Foreword

I f you are a teacher, a school administrator, a school board member, or a parent, we hope that you will find beneficial insights, strategies, and principles in this book to help guide your educational system to realize its highest potential.

What is the highest potential any educational system can expect? In other words, what is the purpose of education, particularly public education? (While the authors hope this book will be just as useful to those who work in private education, they are writing it from a public educational point of view.) Popular focuses for education have been to raise good citizens or to prepare a workforce. Some think that education can prevent social chaos and anarchy or lower crime rates and the spread of diseases. These are good goals, indeed, and any one of them justifies the investment a society makes in public education. But there is one goal that perhaps rises above all others: to enable each individual to learn how to create the life he or she would like to create.

If we focus education toward that result, we certainly will be able to produce good citizens, an exceptional workforce, order and well-being in society, and healthier—and perhaps even happier—people. But it will do several things more as well. It will put students in a unique position of being responsible; that is to say, it will encourage students to take the direction of the lives they lead in their own hands. The more they are able to learn to be the prime builder of their own lives, the more education takes on the role of essential ally rather than unintentional and intrusive adversary.

When the prime goal of education is to enable students to create the lives they want, students engage more deeply in the

process as active, self-generated learners, rather than simply comply to a situation in which they experience little choice. Profound questions of motivation are answered by the true and personal aspirations of each student, rather than by conformity to social norms or reactions against the threat of a repressive life based on lack of education.

STUDENTS' DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Our young people face many threats in the modern world, such as drug abuse, destructive sexual behavior, eating disorders, and various reactive patterns. These aspects of their lives are subject to the individual choices of each student, no matter what good sense we try to make them understand. We can't lock them up, control their every move, or monitor their interactions with their peer group—nor do we want to. We want to protect our young people from harm, but so much of their health and well-being depends on the decisions *they* make.

On a defensive level, we warn them against smoking, drugs, alcohol, sex, poor diet, reckless driving, and so on. But the best we can do on this front is to inspire fear about the negative consequences of poor choices. If the fear is high enough, perhaps they won't fall into the traps we, as adults, can see they face.

Conflict, pressure, and fear of negative consequences have a limited shelf life. The "sky is falling" warnings soon seem less compelling. Other immediate attractions seem to take on the glamour of forbidden fruit, even as adults' credibility fades. Adults soon seem not to know or understand how things *really* are, and the new authorities that can be trusted are other adolescents.

This is why part of education must be real lessons in how to make decisions in one's best interest. We need to teach our young people how to make decisions from the point of view of their long-term aspirations, rather than from their short-term appetites and impulses.

Making Good Decisions Leads to Success in Schoolwork

As students learn how to think about building the future they want, they also learn how to make critical secondary choices that

support their longer-range ambitions. They learn that they must often engage in activities they don't particularly like, that they find difficult, challenging, frustrating, and boring, in order to reach their ultimate goal. They learn how to deepen true self-discipline and they come to see that learning is an important dimension to the life-building process in which they are engaged. They are then motivated to accomplish their homework assignments as part of the overall strategy that will lead them to their personal goals.

We also want students to learn to be objective about reality, learn the skill of critical thinking, be able to focus on desired outcomes, and be able to develop intellectual and physical stamina. The question is, can we *enroll* them in this cause so it becomes their wish as much as our wish? The answer is yes. We do this by focusing education toward enabling them to learn how to create the lives *they* want.

Is education set up for this job? Yes and No. The potential is there, but we, as educators, have to do our work in systems and structures that are not constructed for success. The cards are stacked against us in many basic ways. As we explore just how our educational systems work, we must understand that it wasn't anyone's fault that we have what we have. No one set out to design how politics, funding, training, leadership, unions, standards, parents, and students come together in a mix that often seems destined to bring out the worst in all of us. No one, with malice and forethought, decided to plot against us. But if they had, they couldn't have done a better job of taking the resources we have, blending them with dedicated, well-meaning, and talented people, to create dynamics that often neutralize success, produce factions, cycle fads, and make things harder than they ought to be.

The situation many of us face is more an outcome of systems self-organizing into fragmentation than it is of a lack of good will, good ideas, good people, and good intentions. There is plenty of good will and intentions, plenty of talent and innovative ideas, but somehow, no matter how good the people, the fragmentation works to grind them down. And when people do succeed, it is often by working much harder than they should have had to work. Success came from overcoming forces that were design flaws in the structure.

What can be done? After years of trying to intervene, people become rightfully frustrated, cynical, and unwilling to even think

about school change. They have seen changes come and go and not lead to the promised results. They have seen people form into camps of dogma, assured that their position is the correct one and that if only everyone did it their way success would finally prevail. They have seen a pattern of oscillation—a predictable movement from centralizing to decentralizing, and then back; from local control to state or federal control, and then back; from traditional approaches to new approaches, and then back. They have seen that what goes around comes around. Change efforts often lead to lack of real change.

It is easy for us to become convinced that there is something unchangeable in our school systems. And even though many school systems have created exceptional results, real accomplishment, and significant advances, these triumphs lose something in the translation when the very same approaches are exported to other towns, cities, or states. This too-common experience directs our attention to a principle of nature: Success doesn't always succeed. In fact, sometimes success is systematically neutralized, even within the school system that originated it. For those who have worked hard to innovate, to find new and powerful approaches, they can begin to feel as if the gods are against them or that they are confronting a sinister dimension of human nature.

STRUCTURAL DYNAMICS

The actual situation is less ominous than that. It is a matter of *structural dynamics*. Structural dynamics is the study of how structures work—how elements within a system affect each other. Like its close cousin *systems dynamics*, structural dynamics considers the broader set of relationships that determine how a system behaves. The insight that both studies have in common is that the ultimate behavior is a product of the system or structure, and that without changing the fundamental relationship among elements real change is unlikely. System dynamics is especially good at tracking complex systems, but it is not often a good design tool. Through system dynamics we can get profound insights that can lead to useful dialogue. We can realize that things often are not what they appear to be and that our knee-jerk reactions to problems often lead us to solutions that do more harm than good.

System dynamics is a wonderful discipline that can help people rethink their basic assumptions.

Structural dynamics, while tracking different sets of relationships than does system dynamics, also understands how elements combine to produce predictable patterns of behavior. It also understands that any change effort, no matter how good it is on its own, cannot succeed when imposed on an inadequate structure. The reason why many good innovations in education have failed is that the structures in place rejected the change, as a body will reject an improperly matched implanted organ. Without a change of structure, any change effort, no matter how useful, innovated, or successful in other systems, is doomed to failure. What we learn from structural dynamics is how to support change by redesigning structures. It is a very good design tool, especially in education.

Structures produce predictable patterns of behavior. Some structures produce patterns of oscillation, some produce advancement. The telltale sign of an oscillating structure is that success is followed by reversals and then by a return to the original situation. An advancing structure is one in which goals are achieved and, instead of a reversal that neutralizes the progress that was made, the success becomes a platform for future success. When we are in an advancing structure, we are able to build momentum that makes it easier for us to expand, grow, and achieve our goals.

For change to succeed ultimately, it must be supported by the structure within which it is made. Many of the suggestions the authors Burrello, Hoffman, and Murray offer in this book are to be viewed from the vantage point of how can they work within our *actual* structures. We can't assume that good ideas and practices are good suggestions. For us to make ideas work they must be thought of from the perspective of a greater strategy . . . one that takes into account the actual structural dynamics that are in play. Sometimes, we will need to change the structural dynamics to accomplish our goals. This is a task that is impossible if we are unaware of current structures. Burrello, Hoffman, and Murray explore how to think about the structural forces in play and how we might redesign them as needed.

Some change can happen within the "trenches" by an individual teacher in relationship to his or her classes or by a principal in relation to his or her teachers. Burrello, Hoffman, and Murray

give suggestions about how individuals can work within a structure that is unlikely to change.

However, some changes need to be engineered by groups of people. When an entire educational system takes on the job of redesigning the prevailing structures, those involved have a great chance of accomplishing significant, lasting, and dynamic change. Changes of structure lead to changes of possibilities. What was once only a hope or a dream can become a practical reality. But for this to happen, educational systems must move from chronic fragmentation to careful composition.

Fragmented educational systems self-organize into various conflicts of interests, structural conflicts, reactive modes, organizational and intellectual clutter, and predictable oscillating patterns. As the authors address structural change in this book, they explore how to build a system that can reinforce the goals and actions people take, build competency over time, increase organizational and systemic learning, bring out the best in people, and create momentum.

The more we as educators understand the elements of the structures we are in and how those elements combine, the less likely we are to villainize various elements when we are in fragmented systems. The more we can understand how and why fragmented systems operate the way they do, the more we can address the real impediments to success. We can become designers and architects of the structures, rather than simply pawns in a game we haven't made. The experience moves from being one that seems somehow conspiratorial to one that seems collegial.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership, as it is thought of in this book, is not simply getting out in front and setting direction for the cause. The leader is also an architect, designing new structures in which true progress can become a platform for future success.

As leaders, we must come to understand the dynamics we confront. As leaders, our designs need to establish a true foundation on which we can build. We need to have a compelling vision, and this vision needs to be shared. But we also need to share in our

understanding of reality as it is and as it changes. This is not easy. It takes discipline. It is not natural for people to join together to study reality objectively and critically. But all disciplines are unnatural. That's why they are disciplines.

As we lead, we begin to build communities. The need for shared vision and shared understanding of reality becomes even more crucial to moving forward. And from knowing the desired state in relationship to the actual state, we can invent effective strategies and tactics that will enable us to reach our goals. We can learn to learn from our successes and mistakes. We can evaluate and adjust our actions in a dynamic feedback system. Together, we can grow, learn, accomplish, and build.

THE DEEPER CAUSE

One of this book's major goals is to help the reader reconnect with the deeper source of his or her inspiration, aspirations, and values in education. For those of you who have become cynical over the years as you have tried, but failed, to have the impact on education you wanted, remember—a cynic is someone who once cared deeply but was then disappointed. The question of how can this approach be different from what you've read before, tried before, seen before, is a good question. I think the book will clearly answer that question.

If there is an enemy in education, it is mindlessness. How do we become mindless? We think we know all the answers, and so we don't ask the right questions. We substitute our own concepts for true observation. We form conclusions and then impose our interpretations on the world. We generalize rather than look at the world freshly. We presume to know rather than not to know. We view reality from only one perspective rather than shifting vantage points to broaden our perspective. We drown in slogans, clichés, fads, and jargon.

Mindfulness is our ally. We need to rethink what we think we know. We need to ask authentic questions without a bias. We need to look from new vantage points, from broader perspectives, from greater heights, and with new eyes. And when we do, we will find something new. We think that education is a profoundly worthy

cause and a noble profession. We think that it is one of the most powerful building blocks of our society. We think that educators need the right tools, understanding, and support to do their jobs. This book seeks to be an aid in that cause.

Robert Fritz