Symposium title: Innovative Pathways to Inclusion: Turning Policy into Positive Student Outcomes

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Conference theme: *Leadership for and in the future*

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Abstract: This symposium, entitled Innovative Pathways to Inclusion: Turning Policy into Positive Student Outcomes, discusses findings from research into 'inclusion' across diverse school contexts, from metropolitan to rural and remote regions of Queensland, Australia. The overall question addressed is "What are the common levers that inclusive schools apply to effectively turn inclusion policy into practice?" The symposium sits within the strand entitled *Rethinking roles and relationships within systems*. The purpose of the symposium is to present, from varied angles, ways in which effective partnerships between and within schools and systems result in innovative planning and support for all students regardless of learning need, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic background or past. The team have used a Refractive Phenomenological Approach (Abawi, 2012) to analyse and present the data, using filters derived from the three layers of Schein's Model of Organisational Culture (1990), and the elements of the Leadership Research International's Research Based Framework for Organisational Alignment (2010). Professor Lindy Abawi will chair this symposium. Prof. Abawi leads a team of researchers, both national and international, who have been conducting research in this field for over five years. This research focuses on the practice of inclusion and the 'what' of how it is enacted.

Paper one highlights the central importance of leadership practices that result in personalised learning pathways being developed for all students. An exploratory case study approach was used to capture both the lived leadership experiences of school leaders and educators and the key themes within each context, as participants endeavoured to respond to the diversity within the school populations. Schein's (2004) levels of culture model provided researchers and leaders with a framework to analyse organisational culture at various levels. Schools with distributed leadership structures, strong communication practices, and a clearly articulated vision for student learning are well positioned to support whole school improvement (Abawi, Leach & Raitelli, 2017; Sharratt & Fullan, 2011). While acknowledging the importance of this, there needs to be consideration given to the role that human interaction plays (Rousseau, 1990; Schein, 2004). This paper's findings indicate that successful inclusion – that incorporates equity, opportunity, access and individual rights - results from collaborative leadership practices characterised by attributes such as; personal commitment to the task, management of tensions between diverging viewpoints, modelling self-reflection and engaging in ongoing learning.

Paper two explores what type of school-wide pedagogical approach enables positive outcomes within these inclusive schools. Hargreaves and Shirley (2012) outline the importance of having the right purpose for planning and implementing actions at the system and school levels. Assessment literature suggests that while assessment policy has been a focus for the past two decades, effective practice continues to be a challenge. Renshaw, Baroutis, Van Kraayenoord, Goos and Dole's research (2013) identified numerous barriers to effective data use suggesting "more nuanced understandings and uses of data can be developed" (p.14). In this explanatory case study, a school/middle system leader partnership facilitated Assessment Literacy professional learning within three schools. A Cascade Coaching Model was implemented which utilised distributed leadership practices and data interrogation processes as levers for change and cultural alignment (Schein, 2004). This paper sheds light on this system/school relationship and how the cascade coaching model aimed at developing staff data literacy skills aided the development of coherence across multiple layers of the school.

Paper three explores the lived experiences of school community members and what these tell us about the translation of inclusive policy into daily work practice. The Queensland Department of Education's Inclusion Policy (Australia) states that inclusion means that "students can access and fully participate in learning" (2018, p1). Data was analysed through the qualitative Refractive Phenomenology approach (Abawi, 2012), indicating that practices and processes were specifically developed for each setting at the community, whole school and classroom levels. This involved the local education context and broader community being mobilised to provide practical strategies for supporting students, no matter what their individual need. As clear evidence of the inclusive school culture now established, elements of a common language and understanding of expectations for inclusion had become part of the 'norms and assumptions' of each school's culture (Schein, 2004). Professional practices embedded in all aspects of school life maximised inclusion of all children through structured routines and effective planning.

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Discussant

What are leadership practices, at all levels, that contribute to a clear vision of inclusion and a shared pedagogical approach to student learning?