A view from outside the confines of South Australia

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The SACE Review report, Success for All, completely ignores two important issues, namely, (a) the portability of the certificate, and (b) the nature of secondary schooling in a future that is set in a global world. The Review saw the South Australian education system operating in a context that was limited to the geographical and cultural boundaries of the state. This paper discusses both of these issues that appear to require the resolution of conflicting and incompatible problems. In conclusion the paper considers the changing nature of schooling and the role of alternative education in both schools and programs and rejects the continuance of comprehensive schooling at the upper secondary school level within a bureaucratic education system. The paper argues that different types of schools should be gradually established through the self-management and self-governance of schools by the communities served and the choices made by the students who attend the schools and their parents, and who support them while they are engaged in upper secondary education.

Certification, selection, alternative schools, future of schooling, self-governance

INTRODUCTION

During the second half of the twentieth century there was a remarkable expansion of secondary education in many of the highly developed countries of the world. Australia and the state of South Australia were heavily involved in this expansion. Furthermore, there was a marked change in the content of the secondary school curriculum from the early 1960s onward to take into consideration the substantial growth in knowledge that had occurred during the previous 100 years. These developments led to further changes in the manner in which teaching and learning took place in secondary schools, and it cannot be assumed that the time for change has passed. Indeed it must be argued that further change is long overdue and cannot be held back. Consequently, the SACE Review must be considered to be timely.

Nevertheless, it is argued in this paper that the issues are very much more complex than the SACE Review panel has envisaged from the material presented in its report *Success for All*. The full gamut of issues that need to be taken into consideration cannot be presented in one brief paper. Other papers in this volume draw attention to the failure to consider evidence from educational research and the limited information that is available in South Australia which bears on these problems. Moreover, little attempt would appear to have been made in the SACE Review to assemble the available research findings and reports that address the many issues that very clearly exist.

This paper is limited to considering two issues that arise from viewing the South Australian education system as operating in a context that extends well beyond the geographical and cultural boundaries in which the people of South Australia live. The Government of the state of South Australia is no longer running an isolated school system. South Australia is also a small state that must provide for education within an Australian system, with a flow of students in and out of the state and the country during their years of schooling and tertiary studies. Moreover, Australia is a relatively small, although affluent country, with a high level of human development set in the Asia

Pacific region, but with traditional and strong ties to the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States, upon which its culture is largely based.

The SACE Review report totally ignored consideration of the two issues addressed in this paper that arose from outside the geographical and cultural boundaries of the state.

These issues are:

(a) the portability of the South Australian Certificate of Education both within and outside Australia and over time, and

(b) the nature of secondary schooling in a future that is set in a global world.

The complexity involved in addressing these two issues is that they appear to require the resolution of conflicting and incompatible problems.

THE PORTABILITY OF THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION

It is essential that the South Australian Certificate of Education should be portable across the countries of the developed world and, in particular, across the countries of the Asia Pacific region. Not only do students come from countries within this region to study in South Australian schools and institutions of higher education, but there is currently demand from schools in some countries of the region for their students to prepare for and sit for the SACE examination in their home country. The certificate serves the purpose of selection and certification, as well as being a gateway to adult life, not only inside but also outside South Australia. Consequently, the certificate must be based on evidence that the holder has studied curricula which are sound preparation for both work and further study in clearly identifiable fields of learning that may be required by particular employers or by particular educational institutions in different parts of the world, and to enable participation as adults in a complex society.

The demands for this evidence require that comparability of student achievement and development must be consistent with the standards of performance attained by students in other states of Australia. Consequently, it is necessary that:

(a) curricula in particular fields of learning are comparable across states, and that a process of curricular moderation operates to ensure comparability;

(b) a single index for level of performance is provided across a range of fields of learning, in general no less than five fields, in order to ensure that study in the final years of schooling is broadly based and with substantial depth in selected fields; and

(c) procedures for equating levels of performance across states of Australia, across fields of learning, and where necessary across educational institutions and sectors within the state of South Australia, are employed in the calculation of an index for the level of performance achieved.

In addition, there is a need to assess social and emotional development in ways that are meaningful across a wide range of situations both inside and outside Australia.

Without the maintenance of such portability, there would be the serious danger that holders of the South Australian Certificate of Education would be disadvantaged in pursuing further study or obtaining employment in another state of Australia, or in another country, or at a later time in the holder's working life.

The functions of selection, certification and gate-keeping prior to entry to adult life may be seen to overlap or may be seen to differ to the extent that different indicators are employed to serve each

function separately. If more than one indicator is assessed, then the different indicators employed need to provide the required portability for the purposes of selection and certification, as well as an act of gate-keeping for a wide variety of situations. Life in the so-called 'global world' is a very real option for those students graduating from high school in the twenty-first century.

THE NATURE OF SCHOOLING IN THE FUTURE

The nature of schooling, particularly upper secondary schooling, must inevitably change over the next 40 years in response to the advent of information and communications technology, globalisation and the need for learning throughout life. Approximately 40 years ago the public examination system in South Australia underwent considerable change, in which the admirable flexibility of the existing system was lost in efforts to raise the standards of entry to the two universities that would soon be operating within the state. It is clearly evident that over the next 40 years educational institutions at all levels of schools, universities, technical colleges and centres of lifelong learning and development, as well as use of the media, will need to respond to the demands of rapid technological, social and economic changes. Clearly, plans must be made now. There is, however, the danger that preoccupation with the short term political demands of much decision making in the field of education may prevent serious efforts being made in thinking and planning for the future,

The Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) within the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is undertaking a multiphase project concerned with 'Schooling for Tomorrow'. One of the outcomes of the first phase of this project was the development of six scenarios for schooling in the future. The scenarios were organised under three groupings. These are listed on the OECD website (www.oecd.org).

Attempting to Maintain the Status Quo

1. The "Bureaucratic School Systems Continue" Scenario.

The findings of unpublished research in Australia suggest that educational leaders in Australia expect Scenario 1 to continue.

Diverse, Dynamic Schools after Root-and-Branch Reform ("re-schooling")

2. The "Schools as Focused Learning Organisations" Scenario.

At Flinders University and at Adelaide University adjacent to their Schools of Education, which are Teacher Education Institutions, there are two very different institutions that have recently been established to focus on the fields of learning in science and mathematics. Both these schools are undertaking developmental work that would appear to be consistent with this second scenario. Furthermore, as a Federal Government initiative, new technical colleges are being planned for the South Australian education system that will establish institutions of both technical and technological education for school-aged young people. In addition, in South Australia there are already in existence several adult re-entry schools that attract sizable numbers of students. It should be noted that these schools were not taken into consideration in the SACE Review.

3. The "Schools as Core Social Centres" Scenario.

There is the danger that schools will develop in South Australia that are modelled on the examples, which appear on television in weekly programs from the United States where adolescent social life revolves around attendance at high schools that are merely Core Social Centres that focus on particular aspects of social development without concern for aspects of their intellectual development. In these schools the only intellectual activity portrayed is the collecting of results on a Scholastic Aptitude Test for entry to a prestigious college.

The Pursuit of Alternatives as Systems Disband or Disintegrate ("de-schooling")

    4. The "Extending the Market Model" Scenario.

A secondary school currently operates within the City of Adelaide where students are taught during the last two years of schooling in preparation for entry to university. A section of this school is conducted for profit by a commercial organisation that is listed on the Australian Stock Exchange.

Within this scenario, schools are encouraged to compete for students and the financial resources that they bring, through vouchers and focused grants.

    5. The "Learning Networks and the Network Society" Scenario.

At the adult level in South Australia, a recent research study reports that informal network social groups exist in country regions to pass on information, thereby replacing activities that were formerly undertaken by Colleges of Technical and Further Education (TAFE).

    6. The "Teacher Exodus and System Meltdown" Scenario.

With the aging of the teacher workforce, particularly at the upper secondary school level, there is some evidence that the teaching of the subjects of Science, Mathematics and Foreign Languages is collapsing under the strain imposed by the shortage of qualified teachers. Male teachers are disappearing from the teacher workforce, and male students in teacher education programs are apparently declining in number, particularly in the fields of science, mathematics and ICT.

The Second Phase of the "Schooling for Tomorrow" Project has focused on such issues as the 'demand for schooling' and the 'personalisation of learning' in order to develop a range of innovative approaches. In the Third Phase, attention is being directed towards the identification of key trends that are helping to shape the future of education. The OECD is well placed to investigate these problems in a strategic way because it is international and has ready access to rich and extensive sources of data.

While South Australia is listed on the OECD website as being involved in the Third Phase of this Project concerned with 'Schooling for Tomorrow', the SACE Review report *Success for All* neither looked outside the South Australian setting, nor made any suggestions that there were clearly specified scenarios for the future of schooling. Nor did the SACE Review Report undertake an examination of what schooling might look like 40 years ahead both in other parts of the world or within the state of South Australia. Moreover, the Review Panel seemed completely unaware that any thinking was already being done within South Australia about 'Schooling for Tomorrow'.

RESOLVING THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE TWO ISSUES

The two issues raised above, namely portability and flexibility appear, at least superficially, to be in conflict. The former issue requires that the certificate must have portability, which implies that for some students the highest academic standards must be maintained through both rigorous courses and rigorous assessment procedures. However, the latter issue, particularly, the development of the 'Schools as Focused Learning Organisations' Scenario requires that innovative educational programs need to be developed through alternative approaches to schooling. Such schools may have different foci, that involve different curriculum content, different learning processes, and different developmental outcomes. The South Australian education system can already handle schools with very different foci as the Mount Barker Waldorf

School can testify, both through attaining high educational standards that enable its graduates to enter universities within and outside the state of South Australia as well as in their subsequent high levels of performance at the university level.

The existing South Australian system of both selection and certification has much to commend it. The Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia (SSABSA) has quietly and efficiently conducted its business during recent years and has carried out some valuable research studies that are totally ignored in the SACE Review report. The work of SSABSA is also completely neglected both in a review of the past and in planning for the future. It appears that its independence from the State Government Education Department has led to a latent proposal that it should be submerged within a declining bureaucracy.

The SACE Review report fails to indicate how the two issues that are raised in this paper can be resolved. Moreover, it does not indicate an awareness of these issues that both involve a perspective from outside the confines of the state of South Australia.

CHANGING THE NATURE OF SCHOOLING

The issue in changing the nature of schooling is that it should be undertaken with an increase in the quality and strength of the education provided for the growing numbers of students who continue with their education during the post-compulsory years of education and who view education as a lifelong process. The maintenance of a comprehensive school system with a bureaucratic structure is no longer a meaningful approach. The movement towards self-management and self-governance of secondary schools is becoming established not only in Australia but also in many developed and developing countries across the world. It is in a context of growing self-management and self-governance of schools that the future of schooling in South Australia would appear to lie.

The scenario that views 'schools as focused learning organisations' is the most promising of the six scenarios advanced for consideration by the OECD. Beare has emphasised that:

> Good schools have clear educational aims. … Good schools target learning outcomes. … Good schools concentrate on teaching and learning. They understand that their core task is educating, they devote more classroom time to that task, their teachers direct their energy to academic learning, they test regularly for achievement … (Beare, 1993, pp. 73-74)

This view argued by Beare did not imply that all schools should be the same and should provide the same comprehensive educational program. Different groups of students have different needs, different interests and different capacities to succeed at the post compulsory level of schooling, in post-secondary educational institutions, and in life-long learning programs. At the upper-secondary school level, different types of 'focused learning organisations' are needed, but entry to these organisations must be made through choice, prior experience, and prior performance. A certificate must clearly indicate the choices made, the prior experiences entered into and the standards of performance attained. Moreover, such a certificate must be recognised and have portability not only throughout Australia, but also throughout the countries of the Western world.

TOWARDS THE FUTURE

At a time of change, when schooling for a future of perhaps 40 years on is under consideration, a strong core education system is required in each Australian state, as well as across Australia as a whole. Nevertheless, there is an important role for different types of alternative education programs and alternative schools.

Nagata (2004, p. 209), writing about international perspectives of alternative education, states from a study conducted in nine countries:

> I have given much thought to the social function of alternative education as a minority form of education. This means, in other words, leaving some space open in a system in order to allow a certain degree of adventure and unconventionality, or moderate discretion, even if it strays from the standard. It could also mean adding about 10% of play, and inserting it in the social system.

The idea of 'equity' or 'fairness' in education does not necessarily involve the development of a comprehensive education system with all secondary schools providing the same educational fare for all students and in order to reduce the existing differences between Australian schools. It involves a freedom of choice between different types of educational experiences, and in different types of schools leading to different educational outcomes. However, all schools must seek to maintain high standards of education that are widely recognised and lead on to an appropriate form of further education, by choice, by prior experience, and by the attainment of acknowledged standards of performance. The differences between different types of schools, whether public or private, academic or vocational, comprehensive or selective, metropolitan or rural, large or small, and single sex or coeducational would seem to be best determined through self-governance by the community served and the choices made by students and their parents, rather than by bureaucratic decisions or political ideology. The way ahead is not through radical change or the restructuring of an examination system and the certificate it provides, but through the gradual evolution of schooling of high quality at the post-compulsory level. Furthermore, any change must be introduced as the consequence of sound research, together with a systematic monitoring of the effects of change in outcomes over time, commencing prior to the introduction of change.

However, the introduction of change needs to provide guided assistance for alternative schools and guided support for all schools to identify their unique focus as learning organisations. At the same time it is necessary to maintain a solid core of schools that provides an education of high quality and that makes full use of the very considerable degree of flexibility that is currently available through the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia.

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