



MAKING EDUCATION WORK FOR MAN

The Challenges of Complex Urban Schools

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Introduction

The vision for 21st Century education is outlined in the revised New Zealand Curriculum: *young people who will be confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners*. This vision is underpinned by a set of principles that include high expectations, an appreciation of the importance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, acknowledgement of cultural diversity and inclusion. There should be community engagement in learning, a focus on “learning to learn”, system coherence, and a future focus.

This paper argues that the aspirations of the curriculum will be realised when we have interconnected education providers whose services develop young people at every step of their journey, learning connected to community, and responsiveness to local aspirations. This teaching and learning shift also requires shifts in other parts of the system: in schools, and in the system settings that shape school governance, management and operations.

Nowhere is the need for this shift more evident than in urban communities where rapid growth and diversity are features. The legislative and regulatory settings affecting delivery of education services in complex urban schools deserve deeper examination by all those who are stakeholders in education policy-making.

Defining complex urban schools

Complex urban schools are exceptions to the traditional school forms. They have distinguishing characteristics: they are generally large, involve multi-levels of students on a single site, and serve distinct communities with diverse characteristics. Many such schools are found in Manukau, although not exclusively. They include “composite schools”

(such as the Southern Cross Campus in Mangere); combined boards of multiple schools (such as at Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate and at the Clover Park campuses in Otara); and collaborative boards on shared campuses (Mission Heights in Flat Bush). The new campus at Ormiston is under development. A new kind of collaborative school is proposed at the secondary-tertiary interface. The classes and designations of the schools run the full gamut of possibilities under the existing legislation (primary, intermediate, secondary or composite school; as a designated special character school, attached unit, or separate entity). They include both high-decile and low-decile urban communities. And they include new forms of schooling: the “middle school”; the “senior secondary” school; the tertiary high school.

Adaptive challenge

These schools illustrate the phenomenon of adaptive challenge. An adaptive challenge is a problem situation for which solutions lie outside current ways of operating (Heifetz, 1994¹). An adaptive challenge responds to the gap between aspiration and reality, demanding a solution that exists beyond the current repertoire; it requires new learning. (Hopkins 2007; Fullan, 2004²). An adaptive challenge is often described as “a people problem” as well as a system issue, because an adaptive challenge is almost always outside the current competence of those involved, and is

¹ Ron Heifetz 1994: Leadership without easy answers. Belknap,

² Michael Fullan 2004: Systems Thinkers in Action. Department for Education and Skills, Nottingham. <http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/images/stories/files/pdf/SystemsThinkersinAction.pdf>. David Hopkins 2007: Every School a Great School: Realizing the potential of system leadership. McGraw-Hill, London.

accompanied by disequilibrium, and solutions can be threatening and subject to resistance.

Nevertheless, Michael Fullan also argues that solutions are to be found within those that are part of the 'problem'. He says that schooling improvement must move beyond the "plateau" of development at individual school level to a new space that delivers continuous improvement across all parts of the education system.

Drivers for Change

Adaptive work responds to a number of drivers. What are these drivers for change? The Manukau examples of complex urban schools suggest the following:

- The competitive environment of the 1990s which applied a market approach to school enrolments;
- The push for the "middle school" concept in the 1990s from the Intermediate School Principals' Association; and the subsequent creation of new network forms.
- The drive for a more integrated and connected response to community education needs in areas of urban poverty;
- The response of Maori to the preservation of language and culture through bilingual or Kura Kaupapa Maori approaches to education, and to the aspiration to live and succeed as Maori in the wider world;
- Land scarcity and price in urban growth areas;

Emerging as pressures are

- demands from increasingly diverse communities in urban areas like Manukau for education that is more relevant to their aspirations - for example, for Pacific language preservation and maintenance, or religious distinctiveness;
- responding more effectively to learning needs, including providing multi-level learning, home-based learning, or learning outside the classroom;
- the use of new information and communications technologies.

- The development of a new kind of "tertiary high school" based on international models of school partnerships with the tertiary sector, with a focus on addressing youth potential for those currently not achieving in the system.

A contributor to the thinking in this paper noted that "three major schooling improvement initiatives in Manukau City (AIMHI, SEMO and MEI schooling improvement initiatives) have shown how higher level collaboration of local schools has led to significant improvements in schooling outcomes. In isolation, boards would have really struggled to make the same amount of progress. All three initiatives have involved school boards in working collaboratively in a way that has often been quite positive."

Vision.

The Drivers for Change are both pragmatic, and related to community vision and aspirations for learning. The centrality of vision in the constitution of school boards is fundamental to the complex urban schools dynamic. The overall policy position for Tomorrow's Schools was to allow each "unit" in the system to be autonomous. However, the settings for autonomy and independent accountability do not always reflect the need for schools to develop new ways of working together, or new ways of responding to cultural or other community aspirations, or indeed developing a vision that more completely delivers on the aspirations that the policy was originally designed to support. **Vision in the current governance environment is limited to the possibilities offered by the legislation**, rather than tailored to the potential within communities to arrive at solutions that best deliver to changing needs and aspirations.

The themes emerging from the Secondary Futures project³ point to where a vision for governance across the system – as well as for each school – may lie in the future:

³ <http://www.secondaryfutures.co.nz/how-do-we-work/themes.php>

- The system has to serve all students, not require the students to fit the system. As schooling moves away from a 'one size fits all' model, the goals, aspirations, and context of each student becomes the centre of delivery (**Students First**).
- The role of teachers is being redefined (**Inspiring Teachers**). School class and designation shapes teachers to their primary or secondary training heritages rather than to their communities and their students. Better integration of different parts of the system is required to move beyond the “plateau” of student achievement referred to above. This is nowhere more evident than at multi-school campuses. Dismantling of the primary / secondary divide requires a dismantling of the governance and structural supports that preserve it and freeze it.
- The outcomes of education are multiple and layered. Success does not refer solely to academic outcomes. 'Social' outcomes are as important (**Social Effects**). The systems settings for governance must recognise the contribution the school makes to the wider community, and the effect that social settings have on the learning that takes place within the school. A driver for governance reshaping must be the aspiration for language and cultural heritage preservation for Maori, and for Pacific Island communities.
- In the future, learning will become more connected to the people and places outside the immediate school environment and harness all the resources of the community (**Community Connectedness**). The constitutions of schools must be sufficiently flexible to allow that connectedness to happen on a governance level too. The example of MIT representation in the constitution of the Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate campus illustrates this principle in action in the governance setting. However, it is also important that schools become more intimately involved with wider community development processes that shape the economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being of citizens.
- There is no doubt that technology will be influential in the organisation of schooling. The Secondary Futures project notes that young

people worry that a technology-centred learning environment may come at the expense of social interaction. The impact of technology on governance is currently undergoing further consideration.

System Leadership

These Secondary Futures themes point to the development of a set of governance principles that should become reflected in the legislative framework. Though not yet at system crisis levels, restrictions provided by ‘class’ and ‘designation’ that currently shape schooling design are outdated. The legislation as it is currently expressed offers a single constitutional model as a template. This results in all other constitutional arrangements becoming “exceptions” or ad hoc arrangements to fit emerging needs, rather than a planned approach to shifts in the environment.

Achievement of change for such difficult issues requires a level of system leadership. Hopkins again on the notion of adaptive change⁴: “...without a commitment to system reform and the integration with [teaching and learning reform and school reform] it is impossible to ensure that every school is a great school (2004,17).” Among his ten lessons for school reform, Hopkins notes:

That for every school to become a great school requires not [only] an individual school improvement effort but a system-wide response.

Adaptive challenges require those who currently work within the system to grapple with the problem “in the quest for social justice (and high excellence as well as equity). The Complex Urban Schools Summit is the place to begin to develop the system leadership required to effectively deliver on the vision for 21st Century New Zealand schools.

Constitutional Adaptation

The revised curriculum represents a consensus about education direction for the 21st Century. It

⁴ David Hopkins 2007: Every School a Great School: Realizing the potential of system leadership. McGraw-Hill, London.

demands that not only schools become more responsive to community needs and aspirations but also constitutional system settings.

Every school established under the Education Act 1989 has a class – which can be a primary, intermediate, composite or secondary school.

School class and school designation determine resourcing levels - for example, what resourcing and staffing orders apply, which employment contracts apply, and so on. Different provision may be made for schools of different classes or descriptions.

The four classes of school reflect a 19th and 20th Century heritage when education was distinctively stratified according to the age of the student. The exception was in rural communities where economies of size and the practicalities of distance shaped the development of composite schools. In urban areas, these two reasons for the development of “composite” schools don’t apply.

Increasing complexity around the term “composite” school arises because this class of school has become a “catch-all” place for anything that doesn’t fit the historical model. The potential for these collaborations to result in different governance patterns, over time, is limited by the possibilities offered in the legislation.

The four categories of school class defined in Section 154 of the Act get in the way of reshaping education to more effectively respond to these pressures and trends.

There are 139 Composite Schools. *Only seven of these have rolls of over 1000 students*, and six of these are high-decile private or state integrated schools for whom additional resourcing is available from their proprietors. The Southern Cross Campus is a school of 1720 students whose socio-economic disadvantage is perpetuated by the way in which resources are driven by the governance designation rather than vision and equity. The link between governance “class” and resourcing arrangements is likely to be problematic to the long-term, sustainable delivery of the community vision. Perverse incentives exist, instead, for the campus arrangements to dissolve over time. More flexible governance, management and resourcing arrangements are needed to enable the vision of communities to be realised through their schools.

Principalship. Mayhem in governance does not offer attractive incentives to applicants for school leadership. The constitutions of schools and their governance settings needed to be robust enough to meet community aspirations, and sufficiently supported to allow good leadership for learning.

Since instructional leadership is highly important to student achievement, the ability of complex campuses to obtain support for this role across all parts of the school has long-term implications for quality outcomes. In an NZCER report, Kathy Wylie quotes the Education Review Office⁵: “Any changes to governance should be made not because governance does not conform to a particular idea or model but because it is demonstrably hindering student achievement.” The highest quality applicants should find leadership positions on multi-school campuses attractive, and governance arrangements that undermine this over the long term do have an impact on the ways in which student achievement can be delivered.

Governance membership. A fundamental principle of the Tomorrow’s Schools model is that parents must make up the majority of elected representatives. Co-option supports a wider definition of membership of the boards of trustees. The tertiary high school model currently under development at the Manukau Institute of Technology challenges this model: should only ‘parents’ have governance of schools? The question of school governance deserves further analysis.

Conclusion

This paper calls for system leadership to address the challenges of change in the urban school context. Changes to system settings have implications for all schools. This should not prevent us from examining the opportunities for adaptation offered in the present environment.

⁵ Education Review Office, 1999: *School Governance and Student Achievement*. Wellington. Cited in Wylie, 2007: *School Governance in New Zealand: How is it working?* NZCER, Wellington.