

## **Inclusive Education: A Framework for Reform?**

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I am now coming to the end of a period of secondment from the University of Western Australia to Education Queensland as Deputy Director General of Education and I am entering into a condition of reflexivity. This paper provides me with an opportunity to reflect upon the work that has been going on in the State under the Education Queensland 2010 reform agenda in general, and the rubric of inclusive education in particular. In other words I'm stepping back to consider what we did over the past 2½ years in the area of inclusive education, its impacts and the nature of reform undertaken by 'Third Way' (Giddens, 1998) Labor governments. As I return to a university I also feel the need to consider a new research agenda that reflects extant and emerging dilemmas for inclusive education

My paper is divided into three sections. First I want to offer some general reflections regarding the conceptualization of education reform and its impact upon principles and practices of inclusion. Second I will briefly outline key aspects of the reform process in Queensland. Finally, I will indicate some fundamental challenges that remain.

### **Inclusive Education and Educational Reform**

Despite the fact that 1984 passed without as much as a whimper, there remain salutary lessons from Mr Orwell's text that bore the year as its title, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell, 1949). Considering the nature of a fictional authoritarian State in the year 1984, which for Orwell writing in the dying embers of the 1940s was both distant and foreboding, he described an elaborate ensemble of controls to order the behaviour, manage and shape the thinking and maintain surveillance of the citizenry. Language and the creation of Newspeak are at the epicentre of the technology of control. "Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought?" asks Winston who is Orwell's protagonist in the struggle against the corrosion of language, identity and community.

The themes of discursive control and the reduction of ideas are taken up by Don Watson (2003) in his latest book *Death Sentence: the Decay of Public Language*. A former speechwriter for Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating, Watson talks of the constriction of public debate through this atrophy of public language. Buzzwords, clichés, and impenetrable sentences from which all meaning is wrung are mobilized to dull the civic imagination. Public discussion is reduced to invented words and staccato phrases that assume an agreed meaning.

This default vocabulary (Slee, 2001) is deployed to saturation level. Indeed Watson (2003:15) declares:

This kind of writing is now endemic: it is learned, practised, expected, and demanded.

Value-added, benchmarks, world's best practice, flexible implementation, community partnerships, empowerment, performance management, core accountabilities, collaborative decision making processes, sustainable futures, the stakeholder society, is a random selection from management and government lexicons that have invaded and colonized education discourse. As an extension we enter into a shorthand conversation for those in the know and find ourselves reduced to talking in acronyms – KPIs, TQC and QA.

Drawing examples from government memoranda, speeches, bureaucratic briefings, and reports Watson searches for the penultimate death sentence where language and communication are suffocated by words:

Given the within year and budget time flexibility accorded to the science agencies in the determination of resource allocation from within their global budget, a multi-parameter approach to maintaining the agencies budgets in real terms is not appropriate. (Watson, 2003:194)

When you conflate management discourse into a new educational rhetoric, eduspeak or is it edubabble? Without stipulating meaning, the effect is to jettison serious deliberation. Moreover, we know from linguistic codes, including music, that transposition for new contexts is necessary else we are reduced to banality and distortion.

Contemporary government writing in education talks of futures oriented schooling to guarantee workforce readiness for the knowledge economy. (Sounds like Human Capital Theory for New Times). Unspecified innovation is demanded so that all can participate in, or condemned to, lifelong learning, better still to lifelong e-learning delivery-modes. Effective schools are measured by market responsiveness or industry partnerships. Assessment moves from criterion reference, to a set of rich tasks then ricochets back to the checking off of key deliverables. Empowering students through inclusive education will achieve this.

This is not the ranting of someone incapable of keeping up with changing times. All languages must change to reflect advancement of ideas, new technologies, and cultural hybridity. There remains however a substantive issue around the capacity of emergent official education discourses to apprehend complexity, provide critique and offer nuanced reform. I will briefly consider this trend toward slogan driven policy, spin, in relation to frameworks for reform and inclusive education.

### **Public Discourse and the Narrowing Parameters of Education Reform.**

Throughout the past three decades the education reform agenda has mobilised around certain key themes:

➤ **Managerial Reforms.** Here I refer to a suite of structural reforms such as regionalisation and devolution that often manifest as Giddens' (1994) maxim: *steering at a distance*. Paradoxically the result is a tightening of central control through more strident accountability, governance and reporting frameworks that cover human resources deployment, financial operation, mandated curriculum and syllabuses and inspection of teaching. This reform imperative has spawned a concentration on educational leadership and the professional development of school principals as education's battalion of middle managers.

When commissioned to conduct a longitudinal study of school reform in Queensland, Bob Lingard and his colleagues (Education Queensland, 2001) were asked to determine whether school based management led to improved outcomes for students. They concluded that there was no hypodermic link. In other words student outcomes, academic and social, may be enhanced by a condition of school-based management. However, they reported that more typically school based management distracted school leaders with administrative practice and bureaucratic requirements and diminished the quality of educational leadership. Where schools aimed at the production of professional learning communities pedagogic practice and student outcomes were the beneficiaries.

School effectiveness research, comfortably adopted in managerialist discourse, runs the danger of colluding with government to avoid the question that anchors your research: Effective for whom? (Slee, Weiner, & Tomlinson, 1998). Once again having effective schools is a positive aspiration. The critique isn't against effectiveness per se, it is a call for the stipulation of the preconditions for effectiveness. Is a school effective when it selects students to improve its results profile, push up its league table ranking and increase its market share?

➤ **Marketisation of Schools:** Throughout the past two decades Stephen Ball and his colleagues (Ball, 1994; Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995) have observed and critiqued the marketisation of schooling and the reduction of school organisation and teaching to spectacles of performativity. Advocates for inclusive education argue that the attempt to organise the provision of public education according to the operation of an unencumbered marketplace produces distortions that exacerbates the exclusion of those who have traditionally been marginalised and excluded from schools. The market does not generally reverse exclusionary student trajectories. At the recent 15<sup>th</sup> Congress of Commonwealth Ministers of Education in Edinburgh, Amartya Sen called on work of the Scottish philosopher Adam Smith, whose work is often reduced and misrepresented by his metaphor of the invisible hand, to debunk the Hayekian faith in an efficient and benign market place:

... why it would be wrong to leave this to the market: for a very small expence the public can facilitate, can encourage, and can even impose upon almost the whole body of the people, the necessity of acquiring those most essential parts of education. (Adam Smith, 1776)

The more cynical distorting effect is where regular academic schools shed themselves of disabled students, students from minority identity groups and working class children, and the market seeks to provide niche or boutique schools for the different and dispossessed. This provides great administrative convenience as it relieves the burden of having to form inclusive curriculum, pedagogic practice and institutional arrangements across the main game schools.

Mercantile practices and metaphors (Luke, 2004) dominate where schools are urged to become entrepreneurial in their quest to secure market share through product differentiation, marketing and assuring academic excellence.

➤ **Standards and Choice:** the mantra of standards is naturally very compelling. In effect standards have been defined according to an often narrow and traditional

conception of curriculum replete with cultural overlays. Excellence is evaluated through high stakes testing regimes and sometimes overbearing school inspection regimens. Another effect is that choice is not a concession to affirm and represent diversity. Rather it is a case of the market narrowing to the prototypical academic programme.

Moreover, argues Whitty (2002:64):

A great deal of recent education policy discourse has blamed teachers for poor educational standards. ... These attempts to reform and reposition the teaching profession are, of course, linked to other aspects of education reform, including the sorts of 'quasi-markets' in educational services that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s.

➤ **Pedagogic Practice.** Some time ago Michael Apple (1979) warned of the appropriation of teaching both 'by curriculum and instructional commodities moving teachers to engage in consumer like behaviour' (Luke, 2004). I can report that in Queensland as a result of the work by Lingard, Luke, Mills and Hayes (Education Queensland, 2001) and my colleagues in the Curriculum Directorate and New Basics Unit, there has been a programme to reform teachers' fundamental conceptions and practices of pedagogy in order to increase intellectual demand, promote greater levels of student engagement, teach for diversity and produce supportive classroom environments (Education Queensland, 2001). Luke's earlier observation that this has the capacity to quickly become yet another product for incorporation into work practice is apposite. At another level, my worry is that the programme of reform known as productive pedagogies may become a catechism rather than a set of analytic tools.

➤ **Inclusive Schooling:** Let me relate a recent experience to locate inclusive schooling in the overall lexicon of education reform. When I arrived at Education Queensland I declared that calling the organisational unit that administered schooling for students with disabilities *the low incidence unit* was offensive and that we would thenceforth work under the title of inclusive education. I was warned off this linguistic, I hoped political and conceptual, shift as inclusive education had been attempted before but had resulted in too much conflict.

To my dismay I now find that after two years of a dedicated **Inclusive Education Branch** attempts to disperse people through every section of the organisation so that inclusion becomes everybody's business, produced an outcry from all quarters – disabled people and their allies, special school principals who are self-declared 'inclusionists', but still won't budge on dropping traditional nomenclature and practices, and even outrage from the conservative Queensland Teachers Union who paradoxically opposed both its establishment and its dismantling as an industrial issue.

This may be a powerful vindication of an authentic move towards inclusion across the Queensland education community. Or it may confirm my sense that inclusive education is a convenient and politically fashionable descriptor providing shelter for a range of contradictory intentions. I return to my point about the reductive tendencies of policy discourses and the need for a stipulative writing about inclusion.

### **A framework for reform?**

Inclusive education may provide a powerful framework for reform or it may, through a series of adjustments, mask the protection of the status quo. There comes a time when you have to be clear about what you stand for. I have spoken a great deal about language and theory. Devoid of action, theorizing provides a shield for complacency. Van Morrison puts it nicely: 'I cleaned up my diction and had nothing left to say.'

At this stage it is important to honour the work of Edward Said. In *Travelling Theory Reconsidered* (Said, 2000) he discusses the ways in which '... theories sometimes "travel" to other times and situations, in the process of which they lose some of their original power and rebelliousness.' Lukacs' theory of reification is his exemplar. Picked up by Raymond Williams in Cambridge and Lucien Goldmann in Paris, the theory of reification in its travels through space and time gathered orthodoxy, was "tamed and shed its insurrectionary force". Stretched to adhere to different historical and political conditions its elasticity allowed for subversion of the original intent.

I am inclined to argue likewise that inclusive education shows all the signs of jetlag. At its point of origin, inclusive education was a rebellion against medical and psychological explanations of disability enshrined at the citadel of traditional special education. Following Vic Finkelstein, researchers such as Len Barton, Mike Oliver, Sally Tomlinson, and Tony Booth applied a social model of disability to describe and analyse the conditions of oppression for students described as having special educational needs. Thus commenced the long journey for an oppositional theory. You may have already guessed the question that could well act as a punch-line for this paper: Was it tamed? In other words, is inclusive education domesticated neo-liberal blanchmange that stifles discussion and struggle?

In the UK the policy response to the emergent writing was to argue for reasonable adjustments for students with special educational needs (Warnock, 1978). In the state of Victoria in Australia, the Collins Report (1984) called for the integration of disabled students into regular classrooms. It also commissioned the creation of an array of dividing practices as schools began to reassign students and discover their disabilities. Integration became a simile for assimilation and licensed the normalizing quest of schools. While in the US litigation forged a legislative framework for reform with clauses of conditionality (Slee, 1996) to protect the institutional fabric of schools from something more than incrementalism.

While many in traditional special education took to tentative discussions about most appropriate settings, least restrictive environments, normalization (sic), mainstreaming and reverse integration, opponents read this as variations on a general theme of assimilation and cultural oppression. For example, while disabled students in Queensland still had to argue for placement in schools, their non-disabled colleagues were enrolled.

Research focussing on the broader experience of exclusion of a range of student identities through, racism, patriarchy, socio-economic disadvantage, geographic isolation, and sexuality was enlisted. Consequently exclusion was noted as a common experience and that a theory of disablement and activism would benefit from this broader discussion. In this way feminist theory helped to put the personal into a

political theory of disablement. This convinced writers such as Ballard, Ainscow, Allan, Booth, Slee and Brantlinger that theory making and practice in inclusive education might not be a case of foreclosing on a definition of inclusion but on producing the analytic tools to recognize and dismantle exclusion at its points of manifestation. Establishing inclusive education as a struggle around the politics of identity and difference supported a sense of struggle and rebelliousness.

It seemed as if through the confluence of this work that a movement and its mobilizing theory, though hotly contested internally, was gathering political resonance and influence. Prime Minister Blair established a Social Inclusion Unit in his administration. Inclusive education had staked its claim to a right to schooling for all. The *Index for Inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2002) was distributed to all schools. Inclusive education has established itself in the lexicon of governments internationally. My question remains. Does this signify a reconceptualisation of difference and the politics of exclusion? For many the quest is still a technical struggle to match resources to student deficits in order that they do not disrupt institutional equilibrium. In other words, does this lexical adjustment reflect epistemic changes where people frame disablement as the interplay of unequal power relations or does it remain a case-by-case approach to catering for special needs by attracting additional resources to children in unchanging schools?

Reading Paul Gilroy's *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Colour Line* is instructive. He reflects on the profound transformation in the way the idea of "race" is understood and acted upon. W.E.B. Du Bois identified the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the century of the colour line. This was entirely consistent with, albeit offered as a fundamental protest against, the propagation of raciology. Raciology is a social construction of fabricated scientific calibration and explanation to erect hierarchies of power and oppression:

Historic conditions have disrupted the observance of "race" and created a crisis for raciology, the lore that brings the virtual realities of "race" to dismal and destructive life.

Though the impact of DNA has been to assign raciology to the dustbin of history, there remains a residual legacy:

Raciology has saturated the discourses in which it circulates. It cannot be readily re-signified or de-signified, and to imagine that its dangerous meanings can be easily re-articulated into benign, democratic forms would be to exaggerate the power of critical and oppositional interests.

There are lessons to draw from Gilroy's analysis. First, science is contestable and socially constructed. The epistemic foundations, that is – the way we 'know' of disability and disablement determine institutional responses. Accordingly, disability is mostly configured as a problem for policy to fix through adjustments to enable engagement of disabled, and here many would still read *defective*, people in near normal lives. Less frequently is it seen as part of the mosaic of identities that add to social capital. Second, inclusive policy will not of itself dismantle the apparatus of exclusion nor persuade those whose professional status and livelihood is based on segregative practices that change is necessary.

### **Complicit or Explicit? Towards A Language of Educational Reform**

I worry that in the preceding discussion I exude all of the optimism of a Leonard Cohen album. In truth I am extremely optimistic about education reform and the continuing potential for Inclusive Education to offer resistance to exclusion. Moreover there exists space and scope within policy arenas to establish inclusive educational practice as a framework for educational reform.

Why do I say this? I say it because in my current role as Deputy Director General I have had the privilege of working with numerous schools and communities that have refused to be complicit with disablement and exclusion. They explicate their aspirations and steadily transform structure and practice to engage their students and communities and generate new futures for them. Let me also say that in so doing many have found that they are also re-engaging teachers who had drifted in a professional wasteland.

Having said this, there are some fundamental reforms to be made if we are to counter the deep structure of inequality and exclusion. Identifying the key indicators of educational failure and marginalisation in Australia is relatively straightforward. Social class, Aboriginality, geographic isolation and disability are buffeted within and against the hierarchies and cultures of schooling and represent the key determinants of academic failure (Teese & Polesel, 2003). Theorizing inclusive education and working within school communities to improve the inclusiveness of curriculum, policies, pedagogy and community can only go so far.

Schools in Queensland are funded according to an enrolment driven model. Unlike other jurisdictions, such as Seattle or South Australia, there is no weighting of the school grant to reflect the privilege or disadvantage of the school community. Accordingly some schools can draw heavily from affluent communities to extend the opportunities of their students whilst other schools struggle.

As I stipulate the preconditions for inclusive schooling therefore, I am bound to enter into a discussion about distributive justice (Rawls, 1972). But it is not just about redistribution as Nancy Fraser (1995) and Iris Marion Young (1990) both argue, it falls to the ambit of cultural recognition. Years of research tells us that the funding mechanisms which produce hierarchies of need, exhaustive categories with which to simplify and reduce student identities, and a cargo cult amongst teachers and parents, reinforces the urgent requirement to rethink the resourcing of inclusive educational programmes. Curriculum change, pedagogic reform and teacher development is at the heart of a new framework for reform.

Inclusive educators must be cultural vigilantes determined to expose the ways in which the structures of schooling (e.g., curriculum, instruction and assessment / physical environment and ethos) include and exclude. To this end Education Queensland has worked with Mel Ainscow, Mark Vaughan and Tony Booth to enhance local change.

Here I refer to the necessity to provide evidence of the methodology and benefits at local school level to then use as exemplars, as building blocks for change. Positive experiences and outcomes are difficult for bureaucrats, politicians and conservative unionists to resist.

In Queensland this has been encouraged through the work of the **Staff College – Inclusive Education**. A very useful strategy that they have adopted is to host conferences and seminars where schools are invited to submit a portfolio of reform to entitle them to present. This also attracts a grant for the presentation and support for school programmes. Their work is then publishable as a growing *manifesto for change*.

The reform is not an uncoordinated groundswell. The Minister announced a Seven Point Plan that included the revision of the funding mechanism that presently relies on ascertainment to decide level and category of disability to trigger a specified resource allocation. The result has been addition to education budget deficits devoid of school capacity building – often devoid of programmatic reform.

In order that we move beyond the unproductive battlefield that characterized Queensland's approach to inclusive education, where policy was triggered by headlines and litigation, the Minister established a Taskforce that brought representatives of all constituencies to the table. People have come to know and respect each other and learned the value dialogue as vehicle for reform.

### **Conclusion**

In the final section of the paper I promised a list of outstanding business and challenges for inclusion. The real challenge ahead is to establish a deep realisation that inclusive education is not about disability. It is about educational reconstruction, about school reform and social change. It is, as Richard Sennett (2003) recently advised, a project to change the structure of power and overcome *the scarcity of respect*.

Perhaps then we can answer French social theorist Alain Touraine's (2000) challenge in the title of his most recent text: *Can We Live Together?* His plea is that the condition of social struggle and dislocation generated by difference and inequality will only be addressed through education, and like Bernstein (1996) and Knight (1985), he argues for the reform of schooling so that it becomes an apprenticeship in democracy. This is the heart and head for inclusive education. Inclusive education must be a framework for institutional and cultural reform – a democratic apprenticeship.

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