Premier’s Commonwealth Bank Vocational Education in Schools Teacher Scholarship

The role of workplace learning in enterprise education

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Focus

My study focuses on the innovative delivery of Vocational Education, Workplace Learning and Enterprise Education programs. It involves the investigation of programs that give students opportunities to engage in learning that is authentic, relevant and work-based. Within these programs opportunities exist for students to engage with local business to assist in the development of employability and enterprise skills. Initial research found programs supporting enterprise and workplace learning through business partnerships in Ireland and the UK.

My study tour involved:

* + School visits in Ireland to review the Transition Year – a middle school program with Vocational Education focus and mandatory work experience
  + Interviewing the CEO of the Young Enterprise Scotland (YES) program and visiting Scotland’s 2012 Enterprise School of the Year. A review of Skills for Work, a vocational program for students in the junior school
  + School visit to examine Work Based Learning Pathway, a vocational course in Welsh schools.
  + Review of Work Inspiration Program and observing student workshops in London.
  + Visiting Business Ready™ schools in Hull and Education Ready™ business in Leeds.

New Learning

**Transition Year Program**

Transition Year (TY) is a one year school based course of study for Year 10 students between the junior and senior exam cycle. It is an optional year of learning, which 85% of schools in Ireland offer to facilitate the smooth transition from the more dependent learning of the junior cycle to the independent self-directed learning required for the senior cycle. The Mission Statement of TY is: To promote the personal, social, educational and vocational development of pupils and to prepare them for their role as autonomous, participative and responsible members of society[[1]](#footnote-1)

Schools have the freedom to design their own TY programs tailored to the needs and interests of students and based on utilisation of staff expertise. Subjects such as English, Irish, Science and Maths are compulsory whilst a huge and varied range of subjects are taught in modules.[[2]](#footnote-2) A key feature of TY is the use of a range of teaching and learning methodologies resulting in the delivery of courses in modules which are activity and project based. This method of delivery gives students the opportunity to engage in independent, self-directed learning and develop their social, employability and enterprise skills. A major component of TY is mandatory work experience which has become a central feature of the TY program as it helps students contextualise and put into practice what they learn in class. Students participate in two mandatory sessions of work experience and one session of volunteering. The very nature and structure of TY ensures students mature, become independent learners and develop the necessary employability and enterprise skills to transition successfully into the world of work.

In Ireland I visited three schools running TY programs:

* + Our Lady’s Bower Secondary School for Girls has been running TY for over 20 years and was among the first schools in Ireland to implement the program and now has three classes.
  + St Gerard’s School where TY is compulsory as the outcomes for students are valued and measurable. The program incorporates a wide range of skills and activities with an emphasis on project based activities. A summary of their program is outlined on the website.[[3]](#footnote-3)
  + Desmond College has offered a TY program for only two years. Kerrie Collins the TY coordinator enthusiastically praised all parties involved in the organisation and delivery of this new initiative.

All schools deliver a Business module which involves setting up a mini company with a local business mentor and entering national competitions.[[4]](#footnote-4) Teachers with the assistance of the Business Enterprise Board, deliver action based enterprise programs which give students practical experience and develop enterprise capabilities and skills. Desmond College TY students successfully competed in the national finals of Junior Dragons Den.

Local businesses are heavily involved in the hosting of students’ work experience and all TY coordinators recognise the positive role work experience plays in the development of employability skills. Business is keen to sustain links with the schools to connect with future employees, assist in the development of their employability skills and maintain a high profile in the community.

All schools concur that at the completion of TY students are more mature, confident andindependent and have developed skills through engagement in activities that are relevant and work based.

**Young Enterprise Scotland**

I travelled to Scotland to investigate Young Enterprise Scotland (YES) and its Company Program which is run for senior students. In Glasgow I interviewed Marlyn Hosie, Senior Manager of the Company Program.

YES is a charity organisation whose vision is to be recognised as Scotland’s premier organisation for inspiring and preparing young people to become successful enterprising members of society.*[[5]](#footnote-5)* The Company Program is the longest running YES program and it involves working with 17 volunteer boards across Scotland. The 2012/13 program involved 224 companies, 2742 students and 200 volunteers with business backgrounds. The YES competition operates on four levels, Local, Regional, National and European. The Scottish Company of the Year goes on to compete in the UK finals and then the European leg of the competition. In 2008 Fortrose Academy had European success winning the Global Impact Award also winning the 2012 Company Award in the Scottish finals and collecting five out of seven awards. I chose to visit Fortrose Academy (FA) and meet with their YES program Link teacher, Margaret Rhynas and business volunteer, Linda Thomas, to investigate the program more fully in a school context.

FA has an enterprise culture across the school and project based work is started in the junior school years creating enthusiasm to be involved in the YES Company program. Senior students volunteer to be part of this extra-curricular project which is run during lunch and after school and facilitated by the Link teacher. The company comprises around 15 students and a volunteer Business Adviser. The students operate the company for one year and are judged on their innovative approach to running the company not solely the product/service. The FA2012 company, Innovation, with its unique creation; the Measure-Up Cup won 5 awards at the Scottish finals. According to Margaret, most learning through the running of the company is experiential and skills based which students enjoy and prefer.

At FA the business partnerships developed through participation in YES are strong and sustainable as a result of the rewarding experience of local business volunteers involved in the program and their goodwill and desire to help young people.

**Skills for Work Program**

At FA I also reviewed the Skills for Work (SFW) program which is a junior school vocational program aimed at enabling students to develop practical vocational skills and improve their employment prospects. Schools, employers and training providers deliver the program.

SFW courses differ from other vocational provisions because they focus on generic employability skills needed for success in the workplace. The courses offer a variety of practical experiences that are linked to vocational areas such as construction, hairdressing, hospitality, sport and recreation, early education and childcare, emergency services, financial services, retailing and rural skills. Completion earns Intermediate 1 or 2 qualifications.

FA runs the SFW program offering Construction Skills (Int1) and Engineering (Int1). Both courses have business partners who assist in the project based delivery on and offsite. William Gray Construction and Life Scan (engineering) utilise industry visits, conduct workshops and host employer and apprentice talks to assist the transition from school to work.

Nino Meehan, coordinator of the program, says the benefits of the program are not only the development of employability skills and gaining a recognised qualification but also increased literacy and numeracy skills, self-esteem, confidence and improved student behaviour. The sustained partnership between the school and local businesses is an increasingly important means of improving educational outcomes.

**Work Based Learning Pathways Program – Wales**

I visited Mountain Ash Comprehensive School (MACS) in Wales to review Work Based Learning Pathways (WBLP) offered to Year 9 students and delivered in partnership with business to provide structured workplace learning. Students undertaking this two year pathway attend school, college, participate in work placement and study for a vocational qualification. Students gain experience and skills through extended work experience placements of up to 50 days over the two years which can be conducted in school time, evenings, weekends and holidays. By introducing extended work experience into the curriculum students learn in a more practical, work focused way within a business environment. This pattern of study broadens student options for employment, further work based learning through an apprenticeship or continuation at school or higher education. The aim of the WBLP is to give the learner as much valuable hands-on experience as possible and still learn the important core subjects of Maths, English and Science at school. WBLP are offered in the following sectors: Motor Industry, Construction and Built Environment, Sport Management, Leadership and Coaching, Retail, Technologies and Textiles.

MACS offers the Construction and Built Environment WBLP. Principal, Hew Lloyd, recognises that the program is a successful and worthwhile opportunity for students to gain invaluable experience in a real-life business learning practical skills and working towards a vocational qualiﬁcation. The key partner for work experience is local business, Lovell Construction, who offers a range of activities and projects to help students gain industry specific skills. Some of the benefits for Lovell Construction by supporting the WBLP are that it raises the profile of the business within the community, assists recruitment of motivated students and develops the skills of the existing workforce when they work with students on site. Mountain Ash is a mining town with high unemployment and the WBLP is recognised for equipping students for post school options.

**Business Ready™ and Education Ready™ Quality Standards- England**

These quality standards were developed by the Institute of Education Business Excellence (IEBE). Business Ready™ is an accreditation for schools which recognises their contribution to developing young people’s employability, whilst Education Ready™ recognises the efforts of business to develop employability. These accreditations are gained through a self-assessment process, interview and site visit. Schools meeting the standard work with businesses to embed employability in the curriculum, maximise business relationships, and prepare students for work.

I visited Newland School for Girls (NSG) and Malet Lambert School (MLS), the first two standard accredited schools in the UK. Both are recognised as ‘best practise’ schools in the delivery of cross curricular programs to enhance employability and have been awarded a Distinction, the highest achievable Business Ready™ standard.

Principal of NSG, Angela Martinson says that deepening their involvement with business is a priority and a new *“real and alive curriculum*” is in development. A key aspect is the linking of subject areas with specific businesses, so that student learning can be set in context through business led activities. For example,

* + activities are being developed in the junior school Maths program to make it relevant to work
  + the House System links each House to a local company who offers opportunities for students to develop and acquire employability skills.
  + Mandatory work experience for Year 10 students is a vital part of NGS’s wide range of work- related learning opportunities. Quality work experience opportunities are deemed vital in the development of employment related skills.
  + Teaching staff participate in work experience assisting them to understand the ‘world of work’.
  + students participate in project based activities assisted by the business linked to their House in the extra –curricular Work Enterprise Program that operates one afternoon each week.
  + Business and industry representatives regularly visit the school and are involved in class activities.

In securing the Business Ready™ award, MLS was praised for the strong leadership from the principal and the strategic approach to planning and delivery of activities and events to enhance employability and enterprise skills.

Careers HT and Hull Enterprise Teacher of the Year (2011 and 2012) Stephen Logan, believes *“having students better prepared for the world of work is a necessary part of being at school. Our main aim is to enrich student’s experiences and develop employability skills that will help students achieve in their core subjects from year 7 through to year 11.”*

To achieve this, MLS has a cross curricular approach offering a wide range of activity based learning projects that enhance enterprise capabilities. The school also works effectively with business to embed employability skills. Some events local business is involved are:

* + Youth Enterprise Summit hosted by MLSbrings business partners from across the city to support Hull’s enterprising young people and showcases their talent and enterprise skills.
  + Global Entrepreneurship Week inspires young people to take an interest in Enterprise and involves primary and secondary schools and local businesses.
  + Careers Week at MLS is an important part of the school’s Careers program and students participate in a variety of ‘hands on’ activities.
  + AppsGO Workshop – a local App Designer worked with Year 8 students who designed their first smartphone apps.
  + Year 9 students working in small groups at Sewells Skills Academy experienced a variety of building trade and architectural design skills.
  + Hull University-Year 8 and 10 students worked in the Computer Science department programming a simple computer game.
  + Humber Teen Tech – over 30 local and national employers in Science, Engineering and Technology provided practical encounters inspired by “real” engineers showing students how Maths and Physics contribute to employment related skills.
  + Our Future Magazine is a Year 7 project written, produced and published by students with business partners.

Both schools have adopted a whole school approach to employability and enterprise driven by principals and executive. The Business Ready™ accreditation is external recognition of each school’s innovative approach to develop student employability and enterprise skills.

**Education Ready™ Quality Standard**

Telecommunications business O2 was awarded a Distinction for its Education Ready™ accreditation.O2’s corporate social responsibility program, Think Big[[6]](#footnote-6) involves3,000 students from 20 local secondary schools. The Leeds Think Big program is recognised as exemplary and includes:

* + Think Big School-a day of digital entrepreneurship where teams of students think of a great digital idea and turn it into reality with support from business mentors who provide assistance with project management, technology, sales, marketing and presentation skills.
  + Go4Setisa program linking into STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects. It is a 10 week program, launched at 02 offices, where students are provided with a brief ( for example recycling, saving water) followed by work on the project at school and culminating in a final presentation of their work at O2.
  + Inspiring You – a one day program designed to inspire and motivate disengaged young female students is delivered by the designer of the program- a young female apprentice.
  + Set for Success is a 90 minute business site visit and tour followed by discussions around potential jobs. It is aimed at ‘at risk’ students.
  + Go Think Big[[7]](#footnote-7)provides work experience opportunities.
  + AMP Awards regional school battle of the bands; underpinned by business team who stage a finale event. Details outlined[[8]](#footnote-8).
  + O2 Recycle for Schools encourages students to recycle old mobile phones. Students organise and manage the project.
  + O2 Helpers are O2 employee volunteers giving online or face to face support. Helpers are paired up with community projects to provide longer term mentor support.
  + World at Work Days consisting of 2 x 2 hours workshops on specific subjects such as (project management; business planning) also includes a site tour, meet and greet of staff and participation in an interactive “build an app” workshop.
  + E-Ngage Live Sessions are online, interactive one hour modules covering a range of subjects, including Smartphone safety, CV writing and interview skills, internet safety.

Leeds O2 identified a need to work with the local future workforce and enhance their work preparation. The company is now recognised for best practice delivery of sustainable programs and projects connecting schools and business and assisting young people become employable.

**Work Inspiration Initiative- England**

The Work Inspiration (WI) initiative is a UK wide campaign led by Business in the Community (BITC) “to make work experience more meaningful, relevant and inspiring for young people” by turning work experience into work inspiration connecting classrooms to the world of work. I met with Mick Keay, WI coordinator at British Telecom (BT) in London, to review their program. Mick is employed full time to coordinate the WI program which is run by employer volunteers and delivered to school groups in their London and regional offices. Mick had only recently returned from a WI promotional tour in Australia.

In 2009 BT was one of dozens of high profile employers to commit to WI, a corporate social responsibility initiative which targeted 3,000 students for participation in the program in its first year.

Schools now register online to participate in the program and events can be conducted over a period of 1-5 days.BT aims to inspire young people and expose them to opportunities a company like BT can offer and the events focus on transferable skills that are applicable in any job. Students develop their skills through participation in the interactive workshops which focus on activities related to technical roles, engineering, sales and marketing, human resources as well as job search skills.

WI is comprised of three “Insight” workshops consisting of interactive, project based activities:

* + Insight 1 All about Me-assists students articulate their skills, talents and interests in terms of employability.
  + Insight 2 Look behind the Scenes- involves a worksite visit showcasing potential roles within the organisation and students undertake a job research activity.
  + Insight 3 Careers Happen-is about how careers are created and what influences peoples career paths. Employees tell their inspiring stories about how they reached their current position. Students interact with executives and staff to create a Careers Board. It is an interactive way to help students understand that career paths are not linear.

This year additional workshops, on CV writing, preparing for a job interview, interview tips, presentation skills and job search tips have been incorporated into BT’s program. I attended these workshops which were being delivered to students from two inner city high schools.

Mick observed that the program’s success depends on the interaction between students and employees and their preference for hands-on experiences and real tasks, balanced by career conversations with employees.

To date the UK WI campaign has successfully engaged 700 employers in providing nearly 200,000 young people with WI opportunities.

Conclusion

I experienced widespread collaboration between schools and business to support young people and business involvement is a familiar part of education in the UK. A strong culture exists within big business to develop initiatives to directly assist schools through corporate social responsibility projects which have significant student benefit. Small businesses link to their local schools through a variety of sustainable initiatives and schools encourage the development of employability and enterprise skills in junior years through improved school practice. The businesses I visited were very aware of the business benefits gained though strong partnerships with schools and gave me valuable insight into work place environments and practices.

In the programs reviewed quality workplace learning is considered a vital strategy that links students and business and assists development of relevant skills. Participation in project based initiatives provides students with a wide range of opportunities to obtain and demonstrate skills and abilities in authentic contexts to better prepare for the transition from school to work.

My study tour has been an enriching professional development experience and has confirmed my belief that business must become strategic partners with education and work together to develop student employability and enterprise skills.

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1. Rules and Programmes for secondary Schools, Dept of Education and Science, Ireland 2004 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ### Languages, enterprise (mini companies) geography, tech drawing, hospitality, forensic science, art, drama, horticulture, fashion, equestrian, music, media studies, interior design, film making, architecture, archaeology, tourism, legal studies, self-defence, leadership, driver education, graphics, law, camps, national competitions, first aid, PE, coaching, engineering, creative writing, overseas excursions, Gashlea (Duke of Edinburgh)

   [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ### [St Gerard’s](https://www.stgerards.ie/) TY Summary

   [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ### Junior Dragons Den, Get Up and Go, Student Enterprise Awards

   [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [Young Enterprise](http://www.young-enterprise.org.uk/) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [Go Think Big](http://www.o2thinkbig.co.uk/) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. [Go Think Big](http://www.gothinkbig.co.uk/) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. AMP -The schools hold in-school heats and put forward a winning band to the final. The business teams then share different responsibilities; for example merchandise, social media, program design and VIP/ hospitality and have to collaborate to host the final. All schools sell tickets and have to raise money for charity. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)