lapel mike. Record what goes on in your conversations and when you go home at night, get into a nice warm bath, with a whisky or a gin, and listen through your day. What are the images staff have used in their conversations with you? What sorts of words have they used? How many of their names have you used? How often have you expressed hope in talking to them, as opposed to pragmatic acceptance? How often are you talking about the celebration of success? Your own language is pivotal in this area. The performance of the individual, to a significant extent, is determined by the environment, the context and the social relationships within the school.

4 Relationships

Finally there is this issue of the actual nature of working relationships and social interaction. In some ways this is intangible, but you know you can walk into a staffroom and almost instantaneously pick up the vibes. The motivation of the individual is to a large extent a product of the way in which that person perceives him/herself in the organisation. In turn, this is a product of the quality of the personal inter-relationships. This is a peculiar matter of chemistry. All sorts of very complex variables are at play, but nevertheless if we don't get **this** one right, then everything else will be compromised.

We have to look hard at the extent to which we are actually **leading** to create effective relationships, rather than hoping that they emerge.

And this **is** an area we can do something about, because if you take the four components I have outlined — the capability of the individual; the motivation of the individual; the environment in which s/he works; and the relationships that s/he enjoys — then these factors coming together are one of the key constituents for achieving effective performance.

This does not happen by itself, however. It is not the product of some kind of magic, or osmosis. It is the result of a complex equation and, I argue, is the work of a leader, who will need to focus on, articulate and clarify what s/he as an individual can optimise. Leaders will need to explore just how much they really know about the nature of relationships and the work of teams — and how they can have a positive effect on these areas in their own organisation.

THE MATURITY OF ORGANISATIONS

One way of conceptualising this issue of performance in schools is to draw a distinction between mature and immature organisations. I would argue that the less-than-effective organisation is generally an immature one.

The immature organisation is one that:

- is characterised by an emphasis on neat administration — the stock cupboards are tidy, and I'm proud of it;
- is characterised by a focus on control systems;
- talks about training;
- is essentially reactive; and
- is concerned with inspection.

Consider those words I have just used — administration, control, training, reaction and inspection. Compare them with what for me are the characteristics of a mature organisation:

- leadership;
- trust;
- learning;
- anticipation; and
- values.



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There is a huge spectrum here, and the issue is that performance is a neutral concept. We can have performance in an immature organisation, but at what cost? We can have performance in a mature organisation, and where does it take us?

When my son was twelve, the rule was “*In by 8.30 or else — probably Armageddon.*” When he was fifteen, it was “*In by 9.00, please Daniel.*” When he was 18, “*What time can we expect to see you?*”. And now he’s 24 it’s “*Who are you?*”. The relationship has changed over twelve years — from one of control to one of complete trust. There were highs and lows, backwards and forwards steps, but nevertheless, over time, we were able to change the relationship. In my own situation, I am very lucky in having a son in whom I can invest complete trust. In any context, the process of moving from a control culture to a culture of trust is an incredibly complicated one.

What is the culture, in terms of maturity or immaturity, in your school? Where are you along the continuum? Is there an aspiration towards maturity? Look at some of the classrooms in your school; in some of them the culture is mature, in others immature. In the case of a secondary college, during the course of a day a student will move from a mature relationship with his/her teachers to an immature relationship ... and back again ... to and fro. How they cope with it I do not know. Their tolerance is wonderful. They really do know us very well. And they actually organise their days coping with us. They’re brilliant at it. Essentially most schools depend upon the consent of the children, don’t they?

To what extent are you working in an immature or mature organisation? Bear in mind that I exclude the government of Victoria from the following comment, because I do not know enough about the local situation, but certainly the government of England works in a highly immature way. It has a culture of control, of dependency, and it lacks trust. It is very difficult for English Headteachers to create a trusting environment in their schools when the whole system is posited on a lack of trust.

In terms of your own role as a Principal, where do you stand on the control/trust spectrum? How mature is the organisation in which you are the Principal? How can you affect that? Ask yourself those questions, as we try to understand what it is we are working to create.

THE PERFORMANCE-BASED CULTURE

Nobody can offer a panacea as far as the issue of performance is concerned, but what are the characteristics of a performance-based culture? I am convinced that as educationists, as parents, as members of the community — amid all the bureaucracy and curriculum, with all the burdens of external imperatives in schools — every once in a while it is important to try and capture again the actual magic of the process in which we are involved.

We need occasionally to step outside the structure of the day, the getting through lesson plans and so on, and remember that we are into transforming children’s lives. As teachers, each of you, in your various ways, at different times, in different places, has changed a person’s life so infinitely for the better it’s impossible for you to ever fully know. Whatever we say about changing performance in education must be related to this intangible aspect. The bottom line for us is that we do change lives. We do create opportunities that never existed before. What we are concerned about primarily is young people’s learning. There is nothing more inspirational, nothing more challenging ... or scary, for that matter.

The language of aspirations

So, how can we improve the performance base in schools? Let’s go back a bit and ask ourselves “*Are we talking about aspirations?*” I think Principals, Assistant and Deputy Principals often forget how significant they are in teachers’ lives. Your approval is immensely important to your colleagues. Your language is one of the most significant factors in determining the nature of the school. Both the official and the unofficial, the formal and the informal languages of the school are crucial. The way in which you talk to me is the way I will feel. If the vocabulary is hopeful and optimistic, it will make a difference. Culture is created through language. Look into yourselves and ask what language you are using. Is it aspirational? Are we looking to improve, grow and develop? What are the key components of your vocabulary?

Sharing values

Secondly, to what extent are we sharing values? I work in Hull, but my family and I live in Lincoln, one of the great cities of England. As



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often as we can we go to concerts at Lincoln Cathedral, which provides a wonderful combination of music, architecture and a palpable sense of history. What we prefer when we go to a concert is for the members of the orchestra to play the same piece of music. Does that sound simplistic? We find it more beneficial if they've all agreed who's going to play what, when they're going to start and where they are going to stop. In a concert, an effective performance — key word — is based upon a high degree of consensus on why they're there.

Carrying the musical analogy a little further, into your own context, have you decided as a school that you are a Mozart school, a Mahler school, or perhaps a folksong school? Whatever you are, it is important that everybody has decided to play the same tune. Crucially, are we in harmony? Peter Senge, whose wisdom never ceases to amaze me in so many areas, talks about the centrality, the absolutely fundamental need, for organisations to be **in alignment**. Are you in alignment as an organisation? Are you broadly heading in the same direction? What is the degree of consensus?

Directions and purpose

There is nothing new in this. You will know the biblical reference from the Book of Proverbs, which says that *"without a vision people perish"*, and its 20th century equivalent from Peters and Porterman, *"the purpose of management is to keep the herd heading roughly west"*.

Well, having decided which way we're going, have we told the herd, and are they happy to go along with it? Because if we do not have consensus, if we do not have alignment, then how much nervous energy is dissipated in the debate as to where we are going? How much time is lost? The creation of a shared purpose and vision is a fundamentally important process of learning between professionals. *"We know we have to get on with the job, but where are you taking us?"*

Fundamentally, we end up where we started, with the notion of transformation. Again, if I were joining your school, I would be asking right at the start *"What is the core purpose of your school? What is the bottom line?"* Again the choice of language here is fundamental. *"Are you about optimising and celebrating success? Are you about creating a school that is caring? Are you a school that is focussed on learning? If you are a school that's focussed on learning, what definition of learning are you using?"*

What does learning actually mean? That probably leads off towards another paper, but the notion is that we have to clarify our core purpose. And in practice does that then determine everything else?

If we are going to be serious about the art of performance, in a way that will be sustainable, then we need to be clear about where we are going. We need to have the values we are going to work by fundamentally in place. Underpinning clarity of direction and values is core purpose, but often in education I think our core purpose has been confused. There is nothing to prevent any individual school — in any education system in the world — from saying *"Within the context where we operate, our core purpose is this ..."*. You take control of that which you can control. Every school has at its heart an area that it controls, and that area of control is determined by the core purpose. What is your core purpose? Do your colleagues know it and share it?

Improvement and expectations

Taking into account my comments earlier in this paper, a focus on improvement is undeniably essential. In terms of growth, we cannot actually argue that it is acceptable in education to head for the plateau. We cannot argue that it will be OK if we achieve 50 or 70 or 80 per cent and there we stay. One of the most damaging aspects of the quality movement has been the concept of continuous improvement, certainly as it has been interpreted, and many educationalists have found that very difficult. But of course if we have a broader view of what the core purpose of the college or school is, then it becomes possible to say something like: *"We are going to improve all the time, reflecting the fact that we are not complacent. At a fundamental level, we cannot accept the notion that a child is going to fail. That is unacceptable. We may not succeed in the short term, but we are committed to the belief that every child will succeed."*

We also return to the question of explicit expectations. If you look back to the list earlier in this paper, you will recognise which are the most effective classrooms in your school. There is no difference between the effective classroom and the effective school or college as far as I am concerned — in fact, in many ways, the effective classroom is often the best managed unit in the whole school — but the expectations must be clear. If you don't tell me what you want, you deserve what you get.

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We had some wonderful meals while we were in Australia. Melbourne is one of the epicurean capitals of the world. I find that when I order a meal, it helps enormously if I tell the waiter or waitress exactly what I want. If I say, "Bring me food", then it's a lottery. To what extent are you, as Principals, specifying your order? As opposed to saying "Teach these children", let's specify exactly what we mean. The effective teacher, in her/his classroom has very clear, explicit and specific expectations. Are they replicated in the school as a whole? If they are not, then that classroom will find it increasingly difficult to remain effective. And if they are not effective, then there will be a real danger that anything goes.

Using data and technologies

Don't be complacent about the management of all this. Data will assist you in your decision making. Take it and use it. Through the use of ICT it is possible to be far more accurate in our understanding of what an individual student's progress actually is. I'm still not sure that we're using ICT to really support learning, as opposed to administering effectively. Again I don't know enough about the situation in Australia, but in many English schools there are lots of computers that essentially are used as no more than posh typewriters.

An adviser to the US government some years ago argued that our approach to ICT in schools is a bit like the human response to the problem of keeping warm: there are broadly two ways of keeping warm. One way is to stand close to the fire; the other way is to put on more clothes. He argued that with ICT, as far as education is concerned, what we're doing currently equates with standing closer to the clothes.

We are not exploiting the full potential of ICT for developing highly effective assessment procedures. We really aren't gathering the data that we need to know about children as individual learners. One of the key issues in enhancing the performance of the individual learner is to recognise and respond to the uniqueness of each one. ICT provides opportunities to identify that uniqueness.

Individual learning

To try and demonstrate the uniqueness of individual learning, when I delivered this paper, I asked the conference participants to write down their answers to six questions. I told them that they might be expected to share their answers.

You might care to jot down your own answers. The questions were:

- 1 Which piece of music makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end?
- 2 What is the most significant piece of literature that you have ever read?
- 3 Which movie has made you cry?
- 4 Where in the world would you rather be right now?
- 5 Who would you like to be there with? and
- 6 (... which may or may not be related to questions 4 and 5 ...) How many times a week do you have sex? You may qualify this terms of term time or holiday time, and I will accept fractions. I will not accept good intentions.

"Right", I said. "*You have your answers. Would you please find somebody else among the 700 people in this room with the same 6 responses?*"

A small problem? Those six pieces of information are exemplifications of you as a unique human being. My choice for music would not be shared by many of you, I'm sure. What for me is thrilling, exciting, transcendental, for some of you would be boring. But who is to say who's right?

What for me is a significant work of poetry, for you may be doggerel. It is exactly the same piece of work. You are unique, special, different and distinctive. You are the product of a lifetime of learning, which has produced your particular choices. You are individual in so many wonderful ways, and so are the children. Their "set of six" is as significant as your "set of six".

We've got to get into this notion of using the strengths of available technologies to help celebrate the individuality of the individual, because that's how we will get into real performance. As long as you are teaching me as a generic thing, I will never reach my full potential. If you focus on me as an individual, then I may.

Targets

The place of target-setting in both learning and leadership is clearly understood. There are problems, but nevertheless targets have real value.



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*How many children
in your school
will go through today
and not succeed in anything?
How many children
will go through the day
getting things wrong?
At the end of the day,
how will they feel?*

Whenever I leave home, for example, I find it tremendously helpful to have a destination. You've probably noticed this too. The clarification of destinations is important on journeys. Sometimes we can go on magical mystery tours, and that's fine, but let's label it a magical mystery tour. Surely a child's learning, a colleague's learning, a school or college's growth and development, should not be a magical mystery tour. Clarity of where you're going is important. It doesn't matter how far you travel down the wrong road; you'll never get to the right destination.

Training, development and coaching

There is a place for training, but development is even more important and has to be job-related. Courses are fine. Conferences can be superb. But the real professional learning, leading to enhanced performance, has to take place in the classroom. Courses are therapeutic, usually, for the teacher concerned, for the class and often for the Principal as well, but in the final analysis the real learning happens in the workplace. This has implications for the role of the school leader. We are talking about high performance linked to leadership. We are talking about working to improve performance at work, rather than handing over to an "expert" or a consultant.

The more I read and observe, the more I am convinced that coaching is at the heart of effective development, whether for three-year-olds or thirty-year-olds. The coaching relationship appears to be vindicated time and again in research and in anecdotal evidence. This is what people report has transformed them in terms of their performance. It is the coaching that embeds the learning. To what extent, in your perception of your role as leader, do you build in the significance of coaching as one of your most important activities?

The importance of teams

"Team" is one of those terms that an English philosopher called "Hooray Words". You can't actually say that teams are a bad idea. How often, though, in education, have we used the word "team", but in practice what we actually create is not really a team at all? Instead, what we have is a structural group, rather than a genuine team of human beings, with common purpose, high levels of attraction and esteem, and a shared sense of the moral purpose for what they are doing. It is very easy to use the word "Team" as a label. It is very difficult to create genuine teams and it may

well call into question the historical structuring of classrooms in schools. You cannot bolt a team on to an historic hierarchy. You have to change everything.

Team-based learning, linked with coaching, seems to be very powerful, and transforming for performance. This in turn links to motivation and relationships. Again, however, the only way I can understand the organisation is through my relationship with you. Such relationships are too important and too complex to be left to chance.

Given more space and time, I could go on and explore the importance of Emotional Intelligence in this area. Relationships, after all, are about connections. Making relationships implies that we have emotional intelligence links. This may be the subject of a further paper in the future. For the moment we should at least note the need to reflect on the issue.

Opportunities

We have to create opportunities for achievement. In the planning of today's work, how many of your colleagues have consciously and deliberately created opportunities for every child to succeed? How many children in your school will go through today and not succeed in anything? How many children will go through the day getting things wrong? At the end of the day, how will they feel?

There is a lovely story from a primary school in England. A Principal told me about how a group of seven-year-olds, in a fairly radical departure from the National Curriculum, had spent half a morning line dancing. Now I'm professionally, personally, morally and in every other way opposed to line dancing. I regard it as one of the major aberrations on the face of the planet of the moment (and please join my campaign to stamp it out!). However, these thirty seven-year-olds were instructed in line dancing as part of their learning. A small boy, who was the classic "grey child" (one who had never caused any offence, but just drifted in the middle of the averages, almost invisible) suddenly discovered that whatever divinity you believe created the world had put him on this planet to be a line dancer. The vagaries of the Almighty are indeed difficult to comprehend.

Within 10 minutes he found that he was a natural line dancer. Within twenty minutes he found that he could lead others in line dancing. Within thirty minutes he was out the front working with the teacher and you had a grey child

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who was transformed. He was radiant. He had had found something where he could achieve success. And for the first time in his three years at school he had a whole morning of nothing but success. What did that do to him? It made him a different human being. It opened opportunities and possibilities. He could see what it was like to be successful.

This anecdote illustrates how both for our students and for our colleagues, a crucial issue for high performance is creating — deliberately and systematically — opportunities for achievement and then, finally, recognising and celebrating success.

Celebration

How do you celebrate success? Remember that the impact of your praise is out of all proportion to your giving. Doesn't that make sense? You are so significant in the lives of so many. Words of celebration from you are absolutely fundamental and vital in how others see you, crucially in how they perceive themselves, and in how they perceive their work.

I think that often we have become almost Calvinistic in our approach to success and that is actually not a good thing. Some theorists argue that in a successful life, in a successful relationship, in successful learning, the ratio of success to failure must be four to one. Take that on board and look at your classes, asking how many of these children, today, are actually experiencing success, let alone in a ratio of four to one compared with relative non-success?

FINAL COMMENTS

Let's put some of these thoughts together. It is very easy to manage performance. You can set up systems, structures and documentation, and go through the motions. And it may produce improved outcomes. The cost, I fear, will be very high, because if we are talking purely about the management aspects of reform, we are going to lower our sights.

If, on the other hand, we are going to say that performance **is** a component of working together in organisations, and **is** a key component in keeping our promises to young people, then we have to look at leadership distributed throughout, as the basis upon which we create opportunities for success, when that in itself is the basis for performance.



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