Editorial

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Legitimacy restored. This is the poignant epilogue to Phil Hallinger's case study of transformation in higher education in Thailand which, in common with many radical innovations in education, ultimately foundered on the rocks of deeply embedded convention. The story of pedagogic change developed and sustained over a 7 year period encountered that invidious organizational disability described by Peter Senge as 'nothing fails like success'.

The story begins with the assertion 'at the outset that there would be few such "pure" implementations of faculty evaluation in universities internationally as that which took place at the business school—GSB. Yet turnaround takes time and, as we learn yet again, change requires an acute and sensitive grasp of cultural convention. Asian universities, writes Hallinger, struggle to meet the challenges of quality improvement in a global game in which they start with fewer 'chips' on the table and with a respect for status that is reluctant to challenge those who are assumed to know better. Significantly, the word for student—noos—is the same in Thai as the word for mouse.

A key strength of this study's design lay in its longitudinal perspective, a 7 year period, evaluating and gradually transforming thinking and practice. Quoting Terence Deal's aphorism that 'culture is what keeps the herd moving in roughly the same direction', Hallinger adds, 'The quality improvement effort at GSB was clearly asking "the herd" to change its direction. This could not be accomplished, however, without a shared vision of learning. 'Therefore, all conversations about performance and reward were couched in terms of a vision of learning that centered on students'.

In order to effect a shift in the faculty culture, a system of teaching excellence awards was put in place. Five individual teaching awards and one team teaching award were conferred, d in a ceremony that involved handing a certificate of teaching excellence and

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a cheque for 250 US dollars to each awardee who then would tell their story of what they had done in their class to lead to students' success. The names of recipients were then posted on visibly in the college for posterity. While this celebratory ritual was initially met with cynicism, especially among those who did not gain awards, over time as the culture of the GSB changed, some of the erstwhile cynics began to visit the classrooms of their colleagues to see what it was they did to achieve success.

The story might have, should have, ended here with a profound cultural renewal but ironically cultures appear to be change most rapidly in a reactionary direction. Under new leadership timidity replaced risk taking. Empowerment ceded to authority. What it can take 7 years to build can be destroyed within a year. The positive lessons to be learned do, however, live on, and interesting parallels are to be found in a country not too far from Thailand. Although the context here is school rather than higher education, Pak Tee Ng's account of Singapore's celebration of visionary teaching rests on a similar philosophy to that of Hallinger. Pak Tee describes the policy approach in which Achievement, Development, Distinction and Best Practices Awards are given to schools with 'exemplary school processes and practices', with outstanding and sustained achievements in character development, as well as in recognition of high achievement in national exams.

Information on the number and type of awards achieved by each school is published on the MOE website. As in Thailand the focus is on celebration of achievement together with a determination not to highlight failure. The decision was taken, therefore, to publish achievements of schools but not their failings and to put an end to the publication of 'league tables'. SEM (School Excellence Model) scores and SEM reports are also kept confidential.

Herein lies the Singapore paradox. Culturally Singapore is a society that is result oriented. Parents want results. Employers look for results. The government emphasises results. It is a country proud of its achievement and its pre-eminence internationally in terms of student attainment. Student performance, especially in the area of Mathematics and Science, as reported by TIMSS, are the envy of other countries. Yet, the government expresses concern over students who are described as 'passive learners', driven externally to perform but not necessarily engaged or inspired, nor innovative or entrepreneurial enough for the knowledge-age economy. Over a decade ago Goh Chok Tong, then Prime Minister, declared at an international conference that 'what is critical is that we fire in our students a passion for learning, instead of studying for the sake of getting good grades in their examinations'.

The government is now increasingly emphasising a different type of goal. As the globalised knowledge economy places a premium on creativity and innovation, the government seeks to persuade its public, its schools and its teachers that they should pursue broader definitions of success. The tension between learning as lifelong and learning as a proxy for school accountability is not only a longstanding debate in Singapore but it also touches a nerve in every country where learning is constrained by the self-perpetuating hunger for standardised comparative attainment measures.

'McDonaldisation'? This is the term used by Mohammed Alauddin to refer to efficiency and mass production in assessment, which, he argues, sees the quality of students' work compromised by the need for fast turnaround and labour saving devices.

The question being addressed by Alauddin, of relevance to any programme of study whether school or university, is to gauge the balance between progressive assessment and a final summative exam. Should levels of performance in the latter correspond to achievement in the former? What is the role and efficacy of multiple

choice questions (MCQs) as predictors of final grades? And what is their role in motivating students? In Goh Chok Tong's words 'Their knowledge will be fragile, no matter how many As they get...It is the capacity to learn that will define excellence in the future not simply what young people achieve in school'.

An introductory postgraduate course in statistics is used as an empirical exploration of the answers to those questions, examining the relationship between students' performance on MCQs and in progressive assessment and their final examination grades. While the finding is that MCQs appear to have a substantial negative impact on performance in the final examination, there is a fairly strong positive correlation between student performance in progressive assessment and final examinations. For example, a student attaining a higher distinction (HD) at the progressive assessment stage had a 37 per cent chance of securing the same grade (HD) in the final examination.

One conclusion is that statistics anxiety, which is at a very high level, is exacerbated by the examination under timed conditions such as the MCQ, contributing to lower final examination scores relative to those achieved in progressive assessment. Anxiety can, of course, be inimical to recall and to discriminating judgment under pressure, and as we know from numerous studies (Kluger and DeNisi 1996, for example) summative testing, as opposed to formative assessment, can depress both achievement and motivation.

To what extent are students' achievement and motivation related to the motivation and passion for learning of their leaders? How might we answer this question in an international context? Take Australia and Turkey, for example. How similar are their needs? Wildy, Clarke and Styles batting for Australia, and Beycioglu for Turkey, address this question as part of a larger International Study of Principal Preparation (ISPP), now in its fifth year. This paper compares the responses of novice principals in Turkey and Western Australia, using a survey based on data from case studies of principals in their first 3 years.

In many respects the geography, history and cultures of these two countries could hardly be more different, one highly centralised the other decentralised by state. The important similarity is that in both countries principals take up their first appointments without any formal preparation programme. This is particularly pertinent for novice principals in Western Australia where the study was carried out.

Questionnaires completed by 50 Western Australian and 60 Turkish principals probed the nature of the problems they faced and the extent to which they felt prepared for these problems. Managing the budget and achieving work/life balance were least welcome in both countries while aspects of the job relating to the place—the community—presented the least challenge. The contrast is between what may be described as top down pressures from policy, for which they were least prepared, as against the people skills which they brought with them from prior experience.

The apparent paradox here is that those who perceived the work as presenting the most serious challenges were those who felt better prepared. The authors suggest that feeling well prepared to do the job may be associated with understanding the complexity and hence the challenge of the job. Conversely, those who feel under-prepared may have underestimated the job's complexity and hence feel less equipped to both problematise and deal with the range of demands made of them.

The paper concludes with anticipation of data emerging from England and Scotland in the ISPP study. Recent studies in both of those two countries offer remarkable parallels to Western Australia and Turkey despite both having well developed headteacher preparation

and induction programmes. However well prepared these principals might be, the complexity and intensification of the role, accountability demands, a changing social and family context, and the rapid advance of technology all compound the challenges in leading a school in the 21st century. As in the Wildy et al., paper, in U.K. countries, the highly visible nature of the principal's role, the threat to work-life balance are of significant concern in deterring those who might have been aspiring to principalship.

And now for something completely different

Can we draw lessons about evaluation from a story told three Millennia ago in the very unique context of a Jewish world? Antonio Fernandez-Cano clearly believes so. Surely it is appropriate that in a journal devoted to evaluation that we are enjoined to read the book of Judges, as one would assume they know a thing or two about evaluation. This reading is, suggests the author, a necessary prelude before coming to grips with his treatise on hermeneutics and the exemplary evaluation practices of one heroic historical figure. Gideon, 'like any good evaluator, breaks away from prejudice and false concepts', defines needs and goals and is clear in both definition of objectives and how to ascertain their accomplishment.

The exemplar of Gideon is juxtaposed with 'the horrible reputation' of evaluation models which are unscientific, of low empirical validity, persuasive not prescriptive, confused and confusing and devoid of predictive power. Quoting Smith, it is argued that 'evaluation models are most appropriately seen, therefore, as general design heuristics but which are not implementable or testable in discrete, unambiguous ways'.

In Gideon's exemplary approach all the criteria of sound evaluation are met, including its predictive uses. With a little help from the Almighty, not only are medium-term objectives met (to live in peace after driving out the Midianites oppressors) but also the somewhat more lofty goals (that the Jewish people return to monotheism, renouncing apostasy and idols) are also realised.

Antonio Fernandez-Cano's embrace of hermeneutics to interpret a text and draw out contemporary messages ends with an invitation 'I would therefore urge readers to use their good judgment to validate the many possible interpretations of this biblical text, combining credibility, rationality, contextual adaptation, conceptual comprehension and making comparisons with other meanings that could be drawn from the text interpreted here. In short, they should replicate this study by comparing the various plausible interpretations as alternative hypotheses'.

This brief tour around the globe from Thailand and Singapore to Turkey via Australia and the Midianites brings together all three themes of this journal and prompts us to consider once again the delicacy of their inter-relationship and cultural context in which they come to life.

Reference

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