

## **For the IB Conference - some useful extracts on making a more civil and diverse society**

This is a compilation of some writing I have done in the areas I discussed ad lib at the recent conference. I was interested in talking about the questions of how giving young people the IB type of option of learning independent thinking and judgement could make them better citizens. I was also concerned, after listening to the material on Kormilda College, that the IB should not be an elite option, available only to high flying students. This also came from my perception that much of the local IB's promotion was based on its capacity to deliver very high university entrance scores, which suggested that it was not for the 'masses'.

If thinking is worth learning, as is the ability to apply such skills into research and independent learning, then it is surely the responsibility of the IB promoters to develop models that work for a much broader range of students. Another problem with the current model is its base in classical European definitions of knowledge, which exclude, in Kormilda's case, including the highly sophisticated cultural and practical skills of their Aboriginal students. So the challenges I offered were:

- retaining the rigorous standards but working out ways that these could be offered to less able students who will not secure such high scores but learn heaps and
- Explore the possibilities of different ways of seeing and learning as well as oral cultures, and work out ways of honouring and including such knowledge.

This would both build the confidence of a more diverse population of students and recognise the value of other ways of learning. It would also increase the learning of the potential leaders who would recognise the complexities of diversity and wider definitions of knowledge.

The following extracts are part of my arguments on how we make societies more civil as well as creative, inclusive and able to change.

### **Virtuous differences –dissenting voices**

"A condition of being good is that it should always be possible for you to be morally destroyed by something that you couldn't prevent. To be a good human being is to have a kind of openness to the world, an ability to trust uncertain things beyond your own control, things that can lead you to be shattered in very extreme circumstances for which you were not to blame. That says something very important about the ethical life: It is based on a trust in the uncertain and on a willingness to be exposed. Trust is based on being more like a plant than like a jewel -- something fragile but whose very particular beauty is inseparable from that fragility." Martha Nussbaum as quoted by Harriet Rubin, in 'Fast Company' a US Business magazine site.

Differences should be good, sameness may be bad. We often fail to recognise the possible strengths we gain from rubbing up against the sometimes uncomfortable

possibilities of alternative points of view. We can gain strengths for collective action by recognising what we have in common but we can also gain strengths in what we choose to do and how we go about it by exploring a range of options and possibilities.

We need to do things differently, round here and everywhere. There is no possibility that we can all act in the same way or espouse the same values like peas in a mechanistic pod. It is often our unlikeness that becomes the strength of the ways we do things, with the proviso that we do not use the differences to destroy the other. The belief that there are correct ways and lines to run deep in our passions for promoting some causes and beliefs but in reality we need to look at the richness gained from the diversity of these beliefs ranging from small divergences to complete opposition.

Why do we so often promote one way of behaviour/being as the only right way to go? One explanation is the normal state of humanity is tribal and we gain our sense of self through group membership. There are many pluses in a sense of belonging, in particular when this is joined by a sense of purpose, of mission as we are social beings and want to be connected to others.

There is pleasure and satisfaction of desire as part of belonging, so there are many positive reasons to seek and maintain our relationships with familiars. The search for such relationships may also reflect more negative reasons for seeking connections. So we often look out for possibilities of linkages based on recognised communalities and familiarities if we feel isolated and/or fearful.

Tribalism is often based on fear as well as pleasure, so there are problems when the desire to connect becomes a basis for hostility towards the other however defined. Too often the desire to impose views, demand allegiances and seek uniformity may become the basis for both oppression and conflict. Loyalty is a double edged sword which can cut the capacities for making decisions for the common good in seeking consensus by not recognising the need for exploring conflicting views.

Feelings of belonging may betray common sense or rationality. Ethics need to be tempered by feelings and feelings by reason, and both by common sense. The differences we explore and acknowledge allow us to extend our viewpoints and see other possibilities. Avoiding conflict as a strategy is likely to reduce resilience and our capacity for doing the right thing, however defined.

We are often reminded about the problems of difference and the damages of conflict yet we rarely have similar emphases on the problems of uniformity. Instead we see the constant promotion of the virtues of loyalty, commitment, team players, solidarity and other such terms which suggest that we are best served by compliance and conformity. There are occasional pieces of reported research which show that there are serious dangers in phenomena like group think and forms of group behaviour such as soccer hooligans. There are some questions about complicity and silencing of whistle blowers raised when firms collapse or massive organisational problems emerge. But generally there are few who question the limits to loyalty.

The contrary position is also problematic as groups which are totally at odds and mired in conflict are not the alternative option. Localities riven by conflict do not provide any real benefits for residents. Firms or organisations which are split into constantly conflicting groups do not offer their clients much in the way of benefits. Squabbling in groups makes being part of them often quite unpleasant and interferes with good functioning and abilities to make things happen and get things done. Research in many areas and most recently in social capital places a high value on maintaining levels of social cohesion which facilitate collective action. Doing things co-operatively and collaboratively often is both a pleasant experience and an effective process for the participants.

So we appreciate the types of structures and environments which allow us to pursue common interests and purposes harmoniously. It feels good and often works very well for all involved. So the widespread focus on harmony has a solid base in our own experiences. However, there are both traps and problems in controlling processes to achieve such processes rather than rely on the organic processes of the project or group to create the sense of commitment. If we can achieve a sense of common purpose amongst groups who feel committed without feeling silenced or co-opted, we are looking at a much better process of cohesion.

Holding a group together by either creating an enemy or controlling the entry and acceptance of members is very risky. The types of connection made under such pressures may be brittle and fragile as they cannot cope with any questioning or new ideas. The demands for commitment and loyalty may also lead to injustices both for those in the group and those maybe targeted on the outside. As dissenting voices are not welcomed, errors and misjudgements are not able to be raised and problems may undermine the whole enterprise. Some workplaces obviously follow such cultures to their demise. At a lesser level, those organisations whose membership, workers or whatever are all selected to retain the comfort zone of the defining group may also be at risk because these again tend to reject any perceived threat to their status quo.

The idea that we can do without dissenting voices carries serious problems, both in doing the right thing and in the ways we go about doing it. We need therefore to ensure that our system of governance and our institutions recognise the need for a judicious mix of loyalty and commitment and the possibility of critique and questions. This is not so much a question of mixing the right people because most of us are capable of being both committed members and outside critics, sometimes at the same time. So it is our perceptions of our social and cultural environments that triggers off our sense of being able to belong and to be good citizen, not (JRS) just by loyalty but also by being prepared to speak out when necessary. This is an interesting balance we often fail to address.

Most of us prefer the non conflictual environment and will often put up with quite difficult situations rather than making trouble. A few of us seem inherently contrarian; maybe from an early age we started to question and developed this mode as a way of being. Too many of us would be a problem, but too few is also one. We need therefore to question not only when there are too many critics but also when there are too few. Like

the canaries in the old coal mines, the lack of early warnings by the dissenters may lead to invisible poison fumes affecting the masses.

### **How to assess ethical cultures**

Learning to learn in an ethical culture means ensuring that questions of fairness, respect for difference, doing the right thing, trust and other aspects of good social and organisational cultures are modelled as well as taught. Recent work on social capital and social and ethical auditing (the third bottom line) has opened up some possibilities of creating/changing group cultures so they become inclusive by changing the cultures of the organisations.

Creating ethical cultures in educational institutions set up some interesting challenges as it involved both content and process. Many of the reforms of the last two decades have involved content change but have often done little about the necessary accompanying cultural and organisational changes that are needed to embed diversities into mainstreams. The result has often been few shifts in 'the ways we do things round here', but often focus on making the excluded fit in.

By applying some social capital principles and ethical processes we can create organisational changes which may result in better correspondence between ethical principles ie inclusiveness and respect for diversity, ie 'doing the right thing' and 'the way we do things round here'.

### **Some possible organisational indicators of ethical processes**

- *A. Ethical organisations encourage debate and challenges, both from within and outside stakeholders:*
  1. Culture of acceptance of discussion and debate
  2. Recognition of the possibility of whistle blowing
  3. Acceptance that loyalty can include criticism
  4. Formal complaints mechanism
  5. Willingness of stakeholders to trust organisation with complaints
  6. Lack of any culture of suspicion.
  7. Manifest integrity within the organisation [maintenance of confidentiality, instituting change where promised, etc.]
  
- *B. Ethical organisations conscientiously take into account the needs of all the stakeholders within their objectives and seek to do no harm or minimise the effects on the less powerful:*
  1. Open stakeholder consultation
  2. Clear focus on inclusion of the less articulate
  3. Transparency about decision making
  4. Feedback to stakeholders on reasons for decisions
  5. Acknowledgement and appropriate compensation where harm is seen as not avoidable

6. Decision-making processes being open to all concerned
- *C. Ethical organisations value transparency and accept outside scrutiny*
    1. Open access to records and minimisation of commercial in confidence category
    2. Voluntary involvement in social and ethical auditing
    3. Preparedness to accept independent scrutiny
    4. Willingness to acknowledge and remedy problems
    5. Setting benchmarks and key performance indicators and reporting on these
    6. Evidence of high levels of trust of the organisation by stakeholders
    7. Practices of accountability at all levels.
    8. The active seeking of feedback from students, staff, customers, suppliers and other stakeholders
    9. A general freedom of organisational information.
  - *D. Ethical organisations are socially responsible and recognise the need to consider the common good as well as the needs of interest groups;*
    1. Articulated objectives and values which can be quantified
    2. Research into the effects of any actions where these are not known
    3. Setting of key performance indicators on wider social responsibilities of the organisation to the community, nation or international obligations
    4. Congruence between its declared ethical position and actual conduct.
    5. Stakeholders' perception of willingness to comply with values
  - *E. Ethical organisations act fairly and do not discriminate, directly or indirectly, against the less powerful;*
    1. Respect for difference, based on understanding with capacity for debate amongst equals.
    2. A cross section of diverse groups both in leadership positions and at the lowest levels
    3. Plans and actions for inclusion of under represented groups
    4. Fair and transparent allocation of tasks, rewards and resources
    5. Valuing contributions and appropriate use of sanctions
    6. Appropriate cultures which penalise favouritism, harassment and bullying
    7. Commitment to creating a culture of trust and security/safety
    8. Transparency of organisational interactions with stakeholders
    9. High perceptions of being trustworthy and fair by stakeholders

**For the people within them (staff/students/residents) the following should be outcomes and outputs of ethical cultures as outlined above.**

Learning to do the right thing because it is how things happen round here  
 Developing self confidence and confidence in others

Developing optimism about the possibilities of life  
Manifesting a healthy mix of good trust relationships and questioning  
Increased willingness to risk the new and different  
Comfortable ability to relate to others and strangers  
Respect for the organisational ethos and functions  
Commitment to the organisation, and solving any problems  
Recognition that mistakes happen and can be forgiven  
Preparedness to initiate and innovate  
Preparedness to take on responsibilities  
Desire to collaborate and co-operate  
Protective of an ethical culture against undermining  
Pride in being part of the organisation  
Able to see the view points of others and argue differences  
Respect differences and argue as equals  
Ensure others do not practice discrimination and harassment.

### **Can we make ethical equitable and exciting futures?**

Most of us want to make a positive difference, to make changes for others, even if things are good for us. Many of us also are worried about keeping what we currently have, particularly those changes we worked hard for over the past three or four decades. These included extending law reforms, public recognition and better services for women, those with disabilities, sexualities, immigrant cultures and to a more limited degree, indigenous groups. My worry is that the pace of such gains has slowed over the past decade and there are signs of we are moving backwards.

How do we recreate the optimism that drove those changes and follow up continuing and newer inequities and possibilities? We need to start with some wider visions of the future to work for and to find some common goals, some ways of moving out of the anxieties and feelings of despair that seem to lock many people into doing nothing or too little.

Let us start by thinking through some visions of utopia, the ideal society we would like to live in and leave to our children.. Firstly, let's put the social, ie inter-relating people, at the core of our future society, and focus on more than the economy and material well being. We can redefine our goals as people oriented and social well being, which relate to how we do things, as well as what we do. I am suggesting making things better incrementally rather than creating some grand socialist or market driven dream palace.

So my Utopia is a roadmap for ways of moving on and exploring what we need to do to ensure life is better, not just for us, but for the others with whom we share the planet. To feel able to move on, we need to see the possibilities, some sense of purpose, a light on the hill, or even many lights, even if elusive and always ahead of us. Oscar Wilde once described Utopia was always the next island to the one you just arrived on. So travelling well becomes the objective, not the destination, so there is no difference between means and ends.

Roadmaps need some suggested signposts for how we can move to more civil societies, so I am suggesting the following starting point for moving with a shared purpose::

Fairness and equity:	Create social cohesion based on mutual recognition of rights to treat each other well rather than fear of other.
Collaboration, co-operation and collectivity	Social communal connections and the maintenance of mutual trust balance individualism and competition
Diversity and pluralism	Differences make for creativity while uniformity and conformity will stifle imagination and variations
Complexity, conflict and tensions	Society needs to deal with these civilly to generate the necessary discussion, dissent, options and solutions
Responsibility and reciprocity	Building inter-active social connections become the basis for social systems and orderly exchanges of resources
Generosity and altruism	The pleasures of sharing and giving are crucial to our sense of commonalities and non commercial relationships
Rewards and recognition	Individual and group contributions and successes need to be noted and valued to reinforce positives and commitment
Dignity and belonging	Being accepted and respected for whom we are is crucial
Trust and trustworthiness	Ethical practices, doing the right thing, are core to general social trusting of those we don't necessarily know
Rules and laws and enforcement as last resort	Provide the needed safety net of minimum standards for order and rights if mores and values do not assert control.

The above list is my first attempt at some criteria for a good society based on recognising that we are social beings, and it is the qualities of our relationships and connections to others that define how we feel about our lives. We are interdependent and value ourselves as linked with other people. The big question is whom we see as meriting our trust and being part of our society. There are many polls that show losses of trust in most people and increased anxieties about the future since the eighties.

These include

- increasing sense of inequality in our society which worries at our egalitarian beliefs
- distrust of many institutions including politicians and big business
- increased fear of crime, even when rates are going down
- lower trust of strangers

These polls probably explain the paradox of our country both doing well economically and still feeling bad about the future. There are major rifts in our social links, both internally and cross nationally, which undermine our sense of belonging to wider world than those who are like us.

How do we start to put the fragments back together again? What has changed over this time which makes us feel much less connected in some wider senses? One big change is the disappearing public sphere. After many centuries of expectations of progress and

growing government intervention and shared risks, we have moved back into, at least at the rhetorical level, assumptions about individual self sufficiency that sits oddly in our interdependent society.

The last few centuries of Western history saw moves first from peasants to city states, to nation states; from traditional rulers to rules of law. At the same time, the expansion of knowledge and ideas has enhanced our sense of who we are and can be. Our cultures have become more global and our views have expanded. We may have lost some sense of local belonging, of being parts of rich traditions and cultures, but we are more likely to recognise the universality of societies, our common humanity and relationships with different peoples and ways of living, than ever before. Yet there are signs that some groups and even nations are seeing the post modern world as threatening and even bad.

We need to recreate some of the sense of connectedness and mutuality we had before collectivity, belonging and interdependence were conceptually over-ridden by consumerism, markets and choices. We need ways to reconnect more widely, so we can have the good will necessary to recreate inclusive, equitable societies.

We need policies that create genuine social cohesion across differences and encourage civil debate and dissent. These processes counter the ill effects of division and fear, and the distrust that engenders, by acknowledging rights, countering prejudice and acting on unfair inequalities between people. Current gaps between health and education outcomes that correlate with income and location are not acceptable in a wealthy country.

We need to make changes to those existing policies that have encouraged moral panics about various other groups: those who arrive on boats, some older immigrant groups who happen to be Muslim, recent immigrants from the Sudan, gay couples, sole parents with children over six, people who are judged to have insufficient disabilities and those deemed to be security risks under our complex terrorism regimes.

There are many other policy areas that need attention. One continuing issue is time and how we divide this between paid work, family care and community involvements. Once, the gender divide sorted out who took on the workplace and home commitments, now we need policies that recognise the need for workplace flexibility and the needs for care in both families and communities. Therefore changes in workplace law are urgently needed to re-balance the power of workers and employers and to cover areas like paid parental leave.

With an ageing population, a small baby boom and serious labour shortages, it seems a no brainer to change the ways of treating the tensions between paid and unpaid work time by both cash and good services. This involves valuing the higher productivity of part-time workers, meeting the need for more accessible, affordable, and higher quality care services and offering better pay for those who work in them. Maybe the incoming government could initiate an inquiry into how to spend time as well as money.

## **In sum**

The above cuts are from recent writings which cover the areas I talked about, as far as I can remember. I tend to respond to the audience and to what is happening on the day, so recreating my speech is difficult. So the pieces above are a cobbled together version of my continuing road map for creating more civil and inclusive societies. Creating ethical organisations, particularly in schools, models the wider possibilities. Accepting the need for bridging divides, recognising and valuing diversity, respecting differences and arguing its merits amongst equals are all part of what I call an ethical culture.