Education as community partnerships: An ethnographic study of the US Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) and the Australian National Schools Network (NSN)

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Education as Community Partnerships:
An Ethnographic Study of the US Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) and the Australian National Schools Network (NSN)¹

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Abstrak

Tulisan ini menyajikan suatu bentuk pendekatan yang dianggap berhasil meningkatkan mutu pendidikan dengan cara membuat sebuah kemitraan antarkelompok komuniti antarsekolah. Cara ini dinilai dapat menjawab persoalan-persoalan birokrasi pendidikan negara yang terlalu rumit dan berjenjang. Penulis meyakini bahwa sekolah merupakan tempat seseorang memperkaya diri di segala bidang. Namun, seringkali birokrasi pendidikan yang terpusat dan diatur oleh negara membuat institusi sekolah (termasuk tenaga guru) tidak memiliki otonomi untuk mengembangkan diri, serta mengembangkan visi dan misi yang lebih tepat dan kontekstual.

Melalui studi etnografi selama dua tahun terhadap kemitraan dua kelompok bentukan komuniti pendidikan di Amerika dan Australia, diperlihatkan bahwa kerjasama antara tenaga pendidik, staf administrasi, orang tua, dan tokoh masyarakat merupakan unsur penting dalam peningkatan kualitas pendidikan. Tulisan ini diharapkan dapat menjadi acuan pembanding untuk kasus birokrasi pendidikan di Indonesia dalam konteks otonomi daerah yang mulai bergulir.

Background

This paper presents the experiences of non-bureaucratic organisations—networks or community partnerships—within educational systems of two countries, namely the United States of America and Australia. The American network is called the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) and is based in Oakland, California. The Australian network is called the National Schools Network (NSN) and is located in Sydney, Australia. Comprehensive ethnographic research was undertaken in the head office and at schools belonging to the NSN from 1999 to 2001. Extensive qualitative interviews were also conducted at the main office and regional centers of CES from October to December 2000.

These community partnerships offer a viable alternative system of education to that of the traditional bureaucratic educational hierar-
chy. The histories, impacts, contributions and the issues and challenges that these networks continue to face operating within their education systems provide significant lessons in the governance of community partnerships as viable alternative education systems.

In light of the ambitious decentralisation process of educational services currently happening in the vast and richly diverse archipelago of the Indonesian republic, the experience of these educational partnerships operating within a deeply entrenched bureaucratic system offer valuable insights. The colourful histories of the CES and the NSN are not meant to be offered as prescriptions for success in the process of educational decentralisation. The trajectories of these two groups are presented here in this paper, as notes of experience.

The study is divided into three main sections. The first presents a brief literature review on the historical significance of mass education and its inextricable link with organisational bureaucracy. This literature review also elucidates on current network theories. The second section highlights the salient points concerning the American CES and the Australian NSN. The third section underscores the contributions of educational partnerships and also elucidates the significant issues and challenges that these alternative systems face within their respective educational context. This final section is concluded with an epilogue proposing possible lessons that may be derived from the experience of these partnerships.

Literature review

Organisational bureaucratic processes that is commonly found in Western systems of mass education trace their roots in the periods closely-linked with the 19th century industrial revolution. Mass education, also known as compulsory school attendance according to the literature presented below was an instrument used by the State—the governing powers—in organising the populace according to specific political and religious lines.

Crittenden (1988:42) says that industrial societies started implementing compulsory school attendance laws from around the middle of the twentieth century. In practice they were associated with the creation of a system of common or public schools, supported and financed by the State and in varying degrees subject to its control. In some places the dominant ethno-religious groups realised that compulsory common school system can be excellent instruments for securing conformity to its own values.

Boli, Ramirez and Meyer (1987:58) postulate that mass education is a social construct of the created institutions in the modern era. Mass education certainly is a powerful tool in the sustenance of the notions of citizen-based nations and states. Boli, Ramirez and Meyer say that in the broadest sense, mass education is a purposive project to construct the modern polity, reconstructing individuals in accordance with collective religious, political and economic goods and purposes.

The key word that Boli, Ramirez and Meyer identify is the collective. In the task of propagating mass education, the collective or organising people into a group for political and economic goods and purposes, was the fundamental rationale in organising education, albeit mass education.

Boli, Ramirez and Meyer (1987) and Crittenden (1998) are in agreement when they state that the roots of mass education can be delineated from the collective, or ethno-religious group. Boli, Ramirez and Meyer describe mass education as a purposive project to create a modern polity. Crittenden portrays it as
excellent instruments for securing conformity. Both are consistent in saying that mass education—with its paraphernalia of authority, control and structure—were tools that society used to organize people into what Boli, Ramirez and Meyer (1987) refer to as notions of citizen-based nations and states. It would be logical to conclude then that mass education as defined by Crittenden and Boli, Ramirez and Meyer is thus an organizational structure that is based on the traditional bureaucratic model—authority and control centered and monolithic in structure.

The main characteristics of a bureaucracy according to Thompson et al. (1991:9) are systematic administration involving the specialisation of functions, objective qualifications and qualities of office, acting only according to a fixed set of rules and a hierarchy of authority. This was exactly the type of organization structure that is currently prevailing in the educational systems of both the US and Australia.

Coalitions, federations, networks

This part of the study looks into other organisational forms that attempt to be nonbureaucratic in nature that find its presence in various international contexts. These non-traditional organisational structures were borne out of the need to break out from the conventional hierarchical forms that have dominated education organisations since the early nineteenth century. These forms range from what are called coalitions, federations and networks. The interesting feature that all these unique organisational structures possess is the conscious attempt to dismantle strong hierarchical, bureaucratic presence.

A coalition is an alliance between separate groups which may have differing long-term goals. This alliance is often only temporary, lasting only as long as the alliance is mutually beneficial. Furthermore, it is predicated on each party in the coalition being able to achieve that portion of the goals which happens to coincide with the other parties' goals and objectives at the time (Dudley and Vidovich 1995:52).

A coalition is an alliance of different stakeholders joined together in an attempt to pursue and accomplish mutually beneficial goals. In the colourful history of reform movements in developed nations (i.e. the US and Australia), coalitions have played a significant role in achieving varied levels of success in many fronts.

North (1987) presents a working definition of a federation:

Federations of small schools can lend considerable strength to all of them as well as allowing them to preserve their individuality. It must, however, be handled and resourced properly. If a federation of five, ten or fifteen small schools is to work properly then teachers must sink any petty rivalry and jealousy and concentrate on the greater good (North 1987:35).

A federation is almost like a coalition. The main difference is that the federation is a less informal type of organisation. The quality of sharing common ideals whilst preserving individual goals and objectives is also present in federations. As mentioned by North above, a crucial element for the effective functioning of a federation is the focus and concentration that individual members need to do in order to preserve the common and greater good.

Networks and their keys to success

A network is also similar to a coalition and to a federation. The difference (this is something that is almost indiscernible) is that a network compared to coalitions and federations is more loosely-coupled, and has no identifiable permanent leader. Parker (in Lieberman and Gronlack 1996) describes what he calls the five key ingredients of a network:
The five key ingredients of networks:
- a strong sense of commitment to the innovation;
- a sense of shared purpose;
- a mixture of information sharing and psychological support;
- an effective facilitator; and
- voluntary participation and equal treatment (Parker in Lieberman and Grolnick 1996:9).

The ingredients mentioned above are important to consider: (i) commitment, (ii) shared purpose, (iii) information sharing and psychological support, (iv) an effective facilitator, (v) and voluntary participation and equal treatment—for these are ingredients that all members of the network should continually strive for. The prescription that Parker offers for successful networks to function simply requires transparency, teamwork and decency.

It is worthwhile going through each of the capital effects of networks as described by Lieberman and Grolnick (1996). The first point that they raise is the notion that networks provide opportunities for teachers and administrators to label, articulate and share the tacit knowledge that they have developed through their work. Essentially, what this means is that networks effectively provide a voice for both teachers and administrators to speak. Furthermore, networks also provide listeners—not merely passive ones but ones who are genuinely listening—to the voice of teachers and administrators. This is diametrically opposed to the bureaucratic mode of school structure that creates distance.

**How do education networks work?**

Education networks bridge two cultures. On the one hand they are connected to a system that organises the delivery of education to school-age children through an elaborate system of codes, regulations, standards and assessments. On the other hand, they support the professional development of teachers and administrators who work within that system, who need to be free to step outside of it in order to consider ways to improve the very schools and system within which they work (Lieberman and Grolnick 1996:36).

According to Lieberman and Grolnick, education networks function as portals. They bridge the more formal and hierarchic culture of teaching in the classroom with all the accompanying wherewithal and also the informal yet equally important culture of personal and professional development for educators. The network offers a respite, where people within the more formal bureaucratic school structure can pause—without incurring any risk of slowing down the bureaucratic engine—and reflect on their craft with the intention of improving them.

The powerful effect of networks:
- first, teachers and administrators are given opportunities to label, articulate and share the tacit knowledge that they have developed through their work;
- second, networks have the flexibility to organise activities first, letting the structures needed to support those activities follow, instead of the other way around;
- third, we found that these networks were attempting to shift the meaning of adult learning away from prescription toward challenging involvement and problem solving;
- fourth, although each of the networks we studied had a formal leader, there were numerous opportunities for members to take leadership roles;
- fifth, networks provide numerous examples of collaboration among their members; and
sixth, when networks, coalitions and partnerships last long enough to create ongoing learning communities, cultures based on mutual knowledge learning and collaboration replace the transmission of knowledge from one institution to another (Lieberman and Gronick 1996:40).

The powerful effect of networks among its members—schools, administrators, parents and students—provides the school community members to communicate and participate to talk. This is the opposite of what happens in highly-bureaucratic school systems where procedures and guidelines mask the personalities and communicative facilities of the community members—thus leading to a metaphorical silence in schools.

The second powerful effect of networks is simply put, the adage of form follows function. In networks, members get to do and engage in activities without worrying too much about structures, rules and regulations. This again is anathema to the typical bureaucratic school organisation, where activities and projects of teachers and administrators—whether these be routine or new—need to be able to fit in to an existing mould, a current regulation within the school.

The third powerful effect of networks can be rephrased as learning through challenges and problem-solving. The assembly-line mode of teaching and learning that is commonplace in school organisations is somehow spruced up through the introduction of challenges and problems that need to be addressed.

The fourth salient effect of networks is something that is badly needed in educational organisations—ongoing opportunities for academic leadership. Too often in a highly bureaucratic educational structure, leadership opportunities are very limited, leadership creativity and innovation are oftentimes stifled by hier-

archical obstacles.

The fifth effect is concerned with collaboration among members of a network. It must be pointed out here that collaboration—or teamwork among active and genuinely enthusiastic individuals in accomplishing an agreed objective—is very different from performing a group chore, which may not even require group participants to communicate. Much of the lacklustre that happens in overly formal organisation set-up is the prevalence of performing group chores that are routine and that do not encourage nor promote active and enthusiastic cooperation and collaboration from group members.

The sixth effect discusses the merits of mutual knowledge learning and collaboration versus transmission of knowledge. On the one hand, transmission of knowledge assumes that one party has the knowledge while the other does not. On the other hand, mutual knowledge learning and collaboration implicitly assumes that the amount, equality or disparity of knowledge among the parties in the transaction are not vital. What is important is that everyone in the network learns and collaborates—in mutual fashion—from one another.

Community partnerships in education: The United States Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) and the Australian National Schools Network (NSN)

The National Schools Network

The National Schools Network (NSN) was one of the three major components of the National Project on Quality Teaching and Learning (NPQTL) that was framed by teacher unions, school employing authorities, the Commonwealth and the Australian Council of Trade Unions in early 1993.
The NSN was one of the most unique attempts at education reform. It was designed as a collaborative venture formed with more than 300 Australian schools (government and non-government, primary and secondary schools) nationwide and with support and participation coming from the Commonwealth, the various States and the larger community (parents' associations, universities and teachers' unions).

The services of the NSN

The National Office coordinates with all its member schools in providing the regular benefits that NSN school members enjoy. These benefits are in the form of regular publications on the NSN, sharing of current research and development on school reform within NSN schools (best practices experiences) and the regular conduct of professional development (PD) courses organised by the National Office. The NSN actively seeks members from different schools in Australia. Regular publications and research undertakings—funded by the Australian Research Commission (ARC) by the Department of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) and other organisations—are also part of the services that the NSN provide. The NSN has also established formal linkages with education reform bodies in the US and Germany.

More specifically, the NSN has three core services that it provides to its members, namely: 1) roundtables, 2) research circles and, 3) mentors and consultancy. These three also fall within the general objective of professional development and research on school reform practices.

- Roundtables
The roundtables are regular colloquia organised by the NSN where University Academics, participating schools, unions and the NSN office engage in intellectual discussions on reform practices that occur not only in NSN schools but in other places of the world as well. The roundtables are a direct offshoot of one of the key programs belonging to the Innovative Links Program.

- Research circles
Research circles on the other hand, are collaborative research projects undertaken by the NSN, NSN schools, University Academics and other actors of the network designed across specific areas of concern. Not infrequently, research circles target innovative areas, or problem areas that occur in school and that are tackled by the members of the research circle with the end of acquiring more knowledge about the issues.

- Mentors and consultancy
NSN member schools are also entitled to receive mentoring and consultancy services, either on a short-term basis or on a longer and semi-permanent basis from the NSN. NSN contracts its pool of experts, mostly University Academics and partners from other national or international networks for specific projects that NSN member schools may request from the NSN.

The Coalition of Essential Schools

One of the most successful education coalitions in the US is the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) whose main office is located in Oakland, California. The CES is a reform-minded coalition which has over 1,000 member schools.

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2 The Innovative Links Programme was a Commonwealth initiative in school reform that finds its roots in the educational partnerships of the NSN. University Academics, the NSN, NSN schools and other reform-minded groups in Australia had initiated regular discussions—roundtables—that dealt with the subject of reform in schools. After this program completed its tour of duty, the NSN decided to continue the practice of roundtables with its participating schools.
all over the American continent. The coalition is a loose network of different types of schools that share what they refer to as the 10 Common Principles of the Coalition. Each of the schools has differing agenda and objectives but all share in the ideal that in practicing the 10 Common Principles they would be able to achieve greater educational outcomes in their respective schools.

The Services of the National CES

The National CES regularly organises fora (the annual CES Fall Forum) where national members get-together to discuss current issues on school reform and share best experiences in the planning and implementation of school reform in their respective contexts. The CES also hosts a CES University where experts in various facets of school reform gather together with participants from other CES participating regions and schools to learn from each other.

- Information sources
  The National CES also carries a regularly circulated journal called Horace. This journal highlights ongoing programs and current projects related to the implementation of the Coalitions’ 10 Common Principles in their respective school contexts.

- Professional development
  The National CES frequently organises Professional Development (PD) courses and activities for its regional centers and its schools.

- Research and advocacy
  The National CES conducts research on various issues related to reform in education administration, curriculum development and academic leadership. The CES likewise continually pursues national advocacy for the propagation of the Coalitions’ principles in mainstream educational settings.

Impact of Educational Partnerships

The contributions and impact of the NSN

NSN creates space

The testimonies of the key participants of the study have indicated that one of the significant contributions of the NSN is that it creates space for dialogue, collaboration and networking to happen among members of the network. School personnel, the university academic, Department personnel and NSN personnel all agreed that the NSN has paved the way for the actors of the network to talk and see each others’ working practices in an environment that is intellectually critical and most importantly free from industrial restrictions and hierarchical bureaucratic barriers that have stifled a good number of educational organisations nowadays.

Teacher training

Another area that has been consistently identified by the network actors as a common contribution provided by the NSN is teacher training. The network actors have identified that a vital service that the NSN makes available is teacher training. A number of network actors mentioned that although the department also provided professional development courses to its schools, the teacher training programs given by the NSN are much different. Some of the network actors have identified that the kind of professional development the NSN provides is relevant, has the guarantee of being followed-up and addresses the schools’ real needs.

Networking

Networking is an area that the actors have unanimously declared as an outstanding service provided by the NSN. The network actors described the opportunities of getting to know other people; experimenting with innovative
ideas and accessing leading-edge resources and innovative education programs worldwide as powerful benefits derived from the networking available from the NSN. Similarly, some network actors identified that the department also provides networking opportunities; but what the NSN offers is far wider and more relevant to what the schools really need.

**Breaking down traditional structures**

The network actors have likewise identified breaking down traditional structures as another significant contribution that the NSN has made. Reference was made numerous times by the network actors about the stifling hierarchical structures that characterise educational organisations—schools and the departments of education. The network actors have claimed that the collaborative and networking qualities of the NSN and its inherent objective of questioning current work practices have significantly reduced and in some cases broken down some of the traditional structures found in schools and between highly-contested and politically-charged terrain of the unions and employers.

**NSN built within industrial agreement**

A very salient and consistent observation made by the network actors is about the NSN being built within the industrial agreement. This is a point that is related to the concept of breaking down traditional structures. The NSN—due to its unique nature as fashioned between the employers and unions—has managed to bridge the obfuscating gap that has characterised reform movements in Australia. The politically sensitive domain of employers versus union is somehow neutralised by the institutional nature of the NSN. Some of the network actors rightfully identified that this characteristic of the NSN has made a considerable impact and has the potential to do even more substantive changes related to education reform initiatives in Australian education.

**Impact of the CES**

**CES corporate culture**

Almost all the network actors of the CES identify a CES Corporate Culture that exists in the school. This corporate culture emanates from the deliberate attempt of the school community to practice the 10 Common Principles of the Coalition. The main highlights of this corporate culture are (1) increased student involvement in schools, (2) vital participation of parents in school and (3) school teachers and administrators consciously implementing school programs consistent with the 10 Common Principles.

**Exchange of information and experience**

A significant number of the network actors of the CES categorically state that the regular fora and conferences organised by CES National and its regional offices provide valuable opportunities for administrators and teachers to exchange information and experience and to ‘learn from each other.’ These actors further state that these systematic and regular interactions among CES members constitute a significant enriching aspect of membership to the CES.

**CES and support from community**

A considerable number of CES actors ascribe participation and support of external foundations and other groups to the CES as a barometer of success. In numerous occasions, network actors of the CES identified the influential Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Grant to CES (a grant providing funds not only to the CES but to other groups as well that would push for the systematic target of schools with a maximum student population of 600) as an indisputable example of the efficacy of community partnerships at CES.
CES influences education policy

The response of network actors regarding the impact of CES to education policy is varied. Some of the network actors claim that the CES has impacted on educational policy (District and State level). Examples cited were the Senior School Project (implemented in several districts in Seattle) and the reduction of school populations (implemented in numerous States i.e., California, New York) which according to some network actors are be directly attributed to the work and influence of the CES. Other network actors state that the policy influence of the CES has not been as expected. Although the CES categorically plays a policy advocacy role in education, a number of the network actors state that the bureaucratic mindset in most of the education systems in America is still too rigid to yield to reform.

Issues and challenges facing educational partnerships

Challenges facing the NSN

NSN leadership

The network actors were in disagreement with regard to the effectiveness of the NSN leadership. Some believed that there was a problem of the centrality of the operations of the network on a few individuals. Others acknowledged that these few individuals who were running the network were doing an invaluable job. There was also disagreement on the ideal role of champions in the network; where some believed that these champions necessarily have to be dominant and would require assuming most of the responsibility by themselves while others mentioned that this should not be the case.

NSN objectives

There was also a considerable degree of disagreement on the objectives of the NSN as these were being carried out in the network. Some of the network actors believed that different stakeholders of the NSN had varied motives—takes—in participating in the NSN. A significant point raised by some of the network actors was the questionable set of motives that some of the network actors had in joining the network. These same network actors explicitly mentioned that some of the participants of the NSN had joined straight for the money or were primarily interested with the huge amount of financial resources they could tap into and that were then available to the NSN.

Accessibility and collaboration

A point of disagreement very much related to the question of leadership is the accessibility and the degree of collaboration that exists in the network. Some of the network actors claimed that accessibility to the leadership and the resources made available by the NSN was limited. Some other network actors said that the collaboration that is supposed to occur in the network does not exist any more especially after the withdrawal of support from the Commonwealth government and from most of the state governments. Reference was also made by some of the network actors in the NSN being a clubbish group that prevented greater accessibility and collaboration from other interested individuals or groups.

NSN influence

There was also considerable disagreement among the network actors in the impact of the NSN objectives to education reform in Australia. Some network actors believed that the NSN has made significant policy impacts on Australian education policy. Others declared that
the impact of the NSN could only be detected among individuals, specific schools or to groups of schools. Other factors, on the other hand, said that the NSN has made very little impact on education policy.

Future of the NSN

Another area that saw great variance among the network actors is that of the future of the NSN. Some believed that the NSN would continue as it does now, small scale networks going about low key reform efforts in individual schools. A number of network actors have indicated soliciting support from private institutions was a viable option to take. Some attested to the fact that the NSN, if it were to survive nationally, needed a national sponsor and that would undoubtedly be the Commonwealth government.

The role of the federal government

A point raised in the study is about the role of the Federal Government. In the history of the NSN, the federal government was the main sponsor of the network. It has initiated the early form of the NSN through the original NPQTL. It also had provided huge start-up funds in the early years of the network.

A corollary to this point is the close link-age that the NSN has traditionally had with a Labor government. A significant number of the network actors have linked the future of the NSN to that of the Labor government of Australia that had strongly supported the NSN during its political prominence in the late eighties and the early nineties. One of the network actors had aptly commented that what was an advantage before (during the Labor government) for the NSN; is now a disadvantage (for the Liberal-Coalition government). Whether the NSN would seek support from the Commonwealth government with a Labor party colour or whether the NSN chooses to continue the path of a user-pays incorporated network are important questions for the NSN to address.

Flattened leadership

A very significant insight that came out of the personnel accounts was the idea of flattened leadership. The network actors claimed that the introduction of reform by the NSN had created flattened leadership in the school. This innovative type of leadership had resulted to the establishment of empowerment not only among teachers but also among the students of the schools. A number of network actors had indicated that these innovative, empowering leadership styles were essential ingredients for the reforms of the NSN to take place.

It would seem that the existence of or the presence of flattened leadership is almost in-dispensable in achieving empowerment and eventual radical reforms in schools. Exploring the possibilities of systematic documentation and research and even of introduction or replication of modified forms of flattened leadership would certainly be promising initiatives spearheaded by the NSN.

Critical reflection

One of the more impressive insights that was extracted from the personal accounts of the network actors is the concept of critical reflection. A significant observation made by a number of network actors was the creation of a culture of enlightened exercise in reviewing professional practices in schools. The network actors mentioned that with the NSN, skills, techniques and even a method of articulation among the various network participants began to manifest. A further common observation made was that NSN member schools seemed to possess a more universal perspective with regard to issues in education as opposed to a parochial perspective.
Based on the descriptions of the network actors, it would be safe to assume that critical reflection is a sub-culture that pervades the NSN. Being a culture, it can be studied more systematically and it can even be learned and taught. With research and development as distinctive features of the NSN, it would most definitely be a productive venture to investigate the dynamics of critical reflection.

Power and politics in the NSN

A compelling observation made by a number of the network actors is the power and politics that happen within the NSN. On several occasions, network actors have identified frustration, tension, and compromise as the outputs of the power and political struggle within the NSN. One particular network actor identified that the NSN is home to two of the most powerful opposing bureaucracies in Australian education—the departments of education and the teachers' unions. On the other hand, some network actors have identified the network as a great instrument in neutralising the power and political struggles that are usually found in the education context of Australia.

The incredible divergence in the perspectives of network actors in the NSN serve to reinforce one logical conclusion: within the network structure of the NSN that should in principle be collaborative and cooperative very real power and political struggles exist.

Policy influence of the NSN

The point that was most contentious among the different issues raised regarding the NSN is its potential to influence policy. Several network actors categorically stated that the NSN has made significant impacts on Australian education policy. On the other hand, some network actors downplayed and as a matter of fact even stated that policy influence is not and should not be a domain of the network.

The reason for this policy default as enumerated by their advocates is the possible conflicts collapse that may occur within the loose coalition of the NSN if particular stances were taken by the body. Some network actors mentioned that policy influence can never happen in the network because two of the more prominent actors—the employers and the unions—have motives that are diametrically opposed to one another.

An important issue that network actors of the NSN need to confront is that the stand of the network as regards policy. If the network states that their objective is to carry out school reform—professional development of teachers and improved learning outcomes for students—then influencing education policy directly or indirectly, both in the state and federal government level is an arena that the NSN would need to be an active part of. Education policy is the venue where guidelines, rules and directives that affect the schools, teachers and classroom are fashioned most of the time as a result of political compromise between traditional bureaucratic hierarchies.

The NSN as a collaborative venture between key stakeholders of Australian education with its own positive culture of flattened leadership, networking and critical reflection makes it a potentially powerful group in Australian education. Whether or not the NSN is able to harness that potential to accomplish its avowed objectives of genuine school reform is the question that it must confront headlong.

Challenges Facing the CES

CES principles versus state mandated policies

A considerable number of network actors of the CES have stated that one of the biggest difficulties they encounter is the clash between practicing the principles of the CES and State-
mandated educational directives (i.e., classroom tracking, high stakes completion exams). A fundamental principle of the CES is that students are treated with equity (anathema to systems of tracking or 'honors' classes in schools; CES also frowns upon using high-stakes tests (SATs, middle school qualifying exams) as bases for learning for students. Consequently CES school administrators and teachers continually identify these clashes as very real challenges the CES needs to face in the future.

*Teacher burn-out and CES principles*

Another concern that was raised by a good number of CES administrators and teachers is the burn-out (increased workload) that teachers have to deal with in trying to implement the principles of the CES. The network actors of the CES unanimously state that the carrying out the principles of the NSN require and demand a lot more in terms of time and preparation for teachers and administrators within a typical school. As a result, fulfilling the State and District-mandated requirements for teachers in schools and then added over and above all these by the demands that follow as a result of the principles of the CES take quite a toll on the teachers and administrators of the CES.

*CES transformation into a user-pays group*

A number of the network actors of the CES (CES Regional and National Officers) state that a natural consequence of the changing economic (increasing overhead costs) and geographic (steadily increasing number of schools affiliated with the CES) pressures the CES has had to undergo a transformation from an original 'no fee' organisation offering services to a 'user-pays' coalition. The network actors claim that the transformation is a necessary and crucial step that CES has to take in order to assure its continued service and impact in society.

*CES and its struggle with equity for all students*

An overwhelming majority of the CES network actors have identified equity for all students as one of the biggest challenges facing the coalition. They state that in the affluent United States of America the marginalised sectors of society 'students from impoverished groups, minorities, immigrant sectors' suffer from the impersonal bureaucratic American educational system. Although recent reports have claimed that the quality of education in American schools is slowly improving, CES counters that this is the case only for students belonging to middle class and to the affluent sectors. Those belonging to the impoverished remain trapped in a bureaucratic system that buries them deeper into the difficulties of lack of access and exposure to education.

*Epilogue*

The histories of the CES and the NSN in their attempt to operate and become efficacious in highly-bureaucratic education systems offer important lessons and insights for individuals and groups who are looking at alternative organisation systems of delivery.

An outstanding common experience shared by the CES and the NSN is the almost omnipresent influence of the monolithic bureaucracy on the systems and operations of these community partnerships. It would seem that the education environment where the CES and the NSN are located (certain sectors of the US and Australia) have deeply-embedded bureaucratic core. It is a pervasive system that encroaches even on the functions of organisations that have distinctly endeavoured to be non-bureaucratic in nature. This would seem to be the challenge that would eventually face educational community partnerships that are yet to be formed in previously highly-
bureaucratised systems—the pervasive influence of an omnipresent bureaucratic system. Notwithstanding the successes and breakthroughs, as well as the issues and challenges that continually confront the CES and the NSN serve as nuggets of inspiration, and more importantly, blueprints for technology transfer, that individuals and groups desirous of establishing community partnerships in education may learn and draw viable lessons from.

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