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**The Inclusive Mantra of Educational Reform**  
**A Critical Analysis of *Queensland State Education 2010***  
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## **The Inclusive Mantra of Educational Reform A Critical Analysis of *Queensland State Education 2010***

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*Much that happened to Australia happened beyond its horizons... as globalisation gathered momentum and the new technology expanded at a blinding rate, while the world rearranged itself, there was a sense in which ... the great debate was never had: this debate concerned the options available to Australia in the midst of a technological revolution and a globalising world economy and culture (Watson, 2002: 93)*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this paper, we are concerned with the ‘great debate that was never had’ in relation to the reform of public education in Queensland (Watson, 2002: 93). In the discussion papers, summits and forums that were conducted about the purposes of public education, two key themes emerged: *inclusion* and *students at educational risk*. Both themes relate to the visions or imaginings of equitable public education. And while a consensus was never achieved about what these terms meant, they came to dominate the talk of the times. Our concerns are with the ways in which these words or phrases, *inclusion* and *educational risk*, were appropriated in the debates and struggles about what constitutes equitable publicly funded education in Queensland, Australia. In particular, we are interested in the ‘policy regimes’ or ‘interrelated ensemble of policies’ (Ball, 2003: 30) produced by Education Queensland ‘in the midst of a technological revolution and a globalising world economy and culture’ (Watson, 2002: 93). In the case of Education Queensland, these policy regimes comprise the set of background, research and discussion papers produced prior to the formulation of the vision statement ‘Queensland State Education 2010’ (hereafter: QSE2010), as well as the departmental papers and interview talk of key policy actors<sup>1</sup> responsible for policy formulation and implementation in the early years of the new millennium (see for example: Cullen, Cosier, Greco, & Payne, 1999; Edgar, 1999; Education Queensland, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Luke, 1999; Martinez, 1999; Schofield, 1999a, 1999b). These various documents were produced as part of a major reform of public or state education in Queensland, Australia.

We propose that ‘the inclusive mantra’ became the dominant way of talking and thinking about educational reform and equity during this period (see Watson, 2002). Thus, words like *inclusion* and *educational risk* became the *drivers* for pushing forward reform and change in the public education sector. In this paper, we analyse the battles and struggles over redefining equity agendas in state or public education within this new ‘inclusive mantra’. To achieve this objective we have organized the paper in four parts. In the first section, we define what we mean by the terms policy and policy regimes in the context of global informationalism. We then move on to discuss the specifics of the case study of Queensland State Education reported in this paper. In the third section, we explore the data collection and analysis methods used in the reported study. And in the fourth section, we analyse the competing, complementary and incoherent discourses of *inclusion* and *educational risk* that constitute the new discursive regime about equity agendas in public education in Queensland, Australia.

### **EDUCATIONAL POLICIES IN ‘NEW TIMES’**

In this section of the paper we want to focus on two issues: (1) the emergence of a new global societal order – informationalism or reflexive modernity; and (2) the social inequities and social exclusions produced by this new order.

## Emergence of Informationalism

Over the last four decades, information communication technologies (ICTs) have played a crucial role in accelerating the processes of capitalist globalization. Indeed, the growth and spread of ICTs have hastened the speed and multidirectional movement of ideas, images, sounds, fashion codes, and finances across the planet (Castells, 2000). In addition, ICTs and the 'culture of real virtually' have radically changed the way in which people think, produce and consume knowledge not only for study and research purposes, but in their everyday lives, and other work practices (Castells, 2000: 1). According to Stromquist (2002: 69):

... the Internet has become an instrument of massive global communication, increasing from nine million users in 1995, to 350 million users in 2000, to 700 million projected in 2001 and two billion for 2007, or one-third of the world's population.

Some scholars have argued that the growth of information communication technologies have heralded in a new age: 'informationalism' (Castells, 2000) or 'reflexive modernity' (Giddens, 2000). Informationalism refers to the

... mode of development in which the main source of productivity is the qualitative capacity to optimize the combination and use of factors of production on the basis of knowledge and information. The rise of informationalism is inseparable from a new social structure, the network society (Castells, 2000: 8).

Anthony Giddens (1990: 64) describes reflexive modernity in the following way:

... the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. This is a dialectical process because such local happenings may move in an obverse direction from the very distanced relations that shape them. *Local transformation* is as much a part of globalisation as the lateral extension of social connections across time and space.

## Social Inequities and Exclusions in the Age of Informationalism

Informationalism or reflexive modernity has been characterized by increasing inequalities and social exclusion. According to Castells (2000: 69) it is important to distinguish between the processes of social differentiation produced on the one hand by the 'relationships of distribution/consumption', and on the other hand by the 'specific processes *vis-à-vis* relations of production'. The differential distribution of resources (the collective wealth) have produced growing '*inequality, polarization, poverty and misery*' (Castells, 2000: 69). While the term inequality refers explicitly to the differential appropriation of income and assets by different social groups relative to each other, the term polarization refers to the specific processes of inequality 'when both the top and bottom of the scale of income or wealth distribution grow faster than the middle, thus shrinking the middle, and sharpening social differences between two extreme segments of the population' (Castells, 2000: 69). The term poverty is used to refer to an 'institutionally defined norm concerning a level of resources below which it is not possible to reach the living standards considered to be the minimum norm in a given society at a given time' (Castells, 2000: 69). By contrast, the term misery is used to refer to cases of 'extreme poverty' or 'deprivation' (Castells, 2000: 69). Informationalism is characterized by greater social polarization and misery, leading to the emergence of what Castells refers to as the 'fourth world' in the so-called 'developed world' – these are urban ghettos in global cities,

as well as rural areas of extreme poverty, where industrial restructuring has not kept pace with the pressures of global informationalism (see also Edgar, 1999).

It will be recalled that the second category of social differentiation refers to the contribution of different categories of labour to production, or the generation of wealth/resources. Castells (2000) identifies three specific processes that characterise the contribution of labour to production in the age of informationalism, namely: '*individualization of work, over-exploitation of workers, [and] social exclusion*' (Castells, 2000: 64). Individualization of work implies that the 'labour contribution to production' for each worker can be specified through individual salaried contracts or self-employment, and managed/regulated via the surveillance capacities of the new technologies (Castells, 2004: 70). The term 'over-exploitation' suggests that the vulnerable categories of labour, that is generic, unskilled workers, 'immigrants, minorities, women, young people, children' are further exploited under conditions of informationalism through lower wages, casual employment and fewer entitlements such as sick leave, holiday pay and so forth. Social exclusion refers to the process by which certain individuals and groups are systematically excluded from '*access to positions that would enable them to an autonomous livelihood within the social standards framed by institutions and values in a given context*' (Castells, 2002: 71). Such positions normally entail regular, paid labor at wages above the poverty level, for at least one member of a relatively stable household (Castells, 2000: 71). The growth of flexible, casual, generic, routine work, under conditions of informationalism, has reduced the number of work positions that ensure '*autonomous livelihood*'. Moreover, only those with higher levels of specialist/esoteric education are in a position to compete for jobs that provide higher wages, continuous employment and leave entitlements.

Indeed, Castells (2000: 135) argues that empirical evidence from the US in the 1990s supports the interpretation that the growth of inequality and social exclusion is linked to a number of factors, including, 'the premium placed by the informational economy on a high level of education, coupled with growing inequality in access to good quality, public education'. Under conditions of informationalism, 'labour is redefined in its role as producer, and sharply differentiated according to workers' characteristics' (Castells, 2002: 372).

A major difference refers to ... generic labor versus self-programmable labor. The critical quality in differentiating these two kinds of labor is education, and the capacity of accessing higher levels of education; that is, embodied knowledge and information. ... Education (as distinct from warehousing of children and students) is the process by which people, that is labour, acquire the capability constantly to redefine the necessary skills for a given task, and to access the sources for learning these skills. Whoever is educated, in the proper organizational environment, can reprogram him/herself toward the endlessly changing tasks of the production process. On the other hand, generic labor is assigned a given task, with no reprogramming capability, and it does not presuppose the embodiment of information and knowledge beyond the ability to receive and execute signals (Castells, 2002: 372).

In this section of the paper, we discussed the emergence of a new societal order: informationalism, and the growing social inequalities and social exclusions produced by this new social formation. We concluded the section by examining the key role that education plays in the re-production of social inequality and social exclusion. Following Castells (2000) we argued that the lack of good quality public education contributes to social inequalities and exclusions in the age of informationalism.

## Cultural Globalization and Educational Policy

In this section of the paper, we turn our attention to understanding the processes of educational policy formulation and implementation in an age of global informationalism. Some scholars have argued that the cultural dimension of globalization plays a key role in educational policy in international, national and local contexts. The term cultural dimension refers to the 'new global flows of communications, ideas, images and people' (Levin, 2001: 63) across territorial borders. There are three analytic components to the cultural dimension of globalization.

### Global Culture

The first concept of cultural globalization, the concept of *global culture* or dominant ideology of globalization, is used to refer to the growing uniformity or standardization of social institutions across the globe. The term is also used to refer to the globe as a single, unitary place (*e.g.*, act locally think globally). A number of researchers have suggested that a new 'global policy orthodoxy' has emerged in recent years (Ball, 2003: 29; see also Levin, 2001; Lingard, 2000; Spring, 2001). This global policy orthodoxy has been produced by a transnational elite of policy actors and constitutes part of an alignment with supranational organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the European Union (Ball, 2003; Henry et al, 2001; Stromquist, 2002). This alignment deal opens up the economies of these countries, 'in all sectors, to global capitalist institutions' (Ball, 2003: 31). According to Stephen Ball, this neo-liberal orthodoxy typically combines the following elements: 'competition, choice, devolution, managerialism and performativity' (Ball, 2003: 30). Similarly, Levin (2001: 63) argues that the dominant ideologies accompanying globalization include 'the ideology of corporatism, the adoration of self-interest and the dismissal of the public good'. Bourdieu (1998 summarized in Stromquist, 2002: 6) defines neoliberalism (theories and practices) as a:

program capable of destroying any collective structure attempting to resist the logic of the "pure market". He explains that neoliberalism has acquired a powerful discourse, is extremely difficult to combat, and presents a realism impossible to question because it represents the coordinated actions of all forces that hold prevailing positions.

In general terms, the discourse of neoliberalism calls for: (1) less intervention from government in economic and social fields through such measures as deregulation (reduction of rules and guidelines for economic exchanges); (2) decentralization (devolution of governance and financial responsibility to local levels); and (3) privatization (selling off government assets, and privatizing state institutions). While many of these measures were designed to decrease government intervention or weaken the role of the state, in some instances they have made the 'state more centralized and controlling as it institutes measures to ensure compliance with new procedures and similarity of outcomes' (Stromquist, 2002: 6). This is particularly the case in the field of education. Moreover, the centralization of decision making in education systems under neo-liberal economic reform agendas has led to greater control by those interest groups or stakeholders that exert substantial influence on the state (Stromquist, 2002: 30; see also Ball, 2003).

In the context of neoliberal economic reform, educational policy becomes a part of economic policy, 'framed by the transition from education linked to a bounded economic nationalism to education conceived in relation to internationalizing national economies' (Lingard, 2002: 100). The reform of education is considered vital to micro-economic restructuring in the transition to the new global information age. In other words, 'education as a *means* to succeeding in a globalized world is ... given great importance' (Stromquist,

2002: xiii-xiv). At the same time, 'education has become the key *venue* to support globalization' (Stromquist, 2002: xiv). In other words, education has become a vehicle for the promotion of globalization processes through:

- (1) the adoption of economistic values and the naturalization of new objectives and concomitant practices in schools and universities, (2) the priority assigned to certain subject matters and fields of study over others, and (3) the disregard, and sometimes plain erasure, of certain knowledge, particularly that which might contest points 1 and 2 (Stromquist, 2002: xiv)

In terms of educational equity, the global culture of education emphasizes 'human capital accounting and economic development' (Spring, 2001: 10). An important concept in the human capital model of education is the notion of equality of opportunity, which suggests equal opportunity to compete in the labor market, to 'accumulate wealth,' and to use this wealth for the 'consumption of products' (Spring, 2001: 12). Equity is still considered to be important, and has not been abandoned under neoliberal economic reforms, and thus remains on the policy agenda, but in individualistic terms. This is a market-individualistic perspective that shifts the view of educational equality 'away from social distribution to people's entitlements or *consumers*' right to choose.' (Henry, 2001: 32) According to Stromquist (2002: 28):

[i]n the field of education, the argument for equity is now being directed toward "ending the injustice of social promotion", "holding all students to the same high standards", making students "work hard", and creating "world-class schools". But since principles of equity now operate in parallel with reductions in government support for public education, the drive for student success ends up placing responsibility (and thus blame) on parents, students, schools, and teachers.

At the level of institutional or organizational reform, 'the managerial culture and the business culture' become the dominant discourses driving the neo-liberal economic reform agenda (Levin, 2001: 64). In general terms, managerialism embraces 'restructuring, accountability, performance or "performativity", and measurement of educational activities as solutions to both social and educational problems' (Boshier, 2000 cited in Levin, 2001: 64).

### **Global Flow**

The second concept of cultural globalization, the term *global flow*, is used to indicate the simultaneous fluid movement and changing meaning of ideas, as well as their location in specific 'historical, linguistic and political contexts' (Spring, 2001: 7). This suggests that while there may be an emerging consensus about educational policy and reform, local contexts and actors are likely to shape the specific form of local educational discourses and practices. On this point, Lingard (2000: 80) suggests that 'the apparent educational policy convergence across nations' is 'mediated, translated and recontextualized within national and local structures'. This is the tension between "'context-productive'" (top-down and policy driven) and "context-generative" (localized) practices', which are produced by the multidirectional flows of cultural globalization (Appadurai cited in Lingard, 2000: 80).

### **Phenomenology of Cultural Globalization**

The third concept of cultural globalization, the phenomenological or subjective experience of cultural globalization, refers to the ways in which people experience and imagine their personal, everyday and work lives in the context of global connectivity, informationalism and a culture of real virtuality (Appadurai, 1996; Castells, 2000; Giddens, 2000). Informational modernity is characterised by a 'high degree of 'social reflexivity' (Giddens & Pierson, 1998: 17). The term social reflexivity refers to 'a society where the conditions in

which we live are increasingly a product of our own actions and, conversely, our actions are increasingly oriented towards managing and challenging the risks and opportunities that we ourselves have created' (Giddens & Pierson, 1998: 17). Moreover, social reflexivity refers to living in a 'world increasingly constituted by information rather than pre-given modes of conduct' (Giddens & Pierson, 1998: 17). In an information society, we are all expected to take responsibility and manage the risks associated with accessing and evaluating information and making 'future-oriented' or 'forward-oriented decisions' about mapping out our life-pathways and trajectories (Giddens, 2000: 40; Giddens & Pierson, 1998: 17). According to Giddens and Pierson (1998: 209) the word risk:

... refers to a world which we are both exploring, and seeking to normalize and control. Essentially, 'risk' always has a negative connotation, since it refers to the chance of avoiding an unwanted outcome. But it can quite often be seen in a positive light, in terms of the taking of bold initiatives in the face of a problematic future.

The positive aspect of risk is closely associated with innovation and expansion of choice (Giddens, 2000). Indeed, active risk taking is considered to be the driving engine of the globalising information economy. Innovation is not possible without active risk taking. Moreover, risk is associated with the expansion of choice because it signifies a society actively trying to 'break away from its past' (Giddens, 2000: 40).

Risk is the mobilising dynamic of society bent on change, that wants to determine its own future rather than leaving it to religion, tradition, or the vagaries of nature. Modern capitalism differs from all previous forms of economic system in terms of its attitudes towards the future. ... Modern capitalism embeds itself into the future by calculating future profit and loss, and therefore risk, as a continuous process (Giddens, 2000: 42).

It is increasingly important for people to access and evaluate information and thus exercise greater choice over their own lives and life-pathways. However, the knowledge needed to do this symbolic work is differentially distributed in a global information society characterised by social inequalities and social exclusions. Indeed, Stephen Ball (2003: 150) argues that 'risk constantly reinforces responsibility and the values of the developmental self'. This leads to the 'rise of a new form of inequality, that is, "the inequality of dealing with insecurity and reflexivity"' (Ulrich Beck cited in Ball, 2003: 150). Risk and risk management within a 'privatized and more open post-welfare, choice' system is considered to be:

... an inherent characteristic of the market form, an essential part of its dynamic, a quality that is celebrated and set over and against the conservatism of bureaucratic systems. The market form rests on responsibility, skills and resourcefulness and an absence of uncertainty. ... Part of the riskiness of the post-welfare, choice system, ... inheres in the importance and elusiveness of useful and accurate information (Ball, 2003: 151).

In the preceding section, we focussed on three key points associated with educational policy formulation and implementation in an era of cultural globalisation. These three key points were: (1) the new educational policy orthodoxy intricately connected to global neo-liberal economic reform and manifested in managerialist discourses: accountability, productivity, performativity, privatization; (2) the indigenisation or glocalization of this global policy regime or orthodoxy within local contexts; and (3) the phenomenological or subjective experiences of globalization: information overload, uncertainty, risk management and choice.

In the next section of the paper, we turn our attention to describing our empirical study.

## **EMPIRICAL STUDY**

We interviewed fourteen 'key players', in eleven separate interviews about issues of equity and difference in the development and early stages of the implementation of *QSE 2010*. The policy actors interviewed for the study included relevant senior bureaucrats in Education Queensland and one influential academic/researcher who had been involved in the reforms. Three areas of the bureaucracy (as it was then structured) were represented in the interviews: (1) Strategic Directions, Performance and Measurement (SDP&M) – Policy Actors A, B, C, D; (2) Curriculum and Assessment (C&A) – Policy Actors E, F, G, H, I; and (3) Workforce and Professional Development (W&PD) – Policy Actors J<sup>1</sup>, J<sup>2</sup>, J<sup>3</sup>, J<sup>4</sup>.

The interviews pursued the research questions in a dialectical way as part of a 'conversation with a purpose' (Burgess 1984). This approach has been used in other major research studies conducted with key policy actors (eg Henry et al., 2001). Interview questions explored how equity issues were being framed, what language was used, what specific groups were being targeted, what programs were being funded, and how outcomes were being monitored. Interviews were approximately an hour in length and were audio taped and later transcribed. In addition, we wrote field-notes immediately after each interview was conducted. This was necessary, given the fact that audio-taping only captured the 'official' voices of participants, and did not record facial gestures; figures, tables and other information discussed; and 'off-the-record' comments.

### **Data Analytic Methods**

The interviews provided by the fourteen key policy actors, as well as the documents collected for the study (research and position papers informing QSE2010, implementation papers/statements relating to QSE 2010, and internal memos on issues of inclusion and students at educational risk) were analysed in a number of phases. Firstly, the data were coded to quantify how often the terms 'inclusion/inclusive', 'equity', 'difference', 'diversity', and 'risk' were used in the various texts – documents and interview data. For example, the terms inclusion and inclusive were used in at least twelve of the documents related to QSE 2010 (see Cullen, Cosier, Greco, & Payne, 1999; Edgar, 1999; Education Queensland, 1999, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, n.d.; Luke, 1999; Martinez, 1999; Schofield, 1999a, 1999b).

In the second phase of data analysis, individual extracts of data identified in the various policy and discussion documents were analysed to determine the preferred meaning given to the terms: 'inclusion/inclusive' and 'at-risk'. Oppositional meanings were also identified. Many of the documents referred explicitly to the notion of an inclusive public education system. Here the term 'inclusive' public education was contrasted with the exclusive notion of private schooling (Education Queensland, 1999: 9). Public education was constructed as providing equality of 'access' and 'opportunity to all' (Education Queensland, 1999; 2001b).

[The] public education system encompasses a breadth of life that reflects all of society. It is the glory and the burden of the public education system that it caters to all of children, whether delinquent or obedient, brilliant or handicapped, privileged or scarred. This is what makes it a public education system (Education Queensland, 1999: 3).

However, in other documents the term inclusive education signified catering for: 'individual needs and learning styles' (Schofield, 1999a: 8), 'gifted kids', as well as 'remedial students' (Schofield, 1999b: 20-21). These notions of inclusion could only be achieved via 'greater diversity between institutions' (Schofield, 1999b: 24). At the same

time, concerns were expressed that the term inclusion had a discursive legacy and attachment to only one category of students, namely, 'students with disabilities' (Education Queensland, n.d.).

Yet again, other documents used the word 'inclusion' to refer to building an 'inclusive society' through notions of 'inclusive citizenship' 'that maintains the well-being of our own diverse communities, and develops respectful relations with others' (Martinez, 1999: 8, 9, 13; see also Edgar, 1999; Education Queensland, 2000). In these documents, reference is made to the changing composition of the Australian population, as well as changes to employment patterns, family life, local communities and participation in civil society.

Similarly, the term 'students at educational risk' was used in a number of the documents, including the key paper, '*SM-17: Students at Educational Risk*' (Education Queensland, 2000). The term was defined as follows:

"Students at educational risk" are those students whose experience of schooling, together with other factors in their lives, makes them vulnerable to not completing twelve years of schooling or equivalent qualification, or not achieving to their potential, the essential knowledge and skills for effective participation in work, relationships and families, and as active citizens in the community (Education Queensland, 2000: 3)

Other documents talked explicitly about curriculum and pedagogy reform to improve educational outcomes for the 'most at risk students' (see Education Queensland, 2001a; Luke, 1999). This was also the main concern of the document titled: '*SM-17: Students at Educational Risk*'

Recognising that there is a recurring cohort of students in state schools who are at educational risk, the policy sets out accountabilities at all levels of Education Queensland to support teachers in improving:

- (a) the attainments and school completion of students at educational risk;
- (b) the quality of engagement in learning and school life at all levels of schooling for students at educational risk; and
- (c) the average and distribution of results of students at educational risk to reflect those of the total student population (Education Queensland, 2000: 3).

Similarly, the document QSE2010 (Education Queensland, 2001: 17) referred to 'a new deal on equity' which entailed, in part, the 'development of a systematic approach to improving outcomes for at-risk groups'. At the same time, however, there was some concern that the terms 'educational risk' and 'at-risk groups' may have negative connotations, and it may be more appropriate to use the word 'educational inclusion' in reference to social justice issues (Education Queensland, n.d.).

During the third phase of analysis, the interview data were coded to quantify how often and where the terms: difference, diversity, equity, inclusive and risk were used. In addition, the data was tabulated in order to conceptualize the different uses of the terms by different sections of the education bureaucracy, as well as by different policy actors.<sup>2</sup>

In the fourth phase of analysis, the individual interviews with the key policy actors were divided into episodes relating specifically to: (1) the public education goals of 'inclusion'; (2) the system and/or student problem of 'educational risk', and (3) the procedures for addressing 'educational risk' and thereby achieving 'inclusion'. An episode or extract of data commenced with the researcher's question and ended with the policy actor's completed response. A description of the text immediately preceding the data extract was outlined as this set the context for the policy actor's response. In addition, the links

between the above three topics, namely, inclusive 'learning' goals of public education, the students excluded or 'at risk' from achieving these goals; and the initiatives, strategies or innovations designed to steer the system towards its utopian ideal were fleshed out.

In the final and fifth phase of analysis, we focused on the strength of the power relations constituting the various categories of discourses about 'inclusion' and 'educational risk'. Bernstein's (2000) notion of classification was used to determine the strength of a discursive category, and thereby the specialized identity of a category. Briefly, Bernstein (2000) argued that power relations can be discerned through an analysis of the boundaries insulating categories of discourse, agents and institutional spaces. Power relations maybe visible, and thus marked by strong insulation boundaries, or invisible and marked by weak insulation boundaries. For Bernstein (2000) and Bourdieu (1992) the analytic focus is not on the content of the categories, but rather on the strength of the insulation demarcating symbolic categories. Both sociologists argued that the strength of the symbolic demarcation regulates the specificity or identity of a category, and thus the attributes attached to a category.

### **The Mantra of Inclusion**

*... certain words and phrases hatched like moths from invisible cocoons: 'closing gaps', 'building partnerships', 'overcoming distances', finding 'common goals'... It was 'binding' rhetoric. The not very attractive word 'inclusive' crept in, and became a mantra of sorts (Watson, 2002: 107-108).*

All of the policy actors talked of the importance of developing and implementing a 'new deal on equity' (Education Queensland, 2001: 17), in the context of the profound social, economic and cultural changes often referred to as the global information revolution, as discussed earlier in the paper. However, the positions taken by the policy actors differed markedly. Differences were clearly evident between policy actors who worked in different sections of the bureaucracy, for example, 'Strategic Directions, Performance and Measurement' or 'Curriculum and Assessment'. They were also evident between newer recruits to the Department ('*schoolies*') and long-term policy actors ('*policy people*'), and between policy actors with education experience (*educationalists*), and those recruited from other departments such as health, transport and family services (*outsiders*). In what follows we examine three points of contention between the various policy actors, namely: (1) framing policy with the language of 'inclusion' and 'educational risk'; (2) policy carriage – the global equity network, and (3) policy traction - monitoring equity outcomes.

### ***Framing a New Equity Agenda: 'Inclusion' and 'At-Risk'***

Policy Actor (A) was involved right from the beginning with the formulation of the document 'Education Queensland 2010'. He was responsible for '*target setting*', '*benchmarking*' and '*a lot of the research that underpinned*' the document. In the following data extract, Policy Actor (A) talked about the new approach to equity issues in Education Queensland.

#### **Extract One: Strategic Directions, Performance and Measurement**

**Researcher (1):** ... how do you see that individual focus ... going alongside any kind of target group approach?

**Policy Actor (A):** Can I answer in a somewhat diverse way? Two of the key research drivers ... for me were two major reports, one was put out by the OECD – entitled 'School Failure'. School failure they defined as any school losing one child without them transferring to another post-secondary education or comparable level. ...The other report came from the European Commission, and it had the same title: 'School Failure.' They defined school failure as any student who fails first year university or first year TAFE post-year 12 without the pre-requisite skills from the school. It's the link between an individual-based approach, to explanatory variables, to a system-based

*approach, to what is it we have to do as a system to become inclusive in terms of the diversity and responsiveness to our needs. ... But until you have a real hard edge on some of these issues you don't force the debate. When you are looking at this, you put values under the table – full stop – and increasingly you have an inclusive approach to education.*

**A number of lines deleted**

**Policy Actor (A):** *And, obviously, what I've articulated here is an inclusive model, that is, diametrically opposed to a model where you have a traditional 1970s, 1980s equity approach. It doesn't mean that we're not interested [in equity issues]. It's a systems approach for how you do it*

**A number of lines deleted.**

**Policy Actor (A):** *It's not that we're [against the strategies used by people in the former equity branch of the department]... it's just the battle of the debate about what's more effective in terms of intervention strategies.*

**Researcher (I):** *I can see there have been problems with, in the past, with the target group approach for all sorts of reasons.*

**Policy Actor (A):** *So we have one target group now and that's every kid – full stop.*

Education Queensland policies were clearly informed by reports produced by the OECD and European Commission. However, this was not a one-way, top-down global flow of educational ideas. Some of the senior policy actors working in Educational Queensland, such as Policy Actor (A), were also actively involved with these supranational organizations. The new policy orthodoxy produced by these organizations shifted the focus away from target equity groups to individual tracking and monitoring. The objective of this data-driven regime was to capture patterns of success and failure in order to devise system-based strategies or interventions for addressing the problem of 'school failure'. Thus the approach was designed to be 'pro-active' and interventionist – capturing data, working out explanatory variables, finding out what works, and extending success stories through networks.

The position taken by Policy Actor (E), who worked in the Curriculum and Assessment Area, was very similar to that adopted by policy officers working in the area of Strategic Directions, Performance and Measurement. However, Policy Actor (E), a new recruit to the bureaucracy with extensive experience in educational research, wanted to establish an 'Inclusive Education Branch' that incorporated all the policy officers who had previously worked on different equity strategies for target groups. Despite resistance to the idea of an inclusive branch, however, he persisted with this push. Policy Actor (E) suggested that 'inclusive education' should be an 'umbrella term' for 'arguing for the participation and achievement of all kids, and that ... at various times, in various places, different kids will be more or less at risk – at educational risk.' In this inclusive approach, he focused on system deficits and thus limited his use of the terms 'at-risk' or 'at educational risk', which he claimed, had the potential to lay blame on individuals.

#### Extract Two: Curriculum and Assessment

**Policy Actor (E):** *...I don't use the "at risk" language very much at all. I try to argue that – you know – kids will become more or less – included more or less; enabled or disabled – more or less vulnerable in schooling because of the existence of a number of barriers, participation and so on.*

**Researcher (I):** *Because of the system?*

**Policy Actor (E):** *Exactly, yeah. So that what we've got to be vigilant about is the – is the process of identifying exclusion, rather than trying to talk – get intellectual foreclosure on a definition of inclusion. I keep saying to people we'll make much more progress if we're vigilant about exclusion and so on, although I mean – you know – I'm not dissuading people from that.*

Similarly, Policy Actor (F), also a new recruit to the education bureaucracy, as well as the area of Curriculum and Assessment, used the 'at-risk' language to refer to the way that the organization responded to the specific educational needs of individuals. He argued that the shift to 'at-risk' language, and away from the term 'disadvantaged students' represented a move away from 'blaming the individual' to focussing on organizational failures.

**Extract Three: Curriculum and Assessment**

**Researcher (2):** *So can we just pick up on that point? It's a notion of shifting the language in a sense - and then, I assume, shifting the way that that language represents a group of people. But also doing something at an organisational level?*

**Policy Actor (F):** *... I suppose, the shift in the language is that I wouldn't use the term "disadvantaged" students. I would use the term 'students at educational risk'.*

**Researcher (2):** *Right. Why?*

**Policy Actor (F):** *And the reason why I wouldn't use "disadvantaged" students is that ... it puts the characteristic on the student. Whereas, in actual fact, it's an interaction. That - we all come to the system with our own backgrounds. And the requirement is that the system responds to us in a way that doesn't disadvantage us. Not necessarily because I'm disadvantaged. But the system doesn't disadvantage us. So we would use a term 'at educational risk' because that puts the onus or the focus on the system, rather than on the individual.*

**A number of lines deleted.**

**Policy Actor (F):** *So, for instance, we would still provide funding or differential funding to schools where there is lower socio-economic status. Or where there is lower performance on standardised tests. Or where there are more indigenous students. So we are still providing resources - differentially - but we are trying to build the ownership of the school in terms of the issues for their population.*

For Policy Actor (F), the term 'inclusion' referred to system or organization processes and procedures designed to meet the needs of all students. Thus inclusive education was viewed as '*a process that responds to individuals within the system ... a process where we're trying to increase presence, access, participation and achievement of all students*' (Policy Actor, F). The term *presence* was coined to signal the educational resources in local communities, as well as identify the students currently present or engaged in schools, and those who are absent or disengaged from these schools. The term *access* referred to the organization of learning environments to ensure that students could access learning at those points when and where it was needed. The term participation referred to the active participation of all students in the '*life of the school and the community*'. And the term, *achievement* meant achievement of educational outcomes to set targets, benchmarks or standards (Policy Actor, F).

By contrast Policy Actor (G), also employed in the Curriculum and Assessment area, was very critical of the terms 'inclusion' and 'at-risk' in relation to an equity agenda for the department. Policy Actor (G) had worked in the equity area for a long time, and had witnessed the dismantling and/or whittling down of equity initiatives since the mid 1990s. At the same time, however, she was adamant of the need to change the way educational equity was conceptualized and implemented. Specifically, Policy Actor (G) argued that the social justice target group agenda of the 1990s no longer worked in the new millennium.<sup>3</sup> She nominated five reasons for the need to re-conceptualize educational equity. The target group social justice strategy did not:

- (1) effectively '*address issues of poverty*' [*because*] *there was 'no voice for it'*;
- (2) promote effective communication between policy officers working on different equity initiatives for specific target groups,
- (3) focus on '*kids as complex human beings*', and therefore produce professional development workshops that captured the whole rather than '*slices*' of students' '*humanity*',
- (4) research the new equity priorities created by the massive social, cultural and economic changes associated with globalization and the new technologies; and
- (5) deal with the '*huge backlash against feminist educators*', and the rearticulation of gender to signal '*boys*' education'.

At the same time, however, Policy Actor (G) was not happy with the new directions proposed for equity initiatives in the department. In particular, she was highly critical of the framework for 'Students at Educational Risk' arguing that it placed the responsibility

for identification of equity needs onto principals and local schools, and thereby emphasised a 'deficit' thinking approach. At the same, she argued that the language of 'inclusion' was still underpinned by a discourse of disability, because it was originally used to refer to the inclusion or mainstreaming of students with disabilities in the Queensland context (a point also made by Policy Actor E & Policy Actor F).

**Extract Four: Curriculum and Assessment**

**Policy Actor (G):** *We're now in a situation where our key policy document is the framework for 'Students at Educational Risk' and I see it, no matter how we try to structure it to not be about deficit, it is read like that in schools and one of the key reasons for that is that in the principal's accountability – as the first one – is to identify students at educational risk.*

**Researcher (2):** *... I thought the shift in the language – 'students at educational risk' was an attempt to get away from the target group deficit outlook but you're saying it's, in fact, reinforcing it.*

**Policy Actor (G):** *It's moving away from target groups, and it's emphasised deficit.*

**Researcher (2):** *And the deficit lies with the individual?*

**Policy Actor (G):** *The deficit lies with identification, I suppose you would say. They might identify a whole group, or an individual student in the process of identification, and then they've got to have specific strategies, specific to the needs of that student/or group. Now we did try to get around that by talking about – you know – the focus of this is, really, engagement – it's on the resources that do exist in communities, not those that are absent. It's on every kid's life experience as a resource for learning. ... And we've got the framework of 'Students at Educational Risk' which is widely interpreted as deficit even though we tried to rescue it from that. And we've got a new language that is mainly about disability. The language about inclusive education – is about inclusion but it's got a heavy kind of underlay of disability to it.*

In the preceding section, we examined the discursive shift in the education equity agenda from a language of 'social justice target groups' to 'inclusion' and 'students at educational risk'. The transnational cultural flows of policy actors meant that the language of 'inclusion', 'school failure', and 'at educational risk' moved rapidly across territorial boundaries, and between supranational (OECD, European Commission) and local organizations (Education Queensland). Moreover, the language of 'inclusion' became the new mantra for talking about an equitable public education system in Queensland. Although the language of inclusion aimed to bind together warring parties and multiple interest groups/stakeholders, there appeared to be no consensus on what the term meant, nor any policy strategy or framework specifically about 'inclusion'. At the same time, while the department did have a framework for 'Students at Educational Risk', many of the policy actors were uncomfortable with the language of 'at-risk' and 'educational risk' suggesting that it had individualistic deficit connotations. Other policy actors working in the area of Strategic Directions, Performance and Measurement suggested that the 'at-risk' language was designed to focus attention on the deficiencies within the system, that is, school failure.

The reformulation of equity issues in individualistic terms was clearly a 'market-individualistic' approach (Henry, 2001) - a shift from 'social distribution' to managing 'individual at-riskness'. The battle within the department raged not only over 'issues of identification' – who was 'at-risk' and how do we know; but also over 'intervention' strategies – what should be done to address inequity. The focus on 'school failure' increasingly devolved responsibility for both 'identification' and 'intervention' to the level of the school. But as Stromquist (2002: 28) has argued these 'principles of equity now operate in parallel with reductions in government support for public education'. Consequently, the 'drive for student success ends up placing responsibility (and thus blame) on parents, students, schools, and teachers' (Stromquist, 2002: 28).

### ***Policy Carriage for the New Equity Framework***

All of the policy actors talked about a departmental move away from centralised policy making, dissemination and implementation. Devolution of decision-making is a key element of the new global education policy orthodoxy. The old *'policy roll out'* approach was considered to be ineffective for a number of reasons, including: the pace of change, and the increasingly global networks of schools. For example, Policy Actor (E) argued that some of the project officers within the bureaucracy were *'behind ... some schools'* in terms of *'their grasp of practice and policy development and theory'*, because these schools had been *'networking with schools and authorities in America or England or wherever'*. In addition, some of the policy officers were *'no longer at the front'* in terms of their *'areas of expertise'*. Thus, the work of the policy actors had to change to a much more *'networked and connected'* approach, that was *'far more connected to what's going on nationally and internationally, and connected with what's happening out in schools and districts'*. (Policy Actor, E).

Similarly, Policy Actor (G) talked about an *'anti-policy environment'* within the bureaucracy, and the move from a *'rowing'* to a *'steering'* approach to educational change and governance.

#### Extract Five: Curriculum and Assessment

**Policy Actor (G):** ... *there is not a great deal of new policy coming out of Education Queensland. There's an anti-policy environment. And I can understand that. I think the old idea that you change a system with policy is not one that you can really believe in. The framework for 'Students at Educational Risk' – is that it was constructed as a steering, not rowing policy. The Senior Policy Actor responsible for driving that policy, saw it as something where the accountabilities were clearly allocated, expressed specifically, and those people had to do that, and we got out of the way.*

Such an approach to policy, however, assumes that various people allocated with accountabilities and responsibilities, have the necessary resources, skills and time to carry out this work. It also assumes that people in schools, and at the district education level, are willing to make *'counter-cultural'* changes. Finally, there is an assumption of similar understandings of terms such as *'inclusion'* and *'at-risk'* – even though these terms had not been clearly defined, and a consensus had not been achieved about the meaning of these terms within the various areas of the central bureaucracy.

#### Extract Six: Curriculum and Assessment

**Policy Actor (G):** ... *there's not a great deal of new policy. The inclusive education direction is just that ... There's a working definition that came from the summit but that only applies to the summit. That's something that belongs to the people who were at that summit. ... There is a commitment to meetings being made through collaborative networks like list servers and things like that. To opening it up and making it – you know – so I suppose democratising it – that's what gives validity to a meaning. That those people are involved in it, you know, own it, et cetera. So we don't have a definition of inclusive education. It's an idea. And in terms of other policy, well, I think there is a very, very narrow group of people in here who recognise that we've got a big hole in terms of social justice policy.*

The weakest aspect of *QSE 2010*, according to Policy Actor (G), was in the area of policy carriage. It was a *'landmark'* strategy, and a completely new way of *'doing policy work'*. But its greatest weakness was in the translation from general philosophical statement, vision or *'strategy'* to action plans for practice. Consequently, another document, *Destination 2010*, was designed to assist with policy carriage. Specifically, *Destination 2010* nominated the areas of responsibility and accountability in terms of monitoring, measuring and improving educational outcomes.

### Extract Seven: Curriculum and Assessment

**Policy Actor (G):** ... QSE2010 was a landmark really. ... it described the dynamics of the society in which schools exist, and it described that in a way that was highly credible and very difficult to put up an argument against. Now in the way it described that and suggested the strategies that should respond to that, I think it was a first. The rationale was in the description. The strategies were clearly something that logically followed from that description and that was a different kind of policy making altogether. I think – you know - it's called a strategy but that's where it was weakest.

**Researcher (2):** Right.

**Policy Actor (G):** That it wasn't – it never really developed. It didn't hit the tracks that took it into practise. And so you've got now – the documents like 'Destination 2010' that I think are highly – there about – there about – proving – not improving necessarily.

**Researcher (2):** Right. Explain when you say "proving" and "not improving".

**Policy Actor (G):** Well, you know, they use all the performativity language of targets and----- that kind of thing. ... I think the rich descriptive map of reality or – you know the maps of reality that QSE2010 provided us with are bleached out of the picture by this. And in the way of Education Queensland this will replace QSE2010 – you know – not formally but that's-----

**Researcher (2):** But that becomes the interpretation of the document.

**Policy Actor (G):** That becomes the new document. So you can go through this and not be reminded of issues like the new concentrations of poverty or mobility of different types of families. We need that kind of thing. So that's my issue with it.

Policy Actor (G) also expressed concern with who/what sector of the bureaucracy was given responsibility for 'policy carriage'. If accountability was to be devolved to the school and district level, and measured by performative outcome criteria, then what role would people in 'professional development' and qualitative data analysis play in the policy process? And how would 'improvement' in learning outcomes be measured within and between schools?

In the preceding section, we examined struggles over policy carriage or recontextualization. Specifically, we argued that the place or role of policy in departmental governance changed substantially from a 'rowing' to 'steering' approach. Thus, QSE 2010 was not written as a traditional policy paper, but rather as a vision statement or strategy. As such, the document attempted to somewhat subvert the neo-liberal global policy orthodoxy by building a vision of education that addressed issues of poverty, active citizenship, social exclusion and social cohesion. The responsibility for enacting this vision was placed in the hands of schools and teachers. These were the reflexive agencies and agents of late modernity that would be able to monitor and manage risks in order to produce innovative educational practices. And yet this is where the strategy or vision was weakest because it did not articulate clear plans for 'policy roll out'. Thus, it left a vacuum in terms of professional development and accountability measures – two instruments or technologies of policy carriage. This vacuum was filled by the document Destination 2010 – a managerialist discourse of accountability and performativity.

### ***Policy Traction for the New Equity Agenda***

*The unceasing conflict at the centre of politics is essentially epistemological ... Politics is the art of the knowable. The protagonists usually divide between the empirical and statistical and the psychological and anthropological. There is the science of polling, the wisdom of experience and the hunch or instinct. There is the ideological and the imagined, the empathetic (Watson, 2002: 84).*

Clearly the central point of contention between the various policy actors, and particularly between those who worked in the area of Curriculum and Assessment, and those who worked in Strategic Directions, Performance and Measurement, was about epistemology – Who is at educational risk? How do we know? And what strategies might make an educational improvement? The protagonists were divided along the lines of 'evidence

*based policy/practice* – ‘the empirical and statistical’ and the ‘*already known*’ – ‘the wisdom of experience and the hunch or instinct’ (Watson, 2002: 84).

Thus, Policy Actor (G) talked about the process by which ‘*the data people*’ who ‘*put together all these graphs and pie charts and whatever*’ came to ‘*own*’ the equity issue.

**Extract Eight: Curriculum and Assessment**

**Policy Actor (G):** ... *The data people weren't telling us anything new. But left most of us not able to participate in a conversation where it became about – came to be about data. About data, really. So it became a data issue rather than a “Let's create a more accessible way of talking about kids and their lives and their families.” That draws attention ...to the complexity of their lives.*

Moreover, both Policy Actor (G) and Policy Actor (F) talked about the limitations of the data actually produced by the department to monitor learning outcomes, and equity strategies. It will be recalled that Policy Actor (G) also took issue with the new strategies for ‘identifying’ ‘at-risk’ students – responsibility for data production rested with individual principals and schools. This was essentially a concern about the knowledge and resources available to principals to make informed, reflexive decisions in relation to risk management. As Stephen Ball (2003: 151) has argued ‘part of the riskiness of the post-welfare, choice system, ... inheres in the importance and elusiveness of useful and accurate information.’ In addition, Policy Actor (G) was concerned about the so-called ‘feedback loop’ between localised data production and ‘whole-of-system’ strategies. Specifically, Policy Actor (G) argued that ‘*there's almost nothing you can pick up by way of information that can tell you how well a policy is going. There's no aggregation of that information in a storied sort of way*’.

**Extract Nine: Curriculum and Assessment**

**Researcher (2):** *Right. So what kind of data would you collect from these schools or regions or how does that actual system work? Because that seems very intriguing for me and then what do you do with that knowledge?*

**Policy Actor (F):** *Yes. I think that the perception is probably more advanced than reality. In that there's not a lot of data collected at schools and reported back on - or - that is high level data. There are all the standardised assessments, but then the problem with those assessments is that a lot of students who have English as a Second Language, or who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, or who have a disability, are exempted from all those standardised assessments. So all that data doesn't really help us, with knowing how we're doing in schools. The qualitative data is collected in an ad hoc way so that there's no - we currently don't have a real mechanism to actually look at how that's looking across the board. What we do do, is every year, is try and undertake a qualitative analysis of the implementation of the ‘students at educational risk policy’ so we try and collect information from schools and it's mostly like dialogue about how they've gone about attempting to improve things and then how they have seen that being achieved and so that we can document - you know - the stories of success within schools.*

**Researcher (2):** *So when you dialogue - what - your team goes out?*

**Policy Actor (F):** *Yes, people go out and actually talk with schools. But it is not - there's not a lot of actual hard data and so there's nothing that comes in here that we use as a branch to really identify - like, how we're doing. [A number of lines deleted] So in some areas there is some data, but generally speaking we are very data poor.*

The positions taken up by Policy Actors G and F, however, stood in stark contrast to those adopted by policy actors working within the Strategic Directions, Performance and Measurement area.

**Extract Ten: Strategic Directions, Performance and Measurement**

**Policy Actor (A):** ... *Once you start tracking every single kid in the State you start seeing some obvious patterns. You start seeing some obvious success stories and you start seeing ways to build bridges between schools that are significantly delivering and those that are not. You then put in place the analytical framework to allow those sorts of research areas to go ahead. We need to have initial research to actually find out what's happening.*

Similarly, Policy Actor (B) who worked in the area of Strategic Directions, Performance and Measurement suggested that the approach adopted by the department was designed to achieve 'best practice' for all students based on empirical evidence. Moreover, the evidence-based 'feed-back loop' was designed to encourage innovation and unhinge the holds of tradition. This was clearly a reflexive research driven strategy aimed at risk management. Moreover, it was a strategy designed to encourage innovation through effective techniques of risk assessment and dealing with uncertainty through data production and analysis.

Extract Eleven: Strategic Directions, Performance and Measurement

**Policy Actor (B):** ... it is really about ...having a performance measurement system that collects, collates, reports and disseminates information back. So it's really a large feedback loop – its really about making the best use of resources and break that nexus of tradition around things being done because they have always been done in a particular way and saying "Well, look what the evidence is there and this works and this doesn't work". So there are some tough questions being asked around divestment. I think it is a much more objective way of creating policy because it is not necessarily driven by political imperative, because at the end of the day we are looking at what works.

However, the data-driven positions taken by Policy Actor (A) and Policy Actor (B) were challenged by Policy Actor (C), a new recruit into the education bureaucracy and the area of Strategic Directions, Performance and Management. Policy Actor (C) described herself as a 'schoolie' rather than a policy person. Her concern was to ensure that the data collected at the school level led to 'professional dialogue' within and between schools. This was not likely to occur without adequate professional development taking place at the level of the school.

Extract Twelve: Strategic Directions, Performance and Measurement

**Researcher (I):** Are you going to do anything about monitoring any of the equity groups?

**Policy Actor (C):** ... we were setting up the data so we could see the value-added-ness for a particular school. We didn't want to just compare the State benchmarks or like schools – we wanted to see the distance travelled ... What I worry about is – you know – unless you have a really good informed person – they won't know what data to produce or how to make sense of it, and what strategies to put into place to change learning outcomes.

A few lines deleted

**Policy Actor (C):** ... I know the Director General [places a lot of importance] on data and targets, and you need that. But I really have an absolutely deep-seated belief that it's the power of the question and the conversation that changes the mindset – you can use data to provoke that, and you never know the impact of the question. [In my experience] teachers can be engaged in professional dialogue about [challenging] questions ... now that is change – ...classroom teachers having a professional dialogue ... and actually seeing that they have made a difference. That's what I think is the most powerful. That's what I like to do and that's what I want executive directors to do and principals to do.

In the preceding section, we examined the 'epistemological' debates and struggles within the department. These debates focussed around the so-called 'data-driven' approach to 'identifying' at-risk groups, and devising 'intervention' strategies specifically for these cohorts of students. The policy actors in the area of Strategic Directions, Performance and Measurement spoke in glowing terms about the data-driven focus, particularly in relation to challenging traditional practices and encouraging innovation. Policy Actor (C) however, suggested that the data was only a starting point for 'professional dialogue' – there was a need for 'challenging questions' and imagining new possibilities for making a difference. By contrast, however, policy actors in the area of Curriculum and Assessment were highly critical of the type of data that was currently collected by the Department arguing that it did not aggregate information effectively at the level of the: school, district, region and whole-of- system in a 'storied sort of way'. This was because very poor qualitative data was collected at the level of the school, and relayed back to regional and central departments.

Moreover, the quantitative data collected was not helpful because the 'usual suspects' were identified in terms of 'educational risk'. There was nothing new in this data.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this paper we focussed on the new equity deal in Education Queensland. We examined this 'new deal' through an analysis of the language of 'inclusion' and 'educational risk' in key documents such as QSE 2010, Destination 2010 and the framework for 'Students at Educational Risk'. In addition, we analysed the interview talk of fourteen policy actors involved in policy framing, carriage and monitoring traction.

We contextualized our concerns about equity issues in terms of the global information revolution. As Castells (2000) has noted the global information networked society has increased rather than reduced social inequality. In terms of the distribution of wealth/resources, there is growing income disparity and increasingly large cohorts of people experience poverty. In addition, the social relation to the means of production has become increasingly individualized, casualized, and routinized. This has meant that vulnerable members of society (women, minorities, children, refugees) are increasingly susceptible to further exploitation (lower wages, fewer benefits, less job continuity).

Good quality public education plays a crucial role in challenging or contesting the inequalities produced by global informationalism. In Education Queensland, equity is still on the agenda, but in radically new neo-liberal economic ways. The focus is individualistic – each individual needs to be tracked because they are potentially 'at-risk' of 'school failure'. Identification of 'at-risk' students has been devolved to the level of the school and district. And intervention strategies have to be devised at the local level. Stories of success are then to be shared/networked with other schools.

Clearly, 'target group equity' strategies are limited in terms of addressing issues of social exclusion and inequity in the new millennium. But the new deal on equity, a market-individualistic approach, is surely an inadequate alternative.

## Endnotes:

1 The interviews with key policy actors and field work data were collected in the latter part of 2002. All names have been replaced by letters of the alphabet to ensure confidentiality. Researcher (1) = Sandra Taylor, Researcher (2) = Parlo Singh. For the sake of clarity, data extracts have been edited.

2 Quantifying Data on Themes: Policy Actors A to J (1-4).

Equity	Policy	Workforce	School
Equity = Inclusion- Every kid	A	-	-
Equity = Inclusion - Mainstreaming + Target groups	-	-	E,F,G
Equity = Educational risk – disengaged groups	I	-	-
Equity = ? - good pedagogy will take care of 'at riskness'	-	-	H
Equity = Parity of services	B	-	-
Equity = Engagement	C	-	-
Equity = Representative	-	J1234	-
Equity = Quality system	D	-	-
Difference	Policy	Workforce	School
Difference = an asset	A	-	-
Difference = student groups failed by the system	-	-	F,G
Difference = disengaged	C,I	-	-
Recognition of difference –individual model	-	-	H
Difference = Target groups	B,D	-	-
Difference = Inclusive	-	-	E
Difference = Diversity	-	J1234	-

3 The targeted student groups of the Social Justice Strategy were:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander...Cultural and Language Diversity...Disability...Educational Risk...Geographic Isolation...Gifts and Talents... Learning Impairment and Learning Difficulty...[and]...Low Socioeconomic Background (Department of Education, 1994, n.p.).

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