Systems models to support inclusive education practices: Engaging Queensland students and teachers in school review and development using The Index for Inclusion.

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Abstract

This paper will give examples of processes established by The Staff College, Inclusive Education in Education Queensland to facilitate reinvigoration of school communities from within, to achieve more inclusive outcomes for students and teachers. As the Queensland State Education 2010 reform process continues, schools are challenged to review their organisational structures, their approach to curriculum and their pedagogical practices to ensure that all students are truly included in the school community. The processes developed from The Index for Inclusion (Booth, Ainscow, Black-Hawkins, Vaughn & Shaw 2002) stimulate a culture where teachers and students can work together as citizens for a life of learning and development. The processes develop more inclusive ways of working, critical thinking, independent and group judgement and action. They encourage participants to question personal assumptions that structure views about schools, teachers, students, teaching and learning; and the interconnectedness between individuals, education and society. This paper will illustrate how and why the Index for Inclusion has become a significant and effective tool to develop school community and how it has become used in the school review process.
Introduction
In Queensland, Australia, our understandings about inclusive education evolved from the notion of integrating students with disabilities into regular schools. The notion of integration, described as “the process of moving children from special education settings into regular classrooms where they undertake most, if not all of their schooling” (Ashman & Elkins, 1998, p.526) had a focus on helping students with disabilities ‘fit in’ to the regular classroom. The problem was that integration did not challenge the organisation and provision of curriculum to meet the needs of all students and prompt review and development. Inclusion involves all students having the right to be truly included, to actively participate with others in the learning experiences provided, to be valued as members of the school community, and to have access to a system that delivers a quality education that is best suited to their unique competencies, skills, and attributes (Ainscow, 2000; Farrell, 2000; Fisher, Roach, & Frey, 2002). This requires a culture where people are valued and treated with respect for their varied knowledge and experiences (Carrington, 1999; Carrington & Robinson, 2004). Therefore, processes of school review and professional development will need to involve reflection about personal assumptions about schools, teachers, students, teaching and learning; and the interconnectedness between individuals, education and society (Crebbin, 2004; Smith, 1998).

Some earlier models of professional development in Queensland could be described as “one shot deal” or “spray paint method” workshops (Schmuck, 1998, p. v) and failed to address the complex changes associated with developing a more inclusive approach (Carrington, 1999; Ainscow, 1999; Kugelmass, 2001; Skrtic, 1991). For example, teachers did not have the opportunity to consider how cultural and often historical constructions of difference and school success/failure can influence personal beliefs and values and shape how educators interact with students (Carrington, 2000). If the aim is to develop a more inclusive approach in schools then the focus needs to be on understanding the cultural/social institutional setting and to guiding a reflective process that considers the range in values and ideals across the school community.

Education Queensland, in Australia provides public education for all Queensland students, regardless of race, gender, disability or location. Queensland State Education – 2010 (QSE – 2010) is the Queensland Government’s 10 year vision for public education. This vision recognises that new times require a new purpose for education - one that provides values and direction for public schools as they seek to meet the needs of different students. Based on consultation with students, parents and teachers, QSE -2010 proposes a broad purpose for education based on the notion that schools:

- create a safe, tolerant and disciplined environment for students;
- prepare young people to be active and reflective Australian citizens;
- develop the skills and desire for lifelong learning in our students;
- help students to become active in community, economic and political life;
- make students confident in their relationships with other cultures both here and abroad.


It was evident that QSE 2010 would surely challenge schools and the system at a deep level. However, a distinctive feature of Queensland State Education - 2010 was an investment in professional development of the workforce to facilitate improvements in outcomes for all students.
through the continuous improvement of teaching and learning. The underlying assumption was that the “quality of the teaching force is at the heart of the reform” (Slee, 2002, p. 16).

A Staff College, Inclusive Education was established in 2002 by Education Queensland, to coordinate Queensland state-wide professional development for inclusive education. The author of this paper was appointed as Foundation Principal. The intent was to bridge the gap between the broad array of new policy and educational reforms associated with QSE - 2010. The message of the Staff College, Inclusive Education was clear: Inclusive Education is core business for Education Queensland. It was acknowledged that staff commitment to create and maintain a climate conducive to learning for all students requires policy, leadership and long-term professional development. This meant that education staff needed to develop a pedagogy of inclusion, which Ainscow (1997) believes is not about making marginal adjustments, but rather is about asking fundamental questions concerning the way in which the organisation is currently structured. I recognised that changing habits of thought is uncomfortable and difficult while changing practices is likely to make teachers feel incompetent (Rudduck, 1991; Zeichner, 1991).

My aims for the Staff College, Inclusive Education were to provide innovative and sustainable learning incorporating cognitive-reflective components, professional dialogue, peer coaching through a networked approach to engagement and long lasting change. However, many teachers in Queensland felt isolated and responsible for executing mandates that were developed without consideration of existing impediments to implementation (Carrington, 2000). The Staff College, Inclusive Education needed to earn the respect of Education Queensland staff.

As Principal of the Staff College, Inclusive Education, I was committed to working in a more supportive way that respected the intellectual strengths and experience of the teaching profession. I used the power of Staff College communication networks established throughout the state of Queensland and funded projects to integrate the range of reforms and initiatives linked to QSE - 2010. The Staff College, Inclusive Education needed to focus on helping people in schools understand the cultural and social institutional setting and the beliefs and values of teachers who deal with a diverse range of students in the school community (Carrington, 1999).

Staff College communication networks introduced the Index for Inclusion (Booth, Ainscow, Black-Hawkins, Vaughan, & Shaw, 2000) as a key resource for school review and development in approximately 50 schools or district education groups. The underlying premise over the two year period (2002-2004) was to use the Index for Inclusion to help challenge and provoke institutional and personal factors such as school policy; organisation of students; staff beliefs and attitudes; funding models; roles and responsibilities of staff; teaching methods; and approaches to curriculum.

School, District, and Central Office staff were shown how the Index for Inclusion could be used to support a process of provocation, critical reflection and development of new practice to address the range of reforms and initiatives linked to QSE - 2010.

The Index for Inclusion provided an excellent process to engage staff and parents in professional conversations about issues of exclusion and inclusion. The Index process helps people understand the wider contextual factors that impact upon the work of schools. Use of the Index encourages forms of collaborative enquiry and develops an understanding that all schools have different community contexts. Schools will have different points in the journey towards more inclusive school development (Robinson & Carrington, 2002).

The process of using the Index was not mandated in Queensland schools but was promoted as an effective tool for developing school community and for school review and development in the areas...
of culture, policy and practice. The School Improvement and Accountability Framework, Policy and Guidelines assist Queensland state schools to contribute to the delivery of educational services within the context of their local community and in accordance with the government’s policy of strengthening communities. As one component of the School Improvement and Accountability Framework, Policy and Guidelines, the Triennial School Review process focuses on student achievement by ensuring continuous quality improvement and enhanced accountability. The Triennial School Review also provides an enhanced opportunity to involve key stakeholders in assessing the school’s performance. The Index for Inclusion is a recommended tool for the Triennial School Review process (School Improvement and Accountability Framework. Managing Triennial School Reviews 2002-2005, http://education.qld.gov.au/strategic/accountability/performance/siaf-index.html).

The process of using The Index for Inclusion developed in Queensland, is strongly linked to the development of a school community and encourages all members to have a voice (Carrington & Robinson, 2004; Robinson & Carrington, 2002). The construct of ‘school community’ (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997; Fullan, 1998) provides a framework to challenge and change traditional assumptions of schooling (Senge et al., 2000) as well as the practices, in an education system. Achieving deep change requires close understanding of, and at times confrontation with, official systems of language use operating in schools at all levels in a school community, particularly those systems that render students invisible or passive or that frame students out of decision-making processes. Real collaboration between members of a school community contributes to the development of a positive culture in a school which is committed to change and creating better learning opportunities for all students. The creation of a collaborative learning community requires exploration and promotion of shared values and development of an appreciation of working cooperatively and caring about one another (Kouzes & Posner, 1993).

In collaborative schools, professionals and students/parents/community members see each other as resources for one another with the collective value of delivering high quality education for all. This collaborative problem solving process with teachers is part of raising awareness about inclusive education in a school. Indeed, it is an ongoing challenge to ensure some voices are not silenced and others privileged as part of traditional school administration discourse. The professional conversations that were facilitated in the Queensland Index process were the most valuable part of the process. Sharing of perspectives and problems between staff, students, school leaders and community personnel ensures deep learning and understanding that informs review and development. The excitement and passion for wanting to make a difference for all, ensures ownership and commitment to the process. Once professional conversations based on the dimensions of the Index are introduced in schools, the level of reflection and problem solving works across areas of teaching and learning in a myriad of ways.

Case Study
Cotton Tree State High School (pseudonyms used throughout the paper) is situated close to the heart of what is a rapidly developing regional hub in Queensland, Australia. Overall student enrolment is 468 students from a diversity of backgrounds. The school has a special education unit supporting 33 students who have a range of disabilities including intellectual disability, autistic spectrum disorder, physical impairment and speech language impairment. 3.5% of the student population are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and only 3.4% of families indicate that they speak a language other than English in their home (Filipino, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Indian).
The Principal at Cotton Tree State High School was keen to involve students in a process of review and future planning for the school that incorporated the Index for Inclusion. She believed that student views frequently are lost in the business of school improvement and noted that they are rarely thought of as active participants in the Triennial School Review process in Queensland schools. “Students are a vastly under-utilized resource. Not only must they be a part of the solution – sometimes they have better ideas for solutions!”

A traditional Student Council at Cotton Tree State High School was evolving into a strong and committed Student Management Team. This team consisted of approximately 35 students from years 9-12 and was growing to ensure students had an active voice in developing and refining school policies and procedures. The students in the Student Management Team were invited to participate in the review and development process. Students in this group were students from grades 9-12 in the school who expressed interest rather than the popular students or the best in academic learning or sport. The students, in general, represented the diversity in the student population at the school. For example, there were students involved in the Student Management Team who received support for learning difficulties and/or had English as a second language. Unfortunately, there was no representation from students receiving support from the Special Education Unit in this first part of the project, however, students from the Special Education Unit were involved in the second stage of the project using visual narrative techniques to support inclusive school development (Carrington, Allen & Osmolowski, in press). The ongoing conversations and practices associated with the collection and review of data in this case study school can be described as cyclical because collecting and reporting data informs cycles of review, development and data collection. This approach reflects the action research cycles described in the Index for Inclusion (Booth et al., 2000).

The procedures used to empower and involve students in the school review and planning process involved a Student Management Team Forum; Student Management Team Presentation to Triennial School Review Facilitating Committee; and Student Management Team – Focus Group Interview with the Triennial School Review Facilitating Committee. These processes will be described in more detail.

**Student Management Team – Forum.** A set of 10 statements were key to the process and focused on elements of school culture and support for students.

**Statements**

1. In most lessons, students and teachers behave well towards each other.
2. Opinions of students are sought about how the school might be improved.
3. Students are confident that their difficulties will be dealt with effectively.
4. Students share responsibility for helping to overcome the difficulties experienced by some students in lessons.
5. When you first joined this school you were helped to feel settled.
6. Students worry about being bullied at this school.
7. Students are taught to appreciate people who have different backgrounds to their own.
8. Teachers try to help all students do their best.
9. At lunchtime there are places in the school where students can go to be comfortable.
10. When students have problems with their work they ask the teacher for help.

The 10 statements were drawn from The Index for Inclusion dimensions: culture, policy and practice. Thirty-five students from grade 9-12 from the Student Management Team received the letters of consent and the above statements the week before the scheduled meeting and agreed to participate in the study.
Thirty-five students met with the author/researcher in a designated meeting room at the school for three hours. The room was an open space catering for group discussion. Once the school principal conducted introductions and endorsed the value of student involvement in school review and development, she departed to enable free and open discussion between the first author and the student group. Initial protocols were established of value and respect and an expectation that students could contribute without judgment in the process. Students received a sheet of paper with the same ten statements sent in the previous week. Each sheet of paper had a coloured dot in the corner of each page so that five cross-age groups could be formed with seven students in each group. Each group was asked to discuss each statement and vote to record an answer: yes - we agree; we are not sure; or no - we do not agree, on a recording chart for each statement posted on the wall. Students were also asked to record any comments from their discussion on sticky notes that were posted on the recording charts. This process took approximately one hour and produced high quality debate and discussion between members of the five groups. Students in grade 9 had surveyed the grade 8 students in the previous week and were able to contribute these opinions to the meeting. At the completion of this first stage, there were 10 charts illustrating the responses (votes) and comments on each statement. Students were interested to take the time to browse and discuss the groups’ responses. After a short break for morning tea, the group reconvened with the author/researcher facilitating a review and collation of the data. One student acted as scribe in this second stage of the process while other students participated in enthusiastic discussion. Data was recorded in a format that clearly indicated which issues were of concern or strength in the school community. For example, if 4 out of 5 groups voted ‘no- we do not agree with Statement 1: In most lessons, students and teachers behave well towards each other, then this would be recorded as a concern. The Student Management Team analysed the data in collaboration with the author/researcher and decided which issue was a concern and which was a strength. Students were then asked ‘what actions need to occur?’ The focus was not on ‘what needs to be fixed’, rather the focus was to acknowledge and continue the successes and address the issues of concern (see Appendix 1).

Student Management Team Presentation to Triennial School Review Facilitating Committee.

Representatives from the Student Management Team presented the issues and the range of actions from Appendix 1 to the Triennial School Review Facilitating Committee (school principal, teaching staff representatives, students and members of the school community including parents of students attending the school). Staff and parents were impressed with the mature insights and suggested actions proposed by the student group. In many areas, it was noted that students had recorded positive responses to statements but voted to record that there were still concerns and room for improvement. For example, in Statement 2: The opinions of students are sought about how the school might be improved - two groups agreed and three groups disagreed. It was acknowledged that students had been included in choice of a new school uniform but could be involved more in discussion and planning for the school. In Statement 5: When you first joined this school you were helped to feel settled - two groups agreed, two groups said not sure, and one group said no. The recorded comments on the sticky notes indicated that 75% of yr 8s agreed, however it was also noted that it is more difficult if a student moves to the school after grade 8, because friendship groups are formed. The Student Management Team suggested a number of student driven ways to assist the welcoming of new students in different grades. For example, the office could liaise with the Student Management Team in the organization of a welcome committee, buddy, and provide information about processes and policies at the school. Student Management Team representatives who attended the Triennial School Review Facilitating Committee Meeting, were congratulated by school staff and parents for their enthusiastic presentation of issues and ideas for actions. The school principal, teachers and parents were supportive of the recommended actions.
Staff, students and parents were involved in a focus group interview to evaluate their perception of the value of the process of school review and development. The results were very positive and have been reported in detail (Carrington & Holm, 2005). The following excerpt of data illustrates the value of using the Index for Inclusion as a process to assist schools in review and development:

A parent representative from the school described how the Index process had been successful:

“Yes the Index process is great because it provides a framework for allowing people to determine what they want to achieve with the school. I think we’re, perhaps if you like, ahead of the game here at Cotton Tree High, because we’re doing what the Index is suggesting, because it comes from the heart. But it provides a framework, and I think any school that perhaps isn’t as advanced as Cotton Tree High, has the opportunity to look at the Index and then see a pathway forward. I think that’s it great value. Clearly it’s been used in a lot of countries around the world, and it provides a great guide to plan where we would go from here. The value of the information yielded out of it, is wonderful. It just gives you a pathway to adopt choices and determine a way forward. Very, very useful as a framework.”

Conclusion
This case study highlights an example of how the Index for Inclusion was used by the Staff College, Inclusive Education to facilitate reinvigoration of school communities from within. The insights of staff, parents and students helped inform a more community based approach to school review and development to achieving more a more socially just and inclusive school. The processes develop more inclusive ways of working, critical thinking, independent and group judgement and action. They encourage participants to question personal assumptions that structure views about schools, teachers, students, teaching and learning; and the interconnectedness between individuals, education and society. The Student Forum process in the case study demonstrates how students can raise awareness of both systemic and social oppressive forces in schools and provide feedback on positive school cultural characteristics from their own perspectives, therefore leading to a higher level of respect for students and their views about the environment and culture of the school.

References


### Appendix 1

**Student Management Team Forum, Data and Planning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Strength / Concern</th>
<th>Action</th>
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| 1. In most lessons, students and teachers behave well towards each other | Concern | Split gender classes in some subjects.  
We need to learn to interact with each other.  
Seating plan.  
Reinforce teacher student relationship.  
Revisit code of behaviour (Student Management Team to review and rewrite) |
| 2. Opinions of students are sought about how the school might be improved. | Concern | Representatives to go to Teacher Management Meeting to make sure the right information is getting told.  
Participate in a range of meetings – Parents and Citizens and Triennial School Review. |
| 3. Students are confident that their difficulties will be dealt with effectively. | Concern | Students should be made aware of their options, where they can go for help.  
Set time in class for students to raise concerns. |
| 4. Students share responsibility for helping to overcome the difficulties experienced by some students in lessons. | Strength | No action needed here. |
| 5. When you first joined this school you were helped to feel settled. | Concern | After a yr 8 entry students find it harder to find themselves.  
Extend workshop and camps to form stronger support groups and friendships.  
Older grades have friendship building activities.  
Student volunteer to help new students.  
A book of hints made by Student Management Team to give to students in yr 7 (e.g. have information on peer mediation process)  
Buddy system but do not force people.  
Continue peer mediation, raise awareness about what they do – needs publicity about this.  
Give students information book in yr 8.  
Focus on teaching about bullying in yr 8 & 9.  
Acknowledge the issues -bullying still exists in upper school but it is subtle. |
| 6. Students worry about being bullied at this school. | Concern | Treat everyone as equals-needs to be more embedded in teaching.  
School expectation is a strength and needs to continue. |
| 7. Students are taught to appreciate people who have different backgrounds to their own. | Concern and Strength | Included in Action for Statement 1. |
| 8. Teachers try to help all students do their best. | Strength and Concern | More seating (all year levels).  
Yr 12s need a place to eat lunch so young grades do not feel intimidated near tuckshop.  
Most teachers do their best to help.  
Students tease other students for asking questions.  
Sometimes students are embarrassed to ask questions. This needs to be addressed. |