All About Advocacy

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During the nineteen nineties the public education system in the State of Victoria was subjected to a number of cost-cutting measures which led to a reduction in the number of teachers, the loss of ancillary services, a narrowing of curriculum, and a decline in teacher morale. By the end of the decade, welfare services within state schools had all but disappeared. Not surprisingly, this had unfortunate consequences for students, especially those labelled "at risk". In a period of high youth unemployment, retention rates of post-compulsory students (15 - 18 year olds) had slipped from 85% in 1990 to 65% in 1998.

In this context the Victorian Department of Education was persuaded to fund a research project to address the problem of school retention. It was based on the following premises:

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

Accordingly an action research project was proposed to develop and test a program based on these premises. In the political context it was important that the program be presented as a radical innovation. It was not acceptable to suggest that the pastoral care and student welfare structures that the system had consciously abandoned needed to be re-introduced. Furthermore senior management of the state system was somewhat infatuated with the possibilities of electronic delivery of curriculum and with the capacity of information technology to enable the systematic monitoring of students on a state wide basis. Accordingly, the proposed program was presented with a rhetoric of "individual student profiles' "electronic delivery" and "the management of student learning' and funding was obtained for a one year trial.

Three schools were involved in 1999. On the basis of the perceived success of the program expressions of interest were sought from schools for involvement in the program in 2000 and an additional twelve schools adopted the program. Following a

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change of government, the Department of education set up a committee of enquiry into post compulsory education in Victoria. The committee recommended that the Department of Education adopt a model of “managed individual pathways” for post compulsory students and suggested the Advocacy Project provided an appropriate approach to the establishment of managed individual pathways in schools.[1] With funding made available for the establishment of MIPs, 160 schools have adopted Advocacy in 2001.

The downgrading of student support services in the past decade is a significant factor shaping the current situation in Victorian government schools. It is only now that the tragic consequencesof this downgrading are being officially recognised. The Education Ministry is now returning resources to pastoral care and student support in schools. Whether they will be adequate or appropriate for the deteriorating situation in unclear.

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 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 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 developand 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 Archemeter) provided to assist in student profiling and guidance. These tools where developed by La Trobe University Institute for Education and the Geelong Science and Technology Centre. The database includes electronic questionnaires on learning preferences, attitudes to school discipline, 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.

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 within the three years that the program has been running. 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. Unfortunately, the sudden expansion of the program in 2001 following the allocation of funding for schools that undertake to establish a structure for managed individual pathways, has meant that some schools have taken on the model without either understanding or commitment. 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 Archemeter

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

The first group (student profiling) are 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 archemeter.

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 Archemeter 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.[2]

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 amodel for possible state-wide implementation. Through ongoing feedback from schools on the problems encountered and the development tof 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 [3].

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.[4]

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 feedbackwe 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 Archemeter without some training.

Using the Archemeter

Up till now, only a minority of advocates and their students have made extensive use of the questionnaires, so that the archemeter 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.

Electronic Delivery

The fantasy of many educators in the nineties that high quality electronic delivery of curriculum would soon be widely available for secondary school students, and would change the way learning is managed in schools, has not been realized. It has had practically no impact on the Advocacy Program as it has been practised to date. Nevertheless it remains part of the model, in the expectation that there will be an increase in electronic delivery in the next few years and that this will bring a need and opportunity and to develop the pastoral role of teachers and to intensify the focus on students as individual learners.

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.[5] 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".[6] 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.[7] 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 Victorian State Government's response to the Kirby Report into post-compulsory schooling has been to commit tagged resources to introduce a managed individual approach to pathways planning. In this context, 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 in 200 I 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.[8] 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.[9]

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.[10] 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.[11] One of the well-documented effects of good teacher-student relationships is the perception by students that school is a safe place to be.[12] The Advocacy Program acknowledges the impact of the teacher's friendliness and support on students learning and the survival of "at risk" students[13] 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.[14] 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[15], and with relationships with caring adults.[16] 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.[17]

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".[18] 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.[19] 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.[20] 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.[21]

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.[22]

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."

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[1] Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria, 2000. *The Kirby Report.*

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

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[3] 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.

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

[5] Students from non English speaking backgrounds express greater appreciation of advocacy than the average.

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

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[11] See E. Bereiter,1985. Towards a solution to the learning paradox. *Review of EducationalResearch,* 55:116-201.

[12] C. R.Rogers, 1983. *Freedom to learn for the Eighties.* Columbus, OH:ChasMerrill.

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[14] K. Osterman, 2000 "Students' Need for Belonging in the School Community" *Review of Educational Research.* Vol 70, No.3, pp. 323-367.

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[18] R. C. Pianta 1999. *Enhancing relationships Between Children and Teachers,* Washington: American Psychological Association; See also M. Rutter, 1987. Psychosocial resilience and protective mechanisms. *American Journal of Psychopsychiatry,* 57: 316-331.

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