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**Practices and possibilities: learning from the Far North Queensland's
District Youth Achievement Planning process**

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Abstract

This paper builds upon a recent evaluation (Taylor, 2006) of the Far Northern Queensland districts District Youth Achievement Plan (DYAP). It describes the governance processes used throughout the trial phase of the DYAP initiative, maps the program's successes against the desired policy outcomes and analyses the policy implementation in terms of policy implementation literature (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Falk, 2002; Hall & McGinty, 1997; Prunty, 1985; Weatherly & Lipsky, 1977) and Considine's (2005) notions of new forms of network governance and "*action channels* and....sets of *boundaries*" (p.13). The initiative does seem to suggest that new "spaces" for political action can be generated through joined up responses to community issues and offer possibilities for new ways of implementing policy.

Introduction

Considine (2005) defines networks as “the connections that express a social world based upon partnerships, collaborations and inter-dependencies.” (p.4) and suggests there are three ways or “domains” in which networks can influence policy and program development. First, are those networks which are generated through joint mandates or resource dependencies. Second, are networks of individuals with organizational roles and third, are interagency or “delivery” networks where diverse agents collaborate in “the provision of a common program or service” (p.9). This third type of network, according to Considine (2005) “implies a new regime of strategies and methods to create joint management and integration of services... [where] members of the network co-produce in some way” (pp.9-10).

This paper builds upon a recent evaluation, where I was Principal Investigator (Taylor, 2006) of the Far Northern Queensland districts District Youth Achievement Plan (DYAP) processes, a network of the third type. It takes up Kaszca’s (2004) suggestion that “local and regional universities are very well positioned to investigate the specific local institutional setups and networks as well as the local socio-economic profiles. In particular, if policy networks and innovation networks exist, and how they operate in local settings is one possible line of investigation for the local academic institutions” (p.15).

The paper describes the governance processes used throughout the trial phase of the DYAP initiative, maps the program’s successes against the desired policy outcomes and analyses the policy implementation in terms of academic literature including

Considine's (2005) notions of new forms of network governance and "*action channels* and....sets of *boundaries*" (p.13). Considine (2005, p.13) suggests that new forms of network governance offer a robust model of public administration in that they can

- Respond flexibly to local conditions (Giguere, 2003, p.22)
- Achieve lower regulatory costs by stimulating collective action (Ostrom, 1998),
- Reduce transaction costs associated with fragmented service delivery (Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002, p.20) and
- Increase legitimacy through increased participation in decision making (Rhodes, 1990; Walsh, 2001, p.111)

and these are examined in relation to the study.

Context: An overview of the initiative

The Far North Queensland region spans a large, diverse geographical area: from small, isolated islands in the Torres Strait, across remote Aboriginal communities in Cape York, rural towns on the Atherton Tablelands and Coastal areas stretching from the Northern tip of Queensland to beyond the farming areas of Innisfail and Tully. The largest urban centre is Cairns with a growing population of over 160,000. The region incorporates the highest numbers of Indigenous school students in Queensland, some of the lowest socio-economic area in the state and the most difficult geographical areas in Australia in which to deliver a range of government services.

In 2002, the Queensland Government released the White Paper *Queensland the Smart State: Education and Training Reforms for the Future* (ETRF) outlining landmark education and training reforms focused on 19 actions to be implemented through partnerships between young people, parents, employers, schools, TAFE Institutes, universities and other stakeholders. The White Paper (2002) also heralded the introduction of new laws

to ensure that all young people in Queensland would be earning or learning. This new legislation, the *Youth Participation in Education and Training Act, 2003*, and *Training Reform Act, 2003* was scheduled to come into effect from January 2006.

In July 2003, 20 schools in 7 districts across Queensland commenced trialling the reforms. In July 2004, all Queensland Education Districts were required to develop District Youth Achievement Plans and prioritize strategies to support young people between 15-17 years to remain in learning or earning. These requirements included the formation of DYAP Committees comprising a diverse cross-section of all ETRF Stakeholders who attend meetings on a regular basis and multiple learning communities. DYAP committees were to identify actions for new learning communities to facilitate multiple pathways for all young people and ensure they were successfully implemented.

Roles and functions of the Local Management Committees

Local DYAP Management Committees (LMCs) were to commence community engagement strategies and planning processes within schools. Their role was to

- participate in and develop action plans, with all parties involved directly or indirectly DYAP and provide advice and support with regard to the roles, responsibilities and expectations necessary to achieve these plans.
- manage prioritisation of all resources allocated specifically for the ETRF and devise strategies to resourced all initiatives of the local DYAP
- oversee development and evaluation of the District Youth Achievement Plan.
- lead the building of partnerships, relationships and networks across the government, private and community sectors to promote an integrated approach to the implementation of the forms of the White Paper.

- direct the application process for grants/funding to support DYAP initiatives with the support from the Executive Officer and Program Manager.
- oversee the submission of project proposals and initiatives.
- Direct the provision of feedback, evaluation and reporting, as required, to government departments, stakeholders and community members on initiatives that outcomes associated with the DYAP (*Draft Memorandum Of Understanding, Education Queensland, November 2004*)

Thus, cooperation or collaborations between government departments (and others) was mandated in legislation, with the Department of Education and the Arts as the lead agency.

The evaluation

In early 2005, six months into the trial, the Department of Education and the Arts underwent a restructure where educational service delivery became managed under a more centralized regional, rather than the previous district structure. At the end of the initial ETRF (Queensland, 2002) trial implementation period, there was a statewide evaluation of the DYAP initiative. On June 8/9 2006, the Far Northern Regional District Youth Achievement Plan Local Management Committee members, Board and other stakeholders met to evaluate the local DYAPs and plan for the region's future. They took the opportunity at this time to evaluate the plans' successes, challenges and identify priorities and future directions and commissioned a qualitative evaluation (Taylor, 2006) to capture local processes, successes, challenges and learnings in a social archive.

A consistent narrative throughout the trial period and theme in the focus group interviews during the local evaluation was that the Far Northern Region was "different"

from elsewhere in the state. Participants believed that statewide performance indicators and aggregated data collected for the statewide evaluation could not capture local narratives and processes. A key participant from the Far Northern Districts said of his interview for the statewide evaluation *most of my conversation was how different our responses were, and had to be, and to try and get them [state level administrators] to understand.*

Thus, the objectives of the local evaluation were threefold:

- To capture perceived successes and challenges in the development and implementation of the District Youth Achievement Plans (DYAPs) and *ETRF* (Queensland, 2002) legislation across the region
- To identify ways forward and regional priorities
- To provide a social archive of local processes and learning to complement the summative statewide evaluation

Local evaluation methodology

The local evaluation is a qualitative study of the processes, successes and challenges experienced in the implementation of the DYAPs across Queensland's Far Northern region. The methodology draws on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) audit trail categories and evidence framework (Table 1) Data include statewide Senior Phase of Learning Trial Implementation Evaluation reports (Queensland Department of Education and the Arts, 2003, 2004, 2005), minutes of meetings, quarterly reporting frameworks, systemic accountability documents and processes collected over the 30 months of the development and implementation of the DYAP and focus group and unstructured interviews carried out with diverse stakeholders (see Table 2) on June 8 and 9 2006.

Table 1*Table of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) Audit Trail Categories and Evidence from the Inquiry*

Audit trail classification	Evidence
Raw data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • statewide Senior Phase of Learning Trial Implementation Evaluation reports (Queensland Department of Education and the Arts, 2003, 2004, 2005) • minutes of meetings • quarterly reporting frameworks • systemic accountability documents and processes collected over the 30 months of the development and implementation of the DYAP • focus group interview • unstructured interviews
Data reduction and analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • concepts and categories • Truths, Trends and Gems strategy • summaries
Data reconstruction and synthesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Truths, Trends and Gems strategy • Focus group identification of major (Truths) and minor (Trends) themes and disconfirming evidence (Gems)
Process notes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methodological • Trustworthiness • Audit trail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • statewide Senior Phase of Learning Trial Implementation Evaluation reports (Queensland Department of Education and the Arts, 2003, 2004, 2005), minutes of meetings, quarterly reporting frameworks, systemic accountability documents and processes, focus group interviews, unstructured interviews • consensus of participant identification of major and minor themes and disconfirming evidence, participant checking. • Data summaries
Intention and disposition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation proposal
Instrument development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drafts reviewed by participants • Feedback notes from participants

Table 2*Table of specifically invited participants and their roles*

Role	Number of participants
Head of Department, Senior Schooling	2
Far North Queensland Project Officer ETRF	1
DYAP Program Managers	2
Executive Director Schools	1
Project Officer, Senior Schooling, Indigenous School Support Unit	1
VET coordinator	1
Principal Adviser, ETRF	1
Principal Education Officer	1
Principal Performance Measurement Officer	1
LMC chair	1
LMC Project Officer	3
CEO, Cairns Regional Development and Employment Corp	1
ETRF Officer, TAFE	1
Deputy Director, TAFE	1
Case Manager, ETRF	1
Officer, DEST	1
Senior Schooling Officer, Catholic Education	1
CEO, FNQ ACC	1
Officer, Indigenous Youth Mobility Program	1
Youth Support Coordinator	1
Regional Manager, DEST	1
ETRF Adviser	1
Chair, Torres Strait Islands Regional Education Council	1
Industrial Officer, Queensland Teachers' Union	1
Regional Director, Department of Communities	1
Regional Manager, Department of Education Science and Training	1
Manager, Education and Training Innovation, TAFE	1
Deputy Chair, Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens, QCPCA	1
Deputy Director, Queensland Dept of Employment and Training DET.	1
Regional Planning Officer, Department of Education and Training	1
Manager Education and Training Innovation, TAFE	1
Deputy Director, Tropical North Queensland TAFE, TNQIT	1
Industrial Officer, Queensland Teacher's Union,	1
Secondary Officer, Catholic Education Office	1
Acting Community Support Officer, Department of Communities	1
FNQ DYAP Project Officer	1

Local governance structure and processes

In the Far Northern Districts, 6 Local Management Committees (LMCs) were formed to coordinate the development and implementation of the DYAPs. A coordinating project officer was appointed to each of the Tablelands, Cairns, Innisfail and the Torres Strait committees. One participant stated *our local approach has been quite different [from others statewide]. Initially we wanted one Local Management Committee but realised the contexts were too diverse.* The project officers also supported the LMCs that had no project officer. A Senior Project Officer, based in Cairns, had general oversight of the DYAP development and implementation, although she stated that *from the outset I wanted to develop local community ownership of both the plan and its implementation.* Thus, the Senior Project Officer paid great attention to community engagement, particularly in the early phases of the trial. Each LMC operated according to a common Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) with the Senior Project Officer as the coordinating communication point across the region. A DYAP Board, with representation from stakeholder groups, met every two months to raise local issues and make recommendations. The Board chair was one of the Executive Directors Schools from the Far Northern Districts. Although, membership of the LMCs and the Board changed over the period of the inquiry, due to staff turnover in stakeholder organizations, three of the four LMC Program Managers, the Senior Project Officer and the Board chair remained in their positions throughout the duration of the trial.

In mid-2005, twelve months into the trial, minutes from the DYAP Board meeting record the endorsement of a proposal for a two-tiered governance structure in response to the changed regional education structure earlier in the year. It was proposed that the Board should comprise high-level regional decision makers and that the Local

Management Committees' roles would be to present information and recommendations to this new Board from the "grass roots" or LMCs.

Summary of the data

Summary of quarterly reports

All regions were given a common reporting template to record key actions, successes and challenges. Local Management Committees reported back quarterly via the Senior Project Officer through the Regional Executive Director to the Education Department's Strategic Implementation Branch against pre-determined criteria which changed according to the phase of the trial implementation period. This quarterly data informed the state trial implementation reports.

In 2004, most of the actions in the quarterly reports were focused on building networks and partnerships, developing protocols and communication strategies, mapping programs, tracking 'at risk' students and increasing awareness of the DYAP initiatives with a variety of stakeholders. Key challenges in these initial stages were pragmatic problems related to geography and the lack of available service providers in remote contexts, attitudinal and awareness issues in schools, staff turnover, inflexibility at district planning levels and an unwillingness to share information across sectors and providers.

In 2005, the actions and challenges remained very similar. There was a continued focus on actions related to coordination, mapping, processes and governance to facilitate effective collaborations, information sharing and coordination. Participation in networks and development of partnerships were major actions. Community engagement processes were also given prominence. The Senior Project Officer at the focus group interviews stated, in relation to community engagement, *I used the Active Citizenship*

model. I was really concerned about processes, and about community ownership. I wanted the process to be democratic, for sustainability. The challenges in 2005 included the time that community engagement processes necessarily require, which was given considerable emphasis in the quarterly reporting and issues of inflexibility within and between agencies. “Resistance from some agencies (particularly education) to partnerships with other agencies.”

The summative report in 2006, reflecting on the overall impact of the initiative, identified the need for the DYAP implementation to have significant coordination support. This was a consistent theme during the 30-month trial period and through the focus group interviews in the evaluation. Lack of staff tenure and staff turnover are seen as major issues along with political and geographical problems. More flexibility in learning options, communication and coordination, and partnerships and data sharing remained significant challenges in the Far Northern Region.

Table 3*Table of Focus group interview data summary*

Focus group question	Summary of responses (those mentioned by all participants)
Reflecting on the FND DYAP journey, what do you think the main outcomes of this initiative have been?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the engagement with stakeholders (outside of the Education Department) • the focus on young people’s issues • having the mechanism for a coordinated approach to issues of youth disengagement • a feeling of optimism in the group that outcomes for young people could be improved through collaborative networks • a way of linking stakeholders together and these linkages had opened up possibilities of what could be achieved.
Reflecting on your FND DYAP journey, what do you consider to have been the major challenges?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the lack of engagement by and awareness from “on the ground” stakeholders, including ‘at risk’ students targeted by the initiative • the uncertainty of ongoing funding support; staff turnover; geographical issues; dealing with large amounts of information which precluded action • competing priorities for stakeholder time.
Reflecting on your role in the FND DYAP, what do you consider to be your major networks and relationships?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An absence of any networks and partnerships that <i>all</i> participants mentioned suggests that networks and partnerships were different for different stakeholders. It seemed that participants formed clusters of networks around the core groups that were the focus of the ETRF legislation (Queensland, 2002).
How do you see the role and function of the Local Management Committees in the development and implementation of the FND DYAP?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “vital” in providing coordination, local responses to local issues and a forum for networking and sharing • the power of local networks to effect local solutions. • DYAP process was seen to provide a mechanism to share information and collaborate across stakeholders • participants feared that moving towards a regional structure may detract from a local approach.
What are the opportunities for future directions of the FND DYAP?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination is a key future opportunity. • Participants saw other future opportunities in the creation of more pathways for students, sustainability of the initiative and sharing. <i>Statewide structures were not set up for mutual networking. The Learning Place website is designed for sharing but that is not really the same thing.</i> • Participants felt they had the power to change policy but there was no clear evidence that this had occurred. • Although participant responses indicated some concerns about the regional structure, they also saw possibilities within the new regional structure for Local Management Committees to continue to be able to respond locally.

Evaluation Findings

Finding 1

The DYAP process provided a mechanism to focus on young people's issues.

The structure of diverse Local Management Committees was deliberately devised to maximize collaboration and local ownership. This worked well in terms of generating feelings of ownership and collaboration and building relationships of trust and commitment. Participants saw the Committees as a flexible mechanism to “provide local solutions to local issues.” Local energies had engendered “alliances of commitment”, even at regional level. However, with the Department of Education and the Arts’ restructure, ultimate authority and power were still located at the top of the regional structure (with the Regional Executive Director). This hierarchy was recognized by the Management Group in their proposal of a two-tiered governance structure. The Senior Project Officer stated *I was really concerned about processes, and about community ownership. I wanted the process to be democratic, and that has been challenged a couple of times. Although LMCs remain vulnerable in terms of power and authority in the regional structure, the current Executive Director Schools with the responsibility for the initiative, observed democratic processes meticulously. He had also managed to put a forceful argument to Central Office about doing business differently in the Far Northern Region saying I spent about 45 minutes speaking [in the interview for the statewide evaluation] about how different our context was from the rest of the state...and they seemed really interested in that.*

However, the two-tiered governance system did not seem to be working effectively. Participants stated that it was difficult to get key players in a forum to focus exclusively on DYAP priorities. On the evaluation days, for example, no Board member, who was not also a Management Group member, was able to attend a Board meeting.

Board members, who had regional or other strategic roles, had multiple priorities. Issues of time and priority will be ongoing for certain members of the Board, especially those with regional roles. Thus, there are tensions between a governance structure that functions effectively in terms of operations (LMCs and project officers) and an authority structure which requires decision-making and the ultimate authority to be at a regional level.

Finding 2

Local Management Committee and Senior Project Officer/Program Manager structure was an effective, flexible way to ensure “local solutions to local issues.”

Participants throughout the evaluation were anxious to preserve the Local Management Committee and coordinating Project Officer structure. They felt a strong sense of ownership to the extent they said they had a voice “to inform policy.” The proposal for future directions of the DYAP preserves the existing structure.

Finding 3

Issues of continuity of funding for coordinating positions impeded commitment by stakeholders.

Issues and concerns regarding continuation of funding, particularly for the coordinating positions, pervaded the quarterly reporting data and the focus group interviews. There was ongoing anxiety that the DYAP initiative was vulnerable to vagaries of Department of Education and the Arts funding. In fact, even in early June, 2006, the Senior Project Officer and the Program Managers were unclear whether their positions would continue beyond June 30, 2006. The Senior Project Officer suggested on a number of occasions that the DYAP initiative should be located within a community foundation model *I really wanted to propose a community foundation/management model...for sustainability...to take it outside of Education...I think it's something we should be working towards.*

Quarterly and focus group data suggest, however, that there are considerable state resources committed to youth issues and ongoing mapping of programs throughout the trial indicated a constantly changing landscape of program and service provision as governments departments and community organizations were striving to meet their particular goals and targets. The mapping exercise also highlighted a number of overlaps in programs and services. The mapping data could provide a powerful economic efficiency argument for coordination roles across agencies to avoid service and program overlaps and duplications. Thus, it could be argued, resourcing the coordination and focus on youth education and training options is a mandate across governments agencies.

Finding 4

The DYAP process provided opportunities for networking and collaboration between government agencies and partnerships with community groups.

The benefits of networking and collaboration are referred to in the quarterly data and the focus group interviews. Participants appreciated the forum the DYAP process provided for building relationships, developing “alliances of commitment” and collaborative interventions and responses to youth issues. Data also suggests, however, that schools were more likely than other stakeholders to be reluctant to build partnerships outside Education. Participants also believed that schools were difficult to engage in the initiative. In early 2005, a key DYAP action was to present professional development about the initiative for stakeholders, including schools. Given the level of staff turnover across stakeholder groups, information sharing and professional development will need to be a continuing focus if newcomers to the initiative in the region are to be engaged and committed.

Responses throughout the evaluation period suggest that the DYAP forum is more about information sharing than action and this was seen as a frustration by some participants. However, the proposal for future directions presented to the focus groups (Figure 1) refers to the role of the DYAP as a “facilitation” network for developing flexible pathways for young people and the role of stakeholders as “enablers” of action within their own organizations. It is pertinent to recall that the function of the DYAP was to *identify* “actions for new learning communities to facilitate multiple pathways for all young people”, not carry them out.. In terms of authority and governance, the DYAP LMCs and Board members have no authority or capacity to enforce the mandate that “The DYAP actions identified in relation to learning communities have been successfully implemented” other than the Regional Executive Director Schools and then only within his (educational) jurisdiction

Finding 5

Inter-agency protocols are a barrier to effective collaboration. There are issues with which Department “owns” which data.

Interagency protocols and politics were sometimes barriers to effective communication. Participants highlighted a culture of secrecy and distrust, particularly across (and even within) government agencies. This was particularly apparent in the inability to identify or track some students, especially those who were not currently enrolled in any school.

Finding 6

There are issues with tracking students across Education systems, particularly those students who are not enrolled in schools.

Tracking and monitoring “at risk” students was an issue raised throughout the trial. Whilst some inroads were being made across the region to share data, and use this evidence to inform school programming and responses, there was no mechanism (other

than Centrelink and the Queensland Police Service databases) to track students who were not enrolled in school and these data were not available to schools or community organizations.

Finding 7

Staff turnover and lack of state wide mechanisms for sharing (other than website) militated against effective networks and collaborations.

The levels of staff turnover across all stakeholder groups were identified as a key challenge during the initiative. The constantly changing relationships between individuals and agencies consumed time and energy and necessarily focused attention within regions, rather than beyond. The consistency of the majority of the DYAP coordinating staff and the Executive Director Schools over the implementation trial period was recognized as a key factor in sustaining the initiative. The possibility of losing these coordinating staff after June 2006 was seen by participants as *the* major threat to the program's longevity.

Although it was a requirement that the local DYAPs were "publicly available" and they were posted on the Department of Education and the Arts' *Learning Place* website, participants had little opportunity to share practice across the state. One participant stated *state structures were not set up for collaboration, other than through the [Learning Place] website*. A strategy to minimize the effects of turnover is to have formal process to capture learning and practice in an ongoing social archive. An Action Learning model of inquiry could be embedded into DYAP processes.

Finding 8

The language of the DYAP, and ETRF strategies is largely deficit. There is a need for a different, but common, language for talking about students needs in order to engage students and others.

Participants identified two issues with the language used around DYAP and ETRF (Queensland, 2002). First, labeling students as “at risk” and talking about this with students was an obstacle to their engagement with DYAP initiatives. Participants related that students generally did not see themselves as “at risk” and attempts to categorize them in this way were rejected. Second, schools did not seem to be as interested in “at risk” students as they were in “positive pathways” for (all) students. The reframing of support and interventions in this way “markets” the DYAP initiative differently to students, parents, schools and communities. Moves away from deficit language and notions of target groups promote inclusivity and encourage cultural change.

Finding 9

Statewide success measures are predominantly summative and quantitative. Qualitative, formative measures would give a better developmental picture of progress towards statewide goals.

The issue of and tools for measuring success were raised by stakeholders. Current systemic indicators of success are predominantly summative (measure impact) and quantitative, for example, number and level of student qualifications achieved. Participants believed that qualitative, formative measures, using adaptations of existing tools could show incremental, achievable steps towards statewide goals and targets. An Action Learning model would be able to capture these kinds of data.

In summary, despite the turnover of staff in stakeholder organizations during the 30-month period of the DYAP Implementation trial, there are strong correlations between themes of success and challenge in the quarterly reports and the focus group interviews. Successes were regarded as

- A focused approach to youth issues
- A coordinated approach to tackling youth issues
- A local approach via the Local Management Committees
- Interagency networks and partnerships and opportunities for collaboration
- Mapping of projects and programs
- Agreements between agencies
- Awareness raising.

Challenges were identified as

- Sustainability of the DYAP processes
- Dependency of the initiative on ongoing funding allocations
- Sustainable partnerships due to staff turnover and lack of continuity
- Geographical and transport issues
- Interagency collaborations and protocols, particularly within education
- Having effective data and tracking mechanisms for young people who have disengaged from schooling

Table 4 compares the role and focus of the DYAP against the levels at which the outcomes are achieved in Far North Queensland. It can be seen that the Far Northern Districts DYAP implementation was generally successful despite ongoing challenges. Again and again, participants referred to the power and ownership engendered by opportunities to work in partnership and networks with others.

Table 4

Table of levels of achievement of the Far North Queensland DYAPS related to DYAP roles and focus

Role and focus	Level of achievement
DYAP Committee comprises a diverse cross-section of all ETRF Stakeholders who attend meetings on a regular basis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embedded across all LMCs • Attention needed to Board attendance
DYAP represents the issues facing young people, 15-17 years and sets out actions to address these issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embedded. Strong representation of issues, actions set out
DYAP is publicly available (i.e. District's Learning Place website, printed copy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieved. Information regularly updated and disseminated to all stakeholders
SET Planning, or its equivalent, is undertaken with Year 10 students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislated. Responsibility lies within schools and TAFEs to monitor
Young people gain education/career planning skills from SET Planning, which assist them during the senior phase of learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not able to determine from this data
Multiple learning communities have been formed which involve a wide range of DYAP stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieved. Wide range of stakeholders in each LMC
DYAP has identified actions for new learning communities to facilitate multiple pathways for all young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieved. Ongoing.
The DYAP actions identified in relation to learning communities have been successfully implemented.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not able to determine from this data

In terms of future governance, at the end of the two evaluation days, the Executive Director Schools proposed a structural model for the future that preserved the existing local management structure (Figure 1) that is, the two-tiered governance Board/Management Committee structure, in accordance with the regional accountability structure and the Local Management Committees.

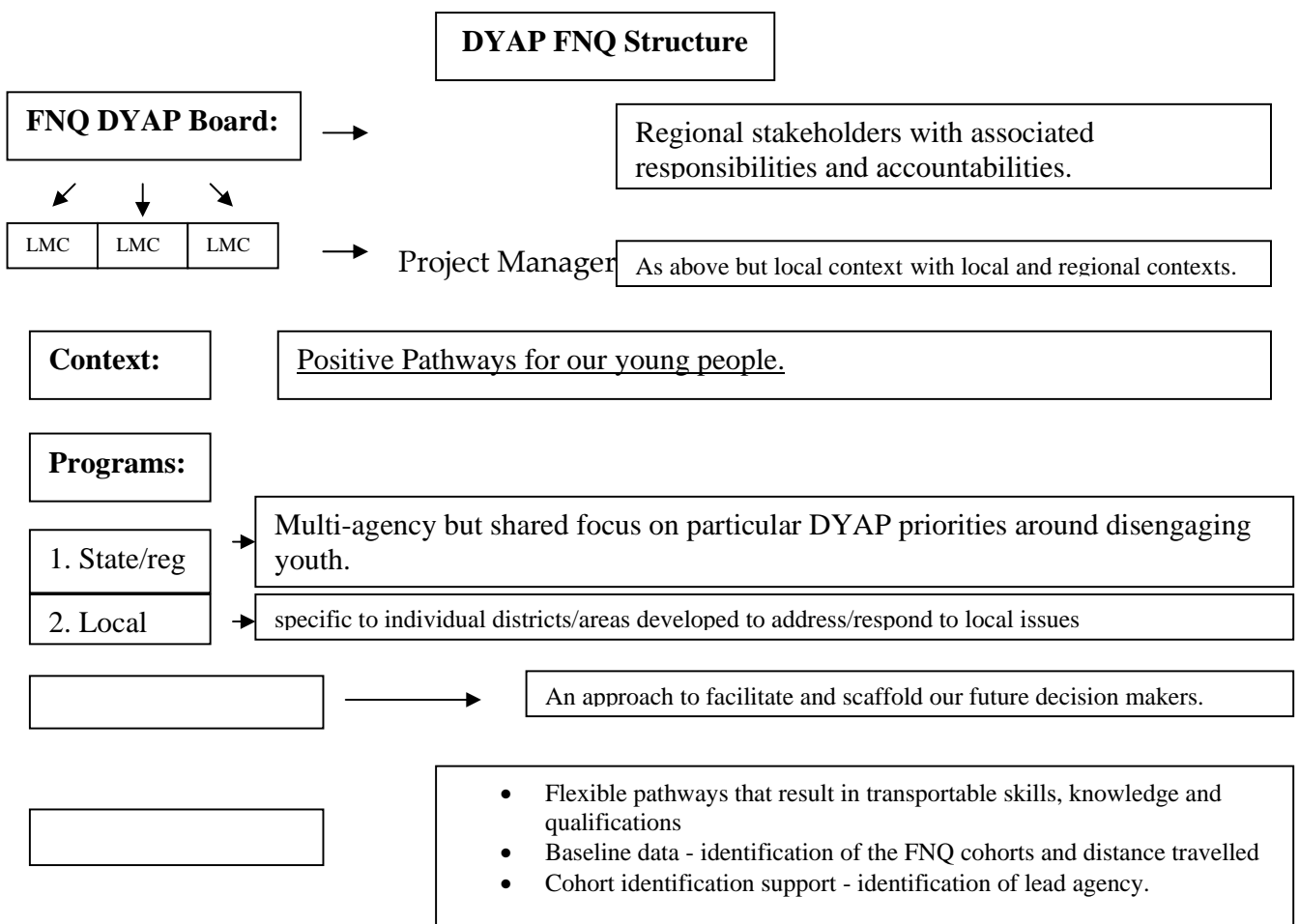
Figure 1

Proposed Far Northern Region DYAP structure.

DYAP FNQ

Focus: The facilitation of flexible learning and training pathways for disengaging 15-17 year old youths.

DYAP is a multi-agency/Industry-linked strategy in partnership with the wider community of FNQ incl Parents, Employers Schools, TAFE, RTOs and others.



The focus is “The facilitation of flexible learning and training pathways for disengaging 15-17 year old youths” thus positioning the initiative and the stakeholders collectively as enablers of flexible pathways. The gerund “disengaging” is used to capture both preventive intent and distance from a culture of “retrieval”. The DYAP is

described as a “multi-agency/industry-linked strategy in partnership with the wider community of FNQ including parents, employers, schools, TAFE, RTOs [Registered Training Organisations] and others” which clearly locates control and responsibility across agencies in partnership with others. Parents are listed first in community groups. The context is “Positive Pathways for our young people” with no mention of disengagement. The possessive “our” focuses attention on the collective responsibility of all stakeholders in the initiative. The approach that will be taken is described as “facilitating and scaffolding” with attention on “Flexible pathways that result in transportable skills, knowledge and qualifications; baseline data and identification of the FNQ cohorts and distance traveled; and cohort identification support - identification of lead agency.”

Overall then, the high degree of correlation between quarterly reporting data and focus groups interviews suggests consensus around key issues across stakeholder groups and a sense of collaboration and cohesion across the trial. Participants remained optimistic about the future sustainability of DYAPs, particularly in view of the state budget (2006-2007) and reassurances that coordinating positions would remain in place at least for another 12 months. They endorsed a future governance structure which mirrored the existing structure and the legislative intent of the DYAP had generally been achieved as indicated in Table 4.

What does this particular initiative contribute to our knowledge of networks?

Before considering what this particular case contributes to knowledge about networks and governance it is important to consider the initiative within a wider framework of policy implementation. Prunty (1985) suggests that policy production and implementation processes are site of struggle to sustain or contest existing power relationships. The formation of Local Management Committees, especially the multiple

Local Management Committees formed in Far North Queensland, seemed to distribute (centralized) power to enable more localized responses to implementation issues. The regional restructure within the Department of Education and the Arts initially caused fears but these were dissipated through open and transparent processes at a local level.

Simply because policy makers express intent in policy, does not mean their goals will be implemented. Implementation “problems” are the subject of a wide body of literature (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Elmore and McLaughlin, 1981; Hall, 1995; Hall & McGinty, 1997; Weatherly & Lipsky, 1977). McDonnell and Elmore (1987) identify four strategies policy makers can use to increase the likelihood of policy being implemented “They can set rules, they can conditionally transfer money, they can invest in future capacity, and they can invest in future capacity, and they can grant or withdraw authority to individuals and agencies.” (p.140). In this initiative, the Queensland Department of Education and the Arts clearly set rules, including one which essentially mandated the formation of networks. “Multiple learning communities have been formed which involve a wide range of DYAP stakeholders”. Money for the initiative was conditionally transferred through the funding of particular coordinating positions and was contingent on particular outcomes being met. There was, however, little explicit investment in future capacity. The Local Management Committees did invest time and energy in professional development for stakeholders but found this difficult to sustain due to high levels of staff turnover. Ultimate accountability for the initiative’s success was placed within the Department of Education and the Arts, via the Regional Executive Directors. Control of the initiative in the Far Northern Districts appeared to be passed to the Local Management Committees and Board, however, participants recognized that this arrangement was vulnerable and the Senior Project Officer reported that their governance had been *challenged a couple of times*. The Executive Director Schools with responsibility for the DYAPs was faithful to the agreed

democratic processes and this encouraged relationships of trust, albeit within, rather than beyond the initiative.

Edwards (1980), McLaughlin, (1998) and Weatherly and Lipsky, (1997) suggest four variables that influence successful policy implementation: communication; financial support; will and bureaucratic structure. In this initiative, communication between Central Office and the regions seemed to be clear although little attention had been paid to communication between agencies, between regions and between all stakeholders across the state. Financial support was provided for policy implementation but was not necessarily ongoing. The evaluation highlighted the will of participants to implement the initiative, despite significant challenges and implementation processes allowed local flexibility in bureaucratic structures.

Hall and McGinty (1997) propose that “the realization of [policy] intentions is shown as both constrained and enabled by (1) organizational context and conventions, (2) linkages between multiple sites and phases of the policy process, (3) the mobilization of resources, and (3) a dynamic and multifaceted conceptualization of power” (p.439) . This notion of power is particularly pertinent in the Far Northern DYAP processes. Significant attention was paid to democratic, localized processes whilst participants were still mindful of the hierarchies which could undermine decision-making and ownership.

Falk (2002) proposes that “inclusive and consultative processes are slow, but they pay off...in both the short and long term; and continuous and iterative evaluation underpins implementation success and sustainability of policy” (p.39). The Senior Project Officer was insistent upon taking the time and effort to build community engagement and this did build a sense of ownership amongst stakeholders, although it is debatable whether the program would or could be sustainable without continuing

government resources. In summary, the policy implementation literature indicates that many of the preconditions for success were evident in this initiative.

Conclusions

Klijn (1993) proposes that networks are “changing patterns of social relationships between interdependent actors which take place around policy outcomes” (p.231). Kickert, Walter, Klijn and Koppenjan (1997) distinguish between rational central rule and policy networks. In the former, government plays a central, controlling role with other actors as implementers. Policy networks on the other hand regard government as one of many actors with approximately equal power. In this study, neither is the case. Participants did not see themselves as mere implementers under government control. They resisted some centralized processes and crafted local responses. In the evaluation, they told narratives about why they constructed their internal governance in particular ways although they recognized government control and power as they controlled ongoing resources to support the coordination positions. Participants perceived they had power to change policy, but there was no evidence to support this perception. A strength of the network was that the individual with the most power meticulously observed the democratic processes within it and in some instances resisted the centralizing power. This network also shared collective knowledge, ideas and values and specific belief systems

So, is there any evidence from this particular case study that contributes new understandings in the way we think about social relations and the way institutions are thought to operate? Are there any indications that this group is operating in a more collaborative, diverse political space with “new transparency and respectful diversity in the relations of a political community” (Said, 1998). It seems so. From the beginning, attention was paid to community engagement and as horizontal a governance structure

as the hierarchy would allow. The meticulous attention to transparency and agreed processes by the Executive Director Schools, the actor with the most power within this network, engendered relationships of trust and resisted centralized processes where they were inconsistent with local realities. This suggests some evidence of “bounded autonomy” (Considine 2005). Although participants expressed frustration at the amount of information to be processed and keeping track of programs and overlaps, they did provide “action channels” (Considine, 2005) in that they enabled local action and formed alliances of commitment in responding to issues of youth disengagement. Although participants cited challenges associated with persuading frontline actors (principals and teachers) within the lead agency (education) to see the initiative as their core business, the forum or political space created through this initiative allowed for a joined up focus on youth issues that had not been possible before.

Stakeholders in this network clearly believed that they were able to respond flexibly to local conditions (Giguere, 2003). Attention to democratic governance processes also seemed to increase legitimacy through increased participation in decision making (Rhodes, 1990; Walsh, 2001) and appeared to foster relationships of trust within the network. The group paid considerable attention to mapping programs and services over the duration of the initiative to try and avoid service duplications and gaps. Thus there was, indeed, potential to reduce costs associated with fragmented service delivery (Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002). The evaluation was unable to determine whether lower regulatory costs were achieved through collective action (Ostrom, 1998).

At the time of going to press, the Far Northern DYAP Board had just received information that the coordinating positions would be continued for another three years. As the group move forward in their endeavors, the nature and dynamic of the program will provide more opportunities to understand if, and how, these sorts of structures and processes provide new forms of social governance and capital.

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