

INSPIRING HOPE

PERSONAL PEDAGOGICAL GIFTS
IN A WORLD OF STANDARDS

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WITH BRUCE ADDISON AND KAREN FOX



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Our organisational approach

Our book comprises an introduction and three parts.

In our introduction, ‘Raising the curtain: Your school, an orchestra of renown?’ we introduce the metaphor of an esteemed symphony orchestra, noting that symphonic orchestral music can be achieved only if the musicians in the orchestra develop their virtuosic gifts to the full and then link them, under the watch of an accomplished conductor, to a prescribed musical score. The same is true for a school: teachers’ virtuosic gifts and the school’s educational score are equivalent essentials in creating a symphonic school. We derived the term *pedagogical balance* partly from our observations, experiences and explorations of the orchestral world. Our introduction also features our interview with orchestral conductor Alondra de la Parra. The experience of sharing musical and educational ideas with Alondra, and observing her at work, was a truly memorable gift for us. We are confident that educators nationwide will be inspired by her wisdom, talents and fascinating orchestral story.

In the first part of this book, ‘The stranger-than-fiction story of educational standards’, we lay the foundations for the first of the two concepts that underpin our pedagogical balance construct – *standards*.

In the first chapter, ‘Standards: The where from, what for and where to’, we present a historical perspective on key forces that are affecting today’s classrooms. Australian education has had standards since the first formal school was established in 1793 – and always with challenges and a degree of stress for teachers. The historical perspective on educational standards is important to understand if the intents of the contemporary concept are to be appreciated for their legitimate professional and political worth (as well as their constraining features) and interpreted with practicality and understanding in school workplaces.

We conclude from our sweeping analysis of eras in Australian education that the significant influence of the 1980s and 1990s neoliberal and economic rationalist ideology continues today. It is understandable but should be very seriously critiqued since it represents only a slice of the total possible ideological pie.

In our second chapter, ‘A kaleidoscope of educational standards for today’s schools’, we contend that externally developed standards have come to represent a pervasive influence in the professional lives of Australian teachers. Viewed in total, the standards kaleidoscope that we present can appear to be overwhelming. But if the ten individual standards are viewed as educationally defensible, pervaded by the

spirit of the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration and able to be coalesced constructively with teachers' personal pedagogical gifts, they can assume very important motivational as well as organisational meaning in teachers' work.

With our second part, 'Shining a light on teachers' greatest assets: Personal pedagogical gifts', we change tack from the organisational influences on teachers' work to the personal.

In the third chapter, 'Life for committed teachers in an age of anxiety', we scrutinise the complex social and political contexts of Australian education in the 2020s. In particular, we trace four significant phenomena that have resulted in today's often-stressful environment for a profession seeking to achieve self-actualisation as well as high levels of measurable productivity. This backdrop of anxiety is complex but it can be managed – indeed, turned from discord into rich processes and outcomes – if we enable teachers, school leaders and system supervisors to develop the concept of pedagogical balance and incorporate it as a fundamental principle in their work.

The fourth chapter, 'The remarkable artistry of your personal pedagogical gift', presents a refined and updated version of the concept of PPGs that was introduced to educational audiences in *Energising teaching* (Crowther & Boyne, 2016). We outline our latest thinking regarding this multifaceted concept, along with educational justifications from Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Daniel Goleman's work on emotional intelligence.

In the final part, 'Towards a profession of hope', we refocus on our mission: to enable Australia's classroom educators to make optimum use of their personal pedagogical capabilities while pursuing educational standards that have national significance and endorsement. We highlight the importance of courageous and enlightened leadership in achieving this.

In our fifth chapter, 'Pedagogical balance: When significant standards and personal pedagogical gifts coalesce', we bring together the two constructs that can engender elegant individual accomplishment, deep professional satisfaction and heightened schoolwide goals. Such is the importance of the concept of balancing standards and personal pedagogical gifts in teachers' work. If there is one chapter of central importance in this book, Chapter 5 is probably it.

In our final chapter, 'Lowering the curtain: From pedagogical balance to a spirit of hope', we reflect on the deep human meanings of the concept of *hope*. We then

draw on the thirteen scenarios to illuminate the ambiances of educational leadership that seem to go with our key concepts of pedagogical balance and hope. The six leadership functions that we propose will seem partly familiar to readers, but partly novel. Unsurprisingly, we conclude our discussion on an optimistic note. We suggest that, even as the curtain is closing on our deliberations, the time-honoured goal of teaching, a learned profession is gaining life.

Our organisational approach is based in a logic that is captured in the sequential flow of Figure 1. As can be seen, each chapter has a distinct theme, but our core message, explicit in the title of our book, derives from our preface, introduction and chapters being holistically intertwined.

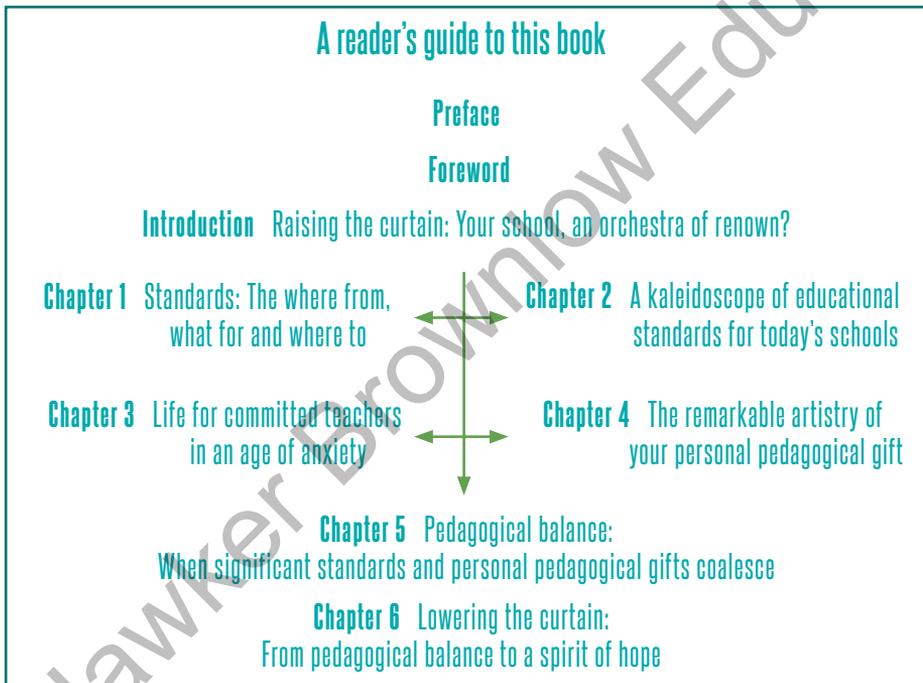


Figure 1: The conceptual basis for the book's organisation

In the spirit of this book, we hope that you will not just read but *do*. We are supportive of the active citizenship goal of the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration and think it should apply to all educators in all classrooms. Thus, each chapter concludes with searching questions that will enable you to relate to the scenarios in that chapter and personalise what we are proposing for you to take forward into your professional life. Additionally, we have included a question directed towards pre-service teachers to assist them in engaging with the major themes of the book.

Preface

With each chapter there is also a reflective exercise that can be undertaken individually or with a group of interested colleagues. By the time you have completed reading the chapters, critiquing the scenarios, speculating on the wonders of the symphonic metaphor and reflecting on the questions and exercises, you will know as much as we know about pedagogical balance and how to inspire a sense of hope in your own educational world. We will welcome your thoughts and suggestions.

Frank Crowther

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Introduction

Raising the curtain: Your school, an orchestra of renown?

Imagine this ... Let's assume for a moment that your role is not that of a teacher at a highly successful school. No, you are a player in a renowned symphony orchestra, let's say the New York Philharmonic. As an acclaimed violinist, or cellist, or percussionist, you strive at each concert to apply your unique musical gift to achieve deep personal satisfaction, the praise of your conductor, the approval of your colleagues and the acclaim of your audience. Your professional life is a continuous search for perfection in its many forms. It is relentless – but you love it.

But what is the secret of your personal success in the New York Philharmonic?

First, of course, you must develop and exercise your own unique musical gift to the absolute nth degree. Even though you were born with a special talent, ensuring that you develop it to its potential is extremely time-consuming, demanding and sometimes frustrating.

But that's only the beginning. There are other accomplished violinists, or flautists, in the New York Philharmonic. The complexities of symphonic expression are intricate. There are conventions to be followed – though there is also the thrill of breaking them if the spell of the moment calls for it!

The essential beauty of a great symphonic performance comes from one hundred musicians achieving a sound that they could not achieve alone, and yet every individual sound matters. The hours of team practice that are required are countless. Differences in personality, cultural background, music school of training and even spoken language have to be put aside. The concentrated listening, interpreting, responding, compromising and experimenting for a precise ensemble to emerge can be incredibly demanding.

But that's not all either.

It all works because of trust: trust in the musical piece, trust in each other and trust in the conductor. Your conductor, armed with a baton and their own unique musical gifts, has in front of them a complex, possibly amazing, musical score. You have been told that the audience will surely love this new score and that, masterfully interpreted and presented, it will enable your orchestra to demonstrate its sublime artistry in the world of symphonic music. Success with the score will depend on you, your conductor, your lead players and your fellow players – and the way that you all interact to create something very special.

Of critical importance in any accomplished orchestra, is what we call *balance*: recognition that the talents, or gifts, of the orchestral performers are of equivalent importance and value to the musical score. Bringing the gifts of the performers and the score into balance in the form of a compelling symphonic performance is no doubt incredibly difficult, requiring special effort on behalf of the individual performers, particularly lead players and also, of course, the conductor.

The orchestral players in the scenario that we have depicted have discovered that delicate balance between their own individual talents and ambitions on the one hand and the requirements of the orchestra – fellow musicians, other performers, the conductor and the composer, possibly Mozart – on the other. Balance, it may be said, is critical to their success, a fundamental plank in their search for elegant personal performance, sublime orchestral synergy and audience satisfaction.

Making a symphony

As authors, we were intrigued by the symphonic metaphor but wondered about its practical applicability in education. Would a world-renowned conductor or virtuosic musician support our intuitions and interpretations?

We were honoured when Alondra de la Parra, chief conductor of the Queensland Symphony Orchestra, agreed to our request for an interview. Alondra is a truly remarkable person – official Cultural Ambassador of Mexico and 2018 Mexican Woman of the Year as well as a female conductor of a leading symphony orchestra. We found that she has used education as an important vehicle in her exceptional life accomplishments and regards formal schooling very highly. We learned that her father is a writer, her mother is a sociologist and educator, and her brother is a leading musician and singer in Mexico. She is also a mother of two small boys and when we met her was preparing to depart Australia for a stint in Berlin before

heading home to New York for a while. She exudes musical passion, deep humanity, love for her family and, to our delight, considerable understanding and respect for what we are attempting with this book. (She attributed this in part to her educator mother's influence on her thinking and values.) As the two-hour interview and follow-up orchestral rehearsal session evolved, we could tell that she understood our mission and genuinely wanted to contribute to the work of Australian teachers. Our 'Alondra interlude' was a significant life event for us as authors. We hope we can share it in spirit and content with Australian educators through these pages.

Alondra's complex world is not easily captured. But what she conveyed to us about the workings of a successful orchestra will surely resonate with educators. We hope that the brief excerpts that follow will convey a sense that your work has a musical equivalent and, in fact, *is* a form of music.

Alondra de la Parra, chief conductor

I have the coolest job in the world ... I am the conduit. I have to get as close as possible to the composer. I have to convey what I am feeling so that the players also 'feel it' ... My use of gesture and my baton has taken many years to develop. It is perhaps my greatest asset.

The orchestra had been playing together under Alondra's direction for several years before the rehearsal that we observed. Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, the precision in players' actions seemed to us to be perfect. But Alondra's engaging voice (both speaking and singing), facial expressiveness, physical vigour, demonstrative – at times theatrical – use of the baton, along with her very pleasant demeanour, created an ardent response from the players that we could feel from the front bleachers of the ABC rehearsal room.

Music has layers – rhythm, harmonics, the 'weight' of sound, the nuances of feeling and emotion. That shows through in every performance ... A good orchestra is one where everyone plays the notes right. A great orchestra is one with skill, emotions and will – the will to give the very best of yourself. You can't teach 'great'. With 'great', trust is so strong that everyone lets go, opens up, travels together. I saw this last week. I had to miss a performance and they did the concert without me. I was so proud ... Will is more than setting standards, it's players demanding the best of themselves and each other. The violinists each have their individual

'sounds'. They have to perfect them and then they have to respect each other's individual sounds and find their 'one sound'.

It occurred to us during the rehearsal, as we studied the players' faces and bodily expressions, that harmony in an orchestra is a product of players listening with total concentration to the sound being created around them and endeavouring individually to complement and enrich that sound. Is such harmony possible in highly successful schools? That question intrigued us.

My work revolves around three activities – source, rehearsal, performance. I have to be true to Stravinsky, exude passion and feeling and inspire the players to also 'feel' what I feel – and then share their 'feeling' with the audience. No two audiences are the same but on the surface what we do is basically the same because Stravinsky doesn't change when I go from Australia to Berlin or New York. We have to leave our audience feeling inspired ... You can see the workings of an orchestra in five minutes. If something isn't working you can hear it. I can 'feel' what is going on.

Alondra stopped play on a number of occasions during the rehearsal, using her baton, gesture and singing voice to suggest a delicately refined rhythm or nuance that added to the already polished interpretations of the score.

I create the music in my head before it happens. The power is in making it happen. Rehearsal is the key because that's when trust is built – between the players in their groups, the whole orchestra and with me ... I believe that to give of yourself is a very generous thing. It is the highest point of being human. It helps people respect themselves and others. That is why I demand skill, respect and trust. Nothing more. If I have to choose between an amazing but egocentric player and one who is talented but not egotistical and cooperates and trusts – I choose the latter.

What we observed, and picked up in post-rehearsal chats, was that each of the hundred-plus musicians is sublimely skilled, feels passion for their personal gift and gains deep satisfaction from how their gift contributes to a beautifully holistic musical performance. The equivalent to a dynamic school workplace did not escape our notice.

'Of course, being so transparent comes with its vulnerabilities. Being an orchestral conductor can be a lonely place,' said Alondra. We could not help but think of principals and the challenge of addressing the competing demands of their

communities at the same time as they demonstrate personalised concern and care throughout school hours.

Two Queensland Symphony Orchestra musicians joined us and offered additional gems of wisdom.

Warwick Adeney, concertmaster

‘Trust and respect together give an orchestra flexibility. You can’t have or express deep feeling without trust. When you have trust, you get “permission” – permission to be yourself, do what you are feeling and do what you do best.’ We observed during the rehearsal that players’ facial expressions revealed obvious admiration for the skills of their co-players. In focussing on one violinist, or cellist, we could see that complementing the sounds of their co-violinists (or co-cellists) appeared to be as important to them as their individual play.

‘If a conductor isn’t listening to the ensemble, the orchestra can start to fray. It is very difficult to repair when that happens.’ (Hmmm ...!)

Alison Mitchell, principal flute

‘We have a culture in our orchestra where anyone can ask questions. We do that.’ During the rehearsal, a number of questions were asked of the conductor and of fellow players. The players were clearly confident and self-assured as they sought clarification on points where various interpretations were possible.

‘In rehearsals, and in performances, Alondra’s role is to provide inspiration. When that happens, I am fully immersed. I feel nothing other than what I am doing at that moment.’ A compelling school professional development session might often share resemblance.

‘Different conductors bring different subtleties of melody to the score and allow for different personalities. As a flautist, sometimes I am the prominent voice, sometimes not. It depends on my capabilities and whether the conductor calls for a strong sound.’ We would say the same about versatile, sensitive school leaders.

We concluded from our very rewarding and illuminating hours with Alondra, Warwick and Alison that the metaphor of a symphony orchestra is exciting for our purposes. Schools are not symphony orchestras – in some ways they are simpler, in other ways more complex – but three important lessons emerged from our