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David W Hughes



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Paper from responsible sources

I first met David Hughes in 1994 when we were both on interview for a deputy headteacher post. He got the job. And rightly so.

I have stayed in touch with him over the years that followed because he is a thoughtful, sincere and knowledgeable person who has a deep concern for the education system.

Every interaction with him has made me think. He has introduced me to new ideas and challenged some of my own practice. David's talent is to create an environment in which new thinking is allowed. It would be unlikely that anyone would adopt all his ideas (he has so many) and he fully understands that ... but one or two?

All school leaders need interactions with wise people. I guess it would be tricky for David to provide 'one on one' support for everyone, but his latest book comes close to replicating the experience.

Any leader willing to open their mind should find time to read it.

Phil Crompton

Former Headteacher at Rushcliffe School and CEO of the Trent Academies Group

I have known David for the last seven years. I have been following his blogs and have had opportunities to deliberate important issues regarding school improvement with him in person during my visits to the UK and US.

It is David's clarity of thought that impresses me the most. His reflections on decades of teaching, leading and mentoring school leaders has given him phenomenal insights into functioning of schools and processes of school improvement.

In this book David has very craftily crystallized his years of learning for young school leaders to learn from. An easy read with several case studies and anecdotes, *Future-proof your school* is a bible every efficient school leader should have.

Arunabh Singh

Director at Nehru World School, India

David Hughes and I facilitated an online global teacher training group ten years ago. David is an Education Visionary who predicts future education trends based on seasoned, relevant experience. David understood the unlimited potential of technology in education for students and teachers. He forecast the need for students and teachers to be lifelong learners or be irrelevant.

I introduced his teaching points on reflective teaching to increase learner outcomes in the United States as well as Africa. Instructional leaders must constantly examine the efficacy of our work in terms of learner outcomes. Personalised learning must be culturally relevant to solve global problems. Metacognition solves different problems in the twenty-first century but this text shows that it is just as relevant today as in the past.

'Technology has globalized knowledge' is a quote from the book. Now we can share theories, research and information instantly and determine if we are educating students to create a world that works for all. Educators will no longer have the upper hand with crystallized intelligence and a large fund of information. Educators will need to be able to guide, harness and channel the fluid intelligence of digital natives.

Darleana McHenry

Executive Director at St. Carries Center SMART Academy

Greater Los Angeles Area

Future-proof Your School by David W Hughes is a must-read volume for all those concerned with the future of children to ensure the sustainability of our schools.

This delightful guide could come out of an intellectual repertoire of only someone who has driven schools, struggled with a failing system and triumphed over several odds. David fits the bill adequately. The book is a work of great insight and integrity which genuinely reflect the author.

In a time, characterised by redefining the role of the teacher, re-engineering curriculum, participative and engaging classrooms, and the leadership demanding more of giving trust rather than earning, *Future-proof Your School*, does some generous handholding.

The author's contention that future schools will deal with personalisation, metacognition, and new learning technologies, comes across as a perfect sketch of the times to come. David is not shy of challenging that learning to teach is as important as learning to learn. No one can dispute that. A change management expert, the author has done full justice to the subject of sustainability of schools and school leaders.

Ashok Pandey, FRSA, Principal, Ahlcon International School, India,

Educationist, #TeachSDGs Ambassador, and action partner for UN's #Act4Sdgs

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MEET THE AUTHOR

DAVID W HUGHES

I was a teacher and senior leader within the secondary and tertiary sectors for more than 24 years, working in a range of both successful and failing schools. I have led and managed improvement projects at local authority, regional and national levels. While working on the Building Schools for the Future programme, I was seconded for almost two years to support the development of the Opening Minds curriculum, devised in collaboration with the Confederation of British Industry as a twenty-first-century learning model for schools, which mirrored the world's most effective educational systems and addressed the attitudes, behaviours and competences required of the modern learner.

I am an associate of the University of Nottingham School of Education and a writer for the educational press. I've developed and managed a peripatetic multimedia learning programme with adults with learning disabilities which pulled into focus many false assumptions about learners and learning and enhanced the model presented in this book.

I post regularly on my blog: <https://learningrenaissance.wordpress.com>.

This is a resource focused on the future of learning at a time which could well be termed the Renaissance in Learning. The aim is to share innovative practice and resources to help create a climate in which every learner can succeed.

INTRODUCTION



Critical issues

- » Why I'm qualified to write this book.
- » Who this book is for - classroom teachers and school leaders.
- » Why the ideas in this book can be used by all learning organisations from nursery to tertiary.
- » The importance of the current context of your school and its impact on change.
- » My definition of school culture.
- » Understanding the creative capacity of the school.
- » A summary of the ideas put forward in this book.

In the complex panorama that is the modern school, this book aims to bring a little light, some reflection and insights that will lead to sustainable improvement of your individual, and your school's, practice.

Why listen to me?

The book is based on my in-school experience over 25 years, and in supporting schools at local authority, regional and national levels. I have been involved in professional development programmes in schools from the Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative (TVEI) to project management of local authority step-change projects for the use of ICT in schools. I completed my National Professional Qualification for Headship in Cohort 1 between 1997 and 1999.

I have had the good fortune to work on the SETNET Project for STEM development, the Training and Enterprise Council/Learning and Skills Council, which aimed to provide a two-way development programme between employers and schools; the Investors in People for Schools Quality Mark; the development of learning platforms in a commercial context; learning architecture design through the Building Schools for the Future programme; and on the Children's Society Birmingham Education Commission.

I continue to be engaged in the International Space School Education Trust (ISSET) charity where I have worked with senior NASA administrators and astronauts. I have had opportunities to explore schools in Europe and the USA and test the processes highlighted in this book. I currently run the Learning Renaissance blog connecting learning innovation ideas from across the globe.

Unlike one of the sullen commentators in a later chapter of this book, I do not believe that education and learning involve a carousel of ideas that comes around and goes around. A more structured and reflective approach to the forces driving schools produces better insights and programmes for sustainable improvement to energise pupils and staff alike.

Clearly, there are many books about modern leadership and management on the market. This one has new conceptual frameworks, which interweave theory with practice and give a number of strategies to adopt and adapt in your own pursuit of sustainable learning development. The scope and terms of reference of the book are outlined below.

Something for everyone

The themes outlined in this book are universal in that they apply to all organisations dedicated to learning, irrespective of educational sector or nationality. The nursery teacher, primary, secondary and tertiary teacher/lecturer should recognise the circumstances, drivers and exemplars outlined. The particular structure of the learning organisation is less significant than its key function – that of developing learners.

The main premise of the book is that we are all leaders in the development of our own learning practices. Whether a student, a probationary teacher, an established teacher, a leader of teams of teachers or invested with a senior responsibility for a whole learning organisation, you are looking to achieve the best learning outcomes for your learners.

Your aim is the short-term one of equipping learners to negotiate the standardised educational hurdles for progression in formal education and, beyond that, providing them with the attitudes, behaviours and competences they will require to be independent and self-motivated learners in the challenges of a fast-changing life beyond school.

If all these individual pursuits of learning excellence can be woven together to form a continuous culture of learning development, then your learning organisation has the ability to improve in a sustainable way. Context, priorities and statutory requirements may change, but you can maintain a consistency of approach and vision in challenging times.

Within this book, 'school' is used as a generic term to mean any learning organisation in any stage in education. The generic term 'pupil' is used to identify the junior learners in the organisation. I might have used 'learner' as the generic term, but a major consideration of this book is to ensure that the staff, and the professional development activities they undertake, are considered to be senior members of the learning cohort of the school. We are all learners.

Context, culture and other constraints to sustainable improvement

This book may be read as an individual self-help book. However, there are limits and constraints as to how far an individual teacher/learner may thrive if they set off on a learning journey with no account taken of the culture or custom and practice of their school.

Many analytical and research devices are available for understanding and developing schools. Cohen and Mannion's (1994) text *Research Methods in Education* is one of the most comprehensive. Among the approaches outlined in the book is reflective practice. This approach forms the basis of the personal learning and professional development which reconciles the individual teacher with the organisational aspirations of the school.

Reflection is an important human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it. It is this working with experience that is important to learning. The capacity to reflect is developed to different stages in different people and it may be this ability which characterises those that learn effectively from experience.

(Boud et al, 1985)

Sustainable school improvement requires consistency of vision and shared effort.

In both education and medical practice, this systematic application of reflection to professional practice represents a 'scientific,' a structured and systematic approach to the improvement of individual and organisational based learning and development.

(Schon, 1983, p 54)

I highlight reflection now as the counterbalance to the forces of managerialism and the 'marketisation' of schools outlined below.

The individual teacher, or indeed the school leader, does not act in a vacuum. There are both external and internal pressures that prioritise and constrain their performance goals and the methods they use to achieve them. It is a universal truism that in all cultures, government, society at large and specific stakeholders such as employers, the church, parents and governors have a range of often conflicting aims and purposes for what happens within the school day.

The government and governors also have mechanisms to ensure that their priorities are serviced effectively and a range of sanctions to apply when they feel that performance against these targets, benchmarks and key performance indicators are not met. Such external pressures cannot be ignored or deflected. The wise educationalist will ensure that the response to such pressures is thoughtful, measured, strategic and does not overwhelm the creative capacity of the school.

What defines an individual school is the way it responds to these wider external pressures and internalises and prioritises their aims, objectives, tactics and strategies. We may refer to the way a school responds to external pressures and forces of change as the school culture. But this does not totally define the school culture. The school culture is as much shaped by past experience as by current pressures. It reflects a set of shared cultural beliefs about the purpose and uniqueness of the school as well as conflicting cultural beliefs engaged in a battle of supremacy to define the developing culture.

Understanding the cultural drivers of a school allows you to appreciate how a school performs as a functioning organism. Only at this level can meaningful change be made, that has the appreciation of all the staff, and is therefore likely to be successful and sustainable in changing their philosophy, insight and the effectiveness of their practice.

Some schools seem to look to improve by layering more bones onto the school skeleton – an assessment policy here, a statement on homework there, a behaviour initiative elsewhere – rather than working in a more holistic way. Few schools have review mechanisms to shed redundant workloads, practices and initiatives that are no longer relevant or necessary to promoting learning development. These cultural vestiges erode productive effort and deflect staff into activities where their efforts yield no return on investment.

The primacy of understanding and developing your school improvement strategies at a cultural level forms the first section of the book.

Current trends and challenges

Although this book focuses on educational practice in the UK, and in England more specifically, it reflects issues that, from my experience, are shared by school systems in Canada, Australia, the United States, New Zealand, India and Europe. Globalisation, the movement of educational professionals between countries, and the increasingly 'managerial' elements of schools, are internationally recognised themes in education.

Aiding this 'managerialist' momentum is the proliferation of information and communication technologies which give educational leaders the often spurious veneer of 'having the figures to hand'. This, in turn, leads to the preponderance of quantitative over qualitative measures of key performance. Those most invested in concerns of data management over quality assurance are at risk of severing themselves from more holistic and meaningful analyses of their schools. Significantly, they may divorce themselves from a fundamental feature of good schools as places where students and staff come to experience fulfilment through personal and collective efforts.

Cartoon: Teacher in Head's office asking for more resources. The head, staring into the computer.
Caption: 'The computer says no.'

A particularly destructive recent phenomenon in English schools has been the 'marketisation' of the national schools' estate. This is the retreat of the state from universal educational provision and the appointment of loose or tight affiliations of educational professionals, charities and businesses constituted as Multiple Academy Trusts (MATs). Many of the businesses involved believe they can bring their successful commercial practices to school improvement. Their approach is managerial. That is, the application of generalised project management approaches which are data-led and have fast turnaround times. Managers with a general business background reason that this will discomfort complacent teachers and drive spectacular improvement. They seem immune to the idea than in any organisation, it is not sufficient to do things right, you need to do the right things right. To have that level of insight requires a qualitative as well as a quantitative vision.

We can see this generalised project management approach in government in the UK from 2010 onwards. As the former English education secretary Michael Gove stated: *We are tired of experts*. This view undid the work of the former government's Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme, and arguably three millennia of rational and scientific thought. Building Schools for the Future, for its faults, promoted a national discussion of the learning architecture required to equip students for the twenty-first century. The BSF programme developed a concept of learning spaces fit for function and flexible enough to accommodate different learning types from large group work, presentations and plenaries, individual online research and small group discussion.

Cartoon: Workmen replacing school name panel from 'St Swithins in the Bog Comprehensive School' with 'Bright Stars Academy Sponsored by Acme Industries MAT... Your first choice in effluent management!'

It was replaced, in true managerial style, by a simple mathematical formula defining a size of classroom by, in the style of battery hens, a standard size space allocation for each of the 30 students who would make up the standard class unit. This approach was adopted despite the fact that BSF initiative was widely applauded by industry as having an agenda designed to ensure that students left school as adaptable, independent learners able to thrive as problem-solvers, team members and presenters of rational arguments.

Looking within the individual learning organisation, the significance of culture to sustainable improvement is critical and is why all the chapters of this book are developed at a cultural perspective. Each chapter focuses on an element of the school culture and how to begin the process of aligning

cultural change with sustainable improvement. It is, in effect, deciding on what are significant elements and ensuring that the processes related to those are clear, flexible, can reflect changes in circumstances, and are supported in custom and practice by all school members.

Such cultural drivers of the individual school form a significant part of its context. To improve the school in a significant and sustainable way is to work at this cultural level. Schools have finite resources, of which the most valuable are staff time and creativity. Having a clear research base for the deployment of these valuable resources to the cause of sustainable school improvement is the emphasis of this book.

The concept of creative capacity

The idea of the creative capacity of the school is an important one in this book. It refers to all the creative time available to the school. This includes all the formal and informal meeting time available to staff, all time devoted to professional and personal development and individual time devoted to productive personal reflection and thinking. In a forward-looking school, this will also include formal time when teachers can collaborate to develop learning materials and share insights into effective learning based on their classroom experiences.

Creative capacity is the concept that links the individual efforts of a teacher working in a classroom with the development demands of the whole school. It is also what links the individual teacher's learning and training requirements with the overall school development planning. The aim is to increase the congruency of these two often conflicting aims.

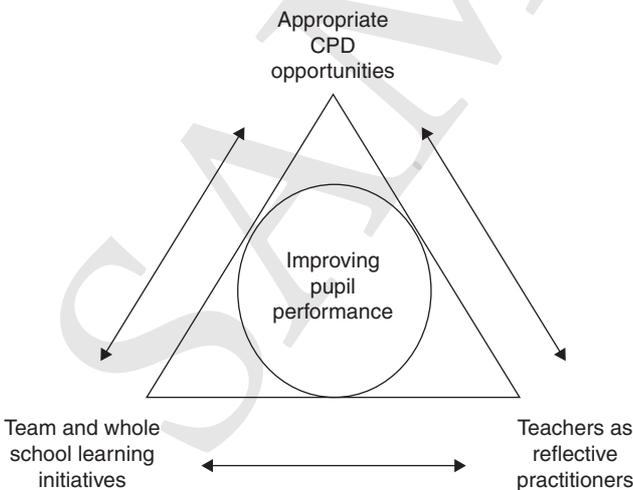


Figure 0.1 Individual and whole school development congruence

If creative capacity is a new concept to you then as an initial exercise it might be worth auditing how the creative capacity of your school is deployed. Certainly, the creative capacity of the school is finite. Therefore any element of it which is not deployed towards moving school performance forward is wasted effort. Worse, it might be deployed in efforts which are counterproductive to the momentum and welfare of the school and pupils within it.

As an example of how creative capacity can be badly deployed I'll cite my own experience. Working in an inner city school in difficult circumstances and on the verge of special measures, I have seen first-hand the corrosive effect on aspiration and morale that dedicating so much energy to simply trying to manage and survive the day has on the health, confidence and performance of staff. I witnessed individuals and teams working excessively hard on containment rather than learning. I saw how poor job titles and descriptions can anchor staff in a whirlpool of frenzied but ultimately unproductive effort.

To illustrate the point, we may consider the job title 'Year Manager'. It is generic but not sufficiently descriptive of purpose. It gives a general focus, constrained by the year group, but no direction, momentum or unifying purpose. It is a static and purposeless description.

Although some year managers can rise above a poor role and job description, they are the exception. More take the role literally and too often this means that year managers spend their time predominantly chasing and intervening in poor and disruptive behaviour, rather than promoting achievement and positivity.

It was only when I thought in terms of total creative capacity that the poor deployment of energy and resource struck me fully. Up until that revelation, I had simply devoted more and more energy into supporting them in daily crisis management, with a significant cost to my own, and my colleagues', well-being.

Harnessing creative capacity to drive sustainable school improvement requires the development of new paradigms which challenge the accepted internal practices of the school. We may consider all the internal practices of the school as comprising the culture. The culture is not a monolithic structure as is sometimes pictured, but an organism capable of mutating in ways that are productive and counterproductive to the mission of the organisation.

You might be amazed when you look at your school's time allocations at how much effort is devoted to maintaining existing structures, regardless of their effectiveness. Even more alarming is how little time is devoted to supporting staff to reach a consistently high standard of learning delivery. The result is in-school variations in performance.

A major shortcoming is that the best of current practice is not captured and shared. Ensuring that there is a repository of resources devoted to developing practice to inform teachers' professional development is probably the most blatant omission I observe when I visit schools. This means that the best practice does not inform improvement and the worst practice persists allowing unacceptable in-school variations in performance.

The structure of this book

Chapter 1 of this book focuses on unwrapping and defining culture in its formal and informal manifestations. The subsequent chapters explore the modifying of practice, the genetic engineering of the school culture, to ensure that the creative energy of the school is devoted to sustainable improvement in learning for all learners, be they pupils or staff.

❖ Triangulation points

Within each chapter, triangulation points are included.

This is a device to enable you to reflect on the chapter content in terms of your own experience. For each triangulation point, you are invited to consider your personal and professional experience related to the chapter content and to triangulate it with the circumstances of your own school or learning organisation. Of particular significance may be the conflicting and shared perceptions that exist in an individual school, so try to test your perception against that of other staff in your school. The triangulation point data-gathering and discussions might also form useful in-school exercises to inform practice and policy development to build sustainable improvement cultures.

Further reading

Cohen, L and Mannion, L (1994) *Research Methods in Education*. London: Routledge.

If you wish to take a more 'scientific' and structured approach to understanding and developing the creative processes and improvement drivers at work in your school, this is the best compendium of research techniques and how to implement them. It covers the Nature of Inquiry to Ethical Considerations as well as a range of appropriate techniques for developmental research such as surveys, case studies, correlational research, action research, triangulation, role-playing, interviews and multidimensional measurement.

Glatter, R, Preedy, M, Riches, C and Masterton, M, eds. (1988) *Understanding School Management*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

An excellent volume that links culture to the way individuals and teams operate in a school context. Section 2 explores school cultures and effectiveness. Other sections consider resource allocation as a route to changing the cultural direction of the school and the leadership and management of staff. This was an important text in anticipating the National Standards for Education, including the National Professional Qualification for Headship.

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