

SCHOOLS OF HOPE

a new agenda for school
improvement

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This book breaks new ground for School Improvement. It arises from the author's question, post-September 11, of how Improvement relates to our troubled world:

Have our schools been driven towards efficiency rather than genuine improvement? What really matters: new targets to meet? higher maths grades perhaps? or caring and creative learners, a future, a sense of justice, the welfare of the planet and its people?

(Editorial, *Improving Schools*, Autumn 2001)

The School Improvement project has developed a sophisticated understanding of the process of change but scarcely stopped to ask 'What for?' This book examines some of the limitations of the dominant models of effectiveness, improvement and accountability, then tries to create a wider vision.

It draws upon diverse fields of educational research (learning and teaching, curriculum studies, 'intelligence', community development, education for citizenship, inclusion and social justice), and inspiring and innovative practices from around the world.

The drive to improve schools is high on government agendas, but what do we really want for our children? Is education mainly about meeting higher targets in, say, mathematics, or is it about developing socially responsible, creative and enthusiastic learners?

Schools need to engage with issues of democratic citizenship, critical thinking, creativity and community – achievement in the widest sense. The young are growing up in a fast changing and troubled world, affected by global events. They need schools in which they feel welcome, schools which embody hope for a better future, an experience of democratic interaction, a vision of social justice.

Some extracts

We need to engage in an active search for new models of democratic learning, not sit blindfolded on the conveyor belt of ‘effective’ schooling...

School improvement for the 21st century requires more than just an efficiency drive, or even an advanced understanding of change processes. In such a time of change as ours, this requires a rethinking of curriculum, its aims and content, and its relationship to teaching and assessment... Unfortunately, school improvement is discussed in Britain as if the curriculum does not matter very much...

Teachers and students need to recover a sense of *authorship* and *creativity*...

If learning has the potential to offer us alternative futures, why does school learning so often feel like a transfer of *inert* knowledge?

We need to think outside the frame, and reconnect school improvement to a wider set of social values which might transcend the present captive state of our world. We need a sense of leadership as direction finding, not just capacity building. We need to turn around our schools until they engage with the contradictions, the hopes and fears of local communities. We need new concepts of intelligence – distributed, emotional, cultural, political – which involve our engagement in shaping the future of our planet. We need the courage to challenge political decisions which place a ceiling on achieving, whether these are new forms of school selection or student debt or punitive accountability regimes which drive good teachers out of needy schools.

We need commitment to a better future.

We will have to *rethink education*, and not simply ‘improve’ schools.