

Leadership for radical transformation in school education



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Abstract

There are now high expectations in Australia and comparable countries for the reform of school education. Change on the scale of transformation is required, that is, significant, systematic and sustained change that secures success for all students in all settings. It is evident that such an outcome can only be achieved if there is a dramatic increase in resources, but this does not mean an exclusive reliance on more money (financial capital), although this is important. Intellectual capital, social capital and spiritual capital are also important. Building strength in each and securing their alignment have profound implications for leadership and governance in schools.

Methodology

In 2004, I began a review of developments in self-managing schools. A self-managing school is a school in a system of education that has experienced a significant amount of decentralisation of authority and responsibility. A self-managing school is empowered to make decisions related to the allocation of resources within a centrally determined framework of goals, policies, standards and accountabilities. A key element in the review was a series of workshops with school leaders in self-managing schools. Nine were conducted over nine weeks in early 2005 in Australia, Chile, England and New Zealand and these yielded new insights, including the way in which the roles of school leaders were changing. Five were conducted in two states of Australia in late 2005 to focus more sharply on school leadership. The findings were reported in *Re-imagining Educational Leadership* (Caldwell, 2006). Nineteen workshops were conducted around Australia in 2006 to share ideas from the book and learn more. I worked with Jim Spinks to conduct six workshops in England

in 2006. We shifted the focus to how schools acquired and utilised different kinds of resources in their efforts to achieve transformation. The findings are reported in *Raising the Stakes: From improvement to transformation in the reform of schools* (Caldwell & Spinks, 2008). In most of these 38 workshops, an interactive technology was employed to gather thousands of responses. This paper is concerned with the complexity of leadership and governance in strengthening and aligning resources to achieve transformation.

A broader view of resources

We found that four kinds of resources – we refer to them as ‘capital’ – are required for transformation and that each must be strong and they must be aligned with the unique mix of needs, interests, aptitudes and aspirations that exist in each school. To build this strength and secure such alignment requires outstanding leadership and governance.

- *Intellectual capital* refers to the level of knowledge and skill of those who work in or for the school, all of whom should be at the forefront of knowledge and skill.
- *Social capital* refers to the strength of formal and informal partnerships and networks involving the school, parents, community, business and industry, indeed, all individuals, agencies, organisations and institutions that have the potential to support and, where appropriate, be supported by the school.
- *Spiritual capital* refers to the strength of moral purpose and the degree of coherence among values, beliefs and attitudes about life and learning. For some schools, spiritual capital has a foundation in religion. In other schools, spiritual capital may refer to ethics and values shared

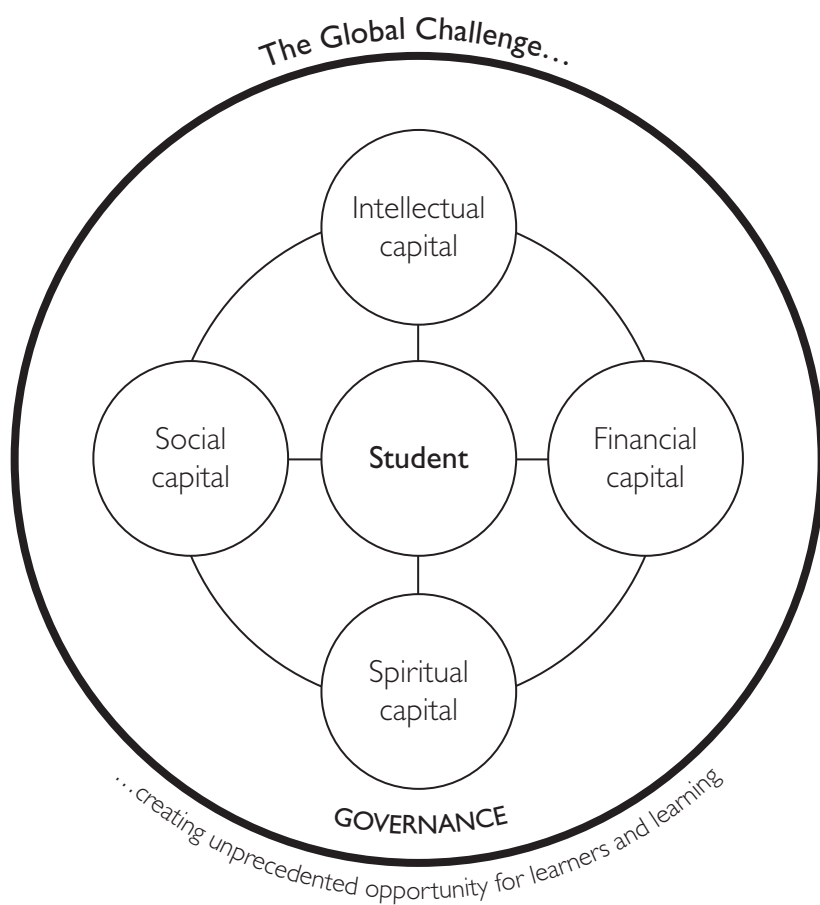


Figure 1: Aligning the four forms of capital

by members of the school and its community.

- *Financial capital* refers to the monetary resources available to support the school. It is acknowledged that some schools are in more challenging circumstances than others.
- *Governance* is concerned with the formal decision-making processes of the school, defined in part by the authorities, responsibilities and accountabilities of participants, and the interaction of these processes with civil society (civil society is the network of mutually supporting relationships that link government, judiciary, business, industry, home,

community, voluntary agencies and institutions, education and other services in the public and private sectors).

The relationship between these forms of capital, with a focus on the student, is illustrated in Figure 1.

Intellectual capital

Rowe's review of literature on student achievement concluded that:

In every case more variance [among measures of student achievement] was accounted for at the department level than between schools, and the proportion of variance at the class level was more than at the departmental level. A general principle emerges from data such as these and that is

the smaller the unit of analysis and the closer one gets to the pupil's experience of education, the greater the proportion of variance explicable by that unit. In accountability terms the models indicate that teachers have the greatest influence (adapted from Rowe, 2004, p. 9).

This finding is supported by research on teaching in 25 countries by the OECD between 2002 and 2004. *Teachers Matter* clearly demonstrates that teacher quality 'is the single most important school variable influencing student achievement' (OECD, 2005, p. 26). Hattie drew on an extensive review of literature and a synthesis of findings in more than half a million studies and reached a similar conclusion:

We should focus on the greatest source of variance that can make the difference – the teacher. We need to ensure that this greatest influence is optimised to have powerful and sensationally positive effects, but they must be exceptional effects. We need to direct attention at higher quality teaching, and higher expectations that students can meet appropriate challenges – and these occur once the classroom door is closed and not by reorganising which or how many students are behind those doors, by promoting different topics for teachers to teach, or by bringing in more sticks to ensure they are following policy (cited in Rowe, 2004, pp. 12–13).

An exemplar is Finland (Harris, 2006). One of several factors accounting for the success of Finland in PISA is the quality of its teachers. Finnish teachers are highly valued and well paid professionals who are expected to have high levels of pedagogical expertise and flexibility within a national curriculum framework in order to achieve success with students who learn in heterogeneous groups. Applications to tertiary education studies are so high that just 10–12 per cent of applicants are accepted in teacher education programs. The high level of pre-service

training is said to contribute to the social status of teachers in Finland and is an attraction to capable students (OECD, 2005, p.100).

The following sample indicators of intellectual capital illustrate complexity in the roles of leaders and managers in schools. Until recently, there were few counterparts, especially in schools in the public sector.

- 1 The staff allocated to or selected by the school are at the forefront of knowledge and skill in required disciplines and pedagogies.
- 2 The school identifies and implements outstanding practice observed in or reported by other schools.
- 3 The school has built a substantial, systematic and sustained capacity for acquiring and sharing professional knowledge .
- 4 Outstanding professional practice is recognised and rewarded.
- 5 The school supports a comprehensive and coherent plan for the professional development of all staff that reflects its needs and priorities.
- 6 When necessary, the school outsources to augment the professional talents of its staff.
- 7 The school participates in networks with other schools and individuals, organisations, institutions and agencies, in education and other fields, to share knowledge, solve problems or pool resources.
- 8 The school ensures that adequate funds are set aside in the budget to support the acquisition and dissemination of professional knowledge.
- 9 The school provides opportunities for staff to innovate in their professional practice.

10 The school supports a 'no-blame' culture which accepts that innovations often fail.

Social capital

Fukuyama defined social capital as 'the ability of people to work together for common purposes in groups and organisations' (Fukuyama, 1995, p. 10). Fukuyama (1995) and Putnam (2000) have written of the loss or absence of social capital, especially in western democracies.

There has been growing interest in recent years in family- and community-school partnerships, one type of relationship that can enhance a school's social capital. The assumption is that schools and their efforts to secure success for their students can be supported by members of the local community who, in turn, may be supported in their activities by the school. In the example of Finland, the local municipality funds both school and extra-curricular activities, such as music tuition for students. Many local schools, in turn, allow their facilities to be used by members of the local community for adult education classes and support providers by assisting them to maintain low cost adult education programs (Harris, 2006). To paraphrase Fukuyama's (1995) definition of social capital, the local councils, schools and adult education providers in Finland work together for the common purpose of providing many forms of education to the community.

Interest in creating partnerships between schools, families and communities is founded primarily in research that suggests that by improving social capital, schools may be able to secure higher levels of success for their students. Coleman's (1988) study found that students from schools with high levels of social capital achieved better outcomes than schools with low levels. He found the link between

social capital and achievement was particularly strong in church-based schools which had strong community networks. While there have been a number of inconsistencies in the findings of research into the relationship between social capital and academic achievement, research has consistently shown that there is a link between parent and community involvement in schools and improvements in student outcomes, including student behaviour, attendance and retention (Harris & Goodall, 2006). Increased community involvement in the school also has the potential to assist student learning and increase the school's intellectual capital through the specific skills, expertise and enthusiasm that members of the community can offer.

In terms of capital formation, there is a connection between social capital and intellectual capital. Edward Lesser, a consultant at the IBM Institute for Knowledge Management, described the importance of social capital in these terms: 'Knowledge in organisations is typically thought of as being either explicit (relatively easy to capture while maintaining its value) or tacit (difficult to articulate and document without losing its value). Social capital is necessary to enable the effective management of both explicit and tacit knowledge' (Lesser, 2000, p. 9).

The following are sample indicators of social capital.

- 1 There is a high level of alignment between the expectations of parents and other key stakeholders and the mission, vision, goals, policies, plans and programs of the school.
- 2 There is extensive and active engagement of parents and others in the community in the educational program of the school.
- 3 Parents and others in the community serve on the governing

body of the school or contribute in other ways to the decision-making process.

- 4 Parents and others in the community are advocates of the school and are prepared to take up its cause in challenging circumstances.
- 5 The school draws cash or in-kind support from individuals, organisations, agencies and institutions in the public and private sectors, in education and other fields, including business and industry, philanthropists and social entrepreneurs.
- 6 The school accepts that support from the community has a reciprocal obligation for the school to contribute to the building of community.
- 7 The school draws from and contributes to networks to share knowledge, address problems and pool resources.
- 8 Partnerships have been developed and sustained to the extent that each partner gains from the arrangement.
- 9 Resources, both financial and human, have been allocated by the school to building partnerships that provide mutual support.
- 10 The school is co-located with or located near other services in the community and these services are utilised in support of the school.

Financial capital

An exclusive reliance on money is unlikely to achieve the transformation of schools. While his message is often greeted by puzzlement or even anger, the Hoover Institution's Eric Hanushek found that increases in funding for schools have had, with few exceptions for some programs, little impact on educational outcomes

over many decades. His conclusion could not be clearer: 'The aggregate picture is consistent with a variety of other studies indicating that [financial] resources alone have not yielded any systematic returns in terms of student performance. The character of reform efforts can largely be described as "same operations with greater intensity"' (Hanushek, 2004, p. 12).

While Hanushek was dealing with financial resources on a nation-wide or system-wide basis, a similar line of argument can be put when the focus is the school. Consider the case of Bellfield Primary School, which serves the Melbourne suburb of West Heidelberg, a community characterised by high levels of aggression, gambling, alcohol and drug abuse. Enrolment is about 220 and remains steady. About 80 per cent of children's families receive the Education Maintenance Allowance (an indicator of socioeconomic status), nearly 60 per cent of students come from single parent families, and slightly more than 20 per cent are from non-English speaking backgrounds. Many of these students are refugees from Somalia. There is an enrolment of about 20 students Indigenous Australian students. It is one of the most disadvantaged schools in Victoria. The 1996 Triennial Review revealed that over 85 per cent of students were behind state-wide benchmarks in literacy and numeracy.

Transformation at Bellfield Primary School is reflected in the performance of students on tests that show remarkable improvement, bringing the school close to the essence of the definition of transformation ('success for all students in all settings'). Results for Bellfield on state-wide tests in Grade 1, as summarised in Table 1, illustrate what has been accomplished. Noteworthy are comparisons with schools in similar settings, with all schools across the state, and with results in 1998.

Table 1: Percentage of Grade 1 students reading with 100 per cent accuracy at Bellfield

Bellfield 2004	Like schools 2004	State-wide 2004	Bellfield 1998
100	26.3	35.9	34.6

Transformation was achieved by building the capacity of staff (intellectual capital). It called for outstanding leadership, notably by former principal John Fleming (see Caldwell, 2006). A feature of Table 1 is the performance of students at Bellfield compared to those in 'like schools' (schools with a similar profile of socioeconomic indicators). The latter are funded on the same basis as Bellfield using the needs-based approach to funding self-managing schools in the State of Victoria. Expressed simply, Bellfield and 'like schools' are starting with the same level of financial capital, yet students at Bellfield perform at a far higher level. Part of the reason lies in the way the school has built its intellectual capital. Another is the way it has built social capital in the community by working closely with parents and care-givers to ensure they understand and support what the school is endeavouring to accomplish, even at the most basic level to ensure that they send their children to schools. Spiritual capital is also important because it is evident that there are shared values and beliefs among staff that all students can learn well, regardless of the challenging circumstances of the socioeconomic setting.

The following are sample indicators of financial capital.

- 1 Funds are raised from several sources including allocations by formula from the public purse, fees, contributions from the community, and other money raised from the public and private sectors.

- 2 Annual planning occurs in the context of a multi-year development plan for the school.
- 3 The financial plan has a multi-year outlook as well as an annual budget.
- 4 Allocation of funds reflects priorities among educational needs that take account of data on student achievement, evidence-based practice, and targets to be achieved.
- 5 There is appropriate involvement of stakeholders in the planning process.
- 6 Appropriate accounting procedures are established to monitor and control expenditure.
- 7 Money can be transferred from one category of the budget to another as needs change or emerge.
- 8 Actual expenditure matches intended expenditure allowing for flexibility to meet emerging needs.
- 9 Educational targets are consistently achieved through the planned allocation of funds.
- 10 The funds from all sources are sufficient and sustainable to meet educational needs.

Spiritual capital

Emerging research into spiritual capital builds on current understandings of social capital. In his influential research into social capital, Putnam found that shared religious beliefs and practices accounted for more than half of the social capital that was identified in his study. Coleman's (1988) influential study of social capital in schools also noted that religious beliefs were one element of the community which had an influence on social capital. According to Malloch:

The often used terms social capital and human (intellectual) capital themselves are based to a large extent on the existence of good faith, trust, stewardship, a sense of purpose and other moral characteristics which

cannot persist in the absence of piety, solidarity and hope that come from religious and spiritual sentiments. When this is lost, societies and economies often decline rather than grow. When this abounds societies and economies prosper. (Malloch 2003, p. 8)

In other words, some form of spiritual capital is inherent in our understandings of both social and intellectual capital, which is also referred to as 'human' capital. Taking schools as an example, high levels of social capital, networks and relationships formed by schools would not function effectively without shared trust and 'other moral characteristics'. Similarly, a school's intellectual capital cannot be effectively implemented without a strong moral purpose and shared values. The influence of spiritual capital on social and intellectual capital shows the need for alignment between all types of resources.

The strength of spiritual capital in a school community has a number of benefits for the school. Van Galen (1997) found that members of a school community who share school values are more likely to participate in school activities. When they share the school's beliefs about life and learning, parents are more likely to feel a connection with the school and, based on this connection, have been found to be more active in advocating for school improvements and promoting school achievements. Furthermore, Van Galen (1997) found that when the school and school community are shaped by shared norms and values there are fewer discipline problems and higher levels of achievement for all students.

The following are sample indicators of spiritual capital.

- 1 There is a high level of alignment between the values, beliefs and attitudes about life and learning held by the school and members of its community.

- 2 The values and beliefs of the school, including where relevant those that derive from a religious foundation, are embedded in its mission, vision, goals, policies, plans and curriculum.
- 3 The values and beliefs of the community are taken into account by the school in the formulation of its mission, vision, goals, policies, plans and curriculum.
- 4 The school explicitly articulates its values and beliefs in publications and presentations.
- 5 Publications and presentations in the wider community reflect an understanding of the values and beliefs of the school.
- 6 There are high levels of trust between the school and members of its community
- 7 Parents and other stakeholders are active in promoting the values and beliefs of the school.
- 8 The values and beliefs of the school are evident in the actions of students and staff.
- 9 Staff and students who are exemplars of the values and beliefs of the school are recognised and rewarded.
- 10 The values and beliefs of the school have sustained it or are likely to sustain it in times of crisis.

Implications for leadership and governance

The indicators for each form of capital illustrate the complexity of leadership and governance if transformation is to be achieved. School leadership itself has been transformed in less than a generation and it is not surprising that the numbers of people applying for the role have decreased sharply throughout Australia and comparable nations. An important implication is

the high priority that should be placed on the transformation of programs for the preparation and professional development of school leaders. Incentives and rewards should more closely approximate those in the private sector.

There are important implications for the governance of schools. Schools require the engagement, support and advocacy of key stakeholders. As suggested at the outset, governance includes formal decision making but is also concerned with links with 'civil society'. There is a need for transformation in approaches to governance, especially in the public sector. The following indicators of good governance may help shape the transformation.

- 1 Authorities, responsibilities and accountabilities of the governing body and professional staff are clearly specified.
- 2 Mechanisms are in place to ensure that obligations in respect to legal liability and risk management are addressed.
- 3 There is a clearly stated connection between the policies of the school and intended outcomes for students.
- 4 Policies have been prepared after consultation with key stakeholders within the school and the wider community.
- 5 Policies have been formally approved by the governing body.
- 6 Policies are consistent in their application across the school so that students with the same needs are supported in the same manner.
- 7 Data are used in making decisions in the formulation of policies and making judgements about their effectiveness.
- 8 Data are gathered across the range of intended outcomes.

- 9 Information about policies and their implementation is readily available to all stakeholders.
- 10 There is a strong sense of commitment to policies and their implementation on the part of all stakeholders.

These and other indicators provided the starting point for the International Project to Frame the Transformation of Schools to be conducted by Educational Transformations Pty Ltd, funded in part by the Australian Government, with partners in China, England, Finland, the United States of America and Wales.

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