

Introduction

For us: why write this book?
For you: why read this book?

This book is based on the confidence we share that teachers and their communities know how to create the schools needed for their children.

Both of us have worked in schools most of our lives. This has brought us face-to-face with the current challenging culture within which schools must deliver. This is work demanding courage, authenticity, and character. Most importantly, it demands of us all to be different tomorrow than we are today.

At the core of our profession is a hunger to be part of learning environments that deliver brilliantly for all involved. We have seen such schools and worked in them and with them. They are a joy. As well, we have listened to many stories of frustration within schools. Teachers share that their school starts on new initiatives, with passion and energy, only to have this fade away with no delivery. The school then starts on another initiative with the same result: nothing absolutely mastered, nothing deeply embedded. Teachers need a sense of completion and achievement as much as their students.

“Posttraumatic initiative fatigue” (PTIF) would be a great descriptor for what is being experienced in many schools across the world. People with high ideals, desperate to do the job they have trained for, are grieving to see their vision lost. This book is about honoring those visions and bringing sanity to the here and now.

Within an evolving culture of disrespect for the people who dedicate their lives to the education of our children, few are questioning systems that no longer serve the interests of our children and society at large. This has resulted in a culture of blame, which creates paralysis. To fill this vacuum, there is a growing body of international literature supplying external processes. Everyone has an answer. This book does not bring definitive answers. Let’s be honest: No one size fits all schools. We share skills, models, processes, and insights that enable schools to deliver. These come from real school experiences of successful delivery across six countries and in

single schools containing many cultures. They define an approach that works in our times, facing our constraints and our complexity.

We stand with schools to acknowledge their challenges and face them with courage. This book is based on processes that break negativity and tap the potential currently buried under the weight of external myopia. In the end, only you can discern what is needed in your context. Different contexts demand different approaches. Knowing your own context provides a thread of authenticity. This lights pathways of growth and softens the pressure of external voices. Schools that deliver weave a powerful path between the competing voices and demands from outside. They draw on their inner resources to satisfy both learners and teachers.

Processes clarifying what is in the hearts and souls of your community for your school are at the core of our work. Having the understandings and processes to then make this a reality on your school site is what we mean by delivery.

We work with school leaders, staff, parents/caregivers, and their communities to create the schools they have long wanted. They describe what they have developed, in rich interaction with us, as being a fresh and liberating approach. This book reveals how people are working productively together within schools to deliver what really matters for their children. This collective voice provides one valuable benchmark.

Seeing beyond our own context is difficult for all of us. Our ongoing action research inside schools keeps us in touch with contemporary schooling and the issues faced internationally. Our aim here is to share a rich range of alternative approaches you can use to reflect on your experiences of your own unique school culture.

Everything in this book has passed the litmus test of working across diverse cultures and situations. We provide quotes and examples throughout the book from colleagues we are learning from and working with. These are schools that deliver.

We focus on the six central areas for delivery:

1. Alignment, which enables our school to better tap the potential of our people
2. The Real Work, which puts energy into what really matters for delivery
3. Leadership, a disposition that helps us all hold our true course
4. Authentic Action, through which we deliver on our promises
5. Core Values and Culture, which are at the root of our actions, both effective and ineffective
6. Community, the rich human web in which schools are wrapped