

Reading 5.1  
Dimmock and Walker

*Strategic Leadership  
and  
Cultural Diversity*

# Summary of Chapter 6

- Focus of the chapter switches from a previous discussion on differences in societal cultures to the implications of these differences for the leadership of schools.
- “ It is argued that school improvement rests first and foremost on prioritizing improvements in teaching and learning through an iterative and reflective process that combines both strategic intent and flexibility in meeting the needs and expectations of local communities in times of rapid change and long-term uncertainty.”  
(Dimmock and Walker, 2005, p.91)
- The chapter concludes with a closer look at the implications of the increasingly multicultural nature of today’s schools.

# Strategic Leadership - *concerns*

This chapter recognises the importance of strategic leadership but the authors are concerned with the way some of the thinking is headed. They identify three problems or concerns;

1. There can be a tendency to connect strategic thinking to school development plans
2. Strategy can be piecemeal and incremental rather than holistic
3. There is a tendency to neglect the relevance of the cultural context of each school.

# Features of strategic thinking & engagement

- The necessity for longer time horizons *and* shorter term strategic flexibility
- The need for a whole-school design approach, the holistic nature of which comprises the interconnected elements that form the school as a system
- An approach to whole school design that is learning-centered and focuses on the core technology of curriculum, teaching and learning
- An approach that is responsive to the demographic, social and cultural composition of multi-ethnic societies

## Whole-school design elements the learning-centered school

If strategic thinking is to engage with the concept of whole-school design aimed at learning-centeredness, then it is essential to the various organizational elements that comprise the whole school.

These are identified as:

- learning outcomes and the curriculum
- learning processes and experiences
- teaching approaches and strategies
- technology, especially computers
- organizational structures
- human and financial resources and their management, including appraisal
- leadership and organizational culture page 94

Although presented separately they are interdependent and interconnected

## Whole-school design and strategic leadership: a backward mapping and iterative process

“the concept of organizational *design* implies the intentional, deliberate and comprehensive alignment and configuration of structures, processes and cultures in such a way as to optimize school achievement of specified goals and purposes.” (page 97)

Three key implications are highlighted in terms of improving schools:

1. Intentionality is brought to the structures, processes and practices
2. Connectivity or linkage between the various elements
3. Reinforcement, synergy and consistency of the different elements aligned towards achievement of goals and purposes

# Strategic Leadership-a backward mapping and iterative process

The authors propose that:

*Leaders need to engage in strategic thinking using a holistic model focused on learning – and learner-centred elements. (page 97)*  
*Figure 6.2 (page98)*

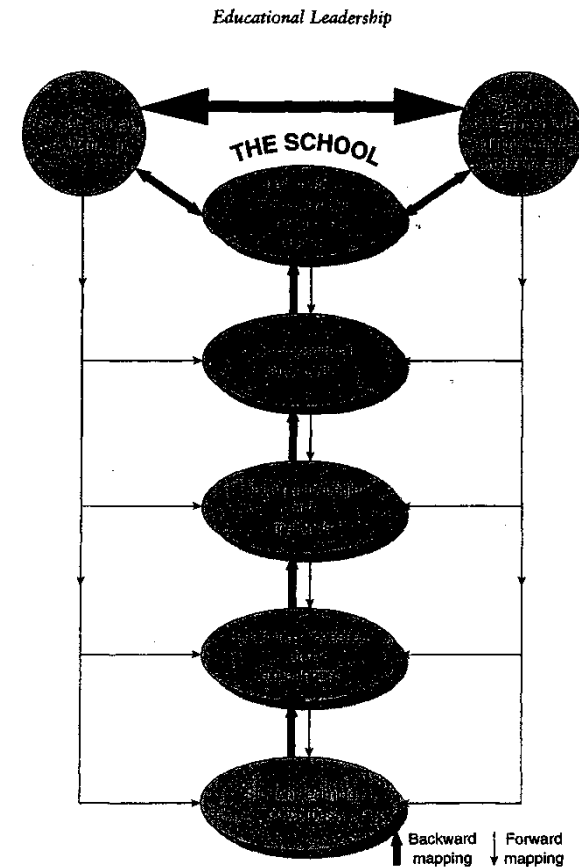


Figure 6.2 Strategic leadership – a backward-mapping and iterative process

# Strategic thinking and leadership as a backward-mapping process

Conventionally strategic thinking and policy has been a “top down” process from the system level into schools and directed vertically down the school.

The process of backward mapping suggests that we “... *begin with the end in mind and work backwards; clarify the goals and achievements, and work back from those, drawing out the implications at each stage.*” (page 99)

The learning focused model on page 98 suggests that we begin with the intended outcomes -student learning outcomes in this case and work backwards through the five clusters of school level variables.

As the process begins with the expression of intended outcomes it is therefore underpinned by shared goals and values which are clearly understood by all.

## Strategic thinking and strategic leadership as iterative processes

However, strategic thinking should not rely solely on the backward mapping process starting with learning outcomes and working back to determine appropriate teaching strategies for learning, teaching methods, organisational structures ie: timetables etc, resources, leadership and culture-building but also requires the process of checking forward.

It is by moving backwards and forwards repeatedly through the sequence of elements that will ensure “...*the maintenance of harmony consistency and alignment.*” (page 101)

This process is essential at both the conceptual and practical levels.

## Strategic thinking and strategic leadership as iterative processes continued.

Within this process, Strategic leadership must maintain a balance between all the interconnected elements of the learning-focused design model and the external environment, namely the system and social cultural contexts.

*“In these and other ways, strategic leadership is constantly balancing, adjusting and compromising the realities of situations against the strategic intent of the learning - focused design. Such leadership then is discerning in the ways the school meets students needs through continually sifting methodologies and processes which stem from within the school....Such sifting is in essence strategic and relies on the values and purposes which underpin the existence of the school.”*  
(page 101)