SEPARATING THE GOOD FROM THE BAD IN MYTHS ABOUT MORE AUTONOMY FOR SCHOOLS

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It is generally well-known that I have been an advocate of self-managing schools in the public sector for more than three decades and you may well be wondering if I have anything to add in a conference on the theme 'Looking Forward, Looking Back'.

Looking back, the position I reached from 1977 was evidence-based, with a series of research projects commencing with my doctoral work at the University of Alberta in Canada from 1975 to 1977, continuing in Australia for a Project of National Significance funded by the Commonwealth Schools Commission in 1983, enriched by five studies in Victoria on its Schools of the Future initiative, and finally the Principal Autonomy Research Project for the Department of Education, Science and Training in 2007 (Educational Transformations, 2007). Along the way I conducted hundreds of workshops for thousands of school leaders in many countries that either provided or planned to provide more authority and responsibility for schools. I have served as a consultant on self-managing schools to governments across the spectrum here in Australia and other countries. It goes without saying that I learnt a lot, what works and what doesn't, things to fight for and things to resist, and I would like to share some of this today in the context of national and state interest in the matter.

As the title suggests, my address will deal with myths about school autonomy, four are 'bad' myths, and I'll deal with these first, while four are 'good' myths.

Myth 1: Autonomy means autonomy

Bad myth! I am disappointed about the use of the word autonomy when in fact no government school has, should have or will have autonomy. We were at pains to point this out in our report of the Principal Autonomy Research Project. We have been clear on this from the outset, and that is why we preferred the idea of a self-managing school rather than a self-governing school or an autonomous school or an independent public school.

We define a self-managing school as a school in a system of public education to which there has been decentralised a significant amount of authority and responsibility to make decisions within a centrally-determined framework of goals, policies, curriculum, standards and accountabilities. Of central importance is the answer to the question 'Decisions about what?' A one-size-suits-all approach is neither desirable nor feasible, and there will be a range of approaches in a state as large and diverse as New South Wales. What may be desirable or possible in a large city may not be desirable or possible in a relatively small remote school.

Myth 2: Autonomy must be earned

Bad myth! The idea that autonomy must be 'earned' by schools gained currency in England over the last decade. John Hattie recently took up an appointment as Director of the Melbourne Education Research Institute at the University of

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Melbourne after serving for many years at the University of Auckland. In an excellent article in *The Australian* (Hattie, 2007) under the title 'Challenge of focusing education reform' he declared that 'we need to think of "earned autonomy" – if a school can dependably demonstrate that it can aid all students make above the "schools like me" average progress each year then it should be "left alone" for local solutions; otherwise there is less autonomy until this situation is met'.

We rejected this approach in the report of the Principal Autonomy Research Project. Instead of a highly centralised approach being the 'default position' with schools having to earn autonomy, a high level of autonomy should be the 'default position' with exceptional cases determined on a needs basis.

In my view the overwhelming majority of principals and teachers in Australia's schools are able and committed professionals who are determined to do the best by their students and are willing to engage in ongoing career-long professional learning. Why should they be singled out among virtually every enterprise in the public and private sectors as having to 'earn' what is taken for granted in other settings?

Myth 3: High levels of autonomy can be implemented quickly

Bad myth! It takes several years to bed down a system in which more authority and responsibility are delivered to schools. While it is widely believed that the Kennett Coalition Government in Victoria brought about a self-managing revolution when it took office in the early 1990s, the truth of the matter is that it was building on a decade of development under successive Labor Governments, with a major thrust in the first two years of Cain Labor in 1983 resulting from a series of ministerial papers. Most of my work in Victoria to support schools was undertaken during the Labor years. The much higher level of autonomy now being achieved in England in 2011 is occurring 23 years after the 1988 Education Reform Act, and the steady progress that had been achieved under Conservative and Labor administrations.

The timetable for roll-out in Australia is relatively sedate, to be completed by 2018, even though by then Victoria will have had 35 years in a steadily evolving approach. There is more than enough time to hone the 'default position' to take account of different schools in different circumstances.

Myth 4: It's all about privatising public education

Bad myth! There was a time, notably just before and just after 1990, when every proposal for creating a system of self-managing schools was alleged to be a right wing plot, and that the aim was to privatise public education. This was understandable when its advocates included Margaret Thatcher, who made it a key part of the 1988 Education Reform Act in England, or in New South Wales when it was proposed by the Greiner Government. At about the same time it was implemented by the Labor Government in New Zealand, when David Lange was Prime Minister and Minister for Education. As noted earlier, the Kennett Government was highly visible in the field, but the foundation work was undertaken by the Labor Government in 1983 and, after Kennett, was extended by Labor under Steve Bracks. Federally, the Liberals claim ownership but Labour under Julia Gillard is pressing ahead in partnership with the states and territories. The truth of the matter is that each end of the political spectrum can find aspects of self-management that fits within its ideological frame. In the final analysis, self-managing schools in the public sector continue to be owned and operated by government.

For me, my first awareness of the possibilities was in my early years, before I became a teacher, when my father was principal of a technical school in Victoria from the 1950s to the 1970s. All technical schools had more-or-less total control of their budgets and were governed by a council of parents, staff and representatives of business, industry and civic institutions. After working in schools in Australia and Canada, my doctoral research at the University of Alberta was undertaken in school districts that were politically 'independent'. Our Commonwealth-funded Project of National Significance in 1983 was undertaken during Labor administrations in Canberra, Tasmania and South Australia. Professional development programs were conducted in Australia and New Zealand under Labor. Our grounded research on developments in England was undertaken in Cambridgeshire and Birmingham, where local authorities were run by left-leaning Liberal Democrat politicians. One of the most enlightening and affirming conversations I had on the topic was with the late Albert Shanker, President of the powerful American Federation of Teachers

Apart from that research background, my advocacy is largely pragmatic within a framework of logic: each school is unique with a unique mix of students in unique communities, and it makes sense to have as much discretionary authority at the school level as possible within a framework that ensures coherence in a system of public education.

Myth 5: Self-management is a megatrend

Good myth! I have co-authored four books on self-managing schools, each with Jim Spinks, who served as an outstanding pioneering principal in the practice of self-management in Tasmania (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988, 1992; 1998; 2008). The second was *Leading the Self-Managing School* (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992) which we wrote after an intensive series of workshops and consultancy over eight years from 1984 to 1992, mainly in Australia, England, Hong Kong and New Zealand. In 1992 we took stock of what was occurring around the world and discerned 10 megatrends – major trends that were shaping schools. It may be helpful to list these to see where the self-managing school fits in and aligns with the others.

1. There will be a powerful but sharply focused role for central authorities, especially in respect to formulating goals, setting priorities, and building frameworks for accountability.
2. National and global considerations will become increasingly important, especially in respect to curriculum and an education system that is responsive to national needs within a global economy.
3. Within centrally determined frameworks, government [public] schools will become largely self-managing, and distinctions between government and non-government [private] schools will narrow.
4. There will be unparalleled concern for the provision of a quality education for each individual.
5. There will be a dispersion of the educative function, with telecommunications and computer technology ensuring that much learning that currently occurs in schools or in institutions of higher education will occur at home and in the workplace.
6. The basics of education will be expanded to include problem-solving, creativity and a capacity for life-long learning and re-learning.
7. There will be an expanded role for the arts and spirituality, defined broadly in each instance; there will be a high level of connectedness in the curriculum.
8. Women will claim their place among the ranks of leaders in education, including those at the most senior levels.
9. The parent and community role in education will be claimed or reclaimed.

10. There will be unparalleled concern for service by those who are required or have the opportunity to support the work of schools.

Megatrend #3 was concerned with self-managing schools and it continues unabated but in many more countries than was evident in 1992. OECD has documented international developments and I summarised these in *Reimagining Educational Leadership* (Caldwell, 2006). The 10 megatrends seem to align well but developments have not been uniform; indeed, some have gone backwards (for example, #7) and there have been dysfunctional effects which I take up in another section of the paper (for example, an unhealthy focus on accountability in #1).

Myth 6: There is a link between self-management and learning outcomes for students

Good myth! We now have evidence of the link between self-management and outcomes for students but it is just one of several strategies that need to work together if it is to have this effect. For example, curriculum and pedagogy must be appropriate and teachers and their leaders need to be at, and remain at, the forefront of knowledge and skill.

Much of this evidence was not available to us in the early stages of self-management in the 1980s and 1990s because we did not have data on school achievement. We were able to do some ground-breaking research in Victoria in the late 1990s when we mapped the links between self-management and learning outcomes. We summarised the findings in *Beyond the Self-Managing School* (Caldwell & Spinks, 1998). It is worth recalling that this research was done in a collaborative effort of primary principals, secondary principals, education department and University of Melbourne. It is also worth recalling that the research effort had expert input from Dr Peter Hill, then Professor of Educational Leadership at the University of Melbourne, now CEO of ACARA, and the late Dr Ken Rowe, who was one of this country's if not world's pre-eminent experts in structural equation modelling, a key statistical tool that enabled us to understand the links.

There is now a robust international evidence base that draws on results in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). There is a consistent finding that a relatively high level of autonomy is associated with higher levels of achievement providing there is a balance of autonomy, accountability and choice (Wößmann, Lüdemann, Schütz & West, 2007).

Myth 7: Self-managing schools are a counterweight to centralised command-and-control cultures

Good myth! It is this theme that I would like to develop. The views I express are not for the faint-hearted because I challenge some of the policy settings that schools are now required to address. I am keen to hear your views on the matters I raise, some of which have been canvassed in the media.

I believe aspects of the reform agenda are seriously dysfunctional. Contrary to declared best intentions these are impairing the capacity of schools to do the best for their students.

Misalignment in strategies for improvement and transformation

A source of several of the major dysfunctions is the mis-alignment of strategies for school reform. The following is an illustration of how misalignment may have occurred in Australia.

In *Why not the Best Schools* (Caldwell & Harris, 2008, Chapter 9) we proposed a 10-point 10-year strategy for achieving the transformation of a nation's schools, with transformation defined as significant, systematic and sustained change that secures success for all students in all settings. It was developed about two-thirds of the way through an eight-year sequence of projects focusing on the transformation of schools. The groundwork was laid from 2004 to 2007 in 73 seminars and workshops involving about 4,000 school and school system leaders from 11 countries. These events included input from me and other consultants, but the centre-piece in most instances was scores of short case studies from school leaders about how their schools had achieved or were being transformed. The purpose of the workshops was to test ideas. It was an iterative program with findings from one event being reported in those that followed.

National studies were conducted to test several hypotheses and these were funded by the Australian Government and Welsh Assembly Government. They were conducted in Australia, China, England, Finland, Wales and the United States. The findings were reported by *Why not the Best Schools*. One outcome was a set of strategies to guide policymaking and policy implementation in efforts to achieve the transformation of schools. They were intended to be immediately adaptable to Australia, but the framework is relevant to any country that has the same intention. The 10-point 10-year strategy was as follows:

1. A national curriculum is designed that is broad enough and sufficiently adaptable to ensure the professional judgement of a highly-skilled profession will prevail at the school level ('national curriculum')
2. Initial teacher education is transformed to ensure all teachers have a master's degree and remain at the forefront of knowledge and skill through continuous professional development ('teacher education')
3. New structural arrangements are designed to ensure diversity of programs in the post-compulsory years in an effective constantly-changing alignment of education, economy and society ('program diversity')
4. National testing of all students is minimised as the highest levels of knowledge and skill are developed by teachers and those who support them ('national testing')
5. The wider community including business is seriously engaged in design and delivery with public and private funds deployed through networks of foundations and trusts ('community engagement')
6. Transparent needs-based mechanisms are designed to ensure the efficient deployment of public and private funds ('transparent funding')
7. Innovative approaches to governance are introduced along the lines of publicly-funded no-fee charter schools to ensure that public schools maintain their appeal to parents ('innovative governance')
8. School ownership ceases to be a factor in determining the amount of public funds that are disbursed to schools ('school ownership')
9. Higher levels of school autonomy in the public sector are achieved within a framework of accountability and choice ('school autonomy')
10. Most schools in the public sector are rebuilt or redesigned to make them suitable for learning and teaching in the 21st century ('school design')

The various alignments that are necessary to achieve transformation are illustrated in the matrix in Table 1, which represents a 'force field' of strategies to achieve the

transformation of schools. Ideally, there should be perfect alignment among the strategies.

Table 1: Force field of strategies to achieve the transformation of schools illustrated in misalignments that may arise from narrowly-focused high-stakes testing (X)

Strategy	National curriculum	Teacher education	Program diversity	National testing	Community engagement	Transparent funding	Innovative governance	School ownership	School autonomy	School design
National curriculum	—									
Teacher education		—								
Program diversity			—							
National Testing	X	X	X	—			X		X	X
Community engagement					—					
Transparent funding						—				
Innovative governance							—			
School ownership								—		
School autonomy									—	
School design										—

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As suggested in the national testing line of Table 1, a source of misalignment is national testing if these are narrowly-focused and high-stakes. Apart from analysis of potential misalignments in national policies, it is suggested that the approach illustrated in Table 1 might be adopted by principals in their own schools, seeking alignments and misalignments in the school's policy framework.

The following are two illustrations of misalignment, one current and one potential, in the national policy framework.

Misalignment in assessment

The contrast between what Australia, England and the United States are doing as far as assessment is concerned and, for example, Finland and New Zealand, is illuminating.

Much has been written about the performance of Finland on international tests of student achievement such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). Its reputation is well-deserved; although it should be pointed out that it did not do so well in the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) when it participated, prior to its switch to PISA. Many reasons are offered in explanation of Finland's performance in PISA, including the quality of its teachers, the relatively high degree of school autonomy, an outstanding approach to providing support to its students, and the capacity of schools to adapt the broad national curriculum to the mix of student needs at the local level. A report that compared performance in the United States with other countries, citing results in PISA 2009, drew attention to other features of schooling in Finland:

> The emphasis on learner-centred, collaborative instruction and a future oriented, relevant curriculum that focuses on creativity and problem solving has made PISA *the* international test for reformers promoting constructivist learning and 21st-century skills. Finland implemented reforms in the 1990s and early 2000s that embraced the tenets of these movements. Several education researchers from Finland have attributed their nation's strong showing to the compatibility of recent reforms with the content of PISA. (Loveless, 2011, p. 11)

In addition to the foregoing, it is important to note that Finland does not have a national testing program, so that schools are freed up from the pressures associated with such an approach. However, it is equally important to note that teachers have high levels of skill in assessing students and personalising learning, especially in respect to the way specially trained staff provide immediate support for students who fall behind.

New Zealand is also a top performer in PISA. It has a better balanced approach to assessment than Australia, England and the United States. A recent discussion paper of the Ministry of Education makes this clear. Here are two excerpts that highlight the importance of both quantitative and qualitative data.

> Assessment information consists of *quantitative* and *qualitative* data. The nature and content of the information will differ depending on the immediate purpose for its collection and the level of the sector at which it is collected. A range of rich assessment data will be captured and shared at the school-level. Subsets of information will be made available with appropriate qualitative and quantitative context to other agencies in the education system to enable them to fulfil their roles. (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 50)

> The Ministry maintains that the publishing of raw, highly aggregated assessment data without qualitative context information will both undermine this collegial environment and subvert the reliability of the assessment data collected. The Ministry of Education considers that it is not appropriate to compare schools on a simplistic and misleading basis. This is a consistent position held by successive Governments in New Zealand and dating back at least to the 1998 Green Paper entitled *Assessment for Success in Primary Schools.* (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 50)

Finally, in this reference to the way things are done in New Zealand, the discussion paper highlighted the importance of 'overall teacher judgements' that are based on both 'tacit information' and 'explicit information' that are drawn from multiple sources.

> Teachers are expected to make professional judgments about student progress and achievement in relation to what is expected by the appropriate standard of reference. These qualitative judgments are termed *overall teacher judgments* because they are 'on balance' judgments made across a range of information and across the range of skills, knowledge and understanding expected at any given reference point. They make use of tacit information held by the teacher as well as a range of explicit information collected by the teacher from multiple sources. (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 16)

Potential misalignment in bonuses for teachers

A potential case of mis-alignment moved to centre stage in Australia in 2011 in the Prime Minister's announcement about a teacher bonus scheme. In my view (Caldwell, 2011a, 2011b), summarised below, the scheme is poorly designed and has no successful counterpart in comparable countries. The intentions may be commendable. After all, there can be no disagreement that high quality teaching is the most important school-based factor in accounting for student achievement, and that high quality teaching should be recognised and rewarded.

It cannot be implemented in the time frame announced by the prime minister. A total of 25,000 teachers or 10 percent of the workforce will receive their bonus in 2014 based on appraisals in 2013. This means that 250,000 teachers must be appraised according to an agreed and valid framework. No such framework exists. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has been charged with developing one and has to its credit secured agreement on a set of teaching standards. There are 37 standards, with a different set for each of 4 categories of teachers, creating 148 different standards. There are currently no agreed evidence-based approaches to determining how each standard will be measured. Implementation in 2013 will likely be no more than a hastily-contrived tick-the-box approach that will de-professionalise rather than enhance the profession.

International experts on school improvement give such schemes the thumbs-down. Canada's Michael Fullan (University of Toronto) concluded that 'performance-based merit pay is a nonstarter' and that 'when common sense tells you it won't work, when no research exists that backs up the claim for merit pay . . . it is time to give up the ghost [of merit pay]' (Fullan, 2010, pp. 91 and p. 84).

The prime minister also raised the possibility that scores in NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy) and information on the My School website might be used. Apart from concerns about the validity of scores and comparisons, with evidence that many schools are 'gaming' the system (for example,

encouraging some students not to sit the tests or providing excessive coaching) there is no provision for assessing the performance of teachers in areas other than literacy and numeracy, for example, in the arts.

Narrowing the curriculum

There is persuasive evidence that some areas of the curriculum, notably the arts, are being sidelined as a result of narrowly-focused high-stakes tests. There is also persuasive evidence that participation in the arts can have a powerful impact on achievement in other areas of the curriculum and on student wellbeing. I don't think I need to persuade you on this topic, given that this conference is being held in Tamworth, the Country Music Capital of Australia, and that your conference flyer has on its cover two students in music performance.

At Educational Transformations we gained a positive view of what is possible in research commissioned by The Song Room (TSR), as published in *Bridging the Gap in School Achievement through the Arts* (Vaughan, Harris & Caldwell, 2011), launched by Hon Peter Garrett, Australia's Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth in March 2011. The Song Room is a non-profit organisation that provides free music and arts-based programs for children in disadvantaged and other high-need settings. According to The Song Room, 700,000 students in government primary schools in Australia have no opportunity to participate in programs in the arts. The research was funded by the Macquarie Group Foundation. The research I shall summarise here was conducted in primary schools but we did the study against a background of international research in both primary and secondary schools. The findings are as unexpected as they are powerful and there is no reason to expect that they do not also apply in secondary schools.

Our research team examined the performance of students in 10 schools in highly disadvantaged settings in Western Sydney. Three schools offered a longer-term program over 12 to 18 months, and three schools offered an initial short-term program of 6 months. In each instance the program was conducted for Grade 5 and 6 students for one hour on a single day once per week. A control group of four schools did not offer The Song Room program. The three sets of schools were a matched set. At the time of the study they scored roughly the same on the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA), as calculated in 2009. An even closer match was evident when 2010 ICSEA scores were used. The study is a rare example of quasi-experimental design in educational research.

Important differences were found in favour of students that undertake The Song Room program. The findings have national and international significance. First, related research in other countries is confirmed. Second, there appears to be a direct association between the arts and outcomes in other areas. Third, the wisdom of including the arts in Australia's national curriculum is confirmed.

Students in TSR programs outperformed students in non-TSR schools in school achievement tests and in NAPLAN tests. Fewer students in TSR programs failed to reach minimum standards in NAPLAN tests. The percentage of students absent on a the day when TSR programs were offered was higher in non-TSR schools than in TSR schools, an important finding given that students who are not attending school are not engaged in learning. The gain in achievement in reading is approximately one year which is a larger effect than achieved in more sharply focused interventions.

Students in each school completed the Social Emotional Well-being (SEWB) survey designed and validated at the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). It has been administered to thousands of students over the years. A higher proportion of student in TSR programs were at the highest levels of SEWB than their counterparts in non-TSR schools. Those in TSR programs had higher levels of resilience and lower levels of stress.

While caution must always be exercised in drawing cause-and-effect relationships, these differences in comparisons in matched sets of schools were statistically significant. Moreover, the longer the students were in TSR programs the greater the differences. The findings were to some extent unexpected because TSR programs ran for just one hour on one day in the week, but they are consistent with what has been found in other nations for students in similar settings.

The Australian research described above has been set in the context of worldwide studies in a book to be published in November 2011 under the title *Transforming Education through the Arts* (Caldwell & Vaughan, 2012).

Residualisation in the public sector

It is possible that the misalignments described above may do more harm to public schools than to private schools. An explanation lies in the fact that large numbers of private schools have, at least in the eyes of parents, a more holistic view of the curriculum and have well-developed programs related to the 21st century skills that have withstood the narrowing effect of high-stakes testing. An associated reason that takes account of socio-economic status in the public sector as well as in the private sector is that latter have more financial resources to draw on or higher levels of social capital from which they can secure support.

An outcome for public schools in many settings is a further loss of students to the private sector, a trend that has continued unabated in Australia; high-stakes national testing and efforts to build capacity in literacy and numeracy with a high level of transparency on the My School website appear to have had little effect, if the balance of students in the public and private sectors is an indicator.

Scenario that secures alignment

It is incumbent on me to suggest a better way to achieve alignment and rectify the dysfunctions I have described. I will do this with a scenario. Writing a scenario is a useful technique for thinking about the future. A scenario is not a prediction. It describes an alternative future, either probable or preferred, with a narrative that credibly explains the pathways from the present to that future (see Caldwell & Loader, 2010 for guidelines on scenarios and scenario-writing). I'll make further reference to scenarios in the workshop session entitled 'How can a school be futures focused when demands for success in current approached are unrelenting?'

Here is a narrative for an alternative future. An adaptation formed part of my evidence to the Senate Inquiry into the Administration and Reporting of NAPLAN Testing and in a presentation I made at the 2010 International Education Research Conference of the Australian Association of Research in Education (AARE) (Caldwell, 2010). Footnotes illustrate the evidence of support for particular elements.

> It is 2020. There is now a higher level of transparency and more assessment in Australia's schools than in the past. However, approaches associated with NAPLAN and the My School website at the start of the decade, when every

student in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 was required to do several 40 to 50 minute, mostly multiple choice 'high stakes' national tests each year, have been abandoned. A united profession and the public at large soon realised that expectations had not been realised and the scheme was become increasingly and seriously dysfunctional. It inhibited rather than supported the transformation [2] of schools. There was marginal improvement in student achievement in the early part of the decade but results soon flat-lined[3]. There was anecdotal evidence of 'gaming the system'. Changes in levels of achievement against national standards are now, in 2020, monitored through periodic testing of samples of students in jurisdictions around the country.

Long-overdue reforms in teacher education starting in 2011 meant that teachers became expert in skilful assessment, diagnosis of need and immediate support of their students in an unprecedented and comprehensive approach to personalising learning[4]. Every school has teachers and other professionals on call who give immediate support to their colleagues to ensure that no student falls behind[5]. A re-modelled national agency prepares tests that schools can choose if they wish, but the high level of professional skill ensures that most schools design their own and use an array of approaches to assessment. This agency works through each jurisdiction to monitor schools to ensure they are doing this well[6].

Parents obtain real-time online reports of how their sons and daughters are progressing[7], and online comparisons of schools in My School were phased out from 2012. They were of dubious validity, difficult to understand and the subject of seemingly endless debates among academics, policymakers and practitioners.

Teaching to the test and the narrowing of the curriculum are dysfunctions of the past. The curriculum has been broadened to address the range of knowledge and skills demanded in the 21st century[8]. Schools have far more autonomy than in the past[9], with many opting for an international rather than national curriculum, but they operate within robust frameworks of accountability. Innovation and creativity flourish and there has been a resurgence in the arts and science. New world-class facilities have been an important factor in attracting able people to the profession[10]. There is a passion that has not been evident for several decades.

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[2] Transformation is defined as significant, systematic and sustained change that secures success for all students in all settings

[3] This occurred in England in the first decade of the 20th century and evidence is emerging in most Australian states and territories

[4] A related standard is addressed in the teaching standards recently approved by MCEEDYA, as developed by AITSL

[5] These practices are major factors in accounting for success in Finland

[6] This approach is currently employed in New Zealand

[7] Several schools and school systems have made good progress in this approach

[8] A related international project in which Australia is a partner is now underway

[9] A national rollout of higher levels of autonomy for government schools will commence in 2015 and be completed by 2018 ($480.5 million is included in the 2011-12 Commonwealth budget to get this under way)

[10] A good start has been made, supported to some extent by initiatives in the contentious Building the Education Revolution project

Myth 8: 'Yes we can!'

Good myth! Forgive me channelling Barack Obama on this point. Reflecting on my experience over the last 30 years I recall several occasions when senior officers in education departments or critics of the approach declared that principals and other school leaders lacked the skills to take on a higher level of authority and responsibility, or couldn't be trusted. There may be exceptions but we have worked with and observed literally thousands of leaders as they acquired the skills. International studies have demonstrated that there is little cause for lack of trust (Levačić & Downes, 2004).

We conducted programs for 5,000 school leaders, teachers, parents and senior secondary students from more than 1,200 schools in Victoria and this helped lay the foundation for what occurred in the 1990s when we worked with principals from more than 1,000 schools to raise the benchmark even higher. In the 2000's we worked with more than 500 school leaders from about 300 schools in 19 workshops in every state and territory to help build capacity to focus on the future as well as achieve success for their schools at present (I'll share some of the insights in the workshop session). I am in awe of what enterprising principals can do with only limited authority and responsibility, and many of you are here today.

It's time to lift the professionalism of the principalship to new heights in a new configuration of relationships across systems of public education.

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