

Schools First Conference – Friday, 19 March, 2010

Adam Smith, CEO, The Foundation for Young Australians

“Corporate Australia’s role in Education and developing our future leaders”

VIDEO #1: "Do you believe in me?"

Dalton Sherman of Dallas, Texas

Keynote speaker at Dallas Independent School District launch of the new school year

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAMLOnSNwzA>

I think there is an absolute fundamental role for corporate Australia to not just invest in but to transform education in this country. And during the panel discussion I tried to make some off the cuff, somewhat controversial remarks about the fear that I observe in the hearts and minds of parents and teachers and the media and a whole range of other stakeholders that we really need to acknowledge. And some of those are totally valid but we need to be able to work through those fears and accept that shared responsibility and collective action is the only way that we’re going to see real change for young people in this country within the school systems that exist.

I will get to the things that I think are going to enable that change, and I think that there is a lot that we can all be thinking about and talking about that will make it a lot easier to determine what is a valuable and significant and appropriate corporate partnership and what is not.

But I think it’s really important that we take a few steps back from that and think about what is the role of a school. Because the role of a school has never been as different as it is right now. And even in that short video you hear a nine year old talking about how school is preparing us for the workforce.

We have such heightened expectations of what every school in this country will deliver, and we have the most unbelievable expectations of what every teacher in this country will achieve. And you can make a pretty compelling case that we’re setting our teachers, our schools and our communities up for failure.

So before I dive into what I think the corporate role is I think we first need to reflect a little on what’s changing in our schools and what’s changing in the role of teaching.

And I have just a couple of short, much shorter videos. This is Sir Ken Robinson, this is talking about interest in education.



VIDEO #2: Sir Ken Robinson, 'Interest in Education'

http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html

I think that's a very short example of how we're changing our thinking about the role of schools. Later on in this presentation, and most of these videos are found from TED (www.ted.com) and if you're not familiar with TED it can possibly be the greatest resource you'll find in terms of bringing the best speakers and the best thinkers into classrooms and into communities around this country and all around the world. He goes on in his presentation to think about how would you explain school to an alien.

VIDEO #3: Sir Ken Robinson, 'Explaining School to an Alien'

http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html

It's really not my intention to give a keynote through other people, although there is a particular appeal about it. But I think there's some really important concepts in there about what or how we need to think about school education in the 21st century.

And it's not to say we've got it wrong. And the last thing I want to convey is that the role of teaching has been diminished because I think the exact opposite. I think that what we now expect teachers to do is absolutely unbelievable and I think as a society it is criminal and absolutely depressing in the extreme that we still don't value this as a real profession in the way it deserves to be valued.

There's some individuals from FYA and I know Michelle Hamilton and John Kilner who work in our Worlds of Work program and I know that one of the most beautiful things that I've heard second or third hand from many of the corporate leaders that are involved in our programs is "now I get why school education and why teaching is so hard, and now I understand why it's such a complex and challenging role" and I know we've got people here from Teach for Australia that are starting to observe exactly the same things.

So before I wrap this into why the corporate role is so important, there's one more video I want to show about "What do Teachers Make?" And I think in two or three minutes captures how we need to be thinking about the role of the teacher as we go forward.



VIDEO #4: What do teachers make?

http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/taylor_mali_what_teachers_make.html

If we think of Ken Robinson as talking about the content within education and the content that we really expect schools to be thinking about and delivering we think about the role of the ideal teacher as someone that can do that, and can do that well and do that better through facilitating excellent partnerships to really open up the community in all of its forms and all of its definitions around the school.

The final clip, which is just a 30 second one, is really thinking about the role of schools and what happens if we don't get all of these pieces right. This comes from a very close friend and colleague of mine in the US by the name of Sam Chaltain. Sam runs the Forum for Education and Democracy in the United States, and that title of an organisation in itself that intrinsically links education and democracy I think says a lot. And this is a campaign that he showed across the United States on CNN and it was just a very short clip to make the case for why education and why our schools matter so much.

VIDEO #5: Rethink Learning Now - The real role of schools

There's so many example in Australia that we can draw on that make a very similar point. I've tried to just give you a couple of different dimensions of thinking about the roles of teachers and the roles of schools in the 21st century. And I think it's really important to reflect on both before we can really understand who else needs to be in this space and why.

To just summarise very briefly the current situation around corporate participation in education. There are some things that are happening at the highest levels in government. There's a report that was put out by Ernst & Young in the United States a couple of years ago called "Best in Class", if you have an interest in how the corporate sector can transform education I certainly recommend you look at this document.

I started to mention as part of the panel discussion before what's happening now with the Deputy Prime Minister following the 2020 Summit, bringing together a group of education and corporate leaders to talk about what should the guiding principles and enablers be for schools and for business to be able to partner in new and effective and appropriate ways.

Some of the concerns that we've got about promoting McDonalds and promoting any particular brand in schools, they are valid concerns. But we need to see it in the broadest possible context. We need to see that young people are not just exposed to these things in the classroom. That they are exposed to them in every possible environment. And the education we need to think about is how to encourage young people to synthesise information and make appropriate choices.



And how do we make them aware of the messaging that's happening all around them in every type of environment.

That's not so say we should be irresponsible about who we invite into our schools. There is no more important institution in our communities, therefore we should have only the highest respect for who we do invite in.

But I think saying that we need to exclude organisations that have a capacity to make a serious impact would be really disappointing.

I think we need to really understand that to put school in its most ideal context, we really need to acknowledge that schools can no longer do this by themselves.

We need to acknowledge that there is a fundamental role and accountability of government and we should be doing more to hold government to account. But what really concerns me is that government can do a good job but they're not going to be the ones that take the risks. They're not going to be the ones that do the really bold, unproven and unconventional things that we know might make the difference in the lives of young people in this country.

And I think we need to think really carefully about the role of philanthropy, the role of corporate Australia, and the role of the community sector in this country.

The community sector is one I want to just touch on very briefly, and people think that the not for profit space is just a relatively small sector that exists off to the side of the real work that happens in other industries.

Earlier this week the Prime Minister and Jenny Macklin and Ursula Stephens who is pictured here, launched what is called the National Compact. It's an odd name, and even the Prime Minister, I overheard him before he got up to launch it said "What is a Compact?". But basically this is looking to redefine the third sector in Australia. And there's some staggering data in this, and it really looks at reshaping what the relationship should be between the third sector and government.

For example, they talked about 5.4 million volunteers working across 600,000 organisations and generation 43 billion dollars a year for the Australian economy. When you combine the number of staff, which is about 8% of the workforce, with the number of volunteers, you have the equal largest industry in this country, equal only to retail.

We don't do enough to really understand or acknowledge the third sector in this country. And there are some superb examples of corporations and of government departments that are starting to understand the role that we play.



And I can certainly speak for a long time about how Schools First is starting to do that. But this is just one example of the hundreds or the thousands that are required to really start to get the best out of the third sector.

What I love about Schools First is that it's not saying it's up to any one not-for-profit organisation, or it's not up to one corporation to really make this impact on school education.

It's really been us sitting around saying what are the unique resources and ideas and values that we can bring to this work. And what FYA brings is so distinctly different to ACER and they are both distinctly different to that of NAB. When we think about what's required in the future, something that is absolutely critical across the community sector, education sector and the corporate sector, is an absolute commitment to greater voice, value and visibility for young Australians.

And I'm not just talking about in conferences or at round tables, I'm talking about in every classroom and in every community and in every discussion about the issues that matter most to young people. We need a far greater commitment to make sure that voice is heard, and that young people are truly valued and respected and are given every opportunity to access the many opportunities that exist.

As an organisation, this is something that we find quite challenging, because it's hard to get this right. And so, for example, the challenge for us is to think what's the broader agenda within which we exist at the moment. And just a very brief example is the My School website.

There was a number of comments made in the closing sequence at the end of the commentary at the end of the panel discussion about what is the one action or what is the one vision for the future. Those that know me know that it's unusual for me to be practical or concrete in my ideas, but the one thing that I think I would like to see is that what we're talking about around school and community engagement to improve student learning outcomes should be the number one thing that's reported on My School, because I think when we start to look at what really defines a school is its capacity to go beyond the classroom and to open up the world as the learning environment for every student. Which will only happen through excellent partnerships.

We have a campaign that we're running at the moment called "Tell Us" and our target is to engage 50,000 secondary school aged students from across the country, and ask them how they believe the success of schools should be measured.



This is not going to solve every problem that we can imagine in every community across this country, but it can start to give young people a voice in decisions that are being made about them and for them in this country.

If you have a secondary school student at home or at school or somewhere in your family or somewhere in your community, I plead with you to ask them to complete this survey. Because what we're trying to do is make a case that what young people are seeing actually makes them the experts. And if we think about education as a business, it's quite an uninformed business model not to listen adequately to your most important stakeholder or client.

And the more we can do to really make sure that the voice of young people are heard, at both the national policy level and right down to a classroom level, the better.

There's a number of things to think about in terms of what the corporate sector can and should be doing to enter this space. And you've heard a number of these things discussed today. I think it's really important to understand what's working at the moment and what's not. But also to have a very frank and very open conversation about why a corporation would want to partner with a school. And it's absolutely OK for us to say there's something in it for them, as there should be.

Every partner in every partnership should be getting something from it. And we shouldn't be afraid of articulating what that is. Because it's not always going to be as negative and as one-dimensional as the stereotype would have us believe. What we need in this country are more structural enablers to make it easier for companies and community groups of every size and scale to really get behind our schools.

And I had a bit of a personal dilemma listening to the former Premier, Steve Bracks. Because I strongly disagree with one particular statement he made about charitable giving to schools. To a point he's right, you can give to a school and to a point he's right that you can get a tax deduction for that. The fine print in there paints quite a different picture. And it's actually near impossible for you to donate to a school in this country except if it's for a building fund - which doesn't make a lot of sense given that we've just invested billions of dollars in new buildings - or in a scholarship fund. There are structural enablers that we can put in place that can really transform how individuals and companies can give to education in this country, and we are a long way from getting it right.



We need to think about the transitions that we can start to make for young people, and how we can make them far more seamless between different learning environments. And it is no longer adequate to assume that the most important learning that happens in the life of a student is in the classroom. The role of the classroom increasingly is the point at which we can facilitate the sharing of information and the transfer of skills and knowledge.

I had a fascinating discussion with someone from within HR at Woolworths, who said that their approach to working in school education is not part of the corporate social responsibility agenda at all. Nor is it part of a sponsorship campaign. The reality is that they have tens of thousands of high school students employed, and these are students that in some cases are totally disengaged from the classroom. But on weekends are managing the local supermarket and are demonstrating the most unbelievable and complex skill sets that we're failing to recognise.

So part of the role of engaging the corporate sector and industry and the community sector is not just about money. In fact money is one of the least important things that we can be talking about.

It's "what are the enablers?"

It's "what are the opportunities to share skills?"

And most importantly, "what are the opportunities to create experiences for young people that see them learning in a number of environments?", but where all of this learning is actually captured by our schools.

That's not going to happen until we revalue learning in this country. Part of that is valuing the role of teachers. A huge part of that is valuing the role of schools. And an organisation like NAB putting the spotlight on schools through Schools First is a really important start in terms of saying this is really important and this really matters.

It's interesting, what I said before, about the role of government not being the one to take risks. We're going through this heated debate in Australia at the moment about measuring school performance and school success. And there's organisations that are relatively good at developing very complex mechanisms to measure this. Microsoft, Cisco and Intel independently of all of this have actually come together and said that we need to define new measures and new approaches to measuring success within learning in the 21st century. This is an example of a project that is not CSR, it is not a corporate wanting to engage their staff, it's a totally different agenda that's about identifying a gap and looking for a set of risks and experiences that can be created to come up with an entirely new approach to understanding success within learning in the 21st century. And that is the type of thinking we need about what is the role of corporate Australia in transforming schools.



The future of corporate investment in this country, my personal hope is that it only continues to increase. But I think we need to be careful about how we measure that because it goes far beyond dollars. There is no school who is going to say we don't need more money. However, I would argue very strongly that money is not enough. And that what we actually need is the transfer of skills and the opportunity to have our young people moving across different environments. This is multidimensional and not easy to do. It's really easy to talk about, and I think we're getting a level of sophisticated understanding in this country about what partnership means and why collaboration is important. That's an OK first step, but we have a really long way to go in terms of getting every sector in this country to really be aware of this and thinking about how they can make it happen.

I haven't been working in the philanthropic sector for decades. But certainly in the last decade I've noticed one major change. I used to go to the Telstra Foundation. I used to go to the Foundation set up within Goldman Sachs JBWere. I used to go with my little funding proposal and grant application and say give us money. And we'd have a to and fro about whether this was a good idea or there was an alignment with the product we wanted to deliver and the objectives they had. That's absolutely changed now. And the most enlightened organisations that we work with start from the point of what can our staff do to help your cause. And it's an entirely different discussion that actually happens more through HR than it does through foundations or corporate responsibility. It's about 'this is a company', whether this is NAB or any other company in this country, 'we have resource, networks, ideas, energy and people. How can that make a difference to what you care about'.

And so I don't think there's a shortage of good will on either side, but I do think we need to get better at finding ways that are appropriate to tap into this capacity to give.

The shared understanding and respect, we've got a long way to go. And I was quite intentional in terms of the videos that I showed here. Because I think sometimes we do need to think back to basics about what do we really think about when we think about schools and we think about teachers.

And on one hand, for a lot of people in the corporate world and in community settings, we're quite removed from. But on the other hand, it's one of the only shared experiences that we have. And everybody in this room could tell a story about an exceptional teacher that has made an impact on their life. And everybody in this room could tell an exceptional story about the worst experience that they've ever had in a school and how that's made them think differently about a particular person or experience or subject. And it can actually bring people together.



And what we really need to move away from is assuming that what education *was* like is what education *needs* to be like in the future. And I think if we think just the role of technology at the moment, it's another enabling factor for us to think about, that there's a real danger we're not going to get right.

I don't really understand why but I've been asked by the Privacy Commissioner in Victoria to do an address about young people and their existence online and how we should regulate that. And I think that's going to spark quite a heated debate because the question is no longer should we allow young people to exist online, even though I can give you examples of secondary schools in this state that have banned Google and banned a whole range of websites that really are, there's very little - if any - justification for doing so.

But the dialogue has to shift about how do we give young people every opportunity to connect and explore and get access to information in an appropriate way. And how we're giving young people the tools and the skills to really be able to synthesise this information and do something positive with it.

I don't think we can forget the role that corporate Australia needs to play in this. And I think that there's a lot we can learn from Schools First, there's also a lot we can learn internationally about what's working and what's not working.

There's still I would say so much fear around getting this right. And I think it comes from a really good place because ultimately we all want the best for every child in this country. The danger is we're going to miss the best possible opportunities to give young people everything they deserve and more.

I think it's critically important that we start to understand learning as something that happens everywhere and not just in four walls of a school environment. And at the moment some of us are accessing the best possible learning environments in our communities and some of us are not. And I think that there's a real obligation for the corporate sector to be thinking differently about how they can start to enable some of these partnerships to be formed.

And my hope would be that through today you've seen Schools First as an example of that. And while it's the largest and one of the most significant in this country, it's not the only example. And while it may be the first of something this size, I certainly hope it's not the last.



So I would just in closing like to just finally acknowledge the Schools First team, who I know haven't really had an explicit mention, but under the guidance of Jodi, to me from day one, this partnership with NAB has absolutely demonstrated to me what corporate partnerships should be about. And the fact that we have such a diverse representation of individuals in this room is just such a success story in itself that Schools First is connecting with people and it really matters to people around this country. So please join me in thanking the Schools First team.

