Towards a 'reflective' professional: Some personal observations on the Conference of the Australasian Association of Criminal Justice Educators at Charles Sturt University, Mitchell Campus, Bathurst held on 4th and 5th July, 1991.

Before I share some of the particular observations deriving from this Conference that impinge directly upon correctional training and practices, specifically custodial, let me advance some general observations. Arising out of this forum was the general consensus that for police and prison officers to be truly professional, their training, or at least some significant part of it, needed to occur on university campuses. This being said, some other important major trends, problems encountered and gains consolidated, could also be discerned in the current situation from the various papers presented.

It was clear that in both police and prison officer training, all states represented at the conference were proceeding in the same broad general direction. That is, the development of a police or prison officer who was capable of dealing "with fluid, indeterminate and conflicting social problems " (Schon 1983, Schon 1988) by "thinking about what they are doing, while they are doing it". Such thinking to be guided by accumulated practitioner based corporate wisdom reflected through the particular circumstances and problem situations which generate the need for such wisdom to arise. It includes, quite importantly, dialogue with the clientele being served - in the case of the police that wider community not just the crime/victim complainant.

A simple example of what was meant was that in considering whether to give chase to car thieves in a 'high pursuit' situation, thereby satisfying both the requirements of the car owner and the political imperative to 'crack down on car theft', the police patrol commander, taking into account that the fact that it is 3 p.m. in the afternoon on a week day with all the school children about to pour out of their schools onto the streets and be endangered by the chase, might call it off. His decision counteracts his standing orders but is one ultimately supportive of and supported by his wider clientele and whilst it may not technically uphold 'the law' most certainly upholds 'public order' by avoiding the mayhem that would occur if either car involved in the chase, but particularly the police, crashed into a school bus killing several children on their way home from school.

This 'reflection-on-action' whilst in the midst of action guided by skills and wisdom located in best practice is seen to be the hallmark of the 'new' police professionalism. It is also the goal of all of the Corrective Service custodial educators present at the conference.

New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia were all represented. Whilst all such custodial educators were obviously on the same path, some had proceeded further down that path than others, the progress seeming to be impeded to varying degrees, by resistant 'old guard' value systems and esprit de corps, unimaginative and untrained managers, the quasi-military structure of prison services including an over emphasis on ceremonial, drill/physical manipulative skills like weapons training and a rigid rank system.
Western Australia appears to have proceeded furthest in its reforms by collapsing custodial ranks to four – Base Grade Officer, Senior Prison Officer, Deputy Superintendent and Superintendent. They have removed towers and armed guards from the gaols and only Superintendents were allowed side-arms in emergencies. All South Australian prison officers remained unarmed relying on tear gas for riot control. Hence both services were devoting much more time to prisoner and conflict management by interpersonal communication techniques. Both states, given the presence of tribal aboriginals in significant numbers in their prisons, had embarked on comprehensive aboriginal cultural awareness programs for prison officers, whilst at the same time vigorously recruiting aboriginal persons to be trained as Prison Officers. South Australia has a three (3) day aboriginal cultural awareness programme, which both recruit and existing staff are required to complete, with the final offer of a job to the recruit being dependant on the successful outcome of such course. They have also recruited and trained 25 aboriginal prison officers in a Service of 700. Western Australia has an aboriginal offenders' gaol which they are endeavouring to staff with aboriginal prison officers.

Generally, both states feel a full assault on 'old guard' values and camaraderie needed to be made at both Pre-Service and Management and In-Service training levels. To that end, Western Australia was moving to abolish the fully residential aspect of recruit training, suggesting that such helps to confirm 'old guard' esprit de corps. This, however, has not been the experience in this State, where Academy residence for some recruits appears to have been an important agent of consolidation of the new 'interactive' and reflective values being infused.

South Australia having trained 200 out of 700 prison officers with the 'new' attitudes and 'values' felt they had reached critical mass proportions where a major impact on old attitudes was being made by the new officers.

Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia were looking to bringing civilian managers in to staff superintendent ranks, Queensland feeling that such civilians would come from their Community Corrections arm as they were moving to rapidly integrate both into something that approximates the New South Wales 'correctional officer' notion.

In South Australia, along with the reduction of general drill and ceremonial, protocol changes had been introduced with saluting being dropped. Western Australian is also moving that way.

What are the implications of these changes for this State?

Dealing with the latter mentioned first, whilst it is hard to see our military trappings going, given our particular background and the intrinsic nature of an Academy in the first place, the expansion of ceremonial and associated drill should not occur nor should there be any increase in rank structure such as has been proposed. Position promotion should be aimed for, not rank promotion.
Lateral entry of civilians into senior ranks is necessary to entrench merit as the guiding principle. This can be done by the establishment of a Senior Executive Officer training course, competitively selected, the minimum entry requirements being a degree. Such to be taught in partnership with the Academy and the universities at post graduate level and including the latest managerial, financial, personnel and penological insights and techniques. On successful completion of the course those unsworn civilian staff can be sworn and become uniformed staff, thereby providing a catchment for senior prison management to be drawn from.

Correspondingly uniformed officers with merit and managerial potential should be identified early and helped to gain the tertiary education necessary to realise their potential. Civilianisation, which is also occurring in the various police services as well, should not be a one way street. In Unit Managed gaols why should prison officers, sufficiently trained, not take on casework and welfare or even assessment type roles. Blurring rigid role boundaries may well facilitate the very cultural change we are all aiming for.

Firearms in the N.S.W. prison system is an area where we are obviously at odds with other state developments, particular the smaller states. If such arms cannot be eliminated then their use and training for such use must be on the model of 'minimum force', de-escalating the potential for violent confrontation rather than the 'equal force' or 'maximum force' notions often encapsulated in S.W.O.S/T.R.G. type police units.

The academic model developed by the N.S.W. Corrective Services Academy's weapons trainers which seeks to contain the use of force and hedge it in, at all times, by personal safety imperatives, has much to recommend it. However, an even greater emphasis on crisis management and weaponless control needs to be made even within the Academy's model.

There was considerable concern expressed at the conference over the incorporation of the juvenile justice detention centres into this department for fear that the ethos of treating their criminality as a concern secondary to their status as children would be lost. The conference was assured that the training of detention centre youth workers would continue to reside in the hands of civilian professionals who likewise would respond to them being children first before being criminals.

Finally, in relation to developing prison officers as 'reflective' professionals through education primarily, this Academy was congratulated on its having 'stolen a march' so to speak. All agreed, given the overtime imperatives of this department and the fact that prison officers are shift workers for the most part, bringing the University into the department to become a joint partner with the Academy in providing professional education for prison officers first, thereby redressing their education deficiency as a group, was a masterstroke. The open entry nature and self paced learning modules of the distance learning mode employed was approved. So much so that the Queensland head of custodial training is to approach the University of
New England – Northern Rivers to see if our Associate Diploma in Correctional Administration and the various associated course modules can be adapted to their situation and supplied directly to them or under license through a tertiary education provider in Queensland.

Even the police services were interested in our initiative, particularly the N.S.W. police through its Academy representatives at the conference.

Summarising then, the most significant developments in police education and prison services in Australasia, I feel, have occurred in Queensland. The Fitzgerald Report has given a tremendous boost, a kick start one might say, to police reform and training in that state with very significant strides being made with the Advanced Certificate in Policing being provided through full time studies by the Police Academy in partnership with Griffith University and Queensland University of Technology. The first semester of this course being spent on campus and the second at the Police Academy. Students are all police employees.

Our own Corrective Services initiative, I would argue, would have to be next.

Police Academy education in this state through falling police resignation and attrition rates and problems in re-defining the 'police role' vis-a-vis the various predators and competitors on their 'turf' seems to be tentatively seeking an In-Service and management development role for itself in contrast to its previous recruit emphasis.

Only South Australia, through the TAFE network there, has any pre-recruit applicant training, with a year's certificate in policing being provided to ordinary TAFE students who are not already police employees but who might want to make that career choice.

Prison officer training in that state is completely departmentally based. Western Australia, however, is looking to form some alliance with Edith Cowan University and the academic head of the justice studies school there carried out the review of prison officer training in that state which added the emphasis of the 'reflective practitioner' to the existing 'skilled technicians' approach.

New Zealand police training is of the modular variety provided by external mode from their police college. They have made some approach to Massey University to oversight their higher education training and provide extra mural studies courses leading ultimately to a degree. Prison officer training in New Zealand is considerably retarded in relation to police training and all prison officer training in Australia where the average length of pre-service training is twelve (12) weeks as compared to their three (3) weeks.
The primary importance of a conference like this for me is the enthusiasm generated through the mutual sharing of ideas, problems and victories with other criminal justice educators and in knowing we are not alone. Their victories are ours in the same way that ours are theirs, however, it became clear to me that if we are not successful at the N.S.W. Corrective Services Academy in our endeavours then our failure will seriously undermine their chances of success. The burden is great but the victory, if achieved, will take Custodial Correctional Services in this country from the 19th century into the 21st century, bypassing the 20th century which, with the exception of the Post-Nagle Royal Commission era, seems to be largely a waste of precious time or worse.

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