

EDUCATIONAL VISIONING PROCESSES: A MODERN FOOTNOTE ON AN ANCIENT TASK?

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Abstract

This paper takes a philosophical look at educational visioning processes. It seeks to show that the tasks associated with visions and educational visioning processes are more involved than would at first appear to be the case. It draws the conclusion that visions seem to represent a contemporary equivalent of what educational philosophy has traditionally termed 'the aims of education'; which, despite the efforts of many luminaries in the field, presents a minefield of questions that remain unresolved. The paper uses an inductive methodology to assay some of the philosophical issues currently concerned with visions. In this respect a 'definition of education' is presented as a centrepiece for making three postulations or 'axioms' about visions and visioning processes. These underscore arguments that may be used to support the formulation of questions for further research. The authors suggest that a review of the lessons of educational philosophy would not be entirely out of place if the worst aspects of managerialism were to be avoided at this stage in the development of educational visioning processes

Introduction

The following is basically a discussion paper that expresses grounds for the authors' unease with one of the several 'flavours of the month' in educational management. It concerns what in some cases amounts to an all too ready acceptance by many in the field as to the value and usefulness of 'visions' and 'educational visioning processes' - primarily, although not exclusively, as an 'essential component' for school leadership and improvement, and educational reform. A significant body of literature has subsequently emerged in the past decade that serves to highlight the importance of this aspect of strategic management (see, for example: Silcox and Cavanagh, 2002; DeFour, 2000; Spady and Schwan, 1998; Wallace, Engel and Mooney, 1997; Smith and Stolp, 1995; Weller, Hartley and Brown, 1994; Conley, Dunlop and Goldman, 1992; Chance [Ed.], 1991; and Ellis and Joslin, 1990; Achilles, 1988, in Greenfield [Ed.], 1988). In light of this, it seems reasonable to ask the question; 'what if?'. What if visions and their attendant processes are not so critical as they appear to be? What if the grounds for accepting their importance are based on similar quicksand to that which so many other educational panaceas have been based? Indeed, what if it's been done before?

The immediate problem with questions of this kind however, is that they are very difficult to validate. Not surprisingly, much of the evidence currently available in this area seems to endorse the worth of visions and educational visioning processes. Nonetheless the feeling persists that there is more than a grain of truth in saying that numbers of educational visions formulated in the recent past are useless - or at least, unhelpful for the educational processes they purport to assist.

The approach taken in the foregoing therefore will be to assay visions in an inductive way and to consider the philosophical grounds for what at present accounts for no more than a sense of unease. The purpose here will be to identify a methodology by which to make postulations or 'axioms' that can be used to investigate the problem in the future.

The word axiom, incidentally, is an interesting one. In current usage, it is most often associated with mathematics, deriving from connections forged by the work of Alfred Tarski in his *Introduction to logic and to the methodology of deductive sciences* (1970; first published, 1940). In the current paper however, the word is used more as an inductive tool. Its traditional meaning is "...a proposition which is assumed without proof for the sake of studying the consequences that follow from it" (Macquarie, 1981, p.158); or as something which is thought of as true "...neither capable of proof nor requiring any" (Mautner, 2000, p.56). The original Greek meaning of the term axiom is "...something worthy of approval or acceptance" (Mautner, 2000, p.56; and Vesey and Foulkes, 1990, p.36). The broad task of this paper is to show the extent to which the axioms that will be formulated deserve approval and acceptance as a future area of study. A more particular task will be to lay a claim on the word 'axiom' for future inductive researches.

Background

The following is drawn from elements of a wider study currently underway as part of a doctoral dissertation. The broader work seeks to facilitate improvements in literacy standards, primarily for groups of international students at the upper-secondary and lower-tertiary stages of post-compulsory education in Western Australia (WA). The specific purpose of this wider enterprise is to bring about literacy improvements by focussing on management aspects that may enhance the utility of educational visioning processes. The basic idea is to build and present a case that, provided the main stakeholders (i.e. students

and educators) and organisational structures (institutional, curriculum design and delivery) embrace and exude a sense of shared commitment regarding literacy standards, this may prove adequate to replace methods that have been used for over 50 years in WA to determine a student's English language competence prior to entering a tertiary institution.

The method used to argue this case has been to develop a series of propositions, drawn from the perspectives of contemporary literature on educational management, to argue the veracity or otherwise of a working hypothesis; that, 'a descriptive, shared vision with respect to literacy may substitute for and to an extent obviate traditionally prescribed standards and measurements for aspiring undergraduates'. The indications are that the thrust of the hypothesis, whilst containing some internal problems is sustainable - although only where primarily constructivist models of curriculum design and delivery are used to embed the vision in the given educational environment. A second 'external' problem that has come to light since the work commenced in 1999 is that a degree of causal imperative may be seen to have shaped these early indications. The fact that the traditional literacy requirement continues to be sidestepped by universities in favour of 'alternative' tertiary entry criteria (particularly for full fee paying students) has been lost on few observers. The trend has been noted since at least 1997 by academic sources (Blackford, 1999; Treston, 1999; Coaldrake and Steadman, 1998) and the extraordinary outpouring of anecdotal evidence in response to articles such as that carried by the Business Review Weekly (Way, 2000), likewise indicates widespread public recognition of some of the issues involved. Notwithstanding the sense of cupidity associated with deriving favourable conclusions from situations that appear unavoidable however - and connected more with the interesting methodological possibilities that have arisen during the course of developing the hypothesis - the foregoing looks at several of the concerns raised in the dissertation. Particularly those relating to the phrase 'educational visioning processes'.

Methodology

Philosophical methods are used in this paper. Broadly speaking, these derive from the two basic interrelated concerns of philosophy in general. The first is to ascertain the meaning of a proposition or concept; and the second, is to consider the nature of the evidence to support a particular proposition (Smart, 1984; cited in Hills [Ed.], 1984). Philosophy is generally acknowledged to embody three different kinds of analysis (Flew, 1978; and Passmore, 1976). These are 'philosophical analysis', 'linguistic analysis' and 'concept analysis', where, as Schofield (1982, p.12) points out; "The second and third terms are really more precise expressions of the first. Strict interpretation of the terms shows that linguistic analysis examines statements to see if they have any real meaning, while concept analysis analyses certain terms (words) which represent ideas (or concepts)". The kinds of analysis used in the following are primarily linguistic and conceptual, although, owing to the interdependent natures of each kind, cannot be separated entirely from the more esoteric and speculative notions associated with the first, 'philosophical' kind of analysis. Indeed, nor would such a separation be wholly desirable. As Russell (1976, p.6) emphasises; "Philosophy, if it cannot *answer* so many questions as we would wish, has at least the power of *asking* questions that increase the interest of the world...". Certainly, *questioning* current usages of educational visioning processes forms a central part of this paper.

As a consequence there is a confluence in the nature of the subject matter treated here - that is, 'vision' - and the methods used to investigate it. Whilst vision and visioning processes are all about meaning and the extent to which educational leaders are able to foster a sense of shared meaning in an organisation (DeFour, 2000; Spady and Schwan, 1998; Wallace, Engel and Mooney, 1997; Smith and Stolp, 1995; Weller, Hartley and Brown, 1994; Conley,

Dunlop and Goldman, 1992; Chance [Ed.], 1991; and Ellis and Joslin, 1990) the methods employed here seek to ascertain meaning about propositions concerning vision, and to determine the veracity of evidence used to support the propositions and/or concepts under investigation. Of course, this is not coincidental. It can be attributed to both the manner in which philosophy has developed over time and to the subject matter and purposes with which this discipline currently busies itself.

Philosophy - meaning literally, 'a love of wisdom' (from Archaic Greek; 'philosophia') - was originally a blanket term used for dealing with all questions about humanity, the physical universe and the manner in which perceptions about the two were perceived to interact through rational human thought (Mautner, 2000). Whilst questions about the physical universe (i.e. 'natural' philosophy) were gradually hived off into specific disciplines such as biology, chemistry, physics and so on, the present concerns of 'philosophy' have become increasingly focussed in three areas. These are: Epistemology, or enquiry into the nature and ground of experience, belief and knowledge; metaphysics, or the immanent or transcendent investigation of the world and of what really exists; and ethics, or how people should act in general, rather than as a means to an end (Bullock and Trombley, 1999). Comments about philosophy made in the current paper are concerned mainly with epistemology and to a lesser extent, ethics.

The main investigative tool of philosophy is logic - the study of correct reasoning - or more exactly, the principle that governs the production and treatment of reliable inferences. As a discipline, logic comprises three branches; namely, the deductive, inductive and inductive-deductive approaches. Whilst the meanings attributed to each has altered significantly during their centuries of usage (Mautner, 2000; Vesey and Foulkes, 1990 and Lacey, 1976) in present-day terms (Mautner, 2000) they can be taken to mean: Firstly, where an inference contains a conclusion that follows necessarily from its premises (deduction); where an inference from a finite number of particular cases is drawn to make a general conclusion (induction); and (induction-deduction) which involves "... a back and forth movement in which the investigator first operates inductively from observations to hypotheses, and then deductively from the hypotheses to their implications, in order to check their validity from the standpoint of compatibility with accepted knowledge" (Mouley, 1978; cited in Cohen and Manion, 1997, p.4). In modern usage, the term logic appears to have been appropriated largely by the physical sciences (particularly mathematics) and in this way, deductive methods predominate as the main kind of logical investigation (Poovey, 1998).

The methods used in linguistic and conceptual analyses however, are drawn primarily from inductive logic. It has been pointed out that this requires the investigator to derive an inference from a specific number of particular cases in order to draw a general conclusion. In so doing however, problems may occur when the premises used to derive the inference are inconsistent with the conclusion. A particular case in point here is where syllogisms were composed during the middle ages concerning the whiteness of swans - until Australia was discovered. This is known as the 'problem of induction' or the 'problem of justification'. Broadly put, this can be stated as, 'the truth of all premises cannot underwrite the truth of the conclusion, because the total of the truth will always go beyond the truth of the premises'. This is self-evidently true, although despite this - and in one way because of this - several aspects concerning inductive logic serve to support its continued use as a means to analyse language and concepts.

Firstly, whilst acknowledging that induction cannot be demonstrative of its conclusions in the manner of deductive logic, it must also be accepted that natural languages and the concepts that are used to describe these are inherently arbitrary. Schofield (1982, p.18) thus highlights the necessity for inductive analyses when examining language and concepts by stating that "... if we remember that words are only ways of expressing ideas, then we realise

that when we analyse the words we are really trying to clarify ideas ... I am not merely looking *at* words, I am looking *for* ideas ...". Secondly, the value of induction to the research process is evident insofar that it is the principal way by which the human mind classifies phenomena that occur to it. As Mautner (2000) points out, when Aristotle first advanced the notion of induction in *Posterior analytics*, it can be claimed that he did not mean by it a formal process of reasoning (i.e. the chief grounds on which it has been attacked) but rather, as comprising an examination of instances that results in the recognition of common features. Finally, and possibly most importantly, there is the view that deductive reasoning is itself based upon empirical knowledge which can be apprehended only from an inductive perspective. The arguments to support this view are complex and lengthy and for reasons of space cannot be represented fully here. However, the following quotation from Russell's *Problems of Philosophy* (1912; reprinted 1976, p.38) serves to illustrate the main thrust:

"The general principles of science, such as the belief in the reign of law, and the belief that every event must have a cause, are as completely dependent upon the inductive principle as are the beliefs of daily life. All such general principles are believed because mankind has found innumerable instances of their truth and no instances of their falsehood. But this affords no evidence for their truth in the future, unless the inductive principle is assumed.

One may observe therefore that despite the problem of justification inherent to inductive logic, it may be viewed as a wholly necessary form of inquiry by which to make sense of ideas that issue from linguistic forms lacking any physical correspondence with the entities to which they refer.

This somewhat lengthy review of methodology has been provided for two reasons. Firstly, there is the compelling reason that the terms are ambiguous. 'Philosophy' may refer to a range of intellectual systems that aim to increase human understanding about knowledge and experience. Depending on the context of use, the subject matter can be arcane, the purposes obscure and the methods (sometimes) gratuitously eristic. Tangentially, the clarification serves a second purpose by pointing out the nature of the methodology employed - an inductive analysis of language and concepts contained in the phrase 'educational visioning processes' - which is one of the three ingredients necessary for philosophical study. The other two elements, concerning subject and purpose, are treated in the remainder of this paper. The subject matter concerns educational visioning processes and the purposes, variously stated, are to develop one or more axioms to question the efficacy of processes by which visions are determined, developed and maintained in educational institutions.

Defining 'education'

The first important task to undertake with linguistic and conceptual analysis is to provide appropriate definitions for the terms in use (Soltis, 1978). The first word in the phrase 'educational visioning processes' of course, is 'education', and this word provides the context for generating meaning about the subject matter. The following review highlights the point that in contemporary terms, what is meant by 'education' issues from recognition of the combination of relationships that exist between its constituent elements - that is to say, its aims, curriculum and pedagogy.

Etymology

From an etymological perspective the word education is not particularly difficult in itself to explain. It is a noun deriving from a Latin borrowing that developed into English along the lines of; *educō, educere, educere, educare, eductum, educatio, educationis* and *educationem*. The original meanings (from *educō*) pertained to actions. These have been variously translated (Lewis, 1992) as; to lead forth, to draw out, to take or bring away, and/or to bring or carry off. Whilst there is some controversy over the primacy of the original meaning (for example, Schofield [1991] notes two opposing camps focussing their attention on *educere* as 'to lead or bring out' and *educare* as 'to form or train') it is clear that from the days of the early Roman Empire (28BC-14AD) the term had become fused and focussed in more specialised ways to concern the rearing, training, raising, nourishing and or 'bringing up' of animals and children (Lewis, 1992).

This general meaning for the word carried into English and persisted at least until the mid-C.17th (McArthur [Ed.], 1995). Although, as Williams (1976, p.95) observes, whilst the "...wide sense (of education) has never quite been lost ... (the word) has been specialised to organised teaching and instruction since (the early) C.17th and predominantly so since (the late) C.18th". Williams' (1976) appraisal of this reasonably straightforward etymology is subsequently borne out by a review of definitions from minor and major dictionaries which state, in sum: "education. consists of teaching people various subjects at a school or college" (Cobuild, 1989, p.246); "Education. Formal schooling of the young in preparation for life, usually as a passage through various institutions set up for that purpose and arranged in levels ..." (Oxford, 1995, p.315); and "education. The act or process of educating; the imparting or acquisition of knowledge, skill etc.; systematic instruction or training" (Macquarie, 1981, p.575).

Grammar

Whilst the etymology of education illustrates a high degree of contiguity between the original and current usages however, its grammatical forms are more problematical. 'Education' is what may be categorised as an abstract noun. It is thus distinguishable from concrete nouns (i.e. of the kinds identified in various typologies as proper, common, collective and material [Nestfield and Wood, 1985]; or common, proper, animate or inanimate [McArthur, 1995]) owing to the physical reality that it is undetectable through the senses of touch, sight, smell, sound or taste. Consequently, 'education' will usually be denoted singularly according to the five criteria - action, concept, event, quality and/or state - by which abstract states are normally apprehended. For example, as a quality, one may talk of a 'good', or a 'poor' or a 'colourful' or an 'humiliating' education. As an abstract state, the phrase 'lifelong education' is sometimes invoked. One may say that a high turnout at 'Education Week' (i.e. an event) assists with the 'education of school leavers' (action). Further, in conceptual usage, one may point in the first instance to the chief constituent 'elements of education' (i.e. aims, curriculum and pedagogy) or secondly, to the individual features that comprise these - the 'aims of education', for example. Overwhelmingly therefore, the term may be employed in strictly abstracted senses. Although, importantly, it cannot be seen as countable - quantifiable - in the way that certain abstractions such as time, area, length, breadth, size and even life or death may be accounted for in concrete ways.

This quality of 'education' - its uncountability (which on occasions may see it referred to as a 'non-count' [McArthur, 1995] or a 'mass' [Allsop, 1988] noun) - renders the term virtually unusable outside of a context of use. On its own the word may mean nothing or many things depending on the perception, perspective, preconception or attitude one may conceive toward its possible uses. Typically, it does not have a plural form, it takes verbs phrased only in the singular, and may occur without a determiner. Acquisition of context and thereby of

meaning and of utility, derives either by juxtaposing a second abstract term in a connective or clausal manner (i.e. as viewed in the five examples of use noted above) or via a conversion of the term's abstract form into related grammatical constructions: That is to say, as a proper or common noun, a verb, an adjective or an adverb. These forms can be observed in the related word: Educate, educating (verbs); educated, educational, educative, educatory (adjectives); educationally (adverb); and in the proper (educator, educationalist) or common (educators, educationalists) nounal forms. Of course, this last conversion renders each of these forms countable, although each still requires an objective context of use in order to acquire meaning and utility in an abstract sense.

Definienda, definientia and related theories

Such grammatical convolutions provide a key indication as to why the term has acquired a degree of notoriety among those attempting a definition of education. Indeed, it has already been noted (Schofield, 1981) that the attempt has been abandoned, at least among those viewing the term from the perspectives of etymology and grammar, because such analyses seem to establish little: "At best they provide clues which it may be worthwhile to follow up" (Peters, 1980). It has been recognised that these perspectives create a sterile environment in which to deduce a definition for the term as these methods tend to focus attention on simply describing the meaning with which the word is commonly associated and the ways in which it can be used. Descriptive definitions (as may be observed from those dictionary definitions presented above) tend toward the generic, the formulaic, the standardised character of meaning for a given term. In general, their effect is to produce a 'one size for all' definition. Certainly, in the case of an abstract term such as education, they do so without identification of the implicit (i.e. aims, curriculum, pedagogy) or explicit (e.g. country, level of education etc.) contextual elements that render a full range of meaning possible. A more useful way of defining education then, would appear to be an examination of the term, not so much from the viewpoint of its definiendum - the thing which is to be defined - but rather, from the perspective of its definiens, or the words and sentences used to explain its meaning.

In order to do so however, a thoroughgoing analysis of aspects attending the act of defining a term is required. This is because the word 'definition' is itself ambiguous, insofar that it can be taken to mean each or all of three things. It can stand for an explicit word(s) or sentence(s) that expresses, usually by virtue of synonymy, that which is to be defined (the definiendum - plural, definienda); it can refer to the meaning(s) implicit to the word(s) or sentence(s) used to express synonymy and thereby produce the definition (the definiens - plural, definientia); and/or it can concern the processes of perception and the attendant underpinning theories relating to the intellectual acts involved at arriving at a definition. Clearly, limitations of space prevent such thorough but necessary treatment; however, consistent with the aims stated for this paper, the key areas of promise for any future study should be mentioned. Briefly, these may be indicated as theoretical aspects attending the definiendum and the definiens of the term (Ayer's [1936] text outlining the logical-positivist stance would probably be useful here); and the philosophical theories and systems that deal with the generation of fundamental meaning from words and concepts. This latter aspect would conceivably involve a review (at least as a starting point) of the Platonic/Socratic-Aristotelean theories of Forms and Universals, and Russell's theories of Types and Knowledge. Tarski's theory of axiomatic systems may also prove fruitful reading as a means to make sense of the theories mentioned.

Review

Thus, from a theoretically truncated 'definition' of education such as that provided above, it can be seen that the word 'education' is more or less evocative and representative of

meaning, depending on the method(s) one uses to attain a definition, and the purposes for which the definition is sought. At an overt level for example, one may employ a definiendum to obtain a relatively simple definition as to what education 'is'. The Macquarie (1988, p.575 - provided above) does just this and offers a high degree of validity - in spite of its brevity and lack of context. At another level, one may employ more encompassing 'definientia' style definitions such as Peter's (1967) 'conditions of being educated' (cited in Hills [Ed.], 1984, p.138): "1) Education implies the transmission of what is worthwhile; 2) Education involves knowledge and understanding and cognitive perspective ... (and); 3) Education rules out coercion of any kind". Although whilst this kind of definition provides greater latitude with respect to context, it also delimits meaning somewhat by failing to state what the term actually 'is'.

Another frequently travelled path that aims to avoid both shortcomings is to compose one's own definition, by incorporating elements of extant definiendum and definiens. For example: 'Education is a word that represents an abstract concept concerning the determination, implementation and monitoring of context specific aims, curriculum and pedagogy in order to: a) Transmit that which is worthwhile; b) facilitate knowledge, understanding and cognitive perspective for learners, and; c) provide an environment in which learners can participate willingly in processes of learning'. Which, of course, is problematic on several counts. The most obvious fault arises with the intrinsic meaning and disputability of abstract constituents such as 'worthwhile' and 'transmit' and 'willingly'; another problem concerns what Scriven (1988; in Jaeger [Ed.], 1988) forthrightly terms 'the general irrelevance of redefinition'. This author correctly points out in his review of this 'false doctrine of conceptual analysis', that the only kind of redefinition standing any chance of acceptance is that which can prove the "... redefined concept is better than the one it replaces" (Scriven, 1988, p.139). Self-evidently, a difficult thing to accomplish with a concept like education.

Fundamentally therefore, this 'definition of education' can state little more than that it is a word which is more - much more - than the sum total of its parts. It is an abstract word representing a concept whose three main elements may, in most circumstances, be regarded as the aims toward which it is directed, the curriculum used by learners at a given time and the pedagogical styles and techniques adopted by teachers. And even this is arguable.

Educational visioning processes

In accepting the somewhat impoverished results of this attempt to define education however - that a shared understanding about education may be gained by viewing it as an interaction between its aims, curriculum and pedagogy in a given situation - one can recognise the pivotal role played by 'aims'. One may observe that curriculum and pedagogy are in many ways concrete, tangible variables in the interactive process that comprises education in the general sense. Curriculum provides the content and basis for *what* educators and learners do; pedagogies provide methods and styles of action to proceed with their actions - the *how* of education. Aims however, are altogether more complicated. A high degree of consensual meaning seems to be a difficult thing to achieve when there is a *why* involved.

'Aims' of education

Consequently, aims seem to have occupied the thoughts of educators ever since education began to be thought of as an intellectual discipline. A powerful philosophical tradition has ensued that includes contributions from many of Western civilisation's most influential practitioners in speculative and analytical philosophy who seek to answer the questions, 'why' and 'for what purpose'. Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Dewey, Whitehead, Russell, and more recently the educational philosophers, O'Connor, Scheffler

and Peters, have each emphasised the fundamental interrelationship and all-pervading influence of the three constructs for undertaking action in education; although, each has run into trouble when attempting to determine its aims (Schofield, 1981). Essentially, the aims described by these important figures were either too prescriptive, or too descriptive or simply unacceptable outside the ages in which they lived. Peter's (1966) attempt to overcome problems associated with the task was to treat aims as an intrinsic rather than extrinsic phenomenon (i.e. an educator should be concerned with education for its own sake rather than with say, training or instruction). However his ingenious approach is debatable (see: *Commentary*, by Woods and Dray; in, Peters, 1980) and this, apparently, marks the last major attempt to assay the aims of education. It is interesting, although perhaps irrelevant to note that it was only a few years after this that the first literature on educational visioning processes appeared.

The appearance of educational visioning literature from the mid-1980's onwards is probably more the result of the ongoing professionalisation of education in general and the boom experienced in post-graduate courses in educational administration and management (Marsh, 1988) in particular. Although, there also exists a temptation here to presume that 'vision' may be a latter day substitute for the ancient, abandoned attempt to identify the aims of education. To prove any such linkage however, one must establish an extant relationship not just between aims and vision, but also between vision and curriculum and pedagogy - equal and contingent parts of an educational equation according to the 'definition' given above. Clearly, this presents an impossible task given the allotted space for this essay. As a consequence, the remainder of this paper will focus on a more obtainable goal.

'Educational' visioning processes

This is to follow a lead provided by Sergiovanni (2000), Wallace (1996) and Whitaker (1994) who identify a linkage between educational visioning processes and business-oriented, corporate models of visioning. A review of literature indicates that there are grounds to support their contention that a linkage exists and moreover, that the relationship has led to various unfortunate side effects in the way visions are conceived, implemented and maintained in many educational institutions. Two interrelated features form the basis of these concerns.

The first feature concerns the business-oriented, corporate models of visioning with which educational visioning processes are historically linked (Sergiovanni, 2000; Wallace, 1996; and Whitaker, 1994). There is a twin tendency in the models discussed here to cast visioning, on one hand, as a top-down process; and on the other, as a clarification of organisational relationships (both internal and external) between the providers and recipients of goods and/or services. To a large extent, the former inclination may be viewed more as a product in the general ordering of management roles and functions, than in the nature of activity it entails. The linkage between vision and strategy -and by extension, the upper levels of organisations usually held responsible for this aspect of management - is an association that has been prescribed since the pioneering days of management roles and functions by Fayol (1916 and 1924), Koontz and O'Donnell (1954) and Mintzberg (1962) (reviews of the work of these authors can be found in most management textbooks - for example: Robbins, Coulter, Bergmann and Stagg, 2000; and Thierauf, Klekamp and Geeding, 1977). However, in broad management terms, a vision requires a broader-based input. A vision is, "...an attractive, ideal future that is credible yet not really attainable... (it) presents a challenge...(and) is shown as a guiding star, drawing everyone along the same path toward the future "(Daft, 1999, p.126). To develop and manage either business or educationally-oriented visions, one must maintain an awareness of four basic considerations. These are: Formulating the vision itself; stating clearly the core purpose and values that constitute the organisation's mission; formulating strategies to attain the vision;

and enacting, monitoring and if necessary, adjusting the strategy employed (Daft, 1999; Schwan and Spady, 1998; Wallace, 1996; Engel and Mooney, 1997; and, Collins and Porras, 1996 and 1991). In short, the 'twist in the tail', is to ensure that all those involved in attempting to make the vision a reality - that is, *all* stakeholders concerned with an organization - should be involved at each of the four stages.

Of course this first tendency has received widespread recognition in the characteristically collegial and collaborative admonishments of school improvement literature: Albeit, this has occurred only gradually and not entirely successfully. Early attempts to translate business-oriented models of visioning processes into educational contexts were focused predominantly on the (undeniably) pivotal role of upper management (see, for example: Achilles, 1988; Colton; 1985; and Spady, 1984). From the late 1980's into the early 1990's however, (notably with the influential monograph by Fullan and Hargreaves [1992] *Working together for your school*) there has been widespread agreement as to the role of teachers in visioning processes (Lambert, 1998). Concord notwithstanding on this point however, visioning processes have maintained a determinedly top-down countenance: A feature that may be explained as the result of system-level 'suggestions' to school managers to facilitate this aspect of strategic planning (1992, WA Ministry of Education); or from necessity, arising from time-pressures on teachers (Jennings, 2001, Personal communication); or perhaps, from the appointment of a principal to a new school prior to the arrival of staff and students (Brooks, 2001).

Thus, the second inclination - that which casts the visioning process as a clarification of internal and external relationships between organizational producers and consumers - derives in large part from the first. In this instance, however, the propensity of corporate visioning processes to impose a top-down mentality, concomitantly underlines the inherent dangers in applying management models in a generic fashion across industries. Three of the four basic considerations underpinning business-oriented visioning models are concerned with defining internal organizational relationships and the manner in which these may be arranged and applied to counter challenges from the external environment (Daft, 1999). They are expressed in the language of strategic role fulfilment and long term planning, with a focus on the attainment of human, financial and production goals (Collins and Porras, 1992). In particular, these serve to clarify the relationship between the organisations, client needs and the means by which to counter a challenge that may arise in meeting these (Collins and Porras, 1996). Which, of course, is how it should be - given that the normal function of corporate activity is to provide goals and services to an external body of clients.

In an educational context however, the role clarification process associated with corporate visioning models does not fully take into account the nature of the activity that takes place. Put simply, the element of strategic partnership between clients (i.e. students) and providers (i.e. educators) that currently exists in educational enterprises does not appear to be fully apprehended in these models.

It is self-evident that the 'clients' of education are themselves recipients *and* producers of the goods and services that form the core purpose and values of an educational 'business'. Students are partners, willing or otherwise - along with teachers, administrators, parents and guardians, educational authorities and the wider community - in the production, character and quality of their own learning. So far as one is able to pronounce 'timelessly true and valid' characteristics of the educational enterprise, this can probably be regarded as such. It is at minimum a truism that is both long-held and acceptable; insofar that its tenets may be observed in 2500 years of Western educational philosophy (Schofield, 1981; Peters, 1980; and, Cahn [Ed], 1970) and at least a century of modern practice (Arends, 2000). Its antithesis is 'gradgrindery', which in its earliest and crudest form, is announced by the atrocious Thomas Gradgrind in Dickens's novel, *Hard Times*:

"Now, what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else and root out nothing else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon, Facts; nothing else will ever be of any service to them...'. ...and (they) swept with their eyes the inclined plane of little vessels then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were filled to the brim" (Dickens, 1992; first published 1854, p.1)

Without putting too fine a point on it, students cannot - and in the main are not - treated as passive consumers of goods and services provided by educators.

Thus, these twin tendencies in corporate visioning processes - to impose top-down models and to create sharp distinctions between providers and clients - combine to produce a decidedly hazy picture as to the actual role of students in the formalisation, implementation and realisation of educational visions. Although, this is not to say that the role of students is paid mere lip-service. Their role is recognised copiously throughout school improvement literature; from earlier reviews of the genre by Beare, Caldwell and Milliken (1989) and Marsh (1988), to more recent work by Hargreaves (1995), Sergiovanni (2000) and Fullan (2001). But with the exception of stout advice to encourage the views of students through school councils (for example, see: Crump, 1993; Caldwell and Spinks, 1988; and, Everard and Morris, 1983) or through interaction between students and teachers in the classroom (for example: Myers, 1996; Stoll and Fink, 1996; and Dimmock, 1993) there seem to be few coherent practical, policy or theoretical paradigms to suggest ways in which this may be achieved.

Lifeworlds and systemsworlds

Within this apparent paucity of focus in school improvement literature on the precise role of students in visioning processes however, there are numerous indications as to where this may be found. Whitaker's (1994) text for example, provides a case in point. In outlining ways to interpret complex change processes evident in most contemporary educational environments - highlighting in particular the overweening attention paid by managers to the structure of schooling and curriculum content - he indicates a "...significant third way to progress' (Whitaker, 1994, p.4). He conceptualises this as "...the climate and culture of schooling (which) relates to those considerations which are essentially the human factors of the system: Personality; relationships; interactions; values; behaviours; (and) experience" (Whitaker, 1994, p.4). The conceptual model he provides to identify and remediate the dimensions of organisational life and their pattern of relationships fulfils this aim admirably from a managerial and teacher-oriented perspective. However, actual explication of the relationship of students in the process, receives little more than passing mention. (For example, "...all participants, pupils included, bring with them into their school their own differentiated experience as a rich resource for the organisational endeavour" [Whitaker, 1994, p.114]). His point however, is well made: The 'obsession' of teachers and educational managers with structure and content, with controlling and prescribing behaviour - fundamentally, with "...bureaucracy, maintenance and efficiency..." - has led to a cavalier disregard of the processes of student learning. (Whitaker, 1994, pp.4-5). Evidentially, students need more than simple 'consideration' in this process. They require admission to and empowerment within the management processes of education in order to assume responsibility for the direction, character and quality of their own learning. In brief, the learning processes and views of students need to be placed on an equal footing with organisational structure and intention, and curriculum content.

Sergiovanni (2000) pursues this theme vigorously. Taking Whitaker's (1994) appraisal of the situation one step further, he associates organizational structure and curriculum content on

one hand, and learning processes on the other, with the concepts of 'systemsworld' and 'lifeworld' respectively. By way of contrast, he explains the concepts thus:

"Culture, meaning and significance are parts of the 'lifeworld' of the school... The 'systemsworld' is a world of instrumentalities usually experienced in schools as management systems. These systems are supposed to help schools effectively and efficiently achieve their goals and objectives. This achievement, in turn, effectively strengthens the culture and enhances meaning and significance. When things are working the way they should in a school, the lifeworld and systemsworld engage each other in a symbiotic relationship". (Sergiovanni, 2000, p.4).

In these terms, a sense emerges that the concepts are not so much in direct competition, but rather create a source of dynamic tension that serves as a bonding agent between competing organisational interests. Sergiovanni (2000, p.180) confirms this perception by noting:

"Both are important...both must be in balance for schools to work well. Balance is achieved when the lifeworld of the school determines the systemsworld, and colonization of the lifeworld occurs when the systemsworld determines the lifeworld. The systemsworld provides the instrumental means, the management know-how, the operational systems, and the technical support that help us to achieve our goals, values and dreams".

The thrust of logic in this view is that the point of intersection between lifeworld and systemsworld centres on the vision for an organisation. If one accepts a priori the proposition that form should follow function, one should also accept that the lifeworld of an organisation must occupy a central location, and the systemsworld be designated, not so much to a peripheral position, but rather, a supportive role. Acceptance of the primacy of function over form - lifeworld over systemsworld - necessarily involves recognition as to the importance of shared meaning between stakeholders in order to determine function. 'Meaningfulness' (in the sense that, "...leads to an elevated commitment to the school, greater effort, tighter connections for everyone, and more academic engagement for students - all of which are virtues in themselves but which have the added value of resulting in heightened levels of student development and increased academic achievement" [Sergiovanni, 2000, p.4]) thus becomes the deontological-teleological derivative of 'vision' as expressed by stakeholders and thereby translated into form. Clearly, the formulation of a vision that includes the views of all stakeholders in an organisation - and particularly those of students - is vital for institutional well-being.

However, if the issue is as self-evident as that outlined above, why has there been "... a dangerous neglect of the learning processes in education" (Whitaker, 1994, p.5). Indeed, why have so many luminaries in the research arm of the profession (Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2000; Hargreaves, 1999) become increasingly strident with their reminders as to the importance of shared meaning deriving from climate, culture, values, community, personal relationships and so forth?

Educational visioning processes, literacy and standards

and teaching-learning processes

Overtly at least, the answer appears to coalesce around the issue of standards and measurements of student learning and achievement. Although, this is not simply a focus on contested and controversial definitions as to what actually constitutes educational standards

per se (for example, see: Guskey, 2001, 2000, 1999, and 1996; and Marzano, 2001 and 1999). Nor is it the fact that there is rare unanimity between exponents of standards and those who express doubt as to their efficacy for school improvement, that their application is wholly necessary for a well-run educational enterprise. (Certainly, the level of concord on this point extends to a general agreement between parties that only the sheer bulk and complexity of educational standards renders them problematic in the short term [Marzano, 2001; and, Sergiovanni, 2000]). Nor even, does it relate entirely to the disconcerting manner in which standards are routinely used and abused to highlight aspects of organisational efficiency and effectiveness (Guskey, 2001; and Marzano, 2001) or conversely, aspects of maladministration, 'poor teaching' and management and other instances of institutional failure (Graham, Nov, 2001). Instead, the prominent issue here is that standards may be formulated and applied in such a way that they become a substitute for vision in educational organizations.

A case in point can be produced with respect to English language literacy in schools; arguably the most significant - certainly the most time-consuming - aspect of the broader curriculum produced for schools. Here, it can be observed that curricula involving English language literacy in educational settings will normally be expected to specify attendant standards of attainment. Tangential to this expectation is that, because literacy is an inherently relative and self-perpetuating concept (Graff, 1987a and 1987b), measurements and standards attenuating its conception are also likely to be self-generative and relative. However whilst the self-perpetuating or self-constituting features of literacy can be reasonably well established (Graff, 1987a and 1987b) - and may be considered, if not benign from an ideological viewpoint (Apple, 1986), then at least, hardly injurious for educational purposes in general (Sergiovanni, 2000) - second aspect, that of relativism, can be seen as altogether more polemical.

This interesting concept holds perhaps the key to understanding the basis of concerns associated with educational standards. The classical expression of relativism was related by the Greek philosopher Protagoras, who asserted that 'man is the measure of all things'. According to the dictum, there is no absolute truth, value or meaning in anything other than that ascribed to a thing or phenomenon by a human mind in a given context and according to various preconceptions and practices that are specifically relevant to the user. A thoroughgoing relativism of course, slides quickly towards solipsism. It is self-defeating, because nothing - including itself as a concept - could ever be stated consistently. In its milder form however, which holds that every attempt to consider the bearing of statements, things and/or events in their own context without imposing presuppositions peculiar to ones own background - the concept can be more useful.

Application of this softer sense of relativism toward literacy and standards in the current context forms a basis for the assertion that 'meaningfulness' (in the sense used above by Sergiovanni [2000, p.4]) is not something that derives or arises in isolation from the educational enterprise. Fundamentally, meaning appears more of a construct that is shaped and formed, on one hand, by the objective nature of curriculum used to facilitate improvements in literacy; and on the other, by the relative values - measurements and standards - pertaining to such improvements. This much is suggested by both advocates and opponents of standards-based approaches to English language literacy who are able to justify their respective positions by pointing to the value of centrally established standards, although their comparative worthlessness as a tool to ascertain measurements of failure or excellence, if the curriculum conveys minor local relevance to students, teachers and other stakeholders (Marzano, 2001; and, Sergiovanni, 2000). 'Meaningfulness', in other words, may be expressed in terms of the standards used to compare student outcomes with respect to an established curriculum, however its catalyst resides in the localized physical realities in which teaching and learning takes place.

Quite reasonably therefore, this leads one toward a conclusion that the objective and relative purposes conceived for literacy and standards, act together to produce meaning for an organisation. In conjunction they serve to frame both form and function - lifeworld and systemsworld - in modern educational enterprises. Indeed, in large part, this same conclusion is suggested by Fullan (2001), Sergiovanni (2000), Hargreaves (1999) and earlier, Whitaker (1994), and this helps to identify the basis for their calls for a greater focus on the conditions of teaching and learning in order to facilitate organisational meaning.

Thus, if recognition of the logic for the argument provides some measure of explanation for the present situation, it may also be seen through this emerging evidence (i.e. of a conceptual relationship between educational visioning processes, literacy and standards, and teaching-learning processes), that a case can be made to suggest that these aspects are really just contemporary terms for the 'aims, curriculum and pedagogy' which have occupied generations of educational philosophers. And just as the word 'aims' beguiled the ancients and not-so-ancient, so too is 'vision' providing significant difficulties for their modern counterparts. The fact that the moderns are labouring with models that are not entirely compatible with educational purposes seems to make their task more difficult - and the margin for conceptual misunderstanding more glaring.

Recommendations or 'axioms' for future research

There does not appear to be a ready answer to the problem outlined above except to suggest areas in which further study can be undertaken. In this spirit, the inductive method of this paper has proceeded and the following axioms are offered:

1. The term 'vision' and the tangential use of 'visioning processes' by educational leaders seem to be contemporary variations of the lately abandoned (Schofield, 1981) attempt by generations of educational philosophers to assay the aims of education - usually as a precursor toward defining the nature of education itself
2. There are fundamental problems that are central to educational visions and visioning processes in many organisations. In educational institutions, these appear to be the result of a flawed transfer of the models most frequently used in industry and commerce

(And, in view of the preceding points and because visions and visioning processes seem likely to continue to attract attention from educational leaders and researchers [Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2000; and Hargreaves, 1999])

3. Educational stakeholders require a wide-ranging, complementary methodology - possibly philosophical - for engaging in educational visioning processes, rather than the narrow, management-focussed models that have hitherto predominated.

The authors would appreciate contact from any reader who feels they may be able to take the inquiry to the next stage by advancing research questions for these axioms.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to show that the tasks concerned with 'educational visioning processes' are a lot more involved than would at first appear to be the case. Visions seem to represent a contemporary equivalent for what educational philosophy has traditionally

termed 'the aims of education'; and, despite the best efforts of many luminaries in the field, there are numerous questions regarding 'aims' that remain unresolved. It has been observed that the conceptual bases for these problems do not seem to have been absorbed by contemporary visionaries. In a number of cases, this has led to the concept of visioning being treated as an isolated management issue to be solved according to formulaic remedies - primarily those found in the literature of business management.

The manner in which the preceding sought to illustrate the nature of this emerging problem was to re-examine the nature of the educational 'enterprise'. The method used in this respect involved a review of some of the problems faced by educational philosophers who had sought to explicate a 'definition of education' - and particularly the way that definitional problems become apparent when attempts were made to determine the 'aims of education'. Following from this, a brief review of contemporary literature was provided to highlight the recent appearance of some basic fallacies and contradictions with respect to educational visioning processes. In this way, the fundamental relationships between the inherent problems of 'visions' and the concept of 'aims' became evident.

At bedrock, the preceding has shown that the managerialist approach to vision formulation does not seem to be providing an enhanced sense of 'meaning' and purpose for all of the educational communities they purport to serve. Contemporary visions and their attendant processes appear to have become entangled with contingent management issues - particularly those relating to 'standards' - and from the examples provided, especially those standards concerning literacy. This seems in large part owing to a failure to acknowledge, not only the philosophical sources of the problem but also, the nature of the educational 'enterprise' with which they are concerned.

In advocating a return to philosophical methods at this point in the development of educational visioning processes however, the authors are aware as to the irony of the proposal. Educational philosophy has traversed this path before with only limited success. Yet the concepts of vision and educational visioning processes currently seem to stand at a critical juncture and the application of a methodology that 'at least has the power of *asking* questions' cannot be considered entirely worthless if the worst aspects of managerialism are to be avoided in the future. Perhaps at minimum, a thoroughgoing extrapolation of the epistemology and ethics of visions and educational visioning processes are required as a new basis for examining this 'essential component' of educational management.

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