

EDUCATIONAL POLICIES IN DETENTION CENTRES*

Sara Thorley-Smith
Special Education and Focus Programs Division
Department of Education (NSW)

In the 1820s there were a number of important, innovative experiments in dealing with detained young offenders. They focussed specifically on education and training. The educational curriculum included literacy and numeracy skills as well as trade and vocational preparation that led to apprenticeships. There was also instruction in social education which encouraged self discipline.

The (boys) undertook general labouring, gardening and trade training. Trades included ... carpentry ... brickmaking ... bakery. Limited education was provided — a full-time teacher.¹

In 1990 a range of programs was introduced to meet the specific needs of detained young offenders. The curriculum includes a focus on literacy and numeracy skills as well as the opportunity to participate in trade and vocational preparation. Social skills and personal development courses that focus on self management of behaviour are offered, as well as courses such as legal studies that reflect student needs. Opportunities to pursue accreditation such as School or Higher School Certificate are available. It would appear that education in correctional facilities has, to a certain extent, come full circle. This paper will address specifically the role of the Department of School Education in delivering educational policies and programs in detention centres through the Community Care Program and the Community Care Schools. General educational policies of the Juvenile Justice Unit of Family and Community Services and the detention centres, are not determined by the Department of School Education but rather by officers of the Department of Family and Community Services.²

The NSW Department of School Education provides educational programs at each of the detention centres in New South Wales through the Community Care Program. The Department of School Education has established schools at each centre (Cobham, Keelong, Minda, Riverina, Reiby, Worimi, Yasmar and Mt Penang). The mission of the Community Care Schools is to deliver effective and appropriate educational services to the young people enrolled, having regard to their special and specific learning needs.

Currently the Community Care Schools are staffed as far as possible on a special fitness basis, priority being given to teachers with special education postgraduate qualifications. All promotions are by special fitness appointment on merit. A different

* Paper presented at a public seminar entitled "Custodial Issues in Juvenile Justice", convened by the Institute of Criminology at Sydney University Law School, 24 April 1991.

1 Brand, I, "Penal Peninsula: Port Arthur and its Outstations, 1827-1898" (Unpublished paper, 1978) cited in Seymour, J, *Dealing With Young Offenders* (1988)

2 Editor's Note: this paper was completed prior to the transfer of Juvenile Justice to the Corrective Services portfolio.

direction has been taken by the Victorian Ministry of Education in the Youth Training Centres. In Victoria, special education training is no longer considered to be an essential criteria for employment.

The NSW Department does not support this view and continues to emphasise the need for special education training and appropriate experience in working with either behaviour or conduct disordered students. Within the framework of postgraduate special education qualifications, teachers are considered to be more appropriately trained to develop individual education programs which reflect the student's specific needs. Experience in working with students with behaviour and conduct disorders, especially adolescents, also prepares teachers for the behaviour management role they will take on in the Community Care School.

THE NATURE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING POLICIES

Educational programs in detention centres are characterised by a number of issues:

- the individual's motivation to learn in confined environments is a limiting factor which impacts on the delivery of educational programs;
- the varying length of stay of the student in both the institution and the Community Care School. During 1988 the average length of stay at Cobham School was 15 days;
- the nature and extent of the previous academic success/failure and school refusal of the student.

Community Care Schools operate under the generic policy and curriculum guidelines of the Department of School Education. There are no policies which specifically address the education of this group of students as opposed to other behaviour or conduct disordered adolescents.

There is a need to provide specialist curriculum initiatives, support documents and resources which give advice on remediating skill deficits, educating girls in custody, educating Aboriginal youth in custody, educating students with disabilities in custody and vocational training for all students enrolled in Community Care Schools. Some of these resources and documents are currently in preparation. Teachers in Community Care Schools have a responsibility to provide individual programs which

- (i) focus on the reintegration needs of the students,
- (ii) assess the needs of the individual student and plan for remediation of deficits and development of strengths,
- (iii) address skill development in literacy, numeracy and oracy,
- (iv) provide opportunities to develop and practice appropriate interpersonal and social skills,
- (v) increase the student's involvement in a planned positive learning experience,
- (vi) develop skills in personal development, independent living and leisure/recreation activities,
- (vii) support and assist in specialised vocational training,

-
- (viii) support and assist positive transition to the community, work or school,
 - (ix) keep the student current in their schooling if they are below school leaving age or engaged in courses of accreditation.

The programs must meet needs in overcoming a confined environment and student helplessness as well as encouraging a wish to learn. They must address academic, social, personal, vocational and recreation domains.

Effective student welfare policies in Community Care Schools are crucial to providing appropriate educational services to the students. These policies should be developed in conjunction with FACS staff in each centre. The standards of behaviour and the methods of intervention for misbehaviour must be realistic, achievable and relevant to both the student and the community.

The overwhelming majority of students in Community Care schools at detention centres are of secondary age. Current indicators are that the age of students and the seriousness of their crime is increasing. This trend will see a number of students successfully complete their secondary education in Community Care Schools. A number of students have been successful in the last two years in achieving their School Certificates while in custody. A number of students are enrolled in years 11 and 12 in 1991. Due to the small size of Community Care Schools, provision does not exist to cover the full range of subjects available at the secondary level. Some subjects are required to maintain the student's continuity of study to satisfy requirements for accreditation. These are offered through partial enrolment in the Correspondence School. Units of correspondence are supervised by the teachers in the Community Care School. Technical and Further Education (TAFE) external studies may provide another avenue towards certification in the future.

There are two distinct models of operation of Community Care Schools located at detention centres.

1. Total Unit Program

Both Education and Family and Community Services personnel work together in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the centre day program. The system operates by all residents attending the school and the youth workers participating in an educational capacity in the school.

2. Separate School Program

Education personnel provide schooling to all residents below 15 years and for those over 15 years wishing to attend school to pursue an academic or remedial educational program. Family and Community Services personnel provide separate activities for residents not enrolled in school.

The choice of model is dependent on the students' ages, the needs of the residents of the centre, staff strengths and training, the overall resources of the centre and the school as well as the philosophy and administration of the centre.

There is a current move towards encouraging all detainees to enrol in school on at least a part-time basis, as well as participating in TAFE and centre educational programs and

work parties. This move is facilitating better outcomes for students and improved multidisciplinary functioning of the centres.

In 1990, the Directors-General of TAFE, School Education and Family and Community Services (FACS) set up a Joint Review of Educational Programs for Young People in Custody. The Joint Review Panel will be visiting each detention centre during 1991 and receiving written submissions on the education of young people in custody. The terms of reference of the Review are :

- (1) to conduct a review of current educational, vocational and living skills provisions to young people in custody,
- (2) to consider issues that will facilitate
 - (a) local management,
 - (b) effective delivery of services at the local level
 - (c) co-ordinated service delivery of educational, vocational and living skills provisions
 - (d) provision and planning for appropriate physical learning environments.

In conducting the Review, the panel will review relevant research, consult with service providers at the local level, liaise with other relevant taskforces and sub-committees as well as actively consulting with representatives of aboriginal, multicultural, youth, women's and disability groups.

At the conclusion of the Review, a report will be presented to the Directors-General and respective Ministers, in order to reach interdepartmental agreement about the most appropriate educational service delivery to young people in detention centres. This will result in the production of a policy statement that will guide the Principals and teachers in Community Care Schools in the program planning and implementation as well as ensuring co-ordinated participation in education by residents.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- National Institute of Corrections, *Building Partnerships for Excellence in Correctional Education: Proceedings* (1985)
- NSW Department of School Education, *Draft Position Paper on the Education of Students in Community Care Schools* (1988)
- Oregon Governor's Office, *Taskforce on Juvenile Corrections Alternatives* (1985)
- Potas, Ivan, et al, *Young People and Crime — Costs and Prevention* (1990)
- Seymour, John, *Dealing with Young Offenders* (1988)
- Thorley-Smith, Sara, *Education and Youth at Risk, Proceedings of Australian Institute of Criminology Conference* (1990)
- Victorian Ministry of Education, *Skilled to Change: Report on Education in Youth Training Centres* (1990)
- United Nations, *Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice* (1986)
- Webb, Sharon, et al, "Moving Students from Institutions into Community Schools" (1986) 7/3 RASE