

Leading the intelligent school

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If I had one wish for all our institutions, and the institution called school in particular, it is that we dedicate ourselves to allowing them to be what they would naturally become, which is human communities, not machines. Living beings who continually ask the questions: Why am I here? What is going on in my world? How might I and we best contribute? (Senge, 2000, p 58)

Introduction

This paper takes a fresh look at schools as organisations that reflects both their dynamic and their organic nature. It draws on Gardner's (1983) notion of multiple intelligence and on recent thinking about the nature of institutions to offer a new way of looking at schools and their capacity to improve. The paper portrays a very different picture from some previous, more mechanistic images of schools. It identifies nine intelligences that, when used in combination, enable a school to have the capacity to achieve its goals successfully. The purpose of the paper is not so much to challenge existing school improvement efforts as to suggest that we need to bring some fresh thought to bear on their purpose and process, which in turn has implications for school leadership.

The intelligent school

Successful schools appear to be using at least nine intelligences in the process of addressing simultaneously the core business of learning, teaching, effectiveness and improvement. The way in which the term "intelligence" is used is not straightforward because it is not easily observable and is even harder to measure. It concerns a range of collective capacities that schools can foster and develop to maximise their effectiveness. It involves the use of wisdom, insight, intuition and experience as well as knowledge, skills and understanding. These intelligences provide something analogous to the fuel, water and oil in a car. They all have discrete functions but, for their success, need to work together.

A description of each of the nine intelligences follows.

1. Contextual intelligence

Contextual intelligence is the capacity of a school to see itself in relationship to its wider community and the world of which it is a part. It is a capacity that enables a school to "read its overall context" in a way that it is neither overwhelmed by it nor distanced from it, and is able to respond to both its positive and negative aspects.

It is characterised by a welcoming responsiveness to visitors, new ideas and events in the immediate environment. It is also characterised by a self-organising capacity. This is not the same as being autonomous. It is the capacity which a school requires to match its decisions and

direction to its context. It is further characterised by a school's capacity to be flexible and to work openly with a range of perspectives, listening to others, particularly in the local community, whilst not losing sight of its core purpose and aims.

Intelligent schools understand the key messages that have emerged from school improvement studies. For example, they know there are no blueprints or quick fixes because they – whilst like every other school in many ways – are unique. As such they are not overly dependent on solutions to come from outside, and are developing problem-solving strategies themselves. At the same time they are aware of and sensitive to the need to work in collaboration, not competition, with other schools so as to learn with and from them.

2. Strategic intelligence

Strategic intelligence includes the findings from the school effectiveness literature that clarity about goals and the standards to be achieved is essential, and that the aims and purposes of the school need to be shared by everyone. Through the use of this type of intelligence a school is able to plan the action needed to achieve improvement, and has the capacity to put vision into practice. This capacity involves the ability to establish a plan in which the long-term priorities for improvement are kept under regular review and revised in the light of new contextual information. It is the kind of plan that is evolutionary (Louis and Miles, 1992) in nature. Hence the school has an approach to planning that enables it to anticipate and manage change. Hopewell (1996, p. 903) reviewing a book by Michael McMaster (1995) states that:

In a fast-changing environment this [the traditional approach] may not respond quickly enough. An uncertain future may make our current strategy a threat to longevity... We need a strategy concerned with creating the future, not merely with adapting to one that is happening already.

Strategic intelligence is about responding appropriately to the present, creating the future and anticipating the consequences.

3. Academic intelligence

Academic intelligence concerns the value put on high-quality study and scholarship. This intelligence incorporates the concept of value added, the characteristics of effective learning and teaching, and the key importance of high expectations. This type of intelligence is distinguished by an ethos that actively encourages pupils' engagement in their learning. It values pupils' questions, contributions and search for meaning. It is prepared to teach and coach pupils in the processes of enquiry, and encourages high achievement and performance.

Academic intelligence values and promotes teachers' learning because it recognises that it is inextricably linked with pupils' learning. Academic intelligence also encourages efficacy for both staff and pupils, in other words, the "can-do" factor.

4. Reflective intelligence

Reflective intelligence covers the core skills and processes of monitoring, reflecting upon and evaluating the effectiveness of the school in general and, in particular, the progress and achievement of the pupils. Reflecting upon the progress and achievement of pupils is a central concern, and as such it is closely interrelated with academic intelligence. This is because integral to this reflective capacity is an awareness of the dangers of low expectations for pupils on the one hand and complacency – for example about their seemingly good examination results – on the other.

Through collecting, analysing, interpreting and using a range of information the school can judge effectiveness by drawing on its contextual intelligence, and can plan improvements by drawing on its strategic intelligence. The data used to reflect upon the pupils' learning includes, not just statistical information and other data collected formally, but the harder-to-evaluate formative data that necessitates evidence to change an assumption or prejudice into a properly substantiated judgement. The intelligent school is comfortable and skilled in its ability to interpret, learn from and use evidence and put it to the service of its pupils and the organisation as a whole.

5. Pedagogical intelligence

Pedagogical intelligence is characterised by the school seeing itself as a learning organisation. It ensures that learning and teaching are regularly being examined and developed so that they never become an orthodoxy. This dimension of intelligence recognises the dynamic relationship between learning and teaching, and therefore understands the notion of "fitness for purpose" when deciding the most appropriate strategies to use. It also understands the dynamic relationship between thinking, learning and teaching, and therefore the importance of developing thinking skills.

...if teachers are to enable learners to develop a better awareness of their own learning, they too will need to develop awareness of their own learning, along with pedagogic strategies to encourage it (Ireson et al, 1999, p 222).

6. Collegial intelligence

Collegial intelligence concerns the capacity for staff to work together, in particular to improve their practice in the classroom. There is recognition of the need to support teachers' learning continuously in a variety of ways.

Underpinning collegial intelligence is an understanding that, whilst individuals can make a difference, the sum of the parts is greater than the whole when staff work together to improve and develop one another's practice. Collegial intelligence stems from an understanding of the relationship between teachers' learning and school improvement, and concerns the capacity to enable teachers to be the main agents of change. The benefits to the school as a whole of this aspect of intelligence have been articulated by Roland Barth (1990). He believes that a number of outcomes may be associated with collegiality:

Decisions tend to be better. Implementation of decisions is better. There is a higher level of trust and morale among adults. *Adult learning is energized and more likely to be sustained.* There is even some evidence that motivation of students and their achievements rises, and evidence that when adults share and co-operate, students do the same (p 31, emphasis added).

7. Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is to do with a school's capacity to allow the feelings of both pupils and staff to be owned, expressed and respected. Howard Gardner (1983) distinguishes between interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence. Interpersonal intelligence is the ability to understand other people: what motivates them, how to work co-operatively with them. Intrapersonal intelligence is a correlative ability turned inward. It is the capacity to form an accurate model of oneself and to be able to use that model to operate effectively in life.

Goleman (1998) argues that emotional intelligence is a vital capacity for learning and a key characteristic of effective leadership. It includes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation,

empathy and social skills. All these aspects impinge on teaching and learning, which illustrates their close connection with academic intelligence.

8. Spiritual intelligence

The national inspection framework (Education (Schools) Act, 1992) requires schools to demonstrate how they plan to ensure the spirituality of their pupils is fostered. Because of its essential ephemeral nature, this has resulted in much interest and discussion as to how it should be done. A handbook (1995) produced as part of a recent project on Values and Visions (Burns and Lamont, 1995, p xiii) states that:

Spirituality is a source of creativity open to us all. It brings that quality of aliveness which sparks inquiry, ideas, observations, insights, empathy, artistic expression, earnest endeavour and playfulness. It opens us to life and to each other. Spirituality is a thread that runs through our life, bringing hope, compassion, thankfulness, courage, peace and a sense of purpose and meaning to the everyday, while reaching beyond the immediate world of the visible and tangible. It drives us to seek and stay true to values not ruled by material success.

Spiritual intelligence is characterised by a fundamental valuing of the lives and development of all members of a school community. Everyone is seen to matter and to have something to contribute. This intelligence also recognises the need to balance the busy life of a school community with times of peace and an opportunity to be in touch with ultimate issues. It values that in our experience which is neither tangible nor measurable. It also concerns the capacity to enable deep learning to occur.

9. Ethical intelligence

Ethical intelligence recognises the importance of pupils' rights and the need to involve pupils in decisions about their own learning. This intelligence incorporates the clear statement of values and beliefs covered in a school's aims statement. It concerns the way a school conveys its moral purpose and principles such as justice, equity and inclusivity. It is characterised by a concern to ensure access for all pupils to a broad and balanced curriculum and a concern about the distribution and use of resources. The concept of entitlement is seen as important, with the result that support for learning is highly valued and there is an understanding about the nature of learners and what learners want.

Schools with ethical intelligence have high self-esteem as an organisation, which is not the same as complacency. They rarely feel totally satisfied about what they are doing, and usually have ideas about how they can do even better next time.

Leading the intelligent school

The nine intelligences have at least three important implications for school leaders:

- They are interdependent.
- They have maximum impact when used in combination.
- They each have the potential to be developed and improved.

The challenge for school leaders therefore is to establish a collective understanding of the range of intelligences being used and identify those that need to be further developed.

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