Chapter 30
The Case for Effectively Using Existing Business Improvement Models in Australian Schools

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ABSTRACT

There is a significant lack of documented research on Australian school improvement that is contextualized within business improvement model settings. This is the case even though Australian schools have been operating within a business environment for a while now. This chapter aims at addressing this gap by discussing what educational quality is within schools. It will present an adapted version for continuous school improvement within school systems in Australia. This adapted version of continuous school improvement provides a theoretical framework on how schools operating as self-managed business systems can ensure that the delivery of educational quality is strategically sustained at the organizational level and that focus remains on the important core business of student learning. This adapted version has been described as strategic TQM and a case is made for its use in Australian schools through five transformations that are brought about through the SCOPE cycle for school improvement.

INTRODUCTION: THE KALEIDOSCOPIC LANDSCAPE OF CONTINUOUS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Making any more mistakes in the "How to" of delivering a quality education will be disastrous to us as a nation, we cannot afford to delay having a world-class education system that builds a stronger future and a fairer Australia that can face the challenges of a globally competitive world. (Commonwealth Of Australia, 2008, p. 34)

For decades there has been a concerted effort at the international and national level to improve educational quality as part of both international and national educational reform agendas. However defining

and coming to an understanding of what educational quality is, has been an ambiguous and difficult journey. There is in fact no universal agreement on its definition, its processes, its methods for measurement, and the complexity of many simultaneously interacting relevant variables that would need to be analysed. This ambiguity in itself provides credence to the fact that educational quality is not a universally defined phenomenon but something that has to be understood at its point of action albeit having a universally accepted notional framework of understanding that nations strive to achieve. As seen over the years, some of the problems endemic to studies of educational effectiveness have been attributed to a lack of empirical evidence, a lack of longitudinal studies modelling change, the issue of data analysis methods, problems in the choice of measures for the outcomes, the issue of sample size, and statistical adjustments (Hill, Rowe, Holmes-Smith & Russell, 1996).

In a rapidly changing environment of social and economic globalisation, education is identified as a primary centrepiece and a requisite for fulfilling many individual, familial and national aspirations (Adams et al., 2012, p. 6). Hill, Mellon, Laker and Goddard (Hill, Mellon, Laker & Goddard, 2016) suggest that, "The strength of a nation's economy and the vitality of its society depend on the quality of its schools". Hill, Rowe, Holmes-Smith and Russell (1996) go on to describe how, "The provision of schooling is one of the most massive and ubiquitous undertakings of the modern state. Schools account for a substantial proportion of public and private expenditure and are universally regarded as vital instruments of social and economic policy aimed at promoting individual fulfilment, social progress and national prosperity" (p. 1). Taking Australia alone as a case in point, it has been found that Australia's declining performance across maths, reading and science may cost the country approximately $120 billion over the coming decades (Hetherington, 2018). This indicates the substantial role that the quality of education plays in any nation's success. In such an environment, understandings around educational quality have understandably become much more complex and comprehensive.

Schools are open systems where people work together to achieve a common purpose. As open systems, schools are always interacting with their environments and therefore structure themselves to deal with forces within these environments. Betts (1992) suggests that, "The improvement of quality involves the design of an educational system that not only optimises the relationship among the elements but also between the educational system and its environment. In general, this means designing a system that is more open, organic, pluralistic, and complex" (p.40). Adams et al. (2012, p. 2) suggest that there are three major implications that should be considered in improvement efforts across education policy, planning and practice which include: (a) increased centrality of education in national development policy and planning; (b) increased focus and priority on decentralisation and localisation with further empowerment of teachers and administrators; and, (c) the trend towards an emphasis on, and assessment of education quality at all levels. Brooks and Normore (2010) further suggest that "a more glocalised (a meaningful integration of local and global forces) approach to education by the discrete agency of educational leaders is imperative" (p. 52) in being able to develop a deeper understanding of educational quality. As they suggest, "the implications of glocalisation are profound, and the consequences of not understanding the way that the local and global are interconnected will increase over time" (p. 73). Torres and Antikainen (2003) similarly identify that "the presence of globalisation makes the study of education even more complex. Traditional preoccupation with the intersection of classes, race, gender, and the state become magnified with the dialectics of the global and the local" (p. 5). According to Fernandes (Fernandes, 2019a), educational leadership practised within schools that actively demonstrate and practice glocal leadership "will provide experientially rich learning to students on how to live, survive and thrive in their future world" (p.27).

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