

LEADING EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS AND SCHOOLS IN TIMES OF DISRUPTION AND EXPONENTIAL CHANGE



A CALL FOR COURAGE, COMMITMENT
AND COLLABORATION

PATRICK DUIGNAN

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Support for this Book

Leading Educational Systems and Schools in Times of Disruption and Exponential Change offers deep insight into the complex, metrics-dominated and radically evolving contexts in which leaders are currently immersed. Professor Duignan cautions us about pursuing old solutions to new challenges and constructs a compelling case for how leaders might adopt radically *new* approaches to their work. While the scale of this challenge can seem overwhelming, Patrick Duignan reveals the breakthrough opportunities it presents. He draws on the wisdom of authentic leadership research to guide contemporary leaders towards human-centred and values-guided clarity, when their moral compass might otherwise be spinning wildly in these times of unparalleled change. Professor Duignan's insights apply to leadership generically but he applies them in depth to educational contexts. This is a ground-breaking work of hope, purpose, progress and inspiration for all educational leaders.

Dr Greg Morgan
Allora Consulting – Leadership and Coaching,
West Launceston, Tasmania, Australia

In this book, Patrick Duignan provides a comprehensively researched account of the need for change in the way we approach educational leadership. His challenge is for us to act with urgency despite complexity and ambiguity, and to withstand the pull of gravity dragging us back to a safer, more orderly version of schooling. What education systems do, how they do it and the way in which they are led must change or else those education systems will become irrelevant. His firm belief in the role of ethics, human-centred learning, leadership that is authentic and positive cultures provides the stability that will help us to navigate the unknown. Duignan provides an essential resource for educational leaders that is designed not to spook or preach but to stimulate and motivate.

Trent Moy
Management Consulting – Director of Halide Ethics and
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Foreword

We are living in an age of disruption and exponential change, times that, arguably, the world has never seen or experienced before. These disruptions include big data, artificial intelligence, machine learning, blockchain, robots, digital automation and an explosion in the speed of connectivity, all of which are emblematic of what has been termed, ‘The Fourth Industrial Revolution’. According to Professor Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum, this revolution of skills and technology is disrupting almost every industry in the world (World Economic Forum, 2017). It extends from energy to education, mining to manufacturing, aviation to agriculture and it is pervasive and relentless.

In the context of education and schooling, the dynamics of the fourth industrial revolution bring with it a number of educational challenges, potential paradoxes and the need to re-imagine dominant assumptions, practices and beliefs about the ways in which we learn, teach and lead. These include the speed and duration of learning, the nature of knowledge boundaries, the role of the educator and the educative process; the continual tension of addressing and balancing equity and excellence; and an ongoing commitment to the personal formation of the individual and the utilitarian value of the current models of schooling informed by the toolkits of a former industrial age. The French Nobel Prize (2014) winning economist, Jean Tirole, points out that we must anticipate the challenge that has come with the digital revolution so we can adapt to it, adjust and thrive rather than merely endure as we have with previous discernible revolutions (Tirole quoted in Frydenberg, 2019, p. 2).

A challenging question, therefore, arises: Are the education and schooling sectors prepared to embrace this fourth industrial revolution? In his book, *Leading Educational Systems and Schools in Times of Disruption and Exponential Change: A Call for Courage, Commitment and Collaboration*, Patrick Duignan provides a well-crafted narrative about the ‘why’, ‘how’ and ‘what’ of the fourth industrial revolution, especially the implications, opportunities and possibilities for the education and schooling sectors. Duignan issues a ‘call to action’ – a ‘clarion call’ for a distinctive form of system and school leadership to not only survive but to thrive in these disrupted and uncertain times; he concludes that educational leaders at all levels will be required to act with *courage*, *commitment* and a willingness to *collaborate*. He uses this leadership frame to explore and analyse contemporary educational leadership practices, by providing commentary and analyses from a diverse range of sources, and makes a series of recommendations

on ways in which educators and educational leaders can achieve transformations in the architectures of schools and schooling; pedagogy for rapidly changing educational environments; and technological connectivity and networking for a future that is presently unimaginable. He claims that educational leaders, including teachers, will need to change their leadership theories and practices if they wish to remain relevant and successful in a constantly disrupted future.

Duignan encourages leaders in education to be braver, to lead with new mindsets; rethink their assumptions; question the relevance of current customs and practices; and challenge the hegemonic notions of what is valued, measured and celebrated by policymakers, system leaders and broader communities of interests, that are currently an integral part of our education sectors. He recommends that educational leaders develop their ethical and moral guidance systems, inspired by core values, moral purpose and authentic processes and practices, in order to navigate shifting and dynamic pathways through environments of uncertainty and change. He also recommends that educational leaders at all levels need to act with curiosity in order to carefully examine and analyse the challenging, confronting and disruptive questions that are necessary for the 'flourishing' of school systems and schools now and into an uncertain future. Educators must according to Duignan lead the discourse and ask the important and 'right' questions for this age.

Leaders of schools and education systems will, he claims, need to be more courageous by issuing invitations to collaborate and be potentially vulnerable, to jointly explore questions to which there is no immediate 'solution' and to be open to broader perspectives. In such circumstances he notes that educational leaders will require dispositions and capabilities to: collaborate across boundaries; create and leverage networks; embrace polarities, paradoxes and tensions; and leverage wisdom and advice from a diverse range of settings and sources. Duignan's book is a compelling read; one that challenges all educators to take action and clearly display a commitment to re-shaping the educational experiences and life chances for all current and future students. His discussions, analyses and recommendations will provide valuable insights for educational policymakers, leaders at system and school levels, leadership researchers and those responsible for leadership training programmes, including leadership professional development, in University settings around the world.

Dr Stephen Brown has a highly successful track record as an Educational Leader at system levels in different state systems in Australia. In 2010, he formed the *Queensland Educational Leadership Institute*, an innovative not-for-profit organisation committed to delivering excellence in leadership by supporting education leaders to establish a strong vision, improve student outcomes and lead change in their school context and wider school communities. In 2016, Dr Brown established the global professional services company, *The Brown Collective* – a company of international experts, specialising in providing customised responses to enhance individual, team and organisational performance. Today, the Collective has an extensive national and international client base and a deep understanding of the challenges that exist within the education and related sectors in their preparations for an unknown and uncertain future.

Acknowledgements

A tribute to a dear friend, colleague and educator *extraordinaire* The late Dr Paul Brock

Dr Paul Brock was a popular, beloved and much celebrated educator who worked at the University of New England, New South Wales (NSW), Australia, and later for the Department of Education, NSW, before his untimely death due to motor neuron disease in 2016. He was a personal and professional friend. He was noted nationally and internationally for his scholarship and his mission to provide a better education for all young people everywhere, but, especially those disadvantaged and/or being treated unjustly. In the conclusion to his 2011 Australian Council for Educational Leaders' Monograph *Towards Schooling in the 21st Century: 'Back to the Basics' Or 'Forward to Fundamentals?'* he pleaded that future teachers of his two daughters, Sophie and Millie, to abide by three fundamental principles that should underpin teaching and learning in all schools. His passionately felt manifesto for educating young people, especially his two daughters, provides a heart-felt introduction to this book:

First, nurture and challenge my daughters' intellectual and imaginative capacities way out to horizons unsullied by self-fulfilling minimalist expectations. Don't patronise them with lowest common denominator blancmange masquerading as knowledge and learning; nor crush their love for learning through boring pedagogy.

Don't bludgeon them with mindless 'busy work' and limit the exploration of the world of evolving knowledge merely to the tyranny of repetitively churned-work-recycled worksheets. Ensure that there is legitimate progression of learning from one day, week, month, term and year to the next.

Second, care for Sophie and Millie with humanity and sensitivity, as developing human beings worthy of being taught with genuine respect, enlightened discipline and imaginative flair.

And third, please strive to maximise their potential for later schooling, post-school education training and employment, and for the quality of life itself so that they can contribute to and enjoy the fruits of living within an Australian society that is fair, just, tolerant, honourable, knowledgeable, prosperous and happy.

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When all is said and done, surely this is what every parent and every student should be able to expect of school education: not only as delivered within every public school in NSW, but within every school not only in Australia but throughout the entire world. (Brock, 2011, p. 24)

Thank you, Paul! Your wisdom from the soul constitutes a valued addendum to the arguments presented throughout this book, especially in the final chapter. Your credo represents a refreshing perspective on educational leadership and its possible positive influence on the quality of teaching, learning and learning outcomes, which will be more in tune with and better nuanced, for forming and reforming learning architectures and students' school experiences now and into the future. Throughout the research for and the writing of this book, I held Paul's pleas to educators on behalf of his own children constantly in my mind, and I am grateful to him for inspiring me to persist through the ups and downs of completing this treatise on reforming our educational systems and schools.