Corrupted Principles
And the Challenges of Critically Reflective Leadership.

Christine L Cunningham

Being a report of an investigation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Murdoch University.
I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not been previously submitted for a degree at any tertiary institution.

Christine L Cunningham
Abstract

*Corrupted Principles* documents my research as a naïve and new K-12 principal in Bolivia. From 2002-2006 I spent four years teaching and observing hundreds of incidents that detailed the hidden underbelly of a prestigious and elite American International School in one of the western hemisphere’s poorest nations. During those years I kept a daily journal of my work that revealed exactly how some of the richest and most powerful families in Bolivia colluded to ensure that their children gained exclusive access to education opportunities and privileges.

Against a backdrop of national crisis while Bolivia’s Indigenous majority struggled to gain executive political power and invoke inclusive and pluralistic education reform, *Corrupted Principles* details how the school’s plutocratic processes helped to guarantee that a new generation of wealthy young graduates would continue to stand against their fellow citizens as advocates of neo-liberal imperialism. Grounded in Critically Reflective Practice and its four step cycle from professional critique, through confrontation then to reconstruction of education practice, the text weaves thick description of school administration experiences and whole-school events with critical education theory. Through this process I uncover how the school fabricated college transcripts and passed failing students and examine why the school remained unaccountable for its corrupt actions.

As the title suggests, *Corrupted Principles* reveals my professional dilemma to remain true to my education ideals while leading a corrupt school. How I resolved this ethical predicament is the crux of this study and illuminates the challenges and inspiration of doing Critically Reflective Leadership.
Acknowledgments

This dissertation could not have been completed without the unerring guidance of my two wonderfully professional and inspiring supervisors: Dr Nado Aveling and Professor Barry Down of Murdoch University in Western Australia.

I could not have conducted this research without the assistance of many dedicated teachers and auxiliary staff who worked, and in some cases still work, at Colegio Americano. The dedication they modelled to students and the integrity they maintained throughout the years I worked in the school are testimony to their professionalism and moral principles. I do not mean to cause any harm or offence to these colleagues by writing Corrupted Principles.

I dedicate this thesis to my young Australian-Bolivian daughter, Helen Ani Lujan-Cunningham. May she grow up in an environment that allows her an education that excites, inspires and changes our world.
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Introduction

Choosing a Theme to Focus and Inform

It looked as if...there was a complex mishmash of systems.

It looked as if... the school was trying to enact authentic assessment practices.

It looked as if... grading processes were unworkable.

It looked as if... Colegio Americano ‘created’ reports that contradicted teachers’ evaluation decisions.

It looked as if... grades were manipulated to ensure student promotion by age.

It looked as if... school transcripts were enhanced to help students get into college.

It looked as if... students understood the rorting in the system.

It looked as if... wealthier parents were buying educational advantage in a competitive education market.

It looked as if... teachers were complicit in unethical practices.

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Acronyms

AI / AIS American International / School
AP Advanced Placement
CRP Critically Reflective Practice
ESL English as a Second Language
GPA Grade Point Average
IBO International Baccalaureate Organisation
IOWA The Iowa Test of Basic Skills
OBE Outcomes Based Education
SACS-CASI Southern Association of Colleges and Schools – Council on Accreditation and School Improvement
SAT Scholastic Aptitude Test
(renamed in 2005 to Scholastic Reasoning Test)
TOEFL Test of English as a Foreign Language

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<tr>
<td>Autonomía</td>
<td>Autonomy to such an extent that it is almost a declaration of independence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachillerato / Bachiller</td>
<td>High School diploma</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buenos días</td>
<td>Good morning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campesino</td>
<td>Peasant; or poor, rural Indigenous Bolivian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Castellanización</td>
<td>Enforced learning of Spanish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criollos</td>
<td>People of Spanish descent but born in Latin America</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colegio Americano</td>
<td>American College</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Empleadas</td>
<td>Hired help</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Horas Cívicas</td>
<td>Literally: civic hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A school period dedicated to civics instruction and celebration</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jailónes (a term of insult)</td>
<td>Spoilt snobs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Latifundios</td>
<td>Agricultural land holding of vast size and wealth</td>
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<td>Libretas Escolares</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manifestación</td>
<td>Political Protest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mestizo</td>
<td>Mixed ancestry – usually a mix of Spanish and Indio-American.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pachamama (Indigenous term)</td>
<td>Mother Earth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poco a poco</td>
<td>Step by step</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quinceañera</td>
<td>Fifteenth Birthday</td>
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