

LINKING EDUCATION AND BUSINESS
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The need for Australia to change work practices and to achieve a level of productivity comparable with other trading nations is almost universally agreed. The evidence and implications of Australia's foreign debt and our balance of trade deficit have forced most people to accept that changes are required.

It is essential that people in all industries, including school education, take the next step and embrace the issue as one in which they have a personal responsibility. Education and business links at the secondary school level can contribute by making students aware of both the relevance of their current studies, and the changes occurring in the structure of employment. The multiskilling that is occurring at all levels of the workforce includes, as a central element, continuing education and training. School education has to become understood by all students, as well as by all of us in education, as an important stage in a life long process of learning. Therefore, when I refer to the relevance of secondary school studies, I use the term to refer to both the development of pre-vocational competencies such as numeracy, interpersonal skills, manual dexterity, and literacy, but also to refer to the development of the skill of learning, and the acquisition of a sense of responsibility for self and for others. Seen in this light, education and business links can enable us to achieve a long cherished goal of liberal education - to create autonomous learners.

As we contemplate the possibilities for enhanced links with business, it is important to understand the context in which, in the 1990's, we are being asked to "embrace business". The OECD, through both its Education Committee and the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), has been most active recently in promoting understanding of the relationship between the economy and education. It might be expected that the Organisation for Economic and Culture Development (OECD) would bring an economic perspective to its projects concerned with educational innovations, but it has not always been so directly evident. When one considers over thirty years of OECD work in education, the question needs to be asked as to why the focus on economic benefits from education and training is so sharp at present. The answer lies in the major structural changes that are

occurring in all developed economies and the central role of education and training in this process (Poole, 1992, 4 cf).

The term business is used in this paper to encompass the broad range of productive activities. It includes manufactures and service providers in the private and public sectors. Community service agencies and primary producers are also included in the ambit of the groups with whom closer links with schools is desirable if schooling is to better help young people prepare for adult roles.

Over the past decade there have been a wide range of new programs involving links between schools and business in most OECD countries. Many people in Australian business are aware of these innovations. They see fine examples of links between schools and business overseas, and in other states within Australia, and they

are interested in the possibility of replicating these initiatives in their local education system. Business interest in education is to be welcomed and encouraged. The appropriate response should not be to accept "imposed" models uncritically, but rather to encourage our supporters in business to join with us in drawing on the experiences of others to help to develop appropriate links for Australian schools and Australian business. Most business people know that overseas procedures need to be modified to fit Australian business conditions, and therefore respond positively when Australian education managers propose to use the concepts behind the overseas initiatives to design products suitable for local conditions.

In NSW this process has led to the establishment of the Schools - Industry Link Program, and the Schools' Visits to Industry Program (Schools' VIP), which both commenced in 1988 and were in full operation in 1989. These are original programs designed in consultation with teachers and business people in NSW, that draw on and learn from experiences elsewhere. This paper describes how the ideas behind some overseas and interstate models that were of interest to people in business have informed practice in NSW.

SCHOOLS - INDUSTRY LINKS

The Schools - Industry Link Program was first established at East Hills Boys High and East Hills Girls High in 1988. By the end of the 1989 school year there were over fifty links being developed or implemented in more than one hundred schools throughout NSW, and in 1992 most government schools in NSW have a Schools - Industry Link. The development of the concept can illustrate how a constructive dialogue with industry and community groups can

lead to relevant education advances.

Education policy makers in NSW and business leaders were aware of the "twinning" program in the United Kingdom. In this scheme a firm and a school form a close bond. In some examples at least, the firm, with the support of the Manpower Services Commission, was seen by some educators to have corrupted the school curriculum, by forcing upon the school specific vocational training, and eliminating or reducing emphasis on subjects such as personal development, art and music. This is a danger to be avoided, not by ignoring firms, but by seeking an equal partnership in which teachers remain responsible for the educational objectives.

Business people and members of the NSW Science and Technology Council, had also observed the "Adopt A School" program in the United States of America. This program title implies that big business "parents", will know what is best for a "fledgeling" School. From all reports, it appears that in the USA there are some brilliant examples of partnerships between schools and business that come under the umbrella of the "Adopt a School" program. There are also some appalling examples of "company town" situations, where a firm dominates the school curriculum. In Australian business, there are many who see the advantages of the exemplary models of partnerships. There also may be a few who are attracted to the adoptive situation. Some educators might suggest that the balance in the above equation is wrong, and that it is many in business who take a narrow perspective. My retort is in two parts. First that educators above all others should avoid using a stereotype to label business people, and secondly that educators who are open to opportunities, and approach them with a clear understanding about the justification for the aims of secondary education, can bring most business people to a fuller understanding of the scope for business to make a contribution. This was the case with the proposal that led to the Schools -

Industry Link Program. In response to approaches from business to trial an "adopt a school" program, we persuaded business to agree to a home grown product. It was designed to achieve the benefits possible from industry involvement in the teaching of existing curriculum, while avoiding the risks associated with both the adopt a school model, and the twinning model of business influence leading to a narrow pre-vocational curriculum. Education policy makers in NSW, with the support of business leaders, worked hard to make the Schools - Industry Link Program a success. It is one in which teachers and business people work in partnership, with responsibilities clearly defined. We were fortunate in the pilot program to have the support of the NSW Science and Technology Council. We were also very fortunate that project officers from the NSW Science & Technology Council

proposed Hawker de Havilland to be the firm involved in the pilot project. Senior managers from Hawker played a substantial and constructive role in the evolution of the NSW Schools - Industry Link model. The support of both the Science & Technology Council and of Hawker, helped to give the pilot a high profile. The key to the success of the pilot, however, lay with the teachers and the company personnel who were directly involved.

In the formative phase of a Schools - Industry Link, teachers from all faculties assess the resources offered by the firm which include its plant, processes, and personnel. Teachers then initiate projects that meet educational objectives specified in the curriculum for various subjects. Business people determine the safety and feasibility of their firm taking part in proposed projects, and how to allocate their resources. Projects are then confirmed by a steering committee comprising representatives from the schools and the firm(s), with an attempt made to ensure that all faculties are represented in the final list of projects.

Once the link program is established and the working relationships are understood, co-operation and collaboration can expand as people come to appreciate each others expertise. The separate objectives of firms and schools, and the benefits that the Schools - Industry Links Program brings to all, can then be realized. A process of negotiation is important in the establishment of each link and teachers must take the initiative to achieve a successful agreement.

It is useful for both parties to be clear about the benefits that they can derive from forming a Schools - Industry Link. For the firm, the benefits include a wider recruitment pool, and enhanced morale among its workforce, many of whom are also the parents of students in local schools. Involvement in a link project can also help the credibility of the firm as a good corporate citizen in the community, and within the firm it can impact on the personnel development of middle management.

For the School, there are benefits for both teachers and students. The relevance of curriculum studies, and the evidence that managers in business value the performance of the students in their studies, can help student motivation. Career opportunities can be advanced both directly for the students who participate, as employers get to see what students can achieve, and also indirectly as employers make an increased commitment to their local community through the link program, and then look to their recruitment and training policies as an aspect of their corporate profile. More positive attitudes both from employers toward students, and from students toward employers, can help the environment in which young people seek to enter employment.

Teachers, on the whole, are able and creative people. When they get to work with business people on joint projects they get an

opportunity to demonstrate their skills. In the evaluation of the pilot programme, business people and the representatives from the Science and Technology Council, volunteered that they have been impressed with the skill and dedication of the teaching staff. This can have both a direct benefit on the morale of the teachers concerned, and a broader benefit for the status of the teaching profession. It has been said that teaching is one of the few professions in which practice is not observed and monitored by other adults. Lawyers, for instance, practice by interacting with their peers and adult clients. Classroom teachers do not normally get feedback on their classroom performance from their peers in the same manner as lawyers get feedback from their peers and clients. In an industry link, however, they do get to work with other adults, and thus the benefits of feedback can be realised.

SCHOOLS' VIP

Schools' VIP offers teachers the opportunity to provide students with an organized industry visit which is focused on a particular syllabus and on specific aspects of that syllabus where an industry experience is either required or recommended. From a curriculum perspective, Schools' VIP is also a program in which the curriculum objectives determine the nature of the link with business. Once the nature of the desired business input is determined, the project officer searches for firms that can contribute the desired experiential input. This program is jointly managed by the NSW Employers' Education Consortium and the NSW Department of School Education and is strongly supported by the NSW Chamber of Manufacturers, which provides office accommodation for the project.

The Schools' Visits to Industry Program is a very successful product that has evolved from the "KNOW BIZ" program in Melbourne, but it differs from the Victorian Know Biz Program in important ways which again illustrate how a positive and constructive response to an industry proposal can achieve benefits for schools. The Know Biz program was run exclusively by business, with little or no input into its design or management by the school system. The result was a program in which business told students and teachers what it thought they should know, rather than what they needed to know. Its focus was on showing students the career opportunities in business, rather than on the broader objectives of the school curriculum. In NSW, the focus on the syllabus means that the students are more attentive and observant in the business setting. As a result they learn a lot

more about the current opportunities in business, simply because they actually learn a lot more during their visit.

Schools' VIP has survived changes in program managers because both business and schools can see benefits from the program. Should either partner slip, the other will seek a recovery because both can benefit. On the other hand, I feel that Know Biz depends too much on a few committed business people, and may therefore not survive their departure.

For Schools in regions that have a low manufacturing base, and for high technology practices that are not widely distributed, the Schools' VIP is essential to enable equitable access. Electronics manufactures, the steel industry, and an airforce base are examples of industries that can provide opportunities for curriculum enrichment and are not widely distributed in the community. Likewise a company recognised for best practice in its industry might prefer to control access to its plant through Schools' VIP, rather than having to field hundreds of enquiries directly. Other manufacturers in the same industry may be able to

provide very suitable and more accessible alternatives for visits. Thus all firms in an industry can have the opportunity to contribute to the enhancement of the curriculum to the limit of their available resources.

It is interesting to note that the Schools' VIP complements the Schools - Industry Link Program both from the perspective of employers, and for School programming. Some firms have a principal physical base in a particular community, and a need to project their corporate image to that local community. The Schools - Industry Link Program gives maximum exposure in the local community. Others seek a wider profile, either because they have a widespread service or distribution network, as is the case with banks, or because they have a product which targets a youth market such as a record company. The Schools' VIP better suits their marketing strategy.

ETHICS AND EQUITY

It is important to be explicit about what benefits will be derived from a link with business, so that the implications can be considered by all involved. A particular issue arises when the firm has a youth market. Companies manufacturing or distributing financial products, records, clothing, or confectionery are likely to have a marketing strategy that targets youth. A visit or link for students undertaking a curriculum project involving the company can provide at least a positive climate for the

products concerned. The students will recognise the brand, and possibly be informed about the benefits of the product, which are two key elements in any marketing strategy. Given that the students are helped to achieve objectives in the curriculum, some may consider that it is sufficient to acknowledge these outcomes for business, and to make students aware that this is part of the reason why these companies are involved. Inevitably, however, one reaches a point where the desirability of allowing the product to be marketed, albeit indirectly, comes into question. Companies like Rothmans and Fosters have excellent manufacturing sites which contain features that could well illustrate, for instance, syllabus topics in Chemistry, or Art, or English Communications. The implications for the Health and Personal Development syllabus are also obvious and less desirable. These examples were addressed by the Board of Schools' VIP who determined that companies or sections of companies known by an alcohol or tobacco brand name, or who were manufacturing alcohol or tobacco products, would not be included in the visits program or accepted as sponsors of Schools' VIP.

Once a ban is placed on particular categories of products, issues are also raised about other products. Confectionery and soft drink manufacturers are other examples that have been raised, and another concerns companies that manufacture military equipment. The approach to this issue that I advocate is to place a total prohibition on links with tobacco and alcohol firms, but for the rest to build into the program, with the knowledge and agreement of the firms, an open exchange with people from the company about moral and ethical issues related to their products and their marketing.

Another issue to arise in industry links is the question of equity, and particularly the issue of gender and employment opportunity. Managers generally respond constructively when teachers raise issues about the opportunities for girls, but many current industry environments reflect the gender segregation in roles and remuneration in the Australian labour market. It is equally important that girls and boys are made aware of the

commitment in business to end gender based discrimination in the work place.

Managers are generally responsive when teachers raise the need to address this issue. It is necessary to actively seek out women and men in non-traditional occupations in the firm and to have them involved in the link activities. This affirmative action can also benefit women in the firm who get an opportunity to demonstrate their skills.

One of the reasons that business seeks to establish closer links with education is to increase its influence over what is taught. As a significant part of society businesses, in their multitude of forms, have a right and a responsibility to contribute to educational policy and practice. Some people fear that closer links with business will result in an undesirable level of control over curriculum by businesses. They dispute whether business people have the knowledge about what young people will need to know in the future (Blakers, 1992, 64). Both Schools' VIP and the Schools Industry - Link Program address this concern by enabling teachers to retain responsibility for curriculum aims, and by engaging business people in a dialogue through which they may be informed about the benefits of the curriculum goals. By assisting business to play a role in the implementation of curriculum, the students can find vocational implications in the curriculum which reinforce the value of a broad liberal education.

FACTORS RELATED TO SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

It is interesting to reflect upon the factors that contributed to the successful implementation of new education and business links in NSW secondary schools in 1988 and 1989. Obviously, there was a considerable demand for enhanced links between education and business from both business leaders and teachers. While almost any initiative might have been expected to enjoy some initial success in the climate in which the programs were introduced, the fact that the climate was right was more a precondition for success than the reason for the successful implementation.

Policy development was based on careful consultation with business. The education policy makers introduced information about the existing curriculum, and constructive critiques of overseas and interstate models. This resulted in many business leaders being convinced of at least two things. First that avenues were open for their involvement and that their ideas would receive a fair but critical hearing, and secondly that while educational administrators were prepared to listen to the views of business, business leaders were expected, in turn, to listen to the views of educators. Perhaps the political climate helped in this exchange. The initiatives were developed in the last nine months of a Labor Government. Most planners expected a Liberal victory, and knew that if the education system failed to deliver an appropriate response to business, that the new government was likely to give business a very strong influence in changing policy. These imperatives certainly helped to focus the minds of education planners. For business to, there were advantages in working with a constructive and willing administration, rather than waiting nine months, and then trying

to impose change on a potentially resentful and unwilling system.

Once the policy options were selected, development was based upon a careful analysis of overseas experience, from which principles for practice in NSW were drawn. Draft material was developed for both programs, and then piloted and evaluated (Catts, 1989)

before being launched across the system. As a consequence, when the projects were launched, there were available policy statements, manuals, and examples that could be provided to teachers and to business managers. There were also teachers and company personnel who could speak first hand to their peers about the success of their experiences with the programs. There was also substantial publicity and strong political endorsement from the Premier and Minister.

Finally, the Schools - Industry Link was rapidly devolved to regions and to schools. Seed money, and consultancy support was available for the first two years in most regions, but there was no expectation that these funds would remain available longer term, and the policy development unit was closed after two years operation. These factors meant that to take advantage of the opportunity presented by the new links, schools had to move promptly. Even in regions which had a policy of deferring statewide initiatives, to slow down what some thought was too much change in the system, the new education and business links were taken up in the initial two year time span.

CONCLUSIONS

It seems that social and economic developments will make closer links between education and business inevitable. Therefore the choice for education is whether to engage business and other community groups in an open partnership, or to leave the initiative to business. The evidence from other Australian states, and from other OECD countries is sufficient to demonstrate that conclusion. With a positive and an active approach to the concept of improving links between schools and business, the process can result in real benefits for teachers and students within the broad framework of the goals of liberal education. On the whole, the NSW secondary school system has made a success of the expanding links between education and business.

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1 During 1989 Ralph Catts was Secretary of the NSW Institute of Senior Educational Administrators, and was involved in the development of links with business as Chief Education Officer (External Links) in the Studies Directorate, NSW Dept of School Education.

2 Barbara Leigh, Faculty of Education, University of Sydney, provided a constructive critique of a draft of this paper.

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