

## INQUIRY INTO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS.

This submission is concerned with one aspect of the Inquiry Brief:

“The place of vocational education in schools:” Undoubtedly the concept of vocational education in schools can be a very potent force for good for many senior boys and girls. It can give direction and focus for their studies. Many students together with their parents and teachers set great store by such studies in schools. They see them as bestowing purpose and prospects to their education and hopefully they will increase retention rates in Yrs 11 &12.

It is to be hoped that education with a vocational bias will produce marketable skills and lead to a valid certificate and/or portfolio in fields of endeavour for which there is continuing demand. Certainly courses which foster business competence and enterprise are to be valued. But vocational education should not usurp too great a portion of the curriculum. A danger is that less confident teachers, weak students and insistent parents will concentrate excessively on course outcomes to the detriment of other valuable parts of the curriculum. It would also be a pity if education in schools was only seen as a means to getting a job; desirable though this would undoubtedly be.

Perhaps the most significant vocation that boys and girls need to prepare for, is life itself. This would be with all the varied consistences inherent in living a worthwhile existence to the full. All the educational endeavours in a school must be to create balance and mature human beings capable of clear judgements and wise choices. Any strictly vocational course must be planned with this in mind. As Cardinal Basil Hume puts it

“We are not engaged surely in producing just good performers in the market place or able technocrats. Our task is the training of good human beings, purposeful and wise, themselves with a vision of what it is to be human and the kind of society that makes that possible”

Experience does not guarantee progress or innovation if there is no vision. Vision is there to take us on from the present to the future.

A holistic view of education without vision and human significance in the minds of youngsters as they mature will send them out on their journey through life with one cylinder missing.

“Every man is ultimately the prisoner of his formative years”

J.H.Davidson (ed) Sideways from the Page. Sydney 1983 p.40

At some point it has to be asked “What can we hope to achieve on earth? What as human beings has our motivation been for?” Can the poet give an answer?

To laugh often and much  
To win the respect of intelligent people  
And the affection of children,  
To earn the appreciation of honest critics  
And endure the betrayal of false friends,  
To appreciate beauty,  
To find the best in others  
To leave the world a bit better,  
Whether by a healthy child, a garden patch  
Or a redeemed social condition,  
To know even one life has breathed easier  
Because you have lived,  
This is to have succeeded.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON.

The planning of vocational courses should not be done in isolation or with rigid demands. Boys and girls should have the opportunity to follow their natural bent and not be denied this through a schools curriculum structure. Every student should have the opportunity to excel in at least one activity no matter what course structure it might come under. Such involvement would access a state of effortless grace. Such “flow” is a feeling that shows a pupil is engaged in an undertaking that is appropriate for him or her. This need not necessarily be a vocational course. One has to find something one likes and remain with it. It is when children get bored at school that they fight and play up and want to leave, and it is when they are defeated by a challenge that they become worried about their school work.

“Flow represents perhaps the ultimate in harnessing the emotions in the service of performance and learning”

“Flow is a state of self-forgetfulness, the opposite of rumination and worry “  
DANIEL GOLEMAN Emotional Intelligence.

Of all worthwhile activities which are part of the school curriculum art in all its forms is perhaps of most general value in more easily accessing flow. Art also has significance apart from this . As Julia Cameron says in her book “The Artists Way (Pan Books) “ in a sense, as we are creative beings our lives become our work of art”

In an effort to capitalise on the undoubted value of well-considered vocational studies it should not be done either in fact or be in the mind of students in such a way that other subjects or courses are devalued. The full resources of a school should be tapped with impartiality and appropriateness where the needs of boys and girls are met . It is here that the concept of designing a well balanced program of vocational education should be a challenge for boys and girls, their teachers and advisors to fit in with. They should exploit the potential of other programs and not smother them. Over and above decisions relating to the curriculum what can we suggest as an easily remembered “outcome” to guide boys and girls as they go through school, notwithstanding “vocational studies” or whatever. This quotation embraces all

“We will find that it is going out to help someone whose need is greater than ours that we can solve our own problems and become fulfilled as a person”

Group Captain L.Cheshire. V.C. OM.

Vocational Studies like other courses should not be an end in itself but a means to an end-as envisaged by Cardinal Hume.

“Our task is the training of good human beings, purposeful and wise, themselves with a vision of what it is to be human and the kind of society that makes that possible.

“To me education is a leading out of what is already there in the pupil’s soul. To Miss Mackay it is a putting in of something that is not there, and that is not what I call education. I call it intrusion.

*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (1961) ch.2.* Muriel Spark.