Why is School Reform Difficult, and Frequently Problematic?

The 21st Century Learning Initiative is a transnational association of researchers, policymakers and educational professionals committed to facilitating new approaches to learning which draw upon a range of insights into the human brain, the functioning of human societies, and learning as a self-organising activity. It was established in Washington DC in 1996 and grew out of the English Education 2000 Trust founded in 1983.

John Abbott, the Director of the Initiative and author of this Paper, was largely educated in the ’50s; trained and became a teacher in the ’60s; was appointed Headmaster in the mid ’70s, and resigned in 1985 “because”, he argued, “bureaucracy was getting in the way of good education”. Subsequently appointed Director of the Education 2000 Trust he was seconded ten years later to Washington DC to establish the Initiative, and to consider its role in the development of educational policy. He has travelled and lectured widely around the world having been, at various stages, a consultant to USAiD, the UN Education Development Agency, and for five years to the Canadian Council on Learning. His most recent book is Overschooled but Undereducated which, together with the Initiative’s ‘Parliamentary Briefing Paper on the Design Faults at the Heart of British Education’ (2009) are the basis for this Paper.

Both the book and the Briefing Paper argue for reuniting thinking with doing, and moving beyond the limitations of the school reform agenda towards a fundamental transformation of education.

An Overview. Questions about school reform are being asked with increasing frequency in many countries, especially those seeking to adapt to rapidly changing social, economic and political turmoil. A range of indicators suggest, however, that after a couple of decades of intensive effort and vast expenditure of funds the results of several English-speaking countries remain problematic. This Paper comprises three sections. In Section 1.0 the Initiative offers an explanation for why, in the light of recent research on the nature of human learning, the present Western, essentially Anglo-American, system of schooling is both upside down in terms of its distribution of resources, and inside out in terms of its excessive dependence on school-as-place; on formal as opposed to informal learning, and on the teacher as instructor rather than as facilitator. Once the entire system is redesigned on the basis of constructivist and enquiry-based practice, then student dependence on teacher and school will begin to decrease with age. This will allow a growth in student choice and responsibility so escaping from the present dilemma of squeezing out-dated systems to perform in ways which truly release human potential at hitherto unprecedented levels.

Section 1.2 explains the ideas as applied in a Canadian province – British Columbia. Section 2.1 sets out a proposal made in the United Kingdom, based on a simplification of the argument. Section 2.2 gives possible reasons for its rejection. Section 3 seeks to relate the British Columbian and British situations to what Michael Fullan (2011) calls “the Right and Wrong Drivers of Whole Systems Change”.

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1 See appendix 1.
1.1. “Schools” in the Future: What has to change, and why

How humans learn – and consequently how children should be brought up – has concerned the elders of society for longer than records have existed. It is referred to as the nature/nurture issue – how much of what we are is a result of what we have been born with and to what extent is this (or can this be) enhanced by the way we are brought up? That there is no easy answer to this question concerned the Greeks as much as it did our Victoria ancestors, and is as lively an issue today for the proponents of ‘outcome-based education’ as it is for those who argue for teaching children how to think for themselves. Given what we now know from research into how children learn is there an alternative way of doing things and would this benefit children and society alike?

Current thinking about the nurture/nature issue polarises around three beliefs, each of which was articulated at least 2,500 years ago;

i. Plato taught that the effectiveness of the human brain was all to do with inheritance – those born to be leaders had gold in their blood, those to be administrators, with silver, while the common man (the vast majority) had only iron. To Plato destiny was fixed at the moment of conception.

ii. Not so, said the ancient Hebrews, it’s all far more dynamic than that, so “do not confine your children to your own learning, for they were born in another time”. Learning – to those ancient seers from the desert – was dependent on taking the wisdom accumulated by your ancestors and (and this was critical to the Jews) adapting it to ever-changing circumstances.

iii. Half a world away in China, Confucius noted that “man’s natures are alike, it is their habits that carry them far apart.” Confucius reminded all those who would listen that “tell a child and he will forget; show him and he will remember; but let him do, and he will understand”. While any observant parent will readily agree with such an observation, some politicians will dismiss this simply as ‘failed child-centred or progressive dogma’.

In today’s world, do these issues have any value? Are they conflicting explanations or can contemporary scientific research show how each actually expresses one aspect of what shapes human learning ... and what might this mean for pupils at Eton College, a comprehensive school, a bush school in Tanzania, or in the school districts of British Columbia?

It was only 150 years ago that Darwin proposed in The Origin of Species that all life is a “work in progress” and subject to continuous, long-term adaptations. Only in the last half century (and essentially in the last 25 years) has biomedical technology, linked up with genetics, evolutionary studies, systems thinking and anthropology, to help explain how the human brain has been shaped by the way our ancestors adapted to their environment. It was only in 1962 that Crick and Watson unravelled the double-helix of the DNA molecule, so enabling scientists subsequently to understand how intellectual processes, developed by our ancestors hundreds of thousands of generations before, still shape the structure of the brain of a baby born within the past five minutes.

Equipped with such technologies, cognitive scientists now see the human brain as being like a veritable archaeological paradise with varying mental predispositions, reflecting adaptations made thousands of generations ago, and subsequently laid one upon another like strata in a geological sequence and – and this is the essence of so much recent research – transmitted genetically to subsequent generations. For instance, the neural networks we use for language ride piggy-back on those much older networks earlier developed for vision, meaning that today we find it much easier to think in terms of pictures and stories, rather than abstract theory, while our ability to ‘read faces’ owes more to the development of empathy a million and more years
ago, than to the much more recent development of using language to describe features.

Steadily, scientists are coming to appreciate that humans, together with all their likes and dislikes, reflect those deep-seated adaptations made by their early ancestors as they adjusted to ancient environmental problems. These ancient adaptations still shape the way we think and act today, and explain our preferred way of doing things. It is this variety of adaptations that account for the complex twists, turns and convolutions in the grain of our brain.

As of now, cognitive scientists see the brain as having all the texture and resilience of a piece of ancient oak, rather than the uni-dimensional nature of a piece of pre-formed chipboard – you can do almost anything with the oak but only one thing with the chipboard. Our brains are so special just because, in comparison with any other species, they bear the deep imprint of the history of our species and it is that which makes the baby’s brain of today eventually highly adaptable and open to learning. We are enormously empowered by ancestral experience but we consistently under-perform when driven to live in ways that are utterly uncongenial to such inherited traits and predispositions.

From this perspective, most of the schools that today’s children attend were designed when prevailing cultures assumed that children were born to be taught rather than to learn. Which is why, for so many children, the wonder of learning has been replaced by the tedium of trying to remember what they were told by somebody else about something that really didn’t interest them very much in the first place.

So what of the cultural factors that have shaped the way schools currently do things? Two thousand years ago the Greeks invented the modern school to supplement and regulate young people’s innate desire to reason things out for themselves. They defined a school as a place of pleasurable activity where children between the ages of 7-14 spent one-third of their time learning the arts of the grammarian (writing, mathematics and the art of oratory), one-third on drama and music, and one-third on gymnastics. Only such a balanced education, the Greeks believed passionately, would fit a man for the responsibility of being a citizen in a democracy.

Conquered by the more methodical and mundane Romans, the Latin version of school became something very different. Replacing the philosophic concerns of the Greeks with the need to ensure compliance with laws, the schools of the Roman Empire became preoccupied with rote learning. Describing his time in a school in Rome, circa 325AD, the young man one day to be known as St Augustine wrote in his diary “Oh my God, how I suffered. What torments and humiliations I experienced. I was told that because I was a mere boy, I had to obey my teachers in everything. I was sent to school. I did not understand what I was taught. I was beaten for my ignorance. I never found out what use school was supposed to be.”

Because the Romans had little sympathy with Aristotle’s humanistic belief that “all men by nature desire knowledge” they treated their children somewhat as they treated their slaves – they frightened them into learning with the threat of being beaten. That was to become the practice of European schools for more than 1,000 years. Learning was forced on children. School became a place of social control where Shakespeare’s “whining schoolboy with his satchel and shining morning face crept like a snail unwillingly to school.”

The first book ever written in English about education was The Scholemaster by Roger Ascham in 1570, and this set the pattern for post-Reformation (i.e. non-church delivered) schooling – e.g. the Boston Latin School of 1643. Ascham argued against the excessive use of fear as a motivation for learning; he encouraged the development of “hard wits” not “quick wits”, but then added a most curious third injunction: “more is learned in one hour of theoretical study than in 20 hours of learning through experience”. To the English Protestant teachers it was their responsibility to censor what a child learned for fear, wrote Ascham, that pupils might rush off to Rome and while studying classical literature be corrupted by the sexually-explicit statues and mosaics then being rescued by the archaeologists. In so doing, Ascham set the schoolteacher and the
Classroom apart from the experience of ordinary men who had to adjust their lives to the requirements of everyday experience.

It was only in the mid 16th Century that the word ‘education’ entered the English language. The word is based on the Latin educare meaning to ‘lead out’ in the sense of a general leading his troops out from the security of the defended camp on to the problematic field of battle. The Roman armies owed their success to the maintenance of perfect discipline and the insistence that every soldier only do what he was ordered to do. Transmitted into the world of education, such a literal definition saw learning as doing what you were told. This narrow definition of education isolated the world of the school from the workaday experience of ordinary people who, through the rigorous development of apprenticeship and learning-on-the-job propelled England into leading the world into the Industrial Revolution on the broad backs and the skilful hands of numerous, reflective, self-aware craftsmen.

Few academics, and certainly no schoolteachers at the time speculated on why it was that some Englishmen from the most obscure backgrounds with little or no formal schooling — like John Harrison who invented the marine chronometer, or Thomas Newcombe who made a steam pump to lift water in 1712, or William Smith the self-taught surveyor who made the world’s first geological map in 1795 — achieved more from direct experience than did their school pupils learn from theory.

Attempting to bridge that divide between the classical version of education and the apprenticeship model of learning, the Earl of Chesterfield wrote to his son in 1746, “do not imagine that the knowledge which I so much recommend to you, is confined to books, pleasing, useful and necessary as that knowledge is for the knowledge of the world is only to be acquired in the word, and not in a closet. Books alone will never teach it to you; but they will suggest many things to your observation which might otherwise escape you”. The Industrial Revolution, while making England phenomenally rich, destroyed that earlier social cohesion that had created the genius of the applied craftsmen. Eventually a form of elementary schooling was established early in the 19th century as a means of social control of the poor, and the old local town grammar schools were replaced by elite secondary boarding schools available only to those who could afford them.

Then in 1859 the publication of The Origin of Species shook Western thinking — science, religion and philosophy — to its roots by arguing that all species, humans included, were simply “works in progress”, prototypes in the process of being refined by experience. The medical profession leapt at such a theory and subsequently used it as the basis for modern medicine so giving humanity a ‘user guide’ to the operation of the body. Darwin was initially nervous about extending his theory to the operation of the human brain, but concluded his book with a challenge to the newly-established subject of psychology by claiming that “this will be based on a new foundation, that of the necessary acquirement of each mental process by gradation (evolution). Light will then be thrown on the origins of man and his history.”

Psychology just did not know how to deal with the principles of evolution. As a formal discipline, psychology had only been established two years earlier as a hybrid of philosophy (a much-respected ancient discipline) and physiology (a new white-coat laboratory-based subject that concentrated on the functioning of animal muscles) — so creating a most uncomfortable partnership. Lacking any technology able to understand, at a molecular level, how the brain might work, psychology turned its back on Darwin, claiming the brain to be the same now as it had been in the past and would be in the future. To psychologists, the brain was simply a mysterious ‘black box’, there was nothing in it that had not been put there by external agencies during the individual’s own life.

For just over a hundred years (up to the 1970s when the oldest of today’s teachers were being trained) psychology ignored any suggestion that the brain might be a product of evolutionary processes. While medical science used evolutionary theory to, in practice, double people’s life expectancy, psychology allowed itself
to be shaped by the Behaviourists who regarded the brain as simply an input/output system.

The Behaviourists claimed that nothing which could not be studied and measured ever existed. This provided the basis for two theories which have done enormous damage to many generations of children. The first was the Behaviourists’ belief that they could define the exact nature of every input which, if properly delivered, could produce the perfect child as defined by them in advance. The management of external motivation, and the construction of a closed environment, was the essence of behaviourism – the child’s progress was totally dependent on the brilliance of the teacher, and had absolutely nothing to do with its inheritance or personal experiences. There was one exception, and that was the expectation running very strongly in the 1930s that a way could be found of developing tests that could so assess the natural ‘quality’ of an individual child’s brain that such tests could predict a child’s innate intelligence as young as the age of 11.

These two ideas were largely contradictory but, lacking the technologies to study the brain objectively, they convinced themselves that the brain was born without any structural preferences to learn in particular ways. Consequently, educational policy makers in England and several other places persuaded themselves in the mid-1940s that psychologists had perfected tests which were of such diagnostic accuracy that they could detect the 25% of children deemed (following the teaching of Plato) to be capable of receiving a classical education; the next 15% fitted for technical skills, while the remainder should go for a limited number of years to a Modern school as a precursor to manual employment.

One further theory has to be understood. The almost total collapse of apprenticeship in the late nineteenth century left young adolescents bereft of any useful work to do. Gilbert S Hall, President of the American Psychological Association, claimed in 1904 that adolescence was a dangerous aberration (something which should not be happening) from which children needed to be protected for their own good – that protection, he argued strongly, should involve keeping adolescents in school for ever longer and giving them so much work to do that this adolescent urge to do their own thing could be bypassed.

In all this lies the origin of today’s Western, especially Anglo, model of schooling (specifically the establishment of locally-elected School Boards in the 1870s); age-related classes assumed to be progressing at a uniform rate; skills and knowledge delivered via subject-specific disciplines; a custodial role for social development confused with a degree of willingness with which a child accepted the ethos of the school; more funds allocated to the education of older pupils leaving the youngest children to be taught in the largest classes; the increased marginalisation of home and community as an integral component of learning; the retention of teenagers in school to ‘save’ them from the turmoil of adolescence, and the training of teachers being more concerned with the preparation of subject specific instruction than with the development of pedagogic strategies informed by philosophy and the research into the nature of human learning.

This basic model has not changed in more than half a century and largely reflects the thinking of the Behaviourists, and the belief in the unchanging nature of human intelligence. No amount of tinkering around the edges will change this – hence today’s frustrations amongst those who understand the importance of this research and how, without significant structural change, pupils will continue to under-perform.

There is one social, economic imperative to be added. Over the past 30 years the aim of education has progressively shifted away from the creation of the all-round child to satisfying the ‘new economic imperative of supply-side investment for national prosperity’. A dangerous confusion has entered the public mind: although most people would deny this in terms of their own personal experience, the public have been convinced by the statisticians that the more paper qualifications children can accumulate the better prepared they will be to think for themselves in a world that looks increasingly problematic. Yet the experience of many is that by continuing to over-emphasise the role of the school and outcome-
based education, national jurisdictions have allowed themselves to so over-school their young people that they are effectively under-educating them.

Some people, some provinces, some school districts, and even individual schools have known this for some time but find that despite their best attempts to break clear of this they are totally frustrated by the legalistic arrangements of recent years which are aimed at squeezing still further life out of an out-dated, and increasingly dysfunctional, system. The traditional factory model is incompatible with the idea that students are workers, that learning must be active, and that children learn in different ways and at different rates.

That dysfunction has been given scientific objectivity by the findings of recent research:

- The brain is driven by curiosity and the need to make sense of all its many experiences.
- Intelligence is more than just a general capacity to learn; it is shrewdness, cleverness and knowledge all rolled together with emotional intuition, balance and a strong sense of practicality. Essentially it is about cognitive and emotional self-regulation, the ability to apply ‘intelligence’ in a self-reflective and meaningful way.
- The brain is empowered by the experience of its ancestors with ‘predispositions’ opening up like windows of opportunity at those stages of life which evolution has found are the most appropriate to the individual’s development.
- Children’s search for meaning starts very young. It is those children who are already anxious to make sense of issues that matter to them in their own private lives, who come to formal schooling anxious to use whatever it can offer them to help their personal objectives. Not the other way around.
- The adolescent brain is a critical evolutionary adaptation that has built up over thousands of generations, and is essential to our species’ survival. Adolescence forces young people in every generation to think beyond their own self-imposed limitations, and exceed their parent’s aspirations. Adolescence is an opportunity, not a threat.

- The brain works best when it is building on what it already knows; when it is working in complex, situated circumstances, and when it accepts the significance of what it is doing. It is at its best when it is exercised in highly challenging but low-threat environments.
- Given the inherent limitations of schooling it seems essential for a child to have an intellectual life outside school. Thus equipped, the child is in a position to use schooling as a source of learning opportunities without being drawn into short-cut strategies that work well for handling school-based tasks but often lead nowhere in the life-long development of expertise.
- Learning is an immensely complex business, so, to put faith in a highly directive, prescriptive curriculum, is to so go ‘against the grain of the brain’, that it inhibits creativity and enterprise......the very skills needed in the complex, diverse economy and community for which we need to prepare our children.

Cognitive scientists, working alongside neurobiologists and anthropologists, have become much interested in the processes that make apprenticeship such a successful model of learning. They advocate a Constructivist approach to learning, with its progressive deepening of earlier understandings, and the joining together of what had earlier been separate, disconnected ideas. It is through experience mixed with reflection that humans weave their own experiences and knowledge of the world into unique patterns. Constructivists see the role of the teacher as ‘guide on the side’ rather than the conventional ‘sage on the stage’.

Cognitive apprenticeship takes constructivism a stage further by showing how our brains, over vast periods of time, have become conditioned to learn through a process of (1) Showing – the ‘teacher’ or parent, craftsman or artist captures the imagination of a young learner who becomes sufficiently intrigued to want to know how to do it for itself; (2) Coaching – the ‘teacher’ shows the novice learner how to identify the sub tasks that have first to be completed, each with its own particular form of expertise; (3) Scaffolding – the ‘teacher’ provides sufficient temporary support as learners go beyond what they had earlier thought.
were the limits of their skills; (4) Fading – the ‘teacher’ has to be as proficient at removing the scaffolding when it is more appropriate to the individual to struggle to stand on his or her feet, as they had been when putting the scaffolding in place; finally (5) Dialogue – through the whole of the apprentice / master relationship the novice learner shares ideas with other learners as they try to describe what they are doing and reflect on the outcome. “Learning is not time-out from productive activity; learning is the very heart of productive activity”.

Within a cognitive apprenticeship both the task, and the process of achieving it, are made highly visible from the beginning. The student understands where they are going and why. Learners have access to expertise in action. They watch each other, get to understand the incremental stages and establish benchmarks against which to measure their progress. These are the processes that are at the heart of apprenticeship. They have evolved over thousands of generations as parents sought the most effective way of helping their children to understand the world. It is what Confucius understood intuitively when he advocated going from “telling” to “showing” to eventually “understanding”.

The definition of success was when the apprentice could demonstrate that Jack was as good as his master, and maybe even better.

Contemporary research takes us beyond the Roman definition of obeying the rules, to the ultimate aim of modern education as the weaning of the novice of his dependence on someone else. “It is a bad teacher,” the philosopher Nietzsche wrote, “whose pupils remain dependent upon him”. This is best defined in terms of Subsidiarity, another Hebrew concept recorded in the book of Exodus, and now inscribed within the framework of the European Union constitution as meaning: “It is wrong for a superior to hold the right of making decisions which an inferior is already able to make for himself.”

Subsidiarity is not the same as delegation where a pre-designed task is assigned to a junior to carry out on your behalf, largely in the way you defined, and then to be answerable to you for completing it to your satisfaction. Subsidiarity could not be more different. Like parents letting go of their children, or a shipbuilder sending his boat into unknown waters, so Subsidiarity is a relationship of trust, not control. Subsidiarity is the exact opposite of Behaviourism.

The problem we all share, as we try to shape a new model of schooling is that we ourselves were often trained as Behaviourists and are now required to lead a revolution about a very different kind of process.

“The method people naturally employ to acquire knowledge is largely unsupported by traditional classroom practice. The human mind is better equipped to gather information about the world by operating within it than by reading about it, hearing lectures on it, or studying abstract models of it. Nearly everyone would agree that experience is the best teacher, but what many fail to realise is that experience may well be the only teacher.”

(Santa Fe Institute 1994)

Elements of Change Required:
Summary

The weight of this research strongly supports a number of elements that cannot be provided in current systems. Schools and administrators have made many changes, but have largely reached the practical as well as the legislative edge of what we can do alone. These changes can be summarised as:

1. Individualized learning paths versus pre-programmed paths from which students choose their course of study.
2. A much greater emphasis on experiential and situational learning, especially as students get older.
3. A much greater emphasis on constructivist and inquiry-based practices.
4. A much greater use of community members and organizations in the direct delivery of educational programs, and in the support of apprentice-like learning outside the school.
5. The evolution of the teacher from the role of instructor when children are young to a much more complex and professional role of learning facilitator as students get older.
6. A student-teacher ratio that varies greatly depending on age and learning activity (this is NOT about class size as we know it)
7. A de-emphasis of courses from Reception through to Grade 12 and a move toward ensuring deep learning that matches developmental levels, and is naturally interdisciplinary.
8. Rich assessment and reporting based on competencies rather than courses or disciplines, and that uses language and artefacts rather than scores to show achievement.
10. A sliding scale of student dependency on teacher and school-as-place that decreases with age, so allowing growth in student choice and responsibility.

Conclusion

Obvious as all this will appear to many in disparate parts of the world who have studied Overschooled but Undereducated, to others the changes are virtually too big to contemplate. “A big challenge, a tall order?” wrote a recent reviewer in The Irish Times. “Yes, but this book makes a very convincing argument for the revitalisation of education to save it from trivialising the very young people it claims to be supporting. Education is like a suit, said the proverbial wise tailor, ‘it has to fit’. Schooling is not fitting very well now. The longer we have to wait the more the present system approximates to the emperor’s new clothes.”

It will not be easy to do, “yet progress is only possible if, once or twice in a generation, someone confronts us with an image in the mirror that makes us feel that we have grown old and stale prematurely. We have to transform ourselves quickly or surely we will perish” wrote Paul Cappon, CEO of the Canadian Council on Learning, while Professor Charles Handy of the London Business School wrote, “The message is critically important ... for the very continuation of our society is at stake”.

Firstly this must start by ensuring that all those – politicians, legislators, administrators and school and teacher leaders really understand the nature of what is involved – if they are to make the changeover between two very different ways of doing things. There is a paradox... this is so urgent it must not be rushed.

Secondly, it will require a systematic drip-feeding of these ideas into whichever communities wish to be involved. This will require an integrated media campaign through press, radio and television.

Thirdly, it will require finding several well-defined pilot areas in which there is the confidence to spearhead these changes on behalf of the rest of the country or province. It cannot be done everywhere all at once.

Fourthly, discussions would have to start with those university education faculties whose support and involvement would be critical if new generations of teachers are to be equipped for their new role, and existing teachers retrained. Such whole systems change has to be backed with the moral imperative to apply this for the benefit of all pupils. Native wisdom in many places recognises that today’s adults have not inherited the land from their parents, but have been loaned it by their children; consequently in the saga of the ages, if a generation fails, the fault lies squarely with the previous generation for not equipping the young well enough for the changes ahead.

In order to update the Initiative’s thinking in early 2010 the above paper was prepared, and then was finally edited in time to send to the entire staff of the Ministry of Education in British Columbia in April of that year so as to consolidate what John Abbott had said during the course of the two-day conference held in Victoria the previous month. The BC response follows in section 1.2.
1.2 Response of British Columbia to the Proposals

Because there has been something of a symbiotic relationship between the Initiative and British Columbia the ideas expressed in this Paper were not seen as excessively new, but extraordinarily helpful in consolidating ideas already circulated across that Province. Seven years before John Abbott had addressed a specially-convened conference on Innovation and Improvement sponsored by the BC Government as it began tentatively to move from a prescriptive management to much more local flexibility. One of his earlier papers ‘What Kind of Education for What Kind of World: do we want pupils to grow up as battery hens or free-range chickens?’ had been circulated as pre-conference reading. At that conference the subsequently much-publicised paper ‘Lieutenant Peter Puget, the grain of the brain and modern society’s failure to understand adolescents’ was much applauded and led to his being invited to address the annual BC Superintendents’ Conference twice in the next four years.

It was the writing of Ronald Wright, the prize-winning author from the Gulf Islands, whose book ‘A Short History of Progress’ with its provocative warning that human innovation could well destroy the planet, that has often been linked by the Initiative to Martin Rees’ warning that he would only give the world a 50/50 chance of survival over the next century because “man’s technological achievements are outpacing his wisdom in knowing what to do with them”. There are other symbiotic relationships with the numerous university and other research foundations in the Province, perhaps best exemplified by Adele Diamond from UBC when she stated recently, “a human being is not just an intellect or just a body; every one of us is both – and we’re not just cognitive and physical, but also emotional and social... if you want to help children with academic development, you will not realise the best results if you focus only on academic achievement”. The Initiative has long felt that the people of British Columbia, living as they are closer to the far extremes of climate variability, perceive the urgency of equipping young people so as ‘to think themselves out of this muddle’.

Importantly, the Initiative has come to appreciate the value of the BC Ministry maintaining 60 semi-autonomous School Boards across the Province, each directed by locally-elected trustees. Maintaining a balanced relationship between central direction and local implementation has always been central to the Initiative’s thinking, and BC with its 60 separate School Boards (each averaging some 80,000 people) within a total population of only 4.5 million, contrasts starkly with the way in which the British Government is effectively removing whole swathes of local government decision-making in favour of making the education of some 51 million English people directly answerable to a single Minister of Education.

The following points were noted in BC last year:

- The Initiative tells a coherent story that helps others fit their own pieces together better, and authenticates this by reference to exceptional practice in other places.
• The timing of this paper was remarkable, as it matched that of the BC Ministry of Education who, after a number of years of deliberation, were sharing their ideas about changing the school system significantly.
• In September 2010 the powerful BC Teachers’ Federation publicly acknowledged the influence of this paper on the embryonic plans being made by the Ministry.
• Making such a careful comparison between the two jurisdictions strengthened policy-makers in BC’s determination to proceed, while showing them the pitfalls that had to be avoided.
• Senior Ministry staff were much impressed when a team of students from the Gulf Islands who had worked with their Superintendent and John Abbott gave these policy-makers a compelling account of how they thought education should be restructured.
• It has been helpful that a number of key officials administering this change process have worked with Abbott on a number of occasions since 2007.
• The BC Government is already encouraging those School Districts able to promote whole-system, community-based learning and use non-traditional class configurations to pioneer what works as models for the eventual benefit of the entire Province.
• BC sees the Initiative as a catalyst for stimulating thought about deeper issues in education. While many of the ideas championed by the Initiative are familiar to BC educators, what the Initiative has done has turned these into a single, cohesive message, the impact of which is powerful, and stirs many people to action.
• Seeing how well their own practice was already congruent with these messages has given the confidence to many within the Province who, during the time that accountability and increasingly granular control by government (essentially teacher-proofing) now enables them to recover their enthusiasm and pull the various bits together.

BC is now well committed to a whole raft of implementations which, because they carry so much professional and community-wide support, have a high chance of turning what is already a good into a superb system.
2.1 Attempting to apply the Initiative’s ideas to the current British educational situation.

Some essential background. The reform of schools in the first part of the 20th century was much concerned that intellectual training by itself could only be a part of young people’s preparation for adulthood. It was noted that (Sir Phillip Morris 1952) the curriculum should consider, “how best to use subjects for the purpose of education... rather than regarding education as the by-product of the efficient teaching of subjects”. It was argued (The Crowther Report 1959) “that unless education is conceived as a whole process in which mind, body and soul are jointly guided towards maturity, a child’s personality will not necessarily be developed”. For the previous three centuries British society had traditionally drawn much of its energy from that 17th Century thinking which resulted in what historians have subsequently called the Protestant Work ethic. John Milton, in his essay On Education in 1642, stated, “I call a complete and generous education that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully and magnanimously, all the offices, public and private, of peace and war.”

That combination of public and private integrity propelled the English into leading the world into the Industrial Revolution. A hundred or so years later such a ‘self-help’ philosophy, linked to a strong moral imperative, created an extraordinary worldwide economic and social network based on the confidence that “an Englishman’s word is his bond.” But another two centuries on the ever more dominant need for ‘efficiency’ to stimulate profits led to the scientific management of work, resulting in employers paying better money to workers who simply followed instructions, rather than to those who sought to be creative in their work. In this cultural change that has dumbed-down of craftsmen-like skills, lie many of the roots of education and social difficulties.

For far too many youngsters both in the selective secondary schools of the 50s, and in the comprehensives that followed in the mid-60s, this was an ambition not often achieved. As politicians, followed by parents and especially employers, have become ever more concerned about the nation’s future productivity so the focus has shifted away from the education of the whole child as a thinking, responsible member of a future democratic society to “the work of the Department of Education and Employment fits with the new economic imperative of supply-side investment for national prosperity” (Minister of Education 2001).

So persistent have been the siren calls of Parliamentarians for young people to concentrate specifically on those skills that will enable them to excel in whatever market place they find themselves, that several generations have lost that sense of collaborative endeavour which has to underpin strong communities. As a nation we no longer understand the proper relationship of collaboration to competition.

Without regenerating such social and moral energy the Initiative fears that no Government will be able to balance the social and personal expectations of the people with the need for a successful economy. At present in England there is a fundamental contradiction in the Coalition’s wish to build communities that hold together because they live and work together, with an education policy
predicated on the individual’s right to put their child in the car or on the bus to send him or her to a school far away from the community in which, in earlier primary years, the child had started to learn to become a participative member.

In addition there are at least six underlying realities, or assumptions, within some aspects of English society, that inhibit the transformation of education. They include:

1. Significant sections of English society seem to have lost any sense of the importance of local democratic involvement in education.
2. Politicians can all too readily dismiss intellectual research as unnecessary “fluff”.
3. The relationship between central and local government has deteriorated badly over many years.
4. The public have come to assume that teachers en masse are simply left-wing trendies.
5. A strong independent schools sector (which has never attempted to provide for all children in all kinds of environments) has led very many politicians to think that every school should stand alone.
6. An unquestioning acceptance of the value of the ‘free market’ has yet to come to terms with ‘slow death’ can all too easily leave failing schools in impossible predicaments.

Consequently when David Cameron re-launched his ‘Big Society’ towards the end of May to a nation apparently uncertain of what this meant and sceptical of politicians’ interest in ‘doing something on the cheap’, David Cameron declared, “The Big Society is not some fluffy add-on to the more gritty and important subjects...you learn about responsibility, and how to live [when] in harmony with others.” The Initiative resolved that it should use this as an opportunity to again submit its proposals to Government, knowing that in doing so it had to tread carefully between what seemed to be already confusing political expectations.

Within the Cabinet, the Minister of Education, Michael Gove, appeared to have a very different understanding of the kind of community that should underpin a civil society – to him community is made up of employers who define the outcome for education; the parents who are the customers, and the school which is the delivery agent. By such criteria 80% or more of the population just doesn’t count (except as Rate-payers with a vote every five years) – we are apparently bystanders with nothing to offer. Is that really the case, because this seems far from the concept of Big Society?

There is another aspect to Coalition policy that is relevant – the support of Localism and Regional Decentralisation which involves several different, and often disconnected, government departments.

The intention of this Paper/Proposal was therefore to show that a demonstration of Decentralisation and real functional Localism would involve the setting up of a number of communities that used these new understandings about how children learn so as to demonstrate how new and different administrative arrangements could revitalise communities, schools and local democracy.

Nb. Given the political climate in England in 2011 the Initiative was urged to restrict itself to a maximum of four pages (less than a quarter of the space readily accepted in British Columbia) if it wanted its ideas taken seriously. This now follows as section 2.2.
2.2 “A Complete and Generous Education ... Creating Big Society”

“What England needs is not a docile workforce with a range of basic skills but an enterprising, creative workforce of confident, self-starting, quick-thinking, problem-solving and risk-taking individuals who can operate in collaborative situations. This range of skills and other attributes cannot be taught solely in the classroom: nor can they be developed solely by teachers” (Education 2000, forerunner of the Initiative, in a Proposal to the Department of Education in 1993).

It is taking England a very long time to realise that schools alone cannot provide young people with enough learning opportunities that, once experienced, lead to the development of a range of skills necessary to create and live responsible lives. For too long policy-makers have forgotten that home and community are as integral to a balanced education, as are the schools and their curricula.

In 2011 it should at last be politically feasible to draw together four strands of Coalition policy – Big Society, Regionalism, Local Financial Responsibility, and the structure of Education – to open up presently untapped opportunities to create a nation of responsible, thoughtful and enterprising people. A successful melding of currently disconnected Departmental policies will however require a better appreciation by all involved of the dynamics of human learning, of the motivators of behaviour, the origins of social capital and the functioning of civil society.

Such a joining-up of policy needs to happen urgently across the whole country. But it won’t happen anywhere unless government, communities, and the private sector work in partnership. By pulling together all our resources in a spontaneous, voluntary covenant – homes, communities, schools and voluntary associations – the UK could transform the way society nurtures its young people. This would galvanize national life by releasing the personal creativity of millions of people to create and support a functional democracy both able to look after itself and make informed judgements over complex issues, and subsequently stick by the outcomes.

‘Since individualism misrepresents our nature, it follows that communal life is the normal state for human beings. But a shared existence is a matter of intention not of fact. Community has to be created and sustained by conscious purpose, and the more successfully this is done, the more we fulfil our personal nature.’ (John MacMurray, 1891 – 1976)

Under the pressure of contemporary life weakened communities have done young people – and themselves – a grave disservice by separating the world of learning from the world of work and its immediate concerns. A joined-up education system would connect these now separate ‘worlds’ by capitalizing on the following philosophies:

- Because the way we are treated while growing up largely determines the way in which what we are born with turns us into what we are, it is the combined influence...
of home, school and community (not formal schooling alone) that creates men and women capable of doing new things well, not simply repeating what earlier generations have already done.

- Quality education is everything to do with teachers, not much to do with structures and very little to do with buildings. Productive teacher-pupil relationships are based on explanation, on talking things through, and seeing issues in their entirety. To achieve this teachers need both technical subject knowledge and considerable expertise in both pedagogy and child development, combined with the avuncular skill of brilliant story-tellers.

- As children grow older and more independent the influence of families and teachers decreases, while the influence of peer group and community increases. Appreciating the evolutionary significance of adolescence demands that communities provide far more opportunities for young people to extend their learning in a hands-on manner, either as formal apprentices or perfecting their skills by working alongside members of the community beyond the classroom setting.

- Current research in the learning sciences shows the critical need for young learners increasingly to work things out for themselves and become less dependent upon teacher-moderated instruction. This demands a reversal of the current policy which allocates more funds to the education of older children, resulting in the largest class sizes being in the earliest years of education, and the smallest at the top of secondary education for 17 and 18 year olds. These older students should have been empowered by their earlier experience to better manage their own learning, without so much dependence on teacher input.

- The transition from primary to secondary school at the age of 11 frequently inhibits many bright pupils who are unnecessarily held back, and damages late developers who are promoted when not yet ready.

So rapid has been the collapse of social capital that an increasingly individualistic culture is robbing communities of that which once gave them their vitality and made their pavements, town squares and backyards the locations for intergenerational discourse. It was here that children learnt intuitively and spontaneously the interdependence of learning, to working and living. It is social capital, not institutional arrangements, that bind people together in their daily lives, and which is so essential in the future. This proposal revolves around the premise that through a joined-up education system, social capital and the fundamentals of civil society would be reinvigorated, and make Big Society a reality.

What needs to happen?

The reality is that the premium the UK’s model of learning places on secondary over primary education, and of the school over the home, is nothing other than “upside-down and inside-out”. A full transformation, reversing this model of learning, would take many years. However, an approach based around pilot communities could deliver tangible benefits, much more affordably, within as little as three years. With the immediate benefits this would demonstrate, it would be much easier to mobilise more communities.

Ten Pilot Communities (representing one third of one percent of all the schools in the
country, with a cost of change element in each community being an additional 10% per annum, decreasing to 0% by the 7th year), selected to reflect a variety of socio-economic conditions, and based on already discrete communities, could pioneer both a revitalised education system and a vibrant demonstration of civil society itself. Each would need:

- Committed champions, such as eminent citizens, representatives of professional and commercial interests, leaders of faith communities, as well as locally and nationally elected politicians,
- A School Board, with Trustees directly elected for the sole purpose of devising and administering the most appropriate education for all children within their community,
- Access to funds to support the change process. Funds could be raised directly through a local tax levy (local taxation with full local responsibility), or by offering tax relief to local contributors (both individual and corporate, with significant contributors encouraged to participate in governance).

Intrinsic to the success of such communities is the incorporation of the following ideas:

- The work in the pilot communities has to start with a reconsideration of how learning takes place, the relationship of children to their communities, of the responsibilities of communities to ‘their’ children. This ‘responsibility’ would appear in the mobilisation of the community to provide more in and out of school support to what they would increasingly come to regard as ‘their young people’.
- A quality education involves far more than simply producing pupils able to pass formal exams; rather it is to equip every child to become a fully-functional adult, able to do wisely and responsibly whatever it will be that each individual – as a functional citizen – has to do.
- As human development involves the growth of the emotions, the intellect and social sensitivity, so the role of the school has always to be seen in parallel with that of the home and the community, for it is social capital, not institutional arrangements, that bind people’s creativity and expectations together.
- The ability to learn, and keep on learning, is the critical skill for the future. “Learning is not something that requires time-out from productive activity, learning is at the very heart of productive activity.” (Shoshana Zuboff, 1988) Teachers must constantly be empowering children to understand how to manage their own learning.

So willing are good teachers to support this that, even within three years, the initial results of such pilot projects would encourage many other communities to embark on the same process themselves. The projects would act as highly visible catalysts to spark nationwide replication.

What Parliamentarians must consider:

- National survival depends more upon the development of the people’s applied common sense (wits), and their ability to pull together within communities comprised of people with disparate skills and interests, than it does on abstract intellectual knowledge.
• While Britain prides itself on being a democracy it frequently forgets that such a fragile concept cannot flourish unless each new generation is well-nurtured in the affairs of the nation and of the mind, and appropriately inducted into the responsibilities of adulthood.

• Parliament serves the country best when it creates the conditions for people to put their personal creativity into action, for the good of the whole, rather than sectional interest. It would be too much to expect of any government to attempt to pilot this project nationally without first testing it out rigorously in some pilot projects, and this is what is needed if the creativity of ordinary people is to be released, and challenged.

The measure of the ultimate success of this transformation would be a national recognition by all that it is the community which has to be the unit of education, not – as is currently seen to be the case – the individual school. It will only be in those communities in which school, home and community are really truly connected that civil society will best operate, and where children will learn from the nursery the value of that interdependence. By progressively ‘front-loading’ the system (the reversal of the present upside-down system of funding), and fully involving the voluntary contribution of home and community (so reversing the inside-out part) this would result in young people being infinitely better educated, far more able to stand on their own two feet, and more responsible for their neighbours, at no more expense than at present.

Endnotes

1 “I call therefore a complete and generous education that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully and magnanimously, all the offices both public and private, of peace and war” (John Milton 1642).

“The Big Society is not some fluffy add on to the more gritty and important subjects...you learn about responsibility and how to live (when) in harmony with others” (David Cameron May 2011).

2 “‘Social Capital’ refers to those tangible substances- good will, fellowship, sympathy, and mutual support that enables a community as a whole to benefit by the cooperation of all its parts” (Robert Putnam 2011).

3 Civil Society is about the quality of human relationships implied by covenant, not contract, as in when John F Kennedy said “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.” In a “convenental relationship, no amount of shoulder shrugging, no anguished appeal to politicians, no recourse to blaming other peoples inertia, can ever excuse the knowledgeable individual’s responsibility to get up and do it for themselves” (Jonathan Sacks 2007)
2.3 An English Response (August – October 2011)

Given the increasing centralisation of structural policy-making by politicians, and the removal of the earlier Chief Education Officers (who had each headed up a Local Education Authority) and the excessive zeal with which policy-makers are driven to implement current government plans, it is extraordinarily difficult to know to whom, and how, to present a proposal that goes far beyond the assumptions that underpin present policy. For example, with government having apparently defined the school as the ultimate unit of accountability direct to the Minister, how does one attract political attention in something whose solution lies ‘outside the box’. Consequently the Initiative decided to approach a senior adviser to the Minister, and a Cabinet Minister responsible for shaping Conservative Party thinking into the future.

The senior adviser had a better grasp of the Paper’s significance than did the Cabinet Minister who seemed pre-occupied with praising the “brilliance” of prizing secondary schools away from the LEAs, and his assumption of the way in which the ‘Free Schools’ would work. The adviser had a good grasp of the paper ‘A Complete and Generous Education...’ and concurred with our assumption about the devastating impact of the 1902 Education Act which had abolished the locally-elected School Boards, as was our description of the devastating split made in 1944 before primary and secondary education. He also agreed about the inherent problem of the over-provision of secondary education at the cost of the primary. In the long run he concurred that without a deep structural change in the relationship of primary to secondary, and the relationship of home to school to community, there would be no long term solution to the problem. The present arrangements for teacher-education were compromised by the need to satisfy short-term political expectations.

He then went on to say, from his perspective, there was no chance of any government that he could foresee ever bringing about such a change because:

- There was simply too much inter-departmental rivalry, and the Department of Education simply did not understand the issues.
- No one in Cabinet really believed that the community was in any sense to be recognised
- The Chancellor in particular was determined to extend the role of the Treasury and would have no truck with anything other than central government accountability
- The Prime Minister had no wish to rock the boat, and wouldn’t understand the argument.
- Most new MPs are lost in the minutiae of business to understand anything as profound as this.
- The issue of teacher education was so vast that it would have to wait on time to find the satisfactory solution.

Having said all that he said the Initiative was quite right to predicate everything it said in the proposal to the construction of a modern equivalent to local School Boards. But as this was so far off the agenda at the moment he suggested that the only groups that might begin to implement what the Initiative was talking about could be the biggest consortia of academies (to me that sounded a pipedream). The Cabinet Minister simply dismissed the Proposal as not being feasible in the present climate as there was no way that ten pilot projects could be established, no extra money was available and he could not see the possibility of raising local finances as a political-goer.
3.1 International Evaluation (build up or beat up?)

Michael Fullan, Professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in Toronto, is recognized as a worldwide authority on the effectiveness of school reform. For a short while he worked in England. His most recent work on studying the effectiveness of reforms in Australia and the United States was published in April 2011 as ‘Choosing the wrong drivers for whole system reform’. Earlier in 2010, McKinsey & Company, global management consultants, published their report on ‘How the world’s most improved school systems keep getting better’. Both reports draw upon the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment, sponsored by OECD) in comparing individual countries as shown by progress in reading, maths and science, and has reported tri-annually since 2000.

As a Canadian with deep knowledge both of his own country, and several other English-speaking countries, his method of measuring effectiveness is useful in looking at possible reasons for the difference in performance between England and British Columbia.

Fullan asks the question that has troubled many of us in different situations – if you want to improve a system do you build this up slowly from the foundations, or do you beat it up from the top down, in the hopeful expectation that you will be able to pick up the bits quickly enough to build something better? Fullan accepts the truism that when dealing with schools the best teachers are just like the best pupils... they give of their best when they are captivated by the excitement of what they are doing, feel totally in control, yet confident enough to ask for help when they need it. Poor teachers, like poor pupils, however perform even more sluggishly when they are swamped by a veritable tsunami of instructions and directions that mean very little to them and to which they cannot emotionally commit. Supporting well-motivated teachers (who can access what Csikszentmihalyi calls “flow”) beats top-down direction every time suggests Fullan, but always providing this is seen in a whole-systems context.

Intrinsic motivation is critical to re-energising education. That is why Fullan’s insightful ‘choosing the wrong drivers for whole system reform’, much of which is reinforced by the McKinsey report, is so very important. Whole system reform is just that – it accepts the moral imperative “of raising the bar (for all students) and closing the gap (for lower performing groups) relative to higher order skills and competencies needed to become successful world citizens”. Whole system reform is dependent upon using the intrinsic motivation of students and teachers in improving learning outcomes; “Unless everyone can feel involved, and see the ideas as being valuable, nothing much will happen”.

Those jurisdictions that, in their hurry to be seen to be doing something, adopt what Fullan calls “the wrong drivers” because initially they appear highly compelling, and suggest that the leaders recognise the urgency of the problem. They start by calling everybody to account: they use test results, teacher appraisal, rewards or punishments and emphasise individual schools’ improvement rather than investing in the overall capacity of the whole system. They concentrate on individuals, rather than building group solutions. They invest heavily in digital technology (which can be
photographed and advertised) than they do on constructing the appropriate pedagogy. Frequently they use a ‘scatter-gun’ approach of endlessly releasing new initiatives, often difficult to relate within an overall strategy. Fullan comments on the reform programmes in the US and Australia which use what he defines as the wrong ‘drivers’, “I will say flat-out that there is no way such ambitious and admirable nationwide goals will be met... for they cannot generate on a large scale the kind of intrinsic motivational energy. As aspirations they sound great but they fail to get at changing the day-to-day culture of school systems”.

Statistics appeal to politicians and policy-makers who make much use of the PISA rankings recorded every three years. Statistics always have to be used very carefully, as their meanings are nothing like as specific as the numbers would seem to imply. Under the heading ‘Britain’s got talent deficit’, the Guardian wrote on the 31st October 2011,

“Who’s top in maths until the next round of assessment in 2012? China-Shanghai by miles, with Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea and Taiwan clustered behind. The UK is 28th, the US 31st. And in reading? Shanghai, Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong all over again, with only gallant little Finland, in third place, to disrupt this tale of eastern promise. UK: 25; USA: 17. Science? Japan joins Finland in the top five, but China-Shanghai is far and away top, with the UK at 16th and America in 21st spot". It continued...

“Are the samples representative? Yes they are. Does Finland do so well because it’s a small, homogenous nation that puts teacher standards and teacher pay high on its agenda? Yes again. So perhaps we can’t expect the US or the UK, with its wide spread of immigrants, languages and backgrounds, to do anything close to as well ... Except that Canada – huge, very mixed, multilingual Canada – is in Pisa’s top 10 under all three categories.”

Not stated in that article (because it wasn’t relevant at that point) is that British Columbia’s overall position would be higher than that in Canada if stated as a separate entity.

The ‘right drivers’, Fullan defines as **Capacity Building, Teamwork, Pedagogic Improvement** and **System-wide Solutions**. Such drivers are held together by the underlying **attitudes**, **philosophy**, and **theory of action** that have been carefully inculcated throughout the system. By applying the right drivers communities inevitably generate personal and collective motivation, and the collective determination to involve everybody in transforming what they then come to regard as the desirable system.

Every country that gets better educationally becomes, Fullan argues, a better neighbour. “The fallacy –to which the US, with its rugged individual traditions, is particularly susceptible – is that success does not come from ad hoc individuals beavering away, but rather from strategies that leverage the group”. (If he had been speaking about England he would probably have blamed this on our command and control mentality). Seeing this as a collective ‘good’ is vital. Systems that embrace the four right drivers and then go on to use the so-called ‘wrong drivers’ in a supportive role, can achieve outstanding results.

Although he does not quote this directly Fullan acknowledges the findings from evolutionary psychology reported by E.O. Wilson in 2007 that, “selfishness beats altruism within groups; altruistic groups beat selfish groups every time”. Looking back over history, virtually all the great empires
arose in areas where major ethnic groups came into close contact with each other and invariably the successful empires were the ones that had higher levels of co-operative behaviour. As with empires in the past so today with individual schools competing within jurisdictions with high levels of internal interdependence; teams of schools within functional jurisdictions pull together, whereas those who are continuously in open competition with their neighbours finally pull apart. It is a truth that school reformers are slow to recognise that it is only through altruistic, collaborative behaviour that systems can thrive (see *Overschooled but Undereducated* p. 159).

Getting the balance between concentrating on capacity-building and what can become an excessive dose of accountability is difficult, Fullan readily concurs. Whole system success requires the commitment that comes from intrinsic motivation and improved technical competences of groups working together “do testing, but do less of it and, above all, position assessment primarily as a strategy for improvement, but not as a measure of external accountability”. Excessive testing crushes the enthusiasm for innovation in a “veritable tsunami which squelch any possibility of teachers leading by what they do best”, demonstrates that with sufficient backing they can devise far better strategies than can any distant administrator.

The power of the group is in the long run always superior to the power of the individual; it is positive culture that drives reform as it involves the parallel development of social capital linked to individual skill development “that gets things done... because they develop the entire teaching profession”. This is critical; while there is a widespread belief in some places in the power of teacher human-capital to transform public education – “all we need are a few inspirational leaders” - unless this is combined with social-capital, Fullan suggests, is like the driver of a high-powered car who never takes his foot off the break. “Social capital is not a characteristic of the individual, but resides in the relationship among teachers and between teachers and principals. High social capital and high human capital must be combined, and of the two the former is more powerful” (and I would add with good evidence, between the formal learning systems of the schools and the potential nurture of thoughtful and caring communities).

Fullan shows that there is heaps of evidence that it is the collaborative group that accelerates performance while at the same time squeezing out underperformance as teachers become less private and more collaborative. “The essence of whole systems success is continuous instructional improvement closely linked to student engagement and the success of all students. Once you dwell on instruction the whole system can be mobilised to that end”. And that is what it is all about...

Every country has to make a choice. Fullan recommends leading with drivers that are known to work. He accepts that this is often more difficult at the beginning because it is out of sympathy with a political wish “to get it done, and quickly”. Many find his more “steady as you go” strategies hard to accept but, recalls Fullan, “feeling awkward at the beginning seems a small price to pay, compared with feeling miserable and worse through persistent failure.”

He concludes his paper; “jettison blatant merit pay, reduce excessive testing, don’t depend on teacher appraisal as a driver, and don’t treat world-class standards as a panacea. Instead, make the
Instruction – assessment nexus the core driver, and back this up with a system that mobilises the masses to make the moral imperative a reality. Change the very culture of the teaching profession... The essence of whole systems success is continuous instructional improvement, closely linked to student engagement. If the wrong drivers have their way they undercut intrinsic motivation and group development. If accountability and assessment don’t kill you, individualistic appraisal will come along to make sure you are dead”.

It is everything to do with the development of intrinsic motivation, and local ownership. “If you want to break the cycle of distrust you have to respect others before they have earned the right to be respected... and then do the things that build competences and trust over time”. Because, as the McKinsey Report states so emphatically, “It’s a systems thing, not a single thing”... it’s organic.

3.2 Some Initial Conclusions (Draft 1/12/11)

- English education is one among a number of English-speaking countries to have become an ever more self-referencing system swamped by statistical analysis, and so dominated by top-down political directives, that is has become detached from the social- and human-capital that exists within communities at large, so robbing young people of a vital introduction to adult life.

- British Columbia, always having had a far-greater belief in the critical importance of local accountability, had been tempted up to some five or six years ago to strengthen Ministerial prescription until it became abundantly obvious that it was only in those Districts (perhaps feeling themselves furthest away from Ministerial oversight) that had the confidence ‘to do their own thing’ that were making the most progress, and setting the pace for others to follow.

- What most separates the response of BC from that of the British Government’s response to the Proposals, is clearly exemplified by Fullan’s descriptions of the drivers, is the belief in British Columbia that powerful reform emerges from strong communities, while the English seem to want to accept this but have little appreciation of what Government might mean by ‘Big Society’.
Appendix 1.

In the Initiative’s Strategic Plan of July 2010 it recommends:

**Rejoining the practices of primary and secondary education.** The primary and secondary school system was set up as a compromise between two conflicting views on how to educate children. Some felt children should be taught by subject (as exemplified by grammar schools), while others believed social development and the ability to make connections across subjects was more important (as exemplified by elementary schools). The system we have today was not set up in the best interests of children, but rather as a way of fudging together these two opposing camps to create one national system. In fact, recent research suggests that this transition at the highly sensitive age of 11 can be traumatic enough to set a child back developmentally.

**Designing a new pedagogy that is sympathetic to the way children develop.** Younger children naturally learn from their teachers, so we should capitalise on this through smaller teacher-pupil ratios. The more care and attention given to a child’s development in the early years, the better equipped they are to direct their own learning in adolescence. Equally, secondary education should be transformed to give adolescents the opportunity they crave to manage their own learning and progression.

**Investing in training highly able teachers.** The transformation of education is more dependent on the quality of future teachers than it is upon structures, and has very little to do with buildings. Productive pupil / teacher relationships are based on explanation, on talking things through and exploring issues in their entirety. Which is why future teachers not only need to know a lot, but be wise enough to adapt their teaching to the needs of each child and class, taking into account factors such as socio-economic profile and geographical area, as well as individual development. With this in mind, we call for a new model of teacher education that combines the highest understanding of subject content (the secondary model) with equally demanding knowledge of pedagogy and child development (the primary model).

**Restoring the importance of home and community as places of learning.** Down-playing the role of the home (in the creation of the emotions) and the community (in creating a sense of social responsibility), has so over-extended the role of ‘institutional’ learning that it fails to induct young people into the much less structured and problematic world of adult life. Given the inherent limitation of schooling it seems essential for a child to have an intellectual life outside school – like a three-legged stool that stays upright however uneven the ground, a balanced education depends on the three legs of home, school and community.

**Such whole-systems thinking** will only be effective if it is unconstrained by conventional assumptions, or current institutional priorities or political dogma. These findings require a departure from the current way of doing things so radical that normal processes of incremental innovation will not be adequate. Neither top-down political imposition nor unsupported grass-roots innovators can create these kinds of change.
Appendix 2.

The Guardian

Britain’s got a talent deficit

Tables that show education in the UK and US lagging far behind Asia’s paint a grim picture of our future

Peter Preston
guardian.co.uk, Sunday 30 October 2011

British teenagers are trailing far behind their counterparts in Asia in terms of literacy and numerical skills. Photograph: Rui Vieira/PA Wire/Press Association Images

What do you think of when China is beseeched to bail out the eurozone – and America, and pretty well any western country fallen on grotesquely indebted times? Think, with a shiver, of what lies beneath. Think of the leaning tower of Pisa, otherwise known as the Programme for International Student Assessment, with tests run every three years on 15-year-olds around the globe by the OECD. Think of one league table you’d rather forget.

Who’s top in maths until the next round of assessment in 2012? China-Shanghai by miles, with Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea and Taiwan clustered behind. The UK is 28th, the US 31st. And in reading? Shanghai, Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong all over again, with only gallant little Finland, in third place, to disrupt this tale of eastern promise. UK: 25; USA: 17. Science? Japan joins Finland in the top five, but China-Shanghai is far and away top, with the UK at 16th and America in 21st spot.

So let’s be clear. This is our future, our Anglo-American future, our European future – and we’re blowing it. We trot out the old Blair mantra from memory. Education, education, education. We demand that entrepreneurs start new businesses to ease the crushing weight of unemployment. But when it comes to turning out entrepreneurs and technical wizards,
the job creators of tomorrow, we are way off the pace. A facile parody of Chinese achievement sees workers toiling for 12 or 14 hours a day for pitiful reward. A more accurate version would see us being outgunned, year after year, in quality and in numbers.

Tom Friedman of the New York Times broods over this in his latest book (That Used to Be Us, co-authored with Michael Mandelbaum) and finds naught for either Washington or Westminster comfort. Are the samples representative? Yes they are. Does Finland do so well because it's a small, homogenous nation that puts teacher standards and teacher pay high on its agenda? Yes again. So perhaps we can't expect the US or the UK, with its wide spread of immigrants, languages and backgrounds, to do anything close to as well ... Except that Canada – huge, very mixed, multilingual Canada – is in Pisa's top 10 under all three categories.

There are no excuses. Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands and Switzerland are consistently above OECD average. The powerhouses of Obama and Cameron are severely underpowered. Not everything is identical. American primary education is good enough; the problems set in at high school. British primary schooling, in contrast, turns out thousands upon thousands without elementary reading or numerical skills, kids condemned to failure at an obscenely early age.

Part of our difficulty lies in bringing deprived inner-city schools up to snuff, of course; but the difficulty beyond that – the one that ought to be haunting us just as much – is that the schools we deem adequate, OK to middling, are falling far, far off the world pace as well.

Don't forget the riots, the poverty traps, society's chronic instabilities, to be sure. But look outwards, towards competitor countries where high levels of education and application keep growth rolling along. Of course all the familiar principles of fairness and equal opportunity still matter. But if Singapore can turn out 10,000 brilliant computer programmers and we can only manage 1,000, then equality won't give us the critical mass of talent we need. OK isn't OK any longer. Revoltingly fat pay packets for OK business managers from Baltimore to Bradford aren't OK either. China isn't bailing out the euro or the dollar by chance this time round. It's putting so much more in to get so much more out of us in a jam.

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http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/oct/30/britain-talent-deficit-asia-education
(accessed 30 Nov 2011)