YEAR 13 OF THE AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

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The numeration of the various annual stages of primary and secondary schooling across Australia was recently amended to a Year 0 to Year 12 designation. Perhaps we can anticipate administrative decisions and assign the numbers 13 onwards to the annual stages of tertiary education. (The proposed establishment of a Tertiary Education Commission should facilitate such a decision and the introduction of fees for higher and second degree students should ensure a reasonable cut-off to the numbers at 16 to 18.)

It is tempting to imagine these numbers as contour values on a map representing Australian education: displayed there are the lowlands of infants and primary schools, the middle ground of lower secondary, and the highlands of the tertiary establishments. The elders who live in this land can remember the days of old when the highlands were shrouded in mist and all believed that Himalayan ranges lay beyond; latterly, the mists have dispersed revealing a somewhat drab plateau, distinguished more by eroded gullies than by massive bluffs. Legends exist of distant days when drought held sway, while heavy rains are of recent memory. There are those who claim that much of that water gushed recklessly and unused down the slopes and across the plains to the sea. All agree that drought has returned.

It is undoubtedly of more interest than profit to pursue this analogy much further, but we should note that the majority of inhabitants of the land are juvenile, being supplemented by teachers, administrators and researchers. The population is for the most part immobile; the juvenile component usually do move once or twice, almost all into a high school at the Years 6/7 transition and some 18% of the original starters to a tertiary institution after Year 12. Each of the three establishments houses two classes of students: infants/primary, junior/senior, undergraduate/postgraduate. It would be interesting to look closely at these divisions and both transitions, to see if they signify real steps in the educational process or whether they are merely a response to administrative convenience, the response being located by arbitrary barrier assessments. However, in this article we look closely only at the transition from upper secondary to undergraduate university.

This school-university interface is the subject of increasing examination, both by educators, especially those working in or near the interface, and by administrators. I give two illustrations, both of which I have personal knowledge. At the 1975 International Conference on Physics Education, sponsored by UNESCO, a working party deliberated on a trend paper, drawn up by Ogborn1, on this matter. In mid-1976 a panel from OECD is carrying out a review of Australian Education Policy, the theme being the transition from school to work or further study.

An ideal school-university interface is difficult, probably impossible, to define since the interface does not exist in isolation from community needs and attitudes. Society and history as well as educational processes and attitudes.

Financial limitations may demand the existence of university and other tertiary places for reasons which are not at all educational. There may be much cynicism but there is some truth in the opinion that military conscription and compulsory higher education are alternate ways to keep youths off the street and out of mischief. The banding together in tertiary institutions, may, of course, lead the students back onto the street and mass demonstrations thus replace solitary muggings.

Nevertheless a quota system does exist for most tertiary establishments and the normal mode of filling this quota is by assessment, usually conducted in Australia by a series of examinations not under the direct control of the selecting bodies. In some parts of the world, especially those developing countries with a strong cultural link to their former colonizers, there is fierce competition for entry, a competition that itself distorts the nature of the interface. Hamburger2 writes . . .

Brazil was known a short time ago, as the country of carnival, the country of football, and the country of happy indolence. But today a traveller who arrives at our shores in the months of November, December, January or February, will find Brazil is, in fact, the country of competition for university entrance (vestibular). Newspapers, radio and television — all the media of the communication — are at the service of the examination, mock examinations, registration instructions, times and places of examinations, names of successful candidates, and computer print-out of results and finally, advertisement after advertisement for cramming courses. Carnival takes second place, football is forgotten; the talk is all of the examination. It looks like collective madness. The families of candidates anxiously follow every turn in

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The distortion produced by the existence of such a more difficult to coherent first year courses to be mounted. arises in the knowledge students bring with them to

Most of us, if we had been setting up a definition of the interface is that teachers are to be applicants sought the

The conventional influence is paramount. State education especially for certain elite sections: and as a

The Australian situation is by no means as extreme as any rise in status in the family and local community.

A pessimistic view of the student's movement through the university-part of the buffer zone sees him as submerging in a large crowd, suffering from a loss of self-importance. Time and time again, the interface and to adapt courses to meet student needs and preparedness. To claim that such adaptation necessitates prostitution of standards is nonsense; yet I have heard this claim made, both explicitly and implicitly, in academic circles.

Ogborn1, in the trend paper noted earlier, refers to school and university in the following terms: "Both the relationship are caught in a conflict between education as the transmission and development of knowledge, and education as the agency for social control."
The words "both parties" could just as well describe academic and student as school and university. We must see value in both sides of the conflict. In the study of the year university, the year 13 of the Australian education system, it could make all the difference of nature of education.

REFERENCES:


3. Sydney Morning Herald, July 9, 1970, Mr. John P. Young, chairman, and managing director of the University of New South Wales, in an interview with the Herald, said that the university could not be held responsible for the actions of its students and that there was no guarantee that they could produce graduates with the skills required for the job market. The university has been accused of being too permissive.
