

Research on the Vocational Education Models for Disengaged Youth

—Inspiration of Australian Federation College Re-engagement Education to China

Yunxian ZHANG*

Department of Social Science
Binzhou Polytechnic
Binzhou City, China

Xiuyan ZHANG

Department of Architecture
Binzhou Polytechnic
Binzhou City, China

Yuye ZHU

Department of Informat Engn
Binzhou Polytechnic
Binzhou City, China

Abstract—This study aims to provide theoretical and practical guidance for the vocational education system for the re-engagement of disengaged students in China. This study investigated and identified strategies implemented in the state of Victoria in Australia to re-engage disengaged secondary school students into formal education. This paper provides a brief introduction to the Victorian post compulsory education system and the issues of youth disengagement, prior to outlining a number of programs which have been developed to re-engage youth to formal education. Some recommendations are put forward for Chinese re-engagement education.

Keywords—vocational education; disengaged youth; re-engagement education; teaching content

I. INTRODUCTION

The Australian educational system provides primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Tertiary education includes both higher education (including universities) and vocational education and training (VET). The management of the education system is shared between the state and federal governments. While state and federal governments have different funding requirements for the provision of education, the design and delivery of post compulsory qualifications must meet the requirements of the Australian Qualifications Framework to ensure a consistent national approach.

The Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) is the national policy for regulated qualifications in Australian education and training. First introduced in 1995 to underpin the national system of qualifications in Australia encompassing higher education, vocational education and training (VET), and schools. The AQF defines Australian qualifications, providing a single framework for all qualifications from Senior Secondary Certification to Doctoral Degree. It provides clear rules about the level of education each qualification title represents, to ensure national recognition and consistency, as well as common understanding across Australia of what defines each

qualification level. The objectives of the AQF are based around lifelong learning, national recognition, supporting industry, and quality. The Australian system is an outcomes based system with the AQF levels defining the relative complexity and depth of achievement, and the autonomy required of graduates to demonstrate that achievement. In the AQF there are 10 levels with level 1 having the lowest complexity and AQF level 10 the highest complexity.

The Australian VET system is driven by the needs of industry with education and training focusing on providing skills for work. As the needs of the workforce change with the introduction of new technologies there is also a focus on lifelong learning. This means that VET is open to people of all ages. VET students may be people joining the workforce for the first time, re-joining the workforce after a break, upgrading skills in their chosen field, or moving into a different career.

This focus on employment has seen VET units of competency (subjects) and qualifications made available for secondary students to enroll in, as identified by the Education Council. Australia has brought vocational education into senior secondary schools and paid attention to students' interests to prepare for future employment. In the state of Victoria, secondary school students may complete the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), a senior secondary certificate that provides pathways to tertiary education, advanced certificate courses and entry to the workforce, or the more applied Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) is a senior secondary certificate that provides practical work-related experience as well as literacy and numeracy skills that are important for life and work. The overall structure of the VCAL qualification is managed by a state based curriculum authority, the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA), but Schools develop content and select VCAL subjects to meet the needs of the student group. The VCAL structure allows for schools to deliver VET units within the VCAL program.

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The VCAL program aims to provide a hands-on and flexible program to enable students to undertake a study program that suits their interests and learning needs. VCAL may be offered by secondary schools, or by a non-school senior secondary education provider that is registered with the VRQA. Registered non-secondary senior secondary providers may include Registered (Vocational) Training Providers, including state funded Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes and Adult Community Education centers.

Once a student finishes the VCAL, he/ she can continue to study at TAFE, or get a job or undertake an apprenticeship, or apply for entry to a University.

Australian Apprenticeships (often referred to as apprenticeships or traineeships) are available to anyone of working age. They offer the opportunity for people to train, study, and earn an income at a variety of qualification levels in many occupations. Apprenticeship or traineeship training involves paid work, and structured training provided by a registered training organisation. Study may be full-time or part-time, and may happen at the training organisation or in the workplace. Apprenticeships are open to school leavers, people re-entering the workforce or adult workers wanting to change careers or gain new skills. Students in Years 11 and 12 of secondary school can start an Australian Apprenticeship while still at school, combining paid employment, formal training provided by a training organisation, and secondary study.

When a student finishes the VCE or VCAL, he/she can directly go to University or take part in a VET course or directly obtain employment or achieve apprenticeship.

II. ISSUE OF DISENGAGED YOUTH

Students disengage from mainstream schools for various reasons. According to the survey by Mission Australia of 28286 young people in 2018 regarding their future plans, 96.3% stated that they intend to complete high school, while the other 5.5% of boys and 2.1% of girls do not want to complete high school. As for confidence, 7.2% felt slightly confident and 2.6% were not at all confident to achieve their study goals^[1]. The report identified barriers which may impact on the achievement of students' study to post-school goals. There are three main barriers: academic ability (22.0%), financial difficulty (14.2%) and mental health (13.2%)^[2]

There are also studies showing a high correlation between family economic background (unemployment, low income and low level of education) and drop-out rate, which may lead to students being disengaged from mainstream schools^[3]. It is very important for disengaged students to stay in the education system. With studies showing that leaving school early impacts on the person's employability income, crime, health. At-risk youth may experience negative peer associations, adverse personal contexts and social prejudices that influence work opportunities in addition to lacking knowledge, skills and workplace readiness.^[4] Therefore, the Victorian government in Australia is targeting these students to help these young people return to the education system. However, some students are unwilling to attend regular learning activities in mainstream schools for various reasons. Therefore,

some institutions are needed to provide vocational education for these disengaged students.

III. TYPES OF RE-ENGAGEMENT IN FEDERATION

Federation College is part of Federation University and is a registered non-school senior education provider. Federation College provides a range of programs targeted at engaging students in formal education. Federation College offers VCAL, language literacy and numeracy support, VETis, and VET units and qualifications. In addition to VETis, VCAL, and the School Based Apprenticeships, additional -engagement programs are provided by the College based around VET units and qualifications. Federation University college have run EAL(English as an Additional Language) English language Program, CGEA (Certificates General Education for Adults)I, II, III, LN Support (Literacy and Numeracy support delivered across all the TAFE Programs), Certificate 1 in Transition Education (Disability Support Program Horsham) and the Senior secondary level re-engagement programs.

The senior secondary level re-engagement programs provide students with nationally recognized units of competency. The following is a detailed explanation of the specific program provided by Federation College. The training purpose, teaching content, duration of each project and the age of students are different:

Kick Start: Used as a transition into the VCAL program. Focuses on communication and personal effectiveness, and creates pathways in education, employment and training delivering units; 15 to 17 year olds who are at risk of leaving the education system permanently. The duration is 5 to 8 weeks

Foundation VCAL: To create pathways into Federation College VCAL, pre-apprenticeships, employment, further training and traineeships. To develop literacy, numeracy and general education skills and is a Year 10 program (Foundation VCAL) ;15 to 19year olds who have not achieved Year 10 (or equivalent); the duration is 6 to 12 months.

Year 11 and 12 Victoria Certificate of Applied Learning : To help students to obtain VCAL certificate, and further training at TAFE college, apprenticeship or get a job; According to students' interests and learning needs, they enroll in VCAL at Foundation, Intermediate of Senior level, as well as completing an accredited VET qualification. Any student who needs flexible time to complete their studies.

Federation Reconnect Program: A pathway to further education, training or employment; Outreach and engagement; development of a student learning and achievement plan; coordination, delivery and monitoring of training and supports; transition planning into further training, employment or both. 15 to 24-year-olds disengaged early school leavers not in education, training or full time employment who enroll in and complete a VET qualification

The Kick Start program is based on the VET units from the Certificate I in General Education for Adults. The goal of the Kick Start program is to stimulate and engage students in a study program to encourage them to re-engage with the

education system and go on to further study. This program encourages students to enhance their social adaptation and employability to help them transition smoothly from school to be productive members of society. Research shows that the resilience may be the key factor in achieving the objective of education, not only to improve the students' well-being but also their academic achievement^[5]. The time duration of Kick Start programme is five weeks and three days a week,

completing three teaching projects: Amazing race, Maths in cooking and Maths in sports. The following table 4 illustrates the teaching purpose, units' content, required knowledge, required skills, training content and training process. Teaching focuses on practical activities, and classes are kept small, with no more than 12 students at a time to meet individual learning needs and encourage student and teacher interaction. The following is Amazing race as example:

TABLE I. KICK START RE-ENGAGEMENT

	Amazing race
Teaching purpose	To help students know community, law, medical treatment in interesting activities in which students participate, improving reading skills, oral communication skills and computing skills.
Required knowledge	1. Master professional vocabulary related to law; 2. Reading strategies to engage with simple printed and /or digital texts.
Required skills	1. Reading strategies to access and interpret information on medical services; interpret basic structural conventions of text; 2. Oral communication skills to convey and discuss information about the legal system and community services; 3. Numeracy skills to read a transport and recreation timetable.
The process of training	1. Students follow the pre-prepared form to find and complete the corresponding tasks, and communicate with relevant agency personnel and record the answers; 2. Students are back to the classroom and finish the poster or corresponding forms; 3. Students show poster and the corresponding tasks are interpreted by the teachers.
Assessment	1. At the end of each week, the students complete the poster or task forms, and submitted for filling; 2. According to the assessment checklist, check students' completion of tasks.

IV. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RE-ENGAGEMENT IN THE FEDERATION COLLEGE

The role of the Australia Government is important. The smooth implementation of re-engagement programs cannot be separated from the leading role of the government, which plays an important role in Vocational Education and Training. The re-engagement program is based on national units of competency from the Certificate I in General Education of Adults. The lower level 1 and 2 qualification in VET are suited to early school leavers because there are no admission requirements, providing the main re-engagement pathway^[6]. The content of re-engagement is partially qualification 1 and 2 level as well as the some part of foundation and Intermediate certificate in VCAL curriculum. So these re-engagement are based on The Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) and incorporated into the education system of the whole country. So government regulation plays a very important role. Students can obtain a certificate after re-engagement training and enter high school or continue studying or be directly employed, providing students with a variety of pathways.

There is a flexible learning environment. The class size of the Kick Start re-engagement program is generally small with 8 to 12 students, and they do not have to wear school uniforms at Fed College, which also gives them some space to show their individuality and this is in line with the psychological characteristics of teenagers. There is no bell in the classroom where students participate in re-engagement programs at Fed College and the teachers start teaching on a project basis. , The small learning environment allows for in-depth communication with others to improve interpersonal skills. Furthermore, the teachers and administrative staff are friendly to the students at Fed College, which is very important for disengaged students to continue to stay at school.

The teaching content is specific and standardized and close to daily life. This Kick Start re-engagement program integrates mathematics and literature into sports activities and daily life, which can let students experience the importance of mathematics and literature and learn how to deal with various problems in daily life and follow the rules in society to improve social capabilities and resilience^[7]. In the process of learning mathematics and literacy, the students are asked to complete the tasks hands-on in the interaction and mention about the importance of good communication between teachers and students. And the students' learning in hands-on operations not only contributes to the emotional adjustment of students, but also has a positive impact on their concentration and mental health, which contributes to the sense of accomplishment for the students, and stimulate the interest in learning.

The teaching method is flexible. The teaching methods in the Kick Start program at Federation College are flexible and diverse. They get rid of the traditional didactic teaching method, using project-based assessments and teaching. . So the teaching method for re-engagement programs has a kind of teaching flexibility and a truly student-centred education. The teachers try to create a relaxed learning atmosphere for students and pay attention to students' interest and advantages, practicing the concept of positive education and cultivating students' self-confidence and yearning for future life. The flexible method focuses on unconditional positive regard for students and a structured vision of well-being in the school and therapeutic principles of teaching and learning.

In summary, there are many characteristics in the re-engagement programs at Federation College that meet the needs of disengaged students. In China, secondary schools are mostly dominated by academic curriculum, and lack vocational education and training for students, which cannot meet the diverse needs of students' development and has led to

an increasing level of youth unemployment, and serious social problems.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The leading role of the government might be considered in the re-engagement system by providing guarantees for the re-engagement programs of the youth who have disengaged or are at a risk. At present, the Chinese government has few re-engagement programs for students who disengaged from mainstream schools or are at risk of disengaging, and there are many reasons for this including lack of resources and the structure of the education system. The Chinese government could consider supporting re-engagement programs in the following ways: Firstly, the government may provide a series of legal policies for the re-engagement system and legally guarantee the implementation for the training projects. Secondly, the Chinese government might unify the content, training objectives and assessment for the re-engagement programs and provide the models and standards for the educational system that aims to promote the enrolment rate and reduce the dropout rate. Finally, according to the needs of Industries, industry organization can be encouraged to participate in the formulation of the re-engagement policy.

Create a harmonious learning atmosphere. The learning atmosphere for disengaged students can be relaxed. A survey demonstrated that teachers and administrative staff are friendly and provide the students with a relaxed learning atmosphere, which is of great significance to stimulate students' desire to continue learning and training^[8]. In order to create a relaxing learning atmosphere, disengaged students don't have to wear uniforms. According to the theory of Mental Development Stage of Erikson, identity achievement is the main task for teenagers who will try to combine all aspects related to themselves to form a self with a unique style and self-determined unity that is different from others.

Be close to daily life for teaching content and flexible for teaching method. The content of re-engagement programs could be specific and practical and the teaching method flexible, conforming to the psychological and physical development characteristics of students. The teaching projects are chosen from the perspective of social adaptation, being concrete, practical, challenges, hands-on and achievable. So this can stimulate students' interest in learning and improve achievement motivation and self-confidence. Students learn in hands-on operation, which greatly stimulates students' interest in learning, and encourages them to continue to complete education programs, training and studies in the future. The re-engagement programs for being disengaged students from mainstream schools can combine with the needs of daily life in the future and the psychological needs of students. These programs can stimulate students to learn knowledge and skills in the sports, cooking and community survey. As for the arrangement of the teaching content, the disengaged students' time in school can be relatively concentrated. Students participating the re-engagement programs might not go to school in the same time as ordinary secondary school, because

some students may disengage from mainstream school for a long time and they are not used to the class hours in ordinary schools.

Encourage all kinds of colleges to provide re-engagement programs. All kinds of higher vocational schools in China have their own specialties and advantageous resources and can be encouraged to give a variety of re-engagement projects and training programs for disengaged students from mainstream schools. Incentive policies can be established by the government if it is necessary to give the vocational colleges or schools a certain financial support and subsidies, encouraging various types of vocational colleges at all levels to provide various pathways of re-engagement programs for meeting the needs of the students who are at risk or have disengaged from the mainstream schools.

Some important things have been learned from this article, from the reasons why student's disengagement from school, what and how educators can do to prevent students from dropping out. The re-engagement programs provided by Federation College have some characteristics, such as a flexible learning environment, the specific and standardized teaching content and close to daily life, and flexible teaching method. The advantages of these projects can be accepted and used for Chinese re-engagement education system. As we are all aware that keeping students in school is very important for the well-being of the students and society as a whole. I hope China can develop various skills and flexible learning programs to minimum or prevent the students from disengaging in the long term.

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