

STUDIES IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP 6

John M. Burger  
Charles F. Webber  
Patricia Klinck  
*Editors*

# Intelligent Leadership

Constructs for Thinking  
Education Leaders

 Springer

# INTELLIGENT LEADERSHIP

# STUDIES IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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## VOLUME 6

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# INTELLIGENT LEADERSHIP

## Constructs for Thinking Education Leaders

*Edited by*

John M. Burger  
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## PREFACE

The idea for this book grew out of a research conference held at the University of Calgary in the summer of 2003. At the conclusion of the conference the inter-connectivity of a number of research topics discussed seemed worth exploring. The observation of this inter-connectivity led to some extended collegial speculation and follow-up discussion in Calgary and at subsequent AERA conferences in San Diego in 2004 and Montreal in 2005 on whether a general theory of what works in education was possible. Such a general theory would need to link what we know about creating and sustaining effective schools with what we know about creating and sustaining effective educational leadership. And this became the challenge for the authors as they accepted and took up the challenge of considering if a search for a unified or general theory of what works in education could have merit.

Through networking, both in person and electronically, the book's conceptual scheme was shared with a group of both leading and emerging education researchers, primarily in Canada, but also in Australia and the United States. However, the experience of the researchers is quite international in scope. As chapters were submitted they were shared with the authors' group to support the inter-connectedness of the books key theme.

The chapters were completed at a differential rate, one after another with some overlap in time, and as they were completed a key question slowly emerged; i.e. it is one thing to read about and to construct an understanding of effective schools and effective leadership research, but how do you incorporate the knowledge and skill sets into a more integrated self, able to make the theory to practice leap in consistently compelling ways?

The answer to this question started to become apparent upon reading all of the chapters and considering them together, and perhaps not too surprisingly, involved thinking about this question as part of a mode of being, a type of world view, if you will. There was once an episode in *Star Trek*, where the spaceship, the *Enterprise*, came into contact with an entity that was best described as "pure intelligence." Such an entity might well be considered to have defied characteristics such as omnipotence, and in theory would be able to consider all of the variables that operate in the present in such a way as to be able to consistently and perfectly predict the future outcomes of any decision. Such ability might be considered a kind of cosmic general theory.

As educators, we probably have never had the opportunity of coming into practical contact with an entity we could describe as “pure intelligence”, although we can all think of leaders who display varying amounts of this quality. So, we do the best we can under the circumstances of the human condition and search for general theories that connect what we do know in more compelling ways than to consider knowledge in discrete and disconnected constructs. And, we try to seek out people who can stimulate our thinking and help us inform our own emerging general theory of what works in education.

It is our hope that this book helps you the reader as you engage in your own search for ideas, knowledge and insights that contribute to effective educational leadership.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book would not have been possible if it were not for a number of individuals who offered support and encouragement to pursue the idea that a loose coalition of widely geographically separated educational researchers could be brought together to pursue an exploration of the off the wall concept that a unified theory of what works in education would even be worth exploring. Dr. Patricia Klinck was the first to provide this encouragement, followed shortly thereafter by Dr. Charles Webber. Dr. Kenneth Leithwood also expressed early encouragement and provided a vital link to the publisher, Springer, who offered a book contract on the basis of the exploratory opening chapter. All of the authors who joined this venture as members of the writing team are of course fundamental to this book coming into being. Special thanks also are extended to Kathy Fast of Alberta Education who provided editing and formatting support. Lastly, I want to recognize my wife, Nancy, whose support, encouragement and patience was manifested as much of the writing occurred while on our various vacations in Comox, British Columbia.

John Burger, Ph.D.

# CHAPTER 1

## IN SEARCH OF THE ELUSIVE GENERAL THEORY

JOHN BURGER

*Alberta Education*

The basic premise of this book is that the definition and explication of a general theory of what works in education, based on a solid base of educational research, has the potential to lead schools and school systems to excellence. Extensive change and development in many national and provincial education systems in the past 20 years have occurred to the extent that a general theory of what works in education is possible. However, even armed with a general theory, the mechanisms for translating theory to practice are handicapped by insufficiently developed leadership networks capable of effecting truly collaborative models focused on effective reform. Schmoker, (2004: 431) in his recent critique of overly complex approaches to educational reform disconnected from practitioners, concludes,

*We can no longer afford to be innocent of the fact that 'collaboration' improves performance.... For this [collaboration] to happen, we have to reach a 'tipping point' the moment when – sometimes quite quickly – people's actions and attitudes change dramatically.... Such a tipping point – from reform to true collaboration – could represent the most productive shift in the history of educational practice.*

If we extend Schmoker's argument to the premise of this book, we are led to the conclusion that it is the absence of more systemic models of collaborative leadership that has inhibited education from becoming a more research-based profession with a clear, theoretical framework of what makes schools successful.

Attempts have been made in Canada in the past to develop more systemic models of leadership development, but these attempts have had limited success. In November 1988, a group of Canadian educators gathered in Vancouver to begin discussions on the potential of developing a Canadian network focused on enhancing educational leadership in Canada. The discussion at the initial meeting in Vancouver was based partially on Marilyn Ferguson's theory of dissipative structures, which explores the theory that the potential for building and maintaining a social structure is dependent on the dynamic tension between the forces that

hold it together vs. the forces that can pull it apart (Ferguson, 1980:162–170). The thinking that emerged at the end of the meeting concluded that there were stronger forces compelling the creation of an educational leadership network than the forces working against such a structure. Ultimately the foundation for the Canadian Educational Leadership Network (CELN) was successfully laid. Connections were established with a wide range of organizations such as the B.C. Principals Association, the Alberta Department of Education, the University of Saskatchewan, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, and others.

Concurrent with the creation of the CELN, in Alberta, Canada, a provincial organization called the Alberta Consortium for the Development of Leadership in Education (ACDLE) was formed on May 5, 1988 which connected all of the key provincial stakeholders to focus on the need to develop educational leadership capacity. The ACDLE contracted researchers at the University of Alberta to conduct a needs assessment of educational leadership in the province (Montgomerie, Peters and Ward: 1991). This report identified five key issues that effectively limited the potential for educational leadership to stimulate educational change in Alberta:

- 1) leadership was characterized as “safe” and “lacking in vision or creativity” and devoid of collaborative networking;
- 2) a lack of “social consensus” and common vision to guide educational leaders in understanding what is appropriate to expect of schools was identified;
- 3) an absence of risk-taking behavior was identified and attributed to the essentially political nature of educational leadership;
- 4) a lack of balance between theoretical content and field-based experience was attributed to leadership development programs at Alberta universities; and,
- 5) effective leadership was deemed less a function of funding leadership development programs (especially in times of fiscal restraint) and more a matter of developing collaborative cultures and cooperation between agencies.

These five issues individually would present a critique of education, but they have functioned interactively and have had the effect in their totality of reinforcing an education system that can be slow to adapt, or react to, or to capitalize on external change stimuli.

Following the creation of the ACDLE and CELN, several years of effort at local, provincial and national levels transpired and culminated in an application to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to provide funding support to a pan-Canadian educational leadership network. Unfortunately the SSHRC application was not successful. In Alberta, the absence of the SSHRC support, coupled with some degree of inter-stakeholder doubts about the efficacy of more collaborative leadership models, stimulated the dissipative forces working against the ACDLE and a national leadership development network. Instead of a national - provincial vision of educational leadership development, regional models within the province began to be seen as more sustainable, particularly in relationship to traditional catchments areas and role responsibilities for leadership development of Alberta universities. When the Alberta Department of Education withdrew its