Submission to Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System

Dr Bernie Neville & Dr. Brendan Schmidt

It is with respect and concern that this small submission is conveyed to directly address aspects of matter number one in the terms of reference.

'How to most effectively prevent mental illness and suicide, and support people to recover from mental illness, early in life, early in illness and early in episode, through Victoria's mental health system, and in close partnership with other services.'

We believe that the Project outlined in the submission has been able to demonstrate a positive effect on adolescent learners, their general wellbeing and mental health.

The model developed through 'The Advocacy Project' was intended as a preventative systematic model using existing resources in schools.

The papers presented here are self explanatory and need no embellishment. In summary, within the relationships developed through the 'Advocacy' processes we believe that the effective prevention of, and the promotion of healthy brain growth, some mitigation of mental illness may be achieved. This has been demonstrated by the researched outcomes available at https://iirire.wordpress.com/publications/   This is the website of the International Institute for Research into Interpersonal Relationships in Education, a not-for-profit established to engage in research in this field.

The model is school based (*in close partnership with other services)* and could be made available to all students.

We submit that further researched trials of this model or derivations of it might allow further cross agency investigation and models to be developed to assist adolescents to better develop healthy working mental models of their world.

The model requires cultural change as outlined in Appendix one. The intended process of 'Advocacy ' is outlined in Appendix two.

Further resources may be found at https://iirire.wordpress.com/publications/

Jetha and Segalowitz (Jetha, M. K., & Segalowitz, S. J. (2012). *Adolescent brain development: Implications for behavior*. San Diego: Academic Press.) in their Meta analysis of Adolescent growth suggest that 'engagement' is central to healthy psychological growth. It is this engagement that is central to the 'Advocacy processes.

> *However, we can now document that this is not just a function of the time needed to have experiences and learn about how the world works and how other people behave. It is also that experiences during growth affect the healthy unfolding of brain structures. Of course, it is those brain structures that are central to how the child or adolescent interprets the experiences, resulting in a feedback loop that is essential to our understanding of mental health. We have presented evidence of many threats to healthy brain growth, but have also discussed some ways to accentuate positive factors. One such factor that has not yet been related to specifics of brain structure and function, but clearly must be related in some way, is captured by the notion of "engagement." There is a resurgence in this concept in the research literature on adolescence, and it can be summarized by thinking about the benefits of being passionately absorbed in constructive activities. Adolescents who are positively engaged demonstrate higher academic performance, happiness, and general psychological well-being.*
>
> *Such engaged living is associated with fewer psychological maladies, such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse and violent behaviours. As adults, our responsibility for healthy brain growth among our youth is to foster contexts in which such positive processes are enabled and threats are minimized.* (2012: 69)

Suggested Recommendation:

"That researched and proven models of improving 'engagement' in schooling be trialled across schools in a longitudinal study to measure their efficacy in developing healthier psychological outcomes for adolescents and that this research be government funded."

We remain available for further consultation, if required, to assist in this important work of the Royal Commission.

Yours sincerely

Dr Bernie Neville   Dr Brendan Schmidt

Appendix 1

Transforming Schooling through Student Advocacy: The History of an Intervention

Bernie Neville

ABSTRACT

In the 1990s public education in the state of Victoria, Australia, was 'reformed' along neo-liberal lines. One of the consequences of the was that school principals dealt with reduced funding by ceasing to employ staff in ancillary areas such as student welfare. Consequences were a decline in the proportion of students completing their schooling and a decline in school attendance. In response to this situation the Advocacy Project was initiated in 1998, with funding from the Victorian Department of Education and Training. The key element in the program was the allocation to each student of a teacher-advocate with whom they would have a conversation for twenty minutes each fortnight to discuss whatever was assisting or inhibiting their school engagement and learning. Teacher-advocates were trained in basic person-centered counselling skills to ensure that they could listen to these students non-judgmentally and advocate for them rather than attempt to manage their behavior.

Three consecutive research studies explored the impact of the Advocacy model on attendance, retention, academic achievement, the social and psychological wellbeing of students and the utility of a set of electronic tools in supporting the process. It became clear that not only was the model effective in achieving the above objectives, but it made a substantial impact on school culture. Current research, built on the previous findings, is exploring the impact of giving priority to the quality of teacher-student relationships within an Advocacy model.

Keywords: student advocacy, teacher-student relationships, student wellbeing,

school dropout, school culture, electronic curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Until fairly recently, research on school dropout or failure focused on the reasons why individual students do not complete their schooling: e.g. young people drop out or fail because they are not motivated, are not engaged, are not committed, have no self-esteem, have no ambition, have no skills. These factors were then conventionally related to factors outside the school: inadequate family support, poverty, peer pressure, minority status, demands of part-time jobs. More recently it has become apparent that it is as reasonable to talk about 'problem schools' or 'problem classrooms' as 'problem students' (Knight, 1991;

Pearls and Knight, 1999). Poor motivation, low aspirations, low self-esteem and generally negative attitudes may indeed be brought to the school, but they can just as well be produced by school experience (Wehlage and Rutter, 1986). There are clearly a variety of dimensions of school experience which may produce the outcome of poor engagement and the consequent low retention rates, but to focus on conventional factors such as school size, curriculum content, school structure and material resources, is to overlook overwhelming evidence that it is the inability of schools to meet the developmental needs of adolescents which is crucial. An intervention based on a model of student advocacy has been tested as an approach to addressing this problem.

THE CONTEXT

The problem of designing appropriate educational provision for young people belongs within a much larger context, in which many adolescents in both urban and rural communities are seen to be 'at risk'. The label of 'at risk students' is variously interpreted, but in the Australian context it is currently employed to include students whose development into happy and productive members of society is perceived to be problematic. There is an assumption, or at least a hope, that the dangers for these young people and society at large would be minimized if the education system could provide a way of managing the later years of schooling which would engage, motivate and support students, and give them the knowledge and skills to gain immediate employment or proceed to further study.

Two decades ago, it became impossible to avoid the evidence that in public schools in the State of Victoria there was a problem of student engagement in schooling, manifested in declining attendance and retention rates. During the 90s these schools had been dragged, with considerable resistance, into overt acceptance of an economic rationalist ideology. With some significant exceptions, the senior management of secondary schools became accustomed to the notion that the only basis for valuing schooling is its contribution to the GDP. Curriculum came to be valued for its contribution to the employability of students, rarely for its contribution to the intellectual, interpersonal, moral, or aesthetic growth of either students or the wider community. Where once it was conventional, or at least not ridiculous, to talk of students as persons with potential to grow, and the school community as a rich environment for intellectual, emotional and social growth, it now became conventional to adopt a rhetoric which describes students as customers, or even as products fashioned to meet the needs of employers. Unsurprisingly, this rhetoric has not produced measurable benefits in the form of higher university entrance scores, lower exit rates and a smoother transition from schooling to employment. Indeed, the nineties saw schools facing a number of challenges for which they were not prepared. Attendance rates were declining and many students were dropping out of school as soon as they could legally do so; evidence was accumulating that such students were at risk of post-school unemployment and associated mental and social problems; teachers and principals were highly stressed and teacher morale was in serious decline; it was becoming clear that the conventional model of education was not compatible with post-compulsory students' sense of themselves as young adults and that the current

teaching model did not allow schools to take advantage of increasing electronic access to curriculum.

THE ADVOCACY PROJECT

It is in this context that the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DEAT) funded and introduced the Advocacy Program. Advocacy is here understood as supporting or espousing students. It is student-centered purposeful, positive and systematic, grounded in an understanding that adolescents, whether or not their behavior is approved by adults, are seeking to live their lives meaningfully.

The Advocacy model as it was formulated had a number of components:
- Regular one on one conversations between a trusted staff member and a student.
- Establishment of an advocate-student relationship in which students feel free to speak about whatever concerns them.
- Adoption of a student-centered approach which emphasizes listening to the student, rather than instructing, evaluating, advising, directing and managing.
- Discussion of whatever impacts on the student's engagement and learning.
- Confidentiality.
- Ensuring that the student's perspective is acknowledged and understood in any conflicts between the student and a teacher or the school administration
- A set of electronic tools designed to assist students and their advocates to reflect on the factors which impact on their wellbeing and school engagement.
- Access to electronic provision of curriculum.

The aim of the intervention was to take some of the randomness out of satisfying students' needs for safety and belonging, to ensure that the students in most need of a consistently supportive relationship would get it, and that the teachers capable of providing it would be given the support and the training to do so. There was an understanding that, with the increasing accessibility of information on the internet, the teacher's role was shifting from provider of content to provider of a relationship which would support and guide learning. The model was inspired by the theory and practice of Carl Rogers, and training teachers in Rogerian person-centered principles and practice was an integral component of the intervention. It was acknowledged that the notion of meeting with students in order to listen to them empathically and non-judgmentally would be challenging for many teachers who would have difficulty setting aside their conventional role of instructing and managing. Accordingly, in order to avoid role confusion the model included a recommendation that a student's teacher-advocate would not be one of their classroom teachers. Furthermore, the role of advocate was distinguished from that of a mentor who might come from outside the school. It was seen to be important that advocates were staff members, who would have credibility if they needed to advocate for a student who was in trouble with their teacher or the school administration.

THREE STUDIES

The initial research project (1998-2001) was a cooperative venture between the Graduate School of Education at La Trobe University and the Geelong Science and Technology Centre (GSAT). The La Trobe researchers provided professional development for teacher-advocates and principals and designed a set of questionnaires to engage students and support the advocacy relationship. GSAT was responsible for developing these questionnaires as a set of electronic tools.

Funding from the DEAT enabled a pilot study in three schools, focusing on students in the final three years of high school. Evaluation was carried out by an independent consultant who collected both quantitative and qualitative data through questionnaires, interviews and school records. There was the opportunity in one of the schools to match the experimental group with a control group. There was a statistically significant difference between the two groups on attendance, retention and academic achievement as measured by statewide examinations. There was substantial evidence that the program produced the kind of measurable outcomes that the Department and school principals were interested in (Ocean and Caulley 2000; Ocean 2001). There were also reports of increased engagement in school activities, increased student wellbeing and lessened teacher stress. The findings were sufficiently robust to persuade DEAT to fund the program in 12 schools in 2000 and 140 schools in 2001.

In the light of these results, the Victorian Health Commission funded a research project to determine whether implementation of the advocacy model had an impact on the psychological and social wellbeing of children in the Middle School (grades 5-9). This was carried out by the Research Institute for Professional and Vocational Education of Deakin University (2001-2003). Interviews with principals, teachers, parents and students in the five participating schools confirmed that the intervention had a positive impact on the social and emotional wellbeing of students (Henry, Barty, and Tregenza, 2003).

In 2008 funding was granted by the Australian Research Council for a study of usefulness of the electronic database which had been designed for the original Advocacy Project in 1998. The study confirmed both the potential usefulness of the electronic tools and the inability of the ten year old software to meet the expectations of present-day adolescents. The study also provided further evidence supporting the findings of the previous studies. (Hutchison and McCann, 2015).

FINDINGS

The three studies provided evidence that, if properly resourced, an advocacy program conducted within a person-centered framework has the capacity to transform school culture and address the needs of students. This was in spite of the narrow instrumentalist focus presented by the researchers in order to gain the support of politicians, bureaucrats and school

principals who had no interest in transforming school culture. Both empirical and anecdotal evidence from the three completed studies point to the capacity of the program to transform school structures and culture, including teachers' understanding of their role.

- Students involved in the program were shown to be significantly more likely attend school regularly, to remain at school and to gain significantly better academic results than the control group.
- There was a substantial improvement in students' attitudes to schooling, study strategies and goal-setting ability.
- There was evidence of the impact of the program on teachers' sense of their role and the beginnings of a re-definition of teacher identity.
- There was evidence of increased wellbeing in students who were allocated teacher-advocates.
- Although the program was set up in a "learning management" framework, students reported that they were more appreciative of help with *wellbeing* and *welfare* issues than of help with *school and study* issues.

- There was evidence that the model only works when it is properly applied and school structures are adapted to include it. When advocates and students did not meet at least once every three weeks, or advocates did not embrace the student-centered approach, advocates declared advocacy to be pointless and unsatisfying and the students found it unhelpful.
- There was evidence that not all teachers were willing or able to abandon the conventional teacher classroom roles of instruction, management, assessment and direction while in the advocate role.
- There was evidence that teachers require training in basic person-centered counseling skills if they are to operate effectively in the role of advocate and listen non-judgmentally to students. There was resistance from some teachers to the notion that they needed to learn how to talk to adolescents!
- Fully embracing an Advocacy program involves significant structural and cultural change in a school, something which many school principals and their staff found too challenging.
- Schools did not yet have adequate internet access to enable them to shift to a model of education in which students were acknowledged to be independent learners accessing content wherever it was available, while teachers focused on developing supportive relationships with students rather than as the primary providers of information.
- Principals were adamant that to sustain the program schools would have to be given additional funding for teacher release.

DISCUSSION

By 2003 there was sufficient empirical evidence and sufficient support from school principals to justify rolling out the program throughout the public education system in Victoria. A select committee had been established in 2001 to investigate student engagement and learning in the post- compulsory years. The committee recommended the introduction of a system of "Managed Individual Pathways" (MIPS), and recommended, moreover, that the Advocacy program be adopted as a preferred approach to delivering such a system (Kirby, 2001). The funding which had supported Advocacy to this point was re-allocated to support the establishment of MIPS in schools. While a handful of schools already familiar with Advocacy handled the new demands by maintaining and expanding their Advocacy programs, the majority of school principals chose to outsource their MIPS program to consultants, a course of action which made fewer demands on school culture and finances and relieved them of responsibility for outcomes.

Thus, just when the effectiveness of the program had been confirmed and a naïve observer might have imagined it being widely incorporated into school structures, key personnel left the Department of Education and Training, leaving no one with the knowledge and commitment to follow through on the research findings. A handful of schools have been maintaining the program up to the present time but, without targeted funding, their limited resources usually force them to modify it (e.g. by substituting group advocate-student meetings for the one-on-one interactions which have proved more effective).

More recent attempts at getting funding to explore the effectiveness of the advocacy model have run into two main obstacles. Funding institutions tell us that since we already have empirical evidence that the program is effective, there is no point in funding another evaluation. And secondly, philanthropic foundations which might be interested in funding a project targeting disadvantaged youth will not fund a project aimed at changing school structures in a way which is designed to benefit all students.

A NEW PROJECT

The promotion of systematic student advocacy as defined in this project is now in the hands of the International Institute for Research into Interpersonal Relationships in Education, a not-for-profit research-focused institute which sees in the Advocacy model a means of transforming the ways in which schooling can be structured in the 21st century.

The original project was theorized and designed within a person-centered framework in an expectation that the systematic attention given to student-teacher relationships within this framework would have a significant positive impact not only on student engagement in schooling but on the culture of the school. However, for the purposes of obtaining research funding it was presented as a means of improving easily measured outcomes which were of concern to the state education system, that is to say, the attendance, retention and achievement of students in the upper levels of high school. The focus was then expanded to include the psychological and social wellbeing of students at all levels. However, it became

clear to the researchers that they were correct in their expectation that a person-centered intervention in one small aspect of a school's structure and process could be the stimulus for major cultural change. When teachers and students discover the value of genuine relationships within the advocate-student interaction, other things follow: teachers' roles (both in and out of the classroom), students' sense of themselves as independent learners', intra-staff relations and a sense of shared purpose are all impacted by the prioritization of relationship. When we add to this the increasing availability of electronically delivered curriculum, which is threatening the teacher's traditional role as provider of knowledge, we have the basis for a radical transformation in the way education is provided.

The Institute's current research endeavor is an action research project aimed at this radical transformation.

There are eight interlinked components in the model we are promoting:

- **Regular one-on-one student-centered conversations between students and teacher-advocates**, built into the school's program, and supported by professional development. This requires and facilitates
- **Organizational change** within the school, in which
- The principal embraces **transformational leadership**, and which has
- A significant impact on **school culture**, involving change in teachers' roles, the prioritizing of relationship, and changes to the way curriculum is delivered, which become possible through
- The provision of **electronic curriculum,** which facilitates
- The development of students into **independent learners,** the freeing of teachers from much classroom-based teaching and a shift to
- **Project-based learning,** with projects being chosen by the students, monitored and supervised in
- **Regular one-on-one student-centered conversations between students and teacher-advocates.**

Each of these components has been an object of previous research. There is abundant evidence and commentary concerning the impact of positive teacher-student relationships on student social-emotional wellbeing and school achievement (Rogers, 1971; Pianta and Walsh, 1996; Pianta. 1999; Baker, 1999; Cornelius-White, 2012) and the essential contribution that the presence of a caring and trustworthy adult makes to the resilience of at-risk adolescents (Rutter, 1987; Hagerty et al. 1994; Claudet, 1995). The radical move in this project is to integrate all these components in a single intervention – systematic student advocacy. We are initiating a longitudinal study in three disadvantaged schools. All students in year 7 will be allocated advocates in the first year, they will continue in the program in the following years while each new year 7 cohort will join it. The first group of teacher-advocates will be trained in basic counselling and other advocacy skills prior to the commencement of the program, after which we will adopt a "train the trainer" model. All components of the model will be addressed through targeted professional development of principals and teachers.

The methodology adopted for this project is cooperative action research in three independent longitudinal case studies with a duration of seven years. Principals, teachers, students and parents will participate in the collection and discussion of quantitative and qualitative data. The research activity of data checking, which facilitates the school community's reflection on the process and impact of the project and provides feedback to the lead researchers, will be a component of the intervention and is likely to lead in some instances to a modification of the model.

As is conventional in action research, evaluation will be continuous through the documentation of ongoing participant reflective groups. There will be substantial formal evaluation and an associated report in years 4 and 8.

DISCUSSION

The Advocacy Program commits resources to encouraging teachers to do what good teachers have always understood to be necessary and have always tried to do. What is significant about it in the current context is that it represents a re-valuing of the pastoral role of teachers after a period in which it was unfashionable or unpolitic to give it any value at all in public schooling in Australia. Furthermore, it takes a rather different path from traditional approaches to pastoral care in that it focuses specifically and explicitly not on student wellbeing but on assisting students in their learning. Teachers do not approach students to discuss welfare issues, but to help them reflect on how they are managing the business of being at school. As it turns out, once a trusting relationship has been established, students seize the opportunity to talk about welfare issues, but this is very much their own decision. And they make this choice because they believe they have found someone who respects them, someone who is trustworthy, and someone who will not give up on them.

Observations of the fractal nature of organizational structures suggests that the similar dynamics operate at all levels (Wheatley, 1999) This is consistent with our observation that changing the quality of student-teacher interactions through the introduction of Advocacy impacts on the quality of interpersonal interactions throughout the school. This facilitates the maintenance of an effective advocacy program. We suggest that such positive feedback loops will exist between all elements in a school which adequately resources an Advocacy program: between better interpersonal relationships and students taking responsibility for independent learning; between students developing into independent learners and their effective use of electronic curriculum; between the changed classroom behavior of students in an effective advocacy relationship and the 'management culture' of the teaching staff. And so on.

In an era of organizational complexity, transformation is possible.

CONCLUSION

It is not unusual for education researchers to be frustrated by the inability or unwillingness of education bureaucracies either to acknowledge the implications of their findings or (supposing they do acknowledge them) to take appropriate action. The experience of the lead researchers in the three studies outlined above is that even when they have obtained substantial evidence of the positive impact of an intervention, their findings are likely to be trumped by politics, inertia and funding priorities. In the present case, there have been two decades of work within a small research community and a handful of schools to demonstrate the impact of a shift in focus from conventional classroom management to student-teacher relationships. Children and adolescents flourish in an environment characterized by safe, trusting relationships between teachers and students.

Research, both local and international, has delivered this bit of information time and again over the past decades. Unfortunately, however uncomfortable individual teachers in Australia may feel in the current assessment-obsessed, control-obsessed culture of schooling, the State educational systems have largely proved immune to change. We like to think that good research is the key to educational transformation. Let's try again.

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All About Advocacy

Bernie Neville and Brendan Schmidt[1]

The Advocacy Project was devised to address issues of school retention and was based on the following premises:

- In view of the large number of students failing to complete high school it is necessary to acknowledge that schools are not meeting the students' needs rather than assume that they are dropping out because of lack of ability.
- Among the needs identified is the need for a mode of schooling that is compatible with students' sense of themselves as young adults, and the need for schools to develop structures which will enable them to address the elements of students' out-of-school lives which are putting them at risk.
- In view of the increasing electronic access to curriculum, it is considered both possible and desirable to change the role of teachers from that of instructor to that of guide.
- This challenge can only be met through significant cultural change in schools.

Many of the factors involved in the current situation are outside the scope of schools. For instance, even where schools provide students with the skills that make them employable, this achieves little if there are no jobs for them. Nevertheless, it can certainly be argued that current models of schooling, especially in the post-compulsory years, are generally not meeting the needs of "students at risk" and there is some urgency in attempts to develop alternative models.

Furthermore, in a political context where the public funding of education has been substantially reduced and where new schooling initiatives that require a major injection of funds are not likely to be supported, there is an urgent need to develop alternative models

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[1] Paper initially presented at the national conference of the Australian Curriculum Studies Association, Canberra, September 2001.

that are close to cost neutral. Principals may not be willing to allocate scarce resources to supporting a program such as Advocacy unless there are payoffs which enable them save resources elsewhere.

Description of the Advocacy Model

"Advocacy" as understood in this model implies a commitment to supporting, espousing and arguing on behalf of students. The key component is the one-to-one relationship between each student in the program and a teacher/advocate who undertakes specific responsibilities with regard to that student.

Teachers who take on the advocacy role commit themselves to:

- taking responsibility for supporting and monitoring the progress of up to ten students in their school
- becoming aware of these students' personal history, background, educational profile, learning difficulties and preferences
- meeting with each of these students for at least twenty minutes per fortnight to develop a collaborative approach to managing the student's learning
- facilitating the provision of support from community agencies where necessary
- ensuring that the student's perspective is acknowledged and understood in any dispute with the school administration
- helping each student develop a learning plan, drawing on their professional expertise and the range of courses available to the school
- coaching these students in goal setting, and helping each student to develop and articulate life goals and to acknowledge the concrete implications of such goals for their day to day engagement in schooling
- working from the context of the learner and assisting them to solve problems, rather than apply rules.
- following up all absences, and following up students who "drop out" in order to offer assistance and support.
- not giving up on the students for whom they are responsible.

The project involves more than allocating each student a counsellor, mentor, or concerned adult. The impact of these teacher-student relationships is very limited unless there is systemic change within the school to support them. Accordingly, schools involved in this project are expected to commit themselves to

- developing policies and processes to ensure that student engagement is a high priority
- supporting the work of advocates (e.g. through appropriate time allowance)
- developing new ways of delivering support and curriculum programs
- developing individual student profiles, processes and progress of each student.

- developing an engagement of the school with a full range of community agencies
- supporting the changes in teachers' roles and teaching methods required to meet the needs of students
- providing an adequate redistribution of resources to enable the processes of change.
- providing the opportunity for teachers to undertake professional development to develop the skills and understandings required for the role of advocate.
- providing an appropriate range of learning & curriculum experiences.

A third component of the program is the electronic data base and cluster of instruments (The Student Assessment Inventory) provided to assist in student profiling and guidance. These tools are developed by La Trobe University Faculty of education (Bundoora). The database includes electronic questionnaires on learning preferences, attitudes to school discipline, goal setting and planning instruments, literacy and study skills, with feedback to students designed to enable them to develop their strengths and minimise their weaknesses.

This all takes time and resources and cannot realistically be achieved within current structures. Such commitments are not possible without significant change in the way learning is managed in schools, and without significant change in the culture of schools and the roles of teachers. Since there is no prospect of a major injection of funds to support the model, the aim from the beginning has been to make its introduction into schools as close to cost neutral as possible. The model is designed to introduce efficiencies that will balance the costs associated with it.

Ideally the program might work something like this.

The school principal and senior staff attend an information session outlining the program and what it offers. On the basis of this information they consult with staff in their school and find general support for its introduction. Teachers volunteer to be advocates on an understanding that their teaching or other responsibilities will be reduced to give them adequate time to spend in one to one interaction with students. Teachers undertake professional development in relevant areas, including counselling skills, approaches to student empowerment and the use of the electronic data base.

Students are allocated to teacher/advocates. The basis for student selection will differ from school to school. In some schools all students at a particular grade level will get advocates. In others a particular group of students perceived to be "at risk" will be selected for the program. (Few schools currently have the resources to enable every post compulsory student to have an advocate.) Advocates may be responsible for as few as one or as many as

ten students. Care needs to be taken with initial selection of the student cohort as it can have ramifications for future development.

Advocates will meet the students individually at least once every two weeks for at least fifteen minutes. During this time they will focus primarily on helping the students manage their learning. This is likely to involve assisting them with goal-setting and problem-solving, introducing them to the questionnaires on the archemeter and helping them interpret the feedback. The essence of the interaction is that the advocate is a caring adult who listens with respect to what the student has to say, is committed to the best interests of the student and provides support wherever it is necessary.

Consequently, the advocate role may extend to following up a student whose attendance is poor, staying in touch with students who leave school, connecting them with other agencies (e.g. welfare) if this appears necessary, supporting them in finding a job if they decide to leave school, developing a productive relationship with a student's parents, intervening on their behalf with other teachers, ensuring that a student's case is properly heard in disputes with other teachers or the school administration. .

There is no way that a teacher/advocate can take on this commitment without substantial support. No matter how successful the program is, it will not survive if it simply adds to the workload of the teachers who make this commitment. Accordingly, the ideal situation that we are describing will have certain other elements.

The school culture will be one in which senior students are treated in a way which is compatible with their sense of themselves as young adults. They will feel that they are making meaningful choices rather than being controlled by a group of adults who are more interested in maintaining order than in meeting their needs. The school culture will be one in which human rights are respected, including the right to privacy and the right to respectful and non-discriminatory treatment.

The school will develop structures that encourage students to take responsibility for their learning, and the resources to allow it. In particular, the school will provide electronic support for the curriculum and give students adequate access to it. A reduction of face to face teaching time may give teachers time for advocacy, where they add the role of learning guide to that of information-giver.

As long as we are talking about the ideal, we can add that the impact of advocacy will be to give students a sense that they are valued, help them to find a purpose in what they are doing and engage them more fully in their learning. The effect of all this is that the classroom teaching of these students becomes both easier and more effective, teachers find their work more engaging and more satisfying, and the school community can cease to expend great amounts of energy dealing with the issue of control.

While this is presented here as ideal, it is not a fantasy. All of these effects have been observed in schools that implemented the program. However, it is not always like this. It is apparent from the formal evaluation of the program and from conversations with principals and advocates, that advocacy only works when it is adequately implemented. In some cases a school principal has introduced the program simply because the money was available, without acknowledgement of a need to change school structures and culture. In some cases the principal has become enthusiastic about the model and introduced it into his or her school without any consultation with the staff who will be affected. In some cases inappropriate or reluctant people have been given the role of advocate. In some cases advocates have not been given the opportunity to develop the skills they need, or there has been no recognition that any specific skills are necessary. In some cases advocates have found themselves too busy to give individual talking time to their students. Since the essence of the approach is to be found in the regular face to face meeting between the student and a concerned, caring and skilled adult, this somewhat undermines the pretence that the program is being implemented.

The Student Assessment Inventory

The SAI is an electronic data base which has been developed to support the work of advocates. It includes instruments of three kinds.

The first group of instruments (student profiling) is designed to allow the student to enter information about themselves to be shared with their advocate. They are invited to key in information about their interests and hobbies, their employment, their domestic circumstances, the conditions under which they study, their estimate of how well they are coping with each subject at school, and so on. The data in these instruments is protected by the student's password, as is the data on all instruments in the SAI.

While not every student is interested in giving these details, many seize this opportunity to paint a self-portrait. One of the features of this sort of technology is that young people are often happy to enter this data on screen and discuss it with their advocate, whereas if the advocate were to ask the same questions in a face to face interview - especially early in the student-advocate relationship - it would be perceived as an interrogation and consequently resisted. Many advocates have found this a good way to establish a positive relationship with a student, sitting beside him or her in front of a computer screen while the student enters this information and comments on it. Many have also found that students take the opportunity to give information that they might get no other chance to impart, and discover that the student who seems to be sailing easily through school is effectively homeless or has a parent who is seriously ill.

A second group of instruments is designed to assist students in goal -setting, in career choice and in developing an identity as a competent person. It is a common observation, backed by research, that students designated as "at risk" are likely also to be

students who have little sense of purpose in being at school, little ability to set goals for themselves and little sense of themselves as competent people. With the assistance of the advocate, the student is able to use these instruments in developing a sense that what they are doing at school can take them somewhere they want to go, and an appreciation that pursuing long-term goals may involve changing their current approach to their studies. With the aid of these instruments the advocate can also help them become aware of the skills they exercise from day to day, in and out of school, which only need a little re-framing to appear as the competencies valued by employers.

A third group of instruments consists of questionnaires designed to explore the young person's experience of being a student. There is, for instance a questionnaire that gives the student a profile of him or herself as a learner with regard to learning styles, intelligences and personality type. There is also a questionnaire on the application of effective study habits in each of the student's school subjects. These questionnaires give immediate explanatory feedback to students to assist them in interpreting the results and making choices about their way of studying.

There are also questionnaires to assist student and advocate to explore the way the students copes with the pressure of the final years of school, their readiness to take responsibility for their actions, their perception of school and attitudes to it.

A final group of questionnaires deals with literacy and numeracy. While they have the form of diagnostic tests, their purpose is to help students who have problems in literacy or numeracy to understand where these problems lie and what they might do about them.

The SAI is not central to the Advocacy model, but many advocates have found it a very useful resource. Since schools are now expected to be aware of the needs, abilities and goals of each student, adjust their programs accordingly and map each student's progress through the final years of schooling into employment or further education, it provides a very useful resource.

Does it work?

The program was thoroughly evaluated in 1999 and 2000 in the post compulsory years and 2003 when piloted in the middle years of schooling.[i]

Students involved in the program were shown to be significantly more likely to remain at school and to gain significantly better VCE results than the control group. The associated qualitative evaluation showed a substantial improvement in students' attitudes to schooling, study strategies and goal-setting ability. It also provided evidence of the impact of the program on teachers' sense of their role and the beginnings of a re-definition of teacher identity in a context of the increasing independence of senior students and the provision of electronically delivered curriculum.

The evaluation carried out in 1999 led to refinement of the model and wider implementation in 2000.

Both formative and summative evaluation were carried out again in 2000, with a view to developing a model for possible state-wide implementation. Through ongoing feedback from schools on the problems encountered and the development of effective processes, it was hoped that a model could be developed which could deliver the objectives of the project without an immense injection of funds. This expectation was based on the notion that implementation of the model would generate radical change in teachers' roles, student attitudes and school culture which would deliver efficiencies sufficient to cover the resource implications of releasing teachers for advocacy. The availability of online curriculum is a key element in this scenario.

The 2000 evaluation confirmed the findings for the previous year. A significant majority of students say advocacy has given them personal support, that it has given them both more confidence and an increased ability to goal-set, and that it has raised their marks. Where students were randomly allocated to advocacy and non-advocacy groups to allow statistical comparison, it was found that students in the advocacy group had significantly lower exit rates and significantly higher examination scores, even after one semester.

The main focus of the evaluation was to identify more precisely what advocates *do* to raise achievement and participation. The evaluator found that the things advocates actually do with students can be categorised as help with *well being* issues, help with *school and study* issues, and help with *welfare* issues. It is help in these three areas that raises participation and achievement rates for students in the advocacy program. Although the program was set up in a "learning management" framework, it appears that students are more aware and more appreciative of help with *well being* and *welfare.* Furthermore, the findings suggest that attention to *well being* and *welfare* issues has to precede attention to *school and study* issues. Intervention in learning is not effective while a student's welfare or well being are not secure. The message from the students was that advocates were inclined to give them rather more support than they needed regarding study and less support than they needed regarding welfare [ii].

The evaluation has confirmed the observation that the model only works when it is properly applied. When advocates and students did not meet at least once every three weeks advocates declared advocacy to be pointless and unsatisfying and the students found it unhelpful.

It is clear from their responses to the evaluation questionnaires that students got rather more from advocacy than they expected to get. It is also clear that they have certain expectations of teachers who take on this role. They want a commitment to equality, fairness, tolerance, friendliness, being a good listener, giving help when it is needed, respecting confidentiality, being non-judgemental and taking students seriously when they

have problems. It is also clear that some advocates do not meet students' criteria in these regards.[iii]

Based on the evidence from the post-compulsory years evaluations it was decided to pilot the program in middle years of schooling across Primary, Secondary and p-12 schools. The 2003 evaluation discovered similar findings to the post compulsory program outlined above. It also found that the one-to-one aspect of the relationship was particularly important and that the program was less likely to 'work' if undertaken in home groups. In the earlier years it was identified that students with learning difficulties could be helped in a targeted manner if incorporated into an Advocacy program which adopted an holistic approach to learning. Students suggested that the program be available to all students rather than voluntary or targeted and reported that their time with the advocate was beneficial. It was also evident that many students showed signs of overcoming difficulties within a few months of 'connecting'.

Improving Advocacy

The Advocacy program is framed as an ongoing action research project. Feedback from advocates, principals, students and academics involved in professional development is taken seriously with a view to improving the model and making it both effective and user-friendly. The formal evaluation has provided useful information on both outcomes and process. In addition, there is a great deal of informal and anecdotal information that can help contribute to the ongoing shaping of the program. From this feedback we have learned a great deal about what works, what doesn't work, and what needs to be added.

Implementation

If the Advocacy is to have optimum impact it needs to be introduced from the beginning of the school year, before the establishment of structures and routines which may get in the way of it. Advocacy needs to be structured into the school's program, not added on as an option for a few enthusiasts. Even if only a minority of teachers take on the advocate role in the first instance, the program needs to be accepted and supported by the staff as a whole.

Organization

For the program to be effective, teachers need the time to be able to commit at least ten minutes per week per student. Attempts to use teachers' time more efficiently by meeting students in groups appear to be less successful. The program appears to work best where advocates and students meet regularly by appointment, if the student is willing, and otherwise by informal and casual contact.

Selection of Advocates

Advocates should be volunteers. The model seems to work best when one or more members of the senior management team take on the advocate role. This enables them to

understand how the model works in practice and to be aware of structures and attitudes in the school that are inhibiting its impact.

Students need to have a degree of choice in the allocation of advocates. While it is unlikely that absolute freedom of choice will be possible, there will be a number of students with legitimate preferences regarding gender and ethnicity. There should be an understanding that if a student wishes to terminate the relationship with a particular advocate they may do so without having to justify their request.

As a rule, it is preferable that teachers not advocate for students whom they teach, as the teacher role and advocacy role differ in significant respects. A number of teachers who have attempted to combine the roles report that this is difficult both for themselves and for their students. Level coordinators responsible for discipline should not as a rule be advocates because of conflict between disciplinary and support roles. The advocate must be free to speak for the particular student without conflict with a responsibility for controlling the student's behavior, and those responsible for discipline must accept this as an essential element in the advocacy role.

Selection of Students

The program appears to be advantageous for the majority of students, not just those who may be categorised as "at risk". Schools do not currently have the resources to provide an advocate for every post-compulsory student. Some schools select the students who seem most likely to benefit from the program. Some schools randomly select students in the first year so that they can test the effectiveness of the program by comparing these students with a parallel group. Some provide advocates for all students in year ten or eleven, and find that if a productive relationship is built up through advocacy during that year, an informal and unstructured relationship will suffice in the following years; the student who needs help will be ready to ask for it and have some one to ask.

Professional Development

Teachers taking on the advocacy role for the first time value professional development, especially that offered by experienced advocates. It is important that means be found to provide this sort of professional development for new advocates. It is not desirable to thrust new advocates into the role without preliminary training.

Advocacy demands different skills from those conventionally associated with teaching. In particular, advocates need to be able to deal with students empathically and non-judgmentally. Teachers need access to training in counselling skills (including grief and careers counselling). They also need training in welfare skills and in assisting individual students to improve their study skills and habits. It is unlikely that advocates will make optimal use of the instruments on the SAI without some training.

Using the SAI

Up till now, only a minority of advocates and their students have made extensive use of the questionnaires, so that the SAI has in fact remained fairly peripheral to the program. Feedback from advocates ranges from highly enthusiastic to dismissive. This is partly an effect of early problems with access, which led some advocates to conclude that it was not worth the trouble. Access and security problems have now been largely eliminated, but advocates report that in the brief time that they have with their students, they find it more fruitful to devote themselves to listening to students and building a relationship. There has been a problem with the literacy level required for students to use the questionnaires without assistance, and this still needs to be addressed. Furthermore, schools have to be prepared to commit computer technician time to supporting advocates and students in the use of the electronic data base.

While most of the questionnaires offer immediate feedback to students and advocates to assist them in interpreting the results and assessing their implications, this feature needs to be developed further.

From student and advocate feedback it appears that the goal-setting instrument, the student preference questionnaire (on learning styles) and the student profiling instrument have been found most useful to date. However, some of the instruments are as yet untested. One specific gap in the panel of instruments has been singled out by advocates. Since a large majority of the students want career advice from their advocates, ways to support this through an electronic questionnaire need to be developed.

School culture

There is evidence that the implementation of the Advocacy Program has stimulated cultural change in some schools. Students in a productive advocacy relationship present less problems in a management sense and cause less stress for teachers. This in turn influences the teachers' approach to students. In schools that have supported a significant number of advocates, teachers report change in the way they see their teaching role. There is little doubt that the program has the capacity to significantly change the culture of schools and the teacher's role. How this can best be supported systemically has yet to be determined.

Problems with Advocacy

As we might expect, there have been problems in the introduction of the program into schools. Some of these have been associated with the fact that the availability of supporting funding has been confirmed each year too late for schools to make the structural changes necessary to introduce the program at the beginning of the school year. With the present guarantee of funding to support managed individual pathways for three years, this particular problem is on the way to solution. Principals now employing the Advocacy model for the second or third year have recognized the importance of fully incorporating it in the school's systems and processes from the beginning of the school year.

There is, of course, a resource problem. Within conventional school structures the provision of an advocate for each student in a ratio of one to ten might involve making all teachers advocates and giving each teacher two hours time release each week. This is not currently possible and probably not desirable. However, there is enough evidence already that the change in students' attitudes to school and approach to learning which comes with the systematic practice of advocacy is sufficient to justify reducing the time students and teachers spend in classrooms and increasing the time teachers spend in guidance and support and the time students spend in activities of their own choice.

Unless the program is accepted, understood and owned by the teaching and administrative staff of the school, problems are likely to be encountered with other staff. Student welfare coordinators, school counsellors or chaplains (where they exist) and careers teachers may see the program as undermining their positions. This is not the intention of the program. If there is special expertise in the school, advocates are advised to direct students to it. Anecdotal evidence suggests that students are inclined to discuss "middle-size" problems with their advocates— problems which are too personal to discuss with their teacher but not important enough to warrant an appointment with a counsellor or student welfare coordinator. Often students will raise a welfare or career issue with their advocate because of the relationship they have developed, but without the expectation that the advocate will be able to solve it for them. The specialist roles are still required.

Unless they understand the place of advocacy in the school, teachers who are not in the role of advocate may object to students leaving their class for appointments, and may resent the fact that advocates are released from teaching or yard duty. It is important that advocacy be seen as a whole school program from which every one benefits, but there is resistance to this notion in some schools.

While advocacy was designed in the first place for those most in need of it, there is a danger in having a group of students designated as "advocacy" students. In schools where students are selected for advocacy because they are failing academically or have some other perceived need for it, allocation of an advocate is likely to get a negative connotation. Instead of appreciating the opportunity for assistance, students resent being labeled as a "problem". The criteria for selection need to be thought through in the context of the school's circumstances and culture. The program has been implemented successfully with "at risk" students, gifted students, randomly selected students and all students from a particular grade level. It has been productive with students from all ethnicities represented in the schools.[iv] However, whatever the selection criteria, it needs to be implemented with serious consideration of the way it will be viewed both by the students selected and those who are not.

Advocates may be unsuitable for the role given them. If they are inclined to tell students what to do rather than listen to them, if they are unable to restrain their urge to tell

students where they are going wrong, if they are defensive of their authority, if they are unable to give a student's needs priority for fifteen minutes, if they have poor interpersonal skills, the advocacy relationship is not likely to be satisfying or productive either for them or for their students. The evaluation in 1999 and 2000 has given us some indication of what sort of teachers are likely to find the advocacy role effective and satisfying.

It appears that teacher/advocates who are young, female and/or NESB and are also aware of a need to increase their skills are more likely to be enthusiastic about advocacy (and have more satisfied students) than those who are middle -aged, male and/or Anglo and satisfied that they have all the skills required!

In the implementation of the program some schools have anticipated problems in persuading parents of its value, especially where it involved regularly taking students out of class. However, schools report no such problem. When parents are asked for signed permission to include their children in the advocacy program they do so with appreciation of what they see as the school's extra effort to assist their children. There has been little or no evidence of either objection or suspicion on the part of parents.

Why Advocacy

Until fairly recently research on school dropout or failure focused on the reasons why individual students do not complete their schooling: e.g. young people drop out or fail because they are not motivated, are not committed, have no self-esteem, have no ambition, have no skills. These factors were then conventionally related to factors outside the school: inadequate family support, poverty, peer pressure, minority status, demands of part-time jobs. More recently it has become apparent that it is as reasonable to talk about "problem schools" or "problem classrooms" as "problem students".[v] Poor motivation, low aspirations, low self esteem and generally negative attitudes may indeed be brought to the school, but they can just as well be produced by school experience.[vi] There are clearly a variety of dimensions of school experience which may produce the outcome of low retention rates, but to focus on conventional factors such as school size, curriculum content, school structure and material resources, is to overlook overwhelming evidence that it is the inability of schools to meet the developmental needs of adolescents which is crucial.

The problem of designing appropriate educational provision for young people in the 15-19 yr age group belongs within a much larger context, in which many adolescents in both urban and rural communities are seen to be "at risk". The label of "at risk students" is variously interpreted, but is currently employed to include students whose development into happy and productive members of Australian society is perceived to be problematic because of disability, homelessness, drug taking, exposure to sexual abuse, poverty, poor motivation and achievement in schooling, exposure to health risks, criminal activity, and lack of employment opportunity.

There is an assumption, or at least a hope, that the dangers for these young people and society at large would be minimized if the education system could provide a way of managing the later years of schooling which could engage, motivate and support students, and give them the knowledge and skills to gain immediate employment or proceed to further study.

The Advocacy Program provides a tested approach to the improved tracking of students through and between post-compulsory education and training and employment. It is designed to meet the Government's aims for a more student-centred, cross-sectoral, collaborative approach to post- compulsory education and training.

The linking of the Advocacy Project with managed individual pathways accepts the official view that "at risk" students can be most practically be identified in terms of school retention, and that successful programs for "at risk" students are those which keep post compulsory students at school for an extra year or two, or assist them to move from school to a job. However, this instrumental view of Advocacy as a means to keep students at school, get them better scores in their VCE, or help the shift from schooling to employment is only one view. It is good that Advocacy "works" in this instrumental sense, and the evidence that it works has enabled the expansion of the program. However, there is more to Advocacy than this.

During the nineties the State education system of Victoria was dragged, with considerable resistance, into overt acceptance of an economic rationalist ideology. With some significant exceptions, the senior management of secondary schools has become accustomed to the notion that the only basis for valuing schooling is its contribution to the GDP. Curriculum came to be valued for its contribution to the employability of students, rarely for its contribution to the intellectual, interpersonal, moral, or aesthetic growth of either students or the wider community. Where once it was conventional, or at least not ridiculous, to talk of students as persons with potential to grow, and the school community as a rich environment for intellectual, emotional and social growth, it became conventional to adopt a rhetoric which describes students as customers, or even as products fashioned to meet the needs of employers. In such a context, the appeal of Advocacy to school principals comes primarily from evidence that adoption of the program will produce measurable benefits in the form of higher university entrance scores, lower exit rates and a smoother transition from schooling to employment, and will enable them to demonstrate accountability within this framework. It is in this context that the program was introduced and developed, and these outcomes of the program are certainly to be valued. However, these outcomes are not the only outcomes to be sought through Advocacy, and the sterile ideology that has driven Australian schooling in its recent unfortunate history is not the only ideology that can justify a society's commitment to education and its expenditure on schools.

Whatever our politicians might think, teachers do not get up each morning filled with the desire to contribute to Australia's economy by fashioning skilled and compliant workers for industry. They have lots of different ways of explaining why they stay in such a difficult and under-valued profession, and we do not need to list them here. Rather, what we want to do is point briefly to a broader view of education. There are other aims of education and other arguments for introducing some form of student advocacy.

We might argue, for instance, that the primary function of schools is the education of aware and engaged citizens of a democratic society. If the message of schools is that the more powerful members of a society have the right to command the less powerful members, irrespective of whether the latter believe it is in their best interests, they will carry this message into their adult lives. Unless the students in our schools experience democratic processes in their schooling and come to take responsibility for the impact of their actions in the community to which they belong, they are unlikely to develop the attitudes and skills required of members of a mature democratic society. The Advocacy Program is designed to educate students in democracy. It is built on the notion that mature democratic societies and organizations are founded on mutual respect. It acknowledges the reality that Australian teachers actually have little coercive or positional power over students and that the attempt to exercise it is often counter-productive. In a democratic model of education the good teacher-student relationship and the good learning environment are defined in terms of power distribution and the recognition of student rights – freedom, privacy, choice, due process and participation in decision-making.[vii] In implementing the Advocacy Program, teachers and students engage in a collaborative exercise to pursue the best interests of the students. The experience of a reliable relationship with a teacher who is genuinely interested in their well being, listens with respect to their concerns, understands them well enough to offer appropriate advice when it is asked for and is willing to hand them power over decisions which affect them, enables them to approach their schooling as a cooperative venture in which they can choose to be engaged without the need to preserve their adolescent identity through resistance.

We might follow William Glasser in arguing that we each distinguish between a "quality world" (which comprises the core group of people who satisfy our needs for belonging, power, freedom and fun) from the rest of humanity (which is either irrelevant to our need-satisfaction or blocks such satisfaction). Glasser suggests that if a teacher and the subject she teaches belong within an adolescent's quality world he will choose to engage with the subject and learn. If not, he will quite rationally choose not to learn. The Advocacy Program represents a systematic approach to satisfying the needs of "at risk" students by providing a safe environment where teachers demonstrate that they care for students, where coercion is eliminated and where students are given the opportunity to choose.[viii]

We might follow Carl Rogers in arguing that the quality of relationships between teachers and students is critically important for students' learning. Good teacher - student

relationships have a rather wider effect than simply making schools nicer places to be. We have strong grounds for arguing that they make a critical difference to students' academic learning, self-image and social adjustment. Or we can point to the extensive theory and research within cognitive-behavioral psychology on the impact of an emotionally supportive environment o~ cognitive processing.[ix] Research on the interaction between the human emotional system and cognitive system has led to the conclusion that "facilitative" or "supportive" environments, which produce "positive affect", are critically important for cognitive processing.[x] One of the well-documented effects of good teacher-student relationships is the perception by students that school is a safe place to be.[xi] The Advocacy Program acknowledges the impact of the teacher's friendliness and support on students learning and the survival of "at risk" students[xii] and sets out to make the school a safe place to learn.

We could argue from the research on belongingness that students' need to belong has to be satisfied in the school environment if the school is to have a positive impact on their learning and development. In her review of the literature on belongingness, Karen Osterman points to the evidence that the need to belong is associated with differences in cognitive processes, emotional patterns, behavior, health, and well being.[xiii] There is strong evidence that the development of a positive sense of self and positive social attitudes, the establishment of academic attitudes and motives and the experience of successful participation in school processes as well as academic achievement are all directly related to belongingness.

Many, hopefully most, students have relationships with teachers and other students that enable them to experience the school as a place where they comfortably belong. Unfortunately there is a minority who have no such experience. One of the strengths of a successful Advocacy program is that such students will have one person in the school who will take on as a professional responsibility the task of establishing a personal connection with them.

We might argue further that anti-social, aggressive and self-destructive behavior among children and adolescents has its source in stress, and that an important way in which schools can respond to this problem is to meet their real needs, among which are a safe environment, caring adults and appropriate opportunities for learning. We can point to research in this framework that demonstrates the importance of developing support systems that provide young people with a sense of connectedness, safety and capacity for initiative[xiv], and with relationships with caring adults.[xv] There is strong research evidence that the willingness of students to work for academic goals and to support each other in doing so depends on their perception that teachers care about them as persons and as students.[xvi]

The Advocacy Program is an attempt to take some of the randomness out of satisfying students' needs for safety and affirmation. Many students are lucky in the quality

of the relationships offered them by their teachers. Others are not. Incorporating Advocacy into a school's processes and structures is designed to ensure that the students in most need of a consistently supportive relationship will get it, and that the teachers most capable of providing it are given the support (and, where necessary, the training) to do so.

We might argue that the "outcomes" approach to determining the impact of education is based on a simplistic cause-and-effect paradigm that has been under challenge for more than a century. Such an approach may have produced productive members of society in the industrial age, but the twenty-first century is likely to expect rather more of the students in our schools than was expected of their parents.

Schools are still constrained by an ideology that gives priority to what information and skills exiting students take with them from school to work. What ought to get more attention in a world where "change is the only constant" is how they create a world through processing their experience. Although Newton's clockwork universe has long ago been replaced by a universe characterised by chaos and complexity, no longer built of "things" but of relationships, schools are still expected to treat knowledge as a 'thing" to be transmitted, possessed, measured and traded for a prosperous life. We should not be surprised to find many young people reluctant to accept this nonsense. They are, however, interested in experience and apt to be engaged by an education that takes experience seriously.

The Advocacy program introduces an invitation for regular reflection with a skilled and caring adult on the personal experience of learning and the meaning of this experience for one's life. The advocate's ability to assist the students in reflection and goal-setting, in developing awareness of the ways they learn best and the ways they resist learning, makes a significant contribution to the adolescent's identity-formation.

We could justify committing resources to Advocacy on the basis of research into the effectiveness of specific "protective mechanisms" which impact on the well being and academic success of children broadly classified as "at risk".[xvii] This research suggests that positive adult-child relationships, even transitory ones, are a key protective factor in enabling at risk children to become competent students.

There is persuasive evidence that the impact of successive adult-child relationships is cumulative either for better or for worse: high-risk children's and adolescents' adjustment, self- image, success and retention at school is positively correlated with good teacher-student relationships and negatively correlated with poor ones.[xviii] Research on adolescent resilience, focusing on successful students from high-risk environments, has provided strong evidence that positive, supportive relationships with peers, parents and other adults are a major factor accounting for their staying at school and achieving academic success.[xix] The evidence suggests that encouraging teachers to develop friendship relationships with adolescent students, or simply increasing the time teachers spend with students out of class,

provides protection against at-risk behavior and increases students' engagement in schooling.[xx]

The Advocacy Program commits resources to encouraging teachers to do what good teachers have always understood to be necessary and have always tried to do. What is significant about it in the current context is that it represents a re-valuing of the pastoral role of teachers after a period in which it was unfashionable or unpolitic to give it any value at all. Furthermore, it takes a rather different path from traditional approaches to pastoral care in that it focuses specifically and explicitly not on student well being but on assisting students in their learning. Teachers do not approach students to discuss welfare issues, but to help them reflect on how they are managing the business of being at school. As it turns out, once a trusting relationship has been established, students seize the opportunity to talk about welfare issues, but this is very much their own decision. And they make this choice because they believe they have found some one who respects them, some one who is trustworthy, and some one who will not give up on them.[xxi]

Finally

The narrow view of the function of schools shared by politicians of all persuasions and the consequent withholding of financial support for anything that goes beyond that view have led to an increase in the stress under which teachers work and a decline in schools' capacity to meet the needs of their students. Though the Advocacy Program was designed in the context of an action research project to address a particular problem that had become apparent in disengagement of a large proportion of students in Victorian public sector secondary colleges and the inability of schools to retain them in the post compulsory years, it clearly has wider implications. The success of the program to date confirms the experience of schools that have implemented mentoring and pastoral care programs as a way of dealing with the changing environment that educators and their students inhabit. After three years of development the Advocacy model is proving to be an effective approach to ensuring the engagement not only of early leavers, but of students generally, not only of post compulsory students but of middle school students as well, not only of students in secondary schools but of students in TAFE programs.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that in Advocacy we have found a formula that can be codified and applied on a "one size fits all" basis, just as it would be a mistake to assume that any solution for today's problems can be a solution for tomorrow's. The Advocacy Program remains, as it must, "in development."

[i] Evaluations in both 1999 and 2000 were carried out by Ms Jude Ocean of Ocean Consulting.

[ii] Advocates' support in welfare issues usually involved arranging for the student to speak to the school's student welfare coordinator who was in a better position to give practical assistance. However, some students would not have approached the latter had they not first raised the matter with their advocate.

[iii] The complete evaluation reports for 1999 and 2000 are available on the Advocacywebsite: http://www.advocacv.gsat.edu.advocacv/advocacy.htm

(No longer available at this site)
[iv] Students from non English speaking backgrounds express greater appreciation of advocacy than the average.

[v] T. Knight, 1991, "At risk schools": a problem for students. *Principal Matters.* 24. 15-17.

[vi] G. Wehlage & A. Rutter, 1986. Dropping out: how much do schools contribute to the problem? *Teachers College Record,* 87:374-92.

[vii] A. Pearls, 1991. Systemic and institutional factors in Chicano school failure. In R. Valencia, ed. *Chicano School Failure and Success.* New York: Falmer Press; A. Pearls & T. Knight 1999. *The Democratic Classroom: Theory to Inform Practice.* Cresswell, NJ: Hampton Press

[viii] W. Glasser 1998. A new look at school failure and school success. *Phi Delta Kappan,* April: 597-602.

[ix] J. Barrow, 1986. *Fostering Cognitive Development of Students.* San Francisco: Jossey Bass; E. Jensen, 1998. *Teaching with the Brain in Mind.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development; T. Ferro, 1993. The influence of affective processing in education and training. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education,* 59: 25-33; B.Neville, 1989. *Educating Psyche: Emotion, Imagination and the Unconscious in Learning.* Melbourne: Collins Dove.

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<u>Appendix 2</u>

Developing the reflective function: The Advocacy Model as a way of developing a sense of meaning in young people.

Brendan Schmidt and Bernie Neville

Abstract

The psychological development of children and adolescents, however broadly or narrowly conceived, is central to the purpose and function of schools. However, insufficient attention may be paid to a key aspect of psychological development in adolescence — the reflective function. This paper outlines the rationale for a specific systemic intervention in the schooling experience of adolescents. In a number of schools in Victoria the provision of one-to-one relationships between teacher-advocates and students is coupled with the use of a bank of electronic tools (the Student Achievement Inventory) designed to support the development of refective function and with it the capacity to construct a meaningful experience of learning within the school context. The Advocacy Model is discussed within the framework of developmental psychology and attachment theory.

Background

Since 2000, a number of state and commonwealth reports have addressed the problems of adolescent disengagement from schooling, early school drop out and consequent unemployment and disengagement from society. These include the report of the Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce (2001), the National Evaluation Report of the Full Service Schools Program 1999 and 2000 (2001), DETYA's Doing it Well Report on best practice in dealing with at risk young people (2001), the Victorian Dept of Education's Kirby Report (2001), The Queensland DEA's Staying on at School report (2004), the SA Dept of Premier and Cabinet's Making the Connections School Retention Action Plan (2006). These have provided a wide range of recommendations, ranging from early intervention literacy programs, through student support services, to school to work transition programs, many which have been implemented.

A common thread in these reports has been the importance of establishing a positive learning experience for students in the middle and senior school. The importance of a one-

to-one relationship with a caring adult in determining student's attitudes to schooling, their learning progress and decisions to complete their education, and — indirectly — to avert undesirable behaviours such as substance abuse, is supported by a number of significant Australian studies (e.g. Stokes et al., 1998; Brookes and Milne, 1997; Holden and Dwyer; 1992) as well as international studies. Overviews of school reform programs in the search for common characteristics associated with effectiveness have pointed to one-to-one relationships between a student and an adult as an essential component of programs leading to positive outcomes (e.g. Fashola & Slavin, 1997; Mukherjee, 1999). Fraser, Walberg et al.'s (1987) synthesis of meta-analyses of studies of school reform concluded that, in the matter of school reform, 'proximal' factors such as interactive student-teacher variables are more potent than more distal variables such as school aims and curriculum changes. They argue that the empowerment of students in interaction with teachers is empirically supported as one of the best ways to improve student outcomes. This is especially the case where students 'at risk' are concerned (Baker et al. 1997). Likewise, on the basis of a review of studies conducted within the framework of cognitive psychology, Osterman (2000) argues that that lack of 'belongingness' consequent on inadequate teacher-student relationships is associated with mental and physical illness and behavioural problems. These, in turn, lead to lack of success at school. In contrast, positive involvement with teachers is associated with engagement, well-being and achievement.

   The Advocacy model of student support has been developed within this context. The Advocacy Project (1998-2003), funded by the Victorian Department of Education, trialled certain components of the model, which were found to be efficacious in promoting school engagement (Ocean, 2001; Henry et al., 2003). There are two central components of the model. Firstly, it involves a one-to-one relationship between a student and a teacher/advocate, who undertakes specific responsibilities with regard to that student. The label 'advocacy' was adopted, rather than 'advisor' or 'mentor', to emphasise a particular aspect of the relationship, in that the teacher/advocate focuses on listening to the student to ensure that the student's voice is heard within the school. If the student is in conflict with a teacher or the school administration, the advocate will take make sure that the student's perspective is taken seriously. This involves having an understanding of the student's background and motivation. Within this structure of support, the advocacy model requires the students to accept responsibility for their own progress. Secondly, the model includes an electronic Student Achievement Inventory (SAI) designed to assist the student, with the support of their advocates, to reflect on their purposes, achievements and school experience.

   At its inception in 1998 the Advocacy model was designed as a means of compensating for the lack of pastoral care resources in Victorian State schools in the 1990s. The proportion of students completing year 12 in State system had declined from 85% to 65% over this period, and it was argued that this was the result of the lessening of funds to assist

with individual learning difficulties. The positive impact of Advocacy was seen in the evidence that students with advocates were more likely to remain at school, were more likely to attend school consistently and were likely to have better academic outcomes than comparable students without advocates (Ocean 2000, 2001). Further experience with the model suggests that the provision of a secure and reliable relationship with a teacher/advocate who engages with the student empathically and non-judgementally has an impact on the adolescent's psychological development (McCann 2008).

The use of the electronic Student Achievement Inventory within an Advocacy framework has the potential to further support adolescent psychological development.

A number of instruments developed overseas are currently available for the recording of study attitudes and skills e.g. SAMS (Michael, Michael, & Zimmerman, 1985), PSRS (Karnes & Bean, 1990) LASSI (Weinstein & Palmer, 1990) and the SBI (Bliss and Mueller,2002). While there have been a number of studies of the utility of such self-assessment instruments in facilitating school achievement (Olivárez & Tallent-Runnels, 1994; Everson et al. 2000) none have focused on their use within the context of a structured supportive relationship such as Advocacy.

The SAI includes online questionnaires relating to the student's interests, learning history, learning preferences, goals, attitudes to school discipline, as well as literacy, numeracy and study skills, as perceived by the students themselves. The immediate feedback provided to students is designed to help them recognise some aspects of themselves in a profile which highlights their strengths as well as their weaknesses. The data base also allows them to compare this profile as it changes over time, or to compare it with a profile created from the aggregated student data. It also allows the school to profile the student population on a number of significant dimensions.

While these tools have been developed for students to use independently, informal trials suggest that they are also effective as triggers for students to talk more freely about themselves to the teacher/advocate. Conversely, the supportive relationship may assist the student to be honest in recognizing the things they can change, and develop the confidence to do so.

Reflective function and engagement

Jean Knox (2003) argues that 'reflective function' is the root of our sense of meaning and capacity to symbolise.

> It begins to become clear that the concepts of reflective function has enormous implications for our understanding of human psychological development and functioning and in particular for the development of a sense of meaning — a word

that we are all intuitively understand that which a moment's reflection shows is to be rather vague and imprecise. What are the contributing factors to a sense of meaning, which is rooted in the capacity to find symbolic significance in our experience? I would suggest there are four key and interrelated elements, all of which contribute to the development of reflective function:

1. Narrative competence: the recognition of psychological cause and effect, which links events in a meaningful way and is the basis for a sense of agency.

2. Intentionality: the capacity to pursue goals and desires, that is, to have a mental appetite.

3. Appraisal: the capacity to evaluate the relative significance of experiences.

4. Individuation: the awareness of one's own and other people's independent subjectivity. (142).

Knox bases her argument on current understandings of developmental psychology and the related field of attachment theory. She prefers the term 'reflective function' to such terms as 'metacognitive monitoring' and 'mentalization', which have been used by other writers to describe the awareness of oneself and others as independent psychological and emotional beings. On the one hand she proposes that the reflective function begins to emerge in children in their second year. On the other she argues that not everybody manages to develop an adequate reflective function, and hence they 'lack the capacity to empathize with other people or place their own emotions in a meaningful context, to reflect on them and so experience them in a safe way'(139). They habitually treat themselves and others as objects, and are unable to give a reflective and coherent account of their lives. She makes the case that this is a consequence of their failure to develop secure attachment as infants.

Insecure attachment as infants leads to insecure attachment as adolescents and adults.This is manifested in specific 'attachment styles' which attachment theorists identify as secure, anxious-preoccupied, dismissive-avoidant, and fearful-avoidant. (Bartholomew et al. 1991; Fonagy et al. 2005) However, insecure attachment styles are not set in stone from infancy. Knox herself is a Jungian analyst, and clearly believes, like Fonagy and his co-authors, in the capacity of the analytical process to counteract the effects of early destructive relationships. Working within a very different framework, Carl Rogers (1951,1961) argued that the therapist's provision of a relationship characterized by empathy, acceptance and congruence was of itself efficacious in giving the client the freedom to abandon self-destructive habits of mind and behaviour.

Some adolescents will have 'attachment issues', grounded in infantile trauma or inadequate parenting, and can be helped to overcome them through the offering of secure relationships with adults and peers in a school setting. Others will be confidently secure in

their relationships. Regardless of their starting point, both groups will be assisted in the development of the reflective function, and consequently of their capacity to construct a meaningful experience of schooling, if provided with a secure and reliable relationship with a committed teacher-advocate. Developmental psychologists since Piaget have argued that the attainment of reflective function (variously described and labeled) is a particular developmental task of adolescence (See Kegan, 1997; Egan,1983, 1998)

Promoting a Sense of Meaning

It can be argued that promoting a sense of meaning is the major focus of schooling, however that "sense of meaning" may be interpreted by schools. We will not be capable of engaging and continuing to engage students in their education if schooling is for them a meaningless activity.

What is the significance of an education? Why am I here? Where am I going? What am I doing? When does it have to be done? These are questions that adolescents ask as they progress through the education system. Schools which operate within a strong narrative, religious or secular, may be able to provide answers which satisfy some, at least, of their students. However, the education system seems largely unable to assist students toward a vision of life. The demands of a consumerist culture are not an adequate substitute for meaningful intention. As Knox points out:

> There are many people who simply do not seem to know what they want, what interests them or excites their attention. They seem trapped in a passive prison in which they are doomed to respond endlessly to other people's demands on them, because the alternative is a terrifying emptiness and aimlessness born out of the absence of desire (2003:150).

In the schooling we provide we make constant demands on students regarding their behaviour and their achievement. We tend to prefer a mindless compliance to an authentic resistance. We offer little opportunity for students to gain meaning from the daily activities, the trials and the tribulations of participation in the education system. We offer little opportunity to engage in reflection on who they are as learners, develop intentions or reflect with a significant other upon achievement and what it might mean.

The Advocacy Relationship

If we are to engage young people in schooling there needs to be an active and systematic approach to the development of meaning. This requires a degree of understanding of the symbolic significance of the adolescents' experience — schooling, job, money, lifestyle, problem solving, peer culture. With this in view, teacher/advocates are provided with

professional development in a Rogerian, 'person-centred' approach to interpersonal communication. Evaluations of earlier experiments with the Advocacy model (Ocean, 2001; Henry, 2003) have indicated that the model works best when the teacher/advocate not only provides a secure and reliable relationship (which may well be provided in a conventional teacher role) but focuses specifically on listening to the student rather than on directing, evaluating and advising — functions which teachers habitually exercise but which are counter to good practice in an advocacy role.

Carl Rogers (1951) developed a theory of personality and therapeutic change within a subjectivist paradigm, arguing that 'behaviour is basically the goal-directed attempt of the organism to satisfy its needs as experienced, in the field as perceived' (491) and 'the best vantage point for understanding behaviour is from the internal frame of reference of the individual himself [sic]' (494). Within such an understanding we can argue that a particular student's self-destructive or anti-social behaviour is simply their way of dealing with 'the field as perceived'.

Rogers' research on therapeutic process led him to the conclusion that the quality of the relationship between therapist and client was critical. Only a relationship characterized by empathy, congruence (genuineness) and what he called 'unconditional positive regard' could provide the opportunity for the client to freely reflect on the nature of 'the field as perceived' and become aware of their capacity to choose their behaviour consciously rather than act out of habit or react mindlessly to their environment. Only such a relationship could provide an environment for the client's own development of empathy, genuineness and acceptance of others.

Though Rogers' thinking originally revolved around the relationship of therapist and client, he became aware that what was true of the therapeutic relationship was true of all relationships. Good relationships — between partners, between parents and children, between teachers and students — are characterized by empathy, genuineness and acceptance. This is especially critical in an explicitly supportive relationship such as advocacy.

Teachers are inclined to see counselling as involving specific professional skills, skills quite different from those in which they are themselves trained and experienced. They may be reluctant to embrace the advocate role if they see it as taking over the role of school counsellor. School counsellors, likewise, may not be inclined to look with favour on the introduction of the advocacy model if it looks as though untrained people are going to be involved in counselling students.(? necessity)

However, advocacy as understood here is not counselling, certainly not the kind of counselling which is conventionally seen as the norm in Australia: cognitive behavioural therapy. (? Appears negative: Is it better to focus on the next sentence)The focus of the

advocate is on supporting the student's learning. The method of advocacy is to provide the student with a secure and reliable relationship in which an interested adult will listen non-judgementally to whatever the student has to say about their learning and the factors which affect it for better or for worse. It creates a situation in which some one in the school knows something of the student's aims and goals (or lack of them), the difficulties she faces, and his life outside school. There is some one in the school who is able to intervene on the student's behalf when the school is reacting to 'bad behaviour' which, as far as the student is concerned is simply 'the goal directed attempt to satisfy [their] needs as experienced in the field as perceived'.

Neither is advocacy teaching. Teachers instruct, advise, evaluate and, where necessary, reprimand or control the students in their classes. The role of advocate differs from this in significant ways. The advocate restrains the urge to direct, judge or reprimand, and concentrates on the attempt to understand how the student perceives the world of learning, and how he or she may be helped to connect with it. She even restrains her urge to give advice, acknowledging that the aim of helping students to become an independent learner may be hindered by an over-eagerness to tell them what they should be doing. It is desirable to keep the roles of teacher and advocate separate, avoiding a situation where teachers are acting as advocates for students who are in their own classes.

Advocacy and Reflective Function

The opportunity exists in the Advocacy model to provide students with the opportunity to construct meaning for their participation in the education system and to discover how they might best use it to achieve personal goals. The Advocacy model provides an approach whereby the students are given the chance to develop their reflective function and hence gain a greater sense of meaning from their experience at school. Essential to this is the teacher/advocates' success in developing positive relationships with the students for whom they take responsibility.

Within the advocacy model as described by Ocean (2001), Neville and Schmidt (2001), Henry (2003) and McCann (2008), the central role played by the advocate is to link the personal attributes of the young person to the education and community systems in a meaningful way. However, unless a student and teacher have a common language it is difficult for either the advocate or the student to develop a strong personal educational narrative. If students are to take responsibility for their own progress, it incumbent upon us to engage the learner in dialogue around the meaning of their experiences at school, and to hold this dialogue within the phenomenal world of the student.

Knox's notion of 'reflective function', which she develops within the framework of attachment theory, provides a key to understanding the interaction between the teacher-

advocate and the student within the advocacy model. The advocacy framework, on its part, provides an approach to developing reflective function within the student. Within a secure and reliable relationship the adolescent is able to develop psychologically within in the four dimensions listed by Knox: narrative competence, intentionality, appraisal and individuation.

Narrative competence

In attachment theory as developed by Fonagy (2005) and Knox (2003) narrative competence is perceived to be the basis for the development of a sense of agency. If this is so, it will be a key focus in the work of schools, and therefore of the advocate, to provide the opportunity for the sense of agency to develop in the students with whom they have a responsibility. Within an educational setting the key issue is the development of a sense of personal agency in the task of learning. The teacher-advocate has a significant role in this.

In the Advocacy model the advocate is given a set of tools to assist in developing a productive relationship with a student with a focus on the student's sense of agency.

The Student Achievement Inventory provides students with instant feedback, giving them a language in which to reflect on and discuss their personal learning history, interest, likes, dislikes, hobbies, learning styles and difficulties, their intentions and their achievements. Questionnaires included in the SAI provide a basis for dialogue around a range of issues related to the construction of a personal narrative. Feedback provides profiles of the following:

- Home/family context
- Personal interests and hobbies
- Roles from family, work, school, community, sporting clubs
- Responsibilities
- Preferred learning style
- Attitudes to authority
- Attitude to responsibility
- A personal curriculum vitae

These questiomnnaires provide a rich background for discussion around the theme of personal agency…..What am I doing? Why am I here? What am I good at?

The SAI provides the symbolic language enabling a discussion around the development of the student's personal narrative.

In developing a personal narrative for each student the advocate takes care to build an accurate profile of the student's successes and difficulties. The underlying assumptions on which the students builds their sense of success and failure are noted and examined. These assumptions can come from previous schooling experiences, the home and wider social influences. Early experiences are powerful in shaping our stance towards our world, and by the time the student has reached adolescence the student has developed 'working models' (Bowlby 1979) of relationships with adults and of his or her identity as a participant in the school culture. Whether they are functional or disfunctional, such working models are extremely resilient. Adolescents whose experience has taught them that adults are uncaring or untrustworthy and whose personal narratives proclaim that they are 'losers' will tend to stick to this story regardless of evidence that may contradict it.

Through dialogue around the SAI the teacher-advocate and the student can develop a shared understanding of who this student is and how he or she learns, against a backdrop of the ways others might prefer to learn. Students construct meaning through learning to reflect on their experience within the safe container of a one-to-one relationship with a trustworthy adult.

The narrative competence of the student can be progressed by the linking of the information gained from the SAI with the student's schooling and experience of the wider world. By more clearly defining what they have done, what they have achieved, an enhanced sense of agency can be developed.

Intentionality

The SAI questionnaires look also to the future, raising such issues as …. What do I want? Where am I going? How will I get there?

This second aspect of reflective function Knox describes as the 'capacity to pursue goals and desires, that is, to have a mental appetite' (Knox, 2003: 142). With adequately secure attachment the child learns both to acknowledge and understand the intentions of others and to protect and explain their own behaviour, a crucial developmental achievement and a central feature of theory of mind. Adequate psychological development includes a capacity to be mindful of one's own intentions and needs, and mindful also of the intentions and needs of others.

Within the advocacy relationship the concept of intentionality is highlighted in two ways. The first is the discussion around the formation of a long term plan so that the students develop a long-term goal that they have set for themselves. The second is short-term goal-

setting which breaks up the more broadly based concepts into weekly actions that need to be achieved. Short-term goals, facilitated by tools in the SAI, can be set in discussion between the advocate and the student. They cover aspects of the student's life in school and community — study, sporting clubs, family, relationships and other aspects of life which are currently important to the student.

The function of the intense goal-setting is to make the student aware that by setting and achieving goals on a short-term basis a record of achievement can be developed over a short period of time. If six goals are set and achieved and appraised by the advocate as achieved, for each week, then after six weeks 36 goals will have been achieved. At this point the advocate and the student can celebrate the achievement of so many small aspects of developing ' intentionality ' .

The setting of long-term goals, while important, can be ineffective unless attention is drawn to these goals on a regular basis. My (BS) experience with the Victorian Managed Individual Pathways Project, which was established following a recommendation from the Kirby review (2001), leads me to believe that many long-term plans are set in such frameworks, but far,far, fewer are regularly reviewed.

The setting of weekly goals insures that the students have a focus for the week around aspects of their life which require them to achieve or complete particular tasks. In some settings these goals include attendance, relationship with peers, relationships with teachers, family relationships, sporting achievement, learning a new hobby, learning a musical instrument, taking new roles in artistic productions, community work or a personal responsibility at school — as well as achieving higher grades on assignments and ceasing to be disruptive in a classroom. Through the discussion that takes place in the one-to-one relationship the advocate and the student are able to easily set short-term goals and monitor them with the tools available in the SAI.

If the goals are not reviewed by the advocate then the point of setting the goals may well be missed by the student. For goal-setting to become an established mode of operation for the student, constant attention must be given to this aspect of the advocacy relationship for a number of months so that the achievement can be registered with the student and his or her parents. The advocate can after some months change the review of the goal-setting from weekly to fortnightly and eventually much longer periods, as weekly goal-setting becomes habitual for the student.

The long-term plans developed with the assistance of the SAI tools can also be reviewed on a regular basis. If these plans are not reviewed then the student may well come to see that the plan has little relevance in the educational setting.

Knox argues that intentionality, the capacity to pursue goals and desires, to have a mental appetite, is an essential step in the psychological development of the child and

adolescent. The appropriate use of the short-term and long-term goal-setting tools in the SAI has the potential to significantly enhance these capacities in students within an advocacy relationship.

Appraisal

Appraisal is described by Knox as the capacity to evaluate the relative significance of experiences.

Appraisal requires an experience to be appraised. The advocate's stance of non-judgemental, empathic listening assists the student to evaluate the quality and meaning of both past and current experiences of schooling. The development of a realization that one has the capacity and the right to judge the meaning and significance of one's experiences, rather than simply accept the appraisals of others, is an essential part of growing up, and starts fairly early in the process. However, children and adolescents who are not supported in this process must either slip into mindless compliance or take a stance of reaction and resistance against those who tell them what they are supposed to think, feel and do. For the adolescent student, the invitation within the advocacy interaction to review and appraise experiences of schooling, work, relationships, desires, emotions, is central to their gaining a sense of how they relate to the world. We may believe that adolescents should grow up as people with minds of their own, rather than constantly defer to others' judgements as more valid than their own. However, not all classroom cultures support this process.

Knox points out that appraisal is largely an unconscious process, operating automatically on the basis of habitual 'working models' of what matters in life. However, it can become conscious, through development of the reflective function. Some adolescents are habitually and auomatically dependent on the appraisals of others. Others are habitually counter-dependent, reacting with automatic resistance to the appraisals of others. The position of independence, which falls between these two reactive stances, demands a conscious sense of psychological identity, in which appraisals are made on the basis of the evidence, not on the basis of other people's expectations or one's negative reaction to them, and not through the internalizations of other people's appraisals of one as 'bad' or 'uncooperative' or 'a loser'. A student's examination of her experience of learning and schooling within a relationship with a trusted adult can make a significant contribution to the development of a sense of 'knowing one's own mind'.

It is necessary for maturing adolescents to develop a sense of meaning in how they perform and relate, and in how other people think and feel as they go about their daily tasks. Within the one-to-one relationship there is an opportunity for the student to gain a strong and realistic sense of self and gain an understanding that others have personal thoughts and feelings which need to be recognised.

In most schools students are appraised in a global fashion and few schools provide the opportunity for extensive individual appraisal which would enable students to appreciate the full meaning or significance of their schooling experiences. Students usually receive reports on their assignments and exams in a collective report issued twice a year. These reports are generally cryptic and provide a minimalist synopsis of the student's achievements in particular subjects.

The advocacy model, including the SAI, provides a methodology and the resources for students to be able to develop a sense of personal appraisal which is far more refined and developed than the appraisal systems we currently see used in schools.

If the goal-setting and planning around aspects of the adolescents learning are given focus within the advocacy relationship, we might arguable expect the productivity of individual students to increase. If this increase is achieved across a large number of students within the school, then school performance will increase. This should make system administrators pleased indeed

Individuation

Individuation, as Knox define it in this context, is 'the awareness of one's own and other people's independent subjectivity' (2003: 156). The achievement of a sense of our own separateness and individuality is associated with a recognition that others have experience, thoughts, values and emotions which are different from our own. Achieving a sense of separateness enables the child or adolescent to transcend the assumption that he must either control or be controlled by others. Emotions become an expression of self instead of a tool of manipulation. Other people are perceived not only to have their own subjectivity, but are allowed to think different thoughts and feel different feelings. Though development of this aspect of reflective function can start early in childhood, not all people manage to achieve it in a lifetime.

The experience of schooling can assist adolescents in this developmental task.

Teachers cannot give adolescents individuation. However, we can construct an educational environment in which the student can be given the opportunity and a set of tools for discovering personal meaning through the development of reflective function.

In a satisfactory advocacy relationship the student gains an understanding of who they are as a learner and as a person, and gains an understanding also that other people (including teachers) may learn differently and react differently to their experiences. It is this independent subjectivity, a personal sense of agency, action, intention and reflection against the background of others' diverse experiences that needs to be supported by teachers and is particularly reinforced within an advocacy relationship. The SAI includes

tools such as the Learning Preference Questionnaire and the Personal Profile and curriculum vitae which are designed to support the student's individuation.

Schools, at their best, are concerned with the psychological and social development of their students and acknowledge that this development involves more than academic or sporting outcomes as defined by others. However, there is always some tension between the school's need for compliance and the adolescent's need to become an independent, individuated person. Within the advocacy relationship it is hoped that these issues can be addressed and the students can be supported in development of reflective function, so that they are not only able to reflect on their own needs and behaviours, but also to acknowledge that teachers (and schools) have needs and behaviours which make sense within the school's 'field of experience'.

Conclusion

When the advocacy project was first designed and piloted in 1999, it was to address a deficit in the Victorian public education system. The decline in support resources targetting individual learners in high schools had left many students without adequate support at a critical time in their lives, with consequent disengagement from the apparently meaningless activity of education. Research on the outcomes of the project indicated clearly enough that students who were provided with the opportunity to form a relationship with a teacher-advocate were less likely to absent themselves from school and more likely to remain at school for the post-compulsory years.

We can argue that through their conversations with their teacher-advocates these students were able to find meaning in their school experience, to the extent that they could see a point in attending school and seeking further qualifications. Though the use of electronic tools in the pilot project was limited. there was some indication that the tools used played a significant part in assisting the students to reflect on their experience and develop meaningful short-term and long-term goals.

The two components of the Advocacy model as it is currently being applied in a number of Victorian schools — the one-to-one relationship and the Student Achievement Inventory — are designed to support student engagement in schooling. This is not simply because having a teacher-advocate who provides a secure and reliable relationship makes school a more comfortable place to be. (Students interviewed in evaluating the model have said things like: 'It's nice having an advocate, because now there is a teacher who knows my name and smiles at me'!). There is no doubt that the model has a very positive impact on the pastoral care of students. However, the model has an unambiguous focus on the support of students' learning. It achieves this through the student and advocate's collaboration in constructing a student's personal meaning system for the student — a meaning system in which learning and goals play a significant part. Support for the student's
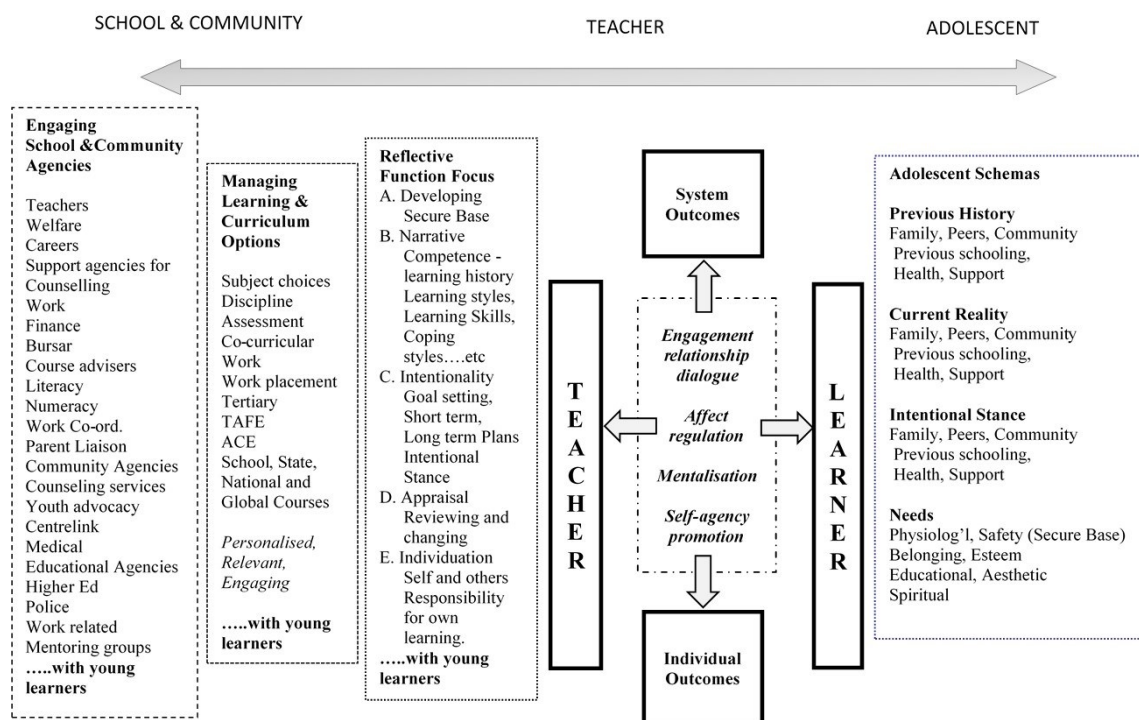
reflection on self, school context and future possibilities is the means to this end. Such reflection is facilitated in a relationship where the trusted adult is prepared to enter the student's world by truly listening, and brings to the conversation not only the skills of a teacher but also the attitude of an advocate.

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SCHOOL & COMMUNITY   TEACHER   ADOLESCENT

Engaging School &Community Agencies

Teachers
Welfare
Careers
Support agencies for Counselling
Work
Finance
Bursar
Course advisers
Literacy
Numeracy
Work Co-ord.
Parent Liaison
Community Agencies
Counseling services
Youth advocacy
Centrelink
Medical
Educational Agencies
Higher Ed
Police
Work related
Mentoring groups
…..with young learners

Managing Learning & Curriculum Options

Subject choices
Discipline
Assessment
Co-curricular
Work
Work placement
Tertiary
TAFE
ACE
School, State, National and Global Courses

Personalised, Relevant, Engaging

…..with young learners

Reflective Function Focus
A. Developing Secure Base
B. Narrative Competence - learning history Learning styles, Learning Skills, Coping styles….etc
C. Intentionality Goal setting, Short term, Long term Plans Intentional Stance
D. Appraisal Reviewing and changing
E. Individuation Self and others Responsibility for own learning.
…..with young learners

System Outcomes

TEACHER

Engagement relationship dialogue

Affect regulation

Mentalisation

Self-agency promotion

LEARNER

Individual Outcomes

Adolescent Schemas

Previous History
Family, Peers, Community
Previous schooling,
Health, Support

Current Reality
Family, Peers, Community
Previous schooling,
Health, Support

Intentional Stance
Family, Peers, Community
Previous schooling,
Health, Support

Needs
Physiolog'l, Safety (Secure Base)
Belonging, Esteem
Educational, Aesthetic
Spiritual

Error! Main Document Only.. **School based model for developing reflective function (Schmidt 2012)**