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Staff Perceptions of an Alternative Educational Model for at Risk Adolescents in Queensland

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Abstract: This paper reports on staff perceptions of the 'educational model' implemented by Glendyne School as an alternative model for the secondary education for 'at risk adolescents'. The paper starts with an extensive literature review that details the attributes of successful alternative programs for students who are unable to be accommodated by mainstream schools. Using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, staff members were consulted in order to gauge perceptions of the effectiveness of the school programs. The paper details the processes used to collect data and reports on the educational provision of programs for "at risk" youth and concludes with a discussion that analyses how the perceptions of the school's staff align with what the literature sees as necessary for authentic programming in an alternative setting.

Keywords: At Risk Students, Adolescents, Alternative School, Alternative Curriculum

Introduction

MOST CURRENT EDUCATIONAL or training opportunities for 'at risk' adolescents that seek to develop skills and knowledge, often do not address specific educational outcomes (Taylor, 1995). Students who do not 'fit' the standard model of education provided in Queensland Schools are generally left floundering with little intervention providing appropriate realistic and authentic schooling. At the Glendyne Training and Education Centre (Glendyne) educational goals and objectives have been integrated with other community functions and locations and provided to the students and their family as a package.

The education and support model explored in this study has been implemented at a school which is a privately funded school in regional Queensland, and caters for 85 students who study with the support of 45 mentors and 20 teaching staff. It has been in existence for 9 years and the focus is on adolescents who would otherwise be or have been excluded from mainstream education systems for a variety of reasons and are termed 'at risk'.

The school works closely with Department of Families, and the Department of Child Safety and Juvenile Justice and has in the past, won a number of awards; 2001 Queensland Training Award for Training Incentives, 2003 National volunteer award, 2004 Queensland Training Award for Implementation of the Education Training Reforms, 2004 Queensland Training Awards for Training Initiatives, and a National award for recognition of the efforts towards crime and violence prevention in 2005.

The school has an indigenous advisory committee with an average attendance of 13 indigenous representatives which provides advice and direction on implications within the curriculum. Indigenous culture is integrated as part of the curriculum with special camps. Indigenous elders teach culture, native foods, and sacred sites in and around the district. Special indigenous days are commemorated especially during National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee Week (known as NAIDOC week). Two indigenous youth workers are employed and presently, indigenous students account for 30% of student enrolments.

Students may be referred to the school from other government and non government agencies or may self refer. Referrals are also made from broader community through approaches to the Principal. Since its inception, the school has worked with 483 boys and 88 girls (even though it was not originally intended to cater for girls). Many of the students have a history of learning difficulties, social issues, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or autism (Aspergers' syndrome in particular). Disability often limits achievements by students in mainstream education (Ashman & Elkins, 2001). As a result of current educational outcomes, the program is now being duplicated in another regional city in Australia in 2007 and Glendyne School has been guaranteed funding to cater for an increase in numbers by up to 30 students in 2008.

The objective for the school is to provide an integrated treatment and rehabilitation program for students who do not cope with mainstream education. The aim is to shift the focus for youth to healthier life alternatives and to provide ongoing awareness



programs to reduce the incidence of undesired or unhelpful behaviors. Many students self identified as having substance abuse problems. Techniques used to facilitate the substance abuse program include the use of a contract system, a parent support group, youth workers to support families, mediation where appropriate, close liaison with drug rehabilitation officers, life skills training and the employment of a school counsellor.

Literature Review

Literature covering educational strategies and learning approaches was explored in detail to understand the strengths and limitations of alternative models of education. As the project aimed to understand the needs of the “at risk” group in relation education provision, literature covering instructional strategies, multimedia development and learning approaches was studied to identify the strengths and limitations of providing alternative models of education to specific cohorts of adolescents. The principles of equity and social justice were used as a foundation upon which an approach to education for such students might be provided (Smith, 2004) and informed the direction of this study.

In Australia, as little as two decades ago, high school students who failed to complete non compulsory education (years 10-12) could obtain jobs or join the military but today they are much more likely to be unemployed, involved in crime or imprisoned (Jeffries, Hollowell & Powell, 2004). Today at-risk youth often fail schooling or are excluded from mainstream schools either for behavioral or learning disability reasons. Many students who fail to complete seek financial support from government agencies as a result of poor family support or opportunities.

Foley and Lan-Sze Pang (2006) suggest that the past two decades have seen a rise in the number of alternative education programs serving youth at-risk of education failure. Normally such education programs have been characterized as small enrolment programs (200 students or less). These programs usually emphasize individual instruction in a supportive environment that strengthen relationships between peers and teachers (Franklin 1992; Foley Lan-Sze Pang, 2006). These findings are supported by those of Taylor (2005) who identified that in the UK although there were pockets of exemplary practice, “*too many young people were in danger of being lost to the system, becoming disaffected and under-achieving*”. Students who offended before they were excluded from school, continued to offend, while others commenced doing so while excluded or suspended from the school. Taylor also identified that current services for this group were based on local vacancies in existing programs rather than careful

matching to appropriate program provision. Generally, according to Foley & Lan-Sze Pang (2006) in America, alternative education programs primarily serve adolescents between the ages of 12 to 21 years. Youth with disabilities related to learning comprise a large portion of student populations served by these schools.

In the literature the term *alternative education* has been confused by many, including teachers and has been over used to describe a broad array of schools e.g. military academies, magnet schools, “schools within a school projects”. None of the latter are designed specifically for disruptive or disaffected youth (Jeffries, Hollowell & Powell (2004). For the purposes of this paper alternative education is as per the Jeffries *et al* (2004, p. 65.) definition which states; *one that specifically serves at-risk students and is not located within or attached to a mainstream school*. Kellmayer (1995) suggested that such a school should fulfill the following criteria;

It should be

- a stand alone facility as opposed to being attached to a mainstream school
- a school that offers work-study opportunities
- a school that has administrators who continually promote the school successes.

Opposition may be presented to such schools by the community due to fear of the students and the grouping of like students together but Kellmayer (1995) says that it is vital for school principals to develop good public relations with the community by promoting the successes of the schools, allowing students to undertake service projects in the community and through education and knowledge convert community fear to support. Such a school according to Raywid (1999) should be non-punitive as the punitive orientated programs rarely prove effective in altering behaviour. Like Kellmayer, Raywid suggests that tough love or punitive approaches usually will not work.

The delivery of health, education and juvenile justice related services requires the development of an overall infrastructure that incorporates the use of mainstream educational requirements within a specific context (Srinivasan & Han, 2000). Efficient and effective delivery requires that the government and private sector cooperate in the provision of the necessary environment. The conceptual framework for the educational model at Glendyne School was based on social justice theory (as discussed by Couzos & Murray, 2005; Smith, 2004; Thomson, 2003; and Gutberlet, 1999). In doing so the program seeks to redress issues of human rights equity, access to services and appropriateness of what programs are provided to adolescents at risk.

Adolescents with learning difficulties often experience prejudice and discrimination within society and as a result may be categorized as a stigmatized group (Finlay & Lyons, 2000). The discrimination experienced by this group can have negative social, economic, political and psychological consequences for its members (Finlay & Lyons, 2000; Crabtree & Rutland, 2001). Social exclusion as experienced by 'perceived misfits' in Australia is an extreme form of marginalization, and can be understood as 'one or more dimensions of non involvement or participation in that society' (Gutberlet, 1999) but according to Smith (2004) social justice is the foundation upon which a services should be provided .

While little Australian data exists on this topic, Jeffries & Lan-Sze Pang (2004) identify a school in Milwaukee (Wisconsin, USA) that has addressed such issues successfully. The school was established by Sample in 1994 who was concerned about high attrition rates of adolescent Indian students from mainstream schools. The school has eighty students (80% graduate successfully) and ten faculty members. Student characteristics included chronically disruptive or disaffected youth, drug and/or alcohol problems, many students have parole officers, are teenage parents, or are involved in gangs. She identified that having work study programs in alternative schools is a valuable strategy that enables a measure of independence for students while simultaneously helping to reduce the dropout rate in alternative schools (p.66). Within the Milwaukee school, students may be referred by school administrators, the justice system or parent or family members. Students are required to provide 100 hours of community service in a variety of settings for which they receive credits.

Students interviewed from the Milwaukee school in the Jeffries (2004) study identified that the smaller class sizes, inclusion in governance issues and processes, trust relationships and caring attitudes of teachers made students feel safe enough to be able to learn and achieve. While the small size of the school enabled closer teacher student relationships and better outcomes for learners, Kellmayer (1995) suggests however, that schools of such size are vulnerable economically and politically, with too few students and thus are more at risk of being closed down.

Self Determination

A key issue in the provision of appropriate levels of education is that of self determination which means there must be stakeholder involvement at all levels of policy and provision of services. O'Donohue (1999) states that this is about empowering communities and must be seen in terms of rights, in particular survival rights. This factor is missing in many

mainstream educational programs. Involving students in governance processes such as planning activities, discipline issues, assemblies and graduations, serves to improve student behavior and improves self determination. While it may appear counterproductive it has been found to actually improve the disruptive students' own behavior, as in serving on committees they are forced to reflect on issues such as misbehavior, devise and implement solutions and model cooperation and good conduct (Jeffries & Lan-Sze Pang 2004). Jeffries and Lan-Sze Pang suggest that this may, in fact, be the students first attempt at school or any other type of governance, and as a result students take it very seriously.

In order to be successful, programs must involve learners in setting the agenda, use peer involvement and utilize parent and community support. They must focus on enhancing and creating positive environmental aspects (families, school and community) that in turn reinforce positive behaviors (Krueger 2006 personal; communication).

Motivation to Learn

Based on the theory of reasoned action, a person's intention (to learn) is a function of two basic determinants, one *personal* in nature and the other reflecting *social influence* (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The personal factor is the individual's positive or negative evaluation of the value of performing the behavior (or learning), which is called "attitude toward the behavior" and refers to attitudinal factors such as motivation, value, worth etc. The second determinant of intention is the person's perception of the social pressure put on him/her to perform (or not perform) the behavior in question. According to Ajzen and Fishbein, a person's attitude toward behavior (or in other words whether or not they desire or choose to learn) is determined by his/her beliefs that performing the behavior is worthwhile for them. In other words, the individual's decision of a behavioral adoption such as learning or changing their non social behaviors is strongly influenced by the surrounding social systems and their own personal values. This factor is significant especially for those students who have a history of non engagement in mainstream educational processes.

Compatibility is defined as *the degree to which an innovation* (such as learning or changing behavior) "is perceived as being consistent with the existing values, past experiences, and needs of potential adopters" (Rogers 1995, p. 15). It measures how compatible an innovation is with the existing *culture, structure, infrastructure*, and previously adopted ideas. Complexity in this situation is defined as being: "the degree to which an innovation is perceived as difficult" (Rogers 1995, p. 16) and measures how

difficult an innovation is to understand, learn, and use. Observability is “the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others” (Rogers, p. 16) and reflects how explicit are the results and outcomes of an innovation. Besides the five perceived attributes of an innovation, other variables also affect its rate of adoption, such as:

- the type of innovation-decision,
- the nature of communication channels diffusing the innovation at various stages in the innovation-decision process,
- the nature of the social system, and
- the extent of change agents’ effort in diffusing the innovation.

The four concepts itemized above impact on student behaviors and decisions to learn and are relevant to the study at hand in that the Glendyne students have all come from a background which may have lacked tangible evidence for students of these factors, and thus did not enable them to learn at optimal levels.

Furlong (2005) explored the way that class cultures impacted on patterns of educational participation and motivation, suggesting that those students with reduced support in class, who did poorly on tests continually lost confidence in their ability to learn and therefore lost the motivation to learn. He identified that these learners saw themselves “on the periphery” (p. 382). Also noted was the fact that students acknowledged that at times their own actions were not helpful and later they usually regretted not working harder but still rationalized their behavior by self identification as a victim of the process. Other factors identified by Furlong included poverty, social class structure and cultural issues all of which have relevance today.

Foley & Lan-Sze Pang (2006) proposed that parental involvement is one of the key factors in alternative education students completing courses and achieving academic outcomes. However they identified that approximately one third of schools only, actively encouraged parental participation. These writers suggest that consideration could be given to alternative communication strategies for working with the child and parents through self directed transition plans, or the use of “family centered approaches to support the student at school” (p.20). This view would seem to facilitate support for access to community support services.

Impact of Classroom and Structure of Programs

In 1998, the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study was commissioned by Education Queensland to identify the impact of classroom, school and systemic reforms on outcomes, especially for those

students deemed at risk. The study was conducted by the University of Queensland from 1998 to 2000 and involved a range of school sizes in widely dispersed locations around Queensland. Community characteristics included:

- high indigenous populations
- variable multicultural compositions
- high to low socio-economic features
- significant numbers of transient students
- settled rural and suburban schools

The design of the study assumed that improvements in the quality of students’ academic and social learning required changes in classroom practices, in pedagogy and assessment and supports comments above by Asjzen and Fishbein (1980) and Rogers (1995). This involved “backward mapping” from student social and academic outcomes to key classroom practices to school organization and then to systemic supports. The research builds explicitly on prior international research, particularly that of “Authentic Pedagogy” and “Authentic Achievement” by Newmann and Associates, from the University of Wisconsin (1979). The following Key Indicators of success were identified by these authors:

- All students should be involved in *intellectually challenging pursuits* – those that provide opportunities for deep engagement with a topic or concept. When students of all backgrounds are expected to undertake work of high intellectual quality, overall academic performance improves and equity gaps diminish. The “dumbing down” of curriculum must be resisted *especially for at-risk students*.
- Classroom practices that engage students in solving a particular problem of significance and relevance to their worlds – be it a community, school-based or regional problem/issue – provide the greatest opportunity for *connectedness* to the world beyond the classroom.
- Strategies that promote *Supportive social environments* have high expectations of all students, make explicit what is required for success and foster high levels of student ownership and motivation. Teachers respond positively to all attempts by students to display their knowledge and skills and explicitly acknowledge behavioral and classroom procedures.
- Strategies that *recognize difference* do so in ways that actively support individuals in participating, having their individual perspectives and experiences given status and operating within embedded democratic values.

Kessler (1988) suggests that skills and capacities named by employers as keys to success go far beyond

the three R's once emphasized as the goal of education. She identified the following criteria for employees that would connote preparation for the contemporary workplace:

- learning to learn,
- listening and communication skills,
- competence in reading, writing and computation,
- adaptability (creative thinking and problem-solving)
- personal management (self-esteem, goal setting, motivation)
- group effective (interpersonal skills, negotiation and teamwork)
- organizational effectiveness and leadership.

With the exception of "competence in reading, writing and computation," these skills can be identified as primarily social and emotional competencies, now being integrated systematically into education through the field of social and emotional learning. These criteria very closely match the Australian *Mayer Key Competencies* for employment identified in 1992 as:

- collecting, analyzing and organizing information
- communicating ideas and information
- planning and organizing activities
- working with others and in teams
- using mathematical ideas and techniques
- solving problems
- using technology.

Identifying the strategies which will best prepare adolescents for the world of employment will therefore require questions addressing the following:

- Key competencies in reading, writing and computation
- Development of social competencies - self-esteem, interpersonal/teamwork/negotiation
- Problem-solving, creativity and adaptability
- Information and communication skills including use of technology

The broad structure of the questioning therefore addressed three key areas to identify strategies contributing to the achievement of the stated objectives based on the indicators of success in adolescent education as suggested by the research documentation:

1. Effectiveness of the teaching and learning program
2. Effectiveness of preparation for the realities of the world of work
3. Effectiveness of key community/parent-caregiver connectedness to the program and of the program to the broader community.

The following is a telling summary of the challenges faced by faculties such as the school in the current study in dealing with contemporary youth:

I feel like I'm on a road at a huge intersection with thousand of streets yet I'm at a loss. There is no one to tell me the way, no "000" in the real world. You can't just call up and say, Hey, I need a destination, I need a place to go. Even if someone did tell me where to go, I wouldn't listen. Sometimes I feel like I'm going nowhere. Sure I'm on the freeway, but where am I going in life? (Personal Communication Glendyne High School Senior, 2006)

The importance of small schools for at-risk students is of utmost importance according to Jeffries & Lan-Sze Pang (2004). These schools have the advantage of being able to offer extracurricular activities, teachers are able to spend more time with each student and as a result, students feel safer. At a school described by Jeffries & Lan-Sze Pang (2004) there were no school uniforms but there was a dress code for students who are able to wear hats, beads, jewelry and baggy clothing should they choose. Teachers were a close knit group who were focused on the success of students. They were required to demonstrate patience, persistence, courage, energy and compassion. Teachers commented that their "social lives aren't very active" as they dedicate too many hours to work. They strive to establish friendly relationships with students by creating engaging lessons, and going the extra mile for students.

Impact of Leadership

Gersten, et. al. (2001) identified that administrative leadership was a powerful predictor of positive teacher attitudes in schools as teachers implement inclusive education practices for students with disabilities. Leadership impacts on working conditions and outcomes. Gersten et. al. suggest that it is the Principal's values that influence the teachers and the learning outcomes in the school. Their study indicated that effective special education services depend on the ability and willingness of the leaders to

- promote an inclusive school culture,
- provide instructional leadership
- model collaborative leadership
- manage and administer organizational processes and
- build and maintain positive relations with teachers, families and the community

Deal & Peterson (1999) agree, stating that if student achievement improves over time, it is due to the fact that stakeholders share the leaders' vision for student

success based on common values, traditions and beliefs.

Summary and Preliminary Research Findings from Literature Review

Youth who fail schooling or are excluded from mainstream schools usually fail to complete schooling and seek financial support from government agencies throughout their lives. Students, who offended before they were excluded from school, continue to offend, while others commenced doing so while excluded or suspended from the school. The literature recommended that alternative schooling be a standalone facility as opposed to being attached to a mainstream school. It should be a school that offers work-study opportunities with a *real life* and *life like* curriculum that does not *dumb down* the students and includes frequent use of technology. The literature draws attention to the need to have administrators who continually promote the schools' successes. The literature also states that efficient and effective delivery of programs requires that the government and private sector cooperate in the provision of the necessary environment. A Milwaukee school identified in the literature was characterized by smaller class sizes, inclusion of parents, students and the community in governance issues and processes, developed trusting relationships and caring attitudes, and that these factors made students feel safe enough to be able to learn and achieve.

This paper is presented to chronicle the achievement of Glendyne School and evaluate its perceived effectiveness in the school community.

Method

The process of gathering data about the programs at Glendyne School was guided by the following research questions.

- Has the program developed at the Glendyne School met the criteria described in the literature review?
- What is the view of students about the success of current program and how relevant and useful is it?
- What is the view of the program from the point of view of parents of students attending?
- What is the view of staff?
- How is the program seen by possible employers in the community?

This study was conducted in a regional area of Queensland. A cross-sectional descriptive design using triangulation was employed. This project researchers interviewed students, staff, parents, and employers. A forced sample was utilized owing to

the specialized nature of the target population (Neuman, 2005). The conceptual framework for this cross sectional design project was based on social justice theory as discussed by Thomson (2003), Smith (2004), and Couzos and Murray (2005). In doing so it was planned to identify how the program has redressed to some degree the issues of human rights equity, access to services and appropriateness of what is provided in the area of education for adolescents who do not fit the 'normal educational system'. An alternative education model at Glendyne was evaluated seeking to identify significant behaviors and processes that if successful may be able to be more widely applied to other Australian settings.

Within this framework, a participatory evaluation approach (Wadsworth, 1997) was used to develop an understanding of the implementation and evaluation model. A simple definition of evaluation research is "the systematic application of research procedures for assessing the conceptualization, design, implementation and utility of services programs or practice" (Rossi & Freeman 1993, p. 5). In this particular study, the specific approach of collaborative evaluation was used. This approach moved beyond process evaluation and included stakeholders in the evaluation process. In other words the study involved key stakeholders at all levels of the organization.

A central notion driving this type of evaluation is negotiation involving all participants affected by the evaluation. The process enabled participants to research alongside the evaluator, integrated program development and implementation from the beginning, and it incorporated evaluation data throughout the life of the project so that actions became more congruent with the evolving goals.

It was anticipated that this process may identify views that may be in conflict and it also worked to create a safe place for those views to be engaged as it integrated new thinking processes into the organization's culture (Koch, 2003). Demographic information about the institutions, contact persons and their details for the purpose of further clarification if needed was collected and stored prior to embarking on the study. Ethics approval for the study was obtained from the University of Southern Queensland and the Baptist Church Diocese in the area.

Staff were interviewed individually in the first phase and in the second phase, a focus group was set up to discuss issues such as self esteem development, communication issues, length of involvement with the school, parent ability to access teachers for information about their child, feedback to parents, academic achievement students and motivation of the students to learn.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (1996) was administered (with permission) to staff of

Glendyne following the focus group interview as part of the evaluative process to determine how this approach to education impacts on staff satisfaction and burnout and to determine whether or not their high levels of involvement—often after hours with the students was having a negative impact.

The survey comprises a 22 item self-report described in the literature as “the most widely used operationalization of burnout” (Lee & Ashforth, 1996, p. 124). The MBI consists of three subscales: emotional exhaustion (EE: sample item, “I feel emotionally drained from my work”), depersonalisation (DP: “I feel I treat some students as if they were impersonal objects”), and personal accomplishment (PA: “I feel I am positively influencing other people’s lives through my work”). Participants responded on a seven-point frequency rating scale, ranging from “never” (0) to “every day” (6). High scores on the EE and DP subscales and low scores on the PA subscale are characteristic of burnout. Reliability coefficients published in the technical manual are .90 for EE, .79 for DP, and .71 for PA (Maslach et al., 1996).

Results

Direct quotes from participants (staff at the School) are recorded in italics in this section of the report.

Student numeracy levels on entry were identified by the centre staff as being lower than the expected

Table 1: Spelling Assessment Results

Born between	Percentage	Reading age in years
1990-1991(i.e. 16-17)	73	<10.9
	15	11-12.4
	12	>15.5

As seen in table 4.1 the majority of students born between 1990- 1991 had a spelling age of less than 10.9 years while only 12% demonstrated a level of 15.5 years or above.

Staff identified that classes sizes are deliberately kept small so that they can work one to one with students. Many students come to Glendyne as a result of learning difficulties or exclusion from mainstream high schools for a variety of reasons;

Many of the students have a history of learning difficulties and social issues (ADHD, Asperger’s Syndrome) and this often limits possible achievements. They respond well to the positive rewards system. They feel really “chuffed” about accomplishing something;

Staff identified that one of the success factors of the learning environment related to the fact that literacy

standardized results for their ages in terms of literacy and spelling abilities using national standardized recommended scores. For assessment purposes students were divided into 8 groups including 2 get set for work groups (GSFW). Results were found to be as follows;

Preliminary level of ability: 1 student in group 2.

Level 1: 3 students in group 3, 1 student in group 4, 1 student in GSFW2.

Level 2: 6 students in group 1, 8 students in group 2, 5 students group 3, 7 students group 4, 6 students in group 5, 8 students in group 6, 2 students in GSFW 1, 5 students in GSFW2.

Level3: 1 student in group 3, 1 student in group 5, and 1 students in GSFW2. There are 3 level 3 students in group 4, 4 students in group 5, 1 student in group 6, 5 students in GSFW1 and 3 students in GSFW2.

Application of the **South Australian Spelling Test (SAST)** which is a nationally standardized spelling test for students in the range of 5-16 years is used by the Centre as a tool to provide a quick screening of spelling ability (and thus identify students who need remediation). Outcomes indicated the following;

and numeracy were related directly to life skills. For example;

... Integration of subjects such as Maths into things like metal work. Doing measuring and Maths and English in catering. Making shopping lists/orders.

And

... Got kids writing recipes from old books as practical exercise...

Staff stated that with the Glendyne approach to learning, students are able to achieve a result that enables graduation from secondary schooling and in some cases which would enable tertiary studies should students choose to do so.

We could help a student get an OP and go on to Uni[versity] if that was possible. There are some students currently who could certainly achieve that.

And;

There is nothing to stop them going on to Uni if they wanted – many go on to further study TAFE-type [vocational] programs. We encourage them and put things in place to help them. We work closely with industry-work-share and placements – hopefully these turn into traineeships

Or;

....a lot of stuff outside of school- gives a confidence boost – it's something we encourage. It is no use sugar coating things to make it look better for them....

Staff reported that they were each heavily involved in the development of student life skills in addition to and as a complement of literacy and numeracy skills. As noted here however, in order to achieve these outcomes, staff at Glendyne appear to be on call almost 24 hours each day (as borne out in comments by students teachers, admin staff and parents who identified that students are collected for activities during weekends and during school vacation periods).

The learning plans developed for students included a variety of life skills as well as literacy and numeracy. These included subjects such as communication, food handling, and tool handling and students were exposed to workplace training meaning that at the end of their schooling they were eligible for employment.

Content is tailored to individuals-not so much down-graded – giving more time – presenting subjects in a more interesting, hands-on presentation.

And;

There are Individual Education Plans written....

And;

The workshops (metal and carpentry) are practical as well – making go-carts, scare-crows, boat repairs-very like industry environment.

And;

We aim to keep them as busy as we can – avoid “down time” – especially in holidays - which is when they get into trouble, do drugs.-Fishing, motor-bikes are offered Monday nights footsal, touch football, Tuesday nights girls footsal. Holiday program aims to take them from when they wake up in the morning to when they go to bed at night (surfing at Rainbow [Beach], Skirmish). Youth workers and interested teachers are involved in this. [We] show them the life-style – be an example

And;

It is a very caring environment – students are not judged or criticized – we aim for a family environment – most of the students are from environments where this is not so.

Staff respondents mentioned that not all students were totally reformed, identifying that some students did re-engage with the justice system or some became pregnant however *processes were available to support these students during pregnancy and birth with process to enable their return to school.*

For the few students who re-offended and were returned to the Justice system, support was also provided by the school to facilitate continuation of their learning.

Responses to Maslach Burnout Index (MBI) Survey

The MBI was administered to 11 staff at Glendyne. It was used to assess three aspects of educators' burnout and is a useful validated tool for teachers, aides and administrators. Results indicated that administrators showed lower levels of personal accomplishment than did teachers (see table 2). Ten (10) teachers reported high levels of perceived accomplishment while one reported moderate levels of accomplishment. Four (4) teachers reported the highest level possible in feelings of accomplishment (see table 4.1). None of the teachers were able to be diagnosed as meeting the criteria for burnout.

Results did not indicate that the academic expectations of Glendyne were any lower for Glendyne students than those at mainstream high schools, nor that even though students came to the school as a result of behavioural problems that they were not required to meet certain standards of behaviour.

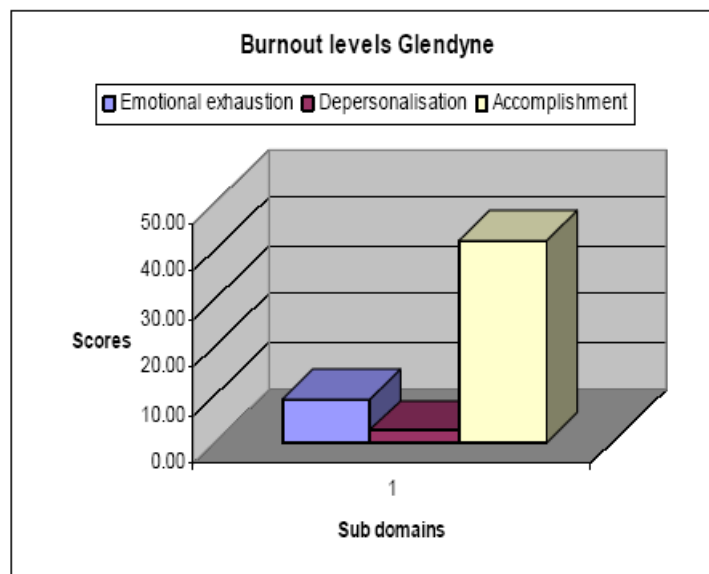


Table 2: Burnout Responses of Glendyne Staff

Teaching staff identified that they receive informal staff development in the areas of counseling and behaviour management strategies but did not identify if these competencies were a prerequisite of their employment.

Discussion

The literature review revealed that alternative schooling should be a stand alone facility as opposed to being attached to a mainstream school that the school should offer work-study opportunities with a *real life* and *life like* curriculum that does not *dumb down* the students and includes frequent use of technology (Kellmayer 1995). The literature also drew attention to the need to have administrators who continually promote the schools' successes. Successful alternative programs at Glendyne are characterized by smaller class sizes, inclusion of parents, students and the community in governance issues and processes, trusting relationships and caring attitudes.

Findings from this study indicate that Glendyne is a stand alone training facility which works closely with Department of Families, and the Department of Child Safety and Juvenile Justice and has in the past, won a number of awards. Staff in particular made comments to the researchers that revealed the depth of the *real life* and *life like* curriculum speaking about the practical aspects of curriculum (e.g. communication, food handling, and tool handling) and the ongoing commitment to emotional and social support of the students.

Overall findings of this review support the proposition that the Glendyne is a model of excellence for alternative education for adolescents who are unable to achieve in mainstream secondary school systems.

Academic standards were found to be appropriate for the learners, and the staff were able to give specific examples where learning is strongly linked to personal development, social skills development and work readiness following supported community experiences. This finding indicates that students are not being 'short changed' nor are they being graduated with unrealistic expectations of their potential in the community.

Staff commented favorably about the learning environment. There was ample evidence through the comments of staff of a commitment to students as individuals and students' achievement in literacy and numeracy as well as social and emotional health and resilience.

While writers such as Gutberlet (1999) suggest that the physical context is of lesser concern than access to people who are willing to care for learners as an individual with specific needs which they are willing to address, student responses in this study differed suggesting that for them, the context coupled with other factors such as teacher unconditional regard was a very important part of the enhancement of their learning outcomes.

Results demonstrated that Glendyne recognizes this and practices in such a way that responds to the value of situated learning upon attitude formation by the students. It reflects findings by Srinivasan (2000) who identified that Government and private sectors need to better cooperate to provide the necessary environment to enable (in this case learning) and they reinforce that social justice is a major issues for marginalized groups as also stated by Couzos and Murray, Smith 2004, Thomson 2003. This more accurately reflects sentiments exhibited by Glendyne Students. This supports findings by Newmann et al (2000) who point out that;

the 'dumbing down' of curriculum must be resisted especially for at-risk students. Classroom practices that engage students in solving a particular problem of significance and relevance to their worlds – be it a community, school-based or regional problem/issue – provide the greatest opportunity for connectedness to the world beyond the classroom(p.6).

This was reported by staff as being the case at Glendyne.

The fact that all respondents emphatically explained that a strict code of conduct exists at Glendyne; that students determine the ultimate outcomes of inappropriate behaviours and that offending students may be excluded on the basis of such behaviours indicates that Glendyne is in no way a soft option for non performing students. It is significant to note that often teachers would visit the homes of student during periods when they were excluded.

Such empowerment and valuing of students is perhaps the most significant attribute of the Glendyne program and is possibly the greatest difference between Glendyne and mainstream education systems. This supports findings by O'Donohue (1996 p.67) that this is actually about empowering communities and must be seen in terms of survival rights.

Social exclusion as experienced by non standard secondary students including Indigenous Australians is an extreme form of marginalization, and can be understood as 'one or more dimensions of non involvement or participation in that society' (Gutberlet, 1999, p. 224) and respondents agreed with the statement that an individual's decision of acceptance of learning is influenced by the surrounding social systems (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980). It is positive to note comments by teachers suggesting the employability and success in this effort by staff.

Researchers queried whether such high levels of personal involvement may lead to increased levels of burnout by staff however surprisingly this was not indicated in the results of the MBI. All staff surveyed (n=11) exhibited very low levels of stress or burnout. This was most likely due to their own per-

sonal beliefs, values and commitment to achieving the best for every student in their care. This was evidenced in their high overt support if students were in trouble. Of course this may always be more achievable with small numbers of students per group.

On the subject of counseling and management skills, if teachers were identified as possessing these specific skills/ qualifications prior to their employment at Glendyne, it would provide another reason for the low score levels of the BMI as teachers would not be working outside their particular comfort areas or scopes of expertise or practice as teachers in terms of involvement or ability to manage student behaviours which were non standard as a result of a variety of disorders. On the other hand all teachers strongly identified with the values and goals and levels of commitment of the Principal as being part of their feelings of personal achievement.

Despite responses by teachers indicating that they spend many outside hours with students involved in extra curricular activities and support, it was not seen by them as an onerous task so it is not surprising that burnout levels of teachers were low given that all teachers reported such high feelings of accomplishment and low levels of emotional exhaustion. Researchers wondered however how sustainable this may be if student numbers were to increase or current teachers relocated or resigned.

The one area of the literature about successful alternative school placements that has not been sufficiently addressed is that of ongoing government support. The literature is adamant that efficient and effective delivery of programs requires that the government and private sector cooperate in the provision of the necessary environment. In Glendyne's case the State and Federal Governments seem to be prepared to provide short term project funding only, with little in the way of a commitment that would enable longer term planning. This clearly needs to be addressed if the program is to be assured of continuing. Recognition of the training centre by the State government as a school facility with ongoing annual funding could be a small start to a successful community partnership.

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