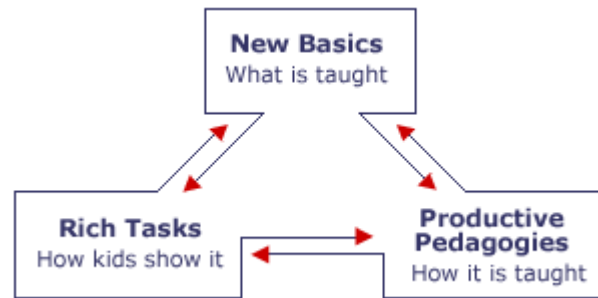


Productive Pedagogies

Productive pedagogies is one of a triumvirate of ‘new’ strategies that falls under the banner of the ‘New Basics Project.



Source: <http://education.qld.gov.au/corporate/newbasics/>

It is defined by Education Queensland as a “multidimensional model of classroom practice [that] is recognised as a framework for professional development that focuses on classroom practices and equity concerns in education” (Education Queensland 2003a). Education Queensland (2003a) identify four dimensions to productive pedagogies. They are:

- ◇ Intellectual quality
- ◇ Connectedness
- ◇ Supportive classroom environment
- ◇ Recognition of Difference

These four dimensions are further broken down into 20 individual pedagogical elements (which, in the interests of brevity, common knowledge, and for their wide availability, will not be discussed here).

Productive Pedagogies, through the New Basics Project aims to:

to prepare our students for the future. It deals with new student identities, new economies and workplaces, new technologies, diverse communities and complex cultures (<http://education.qld.gov.au/corporate/newbasics/>).

Education Queensland (2003a) claim “there is a general need to shift teacher attitudes from a focus on the 'minima' to higher levels of expectation and demand, while maintaining nurturing

and supportive classroom environments.” However, one can be left asking the question do the 20 defined productive pedagogies simply provide a new nomenclature for a logical and pre-existing methodology for teaching? Through the use of this new terminology, the government can “commit themselves to an imprecise, but nonetheless worthy-sounding, mission” (Marsh & Mullins 1998, p.751), without any widely accepted methods of achieving valid outcomes. The biggest fear is that the productive pedagogies strategy runs the risk of being reductionist. Over-simplification may result in ‘Productive Pedagogies’ becoming viewed as merely ‘20 ways to become a better teacher,’ which in turn might disadvantage the very students such a strategy is designed to help.

‘Productive Pedagogies’ may become criticised for being “just another link in a chain of shifting terminology” (Kilmurray 1995). There is concern that the adoption of ‘Productive Pedagogies’ represents nothing more than the relabelling or amalgamation of previous concepts. As Seamus O’Cinneide (in Kilmurray 1995) forcefully puts it “there is no point in using the term simply as a new piece of jargon, a pretentious flavour-of-the-month synonym for the familiar.” Simply adopting the terminology, without adopting an adequate approach to create a more productive classroom environment, will ultimately result in failure. Long-standing and locally developed strategies may be replaced with a broadly irrelevant inclusive pedagogy policy.

Some may also argue that Productive Pedagogies is an ‘affirmative’ strategy, in that attempts to improve performance and outcomes within the existing school framework. Perhaps an even broader, ‘transformative’ approach, that encompasses a restructuring of that underlying framework should be undertaken. Can the Strategy’s goals really be achieved without following this broader approach (Kabeer 2000, p.95)?

Ultimately, the Productive Pedagogies strategy cannot be properly assessed through discursive or policy analysis techniques alone. Only through tracking teacher performance and student outcomes, through programs such as the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS), can a valid critique be made. However, through informal conversations with practising teachers in SE QLD, I have noticed an air of scepticism, and an amount of ‘new strategy fatigue’ when it comes to ‘Productive Pedagogies’.

ICTs for Learning

ICTs for Learning is one component of the Education and Training Reforms for the Future package that is currently being implemented throughout Queensland. It is:

“a three year transition strategy to support teachers and schools in creating the conditions where Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are integrated as everyday tools for learning and delivering curriculum” (Education Queensland 2003b, p.7).

With this strategy the emphasis has shifted from ‘Learning to Use ICTs’ to ‘ICTs for Learning’. And, as such, there comes more than just formal recognition of the place of ICT’s in the classroom. ICTs have become an integral and vital component of Education in Queensland, and a practical supplement to pedagogical practice and strategy. School communities will be challenged to “discuss and plan to create the conditions in their schools where ICTs can be used as everyday tools for student learning” (Bligh 2003).

The strategy is organised into four programs areas. They are (Education Queensland 2003b, p.7):

- ◆ Core Program – provides continued funding and resources for all schools
- ◆ Priority Schools Program – provides assistance for those schools that were identified in 2002 as being significantly below the foundation benchmarks for the computer–student ratio and for connectivity
- ◆ Innovation, Excellence and Improvement Program – provides additional assistance for those schools that have met the foundation benchmarks and are seeking to use ICTs in innovative curriculum programs
- ◆ Systemic Support Programs – provide benefits and resources for all schools through centrally coordinated initiatives.

There are six “key ICT drivers” that “reflect the necessary conditions for successful learning with ICTs” (Education Queensland 2003b, p.11). These drivers are the “critical and interdependent components of an integrated approach” (Education Queensland 2003b, p.11).

They are:

- ◆ Learning, teaching and the curriculum – integrating ICTs into subject and curriculum areas.

- ❖ Learning and development – ensuring teachers have the necessary capabilities to effectively engage with and use ICTs as a tool for learning.
- ❖ ICT infrastructure – ensuring teachers and students have access to modern ICTs.
- ❖ Connectivity – making connections with the people, data and information required to learn. Connecting to each other and to the Internet.
- ❖ ICT support – initiating innovative support measures to remove some of the burden from teachers so that they can concentrate on the core business of teaching and learning.
- ❖ Innovation – acknowledging and encouraging schools and teachers to not rest on their laurels but to commit to improvement.

A “framework for ICTs in education” was established in the first year of the strategy (Education Queensland 2003b). This included the development of coordinated plans for integrating ICTs” by individual schools, based on a “set of foundation and preferred futures benchmarks and six key ICT drivers” (Education Queensland 2003b, p.7). These benchmarks will “move the focus beyond computers and cables to real student learning outcomes” (Bligh 2003).

This framework will be built upon with the following ‘highlights of the strategy (Education Queensland 2003b, p.6):

- ❖ Continued additional ICT funding for all schools
- ❖ Providing new Web and Internet Access Services as an integrated package
- ❖ Enhancing distance education through additional ICT subsidies and loans, infrastructure improvements and digitisation of learning resources
- ❖ Staging five regional conferences focusing on ICT curriculum integration
- ❖ Developing a short course on ICTs curriculum integration for delivery in universities, schools and other centres
- ❖ Producing a series of booklets for teachers which describe approaches to ICT curriculum integration with practical examples for the Queensland curriculum
- ❖ Increasing teacher engagement through the ICT Explorers Project, which will also include the trial of digital cameras
- ❖ Continued grant programs to support school ICT innovation in mathematics, digital portfolios, community access and ICT and under-represented groups
- ❖ Producing an ICTs curriculum integration measurement tool (based on Productive Pedagogies), supported by a three-year longitudinal study.

From the list of ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ (Education Queensland 2003c) on the ICTs for Learning website, it is immediately apparent that the strategy has the potential to become bogged down in the administrative and procedural requirements of its implementation. A considerable burden is placed on the administrative and teaching staff of the schools, to audit,

report and subsequently comply with the various policies. To some degree criticism will be coming from those being brought 'kicking and screaming' into the present (regarding the ability of staff to utilise this technology).

Again, opinions I have been able to gauge, from teachers in South East Queensland, would suggest a general willingness to utilise ICTs within the classroom, with only a few who see only tenuous links between ICTs and their curriculum specialisations. There is concern that ICTs are being forced into the classroom, for the sake of 'compliance', 'fashion' or being seen to be doing the right thing.

The effectiveness of this increase in the implementation of ICTs in the classroom, is ultimately dependant on two things. First, is the continuing technical support, that must be provided to maintain currency of software and reliability of hardware. Second, is the necessity (or perhaps preference) for students to be able to access similar technology in the home. Only when these two requirements can be wholly satisfied can the use of ICTs in the classroom truly reach their full potential.

Comparison

'Productive Pedagogies' and 'ICTs for Learning' are part of an integrated reform package being implemented by Education Queensland throughout the state. Pedagogical practice and ICTs can be mutually benefited by developments in either area. If you take the most simple definition of 'Productive Pedagogies' given above, as being "how it is taught," clearly the use of ICTs is 'the how' of teaching. It is probable that a link between each of the 20 elements of productive pedagogies can be made directly to a particular benefit of utilising ICTs in the classroom. As such, here are some of the more direct correlations:

Higher order thinking and deep knowledge are promoted via the use of ICTs. This is not just knowledge of the ICT application itself, but also the processes of investigation and the knowledge of the topic being taught (Blackhall 2002). Computers especially, allow for the manipulation, analysis and representation of data, in a way that cannot be conceived of in the brain or put down on paper. ICTs, as a popular medium, provide a sense of familiarity for the student, and hence allow for better academic engagement through increased interest, variety

or even novelty value. The shift of medium, away from the spoken word or blackboard, to computer, television screen or other ICT application fosters an engaging class environment. It also facilitates the inclusion of students unable to be engaged through standard techniques (hearing or vision impaired students especially). As such, the element of 'inclusivity' is satisfied.

The internet provides an unprecedented opportunity for student to be connected to the outside world, and to tap in to an immense knowledge bank. Through the internet students can identify and solve real world problems (problem-based curriculum element). Similarly, the access to a wide range of resources allows for the integration of a range of subject areas (knowledge integration element).

One criticism could be, the over use of computers in the classroom could detract from normal social interactions and, hence, have negative impacts on achieving positive outcomes in the Productive Pedagogy elements of group identity and active citizenship. However, if used properly, the internet can allow students to interact with other people, anywhere in the world. The element of knowledge as problematic can also be satisfied through the assessment of information obtained online, on the basis of who is responsible for its publication.

Despite initial insecurities, teachers should welcome the implementation of 'Productive Pedagogies' and ICTs for Learning, and utilise both strategies for the ultimate benefit of the students.

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