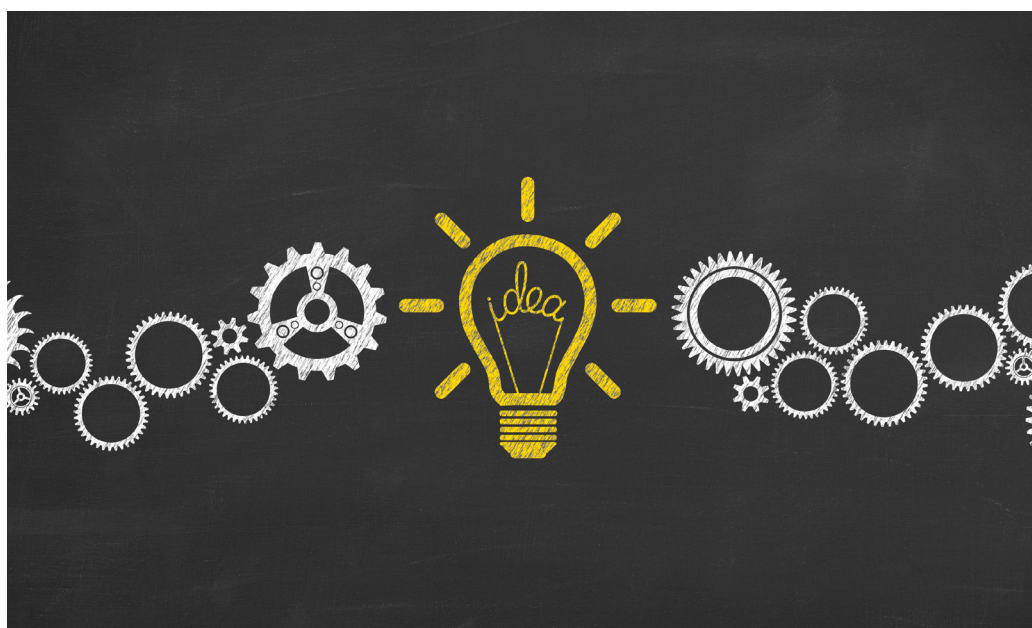


Recognising the 'Next Big Thing'

What happens in schools and classrooms is often influenced or dictated by what happens far beyond the school. Some changes appear to come and go in a cyclical way, but it is probably best to describe these as helical - changes where old issues are revisited from a different perspective or with new understandings. How can school leaders anticipate significant changes in education?



'Leaders cannot act in a vacuum, but need to be aware of the educational, political and economic factors at local, state, national and international levels that have influence on schools.'

Ridden and De Nobile, 2012

Recognising changes that are here to stay

The many influences on schools that may result in changes to policies include curriculum, accountability, staffing, as well as political, economic, social, research and technological trends:

- Recognise patterns in the messages from both sides of parliament. Political solutions may differ, but the issue will be the same. Watch for an influential government minister who has travelled overseas and returned with a strong message about overseas education. Monitor how Australian students compare with other countries.
- Take note of concerns about a slowing or narrowing economy, increased competition from overseas, emerging economic trends, employer concerns and unemployment rates.
- Be aware of social issues with traction in the media, such as issues relating to values, crime, suicide, marginalised groups etc.
- Recognise significant growth in research and knowledge about brain processing, teaching and learning strategies, curriculum, disability etc.
- Understand technological developments that are impacting access to information, communication, teaching and learning, assessment processes etc.

Education reform

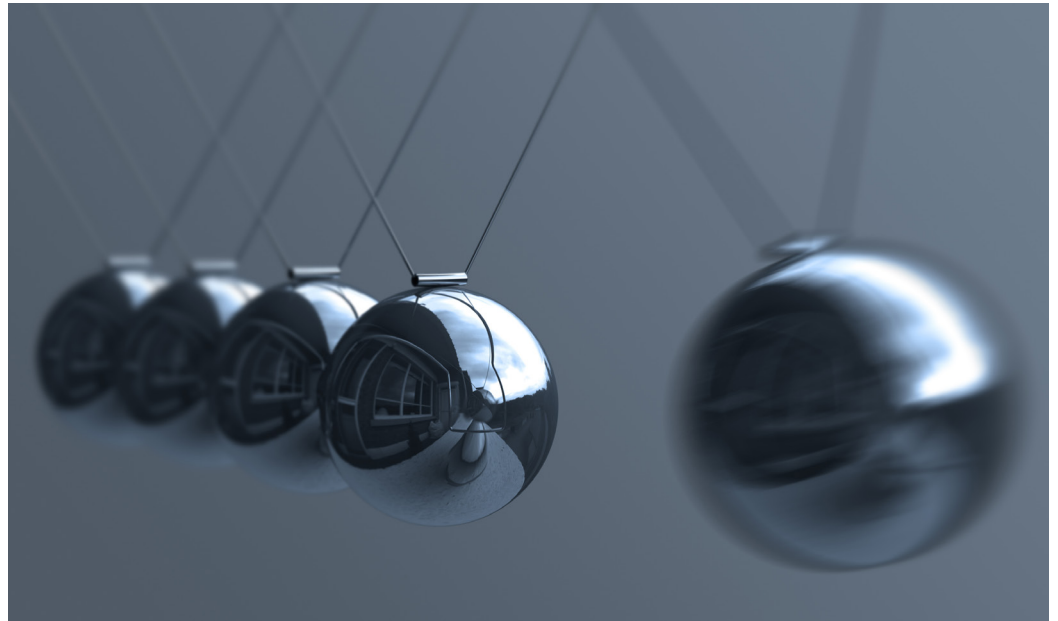
Guthrie and Koppich (1993) suggest ways to recognise which trends or issues are likely to impact schools. They suggest that education reform:

- is a delayed political response to social disequilibrium
- is likely to be a response to a problem recognised by politicians where education is seen as a solution to the problem
- will have been proposed earlier, but not successfully taken up
- implementation coincides with a significant political shift
- occurs during periods when values are confused or unstable
- depends on a policy entrepreneur or champion.

'The nature of work in [the] post-industrial society is changing significantly and this change affects the role of [the] educational leader. Understanding the role and the nature of preparation for it must be based on recognition of how work is being defined and organised in the 21st Century. Across OECD Member countries, "school systems and individual schools are experimenting with new approaches to management that seek to run schools in ways that are right for the 21st Century."' (OECD 2001, p. 13)

'The way forward is not linear; the answers to the questions that challenge schools will not be simple. School leaders cannot rely on others to do the work ...'

Caldwell and Loader, 2010



Educators sometimes feel like pawns in the hands of politicians and government bureaucrats, but educators can influence the debate by:

- focusing on the key issue
- being articulate and knowledgeable to colleagues, parents, politicians, etc.
- enlisting support of credible 'experts'
- actively exploring the implications of the idea and avoiding political bias
- directing attention to student learning and wellbeing.

Educators are often frustrated by changes imposed on schools from 'above', especially as many of them appear to be copies of overseas innovations and do not necessarily translate to the local environment. New ideas and significant changes to schools do not materialise from nowhere; warning signs are visible for some time. Educators need to learn to read the signs, and to recognise and prepare for forthcoming storms and changes.

Key Points

Educators can learn to anticipate the 'next big thing' in the minds of politicians, government policy makers and community influencers:

- Recognise emerging and dominant political, economic, social, research-based and technological issues.
- Consider how these might impact on schools as a contributor to an issue or a solution to a problem.
- Watch for political or social instability and disequilibrium, synergies of policy, dominant voices and the re-defining of earlier issues.

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