

Comments on John Frew's recent paper on '*The Failure of Modern Leadership*'

Arch Park

John Frew's explanation of the structure of modern management, particularly as it applies to education, exposes much of the monolithic nature of the practice as it moved out of the shadows of business theory into the world of education, schools and teaching. He presents its failed 'fit-for-purpose' form that its 'movers and shakers' have provided as the supposed solution to any and all applications no matter what the enterprise might be, exposes these to a series of basic questions of purpose, value and educational (teaching?) need, and adds doubts about management practices that have removed the very essence of educational enterprise and replaced it with blind adherence to the formality of a doctrine that specifically opposes the very principles on which education is based.

As John points out, much of the origins/theory of this approach entered management practice via courses offered through a growing number of Business Schools who over-argued the importance of management conformity at the expense of those very elements that identify and develop enterprise and difference. Resulting from this has been a management approach operating at the numerous levels of organisations within the imposed restrictions of a ubiquitous top-down model of 'leadership'.

John's reference to what this approach replaced is of some interest. The omissions resulting from these differences may in fact be the essential ingredients of the system that worked – and whose removal has become the cause of the problem.

Education/teaching is a funny business. A career in schools once required the rites of passage through the experiences that actually prepared the teacher for each succeeding stage. It also prepared them for careers beyond the school within the professional administration of, for example, the inspectorial system and the like. That is to say, to be a principal a teacher had to succeed at each intervening level and to be an inspector the teacher was similarly required to have succeeded. So it was that inspectors and directors (even including the Director-General of Education) had all been in front of a class within a school at some time during their career. At the same time committees on syllabuses, resources and training were dominated by practicing teachers and those well versed in teacher education. That is to say, problems when they occurred were predictable; there were very little surprises and solutions were in the hands of those asking the questions. It was a model based on the involvement of teachers which no doubt included a serious level of understanding and commitment. The opposite applies today.

As revealed by John, the removal of an integrated administrative structure, in which education is the driving ethos, has released much of the cohesive order of the bureaucracy to the point where the current formations within the structure are difficult to navigate. The specifics of who does what and where are not easy to know and raise the question or a number of questions on their actual connection to teachers and schools. In fact, much of the cohesive shape has dissipated. Where once Directorates within the Department functioned as part of the overall structure, today they exist as agencies outside of those controls in such areas as curriculum (NESA) and teacher training and qualifications.

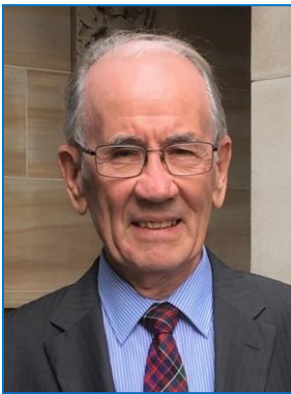
The dramatic administrative proportions of the NSW Department of Education have, at various times in the Department's history, seen a number of attempts at restructuring. And, when conducted in a truly professional education way, focussing on matters education, they were generally successful. That is to say,

the result of such learned change determined the shape of all that trailed behind. Education was the main player in the game and management existed in support.

The management structure of the Department of Education today has, sadly, succumbed not to matters and problems education-related but to issues remote to the very principles of learning, with the focus firmly on a top-down administrative model, often quite oppressive in its implementation, with its separation at a number of crucial levels from the details of teaching and learning. Unfortunately, it is a result that is not unexpected and would occur automatically when that which holds it together is removed.

Contributor details

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Arch held a number of positions in Met West Region under John Farnsworth. He also was a significant leader of developments in Industrial Arts in the 70s and 80s and was a sessional lecturer at Sydney CAE and later Sydney University in Industrial Arts. Arch has also co-authored with Geoff Hogan two books on developments in Industrial Arts and acted as a consultant in the writing of a third book on the history of Industrial Arts from 1820-2020.

Below are links to articles on the two books written by Arch and Geoff Hogan. These are available in the NSW Teachers Federation Library.

<http://education.nswtf.org.au/education20/news-features-4/book-recalls-time-great-change-industrial-arts/>

<https://news.nswtf.org.au/blog/news/2018/11/industrial-arts-teachers-stories-chronicled-print>