Monograph

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The William Walker Oration
'The Past, Present and Future of School Improvement and System Reform'

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By Professor David Hopkins[1]

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There is no doubt that the world's educational systems have made significant progress over recent decades. It is also indubitably true that we have generated substantial practical knowledge over the past fifteen years about how to improve both schools and systems. Yet debates still rage at the policy, practitioner and academic levels over which policy levers and strategies actually make the difference. It is also sadly the case that the most significant consequence of this 'debate' has been to slow the progress of student achievement at the system level. The Oration explores this introductory statement and in support briefly sketches in the recent history of school improvement and system reform. The seminal work of Jurgen Habermas (1972) particularly Knowledge and Human Interests is drawn on to explain why we are, where we currently are. This framework is then used to propose a series of guidelines for policy and research that will ensure sustainable progress in student learning and leadership practice into the future.

The recent history of educational change

It is surprising to realise, as Fullan (2016) has pointed out, how short the history of serious investigation into the change process in schools actually is. It is also quite remarkable to appreciate that this recent history stems from a specific event on a particular day. This was the launch of Sputnik on the 4th October 1957 – almost exactly 60 years before the occasion of this Oration! The launch of Sputnik created a crisis of confidence in the USA; the nation was chagrined to find that the Russians had beaten them in this first major round of the space race. As a response the decision was taken to invest heavily in education to increase the knowledge, problem solving ability and productivity of the next generation of Americans, to ensure that this would never ever happen again.

This led to the first phase of educational change that dates from the early-1960s, which had an emphasis on the *adoption of curriculum materials.* During this phase, educational change strategies were conceived of within a top-down or 'centre-periphery' model. The curriculum reform movement was intended to have major impact on student achievement through the production and dissemination of exemplary curriculum materials. The belief being that if the materials were of sufficiently high quality they would disseminate and be adopted almost automatically. This was a flawed assumption and although the materials were often excellent, in the main they failed to have an impact on teaching. Teachers proved resilient to the adoption of these materials and educational archeologists are still finding the partly rifled packages of original materials where teachers had taken relevant worksheets and activities and incorporated them into their existing lesson plans. This meant that the meta-cognitive and epistemological content and quality of the curricula were completely squandered. Although this analysis applies more to North America than to the UK or Australia, the materials emanating from the Schools Council in England in the late 1960s (see Stenhouse, 1980, for a comprehensive account of these projects) cannot escape censure. The failure of the curriculum reform movement to impact on student learning was predicated on the fact that curriculum do not disseminate just by themselves and that there needs to be a strong connection between teaching style and curriculum development.

As a consequence of this failure, there was a subsequent emphasis, covering most of the 1970s, on understanding the process of implementation. A more adaptive style of educational change strategies was assumed during this period, as it became increasingly apparent that top-down models of change do not work by themselves. It was now acknowledged that implementation does not occur spontaneously as a result of legislative fiat, and that teachers require in-service training to acquire new knowledge and skills. It became clear that implementation is an extremely complex and lengthy process that requires a sensitive combination of strategic planning, individual learning and commitment to succeed. The contribution of Michael Fullan during this phase, in particular his *The New Meaning of Educational Change* (2016) was pivotal. The popularisation of concepts such as the 'Implementation Dip', the emphasis on teacher in-service development and the identification of change agent skills, all stem from this period (for more detail see Hopkins 2001).

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Another key event in the history of educational change came in the summer of 1979 with the publication of *Fifteen Thousand Hours* by Michael Rutter and his colleagues (1979). They compared the 'effectiveness' of ten secondary schools in South London on a range of student outcome measures and found that despite similarities in intake and socio-economic context some schools performed better and were more effective than others. This was one of the first major studies to demonstrate unequivocally that schools DO make a difference and that the school a child goes to does make a difference. The effective schools movement began to lay bare the fallacy that had existed for so long, that academic achievement was due solely to race, class, gender or genetics.

The 'effective schools' described in *Fifteen Thousand Hours*, were characterised by factors 'as varied as the degree of academic emphasis, teacher actions in lessons, the availability of incentives and rewards, good conditions for pupils, and the extent to which children are able to take responsibility' (Rutter et al 1979:178).It was this constellation of factors that Rutter and his colleagues later referred to as the school's 'ethos'.They further claimed (Rutter et al 1979:179) that the:

> *... cumulative effect of these various social factors was considerably greater than the effect of any of the individual factors on their own. The implication is that the individual actions or measures may combine to create a particular ethos, or set of values, attitudes and behaviours which will become characteristic of the school as a whole.*

The identification of the factors associated with the effective school soon led to a complementary emphasis on school improvement – strategies for making the school more effective. There were increasing attempts to draw upon the most robust evidence and to produce interventions that were based on tested practices. Programmes such as *Improving Quality of Education for All* (Hopkins, 2002) and *High Reliability Schools* (HRS) (Reynolds, Stringfield, & Schaffer, 2006; Stringfield, Reynolds & Schaffer 2008, 2010) in England, the *Improving School Effectiveness Project* in Scotland (MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001), the *Manitoba School Improvement Project* in Canada (Earl et al 2003) and the *Dutch National School Improvement Project* (see van Velzen et al 1985) were all examples of well researched school improvement programmes that were productive in terms of student achievement.

All of these interventions took advantage of a key finding from Nunnery (1999), that, in general, schools are more likely to achieve measurable improvements in student performance if they are connected to an external reform-assistance team than if they try to go it alone.

As this emphasis on school improvement deepened so did the interest in large-scale reform intensify. In his recent chapter in *Change Wars* Sir Michael Barber (2009) explains the progression by reminding us that it was the school effectiveness research in the 1980s that gave us increasingly well-defined portraits of the effective school that led in the 1990s to increasing knowledge of school improvement i.e. how to achieve effectiveness. In the same way, we have in the last decade begun to learn far more about the features of an effective educational system, but are now only beginning to understand the dynamics of improvement at system level. It is this insight that provides a useful perspective on the argument being developed in this Oration.

For the moment let us summarise more formally how over the last five decades or so, the school effectiveness and school improvement research bases have gained prominence and recognition on the international stage. As has just been illustrated, in both a theoretical and empirical sense they have matured through a wide range of well-documented research projects, interventions and innovations across a range of countries. This work in general has described how efforts to help schools become increasingly effective learning environments for the full range of their students have been more or less successful. In our comprehensive review, 'School and System Improvement: a narrative state of the art review', (Hopkins et al 2014) we presented and described evidence of the effects of reform efforts at the school and system levels, through articulating five phases of development, as seen in **Table 1.**

Phase of School and System Improvement	Key Features of Each Phase
Phase One – Understanding the organisational culture of the school	• The legacy of the organisational development research • 'The culture of the schools and the challenges inherent in change'
Phase Two – Action research and research initiatives at the school level	• Teacher research and school review • Research programmes such as the Rand Study, DESSI, Special Strategies and the OECD International School Improvement project
Phase Three – Managing change and comprehensive approaches to school reform	• Managing centralised policy change • Comprehensive approaches to school reform, such as: Success for All, New American Schools, High Reliability Schools and IQEA
Phase Four – Building capacity for student learning at the local level and the continuing emphasis on leadership	• Professional learning communities and networks • Recognising the continuing importance and impact of leadership
Phase Five – Towards systemic improvement	• The influence of the knowledge base and the impact of national and international benchmarking studies • Differentiated approaches to school and system reform

Table 1 - Five Phases of Research on School and System Improvement (Hopkins et al 2014)

In this section we have briefly reviewed the recent history of educational change and noted the key developments that underpin current practice. It is now instructive in the following section to review some of the practical strategies for improvement that have been generated as a consequence of this progression.

The practical knowledge about how to improve schools / systems

One of the most positive outcomes of this deepening of knowledge and understanding of how educational change and improvement works is the practical knowledge that has been developed about how to manage, intensify and sustain the process of school and system reform. In this section we shall briefly review an example of this practical / strategic knowledge at the system level and then give a range of examples that are applicable at the school level.

As noted previously, the equivalent of the school effectiveness research at the system level has been provided during the last decade or so by the advent of international benchmarking studies. Most probably the best known and most influential is the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Since 2000 when the OECD launched PISA they have been monitoring learning outcomes in the principal industrialised countries on a regular basis. As a result of this work we have learned a great deal about high performing educational systems over the past ten years. This is not only from PISA, but also from secondary analyses such as Fenton Whelan's (2009) *Lessons Learned: how good policies produce better schools* and the McKinsey study (2007) *How the World's Best Performing School Systems Come Out on Top.*

The influential McKinsey studies (e.g. Mourshead et al 2010), have built on this tradition. In particular Mourshead and her colleagues (2010) have drawn lessons from the analysis of PISA results over time to support the idea of stage dependent 'innovation clusters' that move progressively from top down to increasingly lateral ways of working (Hopkins 2013). Four stages of improvement were identified:

- 'Poor to fair' – ensuring basic standards
- 'Fair to good' – consolidating system foundations
- 'Good to great' – professionalising teaching and leadership
- 'Great to excellent' – system led innovation.

A summary of the progression in these four phases is given below.

Poor to Fair - System improvement journeys in this phase are focused on achieving basic literacy and numeracy by emphasising three themes:

1. Providing scaffolding and motivation for low skill teachers and principals

    a. Scripted lessons

    b. Coaching on curriculum

    c. Incentives for high performance

    d. School visits by centre.

2. Getting all schools to a minimum quality standard

    a. Targets, data, and assessments

    b. Infrastructure

    c. Textbooks and learning resources

    d. Supporting low performing schools.

3. Getting students in seats

    a. Expand seats

    b. Fulfil students' basic needs.

Fair to Good - Improvement journeys in this phase emphasise getting the system foundations in place, focusing on three key strategies that build on those outlined in the previous phase. They are:

1. Data and accountability foundation

    a. Transparency and accountability

    b. Improvement areas.

2. Financial and organisational foundation

    a. Organisation structure

    b. Financial structure.

3. Pedagogical foundation

    a. Learning model.

Good to Great - Improvement journeys in this phase emphasise shaping the profession. Systems, to be successful in this phase, need to have the elements of previous phases embedded, before progress here can be predicted. The three components of this phase are:

1. Raising the calibre of entering teachers and principals

    a. Recruiting

    b. Preparation and induction.

2. Raising the calibre of existing teachers and principals

    a. Professional development

    b. Coaching on practice

    c. Career pathways.

3. School-based decision-making

    a. Self-evaluation

    b. Flexibility.

Great to Excellent - To ensure that there is maximum system capacity at the point of delivery, improvement journeys in this final phase emphasise learning through peers and innovation. In line with the

argument of this book, this phase might not be entered into by all systems and certainly not those who espouse top-down or outside–in ways of working. By definition, these strategies cannot unleash greatness; they just ensure that all schools regress to the mean.

The three broad strategies here are:

1. Cultivating peer-led learning for teachers and principals

    a. Learning communities

    b. Flexibility

    c. Rotations.

2. Creating additional support mechanisms for professionals

    a. Leverage.

3. System-sponsored innovation across schools

    a. Stakeholder innovation.

It is also worth noting that at any phase, in its early stages there needs to be a stimulus to 'ignite' the reform programme (Mourshead et al 2010). School systems that have successfully ignited reforms and sustained their momentum have all relied on at least one of three events to get them started: they have taken advantage of a political or economic crisis, they have commissioned a high profile report critical of the system's performance, or they have appointed a new energetic and visionary political or strategic leader. The role of new leadership is a common and particularly important pattern in igniting school system reforms.

These leaders take advantage of being new, but stay a longer time than usual. They also follow a common 'playbook' of practices, described as follows:

- Decide on what is 'non-negotiable'

- Install capable and like-minded people in the most critical positions

- Engage with stakeholders

- Secure the resources for what is non-negotiable

- Get 'early wins' on the board quickly.

Those countries and schools that utilise this knowledge strategically are able to make significant progress quite rapidly. This only occurs however when it is realised that:

- Different clusters of policy levers are related to specific phases of system performance

- This is a sequential process not a la carte

- Deep implementation is necessary at each phase to ensure a secure foundation for the next

- Leadership is critical

- Narrative is crucial.

Much of this system level advice is also applicable at the school level (Hopkins 2013). Indeed the stages of growth analysis, builds on our early work on differential school improvement (Hopkins, Harris and Jackson 1997), that has now culminated in the publication of the *School Improvement Pathway* (Hopkins and Craig 2015c:25-8).

Besides this broad strategic advice the educational reform and improvement community has also been hard at work in developing more fine grained action frameworks based on high quality research evidence to enhance the work of school leaders and their colleagues. These four examples are reflective of the quality of the practical knowledge currently available.

EEF Toolkit - The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) is an independent charity based in the UK, dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement.

They aim to:

- Raise the attainment of 3-18 year-olds, particularly those facing disadvantage;

- Develop their essential life skills; and

- Prepare young people for the world of work and further study.

They support teachers and senior leaders by providing free, independent and evidence-based resources designed to improve practice and boost learning (see in particular *The EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit* that analyses a range of practical interventions against three criteria: cost, evidence strength and impact). They do this by *generating evidence* of what works to improve teaching and learning, funding rigorous trials of promising but untested programmes and approaches. The EEF also supports schools, as well as early years and post-16 settings, across the country in using evidence to achieve the maximum possible benefit for young people.

In the words of Sir Kevan Collins, the EEF Chief Executive:

> *Research can never replace professional experience and teacher's understanding of their schools and students. But it can be an important supplement to these important skills. Used intelligently, evidence is the teacher's friend.*

Visible Learning – The book *Visible Learning* authored by John Hattie (2009) is a synthesis of more than 800 meta-studies covering more than 80 million students. Hattie's work that is based on the simple proposition - *"To improve schools, draw on the best evidence available"* has become globally influential. He and his team produce 'meta analyses of meta analyses' in order to calculate the effect size of a wide range of educational interventions on student achievement. In total he says that he has conducted 1,200 different meta-analyses looking at all types of interventions, ranging from increased parental involvement to ADHD medications, from longer school days to performance pay for teachers, as well as other factors affecting education, like socioeconomic status. In a recent paper *What doesn't work in education: the politics of distraction*, Hattie (2015) takes on some of the most popular approaches to reform such as small classes, high standards, more money. These popular and oft-prescribed remedies from both the right and the left wings of politics, he argues, have not been shown to work as well as alternatives.

Influence	Effect Size	Source
Feedback	1.13	Teacher
Student's prior cognitive ability	1.04	Student
Instructional quality	1	Teacher
Direct instruction	0.82	Teacher
Remediation/feedback	0.65	Teacher
Student's disposition to learn	0.61	Student
Class environment	0.56	Teacher
Challenge of goals	0.52	Teacher
Peer tutoring	0.5	Teacher

Table 2: Hattie Effect Size Table

In his rankings, socioeconomic status has an effect size of 0.57, meaning that a student growing up in poverty may be expected to perform roughly a year and a half behind an otherwise similar student growing up in more wealthy circumstances. This is bad news for a socially just society and of course for the students themselves. But there is an upside. It is his work on teaching behaviours however, that is probably the best known and has most power to positively deliver on moral purpose at the school and student level.

In the list of effect sizes in **Table 2**, admittedly the student's 'cognitive ability' and 'disposition to learn', have a strong effect, but look at the range of resources that the teacher has at her control to compensate for what students bring with them into the classroom.

One of the clearest findings from the international research on system performance referred to above is that (Hopkins 2013):

"The quality of a system or school cannot exceed the quality of its people."

And,

"The only way to improve student outcomes is to improve the quality of teaching."

It is precision in teaching that counts and Hattie's research has been instrumental in giving us robust and evidence-based guidelines for ensuring student success and realising equity.

Curiosity & Powerful Learning Manuals - The *Curiosity and Powerful Learning* manuals are designed for teachers and for school and system leaders who have embarked on a school improvement journey. The manuals describe how schools can lift student learning and provide action frameworks to strategically guide teaching and school improvement practice. The frameworks and strategic guidelines are drawn from evidence based practical experience, and have been well researched and tested in schools over time.

Three manuals are at the core of the series:

- *The System and Powerful Learning* (Hopkins and Craig 2015a) – that focuses on the systemic approach to school improvement and outlines the inside-out school improvement model.

- *Curiosity and Powerful Learning* (Hopkins and Craig 2015b) – that provide specifications of and protocols for ten Theories of Action for enhancing teaching and learning at both the whole school and classroom levels.

- *Leadership for Powerful Learning* (Hopkins and Craig 2015c) – provides a comprehensive model for school leadership that provides frameworks and strategies for instructional, adaptive, strategic and system leadership.

The series includes *Curiouser and Curiouser* (Munro 2015) and the three *Models of Practice* manuals that concentrate on precision in teaching practice (Hopkins 2016a,b,c). They stand as references for improving, planning, and monitoring professional practice, assisting us to get to the heart of the learning

enterprise. Together they explain how powerful learning is made real for our students through purposeful, specific changes in whole school culture, teaching practice and leadership.

An illustration of this practical yet evidenced based approach is given through the protocols developed for each of the teacher 'theories of action'. The six teacher 'theories of action', that are all supported by effect size data drawn from John Hattie's research, are:

- Harnessing learning intentions, narrative and pace

- Setting challenging learning tasks

- Framing higher order questions

- Connecting feedback and data

- Committing to assessment for learning

- Implementing cooperative group structures.

In the *Curiosity and Powerful Learning* manual the description and specification of the six Theories of Action for Teachers are accompanied by a protocol. Each protocol is precise about habits, behaviours and ways of doing that characterise teacher practice at four phases on a professional development continuum – Commencing, Intermediate, Accomplished, and Expert. They are presented in four domains as shown in **Figure 1**.

The teacher rubrics have four primary purposes:

- To set out clearly the specifications, habits, behaviours, and performance expectations that characterise teaching of the highest quality, reflected in the 'Expert' phase.

- To support personal reflection by teachers about where their practice falls on the continuum.

- To inform planning for professional learning through the use of triads and as a means of gathering data through peer coaching observation for subsequent discussion.

- To provide a common reference point and language for teachers and school leaders to use when they discuss teaching practice and teacher performance.

Through using a common language and structure, the protocols support professional conversations and collective inquiry. They contribute to professional learning by grounding peer observation and collective reflection in what teachers and students actually do in a lesson. They indicate stepping-stones from current practice to improved practice.
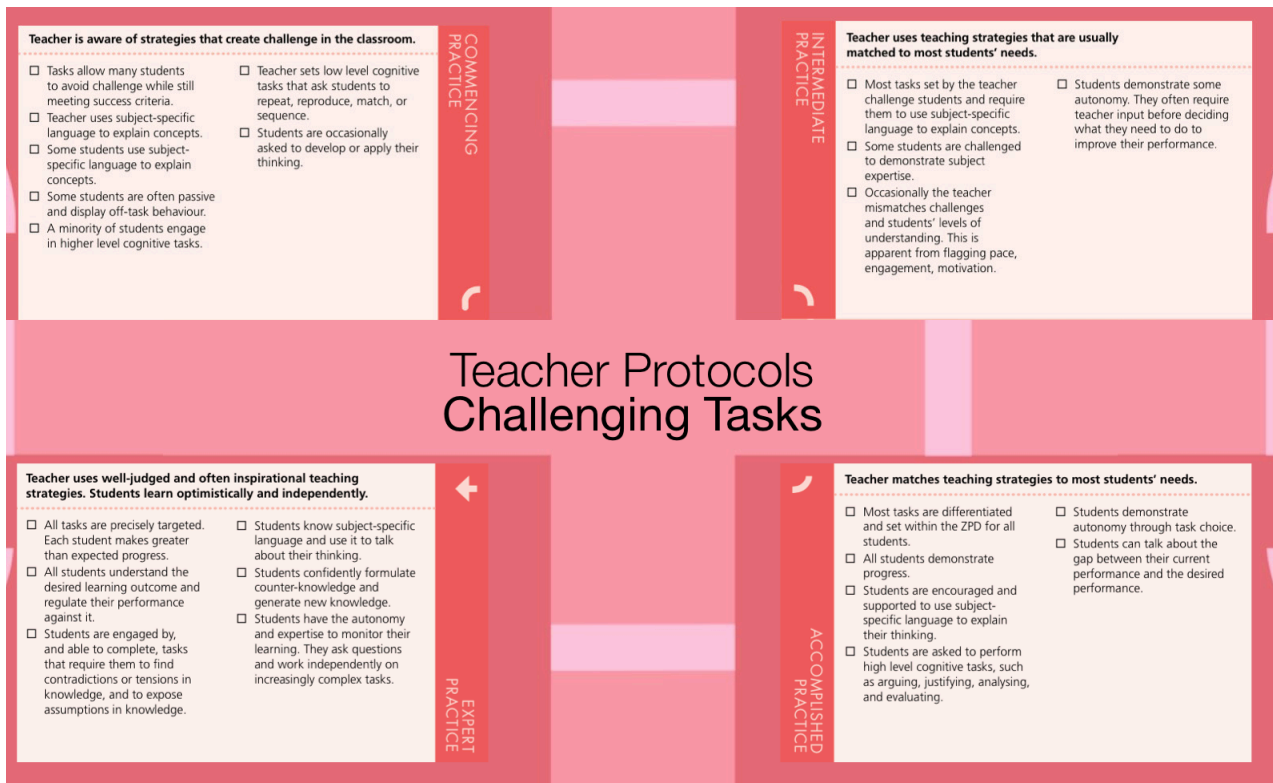
**Teacher Protocols
Challenging Tasks**

COMMENCING PRACTICE

Teacher is aware of strategies that create challenge in the classroom.

- Tasks allow many students to avoid challenge while still meeting success criteria.
- Teacher uses subject-specific language to explain concepts.
- Some students use subject-specific language to explain concepts.
- Some students are often passive and display off-task behaviour.
- A minority of students engage in higher level cognitive tasks.

- Teacher sets low level cognitive tasks that ask students to repeat, reproduce, match, or sequence.
- Students are occasionally asked to develop or apply their thinking.

INTERMEDIATE PRACTICE

Teacher uses teaching strategies that are usually matched to most students' needs.

- Most tasks set by the teacher challenge students and require them to use subject-specific language to explain concepts.
- Some students are challenged to demonstrate subject expertise.
- Occasionally the teacher mismatches challenges and students' levels of understanding. This is apparent from flagging pace, engagement, motivation.

- Students demonstrate some autonomy. They often require teacher input before deciding what they need to do to improve their performance.

EXPERT PRACTICE

Teacher uses well-judged and often inspirational teaching strategies. Students learn optimistically and independently.

- All tasks are precisely targeted. Each student makes greater than expected progress.
- All students understand the desired learning outcome and regulate their performance against it.
- Students are engaged by, and able to complete, tasks that require them to find contradictions or tensions in knowledge, and to expose assumptions in knowledge.

- Students know subject-specific language and use it to talk about their thinking.
- Students confidently formulate counter-knowledge and generate new knowledge.
- Students have the autonomy and expertise to monitor their learning. They ask questions and work independently on increasingly complex tasks.

ACCOMPLISHED PRACTICE

Teacher matches teaching strategies to most students' needs.

- Most tasks are differentiated and set within the ZPD for all students.
- All students demonstrate progress.
- Students are encouraged and supported to use subject-specific language to explain their thinking.
- Students are asked to perform high level cognitive tasks, such as arguing, justifying, analysing, and evaluating.

- Students demonstrate autonomy through task choice.
- Students can talk about the gap between their current performance and the desired performance.

Figure 1: Teacher Protocols, Challenging Tasks

ACER Materials - For the sake of completeness and from an Australian perspective one also needs to mention the fine suite of school improvement materials published by ACER. Among these and of most relevance here are the *National School Improvement Tool* developed by Geoff Masters (2012) and the recent *Driving School Improvement* manual (Macklin and Zbar 2017).

Yet debates still rage - which policy levers and strategies make the difference?

Despite this accumulation of research evidence and practical wisdom that has a potentially powerful impact on student performance, debates still rage over which policy levers and strategies actually make the difference. This is the issue that I address directly in *Exploding the Myths of School Reform* (Hopkins 2013) by arguing that the failure of so many educational reform efforts to impact on the learning and performance of students is due to misguided action based on a number of myths associated with school reform.

It is instructive here to be reminded of the danger of living by myths, as Jonathan Powell (2010:5) does in this quotation from Machiavelli's *The Prince* that he cited in his recent book, *The New Machiavelli: how to wield power in the modern world.*

> But since it is my object to write what shall be useful to whosoever understands it, it seems to me better to follow the real truth of things than an imaginary view of them. For many republics and princedoms have been imagined that were never known to exist in reality.

Powell's point is that too often in politics a conventional wisdom emerges that satisfies a particular group's version of the truth and quite rapidly enters the zeitgeist but, at best, it is a myth, a parody of the truth. If the myths are then acted on, the subsequent actions will fail. Sadly, myths abound in education; think for example of the debates around class size, teaching quality and the influence of external accountability.

Discussion of the myths stems from a deep frustration that despite what we collectively know about school and system reform, the potential contained in this knowledge is not systematically realised. As we see below, this is because as Fullan (2011) says 'the wrong drivers are chosen' and this occurs because of ineptness, misunderstanding or cultural and bureaucratic hegemony.

In *Exploding the Myths of School Reform* an alternative approach was taken to reviewing the evolution of the knowledge base on schools and system reform (Hopkins 2013). The use of the 'myth' as a narrative artifice provided a structure for the critique of contemporary school and system research, policy and practice. Identifying the ten myths and then "exploding" them enabled a realistic and increasingly precise and aligned approach to school and system reform to be presented.

The overarching narrative went something like this:

· We know increasing amounts about leadership, school and system reform.

· Unfortunately, this knowledge is often misused and an illusion or myth is generated that leads in unproductive directions and consequently has little impact on the learning and achievement of students.

· In order to fulfil our moral purpose we must correct the myths and present 'the real truth of things'.

· The knowledge then needs to be couched as theories of action within an overall strategy for school and system reform.

In Chapter Nine of the book, I discuss in some detail the "Myth that 'one size fits all' in implementing school reform". Although most would agree that this myth is self-evidently true, ironically it is the one with the most power to derail even the best-intentioned school improvement efforts. Because of the top-down and instrumentalist approach so dominant in most school reform efforts, as a global community we have succumbed by-and-large to a single solution approach - this reading scheme, this theory of learning or the latest textbook. By way of contrast, inside-out school improvement works from careful diagnosis followed by customisation of strategy to context. Without a degree of professional precision and reflexivity to context, it is understandable why pre-packaged solutions, however good and well intentioned, end up having a limited effect of student learning.

This is a theme that has been taken up and pursued with much passion and intellectual vigour by a number of the most influential opinion leaders in our field. We review three of them here.

Michael Fullan's (2011) paper *'Choosing the wrong drivers for whole system reform'*. In the paper Fullan describes how certain popular policy options are implemented, but without any serious consideration of context.

The following quotes give a flavour of the argument (Fullan 2011):

> A *'wrong driver'* is a deliberate policy force that has little chance of achieving the desired result, while a *'right driver'* is one that ends up achieving better measurable results for students. (p. 3)

> The glue that binds the effective drivers together is the underlying attitude, philosophy, and theory of action. The mindset that works for whole system reform is the one that inevitably generates individual and collective motivation and corresponding skills to transform the system. (p. 5)

Fullan's wrong drivers may be wrong for one of two reasons, or both. They may be wrong because they are wrong, or wrong because they are inappropriate to the stage that the school or system is currently at. As Fullan (2011:5) comments:

> In the rush to move forward, leaders, especially from countries that have not been progressing, tend to choose the wrong drivers. Such ineffective drivers fundamentally miss the target. There are four main 'wrong driver' culprits ...

> 1. *Accountability: using test results, and teacher appraisal, to reward or punish teachers and schools, versus capacity building;*

> 2. *Individual teacher and leadership quality: promoting individual, vs group solutions;*

> 3. *Technology: investing in and assuming that the wonders of the digital world will carry the day vs instruction;*

> 4. *Fragmented strategies vs integrated or systemic strategies.*

In reflecting on this issue, it is worth quoting David Hargreaves (2012: 25) and note his quite appropriate emphasis on the contextualisation of any change to context.

> There may be real gains from looking around the world for some educational policies and practices that might benefit our schools. But a transformation of schooling that is self-generating and sustainable requires that attention be paid to the deep cultural capital that underpins the life of individual schools, of partnerships and alliances, and of the school system as a whole. This is the key lesson we learn from China and East Asia, one by which we can develop our version, based on our own well-established native roots of extended moral purpose and distributed system leadership.

So the key point being advanced here by both Fullan and Hargreaves is the danger of promiscuous policy borrowing; a contention that one finds enthusiastically endorsed in the recent writings of Pasi Sahlberg.

Pasi Sahlberg (2011) in his bestselling book *Finnish Lessons*, explains the success of the Finnish educational system, not in terms of the adoption of a range of external strategies and policies, but more in terms of carefully reflective, customised and culturally relevant approaches. Listen to him speak and he talks about the Finnish paradox that 'less is more' with the following implications: teach less, learn more; test less, learn more; and ensure more equity through growing diversity. This is not a universal panacea and it certainly does not apply to all systems, but is an intelligent response to the cultural context of Finland. The Finns themselves sensibly prefer to combine knowledge of what works, together with a view as to how the Finnish system itself will continue to evolve.

In a subsequent blog, *Global Reform Movement is here!* Sahlberg (2012) argues that the main strategies for developing an equitable, high-performing education system are similar to those underlying the social and economic transformation of Finland into a welfare state and a competitive knowledge society. He continues, that because of the professional strength and moral health of Finnish schools their system has remained virtually free of the viruses associated with the Global Educational Reform Movement [GERM]. These are the collection of ubiquitous policy agendas critiqued above by myself, Fullan and Hargreaves.

The main components of GERM are:

· Standardisation

· Focus on core subjects

· Search for low risk ways to reach learning goals

· Use of corporate management models

· Test-based accountability policies.

By contrast, he argues that the typical features of teaching and learning in Finland are:

· *Great confidence in teachers and principals as high performing professionals;*

· *Encouraging teachers and students to try new ideas and approaches, in other words, to put curiosity, imagination and creativity at the heart of learning; and,*

· *Seeing the purpose of teaching and learning as pursuing the happiness of learning and cultivating the development of the whole child.*

He concludes that:

The best way to avoid infections of GERM is to prepare teachers and leaders well.

AND

Lessons from Finland will help you kill 99.9% of GERMs!

Writing from an Australian perspective **Geoff Masters** (2015) pursues a similar argument. He laments that in terms of Australian school education:

Some of the biggest challenges we face can appear frustratingly intractable. Despite reform efforts, regular government reviews and ongoing calls for change, progress in addressing our most significant challenges is often slow and solutions continue to elude us.

It's not that we don't know what the challenges are. But their roots sometimes lie largely outside the reach of schools or in deeply entrenched educational processes and structures that are difficult to change. A political response is sometimes to focus instead on low-hanging fruit and quick wins – to make changes at the margins where change seems possible.

However, real reform and significant progress in improving the quality and equity of Australian schooling depends on tackling our deepest and most stubborn educational challenges. Masters then phrases these challenges in a helpful way, in so far as he suggests what we should be doing rather than not be doing, and also proposes policies and strategies for resolution. His five such challenges are:

· Raise the professional status of teachers

· Reduce the disparities between Australian schools

· Design a 21st-century curriculum

· Promote flexible learning arrangements focused on growth

· Identify and meet the needs of children on trajectories of low achievement.

Sadly the consequence of this 'debate' has been to slow student achievement

The conclusion to be drawn from the critiques of the current policy reform reviewed above is that the potential impact of the knowledge bases on student achievement and the practical strategies derived from them noted earlier, has not been realised.

The ubiquity of the 'Myths', 'Wrong Drivers' and 'GERM' approaches to school reform have placed a ceiling on student performance in those jurisdictions that follow the paucity of that orthodoxy. Space precludes a detailed analysis of this proposition but the contention is widely accepted by informed opinion (Harris and Jones 2017; Hargreaves and Shirley 2009) as well as those quoted earlier.

The following four data displays are illustrative.

Australia – It is clear that Australia has been falling back in recent years in terms of their PISA rankings. The average score in Maths has fallen from 524 to 494 since 2003, equivalent to a year of schooling. **Figure 2** below shows the steady decline in terms of Mathematical and Reading literacy since 2000. That is in stark and dramatic contrast to Germany whose performance has gone in entirely the opposite direction.
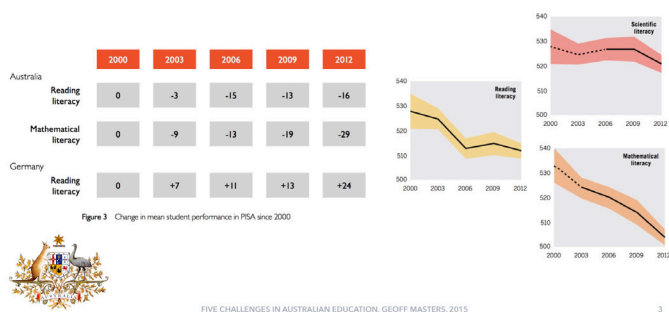
Figure 2: Five challenges in Australian education, Geoff Masters, 2015

England – Figure 3 shows four sets of data on student achievement at age 16, as measured by GCSE scores, and how they have altered over the 20 years, between 1995–2015. Overall the metrics demonstrate a steady increase over the first 15 years, accelerating between 2004 and 2010 when the policy focus was on both structural and pedagogical change (top-down AND bottom-up). The data then becomes highly volatile when the focus is only structural (top-down). Over time this leads to stagnation – 2011 results were the same as 2015, but highly volatile and disruptive in between years. The orange line in particular provides further detail about the volatility of the Coalition

years (2010-2015), where the educational policies were characterised by a top-down, structural and market-led policy focus.
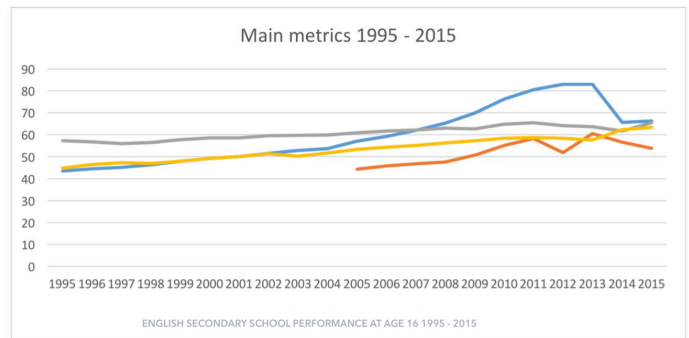

Figure 3: English secondary school performance at age 16, 1995 - 2015

Wales – My own country of Wales, as we note again in the following paragraph, has shown a dramatic decline in PISA performance in recent years – from 510 in 2006 down to 480 in 2012 well below the OECD average (Hopkins 2016d). This decline is the result of ironically abandoning some of 'Wrong Drivers' or GERM elements and adopting some of the Myths instead! The data display below illustrates an aspect of this decline and raises concerns about the reliability of teacher judgment within the system. It shows achievement data of one cohort of FSM (Free School Meals the indicator used as a proxy for deprivation in the UK) as they pass through the system. Their performance dips alarmingly once assessment based on teacher judgment at ages 7 and 11, is replaced by standardised testing at age 16.
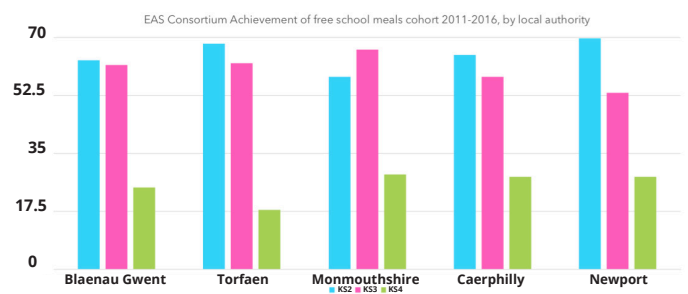

Figure 4: Poverty and Educational Achievement (Wales)

Aggregated PISA data – Despite some recent critiques, it is important to emphasise the contribution made by PISA to our understanding of the dynamics of educational improvement at scale. We need to remind ourselves of three issues.

The first is that as PISA has now been administered on six occasions (the sixth PISA round was administered in 2015) we have significant real-time information as to how national performance changes (or not) over time. As is intimated in **Figure 5**, the performance of some countries has remained stable, Finland, for example, has consistently scored very well, while the trajectories of others have moved both up and down. What explains the dramatic movement of Poland say, from the bottom right-hand segment to the top-left in a little over six years, or the equally dramatic fall of my own country of Wales from the top-left segment to the ignominy of the bottom-right? There are good explanatory reasons for both of these movements related to the policy choices made by respective national governments. The details need not concern us here, the point is that we are getting to a stage where we can predict cause and effect in system change related to the policy levers that governments, for whatever reasons, choose to select.

The second issue is also illustrated in **Figure 5**. Here the OECD compares national performance against two criteria. The first is 'excellence' represented on the vertical axis by mean performance on PISA Mathematics and Science scores in 2015; the second is 'equity' represented by the strength of the relationship between achievement and family background. When the OECD average for both dimensions is inserted, it enables a two-by-two matrix to be constructed. So in the high excellence/high equity segment is Finland and now Canada, with both Australia and England remaining in the high excellence / low equity segment. The advantage of this analysis is that it gives an indication not just of academic performance, but also of how far aims of social justice and moral purpose have been achieved.

A personal anecdote is illustrative. When I became responsible for school standards during the Blair government in late 2001, Estelle Morris, the Secretary of State and David Miliband, the Minister of State for Schools, expressed their moral purpose for the English secondary school system in terms of moving from 'high excellence/low equity' to 'high excellence/ high equity'. Sadly this was never quite achieved, mainly as a consequence of political change. It is

however, inspiring to note that Ontario, Canada had similar aspirations underpinned by the same moral purpose, brilliantly and consistently articulated by the Premier Dalton Mcguinty (between 2003 to 2013) that were realised in the recent PISA rounds.

Third, and related to the point above and the argument being made in this Oration, is that to all intents and purposes those systems that have a strong narrative for reform embedded in moral purpose and who avoid the worst excesses of GERM and adopt the right policy drivers inhabit the high excellence / high equity segment of the diagram. The notable cases here being Finland, Ontario, Singapore and Hong Kong. Those systems that have caught the GERM virus, who lack a strong narrative predicated on moral purpose and are capricious in the policies that they adopt, move up and down the PISA metrics over the years without really knowing why.
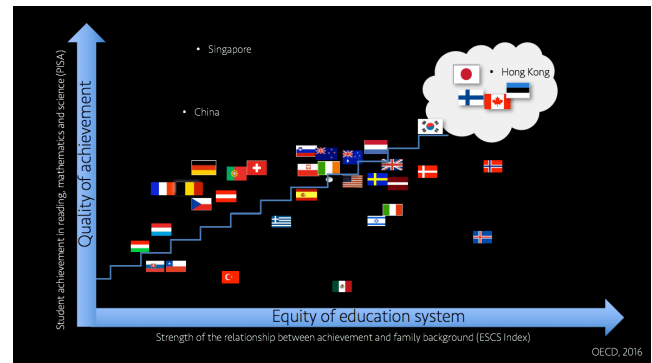

Figure 5: Quality of Achievemnt (PISA) versus Equity of education system (ESCS Index)

Why is your job so hard? - Jurgen Habermas may have the answer

The proposition being developed in this Oration is - that despite the progress in the knowledge base of school and system reform over the past fifty years or so, in terms of enhancing the progress and achievement of students this potential is not being uniformly realised. The reason being is that the wrong policy drivers are often chosen and that as a consequence, student achievement in many countries, including Australia is uneven and in some cases stagnating. The impact of the GERM virus as Pasi Sahlberg would characterise it, is not just on student achievement, but also on the motivation and effectiveness of our school leaders.

Many of our best and well-intentioned Principals, in Australia and elsewhere, tell me that their jobs are very hard; that they are frustrated that despite putting in long hours they are failing to get traction and feel under surveillance from all sides. These are good people; they are not moaning or complaining, just describing the realities of their work lives.

As I listen to their concerns, I begin to realise that they find their job so hard not because of their individual competence, but because of systemic failure. My response to them is that the following reasons begin to explain the source of their frustrations.

- Political imperatives rarely match accurate system diagnosis

- History of weak implementation means that system foundations are not uniformly in place nor are being built on

- The narrative of reform although evident at particular points has not been sustained over time

- Because of its antecedents, teaching has struggled to establish a professional culture built on diagnosis, specifications of practice, collaboration and research

- Bureaucratic rather than systemic organisational structures and cultures continue to dominate.

When I then begin to explain these trends there is a nodding of understanding and a sense of relief that it may not entirely be their own fault - they were trapped within a web of instrumental hegemony!

So one might ask - what IS going on here?

In a slightly different context Paulo Freire once memorably remarked that: " ... *methodological confusion can always be related to ideological error*" (Hopkins 2001:19). This is also the case with school and system improvement! To put it simply and in the lexicon of this Oration, these Principals are working in a system that has been infected by the GERM virus and are displaying all of the usual symptoms. The tension in contemporary school improvement and system reform efforts is commonly related to a tension between 'Top Down' and 'Bottom Up'. One can characterise these two opposing forces like this:

Top Down = Outside In = Positivism

Positivism in terms of school improvement, as with GERM, is related to top down initiatives designed to result in short term measurable gains against largely politically defined criteria.

Bottom Up = Inside Out = Interpretive Approach

The **Interpretive Approach** acknowledges that reality is constructed through the meanings and actions of individuals.

The tension being felt by our Principals is explained by the fact that they on the one hand are the victims of GERM and are subjected to top-down policy forces; and on the other, they wish to create a school culture that is driven by moral purpose and that serves the best purposes of their students (and teachers). They are caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place and there seems to be no escape.

Carr and Kemmis (1986:103) summarise the dichotomy like this:

> *What emerges from the discussion of positivism is the naive way in which it takes the 'objective' character of reality for granted and then interprets that reality as something governed by inescapable laws. In consequence, it tends to confirm a spurious scientific respectability on prevailing 'commonsense' and offers no way of effecting practical change, other than through technical control. A major corrective to positivism provided by the interpretive approach is the recognition that the commonsense view of reality, far from being an 'objective' given, itself constitutes the major problem for theorizing and research. From the interpretive perspective, social reality is not something that exists and can be known independently of the knower. Rather, it is a subjective reality constructed and sustained through the meanings and actions of individuals.*

Neither of these broad approaches provides an entirely satisfactory basis for authentic school improvement as I defined it in *School Improvement for Real* (Hopkins 2001).

Yet advocates of both the positive and the interpretative perspective assume (Carr and Kemmis 1986:105):

> *... that the two positions they represent more or less exhaust the range of possible options available for educational research to adopt.*

Yet as Carr and Kemmis (1986: 129-130) continue, there are major objections to both approaches:

> *... the positivist idea that knowledge has a purely instrumental value in solving educational problems and the consequent tendency to see all educational issues as technical in character needs to be firmly resisted. ... However, the recognition that educational theory must be grounded in the interpretations of teachers (or leaders), is not in itself sufficient.*

For while it may be true that consciousness 'defines reality', it is equally true that reality may systematically distort consciousness. Indeed, one of the major weaknesses of the interpretive model is its failure to realize how the self-understandings of individuals may be shaped by illusory beliefs which sustain irrational and contradictory forms of social life.

Fortunately there is a third approach or paradigm - 'critical theory' - that addresses both of these weaknesses. This approach originated with the 'Frankfurt School' of philosophy – a community of scholars based in that German City, many of whom then immigrated to the United States during the Second World War. The overriding concern of the Frankfurt School was (Carr and Kemmis 1986:130):

... to articulate a view of theory that has the central task of emancipating people from the positivist "domination of thought" through their own understandings and actions.

In *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Jurgen Habermas (1972), the favourite son of the Frankfurt School, describes the three ways in which humans know and construe the world. These, he terms, 'technical,' 'practical' and 'emancipatory.' For Habermas, knowledge is the outcome of human activity that is motivated by natural needs and interests. These interests guide and shape the way knowledge is constituted in different human activities. The *technical* orientation relates to positivism, the *practical* orientation to the interpretative paradigm, and the *critrical* to emancipation and transformation.

The **Table** below summarises **Habermas' Tri – Paradigmatic Framework** by relating the three types of human interest to the kind of knowledge it generates and it's school improvement focus. Ted Aoki (Pinar and Irwin 2004) in particular, has applied these orientations to education in terms of curriculum inquiry research with insight and wisdom.

Type of Human Interest	Kind of Knowledge	School Improvement Focus
Technical – Top Down - Prediction and control	**Instrumental** - Causal explanation and empirical knowing	Is **short term**, using bureaucratic policy options and narrow outcome measures.
Practical – Bottom Up - Interpretation and understanding	**Practical** - Understanding and giving meaning	Is on **process and culture** and on creating a harmonious school environment
Critical - Transformation - Critique and liberation	**Emancipatory** - Critical knowing that combines reflection and action	Is **authentic**, with an emphasis on student learning, intervention and empowerment

Table 3: Habermas' Tri – Paradigmatic Framework

It is Critical Theory then that offers us a way out of the binary dichotomy of top-down and bottom-up and provides the opportunity for our hard working Principals to maximise the benefit of their vision and diligence. Critical Theory provides the philosophical basis for more authentic forms of school improvement in line with the argument of this Oration (Hopkins 2001). Let us explore the concept in a little more detail.

In his study of critical theory and its educational implications, Rex Gibson (1986:5-6) describes its central characteristic like this:

Critical theory acknowledges the sense of frustration and powerlessness that many feel as they see their personal destinies out of their control, and in the hands of (often unknown) others... Critical theory attempts to reveal those factors that prevent groups and individuals taking control of, or even influencing, those decisions that crucially affect their lives. . . In the exploration of the nature and limits of power, authority and freedom, critical theory claims to afford insight into how greater degrees of autonomy could be available.

Making available 'greater degrees of autonomy' marks out Critical Theory's true distinctiveness: its claim to be emancipatory. Not only does it provide enlightenment (deeper awareness of your true interests); more than that (indeed, because of that), it can set you free. Unlike "scientific" theory, it claims to provide guidance as to what to do. This concept of emancipation - enabling people to exert more influence and direction over their own lives - is central to Critical Theory and to authentic school improvement.

Although this slight diversion into the field of philosophy may at first glance seem unwise for a grounded audience of practical action oriented school leaders; I suggest that it is both important and necessary. Not only does it explain the frustration, anomie and sense of powerlessness that many educational leaders feel, but as we shall see in the remainder of this Oration it also provides a practical and strategic way forward. Also the notion of 'emancipation' so crucial to Critical Theory is an idea that is both commonplace and central to many discourses on education.

For example, when David Bowie sang, *We can be Heroes*, this was a hymn to emancipation. In reflecting on the song *Heroes*, Bowie commented, *"The most beautiful thing you can wear is confidence."* David Bowie wasn't born brave, but he knew, like the advocates of Critical Theory, that choosing confidence is both vital in an uncertain world as well as being the source of emancipation.

In terms of educational discourse I can do no better than cite the work of Lawrence Stenhouse. It was he who led the teacher research and curriculum development movements in the UK from the late sixties through to his premature death in 1982 (see Stenhouse 1975 and 1980). Following his untimely passing, Jean Rudduck and I edited his writings into a book length exposition of the key theme that characterised his life's work, *Research as a Basis for Teaching* (Rudduck and Hopkins 1985). The following quotes are taken from that volume.

Stenhouse's writing was characterized by a deep curiosity about the relationship between authority and knowledge. He described the key problem in this way:

> *We produce through education a majority who are ruled by knowledge, not served by it – an intellectual, moral and spiritual proletariat characterized by instrumental competencies rather than autonomous power.*

Stenhouse saw the solution as a process of emancipation:

> *My theme is an old-fashioned one – emancipation. . . The essence of emancipation as I conceive it is the intellectual, moral and spiritual autonomy which we recognise when we eschew paternalism and the role of authority and hold ourselves obliged to appeal to judgement.*

There are three levels at which this concept of emancipation can operate – at the level of the student, the teacher and the school:

- At the level of the **Student**, emancipation refers to the ability to stand outside the teacher's authority on forms of knowledge, and to discover and own it for oneself. In his own work, Stenhouse was moving away from a teacher-dominated classroom to a setting where students, unconstrained by the authority of the teacher, could create meaning for themselves on the basis of evidence and discussion.

- The route to emancipation for the **Teacher** is through adopting a research stance. There are two aspects to this: first, that research is linked to the strengthening of professional judgment and to the self-directed improvement of practice; second, that the most important focus for research is the curriculum in that it is the medium through which knowledge is communicated in schools.

- The knowledge we teach in **Schools** is won through research; and such knowledge cannot be taught except through some form of research-based teaching. This implies a form of learning based on enquiry rather than didacticism and a form of assessment based on problem solving rather than standardised tests.

So to recapitulate, we began this section of the Oration with the question 'Why is your job so hard?' The response is that this difficulty is explained through the dominance of the GERM virus and the tension between top-down and bottom-up change. We found in Critical Theory a 'third way' based on the concept of emancipation that provides both a philosophical, values based and strategic way forward. The argument of this Oration is that achievement at scale is only possible when the:

> a. System works as such and all the various moving parts are linked and pull together; and when,
>
> b. Policies articulated and strategies employed are imbued with the spirit of emancipation.

The list below is an inventory of those moving parts, that together can raise standards and build capacity/emancipation within the system. Beyond this, what recipes can be used to mix the ingredients for specific contexts is the concern of the final section of the Oration. The misinterpretation of these ideas has resulted in the proliferation of the GERM virus and the myths about school and system reform.

To summarise and based on the best of global experience, the following are the key ingredients of reform efforts in both high-performing educational schools and systems (Hopkins 2013). Each principle has a high degree of operational practicality.

1. Ensuring that the achievement and learning of students expressed as **moral purpose** is at the centre of all that teachers and leaders do. This requires a focus on those strategies that have a track record of accelerating student achievement such as building student learning capability, personalising learning and the curriculum, assessment for learning and giving students a voice in their own learning.

2. As a consequence, it is the enhancement of the **quality of teaching**, rather than structural change that needs to be the central theme of any improvement strategy. The quality of teaching is necessarily related to system goals and targeted support that are likely to have a heavy emphasis in the first instance on the teaching of literacy and numeracy and the development of curiosity.

3. High levels of student learning and achievement will be partially achieved by **teacher selection policies** that ensure that only the very best people become educators and educational leaders. Almost by definition, this creates a positive school work-culture and high levels of professional practice.

4. The development of this **professional practice** occurs within a system context where there is increasing clarity on the standards implied by the goals set, and the generation of the most appropriate curriculum and teaching strategies necessary to achieve those standards.

5. Putting in place ongoing and sustained **professional learning opportunities** that develop a common 'practice' of teaching and learning through blending theory, evidence and action through collaborative forms of enquiry.

6. To enable this, procedures are needed to provide **formative, ongoing and transparent data** (both assessment data and inspection evidence) on the performance of the student, school and system that facilitate improvements in learning and teaching.

7. Student and school performance is enhanced by teachers and leaders **'going deeper' and intervening early**, following diagnosis that reflects a range of differential strategies based on performance, with targets being set that are related to implementation.

8. The development of professional practice, utilisation of data and early intervention using differential strategies takes place in schools where the **leadership** has:

   - Very high levels of expectation for both teachers and students

   - An unrelenting focus on the quality of learning and teaching

   - Created structures that ensure an orderly learning environment and that empower and generate professional responsibility and accountability

   - Developed a work culture that takes pride in sharing excellence and has a high degree of trust and reciprocity

   - Appropriate, supported leadership development across a locality.

9. **Inequities in student performance** are addressed through:

   - Good early education

   - Direct classroom support for those falling behind

   - High levels of targeted resourcing

   - Utilising differential strategies at the school level.

10. Finally, **system level structures** are established that reflect the processes just described, linking together the various levels of the system through to the school and classroom, developing capacity by balancing professional autonomy and accountability, and promoting disciplined innovation as a consequence of networking. These activities combine to produce a work-culture that has at its core strong pressure to improve, takes seriously its responsibility to act on and change context, and that embodies a commitment to focus, flexibility and collaboration.

Drivers to raise achievement and build capacity for the next stage of reform

So what does a system reform strategy look like based on these principles? The problem with lists such as this is that they are a 'counsel to perfection'. They may well list the desiderata for an effective system, but they do not contain a 'theory of action' that helps one achieve it. They are all about the 'what' rather than the 'how'.

It is now generally acknowledged that the key to managing system reform is by strategically re-balancing 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' change over time. This however is not to return to the binary dichotomy described above, but to emphasise that in this re-balancing the policies advocated and strategies employed are based on authentic school improvement principles (Hopkins 2001).

The argument goes something like this (Hopkins 2007):

- Most agree that when standards are too low and too varied that some form of direct state / outside intervention is necessary. Typically, the resultant 'national prescription' proves very successful in raising standards in the short term.

- But progress soon tends to plateau and whilst a bit more improvement could be squeezed out especially in underperforming schools, one has to question whether prescription still offers the recipe for sustained large scale reform into the medium / long term.

- There is a growing recognition that schools need to lead the next phase of reform. But, if the hypothesis is correct, it must categorically not be a naïve return to the not so halcyon days when a thousand flowers bloomed and the educational life chances of too many of our children wilted.

- The implication is that we need a transition from an era of Prescription to an era of Professionalism – in which the balance between national prescription and schools leading reform will change.

However, achieving this re-balancing is not straightforward. As Michael Fullan (2003) has commented, it takes capacity to build capacity, and if there is insufficient capacity to begin with it is folly to announce that a move to 'professionalism' provides the basis of a new approach. The key question is, 'How do we get there?' because we cannot simply move from one era to the other without self consciously building professional capacity throughout the system. Building professional capacity implies the adoption of authentic school improvement principles and strategies that raise standards and emancipate at the same time.

It is this progression that is illustrated in **Figure 6** and discussed at length in *Every School a Great School* (Hopkins 2007). This insight seems by now to have achieved wide spread support. Barber (2009) stressed the need for system leadership along with capacity

building. Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) argued for a 'Fourth Way of Change' that consisted of combining top-down "national vision, government steering and support with 'professional involvement' and 'public engagement' all for the purpose of promoting 'learning and results'."
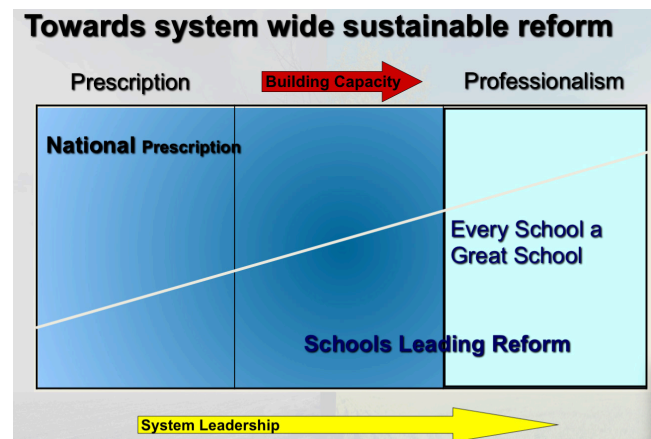

Figure 6: Towards system wide sustainable reform

It is worth taking a little time to unpack the thinking underlying the diagram: four points in particular need to be made.

- The first is to emphasise that neither top-down nor bottom-up change work when conducted in isolation; they have to be in balance, in a creative tension. At any one time, the balance between the two will of course depend on context.

- Secondly, at the early stages of a reform programme when the system is in a relatively poor performing state then more central direction is needed. This reflects the initial emphasis on national prescription as seen in the left-hand segment of the diagram. Over time, as competence and confidence increases the policy agenda and school practice moves towards the right-hand side of the diagram.

- Third, it should be no surprise to realise that the right-hand segment is relatively unknown territory. It implies horizontal and lateral ways of working with assumptions and governance arrangements very different from what is conventionally known. The main difficulty in imagining this landscape is that the thinking of most people is constrained by their experiences within the power structure and norms of the left-hand segment of the diagram, and the binary distinction between top-down and bottom-up.

- Finally, it needs to be reiterated that the transition from prescription to professionalism implied by the diagram is not easy to achieve. In order to move from one to the other, strategies are required that not only continue to raise standards, but also build capacity within the system through an emancipatory process.

It needs to be emphasised that successful school improvement is neither singularly system-led nor led by individual schools—it is best achieved by one supporting the other in an actively interdependent, mutually beneficial relationship. This is why **System Leadership** as the main driver of such an approach is so important. System leaders care about and work for the success of other schools as well as their own. They measure their success in terms of improving student learning and increasing achievement, and strive to both raise the bar and narrow the gap(s). Crucially they are willing to shoulder system leadership roles in the belief that in order to change the larger system you have to engage with it in a meaningful way' (Higham, Hopkins and Matthews 2009).

As has already been intimated, the transition from 'prescription' to 'professionalism' requires strategies that not only continue to raise standards but also build capacity and realise emancipation within the system. This point is key, one cannot just drive to continue to raise standards in an instrumental way, and one also needs to develop social, intellectual and organisational capital. Building capacity demands that we replace numerous central initiatives with a national consensus on a limited number of educational trends. The four drivers of personalised learning, professionalised teaching, networks and collaboration and intelligent accountability provide the core strategy for systemic improvement in most high performing – 'good to great' educational systems. They are the canvas on which system leadership is exercised (Hopkins 2007).
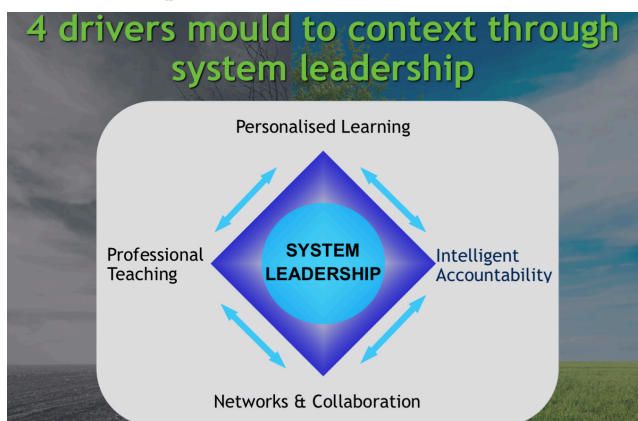

Figure 7: Diamond of Reform

As seen in **Figure 7**, the 'diamond of reform', the four trends coalesce and mould to context through the exercise of responsible system leadership. To reiterate the two crucial points: First, single reforms do not work, it is only clusters of linked policy initiatives that will provide the necessary traction; second, it is system leadership however that drives implementation and adapts policies to context.

Personalised Learning – The current focus on personalisation in many systems, is about putting students at the heart of the education process so as to tailor teaching to individual need, interest and aptitude in order to fulfill every young person's potential. Many schools and teachers have tailored curriculum and teaching methods to meet the needs of children and young people with great success for many years. What is new is the drive to make the best practices universal, as well as focusing on curriculum entitlement and choice, the development of a range of learning skills and the promotion of student well-being. A successful system of personalised learning means clear learning pathways through the education system and the motivation to become independent, e-literate, fulfilled, lifelong learners.

Professionalised Teaching – Significant empirical evidence suggests that teaching quality is the most significant factor influencing student learning that is under the control of the school. The phrase 'professionalised teaching' implies that teachers are on a par with other professions in terms of diagnosis, the application of evidence based practices and professional pride. The image here is of teachers who use data to evaluate the learning needs of their students, and are consistently expanding their repertoire of pedagogic strategies to personalise learning for all students. It also implies schools that adopt innovative approaches to timetabling and the deployment of increasingly differentiated staffing models, all in the quest for reducing within school variation.

Intelligent Accountability – Because of the resilience of external forms of accountability, it is often necessary to compensate by increasing the emphasis on internal forms of accountability. The most common approaches would be the use of teacher assessment, bottom-up target setting, value added measures of school performance and the school holding itself publicly accountable through publishing its own profile of strengths and weaknesses and benchmark comparisons giving a more rounded picture of the schools performance.

It is these forms of accountability that a) allow a sharper fix on the focus of personalisation; and b) develop the professional skill of the teaching staff involved.

As a consequence, when the balance between external and internal accountability becomes more even, it also becomes more 'intelligent' and appreciative. The assumption also is that over time, as schools increasingly lead reform, internal forms of accountability will become the more important.

Networking and Collaboration - This relates to the various ways in which networks of schools can stimulate and spread innovation as well as collaborate to provide curriculum diversity, extended services and community support. The prevalence of networking practice supports the contention that there is no contradiction between strong, independent schools and strong networks, rather the reverse. Nor is there a contradiction between collaboration and competition – many sectors of the economy are demonstrating that the combination of competition and collaboration delivers the most rapid improvements. Although evidence of effectiveness is still accumulating, it is becoming clear that networks support improvement and innovation by enabling schools to collaborate on building curriculum diversity, extended services and professional support to develop a vision of education that is shared and owned well beyond individual school gates.

However, to achieve system transformation requires a deeper form of networking that I am calling segmentation. **Segmentation** refers to the systematic and strategic collaboration of schools in order to positively exploit the natural diversity occurring within the system (Hopkins 2007). In order to be successful this 'segmentation approach' requires a fair degree of boldness in setting system level expectations and conditions. There are five implications in particular that have to be grappled with:

- There is a need to increase the resource of 'system leaders' who are willing and able to shoulder wider system roles. In doing so they are almost as concerned with the success and attainment of students in other schools as they are with their own.

- All failing and underperforming (and potentially low achieving) schools should have a leading school that works with them in either a formal grouping such as a Federation (where the leading school [Executive] Principal assumes overall control and accountability) or in more informal partnership.

- Schools should take greater responsibility for neighbouring schools in order to build capacity for continuous improvement at the local level. This would be on the condition that these schools provided extended services for all students within a geographic area, but equally on the acceptance that there would be incentives for doing so.

- The incentives for greater system responsibility should include significantly enhanced funding for students most at risk. Beyond incentivising local collaboratives, the potential effects for large scale long term reform include:

  - A more even distribution of 'at risk' students and associated increases in standards, due to more schools seeking to admit a larger proportion of 'at risk' students so as to increase their overall income.

  - A significant reduction of 'sink schools' even where 'at risk' students are concentrated, as there would be much greater potential to respond to the social-economic challenges, for example by paying more to attract the best teachers, or by developing excellent parental involvement and outreach services.

- A rationalisation of national, state and local agency functions and roles to allow the higher degree of regional co-ordination for this increasingly devolved system.

The four key drivers provide a core strategy for systemic improvement through building capacity whilst also raising standards of learning and achievement. It is **System Leadership** though that adapts them to particular and individual school contexts. This is leadership that enables systemic reform to be both generic in terms of overall strategy and specific in adapting to individual and particular situations. It needs to be made clear however that, as was intimated earlier, for transformation, System Leadership needs to be reflected at three levels:

- **System leadership at the school level** – with, at essence, Principals becoming almost as concerned about the success of other schools as they are about their own.

- **System leadership at the local/regional level** – with practical principles widely shared and used as a basis for local alignment with specific programmes developed for the most at risk groups.

- **System leadership at the national/state level** – with social justice, moral purpose and a commitment to the success of every learner providing the focus for transformation and collaboration system wide.

Coda

In concluding, it is important to remember that the challenge of school improvement and system reform has great moral depth to it. It addresses directly the learning needs of our students, the professional growth of teachers and enhances the role of the school as an agent of social change. This is why I have argued that as we imagine a new educational future so we require a new way of working capable of realising a future where every school is a great one. Through developing a coherent system reform strategy, re-balancing 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' change and moving to the 'inside-out', the systems that we work with have enhanced the life chances of increasing numbers of their students and are continuing to do so. They have demonstrated that the collective sharing of skills, expertise and experience creates much richer and more sustainable opportunities for rigorous transformation than can ever be provided by isolated institutions. It is this approach that will eventually lead towards 'every school a great school' as well as the 'good society.'

It is the 'good society' that critical theory, emancipation and the principles of authentic school improvement eventually and ineluctably lead us towards. It is fitting to conclude this Oration by reflecting on Amitai Etzioni's (2000) inspirational exhortation.

> We aspire to a society that is not merely civil but is good. A good society is one in which people treat one another as ends in themselves. And not merely as instruments; as whole persons rather than as fragments; as members of a community, bonded by ties of affection and commitment, rather than only as employees, traders, consumers or even as fellow citizens. In terms of the philosopher Martin Buber, a good society nourishes 'I-Thou' relations, although it recognises the inevitable and significant role of 'I-It' relations.

> The good society is an ideal. While we may never quite reach it, it guides our endeavours and we measure our progress by it.

> The vision of a good society is a tableau on which we project our aspirations, not a full checklist of all that deserves our dedication. And the vision is often reformulated as the world around us changes, and as we change. Moreover, it points to different steps that different societies best undertake, depending on their place on the Third Way.

> The Third Way is a road that leads us toward the good society. However, it should be acknowledged at the outset that the Third Way is indeed fuzzy at the edges, not fully etched.

> But this is one of the main virtues of this approach: it points to the directions that we ought to follow, but is neither doctrinaire nor a rigid ideological system.

Acknowledgements

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