Is the Rush to Improve Standards also Pushing Our Most At Risk Young People out of Education?

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In 1995 Barak Obama wrote:

“The more I learned about the system, the more convinced I became that **school reform** was the only possible solution for the plight of the young men I saw on the street; that without stable families, with no prospects for blue-collar work that could support a family of their own, education was their last best hope” (2004, p.256)

*Dreams from My Father* – Barak Obama
In Queensland

- School Reform ... State level
  - **Examples are**: ETRF + New Basics project / Syllabuses /Essential learnings / Australian curriculum
  - ALSO: A full-time Preparatory Year/Raising school entry age to 6yrs/ **Literacy-numeracy hours** in primary/12 Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) replaced the Senior Certificate
  - NEW: **Flying Start for Qld Children** (DET, 2011)
    1. Getting ready for school ... books for bubs/parents read
    2. Getting ready for secondary school ... Yr 7 moved to High School/improved transitions
    3. Boosting performance for all schools ... reviewing teacher education, establishing tchr standards authority
The Australian Curriculum

History
Education and Training 
Reforms for the Future: 
White Paper [Qld] - 2002 

“Today, 10,000 Queenslanders aged 15 to 17 years are not in school, not in work and not in training. This is simply not good enough and we have to try harder.” (Bligh, Foley & Beattie, 2002)

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Continuing Areas of Concern: 
Literacy & numeracy 
Snapshot of young people in Qld - 2010 

“Despite some increases in 2009 in NAPLAN, Queensland’s mean scores remained statistically lower than the national mean in every year level and domain.” (p.105)

That year Professor Masters’ review also reported: “Significant achievement disparities between the best and worst performing students ... by Year 5 the gap between the top and bottom 20% of students is equivalent to about 2.5 years of schooling. By Year 9 this gap is closer to 5.5 years” (ibid., 112).
PARTICIPANT CONCERNS
High Quality Engagement – Youth At Risk

• STUDENT CONCERNS: “It’s like they’re not interested if you learn at all. It’s whether they give you all the information or not” (Female Flexi school student, aged 16 – Livock, 2009)

• TEACHER CONCERNS:

• SOCIAL WORKER CONCERNS:

• PARENT CONCERNS:

• OTHER STAKEHOLDERS’ CONCERNS:
TEACHER CONCERNS:

- **Bert Watt of Brisbane** Posted at 4:54 PM November 08, 2009 “...I too have taught many schools... I was a manager for over 20 years in a variety of industries and have worked in 3 countries and I fear for the future of Australia... I can only agree with Rupert Murdoch (Boyer lectures) that we are ill-prepared for the 21st century global challenges faced by humanity. **Students in middle and senior school struggle with grammar, cannot string a paragraph together, have little analytical skills,** have no idea about deductive and inductive logic, have little or no moral foundation and understanding, are almost solely hedonistic in their outlook, have no coherent worldview and as the writer states have parents who are disinterested ...” (The Courier Mail, 2009, Comment 452 of 459)

- **Joanne Wilson of Tweed Heads** Posted at 10:24 PM November 08, 2009 “**Bert of Brisbane should resign from teaching!** How can anyone let alone a teacher make sweeping generalised comments about children? I also was a teacher for 30 years. **Everyday is different and most children just want to be treated with respect by adults and respond accordingly. We are all different.”** (ibid., Comment 454 of 459)

- **Student Teacher** Posted at 4:54 PM November 08, 2009 “During my 2 pracs this year I've seen the best and worst of behaviour. **Each school seems to develop a culture from it's principal.** One school had a no-nonsense, proactive principle, happy to support teachers when behaviour issues arise. Great and happy school for everyone. The other school had a principal that is rarely seen and lets his teachers suffer with repeated verbal abuse and shocking behaviour. The teachers at this school (in western Brisbane) have poor morale and many students have poor behaviour. Come on principals lead by example and support your teachers!” (ibid., Comment 451 of 459)
COMMUNITY & SOCIAL WORKER

CONCERNS:

• “Reoccurring issues – the lack of real alternatives or flexible learning environments for young people who don’t fit the mainstream schooling model. We are particularly concerned about the lack of options for young people in the 12 – 14 years age group.” (Gold Coast community worker, Personal correspondence, 2011).

• Lack of institutional support - ability to provide a case management typified by persistence, reliability, intimacy and respect, and which delivers comprehensive, practical support (Gronda, 2009).
‘Re-engagement project’ has many issues:

**WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS’ CONTRIBUTION RE CONCERNS:**
STUDENT CONCERNS:

• Not feeling valued, respected, and not being understood;
• Life pressures;
• The way the curriculum is delivered:
  – its relevance to interests and needs;
• Pre/prior knowledge, learning styles;
• Boredom;
• Are schools designed (ie buildings / timetable etc) for maximum learning and engagement anyway?
PARENT CONCERNS:

• Negative parental experience of school;
• Lack of community support;
• Not knowing what is going on
  – What are the influences of other young people on my son or daughter?
  – How can parents be involved?
  – Who to access for help?
  – Does my child/my family need help?
• Higher expectations of what teachers can do;
• How can I manage and support my child?
TEACHER CONCERNS:

About parents:

• Cultural capital – the parents should be more responsible for what the student comes to school with;
• Schools are becoming “the family”, responsible for teaching morals, basic learning which should be learnt at home, and are being “blamed” for not doing a good job;
• Students’ family/parents may be holding students back;
• Parents may not prioritise education over immediate employment prospects [eg in agricultural areas];
• Parental education is needed – parents might not know how to help their kids be successful at school;
• Often stakeholders [including parents/carers] don't know how to connect to schools.

About teachers:

• Culture of school is determined by the personality of the principal;
• Feminization of teaching;
• “I don’t get paid enough to engage kids who don’t want to be there”;
• Need more support in the classroom – eg teacher’s aides;
• Give respect/get respect;
• Who to trust;
• funding;
• truancy;
• pressure .

PTO.
TEACHER CONCERNS:

About students:
- Class size/teacher student ratio
  - too many students;
- Practice of moving on students with behavioural issues
  - then not engaged in any other schools/work/courses
  - then loss of young person
- Knock on effect from failing system

About curriculum:
- Relevant curriculum
- Delivery of curriculum
- About numbers/stats/outcomes approach [ie quantitative versus qualitative requisites]
- Flexibility of the curriculum needed
  - presently a requisite to get out the information, not whether the student learns.
COMMUNITY & SOCIAL WORKER

CONCERNS:

About students, parents & workers:
• Required work for under 14s;
• Alternative education for under 14 years;
• Student /teacher ratios too high;
• Suspension rates;
• Informal exclusions;
• At risk young people in the “too hard basket”;
• Facebook accessibility for students and parents/carers
• Lack of worker access to a school / resources

About Schooling
• Why is school not engaging?
  – too much red tape,
  – hold hand behind back ;
• Principals’ powers;
• Short term intervention that comes too late;
• School system versus communities;
• School/education agenda;
• Structural inequality – eg “society is to blame”;
• System does not support kids;
• Look beyond SYMPTOMS to causes in society – eg lack of services, lack of funding.

Dr Cheryl Livock, Qld State Youth Affairs Conference, 20-21 July, 2011
OTHER STAKEHOLDER CONCERNS:

• Government concerns:
  – what are NGOs doing?
  – what is local school doing?
  – how are they working together?
  – what is the family involvement – “safe family”?
  – are supports such as NGOs able to engage in the situation usefully?

• Do NGOs have capacity to engage physically;

• Community has services to offer and wants to get involved but often it is hard to get connected to the school [principals unsure of what services are “out there”].
Principal Tony Draper of a primary school just outside of London raised standards without external intervention. He reported the following ...

- He has raised the number of pupils reaching the Sats benchmark from 42% in 2008 to 74% in 2009, without a change in leadership.

- Raising standards has been done through "a lot of hard work" ON THE CULTURE, TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE SCHOOL, and with a "supportive local authority“

- Schools should be judged on a "broad measure of progress, not just crude statistics". (BBC, 2011)
London Head Teacher talks about UK School Reform – closing ‘failing schools’ reopening them as semi independent ‘Academies’

“I DON’T THINK THIS IS A VERY GOOD IDEA. I worry about THE CAPACITY OF GOOD OR OUTSTANDING SCHOOLS to support failing schools. There aren’t enough hours in the day. I think the primary reason why schools fail is because there AREN’T ENOUGH GOOD TEACHERS AROUND.”

Principal Andrew Day of Knights Academy in southeast London – attributes his improved standards to ...

“Bringing in a new uniform and ethos made a major difference, although STAFF CHANGES AND TRAINING were also a factor.”

"TRANSFORM THE MINDSET of the children, the parents, the whole school, to get them to believe that this is an aspirational culture.”

(BBC, 2011 June 16)
OF ALL THOSE INVOLVED WITH YOUTH AT RISK
Indigenous Views

• “In particular we have been talking about the delivery of social policy as it impacts on our people – too often good policy becomes bad policy in its delivery” (Marika & Reys, 2006, p.6).

Raymattja Marika, a leader of her community, an expert in Indigenous education, and a Director of Reconciliation Australia (ibid., p.1).

Shelley Reys, a woman who is involved in promoting better policy for Indigenous people Vice-Chairman of The Hollows Foundation and the National Australia Day Council, a Director of Reconciliation Australia (ibid., pp.4-5).
Policy Delivery?

State and Federal efforts to measure Standards of Student Achievement:

• NAPLAN Testing
• QCATs Testing
• Assessment & Reporting

1. WHAT ARE THESE?
   – their format

2. WHY ARE THEY?
   – their purpose

3. IN YOUR EXPERIENCE
   – how effective are they,
   – especially for young people struggling in the mainstream schooling environment?

IS THIS THE EXPLANATION FOR QLD OUTCOMES?
Too often good policy in its delivery becomes bad policy.
PHILOSOPHY  *BEHIND THE PRACTICE*  IS ALL IMPORTANT

•  *Is there a mismatch between policy and practice?*
  – Process of preparing students for QCATs: **reading** the QCATs materials / **speaking** with policy people from Ed Qld & QSA **prescriptive teaching practices not envisaged** (QSA, 2011, p.3).

•  **What do educational and social practitioners believe works?**
  – Why do they often revert to inflexible, prescriptive practices?
  – Particularly the leaders ... in setting organisational objectives?

•  **What are the motivations?**
  – Get through the day?
  – List highly on the My School website? & Qld schools reporting documents?
  – Short term gains
  – Emphasis on majority achieving outcomes?
  – Emphasis on raising top of the graph & neglecting bottom of the graph?
How Does Good Policy become Bad Policy in Practice?

Social Context

Educational Context

STIMULUS QUESTION TO PROVOKE FURTHER DISCUSSION
JOINED UP PRACTICE - Effective practices for young people at risk of disengaging from education, family and community

1. **Person-centred** – ‘different’ identities & contexts acknowledged/given standing, emphasis on relationship building, strengths based approach;

2. **Inclusive of natural networks** – parents, carers, siblings, partners welcomed;

3. **Responsive and flexible** – to changing life circumstances, creative responses to maintain engagement;

4. **Inquiry oriented** – active real life learning experiences; service provision that is dynamic and context responsive with a tool box approach;

5. **Institutionally supported** – above practices, also where sufficient time/resources afforded until there is a resolution/natural conclusion/learning achieved, plus remaining open to re-engagement.

**Meta Characteristics for Effective Social Work and Educational Practice**

(Livock & Crane, 2010)
Person Centred

i. **Individuation**, a fine grained attention to each young person’s lived experience, places their situation at the centre of practice.

ii. **The building of trust and relationships** provides the foundation for moving towards specific outcomes.

iii. **Locates the young person in their broader contexts**, to appreciate something of the complexity and unique texture of their everyday world.

iv. Provides the young person with evidence that they have *standing as a person*.

v. **An ecological and strengths based** perspective which encourage holistic understandings and individual agency.

(Livock & Crane, 2010)
Inclusive of natural networks

i. **Natural networks include** young people’s families, broadly defined, and other sources of social support.

ii. **The inclusion of natural networks of support in a respectful way** is an important for appreciating a person’s lived experience and activating support that has long term meaningfulness and sustainability.

iii. There is substantial evidence that natural networks are **influential in providing support** for young people or undermining effort.

(Livock & Crane, 2010)
i. *The pursuit of personal outcomes rather* than adherence to pre-conceived models of service.

ii. Use of a “toolbox” of well founded strategies facilitates *greater flexibility and responsiveness.*

iii. *Need to be creative* and manage micro-political environment.

iv. *Practitioners develop “customised” responses* given the complexities these young people are seen to present.

v. Practitioners *facilitate opportunities* and support.

vi. And are *role based* rather than role bound.

*(Livock & Crane, 2010)*
Inquiry Oriented

i. Models of service are understood as *dynamic and context responsive* rather than static.

ii. *Active and explicit inquiry processes* to consider what is effective and how service delivery can be more responsive and achieve outcomes.

iii. There are a *variety of process tools* for inquiry that allow a worker, service or program to link observations, feedback and data to both individual and service level change e.g. *action research, action learning and continuous improvement*.

(Livock & Crane, 2010)
i. *Enabling* system and institutional *conditions* are important.

ii. *Sufficient time* is important for relationship formation and maintenance -

   - the capacity to continue working with a young person until there is a resolution or natural conclusion, and
   - remaining open to re-engagement.

iii. *Insufficient time* often a result of the combined effect of institutional *requirements* ...

   - eg class size/ required caseload, and *case complexity*.

(Livock & Crane, 2010)
How to Convince Practitioners to put Good Policy into Practice

Social Context

Educational Context

STIMULUS QUESTION TO PROVOKE FURTHER DISCUSSION

APPLY THE *META CHARACTERISTICS FOR EFFECTIVE SOCIAL WORK AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE* TO ANSWER THIS QUESTION
Emphasis on Standards?

- **Student comment** – don’t care if they learn ... just that teachers deliver the material.
- **In some crazy turn around** – striving for standards and outcomes ... stops or prevents outcomes *for those struggling in the lower end of the classroom*.
- **They in turn lose hope** – Barak Obama ... precursor to earlier comment re school reform - change in the atmosphere ... loss of hope.
- **UK Principal Tony Draper** – schools should be judged on a "*broad measure of progress, not just crude statistics*".

*Refs*
Barak Obama – need for Hope

- [T]he sense that something different was going on with the children of the South Side that spring of 1987;
- that an invisible line had been crossed, a blind and ugly corner turned.
- There was nothing definite I could point to, no hard statistics . . .

- No, it was more a change of atmosphere, like the electricity of an approaching storm . . .
- That’s what was new: the arrival of a new equilibrium between hope and fear;
- the sense, shared by adults and youth alike,
- that some if not most, of our boys were slipping beyond rescue.


