

## Education on just Terms: Reflections on Pedagogical Practice

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### Abstract

*This paper examines a relationship between justice and the wellbeing of young people. Framed in an educational context it draws on my philosophy, research, and reflections on past and current professional practice. It investigates a range of factors that impact on school engagement and offers a number of recommendations. Schools systems have the dubious honour of being both a protective and risk factor in the lives of the young people that reside in the communities that they were established to serve. A democratic society does not tolerate discriminatory educational practices, embraces diversity and promotes inclusion. Nature and nurture have often 'conspired' in the lives of many young people in a manner that has made them a poor fit when it comes to satisfying the increasing range of demands placed on them in school environments. Demands expand, acceptable standards parameters contract, more children are labelled as unacceptable, more children are excluded. Schools need to resist the temptation to 'sit in judgement' on these children. A school's responsibility lies in the provision of an effective academic, emotional and social climate that is responsive to local community needs and is inclusive by nature and practice.*

### 1. Introduction

A number of films have had an impact on my teaching career. For the purpose of this paper I would like to consider three. *To Sir, with Love* convinced me that I wanted to teach and particularly teach 'tough' kids. Released in 1967 this British film depicted the difficulties and achievements of a black teacher working with predominately white disengaged students from London's East End. *Wake in Fright* generated a certain amount of anxiety as I entered my first year of teachers college. Released in 1971, this Australian/American co-production is brutal and confronting in its portrayal of the fortunes and misfortunes of a genteel British teacher professionally 'trapped' in Australia's outback. I'm not British and probably would not be considered genteel, but soon realized how poignant this depiction was in terms of the life I encountered in my first year of teaching in rural Australia. *The Castle* helped me fine-tune my philosophy on public education. Released in

1997, this low budget Australian production depicted the trials and tribulations faced by a family of loveable rogues as they defended their humble home against compulsory acquisition by developers. All appeared lost at one stage, but then as a result of a chance meeting, the family ends up being supported 'pro bono' by an eminent retired constitutional lawyer and their case is won. The lawyer's address on appeal to the High Court of Australia is a pivotal moment in this film.

He presented a simple argument, but one that was relevant across a number of contexts. He referred to the Australian Constitution and particularly the phrase: 'on just terms'. The lawyer stated: "That's what this is all about, being just."

This paper will focus on developed and English speaking communities that provide publically funded educational facilities that are able to be accessed by children in their compulsory years of schooling. It will address issues associated with the estimated 10-30 per cent of young people [1] that are not fully participating in public education with particular reference to those that would be regarded by their schools as sitting quite comfortably at the extreme end of the challenging spectrum. A global issue, this problem is compounded by the 'U' curve that exists with regard to teacher experience levels within schools.

We have alarming attrition rates amongst our young teachers at one end and then a 'bubble' of teachers in the 50+ age category awaiting retirement at the other. Add national standardized testing and the associated 'league tables' and we have a recipe that can lead to discriminatory practices.

### 2. The Philosophy

Equity generates a range of definitions that ultimately drive the distribution of resources within communities. An equitable distribution of resources should not be defined in terms of simple mathematics where each member receives an equal amount. True equity involves the recognition that our communities do not provide the same opportunities to all of their citizens. Public policy should reflect this acknowledgement and a bias should be employed which directs resources toward those in greatest need of assistance.

Education is about 'being just' and its provision needs to be 'on just terms'. A 'just' educational system is built on foundations formed by egalitarian values. These values support community integrity and reflect its priorities, ambitions and desires. Restrictive and exclusive school practices alienate individuals and are an indicator of a community's level of maturity.

Teachers have a responsibility to the communities they serve to provide the best possible education for the children that are placed in their care. This duty is not contingent on whether children are prepared or able to comply with pedagogical requirements.

Abundant research has shown that there is a correlation between education and health. Research has also suggested that education has a causal impact on mortality [2]. These relationships underpin the primary purpose of maintaining an educational setting that encourages engagement on a number of levels, that being, it saves lives.

### 3. The Teachers

A holistic and sensitive approach is required if teachers are to effectively respond to the seemingly every growing number of hurdles that are confronting many of our young people as they attempt to maintain an engagement with their schooling. Teachers must remove themselves from the equation when it comes to being a risk factor in the lives of their children. In doing so they will evolve into a protective factor that promotes inclusiveness and supports diversity.

A focus on applied methodology will be required as teachers expand upon their understandings of cause-and-effect relationships in school engagement and then develop effective means to apply those understandings to improve attendance and participation rates. The acquisition of knowledge per se is of little value in this context, unless coupled with the means to practically apply it. It is incumbent on teachers to ensure that they explore and develop creative solutions to particularly difficult problems. It is also incumbent on the systems that exist to support teachers to ensure that teachers are adequately trained and mentored during this process.

The construction of a truly inclusive educational system requires a significant injection of honesty and sustained energy that is supported by creative responses which are relevant at a national and local level. A value analysis needs to be undertaken of current professional practices and outmoded and counterproductive elements eliminated. This process must resist the attraction of what some have called the 'Christmas Tree Approach' where educational priorities, initiatives and programs 'hang' from schools like Christmas ornaments, only to be removed when festivities are over. Perception can often be confused with reality and politically motivated rhetoric is often the means employed to convince

communities that 'all is well with their educational world'. Whilst passion drives the pursuit of excellence it is sincerity that forms its foundations and supports its sustainability.

We must accept the fact that for a significant number of children, their families, and their teachers, the school world is an exclusive and insensitive environment that demands compliance. For many, this world promotes undifferentiated and anachronistic curriculum that is supported by strict disciplinary models that are often more about the maintenance of order, image and school comfort zones than the provision of educational services and opportunities for all.

By all accounts, teaching is not getting any easier. Many teachers are 'buckling' under the strain of expanding professional expectations. Teaching 'subjects' has been replaced with teaching 'children' and teachers are now expected to respond to a vast range of variables in the classroom. A child's psychosocial and emotional needs are now part of the mix and need to be addressed as schools endeavour to 'produce' good citizens that are both literate and numerate. This is certainly a tall order and is a particularly difficult proposition when educators and children are faced with a curriculum that is often focused on the cohort that occupies the centre of the ability/behavioural bell curve.

Classroom teachers are the 'cornerstone' of an educational system and the children they work with our most vulnerable and valuable resource. The bureaucracies that surround our teachers, both at local and more distant levels, sometimes fail to fully appreciate this value as they develop their own demeanour and absorb limited resources that appear to be more directed toward self preservation than the provision of services to the very people they were established to support. The hardest and most valuable thing about teaching is teaching itself. The classroom has the potential to lift spirits to glorious levels or to 'burn a hole in the soul' of those that are not adequately equipped to deal with the demands associated with working with a diverse range of individuals and groups.

At a school level, children, families and colleagues place differing demands on teachers and it is expected that their resilience levels are such that all can be accommodated, often simultaneously. Introduce a media that thrives on controversy and politicians that promote 'school league tables' and we have formula that can lead to professional 'burn out'.

Few professions demand so much from their employees. Expertise is expected in management, administration and scholarship. Sound understandings are expected in the social and behavioural sciences. These demands draw heavily on a teacher's psychological, emotional and social capacities as they pursue a pedagogical path that is underpinned by the

formation of strong relationships with all parties concerned.

Schools around the world are losing teachers just at the time when their experience, energy and maturity levels are at their most valuable, both in and out of the classroom. Schools are losing the middle-ground of the staffing mix, the group that often forms the social, emotional and professional 'bridge' between new recruits and old warriors. Our young teachers are often more in tune with the cultural trends adopted and preferred by their students and typically of a similar age to the parents of the children they teach. These attributes support the formation of mutually respectful relationships and understandings between teachers, children and their families. Relationships of this nature are mandatory requirements in any school setting and are particularly helpful when it comes to 'engaging the disengaged'.

Recent Australian studies [3] have shown that over 50 per cent of beginning teachers surveyed did not see themselves teaching after ten years despite nearly half indicating that they had changed careers to start teaching. Teaching no longer appears a vocation for life and this is not only an Australian phenomenon. A 2003 report [4] found that in the U.S., a third of teachers leave the profession within three years and almost half within five years. In Britain, a 2003 survey by the University of Buckingham found that 30 per cent of teachers who left teaching that year had been in the profession less than five years.

There appeared to be common concerns amongst these young educators. It is not surprising that workload and behaviour management topped the list of reason for opting out of the profession. The Australian study found that around 60 per cent of beginning teachers found their pre-service teacher education to be in the poor to satisfactory categories with regard to practicum support and preparation for teaching. Significant concerns were also indicated with regard to working and dealing with difficult parents, difficult colleagues and those students that presented with additional needs associated with disabilities, dysfunctional backgrounds and cultural differences. The study also revealed concerns with professional support during the first three years of teaching. Over 45 per cent of respondents had never been formally mentored or been involved in a formal induction process and over 30 per cent had never been involved in behaviour management professional learning. In over 80 per cent of cases professional support was informally sourced from fellow classroom teachers.

Working across both school and tertiary sectors has enabled me to witness the dilemma that has confronted many of our young educators as they enter the profession. Tertiary life for many did not involve a 'gap' year with students often celebrating their 22<sup>nd</sup> birthdays

in their final year of study. Tertiary life is often full of ideals and promotes philosophical development and professional reflection. 'Teased' by limited and often protected practicum experiences and fuelled by idealism our students often can't wait to enter their chosen profession. These young men and woman, often with limited life experiences, are then confronted with the 'coal face' and soon become acutely aware of their limitations. Long hours, large unruly classes and inconsistent professional support structures can conspire in these formative years to erode confidence and self-esteem. More importantly, teachers may lose enjoyment in teaching as their enthusiasm is 'whittled' away.

Much can be done in a variety of contexts to support teachers during these often confusing and troubled times. A confident and capable workforce sets the tone for the development of an education system that prepared to take on the challenges associated with the provision of fair and universal education.

From a tertiary perspective partnerships could be formed between teacher training institutions and the schools that they provide for. One model that could be considered involves teachers reconnecting with their former tertiary institutions during their first few years of employment. A post-graduate qualification could formalize matters and schools would be asked to release staff for short periods during the second semester of their first and second year of teaching. New graduates would be provided with an opportunity to reflect upon their teaching and learning, to access further mentoring support, to access specialist information and to further develop skills that they recognised as being important in their profession. Contacts would be renewed with both staff and fellow students, experiences and ideas shared and a sense of collegiality fostered. Professional growth would be the focus of this exercise with increased confidence, skill development, further study and continued service the anticipated outcomes.

#### 4. The Students

I have spent the past twelve years teaching in a specialist unit working directly with middle-years students (ages 10-15) who were facing and generating significant problems in their mainstream schools. I have been able to couple this work with tertiary duties that have involved lecturing in education with a focus on challenging behaviours and students at risk.

I am acutely aware of the difficulties that some children can generate in mainstream classrooms and I am extremely sensitive to the needs of teachers and other students who are exposed to these often highly charged events. I appreciate the concerns expressed by classroom teachers as they try and rationalize an approach that appears to commit too many resources to the needs of the few at the expense of the many. That being said, my

allegiance is biased toward that every growing minority of young folk that are 'voting with their feet' when it comes to school engagement.

Many of the young people that I worked with would have been regarded as the most difficult students in their schools. Many had been involved with government services associated with child welfare and juvenile justice. These students often presented with multiple risk factors and indicators that included but were not limited to:

- Poverty
- Child abuse
- Difficult/dysfunctional family circumstances
- Cultural discrimination
- Learning and language difficulties and disorders
- Physical, cognitive and mental impairments, difficulties and disorders
- Multiple school enrolments
- Verbal and physical aggression
- Criminal / anti-social behaviours
- Substance abuse
- Low school participation and attendance levels
- Low confidence
- Poor self-esteem
- Risk taking behaviours

These children were often grappling with the demands imposed upon them by a community that was distant, lacked empathy and utilized a set of measures that appeared arbitrary by nature and often supported a deficit model of children. These children were often confronted by a community that was quick to judge an individual's worth by their ability to conform to a set of standards that had more to do with compliance than the promotion of the intrinsic capabilities. These children were often confused by the apparent 'double standards' they experienced on a daily basis. Confusion usually led to frustration and frustration often led to anger.

The emotional, psychological and physical burdens carried by some of these children were extraordinary and at times I congratulated them for just arriving at school let alone participating at a high level.

Observations of these students in their mainstream schools provided me with a range of discrepancies in the manner that they were often approached and treated by school personnel. Staff demeanour, both in posture and language, was often authoritarian and aggressive by nature and usually elicited a corresponding response.

Tenuous relationships had been forged with some students and were often the product of hard work by individual staff members. Certain teachers became significant adults for these children and were often seen

as one of the few positive and approachable adults in their lives.

Many adults appeared quick to criticise these children in a manner that attacked their very essence. Behaviours were not distinguished from the individual and some children started to believe that they were 'just bad' with some even adopting the personas that had been constructed for them.

Good parenting principles advocate that a child be provided with unconditional love and respect at all times. Unacceptable behaviours need to be addressed but in a manner that makes the child feel that the behaviour is in question not them. This approach promotes confidence in the child as they attempt to alter behaviours armed with a belief that there isn't something intrinsically wrong with them that would prevent self-managed adjustments.

Pervasive by nature, generational poverty and child abuse were often common denominators in my student's lives.

Poverty in Australia is defined in relative terms using the percentage of the population that earns well under average annual earnings. 2009 estimates placed around two million Australians below the poverty line with around 1:8 children living in poverty (500,000). [5]. Absolute poverty is defined as living on \$1.25US per day with current estimates placing over a billion people in that category. A more expansive assessment informs us that many more people are suffering. 2008 figures show that almost half the world's population (over 3 billion) were living on less than \$2.50 US per day with at least 80 per cent of the world's population living on \$10.00 US per day [6].

A countries Indigenous and minority groups are sometimes referred to as the "Fourth World." They experience a lower life expectancy, higher rates of infant mortality, higher unemployment rates, a lower general standard of living, high rates of arrest and imprisonment, plus problems with substance abuse.

Australian Indigenous communities are is not exempt from these disturbing statistics. Life expectancy is some ten to twelve years less than for non-Indigenous Australians. Indigenous people suffer more from preventable diseases, higher unemployment, lower house ownership, lower engagement with education and are more likely to be victims of violence. Australian Indigenous poverty is often absolute and in 2006, 50 percent of all Indigenous children lived in poverty (100,000) [5]

Understandings needed to be supplemented with application and my initial endeavours led me to the work of Dr Ruby Payne [7]. I soon found that Payne's work, particularly her direct involvement with schools, had attracted a growing chorus of criticism. Critics often saw Payne's work as crude, factual inaccurate, not supported by research and harmful in its portrayal of stereotypes

that located the problem with the poor and not with classist policies and practice. I researched Payne's work and managed to find material that I could work with and could include in my teaching.

I focused my attention on the way that my students understood and used language. Payne had utilized the work of Martin Joos [8] in describing how the language registers or styles of the poor were often different to that used in schools. My students and their families were often unable to adjust their manner of speaking to suit the varying social contexts they found themselves in and regularly encountered school personnel who were unable or not prepared to make suitable allowances. A simple analysis of typical discourses during these encounters provided me with enough anecdotal evidence to appreciate why there was often so much frustration and anger associated with these interactions. It also led to a teaching approach that I believed would assist my students.

My students and their families really needed a 'style interpreter' who could translate the jargon and advocate on their behalf. My students also needed extra assistance in basic language proficiency and particularly with verbal skills. These empowering skills would help them to more effectively express their thoughts and feelings as well as better understand the thoughts and feelings of others. The collected works of Dr Pamela Snow from Australia's Monash University were very helpful during this period. Her work on oral language difficulties in young people provided much 'food for thought'.

My limited exposure to Indigenous students had more to do with demographics than difficulties. I did complete a number of Indigenous focused programs and spent some time discussing matters with Indigenous parents and elders. It became apparent to me during these discussions that cultural understanding and respect were bigger issues than resource allocation. Indigenous students, in many ways, approached life differently to their white counterparts and it was these differences that needed to be acknowledged, respected and catered for. Generational 'stories of pain' had accompanied many of these children and a new narrative was required before healing could begin.

A fresh look at Abraham Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs* model [9] provide me with an opportunity to develop a new model that placed student needs in a context of human wants and endeavours. My model proposed that we all aspired to be acknowledged and that our development was strongly influenced by this pursuit. I included attachment and a sense of belonging into the primary survival needs categories. I called the positive and negative influences in our lives 'impactors' and defined them in terms of the level of provision of basic survival needs such as food, water and shelter and well as the secondary survival needs of attachment. I saw these 'impactors' as determining factors in a child's

trajectory toward pro-social and anti-social outcomes. I also felt that individuals and organizations could have a positive or negative influence on this progression at any stage and at any age. This model reflected the reality that was before me. These children wanted to belong to a group, they wanted recognition, they wanted to form alliances and develop a code of practice. The disturbing thing was that they could achieve this more easily with a street gang than with the local sports club.

These children were in the process of building and dismantling a pro-social and anti-social construct of self. What they needed were positive role models in their lives that challenged their perception of their worlds. They needed a 'scaffold' that they could build their hopes on and people that they could trust.

I have defined child abuse in relatively narrow terms as an act by parents or caregivers which endangers a child or young person's physical or emotional health or development. Child abuse types are usually categorized as physical, sexual, emotional and neglect.

Child abuse can have a severe and long lasting impact on children's overall development. Children may suffer from reduced cognitive capacity, language delays, poor social functioning and physical and mental health problems.

There is currently no accurate information about the number of children who are experiencing abuse in Australia. Estimates are based on the number of suspected cases which are actually reported to state authorities. Many cases go unreported due to secrecy, shame, threats and the innocence of victims. In 2007-08 an incident of child abuse was reported in Australia every two minutes. Girls were found to be three times more likely than boys to be the subjects of sexual abuse substantiations. Boys were found to be more likely than girls to suffer from physical abuse and Indigenous children were found to be over seven times more likely to be the subject of substantiated reports than non-Indigenous children [10]. The most disturbing statistic was that disabled infants were the most vulnerable category.

Abused children need teachers that understood them, their histories and appreciate their individual circumstances. They need teachers who are aware of the motivations behind certain behaviours. They need teachers who can implement effective responses and initiatives.

The school behaviours exhibited by abused children often sit on a spectrum of fluid extremes that move from aggression, violence and non-compliance through inattention to over compliance, withdrawal and silence. These children are often behind in their work and can find forming and maintaining peer friendships difficult.

My work in this area was greatly assisted by a resource commissioned by my state's Child Safety Commissioner. *Calmer Classrooms: A guide to working*

with *traumatized children* [11] stressed the importance of understanding of the experiences of abused children. This understanding assisted in the development of compassion, patience and empathy and as such, was seen as a key intervention in itself. It was felt that recovery from trauma was best facilitated in the context of healing relationships.

The guide referred to research that showed that the development and maintenance of a positive attachment to school was a significant protective factor for children. Teachers who understood the effects of trauma on children's education were able to develop teaching practices that led to improved educational outcomes and assisted in the healing and recovery process.

Chronic abuse in childhood was seen as affecting the mind, the developing brain, the body, spirit and relationships with others. Attachment difficulties associated with this and subsequent trauma were also seen to interfere with a child's capacity to regulate emotions, reactions and maintain attention and connection.

Much of what was suggested in this guide could easily have been included in a list of general good teaching principles. Themes and actions for teachers included:

- Being in control of relationships without being controlling
- The tone, rhythm and emotional quality of interactions
- Remaining calm and avoiding power battles
- Teacher emotional arousal and regulation
- Assisting angry children
- The need for structure and consistency
- Connecting the dissociative child
- Differentiated interactions and curriculum
- Individual learning and behaviour plans
- Setting limits for behaviour
- Natural consequences, not punishment
- Time In not Time Out
- Children 'owning' their behaviour
- Children seeking attention
- Parent-carer communication and support

*Calmer Classrooms* also dedicated a section to Australian Indigenous children. These children were seen as having specific educational needs. Cultural differences impacted on teaching and learning styles, with Indigenous people tending to prefer narrative storytelling, with the addition of visual cues, rather than reading and direct processing. These children could also find it difficult to admit to teachers that they were struggling due to sensitivity to feeling shamed for 'getting things wrong'.

Hearing difficulties were common amongst Indigenous children as many had suffered from early

untreated ear infections. These children could therefore be easily accused of inattention. They could also have difficulty with voice modulation and generally needed more time than others to observe and absorb material.

Conventional teacher-parent communication routines and expectations needed to be adapted to suit these children and their families. A culture of shared child rearing meant that biological parents were not always the most significant adults in their lives. With early death being common in indigenous families schools needed to understand that the grieving process and associated funeral attendance meant that children could have a quite disrupted school life. Generational distrust of the education system was a common phenomenon and required the development of creative and inclusive school practices that 'left the door open' for dialogue. Educational communities need to take these and many more cultural differences into consideration as they assist in the construction, refinement and maintenance of a 'safety net' that adequately protects Indigenous children from abuse.

## 5. The Schools

The maintenance of a connection with mainstream schooling is an essential requirement for children.

We have a range of cultures and sub-cultures operating within schools, some open and some hidden. We have the open and dominant socio-academic culture driven by teachers and the official curriculum and then we have the often hidden culture that is driven by the socio-emotional needs of students. The school environment is therefore operating on a range of levels and is significant in terms of the provision of social, emotional and cognitive 'nutrients'. Students learn as much in the playground as they do in the classroom.

The formation of social bonds, affiliations and attachments are survival needs. Young people who are excluded from school are often forced to seek and adopt the culture of the streets. This is the culture they understand, the culture that they can relate to, the culture that shares their concerns and provides a sanctuary. The street curriculum can be quite prescriptive and antisocial by nature and often incorporates extreme risk taking behaviours. Street groups can also be quite disparate in their make-up with school exclusion and the associated resentment acting as primary binding components.

An ecological and holistic view of the classroom promotes understandings by teachers that children are different in a range of ways and that these differences need to be taken into account in the construction of a positive emotional, social and academic climate. Prevention is better than cure and can be initially promoted by sound teaching practices that do not target a specific cohort. Rules, routines, organization,

management, predictability, consistency, fairness, fun, humour, enthusiasm and academic credibility are some of the ingredients that support the development of creative and engaging learning environments.

The learning environment atmosphere impacts on all students and can generate negative responses from those that would otherwise be considered as well adjusted and normally engaged. For those that sit on the periphery, poor practices can lead to exclusion and disengagement.

Eliminating teaching practice as a risk factor to engagement is a mandatory requirement and once achieved allows schools to more easily identify those students that may be at risk. These students regularly present with risk factors that are beyond the school's control but within its sphere of reference. The cohort is often loosely attached to the school environment, either on the premises or within local communities. Once engaged, these students need teachers that can appreciate and cater for their individual additional needs.

Young people do not need to be held 'hostage' by risk factors and schools can play an important role in breaking this connection. Differentiated curriculum at the classroom level will encourage students to engage at their own pace while they focus their attentions on material that is of particular relevance to them. Engagement, not content is the primary concern at this stage with a focus on building cooperative and mutually respectfully relationships. Success, fun and getting along are the creeds and once established will form the foundation that more academic pursuits can be built on.

Approaches of this nature should not be confused with the 'educational palliative care' category of options that have been used by some institutions. Such programming does little more than 'caress' attendance statistics while maintaining a holding pattern until an exclusion age is reached.

## 6. The Families

The disruptive and disengaged students that I have encountered often came from family environments that were also disruptive and disengaged. The only thing predictable about many of these environments was their unpredictability. Parents or carers regularly faced significant life difficulties. Calamity appeared the norm, occasionally interrupted by periods of calmness. Past educational experiences were often not positive and normally involved significant conflict, exclusion and early departure. Generational resentment toward educational authorities was common and it didn't take much for conversations to deteriorate into emotionally charged accusations of teacher misconduct. With teachers blaming families and families blaming teachers, taking steps forward was not easy.

Families of this ilk were often tightly bonded by a mutual resentment toward authority. Children,

irrespective of the abuse inflicted, often held a powerful allegiance to the family network and strongly resisted any notion that could be construed as a criticism. Teachers need to be respectful of the complexities and sensitivities involved in these structures as they attempt to reengage families with education.

Families can be extremely powerful allies for educators and often have their children's best interests at heart. Partnerships forged with families based on mutual respect, a welcoming attitude and common objectives have the potential to disrupt negative pathways for young people.

## 7. Conclusion

There are common themes with the students that I have encountered and in what works in dealings with them. These principles are generic by nature but are of particular relevance with disengaged cohorts.

The provision of educational opportunities 'on just terms' is not a relative concept; it is either provided or it is not. A just community does not favour some at the expense of others. A just community recognises that an equitable distribution of resources involves a bias toward those individuals in greatest need. A just community recognises and promotes the potential of all of its members and understands that deprivation leads to instability, segregation, illness and an erosion of cultural integrity.

A school ethos that promotes inclusive practices needs to present a 'positive body language' in dealings with its community. Students and their families need to feel that their teachers and schools want them to be part of their communities and that every effort will be made to maintain contact and nurture positive relationships. Patience and understanding are virtues within this context as success will often need to be measured in increments not normally associated with quick progress. Sound teaching methodology supported by holistic considerations of student needs assist in the development of formulae that supports educational engagement for marginalized groups.

The development of understandings is a gradual process, takes time, and involves all parties. Knowledge needs to be acquired, programs need to be designed, and action needs to be taken.

The philosophy, considerations and recommendations referred to in this paper are not new nor are they difficult to comprehend. Implementation, on the other hand, will require a cultural shift that may, in its self, be the most difficult hurdle to cross.

A cultural shift toward a just educational society will challenge the very essence of individualism because it will require the establishment of a balance between self-interest on one hand, and the support for a higher social cause on the other.

A glance at human history suggests that, as a species, we have needed to differentiate ourselves from others. This need may have served us well in our evolutionary past as we differentiated, amalgamated and then established pecking orders which helped us form and sustain societies.

One of the negative consequences of this possibly innate requirement is that many of our communities promote and define difference solely in terms of the acquisition of power and money. The establishment of an educationally just society will attack the very essence of what it means to be privileged. As more and more citizens become empowered those amongst us that promote exclusive educational practices will find it harder and harder to distinguish themselves from the masses. Significant resistance will therefore confront those amongst us that aspire to establish a 'level educational playing field'.

A cultural shift will also be required with regard to the relationship between gender and leadership. Women bring a range of valuable attributes to leadership positions which often differ from those which are provided by men. Men in leadership positions often take on a 'command and control' persona which involves a goal-directed, single-minded and quite self-centred approach to policy. They often start from their own point of view which is forcibly 'pushed' through the strength of their position. These men are generally less flexible than women and are often not comfortable with a process that involves rigorous consultation with a range of parties. It appears that they 'just want to get on with it' and not be hampered by an array of perspectives which may challenge their view of the world. A male dominated leadership structure often promotes a hierarchical, competitive and exclusive approach to policy development and implementation

Women in leadership positions tend to welcome the opinions of others during the decision making process. They build a persuasive argument that is founded in extensive dialogue with a range of relevant parties. They want to listen to, reflect upon and consider all points of view in an attempt to make informed decisions. This process provides women with an opportunity to truly appreciate and empathize with the views of all participants and generates an atmosphere where all concerned feel that their views are understood and valued. This process of engagement leads to decisions that are supported on the basis of a convincing argument rather than a dictatorial display of authority.

There is of course room for both approaches in any leadership environment. A pragmatic and straightforward method that involves limited consultation does 'get things going' and avoids the possibility of being bogged down in endless committee meetings that never really achieve a unified response or lead to real outcomes. We should not pursue this path if

expediency is the primary driving force behind change. Expediency, by itself, is seldom a sound bases for decision making but is, in conjunction with a mandate, often used by our politicians as justification for pushing through policy that has had little public input.

Given that any environment would benefit from women taking on leadership roles it seems unjust that women currently only account for around 12 per cent of the world's heads of state.

Tertiary institutions are often regarded as places that nurturer and store a nation's intellectual capital. Scholarship undertaken in these environments feeds into the societies they support and often drives or underpins public policy. These places are also the 'nurseries' of our future leaders and as such should be balanced in their approach to teaching, learning and research.

Women make up a significant and growing proportion of the staff mix in tertiary institutions but many argue that appointments and promotions are not gender neutral [12]. Women are generally underrepresented on key decision-making committees and it is suggested that those that want to 'get ahead' need to adopt a male or androgynous persona [13]. Anecdotal experiences suggest that there are similar concerns amongst women involved in the education of children and adolescents.

Justice is only pursued if injustice is acknowledged. The establishment of a truly just educational community requires that the broader society agree that there is a problem, define the problems parameters and then take responsibility for the formation of responses that will aid resolution.

This simple model generates a plethora of hurdles in application. Cultural, political and historical considerations and biases often come into play during discussions and can and do impede the implementation of equitable structures.

Humanity seems incapable of asserting itself in a manner that eliminates discriminatory practices on a universal scale. What we do see is the continued emergence and development of 'pockets' of innovative best practice. Administrations of all persuasions are generally conservative by nature and prefer to observe the outcomes of these innovative ventures before adapting, developing and adopting their own reforms. Implementing innovations is a politically risky business because it identifies the players and clearly demarcates a group's position. Declaring a position nearly always generates a broad range of opposing perspectives and requires that the promoters construct a persuasive argument that shows a clear improvement in the status quo.

In terms of school education, OECD reports [1] do show us that some countries are doing it better than others. There is a brisk global trade in observations and the exchange of ideas with these countries and /or with

particular programs operating within their boundaries. Beneficial in the most part and often strongly supported by research results, we must also recognise that within these countries there are still significant numbers of young people who lack a sense of belonging to their schools. We must therefore resist the temptation to undertake a 'wholesale transplant' of programs for the sake of expediency. We must accept that within our borders we are doing some things right and then compliment these attributes with local and international research, policy and programming.

A truly just educational community is constructed on foundations that are held together by a nation's attitude toward equality. This ethos leads to the development of a bill of rights that defines equality in absolute, universal and irrefutable terms. Equality is just that and although respectful of cultural and political differences and persuasions does not allow for discriminatory practices at any level. Communities must show their citizens through action that none are more equal than others.

## 8. References

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