

Educating Young People to be “Future Makers” for Rural Development

The Dilemma

There is a cohort of secondary students who wish to create their future in their own rural and remote community. They want to stay in their community, or briefly leave for earning and stimulation, but then return. The rural and remote school faces a dilemma in that the current economy offers few opportunities for paid work and the associated learning pathways. The rural and remote character of the economy can further compound the weakness of a collapsed national teenage labour market. Does the school educate the teenager to leave, or does the school accept the wishes of the student. However this second option can often lead to a reduction of effort by the school to broaden horizons and raise aspiration of these students.

Is There a Third Way?

The school implements curriculum activity and a teaching/learning pedagogy that is designed to develop the “spirit of enterprise” in their students and encourage them to be a **future maker**. A future maker (thanks to the futurist Dr Peter Ellyard) is one (alone or with others) who shapes their future, who is open to change, even creating it and who determines their destiny and the future of their community. Although the current economy may offer limited options, the future economy may reveal expanded (quantity and quality) opportunities. Can the student learn to be part of the process of making that future happen?

Students will be supported to explore their local economy and community, access global and external thinking, and imagine what could be. In order to do this, schools will dedicate resources to building partnerships with agencies that are about rural development. For example, regional development agencies/boards as a matter of course, integrate a strong futures dimension into their work and responsibilities.

How Can This Occur?

- Existing resources and programs such as VET, SBA/SBT and Trade Training Centres integrate enterprise education activity and career conversations (with a futures dimension) into their operations. For example all SBA/SBTs are also engaged in host employer supported secondments (say two hours/week) to a project team which researches and then develops a presentation to regional development authorities about the future of their occupation and that of their employers (say in 20 years time).
- Enterprise education activity enables students to learn and experience how to make things happen. Career conversations with a futures dimension enables students, local employers and “Universities from afar” (video – IT) to imagine what current jobs will look like in 25 – 30 years time, and to conceive/visualise future of the local economy. Resources for such enterprise education activity and career conversations could be made available to schools and their partners – if you so wish them developed.

- The profile of STEM related learning is raised in the school curriculum, and a strong futures dimension is integrated.
- VET programs take-on, or further develop a character in which project based learning connects student teams to community partners and together they explore how to develop the contribution of that vocational area to the local economy. All these matters are raised in the NCVET Paper “The enterprising approach to regional growth – implications for policy and the role of vocational education and training”. The writers of this report are dismayed at the lack of strong connections between VET learning and learning for enterprise and regional development.
- The key ingredients of this process of enterprise education and futures making for the student learner are as follows:
 - Students becoming aware of their culture and the current state of economic and local development in the community
 - Students acknowledge their own strengths and assets and that of the community
 - Students experience leadership development opportunities – facilitated by teachers and other adults
 - Students experience the design and implementation of businesses and community centred projects in the community
 - Students are being linked to global thinking – think globally, and act locally.

Stories that Stimulated this Briefing Note

Scotland

- Over the last 30 years, secondary students in some rural and remote **Scottish schools** have engaged with community businesses (social enterprises) to undertake project work that is directly linked to rural development. Student teams have been resourced by teachers and staff/volunteers from those social enterprises to:
 - Research the feasibility of the community business developing a recycling process/plant
 - Develop a non-alcoholic music venue for local young people
 - Explore what jobs could be created locally, if certain services and products were not transported into the community
 - Survey tenants and then offer feedback on both the needs of young people and how they could help develop the local housing association
 - Set up a community development fund for young people’s ideas on social and economic development

- Feasibility of a local “living museum” that attracts tourists
- Ideas on how the community can reduce juvenile crime.

Canada – to be done later

Australia

- The Bank of Ideas newsletter “Community and Economic Development Matters” was first distributed in 2005. Since then, more than fifty editions have been emailed to youthworkers, development workers and educators across the world etc. There is a strong theme of small town and rural development amongst the many (and easy to read) snapshots of activity. A number of these snapshots are about school – community partnerships and some of these stories reveal the leadership roles of students who are working together with the teachers and community partners. To subscribe **free** s to click onto the www.bankofideas.com.au site and then subscribe.
- DEC will be working with Bank of Ideas to produce a special edition of the newsletter on Schools and Rural Development – young people creating a future in and for their community. Many of these stories are living and breathing examples of “enterprise education” in which students learn to design and manage projects to make a difference. The students lead the action and the teacher facilitates the use and development of the enterprising skills – the very skills and mindset necessary to be a future maker. When that project based learning is connected to the broader community, the students have a real opportunity to engage in matters of rural development.
- Australian career development programs such as Career Search (see resource 5 challenge 1) can enable students to explore training options, pathways and career opportunities. It can also empower students to raise the current lack of such opportunities for all or particular young people (e.g. special needs). The origins of Career Search were in the UK, and in one depressed region of north east England, project teams actually:
 - Asked a large nearby manufacturer why there were no current apprenticeships in that business for local young people and what could be done to change that. They presented their findings to the regional development agency (one that had grant funded that multi-national business to establish itself locally)
 - Explored the lack of training options for students with an intellectual disability – reporting back to the local education authority.

Reality Check Authority – The Harsh Realities Facing Many Rural and Remote Schools, and Shaping Their Sense of Hope

Although a number of the above mentioned stories occurred in lower SES communities, they generally required the leadership of students who exhibited confidence, hope and passion. Skilled

teachers and collaborating community agencies facilitated and supported the initiative of the students.

The activities did not miraculously create jobs for young people locally, but they did develop the enterprising spirit and skills of students, a helpful foundation stone for entrepreneurship. They also connected students to adults who were passionate about the future of the local community. The learning also boosts the employability of those same young people in a global labour market that increasingly values employees with initiative, creativity and enterprise.

Really Remote Communities

In the “really remote” communities which are often aboriginal, and relatively disconnected, there are few if any local jobs available. The challenges of poverty and lack of hope, or sense of despair can dominate community life and students motivation to learn. In such a case the definition of transition and pathways must broaden. The vocation or career direction for becoming a community activist offers such a broader concept of transition and pathways to the student and their community. In fact such a mindset and skill-set is essential to improving the lives of local people and it is a legitimate expression of “future making for rural development”. The student project activity and project based learning can enable the students to live and breathe social entrepreneurship. This can happen at secondary level, but often, such relative remote schools do not have senior students. Hence, there is a need to introduce the concept at an earlier age, even though the teacher and community may take a more “protective” approach to facilitating their initiatives.

The point must be made – many aboriginal students do not live and learn in such really remote communities and like their non aboriginal peers, can take up the mantle of becoming Future Maker and work for economic and social rural development. But in these really remote communities, there are special challenges.