LEADING EDUCATION SYSTEMS

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Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2021

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80071-133-4 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-80071-130-3 (Online)
ISBN: 978-1-80071-132-7 (Epub)

ISOQAR certified Management System, awarded to Emerald for adherence to Environmental standard ISO 14001:2004.

Certificate Number 1985
ISO 14001

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CONTENTS

About the Editors vii

About the Contributors ix

Foreword xiii

Introduction to the Book xxiii
Stephen Brown and Patrick Duignan

Praise for Leading Education Systems xxxi

1. System Leaders Scaling Successful Educational Reforms in an Uncertain Future 1
Stephen Brown and Patrick Duignan

2. Leading Education Change Internationally: Towards a New Approach 37
Beatriz Pont

3. Quality Leadership for Learning Systems 59
Bill Maxwell

4. System Leadership for Promoting Collective Responsibility and Communities of Learners: Insights from China 87
Haiyan Qian and Allan Walker

5. System Leadership for Future-ready Learners in Singapore 111
David Ng Foo Seong

6. Leading School Districts for Improved Student Success 133
Kenneth Leithwood and Catherine McCullough

7. Leading a Connected and Partnership-based System 157
Maggie Farrar

8. Sharing Our Story: One Approach to School and System Improvement 179
Anne Ryan and Prue Horan

9. System Leadership – Human Flourishing through Building Trust 201
Philomena Billington

10. Leading Successful Systems in a VUCA World: Advice from Our Contributing Authors 221
Stephen Brown and Patrick Duignan

Index 235

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FOREWORD

I am delighted to have been asked to write the Foreword for this important collection of essays and analyses on *Leading Educational Systems*. The title is deceptive. This book is not about how to lead an education system, in the singular.

Ever since the foundation of public education, we have had education systems and people who have been appointed to lead them – Ministers or Secretaries of Education, Deputy Ministers, Superintendents of School Districts or Local Authorities, Regional Managers and Directors, and so on. Traditionally, the leadership of systems of schools and related services was assigned to and assumed by individuals in hierarchies of ascending and descending bureaucratic control. Leaders might work with boards or teams and consult with other stakeholders, but, essentially, system leaders were leaders and managers of big organisations with lots of schools rather than smaller organisations of adults and young people within schools. In most cases, after you had been a school leader, significant promotion could follow by becoming a middle manager, then a top-manager within 'the system'.

This kind of leadership is not what the authors of the chapters in this book are addressing. System leadership, rather, is more complex and sophisticated. A 'system', in the understandings that are represented in this book, is a network of components, people, and processes that are not necessarily, usually or solely defined in legal or administrative terms as a tightly bounded organisation, like a school district or a state department. System leadership, rather, is concerned with how to lead and manage a complex and rapidly changing systems with fluid boundaries in an increasingly volatile world, yet somehow still create outcomes that achieve cherished values, and important results, within trajectories of continuous improvement.

This modern conception of system or, in the plural, systems leadership, has several points of origin – markets, large-scale reform, systems theory, globalisation, and unparalleled change.

First is the deliberate replacement of traditional bureaucratic hierarchies of school district organisation by individually autonomous schools set in market competition with one another to attract children of affluent parents, achieve measurable results, and solicit performance-related resources. Although these systems have developed in the United States and Sweden, it was England, under the government of Tony Blair, that led the way in turning its attention to how to create coherence and competition among newly autonomous schools so that the central government could achieve its desired results. This led to the evolution of system initiatives described by Maggie Farrar in her chapter that were epitomised during the operation of the UK National College for School Leadership which she has served as its leader.

As early as 2005, The College's first Chief Executive Officer, Heather Du Quesnay, coauthored an article with the College's Director of Research, Geoff Southworth, on 'School Leadership and System Leadership' (Southworth & Du Quesnay, 2005). They quoted Michael Fullan's (2003, p. 4) assertion that

> *improving the overall system will not happen just by endorsing the vision of a strong public school system; principals in particular must be cognizant that changing their schools and the system is a simultaneous proposition.*

School leaders were now seen as an active part of the system, not a passive object of its mandates and other actions.

The National College found itself enmeshed in a dynamic but sometimes chaotic new educational world of networks, federations, chains, and later 'trusts' of schools that were designed to share practices and provide mutual support. Within and across traditional local authorities that still existed in this new market system, ways were created for strong schools to help weaker partners, for school principals (or headteachers) to assist multiple schools if they had been exceptionally effective in turning around a school of their own, and for outstanding schools to be designated as training schools for new teachers.

From this energetic phase of innovation, theoretical understanding began to evolve of how to create coherence and attain impact among disparate initiatives within a diffused system. The National College commissioned a paper from Robert Hill which reflected back the College's definition of system leaders to itself as

> *leaders who work within and beyond their individual organisations; sharing and harnessing the best resources that the system can offer to bring about improvement in their own and other organisations; and influencing thinking, policy and practice so as to have a positive impact on the lives and life chances of all children and young people. (R. Hill, 2009)*

In his research for the College, R. Hill (2009, p. 13) concluded that school leaders become engaged in system leadership

> *because they think it will help them to improve their own school, aid their personal development, bring back learning to their school, open up opportunities for colleagues and enable them to improve outcomes beyond their own school.*

Theoretically, the task of creating coherence within a market-driven system of autonomous schools falls to a process or vision of deliberately developing what my namesake, David Hargreaves (2010), identified as a *self-improving system* involving both vertical and lateral leadership, co-creation, and responsiveness to local circumstances in ways that incorporate mutual evaluation of and feedback concerning practice. This idea is being co-developed more critically by University of London Professor (also former Deputy in the NCSL) Toby Greany (2014). It has also been the subject of an effort to transport its essential principles of 'lattice-like' leadership to the United States by Jonathan Supovitz (2014).

The second source of influence on the emergence of the idea and practice of system leadership comes from the resurgence of large-scale reform over the past two decades, after an era when improvement efforts had mainly been focussed on individual schools and school districts. In some respects, Leithwood and McCullough's chapter represents what research has revealed about school district

leadership and the dispositions it has required as we are drawing towards the end of that era in North America.

In 2000, Michael Fullan (2000) published a defining paper on what he called 'The Return of Large-Scale Reform'. Fullan drew on evolving research from around the world on the design and impact of large-scale change across many schools. This research analysed strategies that included a tight focus on literacy, intensive system-wide efforts to coach teachers in effective methods of instruction, and uses of standardised testing to ensure accountability and target interventions where they were most needed. Fullan's analysis encompassed research on a concerted effort to transform literacy achievement in District 2 of New York City (Elmore & Burney, 1997), on literacy improvement in a Catholic system in Victoria, Australia (P. W. Hill & Crevola, 1999), and on the controversial National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy in the United Kingdom (Barber, 2009). Fullan urged his readers to 'figure out how to work with the district as a system', 'work at alignment and connections', and 'harness the interactive capability of systemic forces' by integrating pressure and support, drawing on both top-down and bottom-up strategies, creating cross-over structures to enhance system learning, and developing greater coherence by removing superfluous and disconnected programmes and initiatives that distract from the focus on clear goals.

As the realities and strategies of educational change were turning to top-down improvement of literacy and mathematics achievement across whole systems, on the one hand, and to efforts to create coherence among autonomous schools in market competition, on the other hand, the field of organisational management was also providing some new directions for business leaders. This third influence on the emergence of system leadership in education came from influential thinking on leadership and change in the business literature.

Peter Senge, Senior Lecturer in Leadership in the Sloan School of Management at the Massachusetts Institute for Technology is the author of one of the most successful business books of all time. *The Fifth Discipline,* first published in 1990, has sold over 4 million copies (Senge, 1990). It has been listed in the top 10 business books of all time by *Time Magazine* and the *Financial Times*. Senge (1990, p. 3)

argues that 'organizations where people continually expand their capacities to create the results they truly desire' and 'where collective aspiration is set free' to practise certain disciplines. One of the five essential disciplines of what he calls learning organisations is *systems thinking*.

Reflecting on the impact of his book, Senge reports how he was both surprised and humbled by the fact that his ideas were used as much by educational leaders as by leaders in business. In any organisation, systems thinking and system leadership are about seeing the interconnections among the parts of the organisation, relating these parts to the whole, and in general, grasping what the 'big picture' of the organisation and its place in the world look like, now and in the future. Many of Brown and Duignan's opening remarks and concluding summary in this book are about the properties of systems from this 'big picture' perspective – being adaptable and nuanced, acting with others rather than alone, building relationships, involving those that decisions affect in making those decisions, inviting challenge, not trying to over-control things, understanding the non-linear nature of cause and effect, being both committed and open, making as much as possible visible, going deep, admitting imperfections, and looking outward and forward all the time. It's a dizzying set of characteristics and expectations. But basically, it serves to steer system leaders away from top-down, individualistic, controlling, secretive, and inward looking forms of leading that focus on delivering a narrow set of outcomes.

Fourth, ever since the OECD conducted its first international Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test assessment in 2000, educational policy has moved in a markedly global direction. International comparative educational studies used to occupy only esoteric corners of the educational field. International meetings of policy experts also used to be dreary set-piece presentations of the various governance structures of education in different countries. Comparing the PISA results of different countries didn't just increase global competitiveness for educational excellence. It also aroused policy curiosity about the reasons for success in the highest performing jurisdictions like Singapore, Shanghai, and Finland. Suddenly, systems became interested in other systems and in the ways in which they organised system leadership.

The OECD's Beatriz Pont, with whom I conducted a review of system leadership in Finland in 2008 (A. Hargreaves, Halasz, & Pont, 2008), draws on her experience of conducting country-by-country policy reviews to compare system leadership internationally. In her chapter, she contrasts a traditional paradigm of top-down policy implementation with an increasingly common one where policy is co-constructed with the people whom it affects. Pont's chapter weaves together examples from Canada, Norway, Iceland, and Estonia to highlight how system leadership practices take distinctive forms in different countries, yet are also evolved in ways that draw on knowledge of those differences in an increasingly global policy environment.

The two chapters on Singapore and Shanghai, respectively, disrupt traditional leadership assumptions about Anglo-American systems that are either top-down bureaucracies or open-market systems. Haiyan Qian and Allan Walker dismantle conventional stereotypes about China by showing how high performance in Shanghai is partly explained by system leadership that combines unapologetic top-down control with a traditionally Confucian sense of collective effort and responsibility to keep learning and improving. And they describe especially innovative structures where expert teachers demonstrate highly effective lessons to their peers, where colleagues undertake a kind of lesson study to provide feedback on one another's classes, and where there are very clear ways of assigning strong schools to come to the assistance of struggling counterparts. Likewise, in Singapore, Ng Foo Sung's chapter unravels misconceptions about Singaporean hierarchies to reveal forms of system leadership that attend to simultaneously developing deep understanding and engagement with core values of human development.

Almost all the world over, system leaders are becoming more aware of different ways of leading and of how their own system and their own leadership are not the only ways to be. Higher performing systems and their leadership project lessons of how to lead more effectively and how change is more feasible than many of us are otherwise inclined to think.

Fifth, as several chapters make clear, we live in a world defined by VUCA. Arising from business management theory in the 1980s, but growing in use in military strategy, business, politics, and

organisational studies since the early 2000s, *VUCA* is an acronym for four new states of social and political life:

- *Volatility* of change that occurs at accelerating speed in shifting directions.
- *Uncertainty* of evidence, information, and capacity to predict the future.
- *Complexity* of intersecting forces.
- *Ambiguity* of what events and circumstances actually mean to people of different identities and perspectives.

A VUCA world results from the rapid expansion of digital communication, the proliferation of intersecting identities, the increasing global movement and mixing of cultures, and the growth of a flexible and insecure gig economy of temporary, part-time, low-paid, and constantly changing work at the expense of predictable and secure employment. The COVID-19 pandemic and all of its consequences is VUCA with added adrenaline. COVID-19 has wrought enormous problems connected with the digital divide, growing inequalities resulting from learning at home, mounting mental health problems for young people and their families, and endless problems incurred by necessities of learning at home with problematic technology. But COVID-19 has also taught us that the world can speed up change and invent vaccines in less than a year. School systems can devise ingenious ways of distributing digital and hard copy resources to students in vastly different home circumstances. Children can often be taught how to become independent online learners. And teachers and leaders are increasingly prepared to turn to each other for help when, almost every day, they are faced with completely new problems they have never experienced before.

VUCA, in the form of COVID, has taught us that even in school systems of legendary bureaucratic inflexibility, change can be fast, people can collaborate, unions and governments can work together, countries with already robust and widely accessible online platforms can respond nimbly and effectively to moving learning from school to home, and all this can be done while preserving and protecting core educational values.

And this is the sixth and last factor behind the emergence of system leadership. In the midst of constant change, and of feeling constantly on the edge of chaos, core values and a sense of mission and service, as well as interpersonal trust can be the anchors in the storm. Abiding leadership capabilities concerned with morality, ethics, and integrity are essential when everything else is swirling around us. And these are the most abiding aspects of servant leadership that Chapters 8 and 9 by Ryan and Horan, and Billington, respectively address, along with the chapter on inspection by Maxwell, to a lesser extent.

I know in my own system leadership, that when I am faced with a seemingly insurmountable challenge or insoluble crisis, inner courage to face my fears and to do what is morally right, however difficult that might be, are my guiding lights. Turning to trusted colleagues who can coach and mentor me through moments of confusion and despair is invaluable. And having a leadership group that cares about each other as well as about the purposes and people that we are meant to serve is priceless.

We can learn a lot from each of the six forces that have brought system leadership to the fore, including their limitations:

From efforts to create coherence in market-driven systems, we have learned how to connect schools in new ways, including ones that particularly assist those that are struggling. But we must also beware of transplanting all the strategies and solutions to more traditional, non-market-based systems where school districts and local democracy still predominate as the main form of organisation.

From large-scale reform, we can be emboldened by the evidence of the capacity to change entire districts or even countries in ways that positively impact very many students. But we should also be aware that the top-down ways that have been adopted to get these results do not work nearly so well when the goals are broader and more complex than raising achievement in basic skills.

From systems thinking theory, we can alert ourselves to the importance of everyone understanding the big picture, not just the individual who is formally in charge. Yet, we should also be cognisant of the fact that while this aspect of organisation theory helps us to get to grips with the properties and even the cultures and relationships of systems, it does nothing to address the power

differences and political agendas in which most of us work. It is as if systems thinking is indifferent to power and politics. So we need other insights to help us in these respects.

From international comparisons, we can open our eyes to other possibilities for system leadership than those that already exist in our own systems and in our own heads. We can learn how to pair up stronger and weaker teachers and schools in a focussed and systematic way, for example. But international differences are not just differences of policy. They are variations in culture and ways of life too. And what might work well in a Confucian-influenced system of respect for hierarchy and collective responsibility may not work nearly so well in a culture and a country that prizes life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, above all else, for example.

Fifth, VUCA can heighten our awareness of the permanency of complexity and even chaos in which our leadership is situated. But it also discourages us from fighting aspects of the volatility that are wilfully disruptive and oppressive. This includes the organised destruction of community-based schools in aggressive market systems, for example. VUCA encourages us to learn and adapt, when sometimes we need to fight and oppose things instead.

Last, this is where the anchoring influences of our courage, our values, and our senses of community come into play. System leadership is organisational and it is interpersonally relational. But it also needs to be ethical and political. These chapters bring us to the edge of this debate and its next steps. As leaders, if we are not deliberately part of the system, it will be all too easy to become just a pawn of that system. That is the ultimate moral lesson of this sophisticated collection of analyses of the state of system leadership today, which I urge you to read in its entirety.

Andy Hargreaves
Ottawa
December 2020

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

Stephen Brown and Patrick Duignan

There is a paucity of research and direct commentary on the leadership of education systems. Moreover, there is little evidence of dedicated formation through capability development of individuals who undertake system leader roles. System leaders are those individuals who undertake roles in non-school-based positions and who are stakeholders influencing the direction, support, accountability and advocacy of any education system. Specifically, what are the leadership dispositions, capabilities, mindsets and abilities required to be a leader and to provide leadership of education systems? This edited book, *Leading Education Systems,* draws on the wisdom, expertise, research and scholarship of acknowledged thought education, researchers, scholar practitioners and respected education system leaders to stimulate discourse on such questions. The context of the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world epitomised by COVID-19 has magnified the importance of leadership in extraordinary times. For current and future leaders of education systems, leadership in the new normal will require, provoke, challenge them to reflect on and redefine what is the nature of system leadership. The edited volume, *Leading Education Systems,* is dedicated to exploring the nature of system leadership, to locate such deliberations within the altered state of a COVID-19 context. The text provides signposts, guidance and considerations on the leaders and leadership of education systems which to this point has not existed.

The urgency of this challenge is examined and analysed by the editors, Stephen Brown and Patrick Duignan, in the first chapter of this book, titled 'System Leaders Scaling Successful Educational Reforms in an Uncertain Future'. They concluded from an extensive review of relevant, evidence-based literature that system leaders in

education will need to transform their leadership theories, mindsets and practices if they wish to remain relevant and successful in this challenging VUCA world. From perspectives and commentaries on COVID-19 in the press, media and leadership literature, they argue that a consensus is emerging that all of us will be required to change the way we think and act if we are going to be successful in the 'new normal' that's rapidly emerging. If system leaders wish to reform and transform education, they must start with the people who will reform and be reformed through understanding their needs, desires and what is likely to drive and inspire them. Simply put, reform is all about people, first, second and always!

Another major challenge for system leaders, they claim, is to encourage professional responses from educational leaders, teachers and other specialists, to learn how to work together in the interests of the common good and, above all, learn and execute the processes for scaling successful educational improvements to system, state and country levels.

In Chapter 2, titled 'Leading Education Change Internationally: Towards a New Approach', Beatriz Pont reports that across many OECD countries, educational reforms and other proposed changes set objectives aiming to improve education systems with different options – some ideological, others more technical and others based on evidence. She claims that many questions arise regarding such education change, especially: Are these reform efforts actually effective and accomplishing real change? She says that in economics, raising lending interest rates or increasing public expenditure are policies which may have direct outcomes, but in education, the outcomes of change are not as straightforward. She asks: 'How can educational change be made sustainable and effective?' Are the old ways of education change working or do we need to think of new approaches?

Beatriz's chapter looks at ways in which education change processes have actually changed themselves and the implications for leadership, and how leadership can be more effective in the future. She states that the views presented in her chapter are based on her own experiences working with policymakers and education stakeholders within OECD countries and internationally. Her aim is to help policymakers and system leaders think about their change

processes with a renewed perspective, because education policy making is shifting, moving away from the traditional top-down perspective to one of supporting and empowering those involved in change more horizontally. She claims this perspective requires having a new perspective on what leadership for change means by: better understanding how education change processes have evolved; creating working frameworks on how to think about change; and giving consideration for how system and school leaders can think about shaping education change processes, especially focussed on current and future VUCA times.

She argues from her research and experiences with policymakers and education stakeholders across OECD countries that education change processes are becoming increasingly complex, and while there is much goodwill from politicians and policymakers, there is a need for a clearer vision and focus for education improvement based on knowledge and research, involving cross-party agreements, guiding coalitions and the experiences of successful practitioners in schools and education systems. She is convinced that educators and educational system leaders are leading towards a new model of education change where those who are at the heart of change will have more agency over it, rather than simply delivering change defined by others. She is observing this from a range of OECD countries, and this view has also been confirmed during the COVID crisis. She predicts that these new system leadership perspectives and practices will be the way of the future.

In Chapter 3, titled 'Quality Leadership for Learning Systems', Bill Maxwell focusses on *quality system improvement strategies for a VUCA world* and argues that no strategy is more important in this volatile and uncertain context than the system's quality strategy. He points out that system improvement should not simply focus on assuring that schools consistently meet fixed standards of quality provision but, more dynamically, ensuring that school systems and schools are engaging in the generation and spread of further improvement so as to assure that quality is continuously improving, not just settling at a stable level. In order to achieve such outcomes, Maxwell urges system leaders and reformers to commit to coherent processes and work together to establish a clear, collective understanding of the vision and the aims and goals

for the school system. Improving system-wide quality requires a clear understanding of what the system is seeking to achieve and strong shared ownership from those who are charged with achieving it. He advocates for a 'collective capacity building model' and provides a useful framework as a springboard from which systems and their leaders can shape contextually appropriate and relevant, contemporary improvement and accountability approaches.

In Chapter 4, titled 'System Leadership for Promoting Collective Responsibility and Communities of Learners: Insights from China', Haiyan Walker and Allan Qian report on and describe system reform initiatives in China, including emerging school consortiums, networked teacher professional learning communities and processes to enhance the role of district/municipal-level Teaching-Research Officers (*jiaoyanyuan*). They point out that these innovative system reform initiatives involve multiple schools, systemic efforts to build professional communities and collective efficacy and models of school organisation where leadership roles and responsibilities are distributed. Over the past 15 years, they claim that various school consortiums have emerged in China embracing commissioned administration (*weituo guanli*), education groups (*jiaoyu jituan*) and a one school, multiple campuses model (*yixiao duoqu*).

The most prominent model of school consortiums is the innovative initiative of commissioned administration in Shanghai, which involves contracting high-quality schools or social organisations to manage relatively weaker schools by sending a school principal or a leadership team to the supported school. The principal applied a strategy called 'success education' and successfully transformed the school. The *Shanghai Education Authority* then asked the principal to help turn around 10 other low-performing schools through 'commissioned administration' as a pilot initiative in Shanghai. The Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2010 referenced the commissioned administration reform as one of the exemplary cases which promoted the transformation of the government's educational role from directly managing schools to providing the legislative, policy, financial and knowledge support to guarantee schools' management autonomy and encourage extensive social participation.

In Chapter 5, titled 'System Leadership for Future-ready Learners in Singapore', David Ng Foo Seong from Singapore calls for

a rethink, reconfiguration and re-orientation of schooling systems and system leadership so that they are more relevant and responsive in ever-changing dynamic contexts, from global to local. He asserts that the leaders of schooling systems have to ensure and assure that the system is supporting, enabling and preparing future-focussed learners. He provides an insightful multidimensional framework to enable system leaders to productively engage with such thinking, with the ultimate aspiration of contributing to the development of learners to be future ready. He asks: 'how do we develop future-ready learners who will co-create living, lifework, and learning in Singapore?' He provides a definition of the purposes of successful education and what being future-ready means:

> *An education system can only be successful if it is able to develop future-ready individuals who will continue to learn beyond graduation, take on future lifework, and thrive in a changing society and environment.*

He argues that sustained improvement of individual schools can only be feasible if all of a system's schools are advancing together. By working together, the aim is to produce ideas and inspire collaborative efforts to achieve collective breakthroughs as a system of schools rather than as individual schools.

Globally, schooling systems vary in terms of their system architecture, processes, component parts and functions. A key question is: 'What are the features and characteristics of any system of schools that contributes successfully and meaningfully to system quality and performance?' In Chapter 6, titled 'Leading School Districts for Improved Student Success', Kenneth Leithwood and Catherine McCullough explore the key characteristics of education districts and systems that matter most to support and influence student achievement. Their work, based on a decade of research related to district effectiveness, discerns and discusses four characteristics that school principals found useful for their work on school improvement. These four conditions (from four of their studies) place a focus on: academic emphasis, reciprocal trust, teacher commitment and collective teacher efficacy. Their chapter provides a brief background to the framework and methods used in the four studies followed by a synopsis of evidence for school improvement

from the studies. All of the studies used student achievement as an outcome measure, but two of the studies also included student engagement and well-being. This chapter ends with a set of recommendations for school improvement by district leaders.

In Chapter 7, titled 'Leading a Connected and Partnership-based System', Maggie Farrar explores the importance and relevance of networks to schooling systems in a VUCA world. This chapter takes a case study approach examining the leadership of effective networks and what we can learn from them. It also examines the strategic leadership required to cultivate the environment in which these networks can become self-improving, strongly accountable and highly autonomous. Another related theme discussed is the highly complex and adaptive role of strategic system leaders in such improvement environments through examining their lived experiences, insights into challenges, as well as the leadership opportunities such roles bring.

This chapter focusses on the English education system and explores the policy context in which the drive for a partnership-based system is becoming mainstream practice. She claims that achieving a partnership-based education system that accelerates improvement, is sustainable and is inspired by the quality of its leaders. Farrar claims that the more she worked with those who are cultivating partnership-based systems, the more she appreciates that it requires everyone, at all levels, to contribute to system leadership. This requires giving those leading schools and education systems the space, legitimacy and encouragement to engage in collaborative work, and she reminds us that this collaboration requires different skills than those required to lead a single institution; adjustment to the scale, speed and scope of such leadership is essential.

In Chapter 8, titled 'Sharing Our Story: One Approach to School and System Improvement', Anne Ryan and Prue Horan explore and apply the concept of *school system* within the context of the Catholic Education, Diocese of Wagga Wagga (CEDWW), New South Wales, Australia. A key feature of their work has been the design, in partnership with the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER), of a tool to guide system and school reform in this schooling system. The *Education System Improvement Tool* (ESIT – to be published by ACER) identifies six domains of effective education system practice: clarity of vision and purpose, enabling effective

leadership, evidence-based policy and practice, quality teaching, collaborative networks and partnerships and targeted use of resources. A shared approach in using the instrument to gather data to inform a three-year Strategic Plan and, subsequent, Annual Improvement Plans. Since the process demanded the identification of a 'skinny plan' (Fullan, 2014) in preference to a broad set of improvement targets, a more intensive approach to improvement efforts was enabled.

The use of the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) across the CEDWW system of schools has enabled each learning community to review and reflect on 'current practice, areas for improvement and evidence that progress is being made'. This 'trigger' initiative deepened system leaders' understanding of the variety of contexts of practice they serve and amplified the ongoing need to nurture collaborative partnerships to mobilise further systemic actions. They quote Fullan and Quinn (2016) who concluded from their research:

> *Developing collaborative cultures is careful and precise work and has profound impact when carried out well because increasing social capital improves coherence, which in turn attracts newcomers and feeds forward into better results. (p. 13)*

In Chapter 9, titled 'System Leadership – Human Flourishing through Building Trust', Philomena Billington uses the context of Catholicism to explore the importance of the contribution of system leaders to schools and schooling by having the capacity of stewarding the mission through co-responsibility, openness to dialogue and a trust in the institution by participants. She points out that a constant topic for discussion in literature discourse on successful systems and schools is around system accountability. Typically, this manifests in questions and provocations such as 'What measures and approaches to accountability are appropriate?' What is the appropriate balance between compliance and development? What are key indicators and artefacts of successful accountability practices within any system?'

She emphasises that we are living in and through a time across the world of education, in which the decades of strategic and operational planning and results-driven outcomes no longer suffice – the current scripts are no longer satisfactory. This is exacerbated by the current coronavirus pandemic. However, she contends that there is an inner map for leaders and educators and that this map is embodied within

the ethics, motivation and the soul of leaders. Now is the time for this inner map to be 'writ large' in leadership and especially at system level where leaders have immense opportunity to inspire and influence.

These chapters provide system leaders, and other educational reformers who focus on improving system performance, with cutting-edge insights into core aspect of effective schooling systems. Moreover, such discourse provides the necessary evidence-informed support to system leaders and critical stakeholders charged with the leadership of schooling in this challenging VUCA world. All of these perspectives on 'systemness' and system constructs have a significant degree of commonality and congruence around common domains, elements or core characteristics of successful schooling systems (Fullan & Quinn, 2015).

Given the nature and characteristics of successful schooling systems identified and discussed by the contributing authors to this edited book on System Leaders and Leadership, and considering the nature of the presenting context in which these leaders exist, the insights provided in the chapters in this edited book will be useful and empowering for system leaders. It seems clear from relevant literature that the concept of system leadership in education varies in interpretation and definition, and this conclusion is well supported by Professor David Hopkins in his superb publication for the National College for School Leadership, titled *The emergence of system leadership* (2009). Hopkins describes four key interactive drivers for system reform: personalised learning; professional teaching; networks and collaboration; and intelligent accountability (p. 4). His model for system leadership practice is particularly notable because it is supported and inspired by moral purpose - a strong theme in our edited book - and it, especially, focuses on incentivizing system and school reform rather than legislating for it. Hopkins concludes that this approach to system leadership '. . . represents a powerful combination of practices that give us glimpses of leadership in a new educational landscape' (p. 7). We agree!

REFERENCE

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PRAISE FOR *LEADING EDUCATION SYSTEMS*

Guiding and inspiring systems of schools is increasingly complex given the myriad of demands placed on school leaders. The value of school systems in realising quality learning outcomes for students, is increasingly supported by evidence based research and the practical experience of those who lead schools. Stephen Brown and Patrick Duignan have brought the experience and perspective of system leaders to this largely unchartered territory. Leading Education Systems draws on the wisdom of educators and researchers to provide system leaders with practical and thought provoking strategies as we come to terms with the immediate and long term implications of COVID-19. As we look to a world beyond the pandemic, the compilation of the experience and insights of those who have worked in Australia and internationally provides a valuable resource for those leading education systems now and in the future. What lies ahead is uncertain, but as educators we can draw on the vast wisdom and knowledge of current leaders and the lessons they have learnt, so that our students will not just survive, but thrive in the world that will emerge as this decade unfolds.

Pam Betts, Executive Director,
Archdiocese of Brisbane Catholic Education,
Australia

Leading a school is challenging and complex enough, but leading a whole system is not for the fainthearted. The challenges are huge, the eco-system is tough to understand and navigate and it can take several years to begin to see an impact. But in a world where it is increasingly

politically, socially and economically essential for states and countries to have successful education systems, system leadership is more important than ever. This book avoids simple solutions to these complex problems. Instead, it provides rich and insightful analyses and case studies, based on research and on what has worked well in different contexts. Thoughtful and challenging in equal measure, it will help system leaders and those who aspire to be system leaders to reflect on their own situation and to ensure that they become the leaders that their context needs them to be.

Professor Steve Munby, former CEO Education Development Trust and former CEO National College for School Leadership, UK.

The world is changing faster than the systems that we design to process its uncertainties and demands. Nowhere is this more urgent, important and difficult than in education. The Covid-19 pandemic has raised the pace and urgency of the challenge, but also, like any great crisis, creates the climate in which innovation and rethinking design and practice can be more acceptable. So it is that this book is one for our times, for education systems need innovation like never before – at the levels of systems, processes and practices on the ground. We should never forget these are profoundly human at every level, and this inspiring collection shows the global scale, richness and urgency of rethinking that is emerging. Brown and Duignan are to be congratulated for bringing together such an accessible digest of visions and sharing them in this volume.

Nigel Nicholson, Emeritus Professor of Organisational Behaviour, London Business School, UK.

Despite a burgeoning literature about approaches to school-based leadership in the contemporary world, very little attention has been paid to leadership at the level

of education systems. This book makes an important contribution to filling that gap. Importantly its authors recognize that the dead hand of the neoliberal policy regime in education cannot deliver the kind of collaborative and democratic leadership that is needed to shape responses by schooling systems to the massive changes that are bearing down on our societies. Each chapter explores approaches to system-wide change which promote partnership, capacity building and teacher professionalism. As a collective they demonstrate that such approaches are far better suited to the demands of the future than the competitive individualism that for too long has formed the basis of education policy around the world.

Professor Emeritus Alan Reid AM,
Education Futures Unit,
University of South Australia, Australia.

Education will become the most critical profession in the next decade. Dramatic global change will require learning systems that encourage our youth to redesign their communities. The world will need educational leaders who can do likewise, and Leading Education Systems is the book for those who seek both the Why and the How of that transformational thinking. Accompanied by contributions from other outstanding educators, the deeply respected expertise of Stephen Brown and Patrick Duignan resonates throughout the text. This is the definitive educational leadership book for these tumultuous times. Savour every word.

Tony Ryan, Education Futurist,
author of *The Next Generation,*
Australia.

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1

SYSTEM LEADERS SCALING SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Stephen Brown and Patrick Duignan

We are all time travellers, journeying together into the future. But let us work together to make that future a place we want to visit.

Be brave, be curious, be determined, overcome the odds. It can be done.

(*Stephen Hawking*, 2019 – *his last book before he passed away*)

This edited book focusses on the challenges and opportunities for education system leaders in contexts of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity – known as a VUCA world. Currently, organisational environments are increasingly characterised by global disruptions that create unprecedented challenges for leaders of complex systems, such as businesses, hospitals, schools and education systems. The pandemic, COVID-19, has presented all citizens and, indeed, leaders in every context with a supreme and

ultimate challenge of unimaginable proportions. Moreover, recent technological transformations have unleashed their own challenges and disruptive forces.

Brown (2020) pointed out that the most powerful disruptions in education including big data, artificial intelligence, machine learning, blockchain, robots, digital automation and an explosion in the speed and connectivity of smart technologies are all emblematic of what has been termed, 'The Fourth Industrial Revolution'. He claimed that, according to Professor Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum, this revolution of skills and technology is disrupting almost every industry in the world (The World Economic Forum, 2017). It extends from energy to education, mining to manufacturing, aviation to agriculture and it is pervasive and relentless (Brown in *Foreword* to Duignan, 2020).

The good news for educational leaders, however, is that the key to their success in leadership in the future lies in the fact that these fast-changing challenges also contain the seeds for successful responses. Leaders have access to the most powerful connectivity capabilities in history, which together with rapidly improving internet speeds and the miniaturisation of connective devices (e.g. smartphones and smart watches) provide them with capabilities they once couldn't even imagine. The global pandemic, COVID-19, challenges all educational leaders to make a fundamental shift to a 'new normal', to new ways of governing schooling and its fundamental core of teaching and learning. Such an event-horizon has provided the stimulus or accelerant to advance at scale many approaches to teaching, learning and the delivery of schooling that have been implemented within the sector.

System leaders in education, however, will need to transform their leadership theories, mindsets and practices if they wish to remain relevant and successful in a VUCA world with its tsunami of changes. Dinham (2014) noted:

> *A tsunami comprises waves with very long wave lengths. Often these go unnoticed until it is too late to do anything about them. When they reach land, great devastation can result. The 'long-wave' changes to education … need to be subjected to intense scrutiny before it is too*

> *late. If the profession remains silent and passive in the face of some of these developments it will have itself to blame, at least in part, for what might eventuate.*

System leaders in education will face many such tsunamis in the future; they will, typically, present as dilemmas, tensions and paradoxes. Back in 1994, Handy foresaw great changes and disturbances ahead for all organisations when he suggested that turbulence was inevitable given the complex, uncertain and turbulent context of constant change.

It would appear that tensions, challenges, dilemmas and paradoxes are endemic to the work of system leadership in education systems currently and into the future (Duignan, 2012), and they are often characterised in education systems and their schools by:

(1) The *narrowing of the schooling agenda* towards an emphasis on testing regimes and results as the primary measure of performance. The Global Education Reform Movement (GERM), with its standardisation approach to testing, data collection and interrogation impacts on curriculum breadth and the degree of teacher professional autonomy.
(2) Leaders of schooling systems responding to government policy deliberations and debates, which are, typically, (i) about the provision, enhancement and improvement of performance or *excellence*, (ii) *equity* – the differentiated support, development, investment in or advancement of some groups, ideas, educative purposes, or (iii) by managing the tensions, dilemmas or paradoxes in ways to ensure a productive combination of excellence and equity.
(3) *Agency*, which represents the ability and authority for system leaders to enable and lead reform within the reality of the 'authorising environment' (after Moore, 1995). The various models of systemic school governance and levels of accountability, devolution of decision-making, vary from context influenced by such factors as culture, history, geographical and political systems (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2007). System leaders need to balance their roles of implementing and aligning policy direction

determined by governments with degrees of discretionary decision-making.

(4) *Approaches to systemic leadership and system regeneration.* Reid (2018, p. 18) provides a useful framework – the four Rs (revert, reboot, reframe and replace) – which '… explores the possible approaches in guiding system leadership in the consideration of reform':

   (a) Revert: strategies that reinstate the key features of the 'past'.
   (b) Reboot: strategies that focus on the quality of teachers and learning.
   (c) Reframe: strategies that depart radically from the past by making significant changes to curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, school organisation and culture.
   (d) Replace: using new technologies to assist in pedagogical reform and renewal.

(5) *Increasing volatile operating environments along with increased expectations* of schools and schooling systems: Peter Hinssen (2017), in his work, *The Day After Tomorrow: How to Survive in Times of Radical Innovation*, notes that most organisations are consumed in dealing with the now, which, in part, are yesterday's concerns, issues and work processes. The reality is that leaders of education systems are endeavouring to respond to a myriad of issues – reactionary work – with little time or opportunity to undertake strategic positioning of the system or schools they lead.

(6) *Minimal preparation of individuals to undertake system leadership roles within the schooling system:* Despite the pivotal role of system leaders in setting direction and enabling policy implementation, there appears to be very little dedicated preparation of individuals to undertake such roles. The typical pathway into such non-school-based executive roles is via school leadership, such as that of a principal, headmaster or equivalent. Further compounding this is that there still remains little or minimal preparation for school leadership roles. 'Some 35 per cent of surveyed principals in Australia have no school administration or principal

> training …. In fact, 45 per cent reported receiving average or weak leadership training as part of their formal education' (OECD, TALIS, 2014).

From perspectives and commentaries on COVID-19 in the press, media and general leadership literature, it seems that a consensus is emerging that all of us will be required to change the way we think and act if we are going to be successful in the 'new normal' that's rapidly emerging. If, for example, we wish to reform and transform education, we must start with the people who will reform and be reformed by it through understanding their needs, desires and what is likely to drive and inspire them. Simply put, reform is all about people, first, second and always! Any attempts to change school systems, schools, teachers or students must start with a consideration of people involved – their leadership paradigms, beliefs, especially their mindsets, and re-form them, if necessary, because: '*If you're shackled to who you are now, you can't recognise – or reach for – who you might become next*' (Garvey Berger, 2020, p. 92). Garvey Berger's research in a number of different types of organisations indicates that leaders' 'identity mindtraps', or 'fixed mindsets' (e.g. Dweck, 2016), can blind them to personal and professional-growth opportunities, mainly because these mindsets focus on protecting the person they have become, not on growing into the person they can become. She reported from her research:

> *I have found that we humans are brilliantly designed for an older, less connected, and more predicable version of the world. In today's highly interconnected, fast-changing world, we need to take some of that brilliant design and purposefully reshape it to be fit for the unpredictable future [the new normal] that is unfolding. (Garvey Berger, pp. 2–3)*

Garvey Berger pointed out that fixed-identity mindsets cause leaders at all levels to attempt to defensively manage, even manipulate, the impressions others have of them as well as their own world views. She claimed that this stance may serve them poorly in a complex and unpredictable world, because if you are 'shackled to who you are now, you can't reach for who you'll become next'

(p. 92). Within a fixed-identity mindset, she stated, 'we protect and defend the identity we have rather than open to new possibilities' (p. 98). She identified four forms of mindsets that leaders (perhaps all of us) tend to operate with and from. First, she claimed the *self-sovereign mind* tends to devalue – even exclude – the views and perspectives of others and values only its own needs and views. Second, leaders often develop a socialised mind (p. 101) where the perspectives they develop of themselves are mostly derived from external sources – their relationships, acquired values and their learned professional expertise. Third, some leaders develop 'a self-authored form of mind' (p. 12), which is more informed and formed by their values, beliefs with a deep sense of moral purpose, but they temper these internal dynamics with the ideas, perspectives beliefs and values of others. Fourth, regarded by Garvey Berger as most suited and useful for leaders who will thrive in an uncertain and rapidly changing world – a VUCA world – is a '… co-constructed and emergent form of mind', which she names 'the self-transforming mind'. People with this form of mind '… are always searching for the next thing that might challenge a deeply held belief system' (p. 103). With this perspective, leaders '… spend less time creating and defending a particular version of [themselves] and more time letting life transform them' (p. 103).

Garvey Berger's concept of self-transforming mindset is similar to Carol Weick's 'growth mindset' where leaders and their colleagues are open to others' views and perspectives and are willing to learn from them. One of the most influential researchers, scholars and writers on the topic of mindset change is the world-renowned Stanford University psychologist, Carol Dweck (2016). In her book, *Mindset, the New Psychology of Success: How We Can Learn to Fulfil Our Potential*, she provided inspirational advice essential for those attempting to lead educational change and transformation at system and organisational levels in rapidly changing contexts. She explained in her introduction that '… changing people's beliefs – even the simplest beliefs – can have profound effects [and] guides a large part of your life' (p. 1). She claimed that '… *the view you adopt for yourself* profoundly affects the way you live your life' (p. 6, italics in original). This concept she calls mindset. She identified two general types of mindsets – a *fixed mindset* where people

believe their personal characteristics and qualities are 'carved in stone' and a *growth mindset*, where they believe that '… the hand you're dealt is just the starting point for development' (p. 7, italics by the authors of this chapter). This latter view '… is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts, your strategies, and help from others' (p. 7).

Dweck's key point is that '… although people may differ in every which way – in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments – everyone can change and grow through application and experience' (p. 7). System leaders driving educational change should be aware of and understand the implications and applications of Garvey Berger's self-transforming mindset and Dweck's growth mindset because self-created or fixed mindsets tend to be more negative in their views of both the present and the future – they are, usually, not optimistic that things will change for the better. Leaders with self-transforming or growth mindsets are more open to possibilities and the potential for the transformation of themselves, others and their systems and organisations; they are committed to learning how to be the best leader they can be. They value the actions of their colleagues and base their behaviours and actions on a collaboratively formed vision based on a clear set of values and a moral code.

Research evidence across a variety of industries (e.g. in business, health and education) and organisations (schools, hospitals and specific businesses), reported on and discussed in this book, indicates that leaders will need to develop their ethical and moral guidance systems inspired by core values, moral purpose and authentic processes and practices, in order to navigate through shifting and dynamic pathways in times of uncertainty and change. They will need to carefully reconcile such degrees of clarity in their vision with a VUCA environment by collaborating with others to forge alternate pathways towards reaching the vision and have enough humility to allow for resetting their vision as circumstances dictate.

Reid (2018, p. 18) noted that 'it is not tenable to consider questions about future directions for schooling without a clear understanding and articulation of the purposes a broad approach to education is designed to achieve'. Without a clear articulation of purposes, the promulgation of any view(s) about the future

direction of schooling would be '… at best problematic and a hit and miss affair' (p. 18). Reid (2018) identified four essential purposes for system and school education leaders to consider in uncertain times (p. 20):

(1) *Democratic purpose*: schools are seen as the main mechanism or means by which society develops young people as citizens who are subsequently able to undertake an active and constructive role in democratic life.
(2) *Economic purpose:* Schools are central to the economic productivity of a country by preparing young people for current and future job markets.
(3) *Individual purpose:* Schools provide a broad range of opportunities, options and experiences for every young person to 'acquire knowledge that takes them beyond their experience' (Young & Lambert, 2014, p. 10, cited in Reid, 2018, p. 20).
(4) *Social and cultural purpose:* Schools are viewed as an essential means by which young people develop the capabilities and dispositions to successfully enable them to be active and informed citizens in an ever-changing society.

Reid's taxonomy of purposes provides a useful framework for education system leaders to frame their necessary and fundamental roles in enabling the formulation of vision and purpose for the future of their enterprises.

In the past, educational leaders often imposed their vision on others under the guise of decisiveness and certainty. Caldwell (2019) cautioned, however, that while a clear vision is necessary in a VUCA world, it should be '… developed collaboratively and embraced throughout the school's [or system's] community. Vision should excite and unify, going beyond a statement of values and bundling of targets' (p. 14). He claimed that '… formulating a vision over time is difficult, such is the pace of change in each factor of the environment: physical, demographic, political, economic, technological, cultural [and] regulatory' (pp. 14–15). He concluded that visionary leadership requires '… strategic navigation … especially in times of turbulence and uncertainty' (p. 15). A further consideration is that visionary leaders must interpret and action