



History of The Fair Go Program: A Brief Overview



Katina Zammit is Deputy Dean and a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education, at Western Sydney University. She has been involved in the Fair Go Program since it began under the leadership of Geoff Munns, working with colleagues on School is for Me, Engaging Middle Years Boys in Rural Educational Settings, Teachers for a Fair Go and Schooling for a Fair Go. Similarly to other researchers, she has presented this work at conferences and published widely. Her interest in the 'Insider School' and engaging messages for teachers continues with the Leadership for a Fair Go project. In this article, Katina provides an historical overview of the projects that encompass the Fair Go Program.

Historical perspective, including development of engagement MeE

Teachers in Greater Western Sydney and academics at Western Sydney University (previously University of Western Sydney) have a focus on social justice and equity, for improving educational outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. I remember the beginning of the *Fair Go Program* and being invited by Geoff Munns to be a member of a team of academics working with teacher-colleagues who were implementing and evaluating changes in their classroom through a focus on student engagement. Each academic had their own area of passion: literacy, social studies and Human Society and Its Environment (HSIE), community connections, technology. Working with Helen Woodward, Geoff Munns introduced the *Insider Classroom* as a framework for teachers to use in both the planning of learning experiences and in the processes within a classroom that promote student engagement in learning. From the outset, teachers were positioned as co-researchers, a principle carried through all the projects that are encompassed by the *Fair Go Program* (FGP) (see Fig. 1, *Fair Go Program* Timeline).

The subsequent *Engaging Messages for Students* framework was conceptualised by drawing upon:

- the initial work of the team, supported by the NSW Department of Education and Training's Priority Schools Program (PSP). Our reflections on the teaching practices that promote student engagement *in* learning and that see education as a 'potential'.
- the research findings of others (such as Bernstein, 1990; Bernstein, 1996; Education Queensland, 2002; Haberman, 2010; Hayes, Lingard, & Mills, 2000; Newmann & Associates, 1996).

Initially, *dis*engaging messages were identified around the discourses of power that are embedded in teachers' classroom practices, (for example, with respect to students' *knowledge, ability, control, voice, and place*). We focused on practices that teachers were using that interrupted or disrupted these negative messages around students' knowledge, ability, and so on and thought about how to shift these to engaging messages to students. A result of this collaboration with the PSP was the book, *School is for me* (Fair Go Project Team, 2006), and other individual and co-written articles, papers and presentations.

The next *Fair Go*-related project was the *Motivation and Engagement of Boys* project, funded through the Australian Department of Education, Science and Training, which drew upon 15 sites, across Australia, identified as having successful educational outcomes for boys with a focus on low SES contexts (Munns



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et al., 2006). The project overlapped with *School is for me*, building on the initial two FGP frameworks. Martin's (2002) work on motivation and strategies to enhance individual students' engagement in learning was adapted into the Fair Go Program's pedagogical frameworks as an additional component for teachers to consider in designing the learning for their students. The *Motivation and Engagement (MeE) Framework* (focused around notions of Motivation, Insider Classroom and Engaging Messages), developed by Munns and Martin (2005), was used as a conceptual framework to analyse and describe the practices at these sites that contributed to the success of boys.

The *MeE* became the basis for the professional learning of teachers in both the 2007-2008 *Engaging Middle Years Boys in Rural Educational Settings* project and the action research each teacher undertook in their classrooms to improve boys' engagement in learning (Cole et al., 2010). The project was funded by the NSW Department of Education and Training's Priority Schools and Equity Programs unit and involved primary and secondary teachers in three regions of rural NSW: Riverina, New England and Illawarra/South Coast.

In 2008, the three-year Australian Research Council (ARC) funded project known as *Teachers for a Fair Go* began, in collaboration with the Department of Education and Training's PSP. The project involved 28 teachers throughout NSW in PSP schools who were regarded by their peers as exemplary in engaging low SES students. The *MeE Framework* was deployed as the data collection tool to record observations of each class. The teachers and academic team worked together on cross-case analysis of the 28 case studies on negotiated themes. The main outcome from this project was the book: *Exemplary teachers of students in poverty* (Munns et al., 2013).

Following on from *Teachers for a Fair Go*, five primary schools in south western Sydney initiated the *Fair Go from the Get Go* project in 2010-2011 for new teachers working with the *MeE Framework*. With the support of academics from Western Sydney University, the new teachers decided on a question based on an aspect of the *MeE Framework* they wanted to investigate in order to improve their students' engagement in learning through their teaching practices.

The project, *Schooling for a Fair Go*, while continuing the principles of teachers as researchers and focusing teacher investigations on an aspect of the *MeE* introduced a mentor-mentee model of professional learning. The mentors were originally drawn from teachers who had been part of the *Teachers for a Fair Go* project; they mentored another teacher at their school or a colleague in another school. The mentee later became a mentor for a teacher at another school as different phases of the project rolled out. In addition, in *Schooling for a Fair Go*, a number of schools focused on building the capacity of *all* staff to investigate their teaching practices. They used the *MeE* to frame individual teachers' research with mentors or coaches working alongside. At the end of the project in 2014, 24 schools in south west Sydney had been involved. One of the outcomes from this project was the publication, *Engaging schooling: developing exemplary education for students in poverty* (Sawyer et al., 2018).

Based in schools involved in the final stage of *Schooling for a Fair Go*, the *Leadership for a Fair Go* project is in its infancy. It expands the focus from teachers per se to consider the processes that a leadership team in a school employ to build an *Insider School* that promotes and embeds *Engaging Messages for Teachers* in their leadership practices (Zammit, 2017). The initial findings from *Leadership for a Fair Go* suggest that schools that adopt an *Insider School* disposition also promote teachers as researchers through their whole school practices and can often ignite further passion around teaching practice.

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