Directions in Education

winning and individual achievement in school sport has also been identified as a particular area of concern for girls in sport, as it reduces their enjoyment of sport and the benefits that they can derive from it (Aust, 4/6/01). Parents and educators are rightly expressing concern with the way in which school-based sport is often associated with a range of negative social learning and the way it is marginalises so many children and young people. In response to these concerns, different models for teaching sport, such as Sport Education, have been widely adopted in Victorian schools and other approaches, such as Teaching Games for Understanding and Sport for Social Responsibility, have been developed.

There certainly are problems with sport in schools but there are few practices that offer so much potential for the simultaneous development of mind and body when appropriate pedagogy is adopted. Sport in schools is a very different practice to sport at the elite level and this needs to be reflected in policies that clearly conceptualise and value sport as an educational medium. The concerns of parents, teachers and students identified by Linda Vining (Australian, 4/6/01) are very real and widespread and there is now a pressing need for critical examination of the way in which sport is practised in both schools and in community settings. It is worth the effort.

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Discovering the Real World

THE NOTION of linking school to work is hardly new. It is how education began in antiquity, and began again as public education in response to the forces of the Industrial Revolution. But recent news suggests that there are new dimensions to linking school and work, ones which provide changing opportunities for young people, though ones that can act to take curriculum decisions out of the hands of educators. This may not be a bad thing, given what students say!

A student from RMIT told the Age (29/5/01: 3) ‘there was hardly any discussion about industry during the course (...) If you can get work, take it, it’s a quicker learning curve compared to study’. Another student doing industry-based learning through Swinburne remarked that was ‘where it finally clicked. You really learn how to apply your knowledge to the real world (where) straight away I was putting pretty much every piece of my studies into practice’. What students take to be the ‘real world’, though, is an interesting issue. What is real in one work place is not in another. Other students observed they were disappointed that their creative free rein in university courses is not valued or allowed in the workforce. For some, with ICT design skills, for example, they reject that ‘real world’ and create one of their own through freelancing. Getting ready for a career, and experiencing the ‘real world’ of work before you really need to, is the object of a new program called ‘The Real Game’, being tried for DETYA by Education Queensland. As part of its Education-2010 Strategy, teaching and curricula in Queensland are being adapted to help students prepare for flexible and adaptable life pathways. In activities prepared for students, from early primary through secondary school, experiences related to making career choices, organising housing and transport, planning education and training, balancing work and leisure, and managing time and money are used to introduce students to the adult world.

In Victoria, according to a report in the Australian (28/5/01:14), TAFE funding was cut through the 1990s and technical high schools closed, resulting in retention rates falling dramatically, and VET in schools participation the lowest (5.9%) in Australia. These students perhaps experienced the ‘real’ adult world earlier than they wished, leaving school and unlikely to want to return to education and training in any context, with potentially devastating effects on their lives.

According to the Age, the Bracks Labor Government in Victoria has acted on this situation. New funding for TAFE was announced in the May Commonwealth Budget (although this money must be matched by the States). NSW has seen a more consistent approach to VET in schools and this year students in Year 12 will be the first year to complete seven new VET courses for the HSC. These courses aim to give a higher academic profile to VET and provide broader articulations with industry and further education. More than 65% of students in NSW take a VET course although, before these reforms, this was not done in a structured way. The new courses involve a two-week work placement which, according to students, is ‘a reality check’. I often wondered, as a teacher, why my work was not considered ‘real’ by students. Perhaps initiatives like those sketched above, with school courses articulating to those in other educational sectors and education in industry, will show young people that, while school can be unreal, it is not irrelevant.

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Boarding Schools’ Resurgence

THE BOARDING school industry in Australia is taking active steps to improve the quality of its service, and help counteract damaging publicity about the inadequacy of some schools in fulfilling their duty of care. Ebru Yaman (Tougher Tests for Boarding School Staff; Aust, 28/5/01:14) describes the initiative of setting up the Australian Residential Schools Association (TARSA), as a move within the industry to develop a greater level of accountability.

The proposal to establish TARSA has been posted on the Internet (www.tarsa.edu.au). Colleagues within the boarding industry will be given a few months to respond to the proposal and, if inadequate support is generated, then TARSA will officially be constituted later in the year. One of the most exciting initiatives already undertaken by TARSA has been the writing of a Certificate Course in Residential Care that will be made available using distance education techniques throughout Australia. There are eleven units within the course, which covers the philosophy of residential care; roles and responsibilities; emergency procedures; security and supervision; dealing with bullying; occupational health and safety; the growing child; meeting pastoral needs; guiding students in work; guiding students in play and dealing with disciplinary matters.

The course has been written by Dr Tim Hawkes, Headmaster of The King's School, with the assistance of other members of the TARSA Executive, which includes Ms Rosa Storelli, Principal of MLC (Melbourne); Mr Bernie Dean, Director of Boarding of Rostrevor College and responsible for the National Boarding Colloquium held in 2000; Mr Richard Stokes, who has, in many ways, been the de-facto Coordinator of Boarding Staff amongst independent schools in Australia (Richard is Dean of Residential Care at Nudgee College in Queensland); Mr Malcolm Lamb, who represents the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia and is Principal of Pembroke College, Adelaide, and Mr Chris Webb, who is the Director of Boarding at Kooralbyn International School in Queensland.

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