

TECHNICAL YEAR 12— ENGLISH IN ANOTHER PLACE

by Barry Carozzi

Unlike High schools, Victoria's Technical schools do not have a long history of involvement in year twelve courses. Technical schools at no stage defined their task as preparing students for University studies. Few students who attended a tech. during the golden years of the sixties and seventies had any intention of going on to Uni. After all, Tech. kids were good with their hands — not their heads!! They were destined to enter the trades or to undertake certificate or diploma courses at one of the Institutes of Technology. Technical schools offered secondary education to form five and provided facilities and teachers for apprenticeship training.

Syllabuses in Technical school English differed little from those in High schools during the fifties and early sixties. The VUSEB English syllabuses, forms 1–5 provided High and Tech. teachers alike with the traditional English recipe: Grammar — the noun, the verb, the adjective . . . the adjectival clause, the gerund, etc.; Vocabulary — Greek and Latin roots; Literature . . . and so on. And Messrs. Ridout and McGregor along with Allsop and Hunt (later to be joined by Bloggs) formed the staple diet for a generation of school children. My own baptism of fire in the mid-sixties involved attempting to make "English for Australian Schools Book 3" palatable to 3GH (there was no KL — GH were the final letters in the third form academic alphabet).

It is no coincidence that the earliest moves for change in what we thought English was about came from the Technical schools and the inner suburban High schools — from Gerry Tickell and Tony Delves, Alec Allinson, and Bill and Lorna Hannan — teachers in working class schools where even "Jack Hill the blind miner" could see that Trad. English was not meeting — and could never meet — the needs of the majority of the students in those schools.

Looking from where we sat — in the Techs. — during that era of rapid change in the pedagogy of English, it seemed that HSC hung around the neck of High schools like an albatross. In conference we grew impatient with High school people saying — "We'd like to try something different but we've got to prepare them for HSC." However, whilst HSC seemed the sole preoccupation of High school teachers, it was almost totally irrelevant to Tech. people.

This history has given Tech. school teachers a quite different perspective with regard to year 12. Tech. schools did offer, during the sixties and early seventies, a subject called English B. As a credential, it was acceptable to some Institutes as a year 12 English and was often taught in Night Schools. Its requirements were similar to HSC but needless to say, it was unrecognised by the Universities.

With the tendency for greater numbers of students to stay on to the higher forms in both Tech. and High schools during the seventies, the issue of Year 12 began to have more impact on Technical schools. Increasingly, Technical school students were being seen as disadvantaged. After all, why shouldn't students be able to complete six years of secondary education? As it was, the sorting process at the end of Primary school channelled those with academic aspirations into High schools, which in itself created serious problems for Technical schools.

The first response was the Tertiary Orientation Program which grew up in a number of schools. This sought to achieve exactly what the title suggests — the preparation of students for Tertiary studies. Again, as a credential, the TOP was not always granted parity with HSC — certainly not in the eyes of the Universities.

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In some ways, those responsible for the preparation of the courses offered as part of TOP attempted to out-demand the HSC people by creating courses which could stand up to the critical scrutiny of the academics. At one college, for example, there was a course in the Humanities area which required year 12 students to divide their year between Marx and Freud!

The most recent star on the Technical school horizon is what is known as Technical Year Twelve. The reasoning which underlies it goes something like this: Largely because of the current economic conditions, more kids are staying longer at school and they're staying in many cases only until they can pick up a job. And who can blame them? There's now a plethora of possible year 12 options available to the discerning year 12 student with his/her eyes on some kind of tertiary education. There's VISE group 1, VISE group 2, STC, Schools Year 12 Tertiary Certificate: a whole course or study structure requiring curriculum to be negotiated by teachers and learner, assessment to be participatory and certification on the basis of was the work completed and a descriptive statement not exceeding 250 words. This course is an approved component of Victorian HSC (also accredited by VISE), and the TOP courses. All have pre-requisites and all are designed with the needs of the "academically-oriented" student in mind. But there are many students wanting to continue their education — even if only until a good job turns up — and there are no courses really suitable for them.

Hence, Technical Year 12. If schools wish to offer Technical Year 12, there are course accreditation procedures. The courses must be submitted to a committee. One of the demands is that there be an "English" component to these courses and that this component be directly related to the practical studies which the course involves.

Perhaps a couple of examples will help to better explain what is intended. During 1982 the school at which I currently teach — Preston East Technical School — prepared a submission for a Year 12 Sport and Recreational Studies COURSE. The course was composed of fifteen units: eight in Physical Education, three units in Humanities, Recreational Studies, and Social Development, and two units in Maths, Biology, Art and Media, and Commerce Studies. The course was not vocational in its orientation; rather it was "intended both to provide a constructive alternative to unemployment, to prepare students for an increasingly unpredictable future in terms of employment and lifestyle, and to contribute to the maturation of the individual."

Technical Year 12 courses are all similarly structured. Students are required to complete a total of 15 units in the course of a year, each unit consisting of around forty hours of work.

In this specific course three Humanities units were required: Urban Life and Leisure, The Power of the Media, and Sport and Politics. (These three units are appended.) The clear intention here is to gear the work in Humanities directly to the overall intentions and preoccupations of the course. This is a feature common to Technical Year 12 courses.

A Community Studies course, developed during 1983, involved a similar Humanities component — in terms of time — but the actual units offered were quite different, addressing aspects of child and adolescent growth, community issues and problems, and so on. Similarly, Year 12 Building Studies Humanities focuses more on technical and report writing and on issues such as the implications of technological change for working patterns, and so on.

This admittedly brief account serves to highlight a number of points about Technical Year 12 "English". Firstly, English components are often subsumed under the broad title "Humanities". Secondly, the actual content of these English programs varies enormously according to the kind of course being offered; the topics chosen tend to be more directly related to the specific interests of the students involved in comparison with other Year 12 courses. Further, there is greater possibility for integrated teaching — for teaching which students perceive as being relevant to the overall purposes of the course they have undertaken.

Year 12 courses in Technical schools are not without their critics. Many argue that they are "dead end courses"; that they lead nowhere; that as a credential, they lack "power". They are recognised by neither employers nor tertiary institutions. In many cases schools mounting Technical Year 12 courses do seek to obtain acceptance of this qualification for graduates with specific institutions. However, such a credential does not stand up against a VISE accredited HSC or STC or a TOP credential.

Others carry this criticism further, arguing that such courses are simply another ploy for shifting the problem of youth unemployment out of the dole queues (and, the more cynical observe, out of the unemployment figures) into the schools.

On the other hand, there are many students for whom HSC, STC and TOP are not real options – students who lack the educational prerequisites to be admitted into such courses and for whom such courses are inappropriate in any case. Supporters of Technical Year 12 argue that there need to be opportunities for such students to continue their schooling into year 12, to undertake courses which will help them to develop “life skills”. In 1970 fewer than a dozen Technical schools offered Technical Year 12 courses. At this time in excess of 30 Technical schools run such courses. This trend suggests that the courses are at least attempting to meet the needs of those students for whom the heavy academic bias of HSC courses and the inflexibility of many STC and TOP courses, along with the at times stringent entry requirements, are inappropriate.

Certainly from the point of curriculum development in English and more generally, in the Humanities, these courses provide the challenge of – and the opportunity for – the development of lively courses more directly attuned to the real needs of a sizeable group of students whose needs in the past have been ill-served by courses aimed at preparing students for tertiary studies with a heavy academic emphasis.

Examples of Technical Year 12 Course “Humanities” Units

Unit One Urban Life and Leisure

Central Aim

To develop the students’ awareness of the “urban lifestyle”, to define “leisure” and to come to some understanding of the recreational and leisure pursuits of their own community.

Specific Aims

To develop and extend students’ written and oral skills. To be able to construct, carry out and interpret a survey. To be able to identify a problem, define and analyse it and propose some solution.

Language

- Debate
- Interviewing
- Preparation and presentation of survey report in written form as a prelude to **Recreational Facilities Model** undertaken in Art/Media and Maths subject areas
- Written articles for school newspaper on Inter-tech sport – weekly competition, swimming and athletic carnivals
- Weekly written and display of team reports from Inter-tech competition.

Literature

- Reading and reviewing a novel of own choice.

Drama

- Interview technique simulation
- Confidence building activities as a prelude to debating and survey interviewing.

Film Study

- Viewing and critical analysis of one or more films depending on availability
 - One on One
 - Chariots of Fire
 - That Championship Season.

Speaker

- Preston City Councillor to discuss with the students the provision and funding of community sporting facilities and the needs of the local community, particularly youth.

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Research

An extensive research assignment looking at

- Amateurism vs. professionalism
- OR Spectatorism
- OR Team sports vs. individual sports
- OR A topic to be negotiated and related to overall unit.

Unit Two The Power of the Media**Central Aim**

To appreciate the power of the media in society, focusing particularly on sports coverage – the creation of heroes, the demise of others, the role of the media in formulating public opinion, the effects of sponsorship and advertising.

Specific Aims

To develop and extend the students written and oral skills and to affect an awareness of the media as a powerful influence in society through discussion and enquiry.

Language

- Discussion, critical analysis and debate of current affairs
- Reporting, written and oral, on a particular event covered by the various media
- Grammar, vocabulary and comprehension exercises as enrichment and remediation
- Clear thinking practice to develop discrimination, clarification of values and logical thinking.

Literature

Reading and study of the Australian play *And the Big Men Fly* (Alan Hopgood)

- written critique and report on specific issues arising from the play.

Film Study

- Viewing and analysis of advertising and sponsorship associated with sporting events and personalities.

Speakers

- Sports writer from National daily paper
- V.F.L. personality.

Research

A major research assignment tracing the role of the media in some sporting issue.

Possible topics

- attitudes to Sunday football
- South Melbourne move to Sydney
- World Series Cricket vs. traditional
- The V.F.L. transfer/clearance (cricket wrangle)
- The inequality of coverage given to various sports
- Womens sport
- Sponsorship by Breweries/Tobacco companies

OR a topic to be negotiated with students.

Unit Three Sports and Politics**General Aim**

To develop the students' awareness of the social system in which they live and its differences from other systems, and to relate this to the international, national and local sporting scene.

Specific Aims

To enrich and extend the students written and oral expression.

To develop an interest in, and understanding of the political influences on sport, both historical and contemporary.

Language

- Debate on negotiated, relevant issue
- Discussion of current events in the political/sporting arena
- Compilation of a folio of press cuttings and other articles relevant to controversial "political" issues in sport
- Major research project on an historical international incident
- Essay writing – argumentative style.

Literature

- Reading and critical evaluation of the Australian play "The Club" (David Williamson).

Poetry

- Researching and analysis of political poetry and song (as a means of social consciousness raising, especially in relation to such issues as apartheid, war, class, etc.)

Film Study

- Viewing of relevant videos from "The Olympics" series
- If available, the documentary relating to the deaths of the Israeli Olympians in Munich.

Speakers

- Sports personality to speak on aspects of training, funding and the establishment of the National Sports Institute in Canberra.

Research

A major research assignment dealing with an historical or contemporary sporting issue and its connection with International/National/Local politics.

Possible topics

- Berlin Olympics – Hitler and Jessie Owens
Mexico 1968 – The Black Power Movement
Munich 1972 – The Israeli massacre
Moscow 1980 – The Afghanistan Issue.
- Sporting ties with South Africa.
- The funding of sporting bodies
Amateur Associations/Professional Associations.
- Nationalism in sport.
- Sporting personalities and their associations with political parties

OR

A topic to be negotiated and related to unit.

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