

Abstract

The notion of Queensland as a ‘Smart State’ is the Queensland Beattie Government’s response to global conditions that require a new type of worker and citizen for a new knowledge economy. The role of education in the success of the ‘Smart State’ is clearly outlined in the Queensland Government’s vision statements and policies, identifying teachers as a key factor in the production of this new type of worker and citizen. In this study I explore the relationship between Queensland’s Smart State policy and the daily practices of teachers as they are implicated in the building of a ‘Smart State’.

The study takes place during what is unquestionably the largest and most comprehensive reform effort to be imposed on Queensland schools and teachers, under the auspices of a ‘Smart State’. The research includes policy analysis of two key Smart State documents, and fieldwork involving semi-structured interviews, observations and artefact collection of the work of two primary school teachers. Using Fairclough’s theories regarding the relationship between discourse and social change, it is possible to show how changes occurring in contemporary organisations are related to changes in discourse, in particular, those surrounding the discourses of a ‘knowledge economy’ or ‘globalisation’.

The ‘Smart State’ is conceptualised in this study as regimes of discourses that may produce new practices and new ways of acting and being (Fairclough, 2001a). The interdiscursive, linguistic and semiotic strategies used in Smart State policy are analysed to show how this discourse is emerging into a hegemonic position, while identifying the dominant discourses reiterated in the policy as necessary skills for a new type of worker. These discourses are mapped onto those identified through the fieldwork of teachers’ daily work practices to determine if Smart State discourses are becoming apparent in teachers’ work.

This study is significant because it makes visible the current relationship between the discourses of the ‘Smart State’ and teachers’ daily work. In this current climate of rapid change and economic survival it is important that the operationalization of a ‘Smart State’ can be attributed to teachers’ work as new ways of acting and interacting become a part of their daily practices.

**Operationalizing Queensland's Smart
State policy through teachers' work:
An analysis of discourses in a Central
Queensland school.**

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Declaration

I certify that this thesis has not been submitted in any form for any other degrees or in any other publication. The main text of the thesis is an original work and any information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text with a list of references provided.

Lenore Adie
December 2006

Foreword

Since 1983, I have worked as a teacher and administrator in both private and public schools in Queensland. In 1998 I became an acting teaching principal of a small rural school with 130 students and seven full time teaching staff. The following year I accepted a position as an acting deputy principal in a larger school with 700 students and thirty teaching staff. During this time, my work as a teacher has been full and varied, enjoyable and rewarding but also, as many teachers report, it has often been frustrating, tiring and all consuming.

Since the 1990s in particular, I have become increasingly interested in how teachers have responded to, and engaged with, the escalating number of changes imposed on them. I have observed teachers stoically continuing with the same practices believing whole heartedly in what they were doing and the transient nature of new practices in education. I have observed others radically change their practices to align with changes only to become disillusioned with a system when promised improvements did not occur. I have struggled to meet the needs of individual students only to find that no matter how much Information & Communications Technologies (ICTs), Multiple Intelligences (MI) or experiential and creative methods I employed, some students still did not engage.

As a parent of two talented girls, I also saw education through their eyes, as an unengaging, often irrelevant exercise that filled in their day but often left them without enthusiasm or inspiration for the school learning experience. So I was led more and more to the questions of how to engage children with their learning in a school setting. It had been easy at home with my children; learning was fun and relaxed with no pressures. Increasingly, however, as teachers, we were being told we were ineffective. Certainly there were still children succeeding at school but some were failing to learn even the basics of literacy and numeracy, while others were totally disengaged. With an ever increasing avalanche of new policies and syllabuses arriving on our desks there barely seemed time to get one under way before something new arrived. However the new policies and syllabuses were not the only complexifying aspect of our work. There were also new accountability demands and an increasing quantity of social and emotional issues occurring in our students' lives that we also needed to address. The accountability measures, particularly mandated testing, did not provide us with any information that we did not already know about our students, in fact, we had far greater knowledge of our students than these tests accounted for. It appeared that our professional judgement was no longer valued, and the feeling that, as teachers, we were no longer trusted permeated the school causing anger in some teachers and confusion in others. Amid all of these demands, the structure of our classes was changing. More and more we were providing support for students involved in marriage break-ups; we had a greater proportion of our students diagnosed with ADHD, autism, asperger's syndrome, anger management issues, depression...; and we had a greater quantity of students 'known' to our local police. What was happening? The nature of my work as a teacher was becoming so complex and the media only seemed to be able to find fault with our work efforts.

I needed to find answers to understand the processes of change and innovation that had led me to question my role and value as a teacher, and to develop an

appreciation about the nature of teaching as a particular kind of work in the current, new millennial context of globalising education. Through this study, I hope to develop my understanding of the contemporary nature of teachers' work and the forces that are driving its present state.