

BASL CONFERENCE 2012

COLLEAGUES, MAY I START BY SAYING HOW GOOD IT IS TO BE BACK AT WHAT I CONSIDER TO BE ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT AND ENJOYABLE EVENTS IN THE LEADERSHIP CALENDAR IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

AND I SAY THIS, CONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEF, NOT BECAUSE OF THE TERPSICHOREAN OPPORTUNITIES IT OFFERS SOME OF US (DANCING), BUT BECAUSE IT IS TRULY AN EXPERIENCE WHICH, IN MY VIEW, IS BOTH FORMATIVE AND INFORMATIVE.

WE ALL RECOGNISE AND ACKNOWLEDGE THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-DEVELOPMENT THROUGH REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AND THE IMPACT OF PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING. SPENDING THE NEXT DAY AND A HALF IN EACH OTHER'S COMPANY ALLOWS US TO PRACTISE WHAT WE PREACH TO ADULT COLLEAGUES AND YOUNG PEOPLE ALIKE, THE OPPORTUNITY TO "WALK THE TALK". THE LEADER AS ROLE MODEL IS AN ABSOLUTE IMPERATIVE IN CREATING AND SUSTAINING A CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND LEARNING. NOT ONLY ARE WE LEADERS OF LEARNING, BUT LEAD LEARNERS.

LET ME TURN NOW TO OUR GUEST SPEAKERS, WHO, I KNOW, WILL STIMULATE AND CHALLENGE, PROVOKE AND INSPIRE AND PROVIDE THE INTELLECTUAL IMPETUS AND EXCITEMENT FOR US TO CONTINUE OUR LEADERSHIP JOURNEYS WITH RENEWED VIGOUR AND DETERMINATION. I AM LOOKING FORWARD IMMENSELY TO HEARING FROM THEM AND THANK THEM FOR TAKING THE TIME TO SHARE THIS EXPERIENCE WITH US.

SO, WHAT'S NEW OR DIFFERENT FROM THE LAST TIME WE CAME TOGETHER IN THIS FORUM?

ON ONE LEVEL ONE COULD REEL OFF A WHOLE LOAD (TECHNICAL TERM, YOU UNDERSTAND) OF GOVERNMENTAL POLICY INITIATIVES, STRATEGIES, REVIEWS AND SUCH LIKE (AND I WILL TOUCH ON SOME OF THESE).

BUT I WOULD POSIT THAT, DESPITE THE CONTOURS OF THE LANDSCAPE IN WHICH WE OPERATE CHANGING SIGNIFICANTLY, THE TOPOLOGY AND LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES WE FACE REMAIN FAIRLY CONSTANT IN SUBSTANCE, BUT PERHAPS WITH AN ADDED DIMENSION OF COMPLEXITY AND EXPECTATION AROUND SPEED OF RESPONSE.

LET ME JUST TRY TO EXPLAIN WHAT I MEAN BY THIS.

FIRSTLY, I AM NOT A MATHEMATICIAN SO LET ME OFFER MY APOLOGIES IN ADVANCE TO THOSE OF YOU IN THE ROOM WHO ARE, IN CASE I GET THIS TOTALLY WRONG.

THE DEFINITION OF TOPOLOGY I AM DRAWING ON IS AS FOLLOWS:

A BRANCH OF GEOMETRY DESCRIBING THE PROPERTIES OF A FIGURE THAT ARE UNAFFECTED BY CONTINUOUS DISTORTION, SUCH AS STRETCHING OR KNOTTING. DOUGHNUTS AND PICTURE FRAMES ARE TOPOLOGICALLY EQUIVALENT, FOR EXAMPLE.

FOR ME, THE FIGURE IN THIS ANALOGY IS OUR SENSE OF PURPOSE IN LEADING THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND ALL THAT YOU PUT INTO HELPING THEM TO ACHIEVE THE BEST POSSIBLE OUTCOMES – SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT, LEARNING AND ACHIEVEMENT, RESILIENCE, INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY AND SO ON. IN TOPOLOGICAL TERMS THIS IS THE INVARIANT, THE THING THAT DOESN'T CHANGE.

AND IT IS THIS INVARIANT WHICH IS SUBJECT TO ALMOST CONSTANT DISTORTION – THE DISTORTION OF CHANGES TO CURRICULUM, TO FUNDING METHODOLOGY, TO INSPECTION FRAMEWORKS AND TO STRUCTURAL CHANGE – THE IMPACT OF WHICH ALWAYS FEELS LIKE STRETCHING AND HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BECOME KNOTTED.

IN STRUCTURAL TERMS, FOR EXAMPLE, OF THE 1,508 ACADEMIES IN THE COUNTRY, AS REPORTED IN LAST WEEK'S TES, 26 ARE IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE (22 SECONDARY, THREE PRIMARY AND ONE SPECIAL). IF ONE WERE TO CONTINUE THE THEME OF STRUCTURAL CHANGE AS A POSSIBLE DISTORTION, THEN THE QUESTION IS: "HAS THIS CHANGED THE ORIGINAL FIGURE, THE SENSE OF PURPOSE TO WHICH I ALLUDED ABOVE?"

I WOULD ARGUE THAT ACADEMIES AND NON-ACADEMIES ARE TOPOLOGICALLY EQUIVALENT AND THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO CHANGE TO THAT SENSE OF PURPOSE.

AND WHY IS THAT? I BELIEVE IT IS BECAUSE OUR PASSION FOR DOING RIGHT BY ALL YOUNG PEOPLE UNITES US IN A COMMON MORAL PURPOSE WHICH TRANSCENDS ANY ATTEMPTS AT DISTORTION. IT IS THE STRENGTH OF THAT COMMITMENT WHICH GIVES US THE COURAGE TO STAND FAST AND PROUD AS LEADERS OF EDUCATION IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE – THE COURAGE TO BELIEVE THAT WE REALLY CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO THE LIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE.

IF WE PAUSE FOR A MOMENT TO REFLECT ON WHAT IS HAPPENING AROUND US ON OUR OWN DOORSTEP YOU MIGHT BE FORGIVEN FOR A MOMENT'S HESITATION AS WE SEE:

- **MORE WARDS FALLING INTO THE LOWEST 30% OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION IN THE COUNTRY;**
- **12,000 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY;**
- **INCREASING NUMBERS OF CHILDREN COMING INTO CARE; AND**
- **18-24 YEAR OLDS MAKING UP 25% OF THOSE SEEKING JOBSEEKERS ALLOWANCE IN SOME PARTS OF THE COUNTY.**

BUT YOUR HESITATION IS FLEETING, IF AT ALL, BECAUSE , AS LEADERS, YOU HAVE HOPE AND OPTIMISM.

AND YOU WILL NEED TO DRAW ON YOUR PERSONAL RESERVES OF HOPE AND OPTIMISM TO LEAD YOUR PEOPLE THROUGH THESE DIFFICULT TIMES.

WITH DIMINISHING RESOURCES, BOTH HUMAN AND FINANCIAL AND GROWING DEMANDS (BE THEY FROM PARENTS, GOVERNMENT OR OFSTED) WE FACE INCREASINGLY TOUGH CHOICES INCREASINGLY FREQUENTLY.

MORE AND MORE, THE ISSUES YOU ARE FACED WITH ARE MORE COMPLEX AND "WICKED". SIMPLE SOLUTIONS ARE NOT AN OPTION. A MORE COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP APPROACH IS REQUIRED.

AN APPROACH WHICH IS PREDICATED ON A STRONG SENSE OF SELF-BELIEF ALIGNED WITH A STRONG AND UNFLINCHING MORAL PURPOSE.

IT IS, IN EVERYDAY PARLANCE, ABOUT HAVING THE COURAGE OF OUR CONVICTIONS – BEING PREPARED TO PUT OUR HEADS ABOVE THE PARAPET AND BE COUNTED FOR WHAT WE BELIEVE IN, EVEN IF IT IS NOT POPULAR. AT ITS MOST BASIC LEVEL IT IS A RELATIVELY EASY CONCEPT – BE CLEAR ABOUT THE STUFF THAT MATTERS AND REMAIN STEADFAST IN ITS PURSUIT. OF COURSE, IN REAL LIFE IT'S NOT THAT EASY.

IF YOU'LL INDULGE ME FOR A MOMENT I WOULD JUST LIKE TO EXEMPLIFY THIS THROUGH MY CURRENT EXPERIENCE OF DISCUSSIONS WITH OFFICIALS FROM THE DfE ON THE "ONE SIZE FITS ALL" APPROACH TO SCHOOLS BELOW FLOOR STANDARDS, I.E. SPONSORED ACADEMIES.

HAVING HAD SEVERAL EXCHANGES OVER RECENT WEEKS, ONE OF THE OFFICIALS ACKNOWLEDGED WE HAD TO AGREE TO DISAGREE ON

THIS ISSUE AND WE WILL RE-GROUP AND RECONVENE AT A LATER DATE.

REFLECTING ON HOW WE HAD GOT TO THIS POSITION, I NEEDED TO ASK MYSELF WHETHER I WAS TAKING AN OPPOSITIONAL STANCE FOR THE SAKE OF IT OR WHETHER THIS WAS CHALLENGING WHAT I BELIEVED IN AND IT WAS IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO ME NOT ONLY TO DEFEND, BUT TO FIGHT FOR.

AND IT IS THE LATTER OF THESE TWO - THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING A SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY'S CONTEXT; THE TRACK RECORD AND PROVEN ABILITY OF PROFESSIONALS IN THE WIDER SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT ARENA AND, ABOVE ALL, THE RIGHT OF INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS TO COME TO A VIEW ABOUT THEIR FUTURE ARE THINGS THAT MATTER TO ME AND I WILL CONTINUE TO HOLD THEM AT THE FOREFRONT OF MY CONTINUING DEBATES.

LET ME JUST CLARIFY BEFORE I MOVE ON THAT I AM NOT IN ANY WAY CONDONING UNDERPERFORMANCE, BUT I AM PURSUING WHAT I BELIEVE IS THE STRONG STRATEGIC ROLE IN EDUCATION THAT MICHAEL GOVE EXPECTED OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES AS SET OUT IN THE WHITE PAPER "THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING".

I SHOULD ALSO PERHAPS ACKNOWLEDGE AT THIS STAGE THAT ONE PERSON'S PERCEPTION OF COURAGE IN LEADERSHIP IS ANOTHER PERSON'S PERCEPTION OF A CAREER-LIMITING MOVE!

THIS EXAMPLE ALSO SERVES TO ILLUSTRATE WHAT I BELIEVE IS WHAT MY LEADERSHIP IS CURRENTLY ABOUT – AND THAT IS ABOUT CREATING THE OPTIMUM ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH YOURSELVES IN SCHOOLS, OFFICERS FROM THE AUTHORITY AND PARTNERS CAN DO THE JOB YOU WANT TO DO IN THE WAY YOU WANT TO DO IT TO THE MAXIMUM BENEFIT OF OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

ONE OF THE DERIVATIVES OF THE WORD "COURAGE" IS THE LATIN WORD "COR" MEANING HEART AND FOR ME, LEADERSHIP IS ABOUT HEARTS AND MINDS.

WE NEED THE HEART TO PERSEVERE WHEN THOSE AROUND US ARE FALTERING AND THE ABILITY TO KNOW OUR OWN HEARTS AND MINDS. SELF-BELIEF COMES FROM KNOWING OURSELVES WELL, KNOWING WHAT REALLY MATTERS TO US AND FOR WHAT WE WOULD GO TO THE WALL.

KNOWING OURSELVES AND BEING HONEST WITH OURSELVES ALSO TAKES COURAGE – IT IS NOT EASY FOR WE MAY EXPOSE A VULNERABILITY.

BUT I WOULD ARGUE THAT THIS IS ALL PART OF THE MAKE-UP OF AN EFFECTIVE LEADER. VULNERABILITY IS NOT FRILITY, IT IS A QUALITY OF OPENNESS, A HUMILITY, WHICH ALLOWS CONNECTION, AT A HUMAN LEVEL, WITH THOSE WHOM WE SEEK TO LEAD AND WITH EACH OTHER.

IT ALSO GIVES AN HONESTY AND AUTHENTICITY TO OUR LEADERSHIP AS WE HAVE THE COURAGE TO SEE OURSELVES AS OTHERS SEE US.

BUT COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP HAS A NUMBER OF OTHER COMPONENTS:

A COURAGEOUS LEADER RECOGNISES POTENTIAL IN OTHERS AND CREATES THE CONDITIONS TO GIVE THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE A GO AND TO LEARN FROM MISTAKES, IT IS ABOUT INSPIRING TRUST AND AWAKENING COURAGE IN OTHERS.

I RECENTLY CAME ACROSS THIS QUOTE FROM PETER McWILLIAMS WHICH I THINK ILLUSTRATES THIS POINT FOR ME:

**“COME TO THE EDGE “, HE SAID.
THEY SAID, “WE ARE AFRAID”.
“COME TO THE EDGE”, HE SAID’
THEY CAME.
HE PUSHED THEM.....
AND THEY FLEW.**

FOR ME COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP IS NOT SYNONYMOUS WITH THE CONCEPT OF THE HERO LEADER.

A COURAGEOUS LEADER DOES NOT SHY AWAY FROM SAYING “I DON’T KNOW” AND SEEKING HELP FROM THOSE WHO DO KNOW AND IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE WE HAVE A PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY IN YOURSELVES WHICH UTILISES AN IMMENSE POOL OF TALENT, EXPERTISE , SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE TO THE BENEFIT OF COLLEAGUES AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

I SEE STRONG ALLIANCES BEING MAINTAINED AND DEVELOPED FURTHER - ALLIANCES BUILT ON MUTUAL RESPECT AND SHARED OBJECTIVES.

ALLIANCES BUILT ON THAT COMMON MORAL PURPOSE TO WHICH I REFERRED EARLIER.

COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP REQUIRES A SENSE OF ADVENTURE; AN ABILITY TO TAKE OTHERS WITH US , GUIDING, PUSHING, PULLING, SENSE MAKING, EXPLORING, OVERCOMING BARRIERS AND ACHIEVING.

IT CAN BE IMMENSELY DRAINING AND YOU NEED TO HAVE REGARD TO YOUR OWN WELL-BEING AS YOU DO FOR THOSE IN YOUR CARE. LOOK AFTER YOURSELVES.

IN FINISHING I WOULD JUST LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU JOHN MAWELL'S 10 STEPS TO DEVELOPING COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP:

- **CONVICTIONS THAT ARE STRONGER THAN MY FEARS**
- **VISION THAT IS CLEARER THAN MY DOUBTS**
- **SPIRITUAL SENSITIVITY THAT IS LOUDER THAN POPULAR OPINION**
- **SELF-ESTEEM THAT IS DEEPER THAN SELF-PROTECTION**
- **APPRECIATION FOR DISCIPLINE THAT IS GREATER THAN MY DESIRE FOR LEISURE**
- **DISSATISFACTION THAT IS MORE FORCEFUL THAN THE STATUS QUO**
- **POISE THAT IS MORE UNSHAKABLE THAN PANIC**
- **RISK-TAKING THAT IS STRONGER THAN SAFETY-KEEPING**
- **ACTIONS THAT ARE MORE ROBUST THAN RATIONALISATION**
- **A DESIRE TO SEE POTENTIAL REACHED MORE THAN SEE PEOPLE PLEASED**

SO AS WE GO ABOUT OUR EVERYDAY BUSINESS, FACING MORE CHALLENGES THAT REQUIRE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP PLEASE REMEMBER THIS:

DON'T EVER LOSE SIGHT OF THE STUFF THAT MATTERS TO YOU.WE ARE IN THIS TOGETHER BECAUSE ONE THING THAT I AM CONFIDENT DOES MATTER TO EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US, ABOVE ALL, IS MAKING A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE TO THE LIVES OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

COLLEAGUES, THANK-YOU FOR LISTENING AND I HOPE YOU ENJOY THE CONFERENCE.

