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A study of the New South Wales public school system 1989-1991, focused through the role of cluster director

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CERTIFICATE

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degree.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

.....

John M. Manefield



**A Study of The New South Wales Public School
System 1989 - 1991, Focused through the Role
of Cluster Director**

John M. Manefield, B.A. M.Ed (Hons) University of New England

**A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Wollongong**

September, 1993.

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While I acknowledge the willing sharing by many of the Cluster Directors in the case study Region, I must specifically testify to the friendship and intellectual support provided by the case study Cluster Director. Himself a capable and published scholar at Doctoral level, he was able to act, not only as the source of perceptive interpretations of events, but also as a sounding board in the development and application of the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis. Allowing me to work along side him, and indeed in his place while he undertook an eight week overseas study tour, was a personal risk he took, at a time when he was most vulnerable. It is an acknowledgement of his commitment to teachers and students, as well as an acknowledgement of his generous capacity and maturity, that he allowed such open scrutiny.

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ABSTRACT

From 1989 to 1991, the long-stable and incrementally adjusting bureaucracy of the New South Wales Department of Education was virtually dismantled by decree of the Minister, Dr. Terry Metherell. The implementation of three major reports re-structured the organisation, reorganised the curriculum and rewrote the legislation. Such an upheaval exposed, for the first time so openly, the norms of the operation of the Department, and its constituents. Probably no other time was better to conduct research into the cultural paradigm of the organisation.

In carrying out that research, the study examined a broad-ranging contextual background at local and international level. Material explaining macro- and micro-economic perspectives, political responses, global strategic occurrences, environmental and social difficulties was examined. The conclusion reached from this analysis was that the world order was at a turning point - a critical move from the industrial to the post-industrial era. Within the post-industrial era, chaotically interconnected problems require much more of an education system than the previously stable, industrially oriented, hierarchical and rationally-based system could provide. What is required is learning of a high order, subjectively focused to allow each student to seek meaning in interactive, co-operative problem solving.

Literature from a range of perspectives was selected, especially that which dealt with the organic alignment of organisations. Literature analysing the Department's bureaucratic operation gave insight into the structural aspects. Literature on curriculum orientations identified the approach needed to achieve personal meaning within a social context. Literature on leadership, management, staff development, organisational culture and cultural change provided a basis for examining the change process and its outcomes.

Three questions stemmed from the context analysis and literature review:

1. What are the characteristics of the culture of an education system which is vertically aligned, organically responsive, pragmatically congruent, and focused on the purpose of producing higher order personal meaning in the minds of each student in a post-modern social context?
2. What were the cultural characteristics of the New South Wales public education system, *circa* 1990?
3. What were some of the early dynamics operating at the focal point of the Cluster Director position as the system underwent rapid and imposed cultural change?

The answer to the first question was provided by using concepts drawn from the literature. The theoretical position derived from this showed that it was essential to have all perspectives of organisational operation aligned about a clear set of touchstone values. That such values lacked *a priori* explicitness had implications for the nature of the interactive operation and for change processes designed to realign cultural norms.

It is suggested that an expanded notion of pragmatic congruence could ensure alignment between each perspective. Such a notion implies that, while no single concept or perspective would dominate another, each would be focused on the attainment of the central values identified as the substantive reality. The functional reality, the plethora of administrative operations within organisational, staff development, management and leadership perspectives, would be horizontally aligned within each perspective to carry out the values inherent in the substantive reality. Thus both horizontal and vertical notions of alignment would ensure that organic operation focused on organisational purpose. A taxonomy of this theoretical framework in operation was developed and is shown as Appendix 5.1.

To apply this theoretical framework and provide an answer to Question Two, the framework components were each compared with an analysis of the Departmental operation while it was exposed to change. The analysis revealed a culture largely out of strategic 'fit', internally at odds with itself and providing only rational, administrative standardisation at a time of increasing disaffection and turbulence. This comparison is shown as a taxonomy in Appendix 6.1

The pivotal role in effecting cultural change was given to a newly created position of Cluster Director, in charge of a K-12 group of about sixteen schools. Focusing on the Cluster Director role, the answer to Question Three was provided by field analysis of the three interfaces of Cluster Director operation. These interfaces were the 'strategic', where Departmental and Regional influences were mediated, the 'Principal', where the first level of leadership of change took place, and the 'school', where the implementation of change was to take effect.

The analysis of the dynamics of the change process reveals a great number of difficulties which, if left unattended, would result in mere reductionist implementation. In particular, the analysis identifies that the Cluster Directors need to be supported to come to an holistic and personally subjective understanding of the implications of the change as it focuses on high order learning outcomes. Additionally, the analysis reveals the need for the Cluster Directors to be given the authority and resource command necessary to refocus the system operation on school issues, rather than on system maintenance. Moreover, there is a clear need for Cluster Directors to be provided with system produced, but cluster controlled and delivered, tools and programs that recognise the outcome focus and the complex intersubjective changes in classroom operation and learning that such a focus will require.

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