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Longitudinal Study of School Restructuring

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Abstract

Since 1996 a team from Victoria University, in collaboration with the NSN, has worked with teachers from schools in Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia to research school restructuring. Developing approaches to practitioner research which have engaged teachers in data collection, analysis and the generation of findings has been the methodological advance made by research. The main research finding is an extended and complex elaboration of the nature of authentic teaching and learning practices. These authentic teaching and learning practices are associated with particular conditions of organisational time and space formed when teachers engage in collaborative and reflective inquiry into students and their learning. The paper will conclude with a discussion of the pedagogical and organisational consequences which have emerged from this study of school restructuring.

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LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING

Introduction

This paper reports the findings of a five year longitudinal study of school re-structuring. The project was initiated and first funded by the National Schools Network, now the Australian National Schools Network, and was developed in conjunction with a team of researchers from Queensland University of Technology. In 1995, the project team received an ARC collaborative research grant to continue the work. In doing so the project research teams in Queensland and Victoria have developed and pursued various methodological approaches although the notion of collaboration has been critical across the project. This report focuses on the research practices of collaborative analysis, interpretation of data and the findings of the research team based at Victoria University. The detail of the methodology has been reported previously (Cherednichenko et al 2000, Cherednichenko et al 1999, James et al 2000) and is not discussed in great detail here, although the collaborative methodological practices remain central to the generation of trustworthy and valid findings.

Overview of the Methodology

The primary function of the project has been to document the processes and outcomes of school restructuring and change as *collaborative practitioner research* with teacher research colleagues from schools. Simultaneously, at each school site, groups of colleagues engaging in school restructuring and change have been participants in their own *action research.* Action research cycles of writing, reflection and action typified the data gathering within the project.

Case writing formed the basis for the gathering of primary data: cases 'are a presentation of facts', as close to the real events as possible (Naumes and Naumes 1999:15). Case writing and professional conversations about the cases have supported the exposure of teachers' descriptions and understandings of practice, thus providing a significant insider view of the teaching and learning, rather than the traditional outsider perspective on the practice of others. Such methodological tools fostered research practices supportive of communicative action (Kemmis 2000) with the potential to lead to shifts in practice. Within this framework, the role of the university research team has therefore been more that of collaborative researcher and not constructed as one of professional development facilitator or critical friend to local action research.

In this project whilst the researchers, somewhat clumsily initially, have struggled to maintain the relationship between practitioners, data collection and analysis, what emerged was a new set of methodological practices which supported and enabled the often lofty goals of 'maintaining teacher voice' and 'teacher as researcher'. In doing so the research method engaged the notion of reflexivity in *praxis.* Similarly, the ability of collaborative practitioner research to infuse action research with a structure for generalising findings became apparent, together with the local realisation of explicit reflexivity. This possibility may of course be contentious as there is little in even the most recent writing (Reason and Bradbury 2000) which indicates that generation of research findings is a principal interest of the action research field.

Understanding social practice from the perspective of the social agents (teacher and learner) was a central feature of the methodology, sustained by teacher professional conversations and validation seminars. In particular, the longitudinal aspect of the research offered a more extensive and comprehensive, and therefore potentially more rigorous reporting of classroom practices through cycles of case writing and dialogue. Teacher professional conversations and commentary writing served to enrich the body of material which explained

actions (Western Melbourne Roundtable 1997). These explanations supported the identification of learning outcomes, confirmed understandings about teaching and learning and enabled teacher researchers to identify and speculate on new findings with regard to links between teaching practice, school organization and student learning.

The analytical task in the Longitudinal Study became a working outwards from the characteristics of teachers' practices and students' learning practices to learning outcomes – as social practice – and to the nature of school organisational practice, education policy, system management and the social location of schooling. Proposing findings was then a matter of distilling, from the mass of description, interpretation and analysis, the core of teaching and learning practices in the schools in the Restructuring Study. The Victoria University methodology intended to identify the practices of teaching which enhance learning. As a result, the research findings are akin to an 'ideal type' of educational practice which the research teams – but most importantly the practitioner researchers – have generated through extended and layered description and analysis over the five years of the Study.

Through all phases of the research, the data have been analysed and referred back to the school colleagues for critique and verification. Further, annual cross-site validation workshops have seen teams of teacher researchers from each school working with university researchers to interrogate the understandings generated at each site. Connections and contradictions across sites were identified, verified and referred back to the data as sketches and threads of practice. The reports of change in each school were developed as case studies. Each case study has drawn from the practices presented in the case writing and has been contested, challenged and finally verified by teacher participants in each school. Thus moving from emergent explanations, to tentative propositions, to generalised findings has been systematic, reflective and arguably rigorous.

These propositions link learning with teaching directly and with less certainty to the personal, educational, and socio-historical aspects of practice: the structural and cultural conditions of schooling (Pollard 1990). The conditions do not have a separate existence where each has been considered in reductionist isolation. They develop in practice and strengthen as practice changes successfully as the school case studies show. In two of the schools, Beaconsfield Primary School and Keller Road Primary School, a clear transition was evident from traditional teacher-centred practices to more open and democratic processes. Marian College exemplified the richness of teachers' practices and students' engagement when a school has had an enduring policy of collaboration. The fourth school, Woolum Bellum School, for all its differences from the others in the Study, presents teachers as finding collaborative practice essential in attempting to re-construct schooling in the interests of Indigenous students.

Propositions about practice which emerge from the research

The data and the school case studies provide evidence that as teaching practices become more collaborative and grounded in teachers' thoughtful awareness then learning improves. In the final Collaborative Validation workshop, the participating teachers – practitioner researchers - agreed that the longitudinal accounts of change in schools were associated with the emergence of teaching characterised by development in the following conditions:

- *Relationships, respect and collaboration – between teachers and students, among staff and between staff and school management*
- *Teachers' thoughtful awareness and response*
- *Talk and communication in teaching and learning*
- *Leadership and values*

- *Personal commitment and morale*
- *Time and space in teaching and learning*

These conditions became the framework for reporting the social practices of teaching and learning described and interpreted by the participating teacher researchers.

Social practices of teaching

In each school, change was directed to or emerged from conscious collaborative practices. What the participating teachers found was that collaboration, say in planning meetings, affected every aspect of their professional practice, from their awareness of their own commitment to their relations with school management. How personal commitment and understanding interacted with organisational, curriculum and pedagogical arrangements has become the form of the explanation of change in schools. It was fundamentally a working out of personal and professional agency within a highly structured organisational and social environment.

Relationships, respect and collaboration – between teachers and students, among staff and between staff and school management

Collaborative teaching practices were generated primarily when teachers reflected on the nature of their relationships with other teachers and with students. In two schools, the teachers felt that the relative isolation they experienced with other staff was reflected in their solitary classroom practices. Participation in National Schools Network (NSN) professional development schools initiated an evaluation of the non-participatory nature of staff relationships and school organisational practices. The culminating achievement in all four schools was the recognition that team planning led to better teaching and more enjoyable and worthwhile learning for students. The relationships at this stage had moved beyond any 'contrived collaboration' (Hargreaves 1994). What teachers noted was that they were showing a developed awareness of and care for their students.

Teachers' thoughtful awareness and response

This heightened awareness for the needs of students and participation in collaborative curriculum decision making demanded that the teachers knew about their students and their learning. In none of the schools was that knowledge lacking. What was clear was that where staff were collaborating a new professional discourse developed as they were required to exercise informed professional judgement. Decisions were less intuitive and more explicitly based on understanding of students and their learning needs, social relationships and curriculum requirements. Teachers also thought they were better placed to respond critically to policy and system organisational developments. To do this teachers documented the need for more time to talk, understand and plan.

Talk and communication in teaching and learning

Collaborating schools are talking and communicating schools. Participation in decision making and team planning resulted in the development of a meeting culture in schools. Formal and informal meetings were a first level of re-structuring among collaborating teachers. The structured communication in the meeting also appeared to be one reported source of the new professional discourse about teaching and learning. The introduction of democratic processes at Beaconsfield Primary School showed how a new language about staff relations and teaching and learning had a direct impact on teaching practices, through for example the negotiation with students of a new school behaviour policy. The importance of talk and communication for staff planning and decision making was reflected in the

change in classrooms. Teachers found that they could not implement change without first discussing it with students.

Leadership and values

Apart from one school, Keller Road Primary School, it was not the School Principal who was the specific reform leader. In schools reforming around collaboration, active educational leadership centred on those who expressed some kind of unease or criticism of current practices. That is leadership in all four schools was vested in or appropriated by a team of teachers. In addition, external support, for example the money and professional development input from the National Schools Network, was important for three of the schools, in providing those teams with the educational arguments, resources and recognition to convince colleagues that change was needed. Practical leadership in such a bottom-up way tapped into teachers' commitment to students and their learning. Leadership was provided by the stimulation of collaborative inquiry about student learning. Answering this inquiry initiated change in all schools.

Time and space in teaching and learning

However much leadership about teaching and learning in all four schools was collaborative, even democratic, change depended on the Principals' assent to proposals for change. The Principals and the leadership structures in the schools provided the resources needed for teachers to meet and plan change; and then approved the classroom developments which resulted from teachers' planning. Those changes resulted in teachers experimenting with the time and space arrangements of teaching. Within classrooms, time and space were associated most clearly with the changes needed to enable active learning by students observed for example where teachers reported working with the whole class, with small groups or in one-on-one conversations. This re-organisation of time and space was critical in developing and sustaining teacher collaboration, teacher reflection evaluation and interpretations of their personal commitment, professional practice and school organisation.

Personal commitment and morale

From the first collaborative validation meetings, the insistence of the teachers participating in the research was that change occurs in schools only because teachers become committed to it. This commitment has two sides. On the one hand, commitment to change results from the sense of care that teachers feel for students and for colleagues. In some cases a culturally informed political commitment was also evident, for example among the teachers at Woolum Bellum School. What was also needed was that the teachers needed to recognise that their sense of care could be constructively applied in improving teaching and learning. This quality of work, which the teachers termed good or high <u>morale</u>, is the antithesis of the guilt and associated 'guilt traps' which Hargreaves (1994) has argued accompany teachers' caring when they are isolated and unable to affect the organisational processes which constrain practice. Authentic learning may be conditional on authentic teaching practices. But the case studies make clear that opening up management structures and developing collaborative organisational practices which the teachers judged to be 'authentic' were the pre-requisite for teachers' sense of care for students to be expressed as authentic pedagogy.

<u>Social practices of learning</u>

The evidence from the research is that the learning which teachers perceived as resulting from *authentic* teaching practices did not connect directly to any formal measurement of educational outcomes; for example testing results or any of the formal system curriculum

and associated lists of standards or outcomes. While teachers in two of the research schools confirmed their judgements by referring to improvements in statewide test scores, the primary source of judging the quality of learning was the nature of students' classroom participation and the products of their learning. That is, learning in the schools in the Longitudinal Study also appeared as a set of social practices.

a trajectory from conversation to production/publication

Teaching practices which engage are those which encourage students to participate in discussions with teachers and peers. Teachers enthusiastically reported those occasions when students initiated conversations or prompted changes in conversation topics. *Conversation* is the correct word to use. Engaged learning which commences in discussion often culminates in production and publication of a text or artefact, for display and communication, rather than the working within the limits of prepared textbooks and worksheets. The learning occurs in the doing and leads students to gain recognition from teachers and peers.

learning with others and in groups

The practical essential for learning through discussion was that classrooms increasingly became organised for cooperative learning and inquiry. Marian College's participation in community forums was led by teams of students. Better thinking and more complex and reflective answers resulted from the sharing of ideas, the giving of reasons and information in groups, which improved and enriched problem solving. The achievement of the group collectively lifted self-esteem, building a positive attitude to learning and encouraging risk-taking. Paradoxically, therefore, cooperative processes led to more independent and self-paced learning.

activity

The shift to engaged learning was also a result of students being active in classrooms. For example, the team teaching introduced in Grade 6 at Beaconsfield PS led to highly active student participation which resulted in improved student behaviour and learning. Content was learned because it was needed for task completion: the finished product is the valuable result of learning. The CORS research pointed to the importance of substantive conversation and value beyond school in enhancing learning (Newmann and Wehlage 1995). What the experiences of the teachers and students in this study suggest is that the conversation might need an immediate practical value, that is an application appreciated by students.

usefulness and meaning for students

Active learning culminated in a product useful or socially significant for students. For example, the public nature of the presentation to a community youth forum by students at Marian College imparted a high-stakes quality to students' classroom activity. That example fits closely the insights proposed by Wilson and Wyn (1987) about learning, in what they termed working class schools. Utility of this kind is the basis of claims for authenticity which must lie in the recognition by students of the relevance of the learning activity.

student participation in deciding what should be learned and how

The data have not suggested any commitment by teachers to full-blown curriculum negotiation. Classrooms which were active, cooperative and meaningful for students, however, were also those which were open to students collectively, but also individually,

participating in deciding what should be learned and how. The case study of Beaconsfield PS is a striking account of the introduction of negotiated processes in classrooms as a direct outcome of teachers thinking through the implications of staffroom democracy.

The socially practical outcome of authentic learning

A notable condition of the case writing and records of meetings and teachers' reflection throughout the Study has been the absence of explicit references to 'learning outcomes' or 'standards'. In two of the schools, teachers referred to statewide test results as a means of confirming the judgements they had made about improvements in students' learning. But there was no sign that any of the teachers was organising classroom practice around the hierarchies of learning outcomes which are currently the dominant form of state and national curricula (eg CURASS Guideline Papers, Curriculum Corporation, 1994). These attributes are intra-individual qualities of learning (Pollard 1990). Their application seeks to define out of practical discourses of learning, the potential that teachers might recognise, and value more highly, learning outcomes of an interpersonal or sociohistorical character. What the teachers in the Longitudinal Study have emphasised is the condition and practical effects of students' participation in learning activities. Participation now is the consequence – or outcome – of previous successful learning experiences and is the basis for future teaching and learning.

One part of the socially practical outcome of schooling, therefore, is engagement in learning. This conception of engagement acknowledged within the discourse of 'The Middle Years' (Cormack and Cummings 1996) is more than just an 'output' of teaching, some kind of intermediate step towards students demonstrating the more valuable progress in gaining learning outcomes. Engagement in learning, as indicated in the research here, enables students to act constructively in their time at school. This conclusion connects with the goals of an earlier generation of school change in Australia (Interim Committee of the Australian School Commission 1973) which included the proposition that students should experience schooling as 'fruitful and enjoyable in itself'. Recognising engagement as a socially practical outcome also relates directly to currently contentious notions of social inclusion and exclusion in 'Third Way' analyses (Giddens 1999).

Thus the second dimension of engagement as a socially practical outcome was that learning successfully enabled students to act in the classroom, for example by sharing information with others or being class experts; in the local community, shown in a number of examples at Marian College; but also globally as the case of email communication at Woolum Bellum School indicates. Successful engagement conferred social power on students. When Dewey (1963) wrote of the 'freedom' of the classroom where learning is occurring, he related the quality to the purpose which students bring to learning and the power of students in reaching that purpose and to act in the world.

Hierarchical progressions of learning outcomes, expressed as 'standards' as in the Victorian Curriculum and Standards Framework, inevitably contain the potential for the construction of elites and thus the production/re-production of social division. Socially practical outcomes have a different character, because they don't locate students or learning within hierarchy. The authenticity of socially practical outcomes, and thus arguably their democratic nature, is that they confer on students the power to act now and to participate in decisions about what they want to learn next, individually and collectively.

The implicit nature of high order thinking: 'disciplined inquiry'

The findings of the Longitudinal Study of School Reform, reported here, provide practical confirmation of the CORS research in the United States of America (Newmann and Wehlage

1995, Newmann and Associates 1996) and the School Reform Longitudinal Study in Queensland (SLRS) (State of Queensland, Department of Education 2000). Two main differences do exist however. The first is the clear diagnosis in this practitioner-based research that learning must engage students in actively participating in producing a tangible benefit to themselves or to people around them and their community. In the CORS study, the 'Construction of Knowledge' standard appears as an intellectual activity only, carried out by desk- and classroom-bound students. The point is not so much a disagreement, but a recognition that if students are to be constructors of knowledge, then teaching practices must shift by enabling the agency-filled activity of students. A good example is the case the implementation of new computers in the development of language curriculum at Keller Rd Primary School. The new tools opened up a wide range of opportunities for writing and communication for both students and teachers. Developing literacy is not just a matter of completing class assignments and receiving teachers' grades. Literacy serves the purpose of communication. Students become engaged in becoming literate because it enables them to communicate with people significant in their lives. This case, and others, suggests that it is not sufficient that learning should have 'value beyond school' as the CORS research has argued. What is needed is thatschooling needs to have value beyond school if it is to engage students successfully!

Another important difference between this small-scale Study and the two macro research projects is to be found in the emphasis given to 'disciplined inquiry' (Newmann and Wehlage 1995) or 'intellectual quality' (State of Queensland, Department of Education 2000), the latter a cluster of pedagogical strategies related to higher order thinking. Those criteria have received a great deal more emphasis in the CORS and SLRS research than accorded by the teachers in this Longitudinal Study. Notwithstanding that evaluation, this research has accumulated data which supports the 'disciplined inquiry' proposition. It does not appear as some kind of generalised classroom condition, but is connected with how particular students gain insights, follow deeper inquiry and engage in conversations which they have initiated. That is, the higher order thinking valued so strongly by the CORS and SLRS studies, is contingent on what the student intends, contributes and receives in practical benefit as much as it depends on the intentions of the teacher to construct learning projects which promote disciplined inquiry. Student intentions are directly related to student initiated inquiry – which then leads directly to higher order thinking and metacognition. Such higher order thinking does not appear to result directly from teacher directed practice/inquiry.

The Implications of Authentic Teaching Practice

From authentic practice to authentic organisation

The findings reported in this research have been derived from a pathway of inquiry which is grounded in practice, more correctly teachers' judgement about practice and its effects. To use a term which connects directly with the interests of the National Schools Network, the research has produced an extended and complex elaboration of the nature of authentic teaching and learning practices. What has emerged from the Longitudinal Study of School Restructuring is a linked set of practices, which develop complexity, as they become more embedded in teaching, learning and school organisation.

Authentic learning, defined here as a social practice enabling students to act knowledgeably and powerfully in the classroom and the world, is characterised by:

- *a trajectory from conversation to production/publication*
- *students learning with others and in groups*
- *active production*
- *usefulness and meaning for students*

- *student participation in deciding what should be learned and how*.

This authentic learning emerges when teachers construct their practices through

- *relationships, respect and collaboration – between teachers and students, among staff and between staff and school management*
- *their thoughtful awareness and response*
- *talk and communication in teaching and learning*
- *explicitly participatory leadership and educational values*
- *personal commitment to students and the morale needed to initiate change.*

In coming to agreement about the nature of <u>authentic teaching practices</u>, the teachers participating in the research project also identified that they worked in *conditions of organisational time and space*. This time and space geography helped shape and in turn was formed by their collaborative and reflective inquiry and action. In this domain, teachers:

- *come to know students well, including an appreciation of the socio-economic, cultural and community conditions of students' lives*
- *acknowledge, and confirm in discussion with other teachers, the nature of students' learning and their learning preferences*
- *are encouraged to collaborate with colleagues in planning tasks which interest students and engage them in learning*
- *have some freedom to explore ways for student participation in negotiating learning*
- *can think through the ways in which curriculum and school organisation should be structured to support engaged student learning*
- *reflexively, are able to inform commitment and thinking through open discussion and argument*
- *become aware of and plan their professional development through practice-based learning.*

An appropriate term for this time and space geography is <u>discursive environment</u>, borrowing from Giddens' (1984) ideas on agency, understanding and social research. To have a discursive understanding is to be able to answer questions about why one acted in a particular way or to give reasons for an unexpected occurrence. For teachers in schools, the discursive environment appears when teachers collaborate in planning, evaluating and giving evidence about the practices of teaching and learning. At those times when teachers become aware of shortcomings in their teaching or the way schools are organised, the discursive environment also appears to encourage argument and critique.

The following extract of a case of practice by a teacher at Beaconsfield Primary School indicates how this idea of the discursive environment is more than a condition of teachers' work. It also reflects development of the teacher's consciousness of changed pedagogy, resulting in disciplined student centred inquiry in the classroom. In reporting this unit of work with grade 5 on Viet Nam, the teacher establishes evidence of the effectiveness of shared negotiation of the curriculum and the ability of students to make connections to the world beyond the classroom (Newmann and Associates 1996):

> *…With other work the children had been ok with what they read/saw/were told. With this book they questioned. Why did they have to leave? What would you take if you had to suddenly leave your home? How big was the boat? (We measured it out and they could see how crowded it would have been.) How did they wash? Where did they go to the toilet? Sleep? Etc.*

…The children were obviously talking about this at home as they were saying things like, 'Dad said… and Mum wanted to know…' The news they were seeing on TV about the boat people landing in northern Australia took on a whole new focus and they were comparing the way that with how 'their family' was progressing and how they might be treated if and when they reached a place to stop. Parents coming to help or just picking up their children commented how their child was enjoying the work and asking questions at home. They were discussing things they were talking about at school with their parents.

…the children learnt not just about Vietnam but about how to discuss, question, debate the various topics which arose. They also learnt many life lessons which showed them that life for many people is unfair, frightening, very, very sad and how strong they were when so many things were against them. They seem to have taken a sort of ownership for this unit.

(Robyn Smedley, Year 5 teacher, Beaconsfield PS, Aug 1999)

Behind the choices teachers made about programs, approaches and technologies and their successful implementation or cessation was the teachers' professional inquiry and learning which discursively initiated a re-thinking of classroom practice. That is, in a discursive environment teachers transform their routinised, intuitive and even unconscious decisions into informed justification of planning, change and practice.

The following sketch of practice from a 1999 teacher's case is an example of such re-thinking. It notes immediate outcomes in student well-being as a result of pedagogical risk as teachers take up new and difficult directions. Lisa, a Year 3 teacher at Beaconsfield Primary School, notices how students have become more confident risk-takers and inquirers, appropriately challenging even her values and attitudes.

Maths unit on space. Individual lesson focussing on properties of a cube. Challenge – How can you make a cube using 12, 25 cubes? After several attempts we still had not experienced success. We talked about taking off the blinkers and thinking in different ways. We then went away to think about possible solutions after lunch. Carli solved the problem quickly. David questioned whether the solution was a 3D shape. We explored this and decided that it was. I made a comment that girls often tend to find this type of thinking easier than boys. David told me that I was being sexist. I clarified the point I was trying to make. I was just making an observation. Andrew went on to tell me that history is sexist because it is his story.

The striking insight that the teachers participating in the research have raised is that the characteristics of teachers' and organisational practice, conceptualised here as a discursive environment, also appear to be the conditions under which students learn best. In the same way that the teachers' practices change through collective agency, students' learning is also a more-or-less conscious and agency filled response by students to teaching. The discursive environment for students is established when they are challenged to have 'substantive conversations' (Newmann and Wehlage 1995) in tasks which they find will lead to a practical benefit: which is how teachers find they work best too!

The location of the discursive environment is not necessarily immediate or local. It can just as easily be international, connecting inquiry about practice across time and space. At

Woolum Bellum, the experience of students and teachers reflects such a discursive experience. Students and teachers explored literacy questions via electronic communication with an Indigenous community in North America. This exemplar draws the link between observations of children using computers and theoretical ideas of literacy as teacher and students realise the possibilities of shared inquiry and negotiating curriculum directions. Such inquiry partnerships have been described in the context of Woolum Bellum as two-way inquiry learning, fostering new cultural and academic knowledge for both teacher and learner:

> *The return e-mail from Charly Bullock became more than just a welcome message from the Zuni tribe of New Mexico. Having 'broadcast' our desire to make contact with a Native American school to the Vice-President's web site, I was quite unsure when, how and from whom a reply might arise. 'Hello, my name is Charly and I teach in a community called A:Shiwi...' really set our path in the direction of international communication and collaboration using telecommunications. Further, it provided our kids with a transparent vehicle to contextual literacy: here was a reason to read and write, a reason to be better, a reason to come to school.'*

Discursive environments are time and space geographies which enable the collective agency of teachers and students; but agency which is constrained by institutional, cultural, community and personal expectations and rules. But such structural constraints are also opportunities for teachers and students to act. The resolution of this problem of constrained agency, this research shows, was an organisational response by school management which not only condoned collaborative inquiry by teachers, but also gave moral encouragement and valuable school resources to enable decisions and planning to be informed and to be put into practice.

At Beaconsfield Primary structural changes affected the way teachers and learners were organised. Democratic practices supported the development of discursive inquiry and the resulting strength of personal and professional relationships as well as affording individual and structural support of democratic action. The practical theorising of teachers was explicit, for example in the comments of a young teacher in her second year of teaching reflecting on the impact of the behaviour management plan on her students.

> *…The system really recognises the importance of quality learning time in an environment which respects their right to learn…. I believe that to be learner in my classroom this year is incredibly different to last year. Students know their boundaries and with small exception, they do not continually test this. They are aware of the consequences of the choices they make and mostly accept this. I am a more relaxed teacher…I can concentrate on motivating and enthusing students, assured that when difficulties arise I will be able to address then according to the policy in and a manner that does not involve conflict and in a way that is anticipated by all class members. If both teaching and learning can be enjoyable then surely this occurs in an environment that appreciates and supports the rights and responsibilities of all involved. I am both a teacher and a learner in my classroom.*

(Karina Jones, Year 6 teacher, 1999)

In the language of school reform, the formation of the discursive environment in schools and classrooms is both a structural and cultural accomplishment of collective leadership. Diagnosing leadership as a critical element of school restructuring is a hardly a novel insight. It is a finding common in both the effectiveness literature (eg Teddlie and Reynolds 2000

and Fullan 1993, 1999) and more socially critical analyses (Hargreaves 1994, Groundwater-Smith 1996, Peters et al 1996 and Smyth et al 2000). The case studies of schools in the Longitudinal Study, however, challenged the assumed success of traditional 'top down' views of leadership. Notably, the case studies showed leadership in practice, as teachers and principals thinking and acting critically, interpreting the school, its students and the world they inhabit to colleagues, school communities and to systems.

The characteristic of this leadership is its reflexivity – or at least its instigation of discursively reflexive awareness in teachers. '*What is it about the way we organise our schools and work practices which gets in the way of student learning?*', is a question which prompted teachers in the schools to reflectively and reflexively think about the routines and habits which structure and constrain teaching and learning practices. The question which initiates teachers' thoughtful awareness about local habits and routines may be more powerful when asked across schools, enabling collaborative discussions in networks.

Resolving the contradiction between interesting or engaging students and the delivery of improved learning outcomes will be a local achievement of teachers' discursively informed agency. The evidence of the Beaconsfield Primary School case study asserts that only teachers working democratically are in a position to construct an authentic 'best curriculum'. This was evident when teachers reflexively and democratically interpreted the government directed curriculum as an opportunity to develop student responsive teaching and learning programs – frequently in negotiation with students and parents. That is the resolution of the engagement/outcomes contradiction is to be found locally, in the structural condition of being at 'arms-length' from systemic control.

The structural and cultural questions which arise from the research are thus the place of teachers in schools, the nature of the connection between schools and systems and the purpose of schooling in the modern world. These are not questions unique to this Study: the CORS and more directly the SLRS research are formed around them (Lingard et al 1998). But the grounding of this research in social practice diverges from those large-scale studies. This research is open to recognising socially just education as a local practice which Sturman (1997) has suggested is the only way it can be generated.

The significance of local practice

Authentic teaching and learning practices emerge in schools restructured as discursive environments, domains of inquiry and action where teachers reflexively and reflectively develop awareness and understanding about students and their learning. The research claims that enhanced student learning results, but with little of the highly prized evidence that authentic practices lead to improved 'learning outcomes'.

Here is the first organisationally and socially significant finding of the research: the apparent lack of any explicit and agreed language or discourse of learning available for teachers to value and present their work. The result is that teachers' interpretation of learning, and how reformed teaching practice affects that learning, can become subsumed in and obscured by systems' insistence on narrowly defined statements of learning outcomes or standards. In the conventional sense employed in Australia, that means seeing students progress through a hierarchical set of skills and knowledge attributes. Thus the next question which arises from the research is how teachers collaborating in a 'discursive environment' construct curriculum and how that practice of curriculum relates to formal and hierarchical curriculum structures: what Connell (1993) terms the 'competitive academic curriculum'.

But in recognising that a problematic relationship exists between the curriculum in practice in schools and the prescribed form of curriculum in education systems returns attention to the

ways in which students appropriate knowledge. Actively engaging students through 'authentic' or 'productive' pedagogy is one matter, which appears to be no longer hypothetical. The outcome of those practices, however, should not be assumed to be an uncomplicated and meritocratic progress through a hierarchical list of learning outcomes. For all the hopefulness associated with the CORS research (Newmann and Wehlage 1995), it does confirm the enduring nature of social division in the acquisition of learning.

Socially divided education therefore becomes not only the framework of inquiry in this research but the troubling focus of its findings. If authentic pedagogy engages students but does not diminish social division, then the possibility for social justice as a condition of education appears to be at the very least an implausible proposition. Sturman's (1997) conclusion that socially just education will be a condition worked out in practice does not represent some kind of solution. But it does transfer the focus of attention from the allure of policy formation and critique to the localised struggle and debates that confront committed teachers in their classrooms.

These five features - discourses of learning, curriculum in practice, social division, social justice and localised struggle – constitute the connection between practice constructed as personal agency in an organised setting and broader social structures and movements. Institutional reflexive practices set up the conditions for practitioners such as teachers to recognise that they possess their own reflexively informed agency with which to challenge systems' one-dimensional prescriptions for schooling. As a result, system initiated monolithic change in education will only have impact on practice when it offers valuable rewards for teachers. The carrot and stick of employment conditions may lead some teachers to take on system initiatives pragmatically. But the long-term benefit teachers will seek is improved learning for their students, a result reflexively experienced in the practices of teaching and learning. The study of the social practice of teaching and learning in the Longitudinal Study of School Restructuring supports this claim. This research makes clear that teacher 'counter publics' (Smyth et al 2000) will not be political movements somehow isolated from practice. They will be primarily concerned with the enduring teaching and learning questions which stimulate and sustain teachers.

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