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"Post secondary education"

presented to high school principals, College Arms, Adelaide College of TAFE, October 1992

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ORGANISATION: HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

DATE: OCTOBER 1992

PLACE: COLLEGE ARMS, ADELAIDE COLLEGE OF TAFE

TOPIC: POST SECONDARY EDUCATION
We live in a world of enormous paradox. We live in times of astounding, stunning and monumental change. We can find technical solutions to many of our problems. We can think the unthinkable and do the undoable - yet are we a lot better off? We can do magic on our computers, land a person on the moon, analyse the gases surrounding Jupiter, fire a probe into the nucleus of Halley's Comet. We have learned brilliantly the means of accomplishing scientific and technical advance. When we look at our present capacity to solve problems it is apparent that we do our best when the problems involve little or no social context. We're skilled in coping with problems with no human ingredient at all, as in the physical sciences or in the technologies. We can send people to the moon, yet we can't find jobs for our young people; or appropriate accommodation for all our older people; we can build in our big cities, gleaming skyscrapers with computer controlled talking elevators, yet we can't make traffic flow; telecommunications wonders...
1. Economic recession and - more importantly - the longer term needs of industry restructuring, have put the vocational role of education at the forefront of the economic agenda. While TAFE is at the leading edge of this movement for vocational relevance, for stress on competencies, for modularised curricula and for alternative teaching and learning methodologies and for a greater industry influence on course design and delivery, the school and university sectors are by no means exempt.

2. We all know that education, especially in schools, is about far more than the instrumental values of the workplace. But unless education is sufficiently supportive of students' career aspirations these wider purposes will themselves be under threat.
3. Nowhere is this more evident than in senior secondary schooling. When, not much more than a decade ago, Year 12 was the preserve of an ambitious third of the age cohort, the choice between academic and vocational could be fudged – although few teachers suffered from the illusion that the competition for a matriculation score permitting entry to medicine or law was based entirely on a love of learning. Now that we are talking about 80 – 90 per cent of the cohort completing Year 12, the issue of vocational relevance cannot be avoided.

4. Unfortunately there are problems arising from our previous attitudes. The worst of these is the view that unless Year 12 leads to a university place the effort has been wasted. A second, perhaps contrary problem is that TAFE pathways, like apprenticeships, which previously provided opportunities for the reasonably talented but academically disinclined, are less readily available.
For many trades, incoming apprentices – currently much reduced in number – not only have Year 12 qualifications but in many cases work experience beyond school. For para-professional TAFE courses, Year 12 is a prerequisite – but unfortunately is seen as an inferior alternative to university training, rather than as a worthwhile career in its own right with increasing opportunities to transfer to degree training with credit.

5. The Finn and Carmichael Reports are attempts by the public to come to grips with these increasingly severe social problems.

The major components are the encapsulation of the work operationalization of the process.
It is possible to summarise the key points raised in those documents as follows:

Education and training will play an active role in responding to the major economic challenges facing Australia; particularly in restructuring the labour market.

The level of participation in education and training is to increase significantly (national targets).

There is a need to improve the quality and flexibility of our education and training systems.

There is a need to improve the distribution and balance of the national education and training effort to better meet the needs of the economy and labour market.

There are areas of knowledge, understanding and skills which all 16-20 year olds should experience (Key Competencies).

The employment and training opportunities for the disadvantaged should increase significantly.

A new structured entry level training system should be developed, with flexible arrangements between TAFE, senior secondary colleges and the workplace (Australian and Vocational Certificate Training System).

Competency based curriculum and assessment should be implemented to create consistent expectations of students whether in TAFE, schools and/or the workplace.

Vocational options should be included in upper secondary school curriculum.
Broad career education should be included in school curriculum.

There should be more emphasis placed on post-compulsory education and training in relation to employment and the work environment - hence the convergence of general and vocational education.

There will need to be changes to both senior secondary, curriculum and TAFE curriculum to accommodate the 'convergence' of general and vocational education.

These themes emerge from a climate which places many stresses on young people and on schools:

High youth unemployment - hence youth treated as a problem rather than a resource for the future. Short term solutions implemented to reduce unemployment; no coherent education/training strategies.

Although entry into full-time work is still seen as a crucial point in the life of young people both materially and symbolically, changing patterns of employment are limiting the number of employment opportunities for young people. This has been brought about by industry restructuring (including new work practices) and new technology. The economic downturn has accentuated this situation.

Schools find themselves in the forefront of the battle for economic survival. They are blamed for the unemployment of young people and are looked upon to remedy the problems - hence:

- accusations of irrelevance.
- demands for the teaching and assessment of the basics.
- the forging of closer links between work and education.
- demand for rigorous assessment and frequent reporting.

Messages from industry are conflicting:

(a) the need for generic skills, ability to think independently and apply skills across a variety of situations.

(b) specialisation, narrow skill acquisition.

Young people are to an extent treated as a homogeneous group in terms of educational provision, even a development like SACE may not cater for all and certainly needs to avoid developing rigid and narrow pathways.
Finn in many ways can be seen as reflecting symptoms rather than analysing solutions.

Both individual and industry needs are leading towards a convergence of general and vocational education. There is an increasing realisation internationally that the most successful forms of work organisation are those which encourage people to be multi-skilled, creative and adaptable. At the same time schools are broadening their programs and curriculums to offer greater access to vocational education for the increasing proportion of young people staying on past the end of compulsory schooling.

This view implies that in order to serve their clients' needs, both schools and TAFE will need to change: schools to become more concerned with issues of employability and the provision of broad vocational education; TAFE to recognise that initial vocational courses must increasingly be concerned with competencies that are more general than those which, for example, characterised the traditional craft-based apprenticeships. In industry, all parties will need to take a more active role in the development and support of ongoing training which is integrated with employment.

More specifically, the Committee proposes the following set of targets:

- as a minimum, at least a Level 1 traineeship or participation in Year 12 for all 18-year-olds by 1995;
- at least a Level 2 traineeship or progress toward a higher level vocational or academic qualification for almost all 20-year-olds by 2001; and
- at least a vocational certificate (Level 3) or progress toward a vocational qualification above Level 3 or a diploma or degree for at least 50 per cent of 22-year-olds by 2001.

This set of targets can be distilled into a single summary target that, by the year 2001, 95 per cent of 19-year-olds should have completed Year 12 or an initial post-school qualification or be participating in education or training.
Key Competencies

The Committee believes that there are certain essential things which all young people need to learn in their preparation for employment. These employment-related 'Key Competencies' are in the areas of:

- language and communication;
- mathematics;
- scientific and technological understanding;
- cultural understanding;
- problem solving; and
- personal and interpersonal characteristics.

Young people should be able to develop these Key Competencies regardless of the education or training pathway that they follow.
The emphasis on key competencies has run into two lines of inappropriate criticism. One is to confuse competencies with subjects in the curriculum and to complain that one’s favourite is not represented. The second was to forget that the remit of the Mayer Committee, which followed up this area of Finn, was solely work related competencies.

Implications for Teachers

The Committee’s proposals imply significant changes to curriculum, assessment, participation and organisational arrangements across the school and TAFE/training sectors. The successful implementation of these changes is dependent upon the capacity and willingness of teachers in both sectors to deliver them. There will be major implications for pre-service teacher education and ongoing professional development for school and TAFE teachers. There will also be implications for the preparation and professional development of trainers in private vocational education and training institutions and for enterprise based providers.
While there is something to be said about the benefits, including in the long term the economic benefits of a generally more educated society - and even more for a generally better education society - the short term consequences may well be a destructive and inequitable rise of credentialism, and, as Bob Gregory's recent empirical work on the incomes of degree holders has shown a drastic decline in the economic benefit received both by the graduate and by society.

OECD indicators - post 2'
attainment
- no correlation w/ econ performance

USA 35%
Japan 31% (Singapore)
Canada 30%
big jump - Japan, Netherlands, Scan 20%
In general it may be argued that the participation targets and patterns which have emerged in Australia, with such a dramatic rise in school retention and with a significant expansion in university places while many TAFE areas, especially apprenticeships, have actually declined, mean that Australia is putting too many of its eggs in the general education basket.

One consequence of all this is that schools must go further down the path of vocational education – at least to ASF level 2, perhaps beyond.
Carmichael is concerned with the decline in structured training for young people entering the workforce, with the fact that many growth industries, like services, have never had formal training as part of their culture, with the failure of the traineeship system to take off, with the vulnerability of apprenticeship training to downturn in the business cycle and with the inequitable access, especially the pronounced gender ties, of existing entry level training.

The purpose of Carmichael is to insist that almost all occupations and industries should provide structured training for enticing workers – and to facilitate a wide range of opportunities for the provision of that training.
15. Thus, in the Carmichael perspective, there is a continuum of acceptable training venues – at one end there is full time institutional training, school of TAFE; at the other is field time training in industry, both on and off the job; in between in every possible combination, with independent recognition of training authorities assessing competencies gained against competencies required in the ASF.

16. Once again, schools are faced with the vocational challenge and with the need to link institution-based education with work experience. Again, they are faced with external scrutiny and in some areas, like industry-level equipment and industrial experience of teachers, it will be difficult to achieve acceptable standards.

17. Clearly the answer lies in cooperative relations with the vocational education and training systems – by which I mean the public TAFE system but also private trainers and industry itself.
I won't even start on the major complications - operational - work-related - discussion.
Given the increasing centrality of Year 12 qualifications, it is increasingly necessary for the certifying authority – in this state SSABSA – to liberalise its credentialling arrangements to give full recognition to TAFE and similar subjects. Some progress has been made, but it has been slow, in contrast with the considerable degree of credit transfer given by TAFE to school subjects.

All excellence involves discipline and tenacity of purpose. As John Gardner, the American Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare 25 years ago, pointed out, "There may be excellence or shoddiness in every line in human endeavour. We must learn to honour excellence (indeed, to demand it) in every socially accepted human activity, however humble the activity, and to scorn shoddiness, however exalted the activity. An excellent plumber is infinitely more admirable than an incompetent philosopher. The society which scorns excellence in plumbing because plumbing is a humble activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because philosophy is an exalted activity will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy. Neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water."
18. In concluding, I wouldn't wish to imply that schools alone face major challenges in the post-Finn post-Carmichael world. For TAFE, the challenges are greater – for example, in incorporating Mayer general competencies into our very specific vocational courses. Beyond that, the environment has changed so drastically in TAFE – what we now call VET – that major governance changes are facing us at both National and State Level – [ANTA and SAVETA]

19. So, as the sun sinks slowly in the west, we remember that great truth: the future lies before us.