



How to ... perceive change leadership as a journey?

Graham Handscomb considers the merits of leaders tapping into improvement trajectories and taking the long view.

■ ■ A changing scene

This HOW TO piece begins by looking at a range of thinking and approaches to leading individual and organisation change and will explore how these have developed in the research literature over past forty years or so. Indeed Andy Hargreaves argues that “in education strategies for bringing about change have themselves changed over time, over three or four decades” (2010, extract from video). In the first video extract link below he characterises these changes in terms of three different

phases or “ways” – the innovation of the 1960s/1970s which was not sufficiently “pulled together”; followed by the era of “enforced competition” which created energy but also gave rise to a good deal of micro-management; and then finally the “third way” which emphasised combining the public and private sector.

In the following videos Hargreaves outlines what he calls a “fourth way” of approaching the whole issue of leading individual and organisational change. In the first extract he outlines the main features as including:





- Inspiring an inclusive vision or dream.
- The capacity of the organisation to work with their communities and to value them.
- The ability to use data but not be driven by it; instead to use it as the basis for the enquiry, as communities together in how organisations can improve.
- Recognition that organisations need to work together for a common good; that the strong should help the weak and that sometimes you can achieve more by collaborating with your competitors.

In contrast to messages coming from, for instance the highly influential McKinsey reports (Barber, Whelan and Clark, 2010; Mourshed, Chijioke and Barber, 2010), Hargreaves emphasises that at the core of the fourth way is “not being number 1 or having vaguely world class standards, but having a strong dream of how we want to be and how to achieve it” (2010, extract from video).

■ ■ Taking the long view

Patterns and trajectories of change

Hallinger and Heck (2011) see school improvement as a journey and that taking this perspective has significant implications for how we view leading individual and organisational change. They conducted research which sought to understand how changes in school leadership were related to changes in school improvement capacity and growth in student learning over a four year period in 200 United States elementary schools. Drawing on their previous research (Hallinger and Heck, 2010) they started by characterising the schools according to three “latent change trajectories”: *stable*, *improving* and *declining* respectively. They then investigated whether it was possible to identify common patterns among the improvement trajectories of the schools (Hallinger and Heck, 2011, page 2). They saw the significance of their research in terms of “establishing whether it is possible to identify underlying patterns of improvement in the performance of schools over a substantial period of time” (page 2).

■ ■ Professional learning task: Dreaming the dream?

View the two brief videos in the links below, and read the following extract from the second video about what Hargreaves says is the core principle of his “fourth way”. How compelling do you feel his argument is for a new fourth way approach in contrast to what has gone before? Do you agree with his emphasis on the importance of having a strong dream or do you find this idealistic and lacking in practical details? What questions would you wish to ask in order to critique and explore this approach further?

[Video link 1: Hargreaves \(2010\) Systems Thinking in Action Conference Preview. 6.48 minutes](#)

[Video link 2: Hargreaves \(2011\) Principles of the Fourth Way. 3.08 minutes](#)

“The core (of the 4th Way) is the idea that what matters most, what drives you, what lifts you, what pulls you together is having some kind of inspiring dream of what you want to be, before you decide how high you want to be. The third way is really about being world class, or being top, or raising the bar, or narrowing the gap. The 4th Way is really about what person you want to be; what kind of contribution do you want to make in the world; what your school will emphasise; what your District or State is all about. The first thing is the dream and that drives and articulates/animates everything else”

Hargreaves (2011, extract from video).

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Their conclusions emphasise that any attempt of leaders to bring about change in their schools needs to take account of the school's specific contextual features and also of its particular change journey or trajectory. This is also echoed by Chapman (2006) when considering leading schools facing challenging circumstances. He identifies the need for a "fit between the (improvement) programme and the school's developmental needs" (page 148). Indeed Hallinger and Heck take issue with the worldwide broad brush practice of calling on such schools to produce development or improvement plans that take little or no account of the school's improvement patterns or trajectory.

Professional learning task: The unique situation of each school

Read the following extract which sets out Hallinger and Heck's perspective on the importance of taking into account individual school trajectories. To what extent does your experience accord with this view? What implications does the "unique set of challenges" that comprise each school's improvement journey raise for the process of school development/improvement planning?

"Across the globe, governments have undertaken strategies to restructure schools that fail to meet minimum standards of learning performance. This is readily apparent, for example, in the USA and the UK, where sustained levels of poor performance can trigger extreme measures including the replacement of principals and teachers, or even closure of schools. In this new policy climate, schools are now routinely required to formulate school improvement or development plans that focus on student learning outcomes. Yet, shaping an evidence-based plan that meets the needs of a particular school's context (or conditions) remains a challenge."

(Day et al., 2010; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Jackson, 2000) ...

"In our view, these "conditions" include not only important features of the context (e.g., student composition, school size, school level) but also the location (i.e., current status) and trajectory (i.e., stable, declining, improving) of the school on its "journey" of school improvement. One can say that these factors combine to create a "unique set of challenges" for each school."

(Hallinger and Heck, 2011, page 21 & 22)

The benefits of longitudinal research

The work of Day et al, 2010 (which explored the contribution of leadership to pupil outcomes over a three year period), and many others, has highlighted the value to be gained by looking at schools over a period of time when seeking to understand the leadership of change. Hallinger and Heck (2011) are adamant that we will only achieve a robust understanding of valid strategies and practices for school improvement if we include "the analysis of longitudinal data that describe the educational conditions in and performance of relatively large numbers of schools over time." They point to there being, until recent times, a paucity of such longitudinal research which has "stalled progress

in identifying and understanding patterns of change in the improvement of schools" (Hallinger and Heck, 2011, page 5).

In the *Change over Time?* project Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) set out to investigate the sustainability of educational change by looking retrospectively at how various educational change forces have exerted effects across eight secondary schools, in two countries, during three decades. So it sought to look at schools as entities with a life span of many years and how they were affected by societal and political developments over this extended period of time. Interviews were conducted with 186 teachers with 50 repeat interviews or questionnaires with teachers and administrators. The researchers claimed that:



“The project has analyzed change longitudinally and retrospectively, through the eyes of teachers and administrators, over a good deal longer period than the 5 years that contemporaneous studies normally allow ... It has sought to tell a story of action within a theory of context ... involving significant and sometimes epochal changes in the wider social, economic, and political landscape that have affected schools as institutions and the lives and missions of those working within them ...

The Change Over Time? project demonstrates the importance and necessity of taking a historical perspective on educational change if change efforts are to be sustainable achievements rather than matters of only transient interest ... Among researchers, change needs to be viewed in the rearview mirror of reflection and not just placed in the service of policy makers’ driving ambition for political success” (Hargreaves and Goodson, 2006, pages 6, 7 and 35)

Professional learning task: Learning over time

What is your view about looking at change in schools over such an extended period?
What do you think are the benefits and what practical problems do you think would be encountered in such an investigation?

Context counts

The last section looked at the importance of looking at schools over time and also in their own context when considering the leadership of change. The research of Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris Hopkins (2006) and subsequently of Day et al (2010) emphasised this crucial element of the way in which leaders used their range of improvement strategies in relationship with *their particular and unique school context*. This relationship is a dynamic one, i.e. not a case of the context determining or narrowing the leadership function, but rather the leader interacting with and being creatively responsive to the context:

“heads in more effective schools are successful in improving pupil outcomes through who they are – their values, virtues dispositions, attributes and competences - the strategies they use, and the specific combination and timely implementation and management of these strategies in the unique contexts in which they work”. (Day et al, 2009, page 195)

The ways in which leaders apply these basic leadership practices – not the practices themselves – demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work. (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins, 2006, page 3)

Cultural context is also significant. Hallinger and Kantamara consider the tension between the “cultural and institutional differences in the context of schooling as well as the nature of successful school leadership” on the one hand, and the drive for “global dissemination” of school improvement programmes” on the other (Hallinger and Kantamara, 2001, page 386). Harber and Muthuhrishna argue that “effectiveness or otherwise of schools must be understood contextually as there are significant differences between both the material and ideological contexts of schooling” (Harber and Muthuhrishna, 2000, page 421). So they state that, for instance, in the South African context education for peace and democracy is an essential feature of school effectiveness. Similarly when reflecting on the Thailand cultural context Hallinger and Kantamara say that their work has led them to believe that there are culturally grounded differences in people’s responses to change. Drawing on the work of Hofstede (1980) they identify the following as appearing to be highly relevant to understanding personal and organizational responses to change:

- the role of the individual versus the group;
 - the type and strength of the social hierarchy;
 - the degree to which people are comfortable with uncertainty, and
 - the emphasis on product versus process.
- (Hallinger and Kantamara, 2001, page 405).

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The fundamental importance of context also featured in Mortimore’s comparative study of schools in Singapore and London, the main findings of which were:

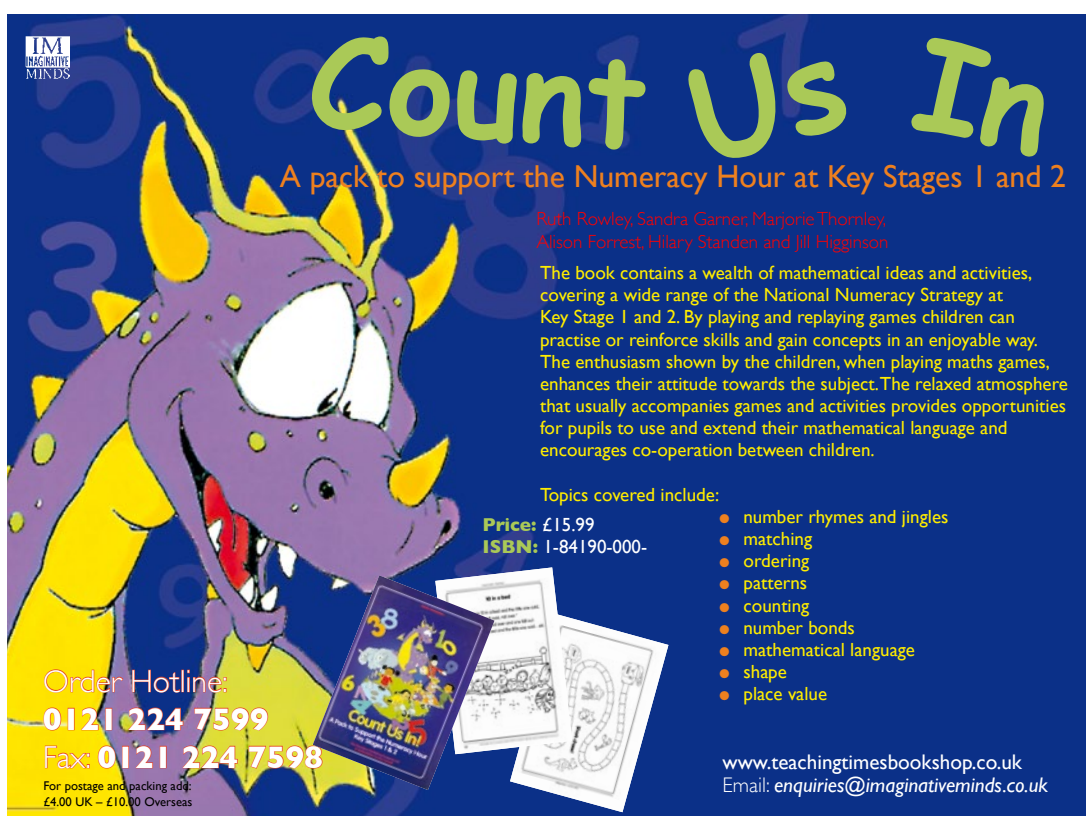
- Improvement techniques must fit with the grain of society rather than go against it.
- Indiscriminate borrowing from other cultures may not achieve the desired results.
- (In line with other studies of school improvement)

there is no “quick fix” for school improvement. (Mortimore, 2001, page 238)

Professional learning task: Going with the grain?

What do you think is meant by the phrase: *Improvement techniques must fit with the grain of society rather than go against it?* What are the issues involved for and against this statement?

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