ROCK-Solid Authentic Leadership:

An Ancient Metaphor for a Postmodern Praxis

By Daniel H. Jarvis, PhD

The notion of *authentic leadership* has been described differently by leading theorists (Duignan & Bhindi, 1997; Taylor, 1991), yet often with certain overlapping ideas. In 2006, Paul Begley presented three main characteristics of authentic leadership: self-knowledge, sensitivity to the perspectives of others, and particular skill and knowledge areas associated with effective leadership. He had elsewhere noted that, "authentic leadership may be thought of as a metaphor for professionally effective, ethically sound, and consciously reflective practices in educational administration. This is leadership that is knowledge-based, values informed, and skillfully executed" (2003, p. 1). Starratt (2004) speaks of three foundational virtues: responsibility, authenticity and presence. Fullan, Hill and Crévola (2006), in discussing moral leadership, focused on personalization, precision and professional learning.

This discussion is centred on the use of the word "ROCK" as a metaphor and acronym within today's education practice, which features the following proposed four core components of effective authentic leadership: Relationships, Organization, Creativity and Knowledge. Further, each of these components includes significant personal and professional elements. The concept of the ROCK acronym/metaphor has evolved from years of doctoral research, personal experiences in leadership capacities (elementary, secondary, university contexts), and leadership preparation through qualification program offerings by the Ontario Principals' Council.

LEADERSHIP

The striking visual image of a solid, immobile rock foundation arguably denotes a certain sense of stability. A rock metaphor, which involves this intrinsic notion of stability and secure foundation, is perhaps also particularly relevant and welcome within what might be considered the maelstrom of uncertainty and inherent controversies and tensions that arguably characterize much of contemporary education. Like the Dunstaffnage Castle on the west coast of Scotland that is built directly upon a massive bedrock foundation, one can consider the concept of ROCK-solid leadership as being firmly based on the four core components of relationships, organization, creativity and knowledge.

RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships between the administrator and the faculty, staff, fellow administrators, parents/guardians and other community members are of utmost importance in building a positive educational space that promotes quality teaching, research and collaboration. Great leaders value people. In discussing the distributive leadership model, Fullan (2005) underscores the significance of both administrator–teacher and teacher–teacher relationships within a productive/sustainable environment. He writes that "from a system perspective, the single answer to the question of how to increase the chances for greater sustainability is to build a critical mass of developmental leaders who can mix and match, and who can surround themselves with other leaders across the system as they spread the new leadership capacities to others. Adaptive challenges such as sustainability, moral purpose for all, deep learning, fine-tuning intelligent accountability, productive lateral capacity building, and getting results never before attained can be tremendously enticing once you start to get good at doing them" (p. 104).

Relationships are critically important to the health of a school or university system. In the absence of their existence, we have perhaps all witnessed how negative energy, destructive attitudes and resulting conflicts tend to ensue in short order.

ORGANIZATION

The authentic leader must be organized, almost to an extreme degree, in order to most effectively respond to the complexity and unpredictability of both the role and the work environment. As with the other three core components of the ROCK acronym, organizational skills and awareness are required at both the personal and professional level (see Table 1).

This high level of personal and professional organization becomes even more significant and vital in light of the pressures and conflicting tensions inherent to the job. Dimmock and Walker (2005) comment on the realities of contemporary leadership in school contexts. "Schools throughout the world operate in an increasingly complex and confusing environment. School leaders in particular are exposed to the problems, paradoxes and dilemmas associated with shifting educational landscapes. Recent research into the dilemmas perceived by school principals presents a picture of leaders torn between opposite, often contradictory, directions as their roles become less circumscribed and more subject to debate in times of societal change" (p. 159).

In addition, it is also important that organization and creativity *need not be viewed as opposite personality types or as polar opposites* on some imagined continuum of administrative practice. They are, and must be, complementary aspects of effective authentic leadership.

CREATIVITY

While creativity theory is becoming increasingly prevalent in both the corporate and education sectors, (Robinson, 2011) relatively little is known about how this component is diagnosed and/or developed within an individual leader. Is creativity in leadership inherent to the individual or, as in visual arts education, can creativity – or the facilitation of creative processes – be taught/learned and nurtured? Clearly, whether or not one considers oneself a "creative leader," one can certainly learn to foster a culture and promulgate an attitude conducive to creative approaches to problem solving and the ability to rethink/improve effective existing practices. Without a creative vision for oneself, individual colleagues, and the institution as a whole, the leader will seldom be able to move beyond the mere maintenance and perpetuation of status quo education and administration.

Although the word *creative* is often defined simply as "relating to, or involving the imagination or original ideas, especially in the production of an artistic work" (Pearsall, 2001, p. 430), there exist innumerable variations in denotation, the term itself proving quite elusive. Historically, creativity has often been discussed in three ways: creativity as it relates to a celebrated and gifted *person*, creativity as a *process*, and creativity as it relates to a *product* (Cropley, 2001; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). This has led to an ever-increasing related body of research and literature in education and the corporate world, and to the rejection of the notion that only certain individuals are capable of experiencing creative processes.

Sir Ken Robinson, in his extremely popular Technology Entertainment Design (TED) conference talk of 2006 ("Do Schools Kill Creativity?") defined creativity as "having original ideas that have value." He has argued strongly that schooling, at all levels, should begin to emphasize creativity and personalized learning to a much greater degree, rather than viewing it as peripheral.

Contemporary business literature is increasingly focused on creativity, its influence on productivity, and its use in corporate research, development and staff training. For example, the concept of Directed Creativity (Plsek), defined as "the purposeful production of creative ideas in a topic area, followed up by deliberate effort to implement some of those ideas," has gained wide popularity. Directed Creativity suggests that all

TABLE 1. PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL ELEMENTS OF THE FOUR CORE ROCK COMPONENTS

RELATIONSHIPS	
PERSONAL	• Family (spouse/partner, children, extended family) & Friends (past/present, nearby/distant) • Community membership in clubs/organizations/ societies/teams/etc.
PROFESSIONAL	• Individuals (administration, faculty, staff) • Internal Groups (committees, associations, interest groups, Professional Learning Communities) • External Groups (institutions, regional/provincial/national/ international bodies/organizations)
ORGANIZATION	
PERSONAL	• Organized office space, files, resources • Organized personal schedule (e.g., family, leisure, health/fitness, meetings, volunteering)
PROFESSIONAL	• Technological (e.g., email, electronic planners [IMAP], mobile devices, Facebook, Twitter, Doodle, Skype, BBL, Moodle, Connect, Content Management Systems) • Cyclical (small cycles such as regular meetings [agenda, hosting, minutes, action items]; larger cycles such as strategic planning, budgets, curriculum/school reform)
CREATIVITY	
PERSONAL	• Wide reading (scope and depth; contemporary/historical/ classic), conferences, travel, research • Setting new personal learning goals/challenges, taking well-considered/researched risks
PROFESSIONAL	• Facilitating workshops or events in which faculty/staff are offered choice, voice, and ongoing support; this encourages self-directed creativity and renewed enthusiasm for daily tasks/work • Parametric Creativity Model for project leadership (Jarvis, 2006)
KNOWLEDGE	
PERSONAL	• Self-awareness regarding personal motivations/values/beliefs/ ethics/worldview • Self-awareness regarding personal skills, strengths, areas for new learning/growth
PROFESSIONAL	• School/University (history, budget, governance, school law, Collective Agreements, issues) • Society (intercultural education, technology, knowledge creation/translation/mobilization, politics, environment, social justice, local/national/global current events, etc.)

creativity tools have three underlying concepts: attention (focusing on things you normally take for granted), escape (get outside normal thinking patterns or preconceptions, or just get outside) and movement (explore, discover, connect, just follow ideas where they lead you). Corporate giants such as 3-M and Google (with their famous "20% Creative Time") have capitalized on this kind of creative productivity by allowing employees to spend portions of their regular work week contemplating creative ideas or projects.

KNOWLEDGE

A leader of excellence must possess a wide, yet ever-expanding, knowledge base regarding research, pedagogy, fiscal management, as well as significant political, cultural and demographical issues. Socrates' metacognitive maxim of "Know thyself, for the unexamined life is not worth living," also comes into play in terms of leader knowledge. As this knowledge of self and society continues to expand and deepen over one's leadership career, certain value conflicts are inevitable, as clearly described by Begley (2011). "Unfortunately, our personal values as well of those of the profession, organization, community and society are not necessarily consistent or compatible with each other. As a result these influences and values, derived from the various arenas of our environment, can generate inconsistencies and conflicts" (paragraph 6). The ability of the leader to be able to recognize personal biases, identify how these relate to issues that arise in leadership decisions, and sort these out according to a careful and well-researched understanding of the issues, is arguably a critical hallmark of an effective and authentic leader.

One major trend in contemporary education at all levels is that of an increasingly mobile and international student body. Notably, there has been a significant shift in the literature from "multicultural education" to "intercultural education." Haworth (2010) explains this transition in terminology. "The shift from multicultural education to intercultural education represents a move from simply identifying cultural differences... to helping 'others' to understand these; looking for ways to communicate effectively across cultures; raising awareness through critical literacy; and an emphasis on constructing meaning from a number of viewpoints.... Such an approach involves proactive identification of strategies for working positively across a range of cultures, and a more global perspective on cultural diversity" (p. 28-29).

A second major trend in contemporary education is towards what has become known as the "Knowledge* (or "K Star") universe," where the asterisk is replaced by a large and ever-expanding list of modifiers including "creation," "transfer," "networks," "management," "dissemination" and "brokering." In Canada, our Tri-Council of national research funding agencies (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada [SSHRC], Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada [NSERC] and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research [CIHR]) are moving towards an increased emphasis on knowledge creation and dissemination in an attempt to increase researcher accountability and the broader

and more coordinated sharing of research findings.

The Information Communication Technology (ICT) revolution represents a third major trend, one which will no doubt continue to transform how, where, and why we learn in formalized schooling as well as in lifelong, adult (re)learning contexts. In, *Globalizing the Research Imagination,* the fascinating work of Kenway and Fahey (2009) offer insights on the intersection of both of these recent, powerful trends. "Alongside all this, various academic activities are increasingly being systematically internationalized and normalized, 'from above' through the logics of knowledge economy policy discourses...and via such practices as 'knowledge networks' and 'knowledge transfer'.... This exchange of knowledge is also facilitated by innovations in information technology. As a result, universities and researchers are coming more and more to see themselves in global and transnational as well as in international terms" (p. 15). Post-secondary institutions the world over are now grappling with how to implement what Guruz (2008) has aptly described as the "brick and click" reality of 21st century university education.

This is, of course, a small sampling of the complex trends with which a contemporary leader must become intimately knowledgeable. To this list, one would certainly have to add other significant issues such as social justice and equity, school/university safety, standardized assessment, mental health among students/faculty, environmental concerns, and the recent global economic crisis with related financial effects on school planning, marketing and curricular implementation.

Notwithstanding this long list of complex issues, the advent of three major trends – intercultural education, knowledge creation/mobilization, and the rapid advances in information communication technology – provides today's leaders with a challenging, yet also highly stimulating educational environment, that is anything but repetitive or dull. Developing a continually expanding/deepening knowledge of self, schooling, and society allows the authentic leader to better prepare for complex decision-making.

CONCLUSION

The ROCK acronym highlights a set of four proposed core components of authentic leadership: an emphasis on relationships, both with individuals and with different social groups; organizational skills at both home and work; creative thinking and risk-taking, both for the leader and for those within her/his sphere of influence; and an ever-increasing knowledge of self, schooling and society.

By starting with the ancient metaphor of the stable rock foundation upon which a solid edifice could be confidently constructed, we have created a well-defined concept for what effective leadership entails today. The increasingly complex role of the education leader may seem overwhelming, perhaps to the point of discouraging new candidates from making the transition to leadership altogether. It is through awareness and comprehension of this ROCK acronym that educators can better serve others, using this interpretive framework for a clearer understanding of authentic educational leadership and the praxis inherent to this journey. ▲

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Contents

THE REGISTER: WINTER 2012, VOLUME 14, NUMBER 4



Toys to tools

Understanding when to power on and off

ONTARIO PRINCIPALS' COUNCIL
Exemplary Leadership in Public Education

Features

08 **Advice in Uncertain Times**
By the OPC Professional Services Team

14 **Seeking the Truth**
By Peggy Sweeney

28 **Mental Health Guide for Schools**
By Stan Kutcher, Lisa Doucet & Yifeng Wei

34 **Toys to Tools**
By Steve Chapelle

22 REGISTER REPORT
ROCK-Solid Authentic Leadership: An Ancient Metaphor for a Postmodern Praxis
By Daniel H. Jarvis, PhD

Columns

04 President's Message

06 OPC News

21 Education Leadership Canada

27 OPC Communicator

42 One Last Thought

Principals' Picks

40 Conference Line-Up

40 Mark Your Calendar

41 Review