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Sent: Wednesday, 14 August 2002 2:16 PM  
Subject: Voc. Ed. in Schools

This submission from Andrew Britton Teacher of Carpentry and Joinery at Gynea College of TAFE.

From my position as a TAFE Trade teacher, I have observed a noticeable difference in the level of skill and knowledge displayed by a student who has completed vocational modules in the school system and those displayed by a TAFE apprentice. This observation has been confirmed by comments from some employers who have told me they also notice a difference on the job.

I believe this difference is a result of three conditions.

Firstly, the school learning environment is different to the adult learning environment in TAFE. Students in TAFE behave differently towards the learning materials because they see a direct link between academic achievement and potential earning capacity. The topics of discussion inside and outside of class often relate to the work environment. There is a culture of common endeavour producing peer pressure. Add to this the industry relevant facilities and you can see why TAFE achieves a tighter learning focus.

Secondly, the students in TAFE have committed to a career path and are experiencing the adult working environment on a daily basis. Students react to the responsibility placed upon them in the work environment by taking greater responsibility for their learning. Whilst TAFE classes provide an invaluable resource of skill and knowledge which fast tracks 'on the job' learning, most learning will take place in the at work and supports the classroom effort. The synergy of this combination is impossible to replicate in the school environment.

Thirdly, I believe that industry skills and experiences brought to the classroom by the TAFE teacher are vital in motivating the student toward learning vocational skills. I have trained several groups of school teachers in the STEP program for Construction Skills and have received many unsolicited comments about how inadequate they feel teaching something they really have no experience in. They find it difficult to contextualise the learning materials and match the real world activities the students are experiencing on work experience. Students readily detect this sense of inadequacy and may fail to commit to the course of learning.

These are the observations of a TAFE teacher. Industry has shown some reluctance to give a stamp of approval to Voc Ed in schools and this is a quality issue that may be very difficult to address in the school environment.

Why do we have a dual system for Voc Ed? Why does TAFE teach HSC?

Why aren't we utilising the quality Voc Ed system provided by TAFE to train young people to be industry ready?

Why aren't we utilising the schools system to deliver quality HSC outcomes?

Hopefully these comments contribute to a body of information which will lead to the development of a Voc Ed system with consistent industry relevant outcomes and motivated learners.

