
- Affective Outcomes in the Context of School Reform -

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Abstract

The late 20th Century saw the rapid rise of quality assurance in most industries and organisations, and in education quality assurance was epitomised as a concern with school effectiveness. Effectiveness measures most often took the form of standardised measures of student achievement in basic skills, and these measures remain the most salient today. While student cognitive development is an essential outcome of schooling, it is argued that interpretations of quality and effectiveness that do not include affective outcomes are inadequate as measures of desirable schooling outcomes.

The argument is supported that school effectiveness is best seen linked with school improvement, with a particular focus on methods of enhancing the school experience for students. In this, a potential future of schooling that involves a realignment of academic and affective outcomes is advocated. Student quality of life and consistent school attendance are suggested as important criteria of school effectiveness and improvement and are contextualised as such. Suggestions are made of how teachers can enhance at least these two criteria by improved mentoring and providing a focus on children's future, health, equity and access to quality education.

KEYWORDS: *Affective Outcomes, Quality of School Life, Attendance, School Reform, School Effectiveness, School Improvement, and Quality Schools*

Introduction - Conceptualising A Potential Future of Education

This paper is based on a definition and articulation of a potential future of education advocating a re-aligning of academic and affective student outcomes. This future contextualises student quality of life and attendance as important measures of school effectiveness and improvement. It also aims to ensure high student quality of life, enhanced teacher pedagogy and inclusive schooling practices. A reassessment of teaching and learning practices may be required to meet student and societal need in the 21st Century. If society requires individuals who can work cooperatively and be active members of this society, new methods of instruction and learning are required as well as new skills, especially enhanced social and communication skills. These developments may not emanate from schools traditionally regarded as effective (Reynolds & Packer, 1992).

Whilst school and educational departments espouse that the education of students is undertaken across a diversity of outcomes, it would appear that school evaluation, student assessment, and school-based research emphasise achievement of a limited range of academic outcomes at the expense of the broader educational curriculum. Schooling forms a major part of the life of children (Ainley & Bourke, 1992) and school and classroom environments have many attributes of adult workplaces (Leonard, 2002; Schofield & Bourke, 1997). Children spend a similar number of hours each day at school as are spent at work by many members of the work force; they undertake mental and physical tasks of similar duration and intensity to many workers; their output is monitored by superiors; and, as with many workplaces, they have a regimented daily routine. Hence in

the same way that quality of life is important in adult life, it would appear obvious that student quality of school life is also most important for young persons and is related to many more factors than simply achievement. Quality and effectiveness need to be considered across a broader range of outcomes.

Safe and happy schools and effective learning are promoted when classrooms are rewarding, stimulating environments where students and teachers want to be. The benefits for students and educators of an increased awareness of the nature of positive and negative impacts on student quality of school life, such as satisfaction and stress (respectively), are obvious. It is contended that students who feel good about themselves and are excited and stimulated by their school environment, are more likely to be students who are ready to learn. Students who want to learn will want to be at school and are likely to make an increased effort to attend. An associated improvement in teacher morale and reduction in absence may also be evident (Leonard, Bourke, & Schofield, 2003).

School Attendance and Non-Attendance

Accordingly, the constructs of effective schooling, such as well-planned educational curricula and improved teacher professional practice, are of little use if students are not actually present to take advantage of these conditions. Students who are not attending regularly are at a significant disadvantage as they have an increased risk of failing to maximise their educational outcomes (Kays & Romszko, 1995). This form of disadvantage takes on even greater significance if these students are disadvantaged in other ways, including socioeconomically. Furthermore, attendance rates have even more import in education systems where public school funding is based on average daily attendance, such as some American states. The potential for school improvement programs, with the intended outcome of increasing student attendance clearly hold extra significance in these systems. School attendance has been related to improved school performance (Rosander, 1984), attainment (Fogelman, 1983), and behaviour (Fogelman, 1983; Rosander, 1984). In contrast, absence and truancy have been linked to higher levels of violence in schools (Levine & Havighurst, 1984).

Student absenteeism may be motivated to a considerable extent by elements within the control of schools. In a study of 150 secondary schools in England, for example, Miller (1995) found that students identified institutional factors such as the pressure of and/or inability to do school work, dislike of particular lessons, and dislike of teachers as more significant motivators of absenteeism than home background. Similarly, factors identified by Reid (1985) as causing students anxiety and leading to a pattern of non-attendance include difficulty of school work; class promotions or demotions; new or different teachers, and teaching styles; dislike of teacher/s; punishment; bullying; and, irrational fears of one or more aspects of school.

If one accepts that the classroom environment resembles a workplace for students, then it is possible that student attendance is one indicator of student health, and quality of school life. Researchers investigating the nature of classroom environments suggest that student satisfaction with the complex environmental conditions can have a significant impact on attendance. The domain of student-teacher variables in particular has been identified as impacting on absence, with persistent absentees having lower opinions of their teachers than those of their peers (Le Riche, 1995).

School has been described as a place for students to learn and socialise (Petersen, 1997). Students who experience difficulties in doing either, Petersen suggested, would exhibit reduced self-esteem, mood swings, increased behaviour problems, and reduced motivation to attend. Academic or social success was described as highly unlikely in this scenario. Petersen speculated that these changes were often associated with a resultant increase in teacher stress along with parent anxiety, and employer cynicism. A significant financial cost to society was also identified, since early academic failure and social isolation and rejection often resulted in crime or welfare dependency.

Similarly, lower teacher self-esteem and the nature of school discipline policies are more important predictors of increased rates of student absence due to suspension than student misbehaviour (Hart, Wearing, & Conn, 1993). Teacher assessment of student ability has also been found to be a significant predictor of rates of student absence, as has the nature of the school environment as a whole (Shotton, 1979; Weston, 1998). Weston argued that one of the factors related to the drift of students away from public schools may be parental belief that their children will have better experiences at Catholic and other private schools than at public schools. The links outlined between absence and reduced satisfaction in this section would suggest that the move to Catholic and private schools for some of these students could be regarded as the ultimate form of absence.

A pattern of school variables negatively impacting on student attendance and quality of school life is evident from these findings. Importantly, research suggests students who have a higher level of attendance perceive school as a positive experience, consider school important to their future, and report that they are doing well in school, even if the latter is not necessarily the case in reality (Schofield & Bourke, 1997). The challenge for educators is to instil and maintain these values in their students for as long as possible to avoid the disaffection driven absence cycle that leads to early school leaving and/or dropout.

Quality of School Life

The purpose of utilising quality of school life data as a measure of school effectiveness and focus school improvement should be to provide individuals with the highest quality of life possible (Halpern, 1993, p.489). A number of factors comprise and impact on student quality of school life including aspects of positive affect, such as satisfaction, and aspects of negative affect, such as stress and bullying. Schools, educators, and administrators also have a significant role in affecting, identifying, and assisting students exhibiting symptoms of reduced quality of school life.

For the purposes of this paper, and in accordance with the definitions of quality of life provided by various authors (Burt, Wiley, Minor, & Murray, 1978; Hart & Conn, 1996; Pelsma, Richard, Harrington, & Burry, 1989), quality of school life is defined as a synthesis of positive experiences, negative experiences, and other feelings related to specific school life domains and outcomes. It may well be that principal indicators of the level of quality of school life for students and teachers will be stress and satisfaction related to these domains and outcomes. Support for such a definition incorporating aspects of positive and negative affect can be found in the research literature (Ainley, 1995; Goodlad, 1984; Gray, McPherson, & Raffe, 1983; Law, 1988; Law & Soliman, 1988; Leonard, 2002; Samdal, Wold, & Bronis, 1999; Schofield & Bourke, 1997; Waugh & Hyde, 1993; Williams & Batten, 1981).

A number of these studies have identified that student perceptions of the quality of their school life, attendance, and social outcomes of schooling were, at least partially, independent of academic outcomes (Goodlad, 1984; Gray et al., 1983; Leonard, Bourke, & Schofield, 2000). However, students were more likely to be involved in learning and achievement if they also had positive views of the quality of their school life (Ainley, 1995). Conversely, students who indicated strong negative feelings regarding their quality of school life were more likely to have negative perceptions regarding their relationships with their teacher/s and peers, success at school, the future usefulness of their schooling (Ainley & Bourke, 1992; Law, 1988; Law & Soliman, 1988; Leonard et al., 2000; Waugh & Hyde, 1993), and perception of fairness, involvement in school decision-making, justice in schools, and safety (Samdal et al., 1999). Negative attitudes were also linked to other school problems such as low achievement, inappropriate behaviour, detachment, early leaving from school (Law, 1988; Law & Soliman, 1988), and absenteeism (Leonard, 2002). Moreover, low satisfaction and student perceptions of the quality of their school life as being poor, were indicators of higher student stress and, if unmediated, resulted in a reduced ability to cope, reduced functioning, increased illness (Samdal et al., 1999), and increased student absence (Schofield & Bourke, 1997).

With regard to quality of life, peer relationship dimensions are a significant potential source of negative stress and dissatisfaction at school for some children. Positive peer relationships are vital for children to learn friendship skills, learn about themselves, and for appropriate long-term adjustment to life as an adult. Research suggests that students who do not have appropriate peer relationships are more likely to be involved in juvenile delinquency, have unhealthy, unhappy adult lives, suffer disabling emotional problems, and attempt suicide (Medeiros, Porter, & Welch, 1983).

In the broader social context, rationalisation, and reorganisation of education through processes such as school reform and quality assurance, it has been suggested, have generated a wide socioeconomic divide between both educational institutions and also students. Some authors have argued that due to restructuring and cost-cutting efforts in a broad range of educational and social welfare services, individuals have become more insecure, unsupported, and vulnerable, with an associated increase in social disruption and distress (Dinham & Scott, 2001; Scott & Dinham, 2001; Scott, Stone, & Dinham, 2001; Troman, 2000). Educators clearly need to develop

practices and methods of improving school life for these students. Potentially, for some very deprived students, the school environment may be the only stable environment they experience in their life.

The nature of the learning environment itself appears to be a determinant of student quality of life at school and wellbeing. Pioneering work in the development of social climate scales argued that individuals are profoundly affected by the social matrix in which they are embedded (Moos, 1991, p.29). In an educational context, Moos argued the focus should be to determine how the characteristics and influences of classroom and school impacted on the quality of life of students and teachers. Accordingly, school has been found to be a place where students can either experience health producing or reducing effects (Close-Conoley, 1989), while school climate has been linked to enhanced or reduced quality of school life for students and educators (Freiberg, 1999, p.210).

Significantly, the identification of variation in school climate has been evident in the literature for over thirty years with some schools described as exciting, happy, and fun places and other schools described as lacking enthusiasm, drab, depressing, and even frightening places (Halpin, 1966; Jencks et al., 1972). Associated with this, adults often perceive that the years spent at school are an exciting and rewarding time in the lives of children, yet research has indicated that, for a least some students, school is no utopia (Ainley & Bourke, 1988; 1992; Anderson & Steinle, 1978; Leonard, Bourke, & Schofield, 2002; Schofield & Bourke, 1997). Other researchers suggest that educators have traditionally failed to realise the importance of the quality of school and classroom life for students, as the nature of the classroom environment has been identified as a potent influence on student performance on a range of outcomes (Creemers, 1994; Fraser & Walberg, 1991).

Moreover, the nature of the school and classroom environment may affect individual students in a highly idiosyncratic way (Madaus, Airasian, & Kellaghan, 1980). Students also interact differentially with these environments throughout their school lives, hence there is potential for wide variation on individual outcome measures during this time. School and class variation across outcome measures may also become increasingly evident as some educators and schools adopt a greater focus on the full range of educational outcomes. Further examples of research regarding the nature of the learning environment and quality of school life are categorised in Figure 1. These examples are grouped under the headings of school effects, classroom effects, classroom and school effects, personnel variables, and the nature of the learning programs.

Figure 1 - The Nature of the Learning Environment and Quality of School Life

<p>School Effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School effects were stronger on attitudes than achievement (Cuttance, 1992). • Significant school differences in academic and affective outcomes. Negative factors affecting student quality of life and well being were: too much focus on academics, excessive school rules, and pupil monitoring (Hofman, Hofman, & Guldemon, 1999). • Student involvement in decision-making at school enhanced perceptions of quality of school life and optimism about future prospects (HREOC, 2000). • More satisfied students had lower stress and absence levels, perceived school to be an enjoyable and fun place that provided good preparation for their future (Leonard et al., 2002). • Satisfaction and negative affect at school affected achievement (Perry, 2000). • Institutional related factors, such as level of resources, and quality and upkeep of facilities, affected student quality of life (Smith & Tomlinson, 1989). • Student satisfaction linked to student self-concept (Young & Fisher, 1996).
<p>Classroom Effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student perceptions of their actual classroom environments were significantly below their preferred ratings (Bruck et al., 2001). • Supportive relationships between students and teachers promoted an effective classroom climate, commitment, student motivation, morale, and sense of achievement. Increased illness, absenteeism, and student anxiety were outcomes in classrooms where competition and control replaced support. Satisfaction and effectiveness were also identified as being positively affected by clear expectations, adequate feedback, and well structured learning environments (Moos, 1991).

- Student perception of the quality of various aspects of their classroom environment such as satisfaction, challenge, cohesion, and absence of stress, found to be major determinants of academic learning (Walberg & Greenberg, 1997).
- Students who perceived that they were in orderly, organised classrooms, and felt a strong affiliation and involvement, also reported enhanced self-control, more positive mood, and greater peer popularity. Teachers also reported that these students were better adjusted (Wright & Cowen, 1982; Wright, Cowen, & Kaplan, 1982).

Classroom and School Effects:

- Student quality of life and level and sources of satisfaction effected by schools and classrooms, especially with regard to student perceptions of the fun and enjoyment gained from schooling, and relationship with their teacher (Ainley & Bourke, 1992).
- Satisfying relationships and communication experiences for students helped to ensure high quality of life in these environments (Bruck et al., 2001).
- Some student outcomes and groups of students were more affected by schools and classrooms than others (including achievement). Low socio-economic status students were less satisfied with schooling than other students (Cuttance, 1992).
- Aspects of school and classroom climate affected the satisfaction and quality of life of not only students but also all school personnel (Goodlad, 1984).
- Pleasant working conditions promoted enhanced student outcomes, behaviour, and attendance (Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, & Ouston, 1979).

Personnel Variables:

- Teachers willing to help students with their problems, providing structured use of praise and rewards, high expectations and promoting confidence, enhanced student performance, and perceptions of quality of school life (Capel, 1990).
- Teacher factors affecting classroom climate included: level of disengagement, hindrance, satisfaction, and intimacy of relationships. Principal factors affecting school climate included: aloofness, production emphasis, lack of consideration, and no clear management policies (Freiberg, 1999).
- Student quality of school life, outcomes, and attendance enhanced by teachers who spent more time communicating with students in a sympathetic, approachable, and dependable manner (Rutter et al., 1979).

Nature of the Learning Programs:

- Student quality of life enhanced by programming that incorporates the benefits of an outcomes-driven curriculum, is individualised and enjoyable, whilst minimising competitive aspects (Leonard, Bourke, & Schofield, 2001).
- Quality teaching incorporating skills such as clear explanation and ordering of materials, effective management of learning, enthusiasm, and task orientation, enhanced student outcomes (Madaus et al., 1980).
- Teachers supported student learning by developing student self-concept, implementing effective classroom management, and using a diversity of teaching learning strategies (Stoll & Reynolds, 1997).
- Students reported gaining fun and enjoyment from sport programs that develop sporting skills, fitness, and ethical sporting behaviour (Thompson, 1994).

For schools this process will occur at a number of levels. Classroom environments, for example, will need to be meaningful to both teachers and students. With regard to students, it may well be that teachers as their direct supervisors will have the most significant role. It may not be a matter of educators choosing between focusing on establishing constructive classroom environments or focusing on student achievement, but rather, that constructive classroom environments enhance student achievement of cognitive and affective outcomes (Bruck et al., 2001; Fraser & Walberg, 1991). These authors highlighted the importance of satisfying relationships and communication experiences for ensuring high student quality of life in these environments in particular.

It would appear that some schools have failed to take advantage of favourable student perceptions of their schooling to further improve their professional practice and redesign teaching and learning. Perhaps teachers

and principals are constrained by administrators and hence unwilling or unable to explore new or enhanced pedagogical methods (Goodlad, 1984).

It would also appear somewhat unusual that greater consideration has not been given to teacher impact on student quality of school life. The research evidence supports the concept that teachers make a difference to their students (Ramsey, 2000a). Ramsey has also argued that few other professions have the potential for input into the formative years of almost every member of society hence the quality of teacher work needs to be assured (Ramsey, 2000b). To fully meet the needs of the broadest possible range of students, curriculum needs to be the constant, with a diverse range of pedagogues utilised, while effective relationships are developed with and between students.

With regard to school effectiveness, in the past research has focused more on school-level conditions rather than teacher practice in the classroom (Whitman, Spendlove, & Clark, 1984). This has occurred despite popular belief that student progress is most strongly linked to effective teaching and learning. School and administrative levels are important in terms of providing conditions for effective instruction, but as teaching and learning takes place at the classroom level it potentially has most influence on student quality of life (Hofman et al., 1999).

Interestingly other researchers have identified the importance of efforts to increase student orientation and enhance student outcomes and motivation occurring concurrently at the school and teacher level. An integrated, whole-school focus on developing student intellectual, personal, social skills, and physical development has been advocated (Hyde & Werner, 1984; Mulford, 1985). Importantly, the latter authors also highlighted low levels of student and teacher dissatisfaction as a feature of effective schools. Accordingly, in terms of establishing a cohesive and effective classroom environment, it may be easier for teachers to maintain an inclusive and rewarding classroom atmosphere for students in a school where the school ethos is supportive of such classrooms (Goodlad, 1984; Moos, 1991).

Summary - Affective Student Outcomes in the Context of School Reform

This paper has attempted to identify that schools need to be need to be flexible, creative, and responsive to meet the diverse nature of challenges that confront them in the 21st Century. Their core business should be the provision of an environment structured to ensure positive student qualities and potentials are promoted across a broad range of outcomes by effectively utilising affective data, particularly student quality of school life and attendance, to inform their school effectiveness, school improvement, and quality assurance processes.

Schools that enhance quality of life, engagement, and achievement of outcomes are healthy learning places (Ames, 1992; Bruck et al., 2001; Candy, Crebert, & O'Leary, 1994; Freiberg, 1999; Ramsden, Margetson, Martin, & Clarke, 1995). These schools also elevate all of their members to love their school and want to be there each day (Freiberg & Stein, 1999, p.11). Furthermore the current authors would argue that students at these schools are being supported in becoming valuable members of society in the new millennium. Conversely, schools that do not focus on enhancing quality of life can be stressful environments for teachers and students because of the nature of the performance and relationship demands made on individuals in this context (Forman & O'Malley, 1984). In the 21st Century, educators and educational authorities need to consider how best to adapt to the changing societal contexts but still maintain quality.

Importantly, some movement towards this approach by educational authorities can be discerned. In New South Wales, the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSWDET) Strategic Directions 2002-2004 highlight the re-emergence of qualitative aspects of the curriculum. A commitment to providing students with the knowledge, understanding, skills, and values for productive and rewarding lives; and, the provision of a well-rounded education that values and supports the intellectual, creative, physical, social, and emotional development of each child, has been propounded as a policy (NSWDET, 2002). With regard to teachers, the Department's strategic plan highlights promoting professionalism, workplace flexibility, providing safe, secure, and disciplined environments for learning, and programs to support school attendance.

Recent research has also highlighted that student perceptions of their quality of school life were increasingly being recognised as important outcomes of schooling and incorporated in school improvement programs (MindMatters Evaluation Consortium, 2000). Significantly, many NSWDET schools are now utilising versions of the Quality of School Life questionnaire (Ainley & Bourke, 1992) at both primary and secondary levels as part of the annual reporting and self-evaluation requirements.

Schools also receive assistance with data analysis from a specialist research and analysis unit within the NSWDET Student Assessment and School Accountability Directorate. The current authors provide unequivocal support for this agenda. To ensure these reforms, that value aspects of student quality of school life, are not overlooked again in the future, it would appear vital that research continues to examine the impact of these variables in the contexts of school improvement and effectiveness.

High quality schools, relevant curricula, and high quality of life at school are fundamental rights of all students. Student quality of school life and attendance are essential indicators of school effectiveness and key components of school improvement and quality assurance. A rich pool of reportable affective outcomes awaits!

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