

DEFINING REALITY: APPLYING DOUBLE DESCRIPTION AND CHAOS THEORY TO THE PRACTICE OF PRACTICE

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INTRODUCTION

Two themes are addressed in this article. The first involves efforts to understand the processes of directed reform and unanticipated change in school districts. The data reported here come from a long-term collaborative project, whose research





The Butterfly Effect exists in nonlinear systems, or systems that do not conform to the laws of ordinary predictability. Scientists have been testing and

exist in complicated systems which may have more than a single attractor. They are

*difference occur, it will be as a consequence of new conditions, which will in fact alter the way the classroom operates altogether. In that way, change will actually facilitate system survival.*

However, Dean and Whyte's title could be re-cast to ask, "of all the many truths being told by my many informants, which ones make a difference in the course of events?" rather than asking "how do you know if the informant is really telling the truth?"

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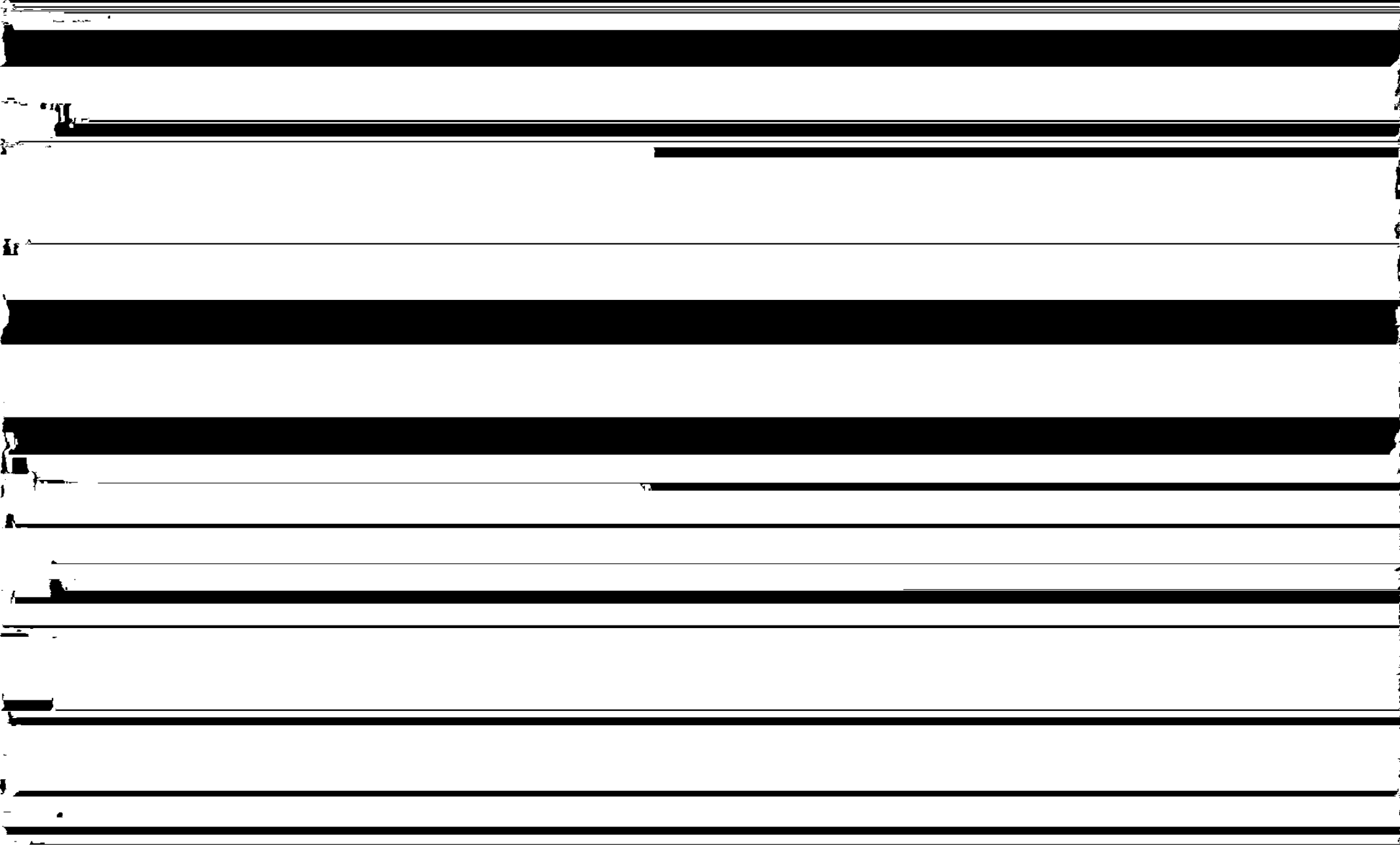


• Navajos learn by modelling the behavior of experts. They watch carefully, not attempting an action until they feel they can do it fairly well on the first try.

in his demeanor. When they responded with shocked anger, saying that his behavior only confirmed *their* belief that no administrators can be trusted, their actions only

all that much. She's over in the other building, and we don't get over there...if she were in *this* office we might talk more. And she's always off doing something. We

be expected. That is, notwithstanding the stimulus-response model that governs most educational planning, simple inputs to the system — such as administrative



of their own knowledge base, especially in the area of

school reform efforts. Mr. Aspen also was frustrated because he felt so professionally

However disparate they may be, the problem of reconciling multiple realities

*unhealthy, and that we can interpret continued recycling of the same ideas — a*

We can seek out such attractors and work toward the construction of more flexible meanings. We can use an historical analysis to determine the origins of sensitivities within school systems. And we can look forward and backward in time, and far beyond the immediate confines of the schoolyard, for the causes and consequences of our present actions. In so doing, we may develop new tools and strategies for understanding the meaning and dynamics of educational systems.