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### Sustainable school transformation: an inside-out school led approach

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*Sustainable school transformation: an inside-out school led approach.* Edited by D. Crossley. Pp 293. London: Bloomsbury. 2013. ISBN 978-1-780-93817-2 (pbk), 978-1-780-93675-8 (hbk).

A dandelion clock features on the cover of this text, perhaps indicative of regeneration and the authors as voices in the wind. The contributors are unquestionably inspirational and seasoned school leaders who can speak to the issue of school improvement from a position of demonstrable achievement. The 10 case studies, book-ended by four contextualising chapters by the editor, are drawn mainly from different geographical regions of England, but there are also notable contributions from New York City and Nashville, Tennessee. The inside-out approach referred to in the title is counter-posed to top-down policies imposed upon systems and individual schools. In different ways, the authors report upon how they have sought to distribute leadership and develop staff buy-in and engagement with educational innovation and change. What the authors want to transform is a culture of compliance and failing nineteenth-century factory models of education.

The editor articulates a strong vision – key themes include empowerment, leadership, collaboration, technology, and accountability. He takes his lead from the work of Professors Andrew Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley (2009). The tone is imperative and urgent – chapter titles include ‘Ten Key Way Forwards’, ‘Making the Most of the Teachers We Have’, ‘Making Sure Every Person Counts’, ‘Being Data Informed Rather Than Data Driven’ and ‘What Should a World-class Curriculum Look Like?’ Sometimes the cod philosophy wears thin – we are told (three times) that the fear factor needs to give way to the peer factor; that ‘You have to find a way through every obstacle if you believe what you are doing is important’ (p. 88); and that ‘What we need to focus on is the base of the cake: a good-quality sponge that all teachers and support staff can produce and deliver, that all students can take hold of and add to, ready to decorate’ (p. 98). But mostly the enthusiasm of the contributors is infectious, and the reader wants to learn more. Who would want to resist the injunction: ‘It is time to bring the magic and wonder back into teaching. It is time to recover the missionary spirit and deep moral purpose of inspiring all students’ (p. 17)?

The two US contributions stood out for me as being particularly interesting. Over 15 years, New York City has experienced probably the most rapid and consistent improvements in students’ attainment and graduation rates of any urban jurisdiction in the world. David Jackson – a UK observer – offers an intelligent and reflective guide through the more recent initiatives and specifically the New York Innovation zone. This initiative has managed to turn all of the rhetoric around personalised learning and twenty-first-century

learning into something real and substantial through the use of online learning, project-based learning and technology. The Nashville case study guides the reader through a sophisticated process of system-wide transformation. The support received from the local business world, and specifically the Ford Motor Company, is notable. The detailed story of radical curriculum re-design and the role of instructional leadership in driving pedagogical change is illuminating. Both of these case studies powerfully exemplify a central theme of the book: how can systems and schools benefit from abandoning doing things that are not making a difference? In the latter case it was the abandonment of teachers planning teaching and learning in isolation that was pivotal to effecting change. Both case studies intelligently articulate the power of creating professional learning communities.

From England, there are informative accounts of the Raising Achievement Transforming Learning project undertaken from 2004 to 2008 and the London Challenge scheme (Chapter 2); case studies of six schools who have been involved in significant curriculum innovation (Chapter 4); two interesting critiques of accountability and inspection as practised by Ofsted (Chapter 9); and accounts of successful teacher development programmes across the Cabot Learning Federation around Bristol (Chapter 11) and at Wakefield City High School (Chapter 13). The book generally avoids the unevenness of tone that can show itself in multi-author texts. There are end-of-chapter references but no collection of references at the end of the text.

It would be churlish not to welcome a book so optimistic in its vision to the possibilities of turning around systems and individual schools in tough urban settings. Headteachers and others with a responsibility for strategic policy settings can only benefit from engaging with the rich case studies and leading-edge practices that are articulated with such evangelical enthusiasm by the contributors. The messages around sustaining change are consistent with much of the contemporary educational leadership literature. Schools are encouraged to collaborate, promote creativity, develop plans that move beyond narrow system demands, and focus closely upon the quality of implementation when instituting change.

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Hargreaves, A. and Shirley, D. (2009) *The Fourth Way – The Inspiring Future for Educational Change* (London, Corwin).

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*Self-determined learning: heutagogy in action*. Edited by Stewart Hase and Chris Kenyon. Pp 224. London: Bloomsbury. 2013. £16.79 (pbk). ISBN 978-1-441-14277-1.

As an edited text, *Self-determined Learning* is extremely accessible and easy to read. This should not be taken to imply that it is overly simplistic, but rather the focus for the book is the exploration of a number of projects and learning interventions that have taken place in a variety of locations and times. There are chapters on postgraduate learning, learning through new technologies, workplace learning, action research and learner-centred learning, creativity, lifelong learning and early years, to name but a few.