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I am a retired film producer and director and a former tertiary lecturer in film production, having taught extensively for many years at both the University of Technology Sydney and the Australian Film Radio and Television School on a casual basis. I am a full member of the Australian Directors Guild and the Australian Cinematographers Society and participate in a number of voluntary industry committees. I act as a juror and pre-selector for several Sydney based Film Festivals and competitions and keep up with quite a number of ex-students and with the development of "the industry".

The provision by TAFE of technical training in both the traditional arts and in film has been increasingly important as universities, in my experience, have moved further towards theoretical education and a down grading of the practical techniques taught at TAFE. I myself was trained at the Australian Film Television & Radio School which was, at that time, not only free but also provided students with a stipend during a very demanding three year diploma course which emphasised the development of craft skills. (A sort of glorified TAFE course). Almost all of my fellow students from this period have made important contributions to film and/or film education both in Australia and overseas.

TAFE with its low cost and broader admission policies is an education available to a much wider range of students than universities. A surprising number of our best cinematographers, for example, have relatively poor educational records -- visual talent sometimes precludes traditional academic achievement and many of the younger technicians in the film industry have started through TAFE courses. Importantly, TAFE allows entry into the arts of people who cannot afford to go to university. And in my view, culturally Australia cannot afford to have our creative and technical arts practitioners drawn predominantly from middle-class backgrounds.

My own family has benefitted greatly from TAFE education. My daughter attended the WA Academy of Performing Arts as a TAFE student. In this way she could afford to do a high level acting course when she could not have attended the equivalent degree course. Her subsequent acting career has included a two year contract with the Sydney Theatre Company, a national tour with Bell Shakespeare, a national tour with the Monkey Baa Children's Theatre, and two comedy series for SBS -- among other work. She is the recipient of a Mike Walsh fellowship which she will use to study Deaf Theatre in Sweden with the aim of working in this area in Australia on her return. She has also started working as a performer with Jean-Paul Bell's Play Up Program which has been shown to have significant beneficial effect on Alzheimer patients in nursing homes. None of this would have been possible without affordable access to an excellent TAFE education.

In terms of disability, my most significant personal experience has been with a close family friend from a very poor family who has severe schizophrenia but who was able to study art at Meadowbank TAFE. Leaving aside the fact that his work has been hung in the Dobell at the AGNSW, his art practice keeps him out of hospital for long periods at a time. (Great savings to the State!). And he earns enough to keep his head above water -- which is hard on the disability pension. I have met a number of people with serious mental or physical illnesses who have likewise benefitted from access to TAFE. My own son, a removalist for over 20 years, now has MS and barely makes ends meet on a disability pension. However, this year he is managing to study radio at TAFE -- what a life-saver! He works hard at it -- it gives him hope and, perhaps, it may even enable him to gain paid employment in the future.

I wish I had time to comment further, but I think that the government's attitude towards accessible TAFE training is one of the most important markers for its wider attitudes towards the Arts and its commitment to diversity. I am very distressed by the NSW government's withdrawal of funds from TAFE, especially from the Arts programs. I hope the Federal government will support TAFE education in the Arts as well as in other areas. I appreciate what is done in Universities, but we need a balance between the practical and the theoretical and for this TAFE is essential.

Martha Ansara