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The future of educational leadership: Five signposts

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Leading educational thinking and practice

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The future of educational leadership: Five signposts

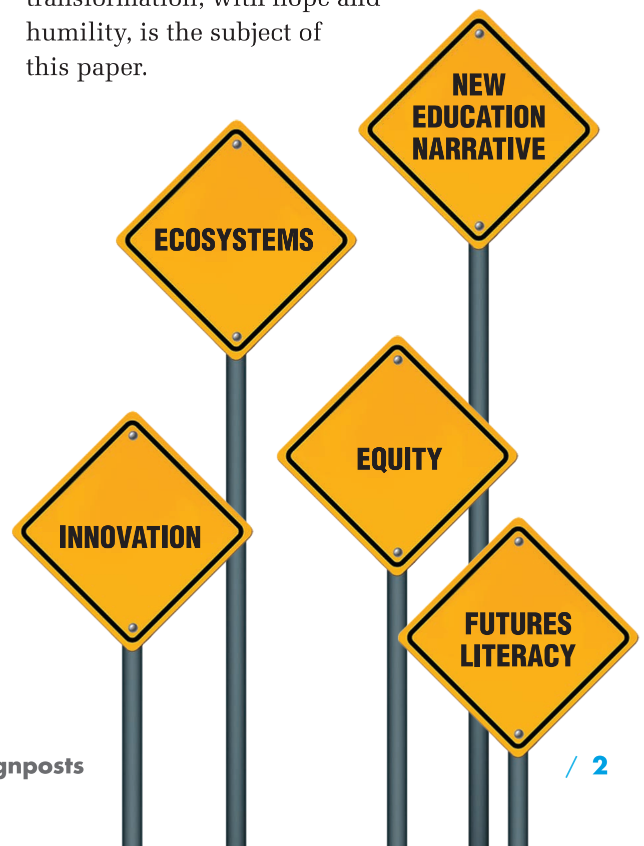
VALERIE HANNON AND ANTHONY MACKAY

Introduction

Part of our argument in this paper will be to focus on the centrality of **purpose**: hence, it seems only right that we start with the purpose of this contribution. Education leadership theory has seen a continuing level of intense activity. This includes recent work on culturally competent, responsive and inclusive leadership (Thompson et al, 2021; Santamaria and Santamaria, 2015). There is renewed work on leadership competencies for complexity; for new approaches to leadership learning; and on the conditions enabling collective leadership. Research and development work has focused on leadership capabilities impacting professional practices that produce deeper learning (Townsend, 2019 and Brown and Duignan, 2021).

Our intention in this paper is to cast a wider frame. It is not merely to tack on an additional set of competencies – although it is the case that some different competencies are proposed. Rather, it is to reflect on the nature of the leadership required at a most pivotal time in human history: an era of existential threat through climate crisis; the perils of pandemics; violent conflict; declining democracy; and widening divides – set against the immense possibilities becoming available. Thriving and flourishing in an Artificial Intelligence (AI) world is possible: but a precondition is educational leadership of a new order. Our purpose in this paper is to indicate the direction such leadership should take. We offer five 'signposts' to that direction.

Fundamental new perspectives on the predicament of humanity are emerging from a wide range of disciplines and standpoints: we will be alluding to insights from the worlds of social philosophy, science, economics, business, the third sector, and economic and social entrepreneurs. Taken together, they indicate that a revolution of values and action is urgently needed, which in turn depends upon a transformation of education. Leading that transformation, with hope and humility, is the subject of this paper.



Discerning new directions

It is clear that leadership in education is entering a new phase. Leadership is more important than ever, but is faced with profound challenges: the legacy of health-related disruption; unacceptable and unsustainable growth in inequality; mental health problems amongst learners and teachers; leadership burnout; and difficulties in recruitment. At the same time, the rapid development of convergent technologies and the awakening of new sensibilities, taken together with new sources of power, offer the most astounding opportunities for humankind – if only we can grasp them (Timms and Heimans, 2018).

Education leaders feel heightened responsibility as a result of the COVID pandemic. If, however, we widen the lens beyond education, we see that this is not a transitory one-off. We have in fact entered a new reality. It has been called the Age of Disruption, the age of Hyperchange (Smith, 2020), or pivotal points in human history, where continuity cannot be assumed; where further shocks (great and small) are inevitable, although the timing and the shape they take cannot be predicted. In one sentence, to list: pandemic; cyber attacks; extreme nationalism and the assaults on democracy; the melting of the ice caps and the burning of the Amazon, brain computer interfaces, human enhancement – as a **sample** – suggests the scale of the shifts.

In the face of all this, education systems and institutions have, for the most part, remained the most resilient (and resistant) to change, the least permeable to digital enhancement of any of the systems that serve society. There is not the space in this paper to prosecute the case for the urgency of the need for transformation in education, which has been convincingly demonstrated elsewhere.[1] In a nutshell, however, the case can be summarised as

- the failure to address the deepest needs of individuals, societies or the planet;
- the growing costs of the current system, with flat-lining gains on the existing outcome metrics;

- frustrated, unfulfilled education professionals (who are often not treated as professionals);
- little impact on inequity; and
- failure to incorporate and exploit digital technologies.

As with much else, the pandemic has shone an unforgiving spotlight on these failings. Hence it seems critical now to re-set, and to ignite the energy and commitment of a new generation of leaders – and those existing leaders who are looking for new sources of inspiration. Systems and leadership development centres have a responsibility to build the capacity of leaders genuinely to lead in the new post-COVID environment. We propose five signposts as to what this looks like.

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The Continuities

In proposing this agenda for change and development, we want first to emphasise that much of the contemporary thinking that has characterised leadership development over the last decade still stands.[2] The past decade has seen multiple insights, fundamentally highlighting the human dimensions of leadership. Perhaps these may be captured as

- the emphasis on education leaders as leaders of learning, and as **learners**;
- the notion that leadership must be inclusive, distributed and co-creative;
- a focus on personal qualities such as honesty, authenticity and humility;
- leadership needing to demonstrate moral integrity;
- underpinning social-emotional competencies, such as empathy.

These are qualities easily described: yet acquired and exercised only with great effort. They assumed even greater resonance as a result of the more acute awareness of the impact of leadership on outcomes during the course of the COVID pandemic. National and institutional leaders' performance came under sharp scrutiny, since their actions affected the lives of others so directly, in ways that perhaps usually are more obscure.
In particular, the performance of female leaders, such as Jacinda Ardern, Angela Merkel and Nicola Sturgeon, was widely praised in sharp contrast to leaders who failed to empathise, to listen and to respond in human terms; yet still without losing the sharp edge of facing and taking hard decisions.

Leading in the Age of Disruption and Hyperchange

It is no overstatement to say that we have now entered the Age of Disruption – inflexion points in history. Disruption is, of course, an article of faith for the Silicon Valley vanguard of new technology. The rapid advance and penetration of AI is a very visible dimension of the phenomenon. However, the truth is that disjunctive change is characterising almost every aspect of human life from economies, politics, work, transport, healthcare – and above all in the climate emergency. That unfolding crisis underpins many other related disruptions – from migration to pandemics. The COVID pandemic is the first of a likely succession of zoogenic healthcare emergencies caused by an egregious failure of environmental stewardship. Yet a further indicator of the new phase into which humanity has entered is contestation around what constitutes truth or factual knowledge. The challenge for too many education systems is that they have not recognised the implications of this new phase of human existence for their own purposes: and for what and how children learn.[3]

> our goal must now be to direct our educational endeavours explicitly to thriving at four inter-related levels: planetary, societal, interpersonal and intrapersonal.

To speak of leadership at all implies a sense of direction: to where or to what is the leadership directed? How can that be explicit or meaningful in an era of hyperchange and disruption? The premise for this paper is that a sense of direction is possible. Indeed, it is imperative. In *Thrive: The New Purpose of Schools in a Changing World* (Hannon and Peterson, 2021) the authors argue that our goal must now be to direct our educational endeavours explicitly to thriving at four inter-related levels: planetary, societal, interpersonal and intrapersonal. This is an alternative vision of 'success'; a vision that combines insights into the deep connections between our inner wellbeing and that of the planet, as well as addressing the preconditions for a prosperous, peaceful, equitable community. Unless we are clear about our foundational purposes, we cannot create a new sense of animating direction.

The importance of leadership is starkly revealed when people face objective threats and dangers; when old ways of working are no longer viable. Thus the major management consultancies and leadership thinkers in business have turned their attention to the implications of these tumultuous shifts.[4]

Few thinkers in education leadership have yet addressed the question of the relationship of education and its leadership to these momentous shifts.[5] We believe it is urgent to do so, and that there are clear implications not just for leaders themselves, but also for those who should be concerned with developing the leaders we need. In a debate at the Global Education Leadership Partnership in May 2021,[6] it was suggested – in a provocation by Kirsten Dunlop, CEO of Climate KIC (Europe's leading climate innovation initiative) – that part of our predicament arises from a poverty of the imagination. We have to return to the moment when, in the West, we pulled apart Art and Science and chose only the road of logic. We need to draw Arts and Humanities firmly back in, and deal in possibility.[7]

How can education leaders face the challenge of their generation and 'deal in possibility'?

Signpost 1:
Lead the creation of a *New Education Narrative*

Arguably, the creation of a collective story – a public narrative – has always been a fundamental element of what great leaders do. They are sense-makers, and they join the dots. Such leaders are capable of constructing (or assembling existing elements of) answers to the questions: Who are we? What do we stand for? What are we trying to do? To choose contemporary examples: in the context of US politics, both Obama and Trump did exactly that, with diametrically opposing answers to the question offered. Readers of this paper will easily fill in the elements of those two stories, but they galvanised, activated and enlisted followers – not just to consent, but to actively engage. The choice of these two leaders reveals sharply how the process of narrative creation can be put to starkly different ends. A narrative can tend towards change, to retrogression or towards stasis.

This point is particularly relevant in relation to education. School leaders frequently engage in narrative around their **institution**. Perhaps they convey its history; its norms; what it means to be a part of that community. Perhaps they create a story around its aspiration toward 'excellence'.

> We think the concept of **thriving** offers a fertile way forward.

Without an explicit, communicable narrative, there is a tendency for the status quo to prevail. Tacit understandings, assumed to be 'common sense', are taken for granted. These are particularly strong around what schooling is for; what counts as 'success'; and therefore what learning goals are adopted (with the ensuing implications for curriculum, pedagogy and assessment).

However, **change** (real change) depends on the creation of a new public narrative – one that extends beyond individual schools and thinks about schools in a wider societal context. Without it, the pervasiveness of the old narrative remains hidden – how it permeates thinking and assumptions. The old paradigm of learning is locked in through a tacit narrative of 'success'. A new narrative about the purpose of learning – one which is expansive, informed and profoundly moral – is now the central business of leaders. We think the concept of **thriving** offers a fertile way forward. There is not space here fully to outline the key features of the new narrative for education that is adequate for the times: indeed, part of what we urge is a free and fresh debate about this. However, surely the outlines are not in dispute: thriving at planetary, societal, interpersonal and intrapersonal levels. If we address what each of these now means to us, our narrative clearly emerges.

The features of the old story are easy to list – even though they are not made explicit too often, since naming them reveals their bankruptcy. We use that term deliberately, because the underlying model is economistic.

Key features include the following.

- Education makes nations more prosperous, because it increases growth (GDP).
- Education is the route to the best jobs.
- Education is the route to social mobility.
- Success in education is getting qualifications.
- Subject-based academics are the qualifications that really matter.
- Getting into university is a key success indicator; if you haven't got a degree, you are 2nd class.

It is interesting that economists themselves are raising issues of the nature of **value/s** at this time. Of course the concept lies at the heart of the discipline of economics; but a new breed of economists has begun to argue for a reassessment of the idea. Amongst the most eminent perhaps, Mark Carney (former Governor of the Bank of England) has examined how economic value and social values became blurred, how we went from living in a market economy to a market society (see Carney, 2021; also Mazzucato, 2020). Everything has become commodified, and price is equated with value. Commodification is corroding: we have placed the things that in truth we need to value at profound risk. Carney sets out a framework for an economic and social renaissance in a post-COVID world, which embeds the values of sustainability, solidarity and responsibility into all decision making. These values are currently notable by their absence.

Commodification is corroding: we have placed the things that in truth we need to value at profound risk.

We have argued elsewhere for the inadequacy and distorting effects of the associated educational paradigm (see Hannon and Peterson, 2021).

A full-scale assault on the societal values – or narrative – that underpin it is to be found in Michael Sandel's powerful book *The Tyranny of Merit*, which should, in our view, be required reading on every leadership development course. The term 'meritocracy', where society is governed based on achievement, was coined satirically by Michael Young in 1958 as a warning. Since then, however, it has become the overwhelming organising principle of our education system and job market, leading to a proliferation of testing, a premium on university education and a fetishisation of academic credentials.

Sandel shows how the profound dislocation and polarisation to be found in contemporary politics – features that threaten the very existence of democracy – are to be traced back to these ideas. They have led to a sense of exclusion, humiliation and resentment; often a lack of a sense of dignity, amongst those for whom education has not delivered the glittering prizes.

The Age of Disruption and pivotal change are such that it is the duty of education leaders to understand their contours and implications. It has to be recognised, however, that the consequences do entail transformational change in the institutions they lead. It is not merely a question of a new wrapper round an old product. Constructing a new narrative and the means to communicate it are the necessary preconditions for achieving consensual deep change. That depends on building political will, the will of stakeholders, the public will and, crucially, the will of young people. This will build the platform to bypass or leapfrog institutional arrangements that hold on to the old grammar of schooling. It will enable the essential innovation in pedagogy, curriculum choice, assessment and culture.

Of course, by its very nature, the future cannot be predicted, but we now know enough to recognise that permitting 'business as usual' in schools and colleges is also a failure of (educational) stewardship. A new story is in the process of being constructed, and leaders are needed who can contribute to and communicate it.

Such leaders can draw strength and inspiration from the increasing number of voices raised to further the task. Writers like Robert Putnam argue – for example in his most recent book, *The Upswing* (2020) – for moving beyond anxiety and despair. He tells the story of how the US came together as the 20th century dawned; but then, over the course of the 1960s, trends reversed to a more individualistic society. He believes, however, that the US can reverse this and move to a more 'we' society: one based on community; more cooperative; more generous; more focused on responsibilities to each other; less focused on narrow self interest.

Storytelling skills have not been a part of the usual leadership repertoire although there are honourable exceptions.[8] They entail, first and foremost, an understanding of what it is we face and the implications for schools and systems. But beyond understanding comes the challenge: how is it to be communicated?

The art of storytelling in the public domain has received valuable critical analysis, as well as creative contribution. As one example, the work of Marshall Ganz, from Harvard, should be mentioned (see, for example, Ganz, 2009). Ganz's central contention is that public narrative is a **leadership art**. Leaders draw on narrative to inspire action across cultures, faiths, professions, classes, and eras. Ganz suggests that there are at least three elements of public narrative, which are

- a story of self, which communicates who I am – my values; my experience; and why I do what I do;
- a story of us – our shared values; our shared experience; and why we do what we do;
- a story of now – What is happening? What are the implications? This transforms the present into a moment of challenge, hope, and choice.

Storytelling is profoundly motivating, as Ganz's work shows. It is also a learnable skill (though it is no doubt true that there are 'born storytellers'; we have all met them) – but to craft a story; to know how and when to utilise it; these are not generally the kinds of skillsets that education leaders think about. Our thesis here is that the construction of public narrative (the story we tell ourselves about ourselves) is fundamental to any possibility of change in education; the change that is needed if today's learners are to thrive in a transforming world.

Signpost 2:
Lead within ecosystems

Leaders who are collaborative have long been valued. Moreover, the leadership skills of engaging deeply and in partnership with schools' local communities (usually understood as parents and local businesses) frequently feature in the development programs. However, the features of the new era entail that this mindset needs to be expanded further. The argument here is that the traditional silos of schooling are no longer adequate to the challenge of providing the range, diversity and personalisation of learning opportunities that young people now need if we are all to thrive. Many more organisations and sectors need to be involved. One way to think about this is to reconceive of 'education systems' (usually top-down hierarchical arrangements of management) as learning ecosystems.[9]

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Learning ecosystems bring together **diverse** providers – not only schools and colleges – but also non-formal learning institutions, private sector organisations, the creative and cultural sectors, businesses and tech companies – to create new learning opportunities. They often involve innovative credentialling systems, so that learning achieved in different contexts and settings can be recognised.

In a study of 40 learning ecosystems worldwide, Luksha et al (2020) offer the following definition.

> *Learning ecosystems are interconnected relationships organising lifelong learning. They can also be described as intentional webs of relational learning which are dynamic, evolving, and enable greater diversity when fostering lifelong learning opportunities. They connect learners and community to develop individual and collective capacity. The purpose of learning ecosystems is to offer pathways for learners to actively co-create thrivable futures for people, places and our planet…*
>
> *The shift from industrial education to ecosystemic learning requires a seismic shift in leadership. Ecosystem leadership is emerging as a potential pathway to unlearn, reimagine, and relearn how to both learn and lead together as we co-create life affirming futures together that work for all.*

Put bluntly, if we are to thrive, education needs to be 'everybody's business'.

The majority of the extant and researched ecosystems involve schools but are not managed or led by schools (Luksha et al, 2020). So leaders must learn collaborative and entrepreneurial skills of a quite different order.

In addition to the competences around management, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment that are required, the new conditions point to the need for a capacity to build and participate in learning ecosystems. Unlocking the learning assets of communities, and extensive engagement

with stakeholders beyond the education sector – these are now the characteristics of the most forward-thinking educators across the planet, in both global north and south. From their research, Luksha et al identify the variety of roles and competencies that ecosystem leaders play when cultivating learning ecosystems (see Figure 1).

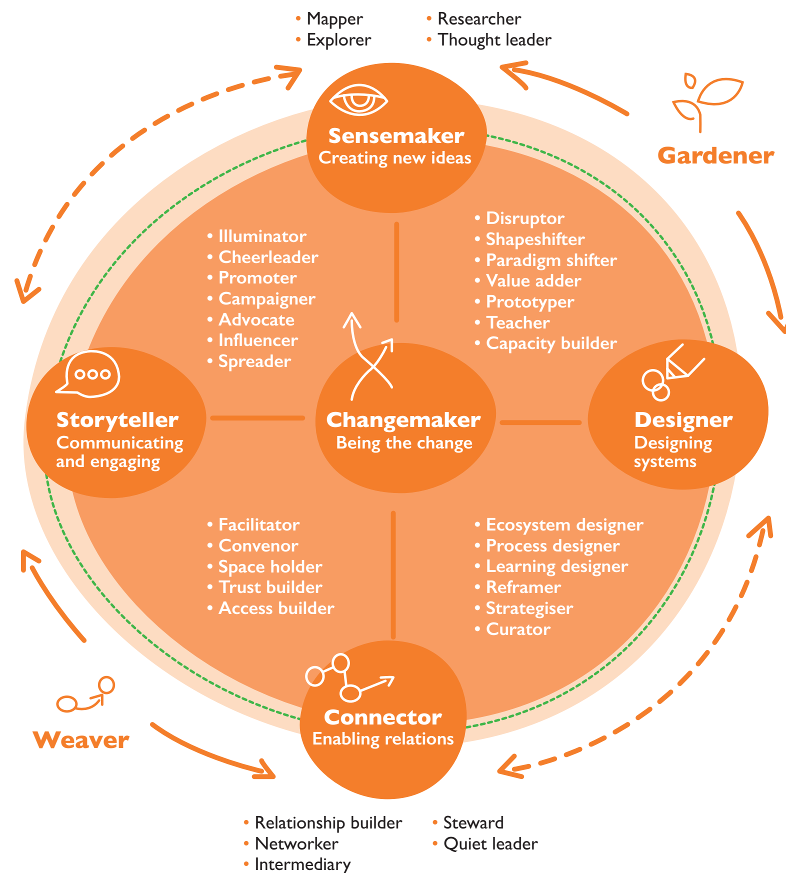
However, this work is in its infancy, and much needs to be done to understand better how these roles are evolving in a post-pandemic context, where the integration of the digital learning resources and community is also a part of the mix.[10]

The prize is valuable. It enables leaders to mobilise a wider educator workforce, to create platforms, alliances and networks to accelerate and amplify powerful professional practices that will create new and richer pathways for learners.

The creation of learning ecosystems enlarges the ideas pool and flow, and fosters enlarged identities for educators. However, our primary concern here is with the benefits for learners. There is emerging evidence how intentionally-created learning ecosystems create new possibilities, aspirations and opportunities for learners.

This perspective is summed up well by Jeff Holte, Director of Learning for the Liger Leadership Academy (LLA) in Cambodia, a school seeking to create a new generation of leaders for a country with a traumatic past. The school provides a residential scholarship program for economically disadvantaged students that combines a comprehensive, internationally competitive education, with an innovative STEM and entrepreneurship curriculum.

Figure 1. Learning ecosystem roles/competencies as identified by leaders



Source: Adapted from Luksha P (2020) *Learning Ecosystems: An Emerging Praxis for the Future of Education*, accessible at learningecosystems2020.globaledufutures.org.

Liger's model is highly empowering: it has enabled young leaders to excel beyond traditional subjects. Liger students have become internationally published authors, app and digital currency developers, regionally-recognised robotics engineers, and national award-winning filmmakers – all by the age of 15. Teachers are called facilitators because they work alongside students to identify a problem or opportunity and design solutions, ideas, and products to address that problem. To achieve this, the school has had to adopt an ecosystemic approach, identifying multiple partners, from NASA to international labs, to local farmers. Jeff Holte says the following.

> *Our real-world projects – for example, reviving the coastline of Cambodia – have forced us to ask: who is a teacher? When you realise that the whole world has opened up, and the world is a classroom, then the answer can be – everyone. Because teachers just can't know everything.*
>
> (see Hannon, 2021, forthcoming)

Schools should also recognise that, in the new conditions we face, schools cannot do everything

Munby's work on 'imperfect leadership' (2019) is focused on leaders who know they cannot know everything. Schools should also recognise that, in the new conditions we face, schools cannot do everything either: they need to incorporate themselves in nets of learning opportunities. This is what leadership in ecosystems means. The implications will be different in different contexts (as always): the leader seeking to work at the system level to engineer an ecosystem for a locality – such as Remake Learning leader Greg Behr,[11] or Damian Allen, CEO of Doncaster Council – will perhaps lay different emphases on the roles set out in Figure 1, from the leader working within the school.

For the latter, though, there is an inherent tension: between building up a strong institution with a distinctive ethos and sense of community, and stretching out horizontally across boundaries (including through digital means) to expand the education workforce, incorporate wider perspectives and engage learners in the wider world. Managing that tension – indeed exploiting it – is an art, not a science.

It may be worth noting here our view that **institutions**, albeit within an ecosystemic context, will – and should – have a vital part to play in the transformation we advocate. It is fashionable to decry the sclerotic grip they can exert on societies' efforts towards rapid and revolutionary change. Our view is that, especially in the age of AI and virtual exchange, institutions are vital, and that we jeopardise them at our peril. This is not just because institutions form the basis of communality and the shared perspectives that hold communities together. It is also because they cushion risk and protect against the unforeseen contingencies that individuals left to themselves cannot (see Lewis, 2018).

In the case of schools, for all their many failures and shortcomings, we believe them to be a fundamental element in the range of new solutions that humankind must evolve, if we are to overcome and transcend the existential challenges that confront us – but only if they are reimagined (see Hannon, forthcoming). They need to become the 'deliberately developmental organisations' that Kegan et al (2016) have advocated. Whilst it may appear that this is not exactly a new insight, what is new is that 'development' is now understood not only as advancement through predictable stages of growth in capabilities, but also as changes in one's fundamental understanding of self in relation to the world (Elmore, 2019). This is a theme to which we will return.

Signpost 3:
Lead for equity

Education leadership has not done nearly enough to divest itself of involvement in replicating historic inequity. A prevailing rhetoric, developed over years of the education 'reform' movement, combines the terms equity and excellence as goals. However, the reality is that in most systems, even where overall education standards (on the old metrics of standardised academic tests) are rising, inequalities remain or are rising (see Bonnor et al, 2021). These, of course, provide a narrowly restricted lens through which to assess the issue. We need to broaden the focus so as to encompass the variety of inequalities that beset us: income/wealth; social class; race; caste; gender; sexuality; neurodiversity – indeed, the multiplicity of ways in which humans are differentiated hierarchically: to advantage some and disadvantage and oppress others. Still, one might argue that leading for equity is hardly a new agenda. 'Closing the gap' (on the old metrics) was a mantra for decades in the school improvement movement. It is just that we have not yet been very good at it. Is it really an issue that needs a fresh approach when thinking about making the future we want?

We want to argue that the issue of equity is profoundly important for humanity's future. It is not a nice-to-have; but rather, it is fundamental to thriving at all the levels set out in the introduction to this paper. Equity is fundamentally about what it is that is valued and how. Whilst 'equity' was simplistically conceived of as, variously, equality of opportunity or outcomes, it did not get to the heart of the question. What are to be the 'goods' in society? (Oil or water? Cash or time? Caring or theorising?) It is now apparent that the overarching goal of thriving cannot be achieved without rethinking equity.

In global or planetary terms, this can be demonstrated in three ways. First, the planet itself has been put at risk by an ideology of greed, consumption and acquisition. We have noted the new movement of economists[12] that has begun, reconceptualising our notions of value, and highlighting the acute need to recognise the limits to growth and consumption within planetary limits. It defines the imperative of finding the sweet spot that meets the needs of all within the means of the planet.

> Increasingly, scholarship is indicating that reducing inequality is also key to delivering future prosperity.

Secondly, in terms of reaching towards a peaceful planet, the dehumanising of groups in a culture of dominance is what has led, and continues to lead, to the precariousness of peace. Tony Jackson (2020) has described this as the prevailing culture of dominance.

> *Globally, we find ourselves in an age defined by the dominance paradigm. As in the past, inequities in power and privilege today lead to gross disparities in the resources required, if not to survive, then to live with some semblance of well-being. These growing excesses in inequality are justified by a view that it's just the natural order of things for some to have more than others, be it wealth or power or both … If there is to be a 22nd century worth living in, we have to both think and act differently. Our survival requires the ascendency of an egalitarian world view and the subordination of the dominance paradigm. We must act to enable human beings from the earliest stages of development, as their minds are forming, to construct reality from a more egalitarian than dominant perspective.*
>
> *… What's needed is education for a 22nd century. Not to prepare for the 22nd century,* ***but to get us there.***

Moreover, moving from the planetary to the societal or community level, it turns out that the evidence shows that becoming a thriving society is not the same as getting richer. Equity is actually the key determinant. In their seminal study *The Spirit Level*, Pickett and Wilkinson (2010) used evidence from a wide variety of peer-reviewed sources on incomes and income distribution, and health and social problems, to look at the question of what makes communities thrive. Counter-intuitively, their work demonstrates clearly how a society's wellbeing is not determined by its overall wealth. Across eleven different health and social areas – physical health, mental health, drug abuse, education, imprisonment, obesity, social mobility, trust and community life, violence, teenage pregnancies, and child wellbeing – outcomes are significantly worse in more unequal rich countries. When it comes to thriving societies, then, increases in wealth appear to be counteracted by increases in inequality: societies with a larger gap between rich and poor are bad for everyone – including the well-off.

Increasingly, scholarship is indicating that reducing inequality is also key to delivering future prosperity. Boushey (2019) demonstrates how rising inequality is a drain on talent, ideas, and innovation. It has led to a concentration of capital and a damaging under-investment in schools, infrastructure, and other public goods. Inequality fuels social unrest and is a serious drag on (good) growth.

As we have noted, however, inequality – or the dominance paradigm – manifests itself in a number of ways, not just the economic (though that is usually a marker). As the *Black Lives Matter* and *#MeToo* campaigns have shown, violence against people of colour and women continues to blight prospects for a thrivable future for all. During COVID lockdowns, it seemed not to occur to any of the (mainly) men in

power that the mantra to stay home and save lives in fact threatened the lives of women subject to domestic violence, who were now trapped inside their homes; under lockdown the rate of such violence soared.[13] Also, in 2021, the *Everyone's Invited* explosion[14] shone a spotlight on how, in just one jurisdiction, the culture of sexism (at best) or misogyny (at worst) gives rise to sexual violence in schools, or the threat of it.

The dominance paradigm is so ingrained, it gets automatically replicated. In *Nice Racism*, Robin DiAngelo (2021) analyses how racism is a system into which all white people are socialised. DiAngelo reveals how well-intentioned white people unknowingly perpetuate racial harm. Similarly, in relation to indigenous/First Nations peoples, the call is out for individual educational leaders to confront the experience of, and response to, education from the voices of indigenous people, as a necessary step to achieving anti-racism in our learning systems. In some jurisdictions, indigenous insights and wisdom are not being merely tolerated; they are becoming central to incorporating a different world view.[15]

Thirdly, the points made by Sandel (touched on above) have profound relevance to the issue of equity. Arguing in similar vein, Goodhart (2020) sets out in *Head Hand Heart* how the three broad streams of human aptitude (heart, head, and hand) have become entirely unbalanced. Cognitive-analytical ability, that which enables people to pass exams, has become the gold-standard of human esteem. For all the attempts such as that by human scientists – including Howard Gardner, with his theory of multiple intelligences – to rebalance and re-value the full spectrum of human aptitudes, cognitive ability still trumps all else. We have reached what Goodhart describes as 'peak head'. In part, COVID may assist in the process of revaluing. Citizens became aware of the centrality of the caring and practical capacities in keeping societies running during lockdowns. (This is not of course to diminish the importance of scientific knowledge and expertise in developing vaccines and defeating the virus.) Moreover, the environmental and social challenges we face – especially in an era of AI – are increasingly putting a premium on valuing place: witness the trends towards labour-intensive organic farming and the inevitable expansion of various care functions in an ageing society. Goodhart brings us back to the centrality of value, as follows.

> *Questions of value underpin all these arguments. What is human worth? What is cultural value? As Jonathan Sacks, a former UK Chief Rabbi, has complained, without God we have increasingly adopted a utilitarian and economic definition of human worth, and questions of meaning and value have been relegated to the private sphere.*
>
> (2020)

What have these arguments to do with equity in education? Leaders have to examine how far we have colluded in an over-valuing of cognitive capacity and the credentialling of it, over the full breadth of human aptitudes and indeed cognitive diversity. Of course, very 'clever' people remain of immense value to society. Big brains make many problems easier to fix.

Over-valuing them, however, leads to a different set of problems. It has underpinned the growing divides in society, and led to profoundly unequal levels of dignity and respect. This is corrosive to the notion of thriving societies. Since education leaders are themselves invariably academically successful, socialised to esteem the supremacy of the cognitive, this is highly challenging.

These arguments have been adduced to demonstrate the centrality of leading for equity if we are to shape a thriving future. Of course, this cannot be down solely to individual leaders. Structural conditions embedded in policy and resourcing create a foundation. In the Australian context, Bonnor et al (2021), for the Gonski Institute, show how a policy and resourcing framework continues to bake in inequity; and they describe the difficulties inherent in addressing this. NCEE (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2020) has described the outlines of the policy frameworks amongst high-performing systems (again, on the old metrics) that support equitable outcomes. These include pre-and post-natal financial and parenting support for new families; comprehensive health and medical care for all families of young children; access to the critical social services, health care, behavioural and mental health services, nutritional supports, and other needs that students from more affluent families receive as a matter of course. It should be noted that these policies relate to the wrap-around services available (or not) to schools. Michael Fullan (2021) refers to them as 'equality investments'. These are necessary but not sufficient. They do not address the gross (and growing) differences in the funding bases between the private and the public sector.

despite the failures of existing policy frameworks ... individual educational leaders do have a vital role in promoting equity, if we are to achieve this next stage in humanity's evolution.

This issue runs very deep: for example, Linda Darling-Hammond[16] provides an anatomy of equity that goes well beyond the provision of equitable school resources. She calls for the application of principles from the science of learning and development to reinvent schools to focus on authentic learning and equity. In similar vein, Sahlberg and Cobbold (2021) have argued for the dual objectives of equity of outcomes for individuals **and** for social groups – that is 'social equity'.

However, despite the failures of existing policy frameworks, the contention here is that individual educational leaders do have a vital role in promoting equity, if we are to achieve this next stage in humanity's evolution. Whether as leaders of systems or institutions, the educational leaders for tomorrow need to be prepared to tackle systemic inequity in all its forms. Such preparation entails an understanding of the historical and social processes that have led to our current predicament. This gives rise to the necessary cultural humility and understanding. However, the process also entails the deeply personal: gaining insight into one's own unrecognised biases, and the sense of privilege and entitlement that can accompany them. Only from this place can authentic leadership for equity arise.

Leaders in the future need to be advocates for inclusion and diversity, for racial equality; fiercely anti-racist and anti-sexist; agents of change, activists intervening to attack institutional barriers to equity and achieve the power shifts that are necessary to produce justice for all. In the everyday running of schools, the very essence of the culture and ensuing policies and practice needs an equity lens. In terms of leadership development, there is a growing knowledge base – arising at present more from practice than research – to support competence in the pursuit of equity.[17] This is no longer about just 'closing the gap' in terms of credentials.

Signpost 4:
Lead for innovation

Perhaps enough has been said about the rapidity of change and its complexity to support the idea that educational leadership can no longer rely on the old tools of planning and implementation. Classically, these entailed the ability to write a detailed multiyear improvement plan; to set objectives for improvement; and to define specific milestones for progress, projected years into the future. There was a linear quality to this activity: complicated (clear solutions to well-understood problems) but not conducive to **complex** problems or environments – those with many unknowns, variables, and interrelationships.

The task is no longer one of improvement of the existing paradigm; and certainly not one of systems maintenance. It has been observed[18] that we need not just innovative solutions, but **system innovation**. More fundamental innovation is needed in two situations: first, when a challenge is stuck and significant gains can no longer be achieved using the same system model. And secondly, when society faces a new, systemic challenge that existing systems were not designed to cope with. Both of these conditions obtain now, in relation to education systems. Moreover, innovation is not just about problem solution: it is also fundamental to the seizing of opportunity. A systemic opportunity is never just a different way to achieve an existing goal: it makes new goals, and ways of life, possible (see Leadbeater and Winhall, 2020). As we have argued, education systems should now be deeply engaged in the task of creating a new, thriving way of life.

Now, education leaders – especially system leaders – need to be committed to experimentation, innovation and knowledge exchange, not only in an individual's own learning environment

but on behalf of the wider system. This entails understanding methods of innovation and how they sit alongside the use of research; involving users – especially learners – in the effort. COVID showed how critical it is for great leaders to be able to iterate, adopt and adapt.

Pioneering collective efforts to develop and scale forms of education innovation have been steadily growing in the last two decades. Amongst others, they include not-for-profits like Innovation Unit (UK and ANZ); Edutopia; Education Reimagined, Remake Learning; for-profit consultancies; and, in some instances, state-backed initiatives (the New York City i-Zone, and the Finnish NAE Innovation and Development Centre[19]).

The good news is that a range of well-evidenced and developed methodologies now exists and is readily available to be deployed in the endeavour. These methodologies may not be standard in leadership development programs; but their use is growing, new approaches are emerging (*Recognition of Learning Success for All*, Milligan et al, 2020) and expertise becoming more widespread. Three examples illustrate the range:

Agile Leadership[20]

Agile Leadership is an approach that focuses on the capacity to respond intelligently and adapt to change flexibly as it happens. Breakspear and colleagues have argued for the development of enhanced agility in the leadership of improvement and innovation (Breakspear, 2016; Breakspear et al, 2017). They propose that agile approaches enable leaders to adjust, learn and iterate throughout the improvement process, in order to gain their desired impact amidst changing conditions.

Agile approaches embrace the inherent complexity and ambiguity of change processes in contemporary systems. They use the process of *sprints*; setting up teams to respond, learn from and adapt

to change as they are working to solve a complex problem. In this approach there is a bias towards action, continuous experimentation, and seeking rapid real-world feedback to guide new iterations. The aim is to make small, critical changes that they can improve through disciplined inquiry and action; identifying the smallest number of high-leverage initiatives. It is argued that the cumulative effect can be transformational. This method is similar to that of improvement science, which deploys rapid tests of change to guide the development, revision, and continued fine tuning of new tools, processes, work roles and relationships (Bryk et al, 2015).

Spirals of Inquiry[21]

Spirals of Inquiry, a method developed in Canada and New Zealand and now in use in many jurisdictions, similarly emphasises real-world, evidenced impact; and a fluidity of approach deploying creativity and strong teamwork. The method also insists on the imperative of involving learners, their families and communities in inquiries. There are six parts to the process, in which the following questions are posed.

1. **Scanning:** What is going on for learners?
2. **Focusing:** Where will concentrating energies make the most difference?
3. **Developing a hunch:** How are we contributing to this situation?
4. **New learning:** How and where will we learn more about what we do?
5. **Taking action:** What intervention will be the most impactful?
6. **Checking:** Have we made enough of a difference?

Human Centred Design

Human Centred Design in education is an approach emerging out of the disciplines of service design, and has been nurtured by such organisations as Design Thinking in Education,[22] the Harvard Graduate School of Education, IDEO (a global design and innovation company), Stanford's d-school and Innovation Unit. It is deeply user-focused (often deploying ethnographic techniques), rapidly prototyping ideas in the real world.

These methodologies, as examples of the range available, offer the leader who aspires to be future-fit, approaches which are similar, in that they

- place purpose and focus upfront, with the requirement really to debate what the goals are;
- acknowledge the complexity of educational goals and problems, not falling back on managerial linear planning techniques;
- emphasise the importance of involving and engaging the most important actors – the learners, their families and their communities;
- rely upon convened teams of empowered educators to explore, enquire, learn and implement together in a structured, disciplined way.

Leaders who become competent in these approaches are able to engage in future-focused innovation with real professional responsibility. We stress competency here, since these are learnable approaches in which leaders can demonstrate proficiency. However, a precondition for their effective deployment is a real shift in mindset: a move away from that of the service manager, to that of the social entrepreneur (see GELP, 2013). Moreover, it is unrealistic in most cases for school-level leaders to undertake this task individually and unsupported. What is really needed is for systems – in whatever configuration – to provide the infrastructural support in order to create a real community of practice.

Signpost 5: Lead for futures literacy

Current conditions are reframing what defines good leadership. The old idea of determining a clear vision and pursuing it (with some gestures towards the impact of changed circumstances) seems too brittle a stance for leaders in the future. As Smith puts it,

> *Leadership must enable a culture that supports the freedom to think and plan in non-linear ways, and views uncertainty as a material to build with, not as a risk to be mitigated.*
>
> (2020)

Everything that we have argued for in this paper derives from the contention that it is the absolute duty of educators to look forward in an informed and balanced way to a future very different from the past: one that, though they may not themselves experience it fully, their students undoubtedly will.

Therefore, leaders need to become 'futures literate', in order to help their communities become so. UNESCO (2020) defines futures literacy as follows:

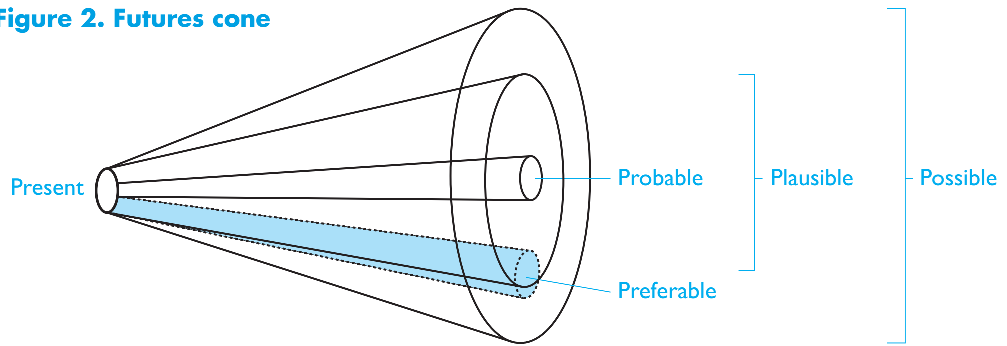
> *Futures Literacy is a capability. It is the skill that allows people to better understand the role of the future in what they see and do. Being futures literate empowers the imagination, enhances our ability to prepare, recover and invent as changes occur ... The term Futures Literacy mimics the idea of reading and writing literacy because it is a skill that everyone can and should acquire. And it is a skill that is within everyone's reach.*[23]

UNESCO believes that democratising the origins of people's images of the future opens up new horizons, in much the same way that establishing universal reading and writing changes human societies. To that end, since 2012 they have been holding a series of (now more than 80) Futures Literacy Labs across the world. These are action learning/research workshops to engage in collective intelligence.

If it is true that futures literacy is a fundamental competency for all, how much more is that the case for education leaders? Before prosecuting the case though, it would be right to mention the alternative view. That is: that a highly sceptical stance should be adopted in relation to futures thinking or foresight work, in view of its record of past failures. In the corporate sector, for example, a recent review of 77 different companies found that fewer than one-third who engaged futurists gained any value from the exercise at all (Rohrbeck and Schwarz, 2013). Why sell this snake oil therefore?

The problem appears to arise if the process is seen as a narrow exercise in prediction. Rather, if it is understood as an effort to understanding the nature of change, of expanding the imagination, and strengthening people's capacity to shape change, then a different picture emerges. This is about learning to be anticipatory of trends and forces that can both promote and produce deeper learning, and of those that threaten a flourishing future. It is about overcoming fear and inspiring hope – issues at the very heart of any leadership

Figure 2. Futures cone



Source: Adapted from Voros (2003, 2017), which was based on Hancock and Bezold (1994). Also see researchgate.net/figure/Futures-Cone-Source-Adapted-from-Voros-2003-2017-which-was-based-on-Hancock-and_fig1_325519712

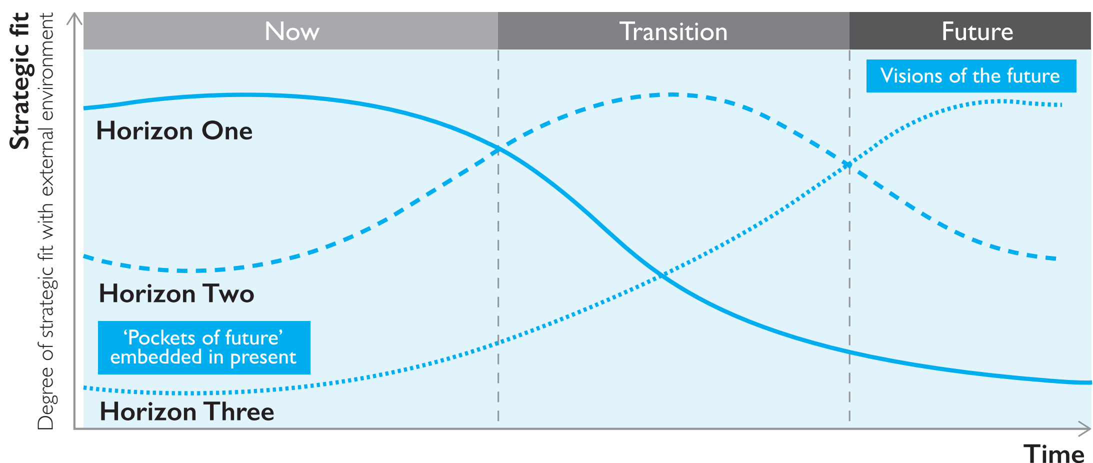
agenda. The point of futures thinking is not to get better at prediction (though that would be rather helpful). Whatever futures methodology is used, the purpose is really to stretch our imaginations by considering what is **possible, plausible, probable, and preferred** (see Figure 2).

Public discourse is replete with images of futures imagined, projected or pronounced to be a *fait accompli*. Often these are also presented as binary false choices – that of dystopia or utopia. At a time when economic visions, belief systems and cultures are all up for grabs, there is a need to work out the contours of a future framed according to our values. That is why the tools and processes of futures thinking are so valuable – to leaders in particular.

'Futures literacy' needs now to be an integral dimension of preparation for leadership – and there are processes and approaches that can equip leaders with the necessary knowledge, skills and values. This is about creating leaders who can navigate different time horizons with the goal of ensuring that our learning system realises the new purposes: individual and collective thriving. As an illustration, two futures-thinking tools might be mentioned.

The first (see Figure 3) is the device of *three-horizon thinking* (Sharpe, 2013).[24] This involves intentionally conceiving of the nature of the tasks ahead on 3 horizons, especially when a crisis or shock to the system has occurred. Such as in the case of a pandemic.

Figure 3. Three-horizon thinking



Source: Adapted from the International Training Centre's Foresight Toolkit, at training.itcilo.org/delta/Foresight/3-Horizons.pdf.

Horizon One recognises that leaders must focus on managing immediate recovery. It entails 'necessary myopia'; but not without an eye to the longer term. Horizon Two is the point of transitioning. Arguably, post-pandemic, schools and systems will be in this space – a 'zone of collision' – for some time. Change theorists believe this is the time of greatest innovation and disruption, when immediate dangers have receded, and where new thinking can emerge. However, the key is to put in place arrangements fitted to Horizon Three, where a new paradigm comes to be built, capturing the 'future we want'; but the idea is precisely **not** to put off that work – it needs to be engaged within the present – and what is critical is that this act of creation genuinely escapes thinking constrained by the old paradigm. That is where the second technique can be valuable.

That is the device of utilising scenarios. In education, Hedley Beare (Beare, 2000), Brian Caldwell and David Loader (Caldwell and Loader, 2010), amongst others, focused educators' minds on possible futures. Until recently, however, there have not been that many who have sought to bring the disciplines of futures literacy to the task. Amongst those who have, OECD deserves special mention. OECD has a long history of utilising scenarios to promote constructive thinking about the future. It pioneered the approach with its *What Schools for Tomorrow?* Program.[25] This work developed six scenarios for the future of schooling, and was utilised in a number of prototyping programs, such as that at the UK National College for School Leadership. The work has been revisited and updated by OECD with its 2020 publication *Back to the Future of Education: Four Scenarios for the Future of Schooling.* As Andreas Schleicher remarks in the introduction,

> *[The scenarios] can be used to dream and to transform. They can be used to future-proof systems and stress-test against unexpected shocks. Above all, they push us to move beyond complacency and easy solutions, presenting us with the tensions and paradoxes inherent in all our systems and which we must address.*
>
> (OECD, 2020)[26]

Of course, these materials are only of value if they can be picked up and utilised in the service of actionable leadership development. We believe there is an urgent need to do so, and there are good examples of it happening. In *Transforming the Future – Anticipation in the 21st Century*, Riel Miller (2019) relates powerful examples of how people are using the future to search for better ways to achieve sustainability, inclusiveness and wellbeing.

Conclusion

Somewhat belatedly, there is increasing attention to bringing education into a new relationship with the economy and work; with technology; with the broader society; and with our planetary survival – all through multiple forms of learning. We have made the case for a growing focus on leadership as a key societal lever in creating the future that humanity needs. In the case of education, the urgency of the need for transformation is acute. It is clear that change will require impact at two levels – internal and external.

In the case of education, the urgency of the need for transformation is acute.

Externally, we need to generate legitimacy via public confidence, stakeholder engagement, and a political shift. Perhaps that shift will entail a new politics: the politics of participative democracy, of community action and the power of networking. This form of socialised power and influence in a hyper-connected world is open, participatory and peer-driven. Timms and Heimens (2018) describe this as *New Power* – like a current, not a currency. In the education context, it surely means education leaders mobilising new voices in order to assert the new narrative, in a way that builds first public and then political support. The learning ecosystems that leaders are building will be the co-creators of the new narrative.

The internal dimension relates to the transformation of self, the authorising of self.

We know that leadership often emerges from a place of need or passion, rather than certification and training (Cuseo et al, 2020). Or, as one principal put it to us: *'It's not now just about the projects we pursue. It's about who we are'*. This remark is profound, because it pinpoints the fundamental question of how system change is related to self-change.[27] The recognition is growing[28] that profound, authentic leadership must emerge from leading **oneself** ahead of seeking to lead others.

We have suggested five new signposts to directions in which that leadership should head. They point to

- co-developed narrative;
- ecosystemic engagement;
- responsible commitment to experimentation;
- a relentless campaign to drive equity (redefined); and
- the evolution of futures literacy.

Naturally, they are inter-related, and will be the more powerful if they are interactive, working in combination. We hope through suggesting these signposts to contribute towards legitimating and promoting new forms of educational leadership. The stakes are high.

> ***Our blunders become their burdens***
>
> Amanda Gorman[29]

Invitation

The authors and network colleagues are committed to further exploration and development of this work. Feedback and examples of 'signpost leadership' in practice will be warmly welcomed. Please use either or both of the following email addresses Valeriehannonconsulting@gmail.com amackay@ozemail.com.au.

Endnotes

1. See, for example, in this CSE series, Lucas, 2021; and Fullan, 2021; and Mehta and Fine, 2019.
2. For an overview, see Pont, 2020.
3. For an extended discussion of this see Hannon and Peterson, 2021.
4. See, for example, *Five New Operating Principles for the Age of Disruption* by Sweetman K and Cragun S, at dukece.com/insights/five-new-operating-principles-age-disruption; *Three Vital Skills for the Age of Disruption* by Krishnan K, for the 2019 World Economic Forum, at weforum.org/agenda/2019/09/3-vital-skills-for-the-age-of-disruption; and *Leading Off*, at www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/Email/Alerts/2020/11/2020-11-30a.html?cid=other-eml-ofl-mip-mck&hdpid=6684b485-dc0a-432f-a2f0-3205ba00def8&hctky=3155024&hlkid=a07d856209944031bb55744f04e37067 (McKinsey Leadership Newsletter).
5. One notable exception is the World Innovation Summit on Education (WISE) ALL-In network wise-qatar.org/all-in which has convened leaders to discuss this issue. We gratefully acknowledge the opportunities to be a part of those convenings as well as the ways in which contributions of other participants have influenced the thinking behind this paper.
6. See GELP-X (Global Education Leaders' Partnership), May 2021.
7. See also Tony Goldsby-Smith hbsp.harvard.edu/product/ROT053-PDF-ENG.
8. For example, the *Leader as Storyteller* program at the Wharton School (University of Pennsylvania) leadership. wharton.upenn.edu/undergraduate-workshops/leader-as-storyteller; and Howard Gardner's *Multiple Intelligences* (1983).
9. For a full discussion of the emergence of learning ecosystems, see Hannon et al, 2018.
10. See also the *Ecosystems Learning Lab* that the World Innovation Summit (WISE) has set up: wise-qatar.org/special-focus/designing-vibrant-and-purposeful-learning-communities.
11. remakelearning.org.
12. Notably Carney (2021), Raworth (2017) and Mazzucato (2020).
13. For the UK evidence see theguardian.com/society/2020/aug/17/domestic-abuse-surged-in-lockdown-panorama-investigation-finds-coronavirus. This is a pattern repeated internationally.
14. everyonesinvited.uk Wikipedia provides the following information. 'Everyone's Invited is an anti-rape movement organisation based in the United Kingdom, focused on exposing rape culture through 'conversation, education and support'. It was founded in June 2020 by Soma Sara, and allows survivors of rape culture to share their stories through testimonies shared anonymously on their website and Instagram profile.'
15. See, for example, the work of the First Nations Education Steering Committee of British Columbia fnesc.ca; also *Unteach Racism*, the New Zealand Teaching Council's strategy teachingcouncil.nz/resource-centre/unteach-racism and teachingcouncil.nz/assets/Files/Leadership-Strategy/Leadership_Strategy.pdf.
16. Darling Hammond, L, learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/covid-new-deal-education-top-10-state-policy-moves Learning Policy Institute Blog Series 2020/2021.
17. See, for example, edutopia.org/article/why-black-teachers-walk-away?utm_content=linkpos1&utm_campaign=weekly-2021-03-31&utm_source=edu-legacy&utm_medium=email and Cuseo et al (2020), representative of a growing body of resources reflective of growing leadership sensitivity to equity.
18. See the Danish Rockwool Foundation rockwoolfonden.dk/en/projects/systeminnovation-hvad-kraever-det-at-forandre-et-system
19. 'The Innovation Centre, which served as the education sector's experimentation and innovation unit, operated under the auspices of the Finnish National Agency for Education from 2017 to 2020. While the Innovation Centre has ceased to operate in its current form, the Finnish National Agency for Education continues to propagate competence related to experimentation with the support of its Innovation and Development function.' (From oph.fi/en/news/2021/innovation-centre-ceases-operate-finnish-national-agency-education-continues-support).
20. See Breakspear, 2016.
21. See Halbert and Kaser, 2013; and see also noiie.ca.
22. tll.gse.harvard.edu/design-thinking#:~:text=Design%20Thinking%20is%20a%20mindset,refining%20ideas%2C%20and%20testing%20solutions.
23. What is Futures Literacy? UNESCO, 2020, Accessed 19/01/2021 at en.unesco.org/futuresliteracy/about#:~:text=It%20is%20the%20skill%20that,what%20they%20see%20and%20do.&text=As%20a%20result%2C%20humans%20are,becoming%20more%20'futures%20literate'
24. Other examples include ITC Foresight training.itcilo.org/delta/Foresight/3-Horizons.pdf
25. oecd-ilibrary.org/education/what-schools-for-the-future_9789264195004-en.
26. Also worthy of particular mention is the education scenarios work of Holon IQ: see holoniq.com/2030.
27. Valuable contributions to the work of transforming self in the process of leadership are to be found in Scharmer, 2013; Elmore, 2016; and Kegan et al, 2016.
28. See for example, Ransom, 2021.
29. Amanda Gorman's, Inauguration Poem 'The Hill We Climb' 20/01/21 thehill.com/homenews/news/535052-read-transcript-of-amanda-gormans-inaugural-poem.

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The authors acknowledge their debt to participants in the World Innovation Summit on Education (WISE) series of webinars in 2021, on the theme Education Reimagined: Leadership for a New Era. We have benefitted from the stimulus, insights and ideas the series provoked.

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