

Book Review:

Re-Imagining Educational Leadership: *An Invitation to Imaginative and Exhilarating Leadership*

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Caldwell, B.J. (2006). *Re-Imagining Educational Leadership*. London: Sage Publications. 224 pp. (Hardback) ISBN: 9781412934695

Brian J. Caldwell's book *Re-Imagining Educational Leadership* offers his experiences from studying the decentralization of school systems and the leadership required to successfully transform schools. The book was published in 2006 by Sage Publications in London. The purpose of *Re-Imagining Educational Leadership* is to celebrate imaginative leadership, provide evidence that more is needed, and offer strategies to get there. It draws on the experiences of successful and imaginative educational leaders from around the globe. It is a call for inspirational vision and complete transformation of schools.

Author Brian J. Caldwell is internationally recognized as an authority in educational leadership. He and Jim M. Spinks pioneered the concept of self-managing schools and have studied and promoted them in numerous countries including Australia, England, Hong Kong, and New Zealand. Together they wrote a trilogy of influential books on self-managing schools that have guided educational reform and impacted school policy and practice: *The Self-Managing School* (1988), *Leading the Self-Managing School* (1992), and *Beyond the Self-Managing School* (1998).

Caldwell is currently the Managing Director of Educational Transformations, an organization that offers a range of services to governments, schools, school systems, and institutions of higher education that guide transformation with a goal of sustained change and high levels of performance. He is Director of Educational Alignments, which promotes high quality performance in all educational settings through the alignment of capital—intellectual, social, spiritual capita, and financial. Caldwell is the Associate Director of iNet (Global) (International Networking for Educational Transformation), an international network of schools and organizations committed to transforming education through innovation. iNet supports schools focused on innovation and student achievement and is an initiative of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust in England. The importance of networking is a concept to which Caldwell devotes significant time in *Re-Imagining Educational Leadership* and his professional life demonstrates his commitment to this important process.

From 1998 to 2004 Caldwell served as Dean of Education at the University of Melbourne where he is currently Professorial Fellow in the Department of Education Policy and Management. His career in educational leadership spans over 25 years of international work on six continents. As previously stated, he is an expert in educational leadership.

Much of the content of *Re-Imagining Educational Leadership* is the result of fourteen workshops and four master classes conducted in Australia, Chile, England, and New Zealand. The purpose of *Re-Imagining Educational Leadership* is to celebrate the successes of imaginative leadership, provide evidence that much more imaginative leadership is needed, and offer strategies to get there. *Re-Imagining Educational Leadership* challenges current leadership practices at the school and system level particularly those practices in highly centralized systems of education. Caldwell describes the cutting edge in education and discusses best practices from around the globe. *Re-Imagining Educational Leadership* provides its readers the opportunity to learn from leaders who are successfully transforming schools. The leadership practices offered depart from traditional leadership strategies and support a new era of imagination and transformation. The setting for this imaginative leadership is the “New Enterprise Logic of Schools” which values the student as the most important unit of organization.

Overview

Re-Imagining Educational Leadership is well written and easily read. It accommodates the busy practitioner who may want to read one chapter at a time or just a few specific sections. It is very well organized and provides introductions and helpful outlines of upcoming chapters and sections. Summaries, conclusions, definitions, examples, and connections among themes are numerous and provide structure and insight. When previously introduced concepts or examples are discussed the original chapter number is provided for easy reference. Topics are often introduced in one chapter, expanded upon in another, and reviewed later. Key concepts and phrases are reviewed numerous times. While helpful to those who read only select chapters, it may appear repetitive to those who read the content thoroughly.

Certain key concepts and definitions are repeated so frequently that one cannot help but memorize them. Perhaps this is the author’s intent; to repeat the worthy. The definition of transformation is one such concept: “transformation is change...that is significant, systematic and sustained, resulting in high levels of achievement for all students in all settings” (Caldwell, 2006, p. 27). This definition, in nearly identical form, is so frequently repeated that it is both amusing and annoying. Another such repeated concept is that of the student as the key unit of organization and a third is the definition of the new enterprise logic. Not only is the definition of the new enterprise logic repeated but its major features are listed in at least three chapters. The OECD’s Schooling for Tomorrow project is described in detail in Chapter 3 and then again in several other chapters. While some repetition reinforces key concepts, there is a limit to its usefulness.

Chapter Highlights

Re-Imagining Educational Leadership contains three parts, each with five chapters. Introductory and concluding chapters contribute to a total of seventeen chapters. The chapters are short enough to read in a brief sitting. Part A, *Re-Imagining the Self-Managing School*, reviews the main concepts of Caldwell and Spinks' three books on self-managing schools and introduces the key themes of transformation, synergy, sagacity, and the new enterprise logic of schools. Part A is the foundation for the book and the concepts discussed in this part are expanded upon and demonstrated throughout the rest of the work.

Caldwell proposes that while there are few examples of complete and successful transformation it is essential for the continued existence of public education. Transformation in schools is needed to regain public trust and ensure that public schools do not become last-resort, safety-net schools. The unit of organization must be the individual student and "at the heart of the matter is the importance of personalizing the learning experience" (p. 29). Caldwell claims that the self-managing school has evolved beyond self-management and is approaching independence and self-governance.

Three essential components to the new self-managing schools are personalization of learning, synergies with public and private organizations, and sagacity. This last component is understood as knowledge networking, knowledge management, and informed professionalism. Part A concludes with the new image of the self-managing school, which is also the starting point for the new enterprise logic of schools. The phrase "new enterprise logic" is the terminology of Zuboff and Maxmin from their book *The Support Economy* (2004) and Caldwell draws heavily on their work throughout his book.

The only serious criticism of Part A is the review of the three earlier works on self-managing schools. Their impact on educational change is clear enough and they are easily available for thorough review, if so desired. *Re-Imagining Educational Leadership* is a different book with completely new contributions to offer to the literature on educational leadership and change. While there is a need for a starting point, this is not the primary demand. Perhaps a detailed case study of a school in the process of transforming from a self-managing school into a self-governing school would be more compelling.

Using themes from Part A as a framework, Part B offers a deeper exploration of the new enterprise logic of schools. Information presented in this section was developed at nine workshops occurring in four countries. Schools in these countries that are driving for change and are on the path toward achieving transformation were invited to attend the workshops and present formally or informally on an element of the new enterprise logic. These elements are organized around the concepts of the new school, the new system, the new profession, and the new leader and provide a thorough discussion of the new enterprise logic of schools.

A description of this concept, as well as its main components, is worth repeating here as it is a core contribution of this book. "The new enterprise logic of schools is thus concerned with an undertaking that is difficult, complicated, and at times risky, often calling for daring activity, which is at all times purposeful. It is an undertaking that is coherent in its intent to achieve transformation. It is an undertaking that is thrilling in its execution..." (Caldwell, 2006, p. 76). The major features of the new enterprise logic as quoted from Caldwell (2006, p. 122) are:

1. The student is the most important unit of organization...
2. ...The success of a school depends on its capacity to join networks...
3. Leadership is distributed...
4. Networks involve a range of...organizations across public and private sectors...
5. New approaches to resource allocation are required...
6. Intellectual capital and social capital are as important as other forms of capital.

The strength of this section is the rich array of successful examples of the new enterprise logic in action. These examples originate from various countries on several continents and are encouraging and inspirational.

The final chapter in Part B discusses a framework for leadership within the context of the new enterprise logic. The components of this framework are vision, tracks for change, dimensions of leadership, domains of practice, and integrating themes. The chapter provides an excellent template for aspiring leaders and provides a guide to the various areas of work to which leaders should devote themselves. This final chapter in Part B is a summary of this section as well as a precursor to the third and final part of the book.

Part C, *Exhilarating Leadership*, discusses the exciting possibilities for leaders engaged in transformational change. It was inspired by the workshops in Part B and by leaders experiencing successful and dramatic change. Caldwell participated in a series of master classes at the University of Melbourne and presents what he learned from four of the master classes. Each master class was led by a principal of a school that had improved dramatically and achieved transformation despite serious difficulties.

Caldwell led five workshops, whose participants included principals and other school leaders. Through a series of questions they were asked to describe exhilarating aspects of their leadership, discouraging aspects, and suggestions for changing or minimizing the discouraging aspects and maximizing the exhilarating ones. Three experts in educational leadership were asked to interpret the responses to the master classes and the five workshops. Caldwell synthesizes their interpretations, as well as contributions of other significant leadership theorists, to create a “master strategy” for leadership. The author also discusses the emerging concept of a system leader and the growth of the global learning community. If an educational professional desires to improve their leadership knowledge, Chapters 13, 14, and 15 are the most essential to read. They provide practical, real-life examples of imaginative leadership and transformation in action.

One criticism of Part C is the absence of a discussion on achieving a better life balance. One of the questions Caldwell proposed to his workshop participants was: “What actions by you or others would make your work as leader more exhilarating and less boring, depressing, discouraging or dispiriting?” (2006, p. 151). The largest category of response to this question was a personal response in which participants believed that the key to making their work more exhilarating lay in their own hands. Within this category of response are two kinds of personal response: one refers to personal lifestyle (achieving a better balance in one’s personal life) and the other refers to the way these leaders carry out their work (the need to delegate more and improve internal relationships and communication).

While Caldwell discusses the need to delegate more and the need for serious leadership distribution to address this second kind of personal response, he does not address

the need for these educational leaders to achieve a better life balance. This need is alarming and deserving of attention. The author does not provide suggestions or even a discussion on achieving balance in one's personal life. If educational leaders do not have balance in their personal lives this incongruity will carry over to their professional life. This is evident by the overwhelming response of these leaders, that in order to make their *work* "more exhilarating and less boring, depressing, discouraging or dispiriting," they desire to achieve a better balance in their *personal* lives.

Historically, the domain of a one's personal life is outside the scope of the professional realm. However, this boundary is becoming increasingly blurred as personal development, self-improvement courses, and mental health counseling are becoming accepted benefits in the workplace. If we are to address the issue of making work more exhilarating and educational leaders are readily conceding that they desire better personal life balance in order to achieve this, then we must care for the entire person. Only then will harmonious consistency be achieved between work and life, raising both to more exhilarating levels.

Conclusion

How do we help these educational leaders achieve better balance in their personal lives? What role does the professional setting play in one's personal life? Does spirituality have a place in this discussion? Is there a danger in blurring the line between one's personal and professional life? Perhaps Caldwell attempts to address the issue of personal life balance indirectly by discussing the need to delegate and distribute leadership. One result of delegating responsibilities and distributing leadership roles may be more free time to pursue personal life balance. If it is only time that these educational leaders are seeking then this may be the answer. However, if the issue is more complex than a lack of time, strategies to make work more exhilarating must address one's personal life balance as well.

The discussion above critiques just one issue in one chapter. It is important that the overwhelmingly positive and significant contributions of this book remain clear. *Re-Imagining Educational Leadership* reviews the main concepts of the self-managing school and discusses the new image of self-managing schools—an image that approaches independence and self-governance. The book provides descriptions, definitions, and examples of transformation, synergy, sagacity, and the new enterprise logic of schools. A detailed framework for the new enterprise logic is supported with encouraging examples from schools across four nations. Experiences from educational professionals regarding their roles as transformational leaders build a case for exhilarating leadership. Caldwell provides a "master strategy" for leadership which outlines areas of critical concern for the successful leader.

Re-Imagining Educational Leadership diverges from previous discussions of leadership set in the "old enterprise logic" and examines what leadership looks like in the context of the new enterprise logic. In this way Caldwell offers a new and exciting addition to the leadership literature. Leadership in the context of the new enterprise logic is exhilarating and imaginative. *Re-Imagining Educational Leadership* is not a set of answers or a methodology for success. Rather, *Re-Imagining Educational Leadership* offers observations of successful transformation and examples of extraordinary leadership. It is not research, nor does it offer

leadership theory. Instead it is the starting point for research studies and a call for policy analysis. If one is concerned with the future of education, this book is a must. While it is humbling, it is also an inspirational invitation for transformation.

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