

**THE (NOT SO) NEW CONTEXT FOR VET:  
THE EDUCATION GOSPEL AND ITS IMPLICATIONS**

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Elements of the Education Gospel — changing work associated with the Knowledge Revolution, globalization; more skills and “new” skills required; education and VET as solutions to individual problems, social problems (growth, competitiveness, poverty, social exclusion)

World-wide: most European countries; OECD; EU and the “Europe of Knowledge”; U.S. since 1890; Australia (*Sleepers Wake!*, 1984; “A Well-Skilled Future”).

What are the novel elements? U.S.: not much. Europe: expansion and vocationalizing of higher education since the early 1970s. Australia?

Positive elements: more attention to schooling including VET; public and private dimensions; incorporating new purposes into education.

But paradoxical implications for VET, esp. VET in schools/secondary voc ed:

Shift of voc/prof ed into universities emphasizes “academic” preparation, lowers the status of VET.

Shift to “modern” occupations in TAFE/Community colleges/universities leaves older “industrial” occupations behind.

New skills/higher-level skills (the “new practitioners”) surely relevant, but require new pedagogies.

Equity: secondary VET remains the “dumping ground” (U.S.) or chosen by low-SES students (Aus).

Quality and levels of occupations remain problems — in most English-speaking countries (U.S.; UK; Canada; Aus.)

Possible solutions:

U.S.: cycling between academic and vocation education. The potential alternative of integrating academic and occupational education, creating multiple “pathways” through secondary schools (some occupational, some non-occupational). Benefits; evidence from quasi-experimental and random-assignment studies.

Implications for postsecondary VET: TAFE/Community colleges/private providers:

Multiple levels of post-secondary education and problems of transparency. Tri-partite systems around the globe.

Match between levels of the labor market and institutional levels unclear.

Importance of transfer to university: does the system have dead-ends?

U.S.: the rise of the remedial/second chance function, swamping other purposes.

Under-funding: U.S., U.K, Aus. Systemic reasons: higher status of universities/lower status of VET; market rhetoric around private providers.

Possible solutions: Peter Kell, *TAFE Futures*. U.S./CA: recognizing the multiple roles of CCs, their roles in the complex system of institutions.

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Worldwide interest in VET: The potential OECD thematic review:

Variety of issues in different countries:

Shortages of work-based positions in dual system.

Skills shortages (e.g., Australia) — but suspect.

Upgrading VET for new/21<sup>st</sup> century skills

Continuing low status of VET (especially secondary VET).

VET as a possible solution to secondary completions rates — unsuccessful.

Enhancing growth and competitiveness

Figuring out the basic structure of VET: emergence of TAFE-like institutions in many countries' lack of clarity about their roles; transparency to employers, students, policy-makers; unclear relationships to levels of the labor market.

Australia: VET in Schools, ANC, TAFE, non-TAFE providers, several levels of universities; correspondence to labor markets.

Flexibility/responsiveness: Not just an issue of market-like mechanisms vs. institutional mechanisms. An Alternative: markets work well when “strong” consumers face “strong” providers. Government's role is to insure that consumers and providers are “strong”.

My own view about the crucial issues:

The changing institutional compositions of VET

The role of VET in equity

The role of work-based learning in the English-speaking countries.

Confronting the exaggerations and the negative consequences of the Education Gospel:

Attitudes among students, as vocationalist attitudes undermine learning.

U.S. evidence, quantitative and qualitative.

The problems of over-education, not under-education; exaggerated forecasts of skilled employment growth.

The diminution of non-occupational purposes of education, esp. civic purposes

Narrowing occupational preparation: the exaggerations of HyperVoc

The inequities of the Education Gospel

Exaggeration of claims for competitiveness, growth, and international standing.

Substitution: Integrating the economic goals of the Education Gospel with the civic /intellectual goals of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.