are we there yet?
past learnings
current realities
future directions for youth affairs in australia

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS
National Youth Affairs Conference
Melbourne 1–3 May 2007
Melbourne Park Function Centre
Are We There Yet? The National Youth Affairs Conference took place over three days in Melbourne, 1–3 May 2007. The conference saw approximately 900 young people, workers with young people, researchers, academics and policymakers come through the doors to discuss and debate youth issues.

The conference was the culmination of two years of planning and hard work. While the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria was the central organiser of the conference we were supported greatly by a number of organisations and individuals. Each of the state and territory youth peak bodies deserve a mention for the energy and effort they put into promoting the conference.

Thank you to all of you who attended the conference, I was thrilled with the energy and excitement the conference generated. There was a genuine buzz during plenary and workshop sessions and in the breaks. The diversity of delegates at the conference, in terms of geographical spread, ethnicity and work background was something many of you commented on. Personally I was delighted to have so many young people with disabilities attend the conference. In all, 204 young people came to the conference, their presence and input greatly enhanced the three days in so many ways.

These kind of events provide invaluable opportunities for us to get together as a sector and re-energise ourselves as workers in the youth field; if the conference achieved nothing else this in itself is a valuable outcome.

These conference proceedings offer a summary of the events and activities that took place over the three days. It is provided as a glimpse of what took place rather than a comprehensive report on the entire event. Not every workshop that was offered at the conference is documented, instead we have covered those workshops that were peer reviewed. I hope this report provides you with some insight into the conference if you weren’t able to attend or serves as a memory jogger for those of you lucky enough to be there. Enjoy!

Georgie Ferrari
YACVic CEO
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So, the conference has been and gone, and in true YACVic fashion, young people were directly involved via the Conference Youth Team (CYT). Every fortnight Larissa (YACVic’s Information and Participation officer), Erin (the Conference Coordinator) and the CYT would meet to help shape the conference and give a youth perspective. No topic was left unturned; everything from promotion strategies, to badges/T-shirt designs, registration packs, session facilitation, roving ambassadors and chill-out mechanisms was discussed, debated and decided on. Although you may not have been able to attend the conference, this article aims to give a young person’s perspective on the Conference Youth Team as a form of youth participation in action.

Given the diversity of young people involved, many different communication methods were required to enable young people to participate. Meetings were held outside of school/work hours and in YACVic’s office, which is centrally located and close to public transport. Teleconferencing was also available to facilitate the involvement of young people who couldn’t physically attend the meeting, and regular email updates were sent out to members. CYT members who didn’t have access to email, were contacted via phone or snail mail (yes, snail mail) to follow up on issues between meetings and receive minutes/agendas etc. This was essential to ensure the maximum number of young people could be involved. YACVic was also flexible on meeting attendance, and if for some reason a young person couldn’t attend a meeting, a combination of communication methods were used to catch them up.

The conference T-shirts were designed by a CYT member (with a little help from the rest of the team!), and they were screen-printed by another CYT member’s friend. These T-shirts were worn throughout the conference to distinguish YACVic staff and the CYT from attendees. They ensured that there was someone who could answer all those important questions from delegates, such as, ‘Where is Yarra Room 3?’ ‘Is there a speaker’s prep room?’ and ‘Where is the plenary held?’ The T-shirt design was also used for badges.

CYT members also helped staff the registration desk, which, at one stage, had to register 650 people in an hour
so that they could attend the first plenary which featured international guest speaker Howard Williamson.

Due to time constraints on the first morning, there wasn’t much preparation for CYT members immediately prior to the first morning of the conference. As a result, a lot of questions that could have been answered by the CYT (with the aid of a quick refresher) were directed to Erin. The learning from this is that next time a refresher would be preferable. This would remind them where the seven rooms were, how the registration process worked, how special meals were to be collected and what facilitation skills they required.

Throughout the conference, different CYT members were ‘roving ambassadors’. This involved them roaming throughout the venue handing out conference badges, conference lollies (blue on the outside, white in the middle with a red question mark, strawberries and cream flavour as decided by CYT) and yoyos. Other CYT members staffed the registration desk and answered the myriad queries that came their way whilst others facilitated sessions. So, if you were thinking of a conference youth team of your very own (perhaps for something on a slightly smaller scale), what can you learn from our experience?

• Be clear around your expectations of the young people involved.
• Be flexible in the communication methods used among participants.
• Give young people the opportunity to share power as much as possible.
• Listen to young people and feedback on any suggestions raised regularly (e.g. We liked x design for the lollies, but it doesn’t fit, we were thinking y design instead. What do you think?)
• Be flexible in the amount of involvement each young person can give (e.g. One young person who was working took all three days of the conference as annual leave and could be there for most of it, others had to juggle their involvement with work/unil).
• Saying thanks never goes astray!

Overall, the CYT experience was a positive one which developed new skills among the participants and demonstrated youth participation in action. Bring on the next conference! Whose turn is it next time?? (I hope it’s the federal peak’s turn …)

Article by Maree Wilson, Conference Youth Team member
Why a National Youth Affairs Conference?
There had not been a national youth affairs conference held in Australia since 1998. Opportunities for the youth affairs sector to come together at a state or a national level are rare. The conference emerged as a result of in-depth discussions between the eight state and territory youth peak bodies. YACVic conducted a preliminary needs assessment that highlighted the extensive interest in the conference from both workers and young people and provided feedback that was channelled into the planning process.

Who attended?
The National Youth Affairs Conference attracted approximately 900 people from across Australia and overseas. The conference brought together youth workers, young people, teachers, drug and alcohol workers, youth health workers, housing and homelessness workers, national youth organisations and the state and territory youth peaks, academics, representatives from all levels of government and policymakers from across Australia.

What were the aims?
• to promote best practice in the youth sector
• to provide an opportunity to network and share ideas
• to debate and discuss new research on young people and youth issues
• to formulate and promote new policy directions for the sector
• to support and celebrate the participation of young people from across Australia.

How did it work?
The conference offered two parallel programs: a workers’ program and a young people’s program.

Young people had the option of participating in workers’ sessions; however, the young people’s program was offered exclusively to those aged between 12 and 25 years.

Workers’ program
Over the three days there was a series of workshops and panel discussions grouped around the following streams:
• Education, employment and training
• Policy and research
• Youth participation
• Professional development
• Advocacy and rights
• Mental health and wellbeing

Young people’s program
This program was grouped around the following streams:
• Wellbeing
• Human rights and advocacy
• Youth participation and leadership
• Fun – interactive workshops covering a range of exciting subjects.

The presentations were coded accordingly:
• Peer refereed. A majority of these presentations included a 15-minute academic lecture followed by 5 minutes for questions and discussion. Peer reviewed papers were reviewed by independent academic reviewers and are published in a separate pdf as part of the conference proceedings.
• Research data – a presentation utilising research data
• Workshop – an interactive one-hour session with audience involvement
• Young person presenting – young person, aged 12-25, presented
• Young people involvement – young people co-presented or were involved in the presentation.
• Paper – theory-based formal paper presentation consisting of a 20-minute presentation followed by 10 minutes for questions and discussion (unless otherwise specified).

What happens now?
Key themes and issues that emerged over the three days will be discussed and used by each of the state and territory youth peak organisations in their development of policy directions in the coming year. Any key national youth issues will be used in campaigning and lobbying in the leadup to the Federal election.
tuesday 1 may
morning plenary

MCs: Alan Wu (AYAC Chairperson)
Jordie Rust (YACVic Chairperson)
Welcome to country: Murrindindi
Conference opening: Minister James Merlino, Minister for Sport and Youth Affairs

Plenary topic: Are we there yet? Exploring the development of youth work internationally and in Australia

Keynote: Prof. Howard Williamson, University of Glamorgan, Wales
Respondents:
Dr Robyn Broadbent, Victoria University
Jude Brigland-Sorenson, Edith Cowan University
Facilitator: Lill Healy, Executive Director, Community Engagement

tuesday 1 may
afternoon plenary

MCs: Mario Filinsyzis and Di Sandulache

Plenary topic: Where are they? Young people, public space and human rights

Keynote: Rob White
Panelists:
Vanda Hamilton
Helena Stewart
Kate Shaw
Facilitator: Howard Williamson

wednesday 2 may
morning plenary

MC: Keira Martin, Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council
Welcome to country: Ian Hunter
Opening address: Senator Nigel Scullion – FaCSIA Minister
Readings from the Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council from ‘VIYAC Voices’

Plenary topic: Where are you mob at? – mainstream organisations working with Indigenous young people

Panelists:
Julie Robinson, Marrickville Youth Resource Centre
Marilyn Graham, Lowana Youth Services
Rebecca Phillips, Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council
Facilitator: Mark Yettica-Paulson

wednesday 2 may
afternoon plenary

MC: Liz Ellis, Youth Disability Advocacy Service

Plenary topic: Youth participation, and now for something completely different!

Panelists:
Rod Baxter, BGI, New Zealand and Emma Haxton, Ministry of Youth Development, New Zealand with young people attending the conference
Facilitator: Roger Holdsworth, Melbourne University

thursday 3 may
morning plenary

MCs: Chris Varney and Cheryl Naik
Welcome to country: Murrindindi
Opening Address: Tanya Plibersek, Shadow Spokesperson for Human Services, Housing, Women and Youth Affairs

Plenary topic: How are we going? Young people’s health and wellbeing – perspectives on contemporary health issues

Panelists:
Chris Tanti, CEO Headspace
Ed Klestadt, Youth2Youth Aid
Bob Jacobs, Youth Advocate
Paul Dillon, National Alcohol and Drug Research Centre
Facilitator: Prof. Susan Sawyer

thursday 3 may
afternoon plenary

MC: Georgie Ferrari

Plenary topic: Why are we going there? A code of ethics for youth workers … is it what we want?

Panelists:
Siyavash Doostkhah, Director, Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ)
Tim Corney, University of Melbourne in the Centre for Post Compulsory Education and Life Long Learning
Heather Stewart, Australian Catholic University
Howard Sercombe, Professor of Community Education at Strathclyde University in Glasgow, Scotland
Facilitator: Richard Hill
The conference organisers do not assume any liability for changes in the program.

Workers and young people

SESSION 1
Policy and research

Towards an Australian Youth Information Network
– Roger Holdsworth, Senior Research Associate, Australian Youth Research Centre, YARN, VIC.
  – Anne Hugo, Information Manager, Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, TAS.

Good practice for positive youth development: A Queensland study
– Kathryn Seymour, PhD Scholar, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith University, Queensland

Education, employment and training

Isn’t this stupid class over yet?
  – Kitty Te Riele, Lecturer, Faculty of Education University of Technology, Sydney, NSW.

Are we on the right track? Mapping the terrain of anger management
  – Suzanne Egan, Research Officer, Rosemount Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service, NSW.

Teaching, learning and the ‘dilemma of difference’ for parenting students in school settings
  – Geoff Shacklock, Associate Professor, School of Education, RMIT University.
  – Dr Lyn Harrison and Jennifer Angwin, Faculty of Education, Deakin University, VIC.

Advocacy and rights

Are we there yet? Hell no!!
  – Jennifer Duncan, Executive Director, Youth Affairs Council of SA.

Towards a national youth affairs peak
  – Alan Wu, Chair, Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, VIC.

Youth participation (a)

Identities in transition: From ‘young person as participant’ to ‘young person as worker’
  – Kathleen Stacey and Paul Stone, Youth Partnership Accountability Collective Members, SA.

Youth participation (b)

Is that what they want?
  – Jemma Wood and Ami Hodgkinson, Initiative Manager, The Foundation for Young Australians, VIC.

SESSION 2
Advocacy and rights

Cronulla – where to from here?
  – Donna Curtis, Executive Officer, Shire Wide Youth Services Inc. NSW.

Youth work in the 21st century
  – Amanda Watkinson, Lecturer, Youth Work, Global Studies Social Sciences and Planning, RMIT University, VIC.

Youth participation

Presenting comedy shows for increased youth participation
  – Michael Connell, Assistant Events Worker, Shire of Yarra Ranges Youth Services, VIC.

‘Armed and dangerous’: Young media makers take over the St Kilda Short Film Festival
  – Adam Whitbread and co-presenters, Director, Blue SKYS Media, St Kilda Youth Service (SKYS), VIC.
Music as a tool: The benefits of youth participation
– Tim Wamala, Youth Events and Media Officer, Moonee Valley Youth Services, VIC.

Policy and research

5th Annual National Youth Survey: Findings and implications for the wellbeing of Australia’s young people
– Anne Hampshire, National Manager, Research and Social Policy, Mission Australia, NSW.

Towards a national agenda for young people in Australia
– Brian Head, CEO, and Geoff Holloway, Project Officer, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, ACT.

Professional development

‘Coffee-cup conversations ‘West Australian style
– Judy Kulisa and Nic James, Western Australian Association of Youth Workers, WA.

Storying a professional identity in youth work: Where the personal and professional collide
– Ellie Hodges, SA.

Education, employment and training

Developing identities: Young people and their involvement in radio training at JOY Melbourne
– Helen Stokes, Research Fellow, Youth Research Centre, VIC.
– Adam Quayle, Youth Coordinator, JOY Melbourne, VIC.

Who said you can’t be religious in schools? Could there really be a place for God in the state school classroom?
– Jacqueline Hodder, PhD Student, University of Melbourne, VIC.

Factors affecting the acceptance of social work services: Evidence from two focus groups with social workers working with youth-at-risk
– Ngan-Pun Ngai, Professor, Department of Social Work, Chinese University of Hong Kong.
– Chau-Kiu Cheung, Associate Professor, Department of Applied Social Studies, City University of Hong Kong.
– Sek-Yum Ngai, Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

SESSION 3
Education, employment and training

Core of life – empowering young people for a positive parenting future
– Deb Pattrick and Tracy Smith, Managers/Midwives, Core of Life Program, VIC.

Embarking together on a learning journey
– Ilena Young, Project Worker and Jacqui Atkinson, Project worker/young mum, Upper Hume Community Health Service, VIC.
Policy and research

Moving out, moving on
– Dr Shelley Mallett, Research Fellow, Key Centre for Women’s Health in Society, University of Melbourne, VIC.

Creating Connections: the Victorian Government’s policy and program response to youth homelessness
– Jac Nancarrow, Senior Policy Officer, Department of Human Services, VIC.

Advocacy and rights

Lessons from the past and new ways for the future
– Jude Bridgland Sorenson, Youth Work Lecturer, Edith Cowan University, WA.

Jacks (& Jills) of all trades – so why is DV so difficult?
– Judy Kulisa, Lecturer, School of International, Cultural and Community Studies, Edith Cowan University, WA.

Youth work students mentoring young people at risk of homelessness: A partnership between a youth work degree program and a local youth agency
– Trudi Cooper, Senior Lecturer, and Orietta Simons, Youth Work Studies, Edith Cowan University, WA.

Mental health and wellbeing

Celebrate, don’t medicate: How psychiatric diagnoses and drugs are hurting children
– Bob Jacobs, Children’s Lawyer and Psychologist, US.

Professional development

Newly arrived young people and public space: Action research
– Helena Stewart, Director, and Carmen Garcia, Manager, Policy and Programs, Multicultural Youth SA Inc., SA.

Sexual pursuits
– Mandy Stevens, Community Educator, Family Planning Victoria, VIC.

SESSION 4
Policy and research (a)

‘The best mistake in the world really’: A critical consideration of young mothers, homelessness and the idealisation of motherhood
– Deborah Keys, Key Centre for Women’s Health in Society, University of Melbourne, VIC.

Fertility futures: Assessing the impacts of pronatalist policies on adolescent women in Far North Queensland
– Marilyn Anderson, Post-graduate doctoral research candidate, James Cook University, QLD.

Policy and Research (b)

Facing futures – facts, fears and fantasies: Using drama techniques to structure intergenerational research dialogues about the future
– Helen Cahill, Deputy Director, Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne, VIC.

Participatory approaches to large-numbers longitudinal research with young people – the life patterns research program
– Dan Woodman and Debra Tyler, Youth Research Centre, VIC.

Will we wait to get connected?
– Andy Simpson, Community and Youth Studies, University of Birmingham, UK.

Mental health and wellbeing

Good starts for refugee young people: Contexts that support wellbeing in the first years of settlement
– Christine Bakopanous, Research Fellow, Refugee Health Research Centre, LaTrobe University, VIC.
tuesday 1 may

Young people only (12–25)

SESSION 1
Youth participation and leadership

Thirsty for youth participation in environmental change
– Elle Morrell, GreenHome Outreach Program Coordinator, Australian Conservation Foundation, VIC.

Human rights and advocacy

What the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities means to young Victorians
– Tiffany Overall, Advocacy & Human Rights Officer, Youthlaw, VIC.

Young people as community leaders: Talking to power
– Reece Pianta, Queensland Youth Council Wide Bay Burnett Representative, Queensland Youth Council, QLD.

SESSION 2
Wellbeing

Young people, relationships and violence
– Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre, VIC.

Fun!

Didgeridoo playing and storytelling workshop.
– Murrundindi

SESSION 3
Wellbeing

Where does it start?
Young people and problem gambling
– Kate Hills, Community Development and Education Worker, Youth Action Group, Gambler’s Help Services, VIC.

Fun!

Powerful young people making a difference
– Elise Klein, Youth Representative for Australia’s Delegation to the UN General Assembly & Reach Senior Facilitator, The Reach Foundation, VIC.

Fun!

Dance workshop
– Facilitated by Kate Wormald

Youth participation and leadership

Leaders of the future – Youth Parliament
– Patrick Ryan, YMCA Youth Parliament Youth Governor 2007 and Stella Cifone, YMCA, Community Development Director, VIC.

Fun!

YMCA Skate Safe Clinic
– Nick Buskens, YMCA Skate Services Director and Ryan Harbott, YMCA Programs Co-ordinator, VIC.

Youth participation (a)

Building online communities to engage with the political world: Young people, participation and internet use
– Ariadne Vromen, Senior Lecturer, Government and International Relations, University of Sydney, NSW.

Models of youth participation within organisations
– Roger Holdsworth, Senior Research Associate, Australian Youth Research Centre, Connect magazine, Victorian Participation Workers Network, VIC.

Youth participation (b)

Foundation for Young Australians Funding Panel
– Ashley Perez, Community Partnerships Manager, The Foundation for Young Australians.

session titles and presenters
session titles and presenters

SESSION 4
Human rights and advocacy

Young Australians at the United Nations
– Ben McKay, National President, United Nations Youth Association, VIC.

Youth disability
– Mario Filintatzis

Youth participation and leadership

Act Now
– Thea Saliba and Dan Pettet, Inspire Foundation, VIC.

Multicultural youth and media making
– Marijana Bosnjak, Youth Officer, National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters Council, VIC.

Fun!

Guerrilla journalism
– Presented by Express Media.

wednesday 2 may

Workers and young people

SESSION 1
Policy and Research

Waiting for the doc or talking to mum: Can expanding the role of general practice nurses in adolescent health improve the accessibility and acceptability of general practice services to young people?
– Verity Newnham, Practice Nurse Research Fellow, Adolescent Health, Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne, VIC.

Anti-gang strategies: An intervention workshop
– Facilitated by Rob White.

Youth participation (a)

Watchaz doin – is hangin’ out with young people the way to go? Looking at contemporary issues in youth engagement
– Anne Garzoli, Kristy Brown, Andy Heaney, Creative Riverina Youth Teams, Griffith City Council, NSW.

Let’s teach about sex, baby!
– Chad Mansbridge, Youth Health & Wellbeing Project Officer, Southern Fleurieu Health Service, SA.

25 years on and we’re not there yet: GLBT youth services, programs and interventions in Australia
– Meredith Turnbull, Executive Officer, Twenty10 GLBT Youth Services, NSW.
session titles and presenters

Youth participation (b)

Youth mentoring – the building blocks and emerging research
– Mike Williams, President, Victorian Youth Mentoring Alliance, VIC.

Whitelion – assisting young people’s journeys
– Amber Griffiths, Youth Programs Co-ordinator and Clare Griffin, Mentoring Team Leader, Whitelion, VIC.

Mental health and wellbeing

Wheel Talk
Wheelchair Sports Victoria
– Sean Corcoran

What does it take to take mental health seriously?
– Ed Klestadt, Clinical Liaison Officer, Youth to Youth Assistance, VIC.

Professional development

Engaging with Indigenous youth: A ‘white fella’s’ perspective
– Trevor Parkee, Young Men’s Worker, and Julie Robinson, Director, Marrickville Youth Resource Centre, NSW.

Building high quality mentoring programs for young people
– Kathleen Vella, Executive Officer, Youth Mentoring Network, NSW.

SESSION 2

Policy and research (a)

Whose vision of Australia?
– Geoff Holloway, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, ACT.

Policy and research (b)

The secret life of the National Youth Roundtable
– Jude Bridgland Sorenson, Youth Work Lecturer, Edith Cowan University, WA.

Policies for youth participation and the development of new political identities
– Philippa Collin, PhD Candidate, Government and International Relations, University of Sydney; Policy Manager, The Inspire Foundation, NSW.

Play hard, play fair: Using sport to engage young males in social action
– Neil Hall, Lecturer, University of Western Sydney, NSW.

Youth participation

‘Sisters Individuals Brothers’
– providing support to young people who have a brother or sister with a disability or chronic illness
– Megan Steele, Siblings Worker, Association for Children with a Disability, VIC.

Teen spirit: Strengthening participation for young people with disabilities through community partnering
– Suzannah Burton, Community Capacity Builder, Department of Human Services, VIC.

Professional development

Not as easy as it sounds
– achieving the potential and avoiding the pitfalls of organisational partnerships
– Sally Reid, Youth Referral and Independent Person Program, and James Tonson, Victorian Student Representative Council, VIC.

Integrating sustainable practices in youth centres: Six steps to an eco-friendly youth centre
– Linda Tohver, North East Waste Forum, and Simon Du Bois, Byron Youth Services, NSW.

Education employment and training

Reading the stories of queer young people aloud: A change methodology
– Michael Crowhurst, Lecturer in Education, RMIT, VIC.

SistaSpeak: Empowering young, Aboriginal women
– Jo Taylor, General Manager, Streetwize Communications, NSW.
SESSION 3
Policy and research

Risking: Chrome magic, uncertainty and harm reduction
– Sarah MacLean, Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne, VIC.

But it is the least of their problems ... Tobacco prevention and management guidelines for youth workers
– Bianca Crosling, Prevention Program Coordinator, Quit Victoria, VIC.

Mental health and wellbeing (a)

Impact of non-clinical programs on adolescent wellbeing
– Romi Kaufman, Youth Support Team Manager and Resident Psychologist, The Reach Foundation, VIC.

The relationship between depressive symptoms and sexual risk behaviours in adolescents living in southwest Sydney
– Joey Le, Medical Student, School of Psychiatry, Liverpool Hospital, University of NSW, NSW.

Mental health and wellbeing (b)

Young people, mental health and a national agenda: Where do we start?
– Bella Burns, Youth Participation Worker, ORYGEN Youth Health and consultant to headspace, VIC.

Culturally diverse young people’s mental health – are we there yet?
– Nadia Garan, Mental Health Project Officer, Transcultural Mental Health Centre, NSW.

Education employment and training

Economic reforms, social inequality and education in Sri Lanka
– Siri Hettige, Professor, Sociology and the Arts, Sri Lanka.

Young people thriving out of low-income families
– Sek-Yum Ngai, Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, the Chinese University of Hong Kong.
– Chau-Kiu Cheung, Associate Professor, Department of Applied Social Studies, City University of Hong Kong.
– Ngan-Pun Ngai, Professor, Department of Social Work, Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Factors affecting the acceptance of social work services: Evidence from two focus groups with social workers working with youth-at-risk
– Sek-Yum Ngai, Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, the Chinese University of Hong Kong.
– Chau-Kiu Cheung, Associate Professor, Department of Applied Social Studies, City University of Hong Kong.
– Ngan-Pun Ngai, Professor, Department of Social Work, Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Professional development

Supervised, supersized, maximised: Methods for youth workers to get the most out of their supervision

SESSION 4
Policy and research

Addressing group violence
– Rob White, under the auspices of the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), TAS.

Foundation for young Australians’ model of philanthropy
– Robyn Broadbent, Senior Lecturer, Victoria University.
– Gina Mancuso, Program Manager Foundation for Young Australians, VIC.
Advocacy and rights

- **Youth Disability Advocacy Service:** Raising voices, expanding choices, and creating change for young people with disabilities
  – George Taleporos, Coordinator, Youth Disability Advocacy Service, VIC.

- **Supporting active student participation – a role for youth workers in schools**
  – James Tonson, Project Officer, VicSRC, VIC.

Education employment and training (a)

- **Should youth workers be teachers?**
  – Tim Corney, Researcher, Centre for Post Compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, University of Melbourne, VIC.

- **Self-employment and community development**
  – Ryan Foster, Brisbane City Council Visible Ink Space, QLD.
  – Ann Howie, Slingshot Community Enterprise and Employment Centre, VIC.
  – Tom Dawkins, Vibewire-sQuareOne Youth Media and Arts Space, NSW.

- **The Victorian Local Government Youth Charter**
  – opportunities and dilemmas
  – Rob Nabben, Lecturer, RMIT, VIC.

- **The Global Connections Program – a model of meaningful youth participation and action.**
  – Samantha Ratnam, Youth Participation Coordinator, Plan International Australia, VIC.

Youth participation

- **Condom credit card and drink spiking awareness**
  – Michelle Horner, Coordinator, Family Planning, NSW.

- **Public nuisance: The regulation of young people in public space**
  – Vanda Hamilton, Lawyer, St Kilda Legal Service, VIC.

- **Young people and the law**
  – St Kilda Legal Service, VIC.

Fun!

- **Auslan – what is it?!?**
  – James Blyth, Auslan Team Leader / Teacher, VicDeaf, VIC.

- **Presenting comedy shows for increased youth participation**
  – Michael Connell, Assistant Events Worker, Shire of Yarra Ranges Youth Service, VIC.

**wednesday 2 may**

Young people only (12–25)

SESSION 1

Wellbeing

- **Condom credit card and drink spiking awareness**
  – Michelle Horner, Coordinator, Family Planning, NSW.

- **Public nuisance: The regulation of young people in public space**
  – Vanda Hamilton, Lawyer, St Kilda Legal Service, VIC.

- **Young people and the law**
  – St Kilda Legal Service, VIC.

SESSION 2

Youth participation and leadership

- **Presenting comedy shows for increased youth participation**
  – Michael Connell, Assistant Events Worker, Shire of Yarra Ranges Youth Service, VIC.
session titles and presenters

**How to run events for young people**
– Marlee Dalton, FReeZA Committee Member, Moonee Valley City Council, VIC.

**Human rights and advocacy**

**Supporting same sex attracted youth in schools and our communities**
– Lee Fox, Same Sex Attracted Youth Project Worker, City of Ballarat Youth Services, VIC.

**Fun!**

**Circus skills**
Facilitated by the Westside Circus.

**SESSION 3**
**Youth participation and leadership**

**Youth participation: What do you do when it all falls apart?**
– Lucas deBoer, SA.

**Word and mouth**
– Kate Emerson, Executive Officer, Word and Mouth, Shepparton, VIC.

**Human rights and advocacy**

**Medley mag**
– Georgina Dimopoulos, Editor-in-chief, Medley Mag, VIC.

**LOOP!**
– Cara Williams, Youth Program Worker, City of Moonee Valley Youth Services, VIC.

**SESSION 4**
**Wellbeing**

**Fun!**

**Digital diaries**
– Vyvyan Stranieri, Youth Programmer, Australian Centre for the Moving Image, VIC.

**Safe partying**
– Athi Kokonis, Community Educator, Family Planning Victoria, VIC.

**SESSION 1**
**Policy and research**

**Crank it up!**

**Fun!**

**Slam poetry and hip hop**
– Zoe Miller, Youth Arts Worker/Spoken Word Emcee, Marrickville Youth Resource Centre, NSW.

**Thursday 3 May**

**SESSION 2**
**Youth participation and leadership**

**Stonnington Youth Council**
– Chrissy Singh, Youth Development Officer, City of Stonnington, VIC.

**Towards a national youth affairs peak**
– Alan Wu, Chair, Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, VIC.

**Young people’s journey to independence: Towards a better future for young people leaving state care in Victoria**
– Philip Mendes, Monash University, VIC.
Adaptation and dissemination of communities that care in Australia: A process designed to encourage healthy community environments for young people
– Professor John W. Toumbourou, School of Psychology, Deakin University, Australia, VIC.

Advocacy and rights

Youth homelessness matters
– Michael Coffey, Executive Officer, Youth Accommodation Association, NSW.

What makes good youth policy? Responding to youth homelessness as a case study
– Anna Forsyth, Youth Policy Officer, Council to Homeless Persons, VIC.

Youth participation (a)

Noongar Girls and New York: Building international relationships through fashion
– Danielle Bolton, Jamie-Lee Verway, Lynley Pickett and Jaime Phillips, Community Capacity Builder, Department for Community Development, WA.

‘Are you mob listening?’
– Delsey Tamiano and co-presenters, Senior Youth Project Worker, Danila Dilba Youth Service, NT.

Youth participation (b)

School students as co-teachers with pre-service doctors and teachers
– Helen Cahill, Deputy Director, Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne. Presenting with Bernadette Murphy, Youth Research Centre, Dr Prue Wales and students from Princes Hill Secondary College, Glen Pearsall and students from Eltham High School, VIC.

Professional development

Clusters of suicide and other sudden death in ‘high risk’ communities in the Northern Territory
– Leonore Hanssens, PhD Student Charles Darwin University, Northern Territory, Board Representative Suicide Prevention Australia, NT.

The role of relationships in youth work practice
– Heather Stewart and Helen Rodd, Youth Studies, Australian Catholic University, VIC.

SESSION 2
Advocacy and rights

Putting young people in the frame – advocating progressive values for the interests of young people
– David Powell, Network Development Officer, Youth Affairs Network of Queensland, QLD.
– John Ferguson, Policy & Training Officer, Youth Action and Policy Association NSW, NSW.

Education employment and training

Young people building social capital – ruMAD?
– Louisa Ellum, National Program Manager, Education Foundation Australia, VIC.

Education success for ‘at risk’ young people – formal education in an informal adult and community education setting
– Rowan Cox, Manager – Equity Centre, Administrator, ALESCO, Learning Centre WEA Hunter, NSW.

Youth participation (a)

Creating a culture: Youth participation in traditional organisations
– Emma Robertson, National Youth Manager and Emil Wajsczczko, Policy Coordinator, Australian Youth Council, St John Ambulance Australia, ACT.
An opportunity presents itself
– Clifford Eberly, Youth Development Officer, Wyndham City Council, VIC.

Youth participation (b)

Power and the youth participation playing field
– Emma Haxton, National Youth Participation Advisor with the Ministry of Youth Development, and Rod Baxter, Youth Worker, BGI Youth Services, NZ.

Professional development

It’s a long way between toilet breaks! Living and working in remote settings
– Emily Connell, Anglicare NT Youth Services Division – East Arnhem, NT.

SESSION 3
Policy and research

‘Warts and all’: Improving service provision through a qualitative peer research methodology
– Justin Barker, Australian National University, ACT.

Young people in rail environs: An interagency approach to conflict reduction and crime prevention
– Trudi Cooper, Senior Lecturer, Edith Cowan University, WA.

‘I wouldn’t get wasted if I didn’t want to’: Looking to young people to inform best practice in the youth alcohol sector
– Ester Mancini-Pena, PhD Candidate, Charles Darwin University, NT.

Education, employment & training (a)

Transitions – housing and related supports for young people in regional South Australia
– Margo Johnson, Shelter SA, SA.

Young carers in schools: The challenges to identify and cater
– Alice Morgan, Community Development and Education – Young Carers, Carers Victoria, VIC.

Education, employment & training (b)

Two heads are better than one: the Family-Project approach to career development
– Gordon Spence, University of Sydney, NSW.

Mentoring rural youth – reaching new heights in the community
– Robyn McKinnon, Northern Midlands Rural Co-Pilots Coordinator, Northern Tasmania Development, TAS.

Mental health and wellbeing

Youth Empowerment Process (YEP) – a MindMatters approach
– Tracy Zilm, National Coordinator, MindMatters/ APAPDC, SA.

SESSION 4
Advocacy and rights

Advocating for youth health services in Aotearoa, New Zealand
– Sarah Helm, National Executive Officer, New Zealand Association for Adolescent Health and Development, NZ.

Advocacy, health and homelessness
– Julie Fry, Community Health Nurse, Royal District Nursing Service Homeless Persons Program, VIC.
Youth participation

Introducing YES: Young people’s democratic participation towards developing a youth democratic voice
– Kathy Edwards, Senior Research Associate, Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney, NSW.

Citizenship: Some stories to believe in
– Ani Wierenga, Lecturer and Research Fellow, Australian Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne, VIC.

Rethinking young people and civic engagement
– Anita Harris, Associate Professor, University of Queensland, QLD.
– Johanna Wyn, Professor, University of Melbourne, VIC.
– Salem Younes, Monash University, VIC.

Mental health and wellbeing

The Reach Out! Online community forum: An innovative and interactive model of addressing mental health issues in Australia with the active involvement of young people
– Laura Dortmans, Youth Ambassador and Young Leader, Inspire Foundation, VIC.

How do young people with mental health issues access community-based support networks?
– Ann Dadich, Research Associate, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, NSW.

Professional development

‘Embedded’ youth work: Ethical challenges in professional practice
– Howard Sercombe, Professor of Community Education, University of Strathclyde, Scotland.

Policy and research

Harnessing information and communication technology in work with young people
– Bill Hoyles and Susan Tregeagle, Senior Manager, Adolescent Services Program Services, Barnardos Australia, NSW.

When Mum goes to prison
– Terry Hannon, Senior Researcher, VACRO, VIC.

Thursday 3 May

Young people only (12–25)

Session 1
Wellbeing

Rock and water – the peaceful warrior
– Bruce Robertson, Senior Instructor, Aiki Institute, NSW.
Human rights and advocacy

I’m not burning my bra!
– Jill McKay, Liz Shield and Rachael Herrick, Zig Zag Young Women’s Resource Centre, QLD.

Fun!

Zine making
– Presented by Express Media.

SESSION 2
Wellbeing

AbsolutMotivation
– Shaylan Ramnath, Co-founder, Real Leaders, NSW.

Youth participation and leadership

The UK Youth Parliament – a democratic voice for young people in the UK, an international example
– Nikki Brooker, Previous London Region Coordinator, UK Youth Parliament, UK.

Fun!

Stencil art workshop

SESSION 3
Youth participation and leadership

CMYI’s short burst training: Boost participation in youth group meetings
– Leanne McGaw, Coordinator-Youth Participation, Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, VIC.

Communication – the key to self-esteem
– Cheryl Naik, YACVic Board Member, YACVic, VIC.

Wellbeing

The world we live in – time to revisit HIV/AIDS education for Australian youth
– Hayley Matic, Director, Youth Empowerment Against HIV/AIDS (YEAH), VIC.

Fun!

‘Armed and dangerous’
– young media makers take over the St Kilda Short Film Festival
– Adam Whitbread, Director, Blue SKYS Media, St Kilda Youth Service, VIC.

SESSION 4
Human rights and advocacy

Sort it – sorting out mobile phone, credit and other disputes
– Eliza Collier, Policy & Public Affairs Manager, Banking and Financial Services Ombudsman, in conjunction with the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, VIC.

Making the difference – how to have your vision become reality
– Josh Levy, ruMAD? Program Facilitator, Education Foundation Australia, VIC.

Fun!

The secret life of me
– Lauren Smeaton, Member and Youth Representative, Youth Affairs Council of South Australia, SA.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Institution/Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Young Endeavour youth scheme</strong></td>
<td>Hayley Bester</td>
<td>Young Endeavour youth scheme, youth crew, TAS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How to run a youth-led grants program</strong></td>
<td>Monique Michell-Moylan</td>
<td>Youth participation officer, Hobsons Bay City Council, VIC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seguro – Safety for all: Addressing bullying – a youth participation focus to a whole school approach</strong></td>
<td>Afra Durance</td>
<td>Secondary school nursing program, Department of Human Services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Northland Youth Centre – a City of Darebin initiative in partner with local agencies</strong></td>
<td>Van Trinh</td>
<td>Northland Youth Centre Project Officer, City of Darebin – Youth Services, VIC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knox Youth Council</strong></td>
<td>Kate Arnott</td>
<td>Youth Development Worker – Groups, Knox City Council’s Youth Services, VIC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HEAT: Learning for Living</strong></td>
<td>Emma Crichton and Carol Tutchener</td>
<td>HEAT, St Kilda Youth Service, VIC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth challenges met in group settings: Planning, designing and implementing groups for young people from the experience in the fields of grief, story-sharing and young carers</strong></td>
<td>Meg Moorhouse</td>
<td>Co-ordinator, TIME Out Sibling Program, Melbourne City Mission, VIC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnic Youth Council</strong></td>
<td>Hala Abdelnour</td>
<td>EYC Project Officer, The Ethnic Youth Council, Northern Migrant Resource Centre, VIC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Are we there yet? An exploration of the key principles for working with children attending transitional supported accommodation services</strong></td>
<td>Lucetta Thomas</td>
<td>Master of Arts in Counselling research student, University of Canberra, School of Education and Community Studies, ACT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sun protection: Does anybody care? Sun protection – attitudes of young South Australians aged 18–24. Developing an action plan for sun protection</strong></td>
<td>Betty Lipparelli</td>
<td>Project officer – Young people’s programs, The Cancer Council South Australia, SA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supporting young carers – programs across Australia</strong></td>
<td>Sarah Waters and Alice Morgan</td>
<td>Young carer peer support and mentoring program, Carers Victoria in conjunction with Carers Australia, VIC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clusters of suicide and other sudden death in ‘high risk’ communities in the Northern Territory</strong></td>
<td>Leonore Hanssens</td>
<td>Mental health project and research officer, Top End Mental Health Services, Department Health Community Services Northern Territory, NT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>International youth volunteers to local community engagement: Youth Challenge Australia’s 4th Challenge</strong></td>
<td>Indu Balachandran and Michelle Lee</td>
<td>Executive Director &amp; Youth Program Manager, Youth Challenge Australia, NSW.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth and community combined action network</strong></td>
<td>Emina Ajanovic</td>
<td>YACCA Program, Youth &amp; Family Service (Logan City) Inc., QLD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Watchaz doin – is hangin out with young people the way to go? Looking at contemporary issues in youth engagement</strong></td>
<td>Anne Garzoli, Kristy Brown and Andy Heaney</td>
<td>Key Emerging Artist project, Creative Riverina Youth Teams, Griffith City Council, NSW.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth Disability Advocacy Service</strong></td>
<td>George Taleporos</td>
<td>Co-ordinator, Youth Disability Advocacy Service, VIC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leaders of the future – Youth Parliament</strong></td>
<td>Stella Cifone</td>
<td>Community Development Director, YMCA Victoria, VIC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anglicare</strong></td>
<td>Matt Pearse</td>
<td>Youth Worker, Anglicare, WA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council</strong></td>
<td>Jade Colgan</td>
<td>State Coordinator, VIYAC, VIC.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
posters

Victorian Student Representative Council
James Tonson
Victorian Student Representative Council, VIC.

Kings Cross Youth At Risk project
Cindi Peterson
South Eastern Sydney and Illawarra Area Health Service, NSW.

Coaching Young People for Success
Olga Varsos
Life Business, VIC.

Ybbblue – The Youth Program of Beyondblue: The national depression initiative
Kat Byron
Ybbblue Crew member, Northern Territory.
Sam Hawkins
Ybbblue Crew member, Victoria.
Hayley Bester
Ybbblue Crew member, Tasmania.
Bec Parks
Ybbblue Crew member, Victoria.

Mitch Wall
Ybbblue Crew member, New South Wales.

Glen Barton
Youth Agenda Project Officer, Beyondblue.

Stride Foundation
Jennifer Brooker
Program and Training Manager Stride Foundation, VIC.

Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies www.acys.info
Anne Hugo
ACYS, TAS.

Interface Anthology
Tom Dawkins
The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria was pleased to host a range of extra events throughout the three days, each described below.

**Day One: Tuesday 1 May**

**Lunch**

**Drama Games**
The Playback Theatre Company hosted drama games utilising a unique form of improvised theatre presented by a team of professional actors: www.melbourneplayback.com.au

**Afternoon Tea**

**Voices from the Street – Short Film**
The film documents homeless young people’s perceptions of public safety in the City of Melbourne. ‘Voices from the Street’ provided insight into what it is like to be young and homeless in inner-city Melbourne, with the aim of defining their public safety concerns and increasing public awareness.

**Evening**

**Curry Conversations**
Day one of the conference ignited many debates and discussions; this didn’t stop when the lights went out at the Melbourne Park Function Centre. Fifty conference delegates, from right around Australia, representing a diverse collection of organisations, wandered over to the Two Fat Indians restaurant to keep the discussion alive. Joining them were keynote speaker Professor Howard Williamson from the University of Glamorgan, and Professor Judith Bessant, from the RMIT University.

Judith and Howard attempted to tackle the difficult question of how youth policy can shape good youth practice, each from their own unique perspective. From a European perspective, Howard argued the need for the youth sector to really engage with policy processes in a pragmatic fashion – to use the political climate to maximise available opportunities for young people. The need for youth workers to make positive connections to the broader policy milieu was stressed. From a local perspective, Judith argued the need for good youth work practice to shape youth work policy; a clarion call for all youth workers to engage with and shape the political climate of the day. The historical differences between youth work in the UK and Australia became greatly apparent.

The heated discussion saw things wrap up after 11pm, proving what an effective combination curry, conversation and wine can be!

**Day Two: Wednesday 2 May**

**Pre Conference**

**The Art of Exploring Everyday Spirituality**
Phil Daughtry and his team from Tabor Adelaide created an environment conducive to spiritual reflection which provided a supportive opportunity to slow down, rest, sit, think, write, read or draw. Delegates wandered through, participated in activities and utilised the opportunity to stop and reflect.

Morning Tea

**Loves Me, Loves Me Not – Short Film**

**Lunch**

**Youth Performance Ensemble**
Westside Circus is a vibrant and growing community arts organisation creating circus, performance, physical theatre, music and leadership opportunities for young people. Over the lunchbreak a group of young performers delighted the audience with a dynamic show: http://www.westsidecircus.com/

**Afternoon Tea**

**Yoga Stretch Session (Gentle Stretches)**
Yoga in Daily Life is a non-profit volunteer community organisation committed to improving the quality of life of the community through health education and promotion. Larissa from Yoga in Daily Life facilitated a yoga stretch session on the lawn with

Early evening
**Stencil art and graffiti laneway tour**
A tour was conducted through Melbourne’s unique laneways by Christy Allison. Starting at Federation Square, Christy led the group through the graffiti and stencil art hotspots. Christy told the group of her own experiences being a graffiti artist, and showed them some of her own work in Hosier Lane.

Evening
**Conference celebration**
The night kicked off at 6.30pm at the Curve Bar in the Arts Centre of Melbourne. Delegates enjoyed a range of BBQ snacks and drinks while being entertained by a local Melbourne DJ, and YACVic staff member, Rys Farthing.

Entertaining the crowd was Rahat Kapur, from Glen Waverley Secondary College, a finalist from the Class Clowns Comedy Festival. Class Clowns is a national secondary school comedy competition and mentoring program: www.classclowns.com.au

Many delegates headed off into the Melbourne CBD until the early hours of Thursday!!

data three: thursday 3 may

**Pre conference**
The art of exploring everyday spirituality
See day two for details
Morning tea

African drumming group
The Melbourne University African Drum and Dance Club (including a Conference Youth Team member) treated the delegates to a high-energy performance. The group showcased rhythms from the West African Nation of Ghana: www.afrodrumming.com.au

Lunch

Poster presentation open space
People who had submitted poster displays were available for discussion and to answer questions regarding the presentations.

Afternoon tea

Launch: What do I do when …?
What do I do when …? is a resource for people who work with young people in Victoria. It provides accessible information about the law to help youth workers feel more comfortable in their interactions with the law and the legal system.

Evening

The Reelife Short Film Festival was established in 2002 to provide a space for young Australians, 15–25, to explore their world through film. The grand final was shown at Kino Dendy, revealing the next generation of Australian filmmakers: www.vibewire.net/reelife

Voiceworks covers exhibition
Presented by Express Media. The quarterly magazine Voiceworks is the only national magazine dedicated to publishing the work of artists and writers under 25, and is distributed nationally. Voiceworks features short stories, poetry, comics, visual art, reviews, interviews and articles. The magazine is written, edited and produced entirely by young people, and published by Express Media. The exhibition tracked young people’s shifting interests, aesthetics and concerns as reflected in each unique cover of Voiceworks. The theme, design and content of each issue charts the evolution of what began in 1990 as an Express Media members’ newsletter into one of Australia’s most unique cultural products: www.expressmedia.org.au

Poster presentations
Poster presentations were on display for the duration of the conference.

Special interest group – working lunches
Throughout the first two days of the conference there was the opportunity for special interest groups to meet over the lunchbreak. These working lunches provided a space for people with an interest in a specific area to meet for an informal discussion. The sessions were facilitated by people from the relevant fields.

‘Look at me’ – youth disability photographic exhibition.
Through the lens of young photographer Chris Garbacz, the exhibition showcased the diversity and pride of young people with disabilities. Presented by the Youth Disability Advocacy Service: www.ydas.org.
The National Youth Affairs Conference received overwhelmingly positive feedback from those who completed the conference evaluation survey. Below is a brief evaluation of the conference.

**Where did delegates come from?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number of delegates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown/Overseas</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total registrations</strong></td>
<td><strong>804</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 1 THE ORIGINS OF CONFERENCE DELEGATES

There were numerous delegates from overseas. These included 12 delegates from New Zealand, 3 from Hong Kong, 3 from the UK, 1 from the USA and 1 from Japan. Approximately 30 to 40 people attended the conference via funding agreements or complimentary registrations.

**What field did delegates work in?**

See Figure 2.

**How did it go?**

Overall the conference delegates were pleased with the conference, rating it as interesting, relevant and beneficial. Attendees suggested that the plenaries and workshops, along with the networking opportunities, were particularly beneficial for them. Of the conference attendees, over 75% rated the conference as good or excellent. See Figure 3.

*Feel new motivation. New ways to re-invigorate some existing programs and new program ideas.*

YOUTH WORKER FROM SOUTH AUSTRALIA

FIGURE 2 CONFERENCE DELEGATES BY TYPE

FIGURE 3 HOW CONFERENCE DELEGATES RATED THE CONFERENCE OVERALL

FIGURE 4 PERCENTAGE OF DELEGATES WHO WOULD LIKE TO ATTEND ANOTHER NATIONAL YOUTH AFFAIRS CONFERENCE
The positive feedback on the conference overall was reinforced by delegates support for regular national youth affairs conferences. In total, 97.5% of attendees would like to see another national conference, in time spans ranging from annually to every five years, but on average biannually. See Figure 4.

**Do you want another National Youth Affairs Conference?**

- **Definitely, necessary yearly.**
  - **YOUNG PERSON FROM VICTORIA**

- **Only if it will be done under the banner of a professional association.**
  - **DELEGATE FROM VICTORIA**

- **Whenever, wherever!!**
  - **CHILD PROTECTION WORKER FROM QUEENSLAND**

**How did young people rate the conference?**

- **I learnt a lot from the workshops and will keep it forever.**
  - **YOUNG PERSON FROM VICTORIA**

Young people were overwhelming positive about their experiences at the conference, with 78% of young people rating the conference as good or excellent. See Figure 5.

Overall, young people found the workshops the most valuable part of the experience, with over 50% of young people claiming they were very valuable or exceptionally valuable.

- **There is just too much info to write down, but has inspired me to use this info in a way that will benefit my community and myself.**
  - **YOUNG PERSON FROM VICTORIA**

The young people who attended came for a variety of places, from universities to local government councils. Many of these delegates were sponsored to attend the conference, with only 5 young people suggesting that they paid in full to attend the conference. See Figure 6.
It was a bit exciting going to Melbourne and doing a big conference.
YOUNG PERSON FROM THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

There were also numerous extra events that ran over the duration of the conference.

I thought the politicians who came to speak at the beginning of each day were good – but then they left straight away. They talked about their interest in young people but then did not stay to listen to the issues young people came up against.
YOUNG PERSON AND YOUTH WORKER FROM WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Either have just YOUTH CONFERENCE for young people or WORKERS CONFERENCE! Don’t try to combine – doesn’t work properly for either.
YOUTH WORKER FROM THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

YACVic would like to send out a huge ‘thank you’ to everyone on the Conference Youth Team for shaping, designing, twisting and moulding the Are We There Yet? National Youth Affairs Conference. Your time, energy and enthusiasm has been greatly appreciated. Special thanks go to:

Charlotte Wakam
Diana Sandulache
Jessica De Mercurio
Katherine Spence
Maree Wilson
Maria Pantelakakis
Mario Filintatzis
Olivia Dennis
YACVic thanks the State Government of Victoria (in particular, the Office for Youth, Employment Programs and the Office for Children) for the leadership it has taken in supporting the conference as our principle sponsor.

We also thank our other conference funders: The Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; Headspace; the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust; City of Melbourne; Victorian Multicultural Commission and Australian Catholic University. Without this valuable support the conference would not have been possible.

Are We There Yet? is the culmination of several years of planning and discussions with people from all over Australia and beyond.

While YACVic’s name appears on the conference material, many other organisations and people have assisted in getting us to this point.

We would like to thank: Municipal Association of Victoria, Youth Research Centre at Melbourne University (in particular Ani Wierenga and Johanna Wyn), The Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, Michael Coffey (Youth Accommodation Association, NSW); the National Multicultural Youth Issues Network; Roger Holdsworth; Tim Corney; Judith Bessant; Cherry Grimwade; and Anne Hugo. We know there will be people we’ve temporarily forgotten, but thanks for your support!

YACVic would also like to acknowledge the work of each of the state and territory youth peak organisations and the many young people that have worked with us to ensure that this is a truly national youth affairs conference.

We thank: the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia, Youth Coalition of the ACT, the Youth Affairs Council of South Australia, Youth Affairs Network of Queensland, the Northern Territory Youth Network, the Youth Network of Tasmania, and the Youth Action and Policy Association of NSW.

Finally we thank all of the keynote speakers, panellists and presenters whose hard work and passion in their fields has contributed to making this conference a success and a significant national event for our sector.
are we there yet?
Past learnings
Current realities
Future directions for youth affairs in Australia

PEER REVIEWED PAPERS
National Youth Affairs Conference
Melbourne 1–3 May 2007
Melbourne Park Function Centre
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   Ann Dadich

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   Philippa Collin

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   Helen Cahill

4. Powerful participation  
   Rod Baxter & Emma Haxton

5. Introducing YES: Young people’s democratic participation – Towards developing a youth democratic voice  
   Kathy Edwards

6. Does spirituality have a role in building community within secondary school systems?  
   Jacqueline Hodder

7. Are we on the right track? Mapping the terrain of anger management  
   Suzanne Egan

8. Economic reforms, social inequality and education in Sri Lanka  
   Siri Hettige

9. The secret life of the National Youth Roundtable  
   Jude Bridgland Sorenson

10. Transitioning from state care: Young people’s journey to independence  
    Philip Mendes & Badal Mosleuddin

11. ‘Play hard, play fair.’ Using sport to engage young males in social action  
    Neil Hall

12. Youth work students mentoring young people at risk of homelessness: A partnership between a youth work degree program and a local youth agency  
    Trudi Cooper, Orietta Simons with Andrew Hall, Melissa Porteus & Amy Hacket

13. Young people in rail environs: An interagency approach to conflict reduction and crime prevention  
    Trudi Cooper, Erin Donovan & Terry Love
Young people thriving out of low-income families
Steven Sek-yum Ngai, Ngan-pun Ngai, Chau-kiu Cheung & Siu-ming To

How much longer is left of this stupid lesson?
Kitty te Riele

Factors affecting the acceptance of social work services:
Evidence from two focus groups with social workers working
with youth-at-risk
Ngan-pun Ngai, Chau-kiu Cheung & Steven Sek-yum Ngai

The Global Connections program –
A model of meaningful youth participation and action
Samantha Ratnam

Developing identities: Young people and their involvement
in radio training at JOY Melbourne
Helen Stokes & Adam Quayle

‘Jacks (& Jills) of all trades’? So why is DV so difficult?
Judy Kulisa

Teaching, learning and the ‘dilemma of difference’ for
parenting students in school settings
Geoff Shacklock, Lyn Harrison & Jennifer Angwin
How do young people with mental health issues access community-based support networks?

By Ann Dadich

Some research suggests that the status of youth mental health is far from ideal; however, government funds for mental health services remain limited. It is thus imperative that the use of community-based sources of support, like Self-Help Support Groups (SHSGs), is examined so that they may be better utilised. This paper presents findings from a recent study that explored the involvement of young people with mental health issues in SHSGs. More explicitly, it examines the trajectories that led to group involvement. While existing policy espouses a holistic approach to mental health care, encompassing both conventional and community-based sources of support, there seems to be a considerable disjunction between these aspirations and the support networks made available to young people. This is because most of the young people consulted in the study did not come to their respective groups through contact with service providers. Their contributions collectively suggest that those who work with young people need to engage more effectively with community-based sources of support so that they might extend the networks available to young people. The research findings also offer valuable direction to improve current policy in youth mental health care.

INTRODUCTION

According to some research, the status of youth mental health is far from ideal (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2004; Australian Institute of Health Welfare (AIHW) 2005; Chung et al. 2002; Moon, Meyer & Grau 1999; Rutter & Smith 1995; Toumbourou et al. 2005; United States Department of Health and Human Services (US DHHS) 2000; World Health Organization (WHO) 2001). Australian studies suggest that a quarter of all young people experience depression before the age of 18, with those between 15 and 17 years being most at risk (AIHW 2003; National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 1996); one in twenty 15- to 16-year-olds engage in regular self-harm (Hibbert et al. 1996); 61% of tertiary students report suicidal ideation (Schweiter, Klayich, & McLean 1995); up to 11% of high school students attempt suicide (Pearce & Martin 1993); when compared with other nations, Australian adolescents have the highest usage rate of amphetamines by injection (Pennington 1996); and young women have a harmful preoccupation with dieting, with 60% engaging in unhealthy weight loss practices at any one time (Wertheim et al. 1997). While identifying mental health issues among young people is a rather complex and contentious process (Boss, Edwards & Pitman 1995; Fonagy et al. 2002; Taylor 1998), available research suggests that a number of Australian young people require additional support. Arguably, the most devastating statistic is the Australian suicide rate for those aged between 15 and 24 years. The 1998 figure stood at 446, representing 25% of all deaths for this age bracket. Although this was an improvement on the 1997 peak rate of 510, representing 26% of all deaths for this age bracket (ABS 2000), the rate remains disturbing.
Collectively, these findings represent a new morbidity, encompassing developmental, behavioural and psycho-social problems (Oberklaid 1988). While having a diagnosed mental illness may not in itself be problematic for an individual, it is the perceptions of, and reactions to, this experience (both by the individual and those around him/her) that may be problematic (Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care 1998).

Why should the current state of youth mental health elicit concern? The simple answer is, cost. This cost is experienced at three levels—personally, socially and financially. At a personal level, mental illness and emotional problems seriously impact upon the various domains of a young person’s life. It affects their ability to continue educational pursuits, initiate and maintain employment, as well as form strong support networks with family members and/or peers (Daniel & Cornwall 1993; NHMRC 1997).

At a social level, mental illness and emotional problems cause many young people to remain on the periphery of societal structures and institutions. This is affirmed by a growing body of political science literature (Bellamy 2002; Bessant, Sercombe & Watts 1998; Stanton-Salazar 1997). It is also acknowledged by Australian reports, which suggest that young people have little opportunity to engage in public debate about policies pertaining to their own mental health matters (Australian Medical Association (AMA) 2001; Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition (AYPAC) 2002).

The financial costs associated with youth mental health issues are also cause for concern, particularly in this epoch of limited public funds (Public Health Group 2005; Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) n.d.). Admittedly, these costs are difficult to calculate; this is because many mental health issues can be precursors to much more disabling disorders during later life (WHO 2001). However, in light of recent fiscal estimates around particular disorders (Access Economics 2002), one can safely assume that youth mental illness constitutes an enormous drain on the public purse.

Because of the personal, social and financial costs associated youth mental health issues, they have attracted the attention of political agendas. This has become apparent through a series of initiatives, such as inquiries into the mental health status of young people (ABS 1998; Davis et al. 2000; Mitchell 2000; Moon et al. 1999; Rickwood & d’Espaignet 1996; Sawyer et al. 1992); research on their ability to access available health and mental health services (Sawyer et al. 1990); the development of youth mental health policy that aims to enhance health and wellbeing (New South Wales (NSW) Government 1999; Northern Territory Office of Youth Affairs (NT OYA) 2002); and, more recently, the launch of headspace—the new National Youth Mental Health Foundation, established to “support organisations or consortia … to develop and implement Communities of Youth Services” (Australian Psychological Society 2006, p.13).

Despite such interest, the mental health system is largely unable to meet demand (RANZCP n.d.). Conventional mental health services do not have the capacity to respond in an appropriate and timely manner to the cries of young people and those who care about them. As described by Sawyer and colleagues (2000), “among young people with the most severe mental health problems, only 50% receive professional help” (p.xii). Further confirmation is offered by a more recent investigation into the state of the Australian mental health sector, which suggests there is still much to be desired:

…the stories we heard during these consultations suggest that the process of de-institutionalisation has not been accompanied by corresponding supports for mentally ill people to live in the community. This has left many people with serious illnesses without the help that they need and deserve. Further, Australia has some way to go before the ideas in the National Mental Health Strategy translate into a mental health care system that delivers “the highest attainable standard” of health care (Mental Health Council of Australia 2005, p.iv).

Given the limited capacity of the public mental health system, current government policies highlight the need to utilise community-based support networks (Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing 2004; NSW Health Department 2002). For instance, the Australian mental health plan for 2003–2008 recognises the need to, “[E]xtend community-based options for the delivery of care, which … include[s] … community support” (Australian Health Ministers 2003, p.20, italics added).

Policies that espouse community-based support systems come in the wake of growing empirical evidence. National and international literature demonstrates the benefits of these networks—particularly Self-Help Support Groups (Carpinello, Knight & Jatulis 1991; Davidson et al. 1999; Reddin & Sonn 2003).

Self-Help Support Groups

The Self-Help Support Group (SHSG) is “a non-profit support group run by and for people who join together on the basis of common experience to help one another. It is not professionally run, although professionals are frequently found in supportive ancillary roles” (Madara 1999, p.171).

SHSGs that meet around mental health issues have quite a following. Although there is limited information about the number of Australians accessing these groups, there is some information about particular organisations, like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) – a 12-step fellowship for those who identify as alcoholic. A recent survey on
Research suggests that SHSGs have much to offer people with mental health issues. In addition to being financially accessible (Riessman 1997), adult group participants have been found to experience behavioural, cognitive and spiritual change (Humphreys et al. 1997; Kyrour Humphreys & Lomis 2002; Turnbull 1997). They can develop greater communicative skills (Finn & Bishop 2001), experience an improved ability to control undesirable behaviours (McCown & Chamberlain 2000; Obuchowski & Zweben 1987), and/or adapt to the issue that initially brought them to the group (Roberts 1989). Mental health benefits also abound, for group participants are thought to experience a greater sense of hope (Ansiewicz, Mears & Bolzan 2001; Cheung & Sun 2001; Davidson et al. 1999; Kennedy 1995; Llewelyn & Haslett 1986), improved self-image and personal identity (Kurtz & Chambon 1987; Reddin & Sorn 2003; Trice & Roman 1970), and an enhanced self-esteem (Lavoie 1984; Young 1991). This is further supported by research demonstrating relationships between group involvement and reduced psychiatric symptomatology (Galanter 1988; Rappaport & Seidman 1986), reduced hospitalisation rates (Kennedy 1990; Kurtz 1988), a reduced reliance on medication and human services (Finn & Bishop 2001; Raiff 1984; Young 1991), and a reduction in the financial cost attributed to the use of these services (Humphreys 1998).

While research concerning young group participants is relatively limited, existing evidence highlights similar benefits. Collectively, these studies cite opportunities for personal development (Dadich 2006a), the development of support networks (Margolis, Kilpatrick & Mooney 2000), enhanced self-esteem (Hughes 1977), prolonged periods of sobriety (Alford, Koehler & Leonard 1991; Kelly, Myers & Brown 2000), insight into personal issues (Dadich 2006b), greater independence (Dadich 2005), and opportunities to develop social capital (Dadich 2003).

In light of the benefits associated with SHSGs, the limited capacity of the public mental health system, and current government policy that supports community-based options, do service providers refer young people with mental health issues to these groups? The dearth of research on youth participation in SHSGs provides no conclusive answer. Only two studies were found to suggest that most young people come to 12-step fellowships through the course of conventional treatment (Bukstein 1995; Marshall, Marshall & Heer 1994); however, this focus on 12-step fellowships, particularly those that meet around substance-use issues, neglects other group types. This gap in the body of research was thus a primary driving force behind the current study.

The aim of this paper was to examine the trajectories that led to SHSG-involvement among young people with mental health issues. More specifically, it identifies the types of support that are accessed prior to group involvement and the ways young people become aware of these groups. Following the presentation of key findings, the paper concludes with valuable direction to improve current policy in youth mental health care.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Recruitment**

Conducted in New South Wales, Australia, attempts were made to recruit young people, aged 15–24 years, who experienced a mental health issue and had participated in a SHSG that met around such issues. This age bracket reflects the combined perspectives adopted by the NSW Health Department (NSW Health Department 1998) and Australian legislation (Redfern Legal Centre 1999), allowing those over 14 years to legally consent to their own general medical or dental treatment.

With no comprehensive SHSG database in this state, many and varied organisations were contacted to locate appropriate groups; these were contacted and visited, when appropriate. Given the definitional ambiguity that surrounds the term SHSG (Meissen & Warren 1994; Wuthnow 1994), this served to ensure that the groups were SHSGs, both from the understanding of the researcher and the group.

The research attended group meetings regularly and networked widely in order to invite young participants of identified groups to contribute to the study. This also led to a process of snowball sampling (Minichilli et al. 1995), which ceased following data saturation (Marshall 1996). There is, therefore, no claim that the research participants in this study constitute a representative sample.

Through the recruitment process it became evident that relatively few young people participated in the identified groups. To maximise the representation of diverse experiences and perspectives, the age bracket was extended to include those aged up to 31 years. This is because those aged 25–31 years would not be that far removed from their experiences as a young person. Moreover, all research participants were asked to reflect on their trajectories into and experiences with SHSGs as young people. It was also thought that these participants could contribute their experiences with a degree of hindsight, having had time to reflect; it was also more likely that they were not in the initial phases of their mental health issue (Sawyer et al. 1990).

**Research method**

Informed by the work of others (Gray et al. 1997), a semi-structured, open-ended interview schedule was
designed to explore the experiences of young people with mental health issues in SHSGs. The schedule facilitated an exploration of life circumstances prior to group involvement; experiences with and perceptions of the group; impact of group involvement on the young person; and advice about who is likely to benefit from group involvement. However, it is the purpose of the present paper to specifically explore the trajectories that led to group involvement.

Each interview was recorded on audiotape and, on average, lasted two hours. Transcriptions were prepared almost immediately after each interview and returned to the research participants for clarification and/or revision. This immediacy also enhanced personal reflexive practices (Hutchby & Wooffitt 1998), as subsequent interviews could be informed by the information gained (Bolam, Gleeson & Murphy 2003).

The interview material was then examined for emerging themes. Given the exploratory nature of the study, this examination was conducted through an interpretive paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln 1994; Flick 1998). This helped to develop interpretations of the social world within a contextual framework involving the research participants and the researcher (Crotty 1998).

The analytical phase of the study involved coding the interview transcripts. More specifically, items and themes of interest were grouped. This process was guided by three questions; notably (1) “What’s interesting?”, (2) “Why is it interesting?” and (3) “Why am I interested in that” (Bazeley & Richards 2000, p.56). Thus, the coding was both a descriptive and interpretive process (Buston 1997) influenced by theoretical preconceptions that were continually revised (Kelle 1997). Responses to these three questions were documented in a journal, giving rise to new questions and the creation of new codes.

**FINDINGS**

**Research participants**

The research participants included 53 young people aged between 15 and 31 years (mean = 24.79 years, median = 25 years), with slightly more males (52.83%). Although the young people represented a number of cultural backgrounds, all participants, except two, identified as Australian; the remaining two were from New Zealand and the USA.

Although the cohort was comprised of young people who had experienced mental health issues, these could be categorized further using the self-definitions of the research participants. They could be classified as having primarily experienced (in order of frequency) a diagnosable mental illness (43.40%); substance use issues, which include alcoholism and drug addiction (30.19%); issues related to sexual identity (20.75%); or emotional health issues (5.66%). These were self-determined identities and not imposed by the researcher or a mental health service provider for the purpose of the study. However, it is probable that service providers were initially responsible for most of these descriptors.

The research participants collectively represented 17 distinct SHSGs. At the request of some research participants, the identity of these groups is not disclosed. Suffice to say, all groups brought together people who shared similar experiences and were run by and for their participants. Payment of fees to verify membership was not required, nor did the groups have a predetermined life span.

On average, the research participants were involved with their respective groups for 2.31 years (median = 18 months), and they attended approximately 7.4 group meetings per month (median = one). This frequency is inflated by the number of 12-step fellowships that met weekly; this enabled some research participants to attend several group meetings each week. Given the diversity represented by the SHSGs, caution is warranted when conclusions are drawn across the groups.

**What led the young people to the Self-Help Support Groups?**

This section describes experiences that led up to involvement in a SHSG. Exemplary quotes complement the analysis; not only do these strengthen the arguments made, but also give voice to the research participants. All quotes are offered as articulated by the research participants, and are not edited. Thus, some of the quotes contain language that may be offensive.

**What support was accessed prior to the Self-Help Support Groups?**

Prior to group involvement, the research participants collectively sought help from a variety of sources. These include family members, friends, educational institutions, places of employment and religious organisations. Of particular interest to the present paper is the support sought from service providers. However, it appears that most of these attempts were deemed unhelpful.

Prior to group involvement, most of the research participants had accessed service providers, including psychiatrists, psychologists and counsellors, to address the mental health issues they experienced (75.47%). A few young people found help through treatments that offered individualised and intense care, particularly at times of hardship:

*I think one-to-one counselling is very helpful at that stage, yeah, rather than coming to the group.*

However, over half of the references to service providers were somewhat negative. There were a number of reasons for this, including the difficulties associated with the diagnosis and treatment of the young people’s mental health issues. As several research participants explained, this was sometimes because it was difficult to effectively communicate to service providers the
behavioural and cognitive changes they experienced. Furthermore, service providers sometimes misconstrued particular behaviours as symptomatic of mental illness. For instance, one young man suggested that homelessness taught him the benefit of hyper-vigilance; yet this was misconstrued by service providers as paranoia, and thus, symptomatic of a psychotic illness. Complicating the communication channels further, it was also difficult to be honest with service providers. This was particularly the case for those with substance use issues. Consequently, treatment was delayed, or, worse still, a process of trial and error was undertaken until best-fit was found:

I went through ten, ten different doctors before I settled on the one that I was with for a long period of time.

I went to a psych for like 18 months and he put me on all this different medication, diagnosed me with five mental illnesses all at, you know, different times and had really bad anxiety at that stage … I just felt like a guinea pig with the psychs.

Sometimes the treatment model impeded the effectiveness of human services. For instance, bringing together people who shared a very similar psychological state offered little opportunity to witness a process of recovery:

… they put all the schizophrenics in a hospital or something, they’d all end up mimicking each other and they’d end up worse.

Collectively, the interview material suggests that conventional sources of mental health care were not always appropriate to meet the needs of the young people, even if they were financially accessible:

I was pretty loaded at the time; I had money and I could afford, you know, to, to go around and check out expensive psychiatrists thinking that … the more you pay … the better quality you get, which is complete bullshit – all you get is a big, a better-looking office; that’s all you get.

The search for support was not easy for most of the research participants. It was made more difficult by the isolation that many experienced. Before becoming involved in a SHSG, many felt disconnected from those around them. Consequently, they believed there was little opportunity to gain the support of others:

I was … just totally isolated from the rest of the world … I mean I was pretty fucking miserable.

Perhaps this isolation gave rise to the self-help strategies that many of the research participants attempted in the hope for change. Before becoming involved in their respective groups, they had used a diverse range of techniques to help themselves. This was particularly the case among those who experienced substance use issues. The self-help strategies included isolation from others, physical exercise, the use of substances (either prescribed or non-prescribed), maintaining a personal journal, researching the mental health issues they experienced to arm themselves with information, as well as meditation and prayer. Although some of these strategies were useful for a time, they failed to meet long-term needs:

… while I was using, I tried exercise, diet, all of that sort of wanky crap to make my life better, without addressing the big thing, which was … stopping using.

The interview material suggests that, prior to group involvement, the research participants made various attempts to achieve the change they were longing for. Yet, for the most part, these attempts left a lot to be desired. Despite this, a number of young people demonstrated a strong sense of persistence, not wanting to relinquish their hope for change.

How did the young people learn about the Self-Help Support Groups?

Prior to group involvement, a few research participants actively sought a SHSG that might help them manage their mental health issue. Yet, their comments reflect issues of access:

I’ve been to so many therapists who’ve told me I have a drinking problem; not one of them ever recommended [a 12-step fellowship], ever. I mentioned to one once that my grandfather was in [a 12-step fellowship] and she went, “Yeah, but that’s, that’s not suitable for people your age”.

There was no easy entry into the SHSGs. This is affirmed by the obstacles that prevented initial group involvement. For instance, there was little public information available about the groups:

When I was initially looking into groups, it was quite hard to find groups; they’re not publicised … at all.

How then did the research participants learn about the SHSG they became involved with? Less than half of those with substance use issues came to their respective groups through contact with human services (43.75%). This includes referral services, as well as rehabilitation or detoxification services where involvement in a 12-step fellowship was part of treatment:

I went to … a referral centre … I wandered in there and said … “How can I fix these problems; why is
of the research participants had accessed service providers. While most had accessed conventional service providers, they did not learn about their respective SHSGs through service providers (75.68%). In fact, the largest proportion of those who did not experience substance use issues had self-initiated contact with their group (27.03%). They responded to promotional material, used local telephone directories or the internet, networked widely to learn of available support options, or used prior knowledge about the groups. Many spoke of difficulty in finding a group; the extensiveness of their search demonstrates the effort they took in attempting to locate and access a SHSG:

I looked on the internet to try and find anything and I couldn't really find anything. I looked in the phone book and there was the … counselling service, so I rang them and just asked, “What kind of services are available?” and they told me about [the group] … gave me the number, so I rang and … it went from there.

Others who did not experience substance use issues came to their group through the advice of family members, or friends, while a minority exercised self-initiative and accessed the group of their on accord:

… at the time … I was just about to fall back down and have another rock bottom. I don’t know what made me think that, but I was sitting at home one night and drinking and it didn’t stop … I was just looking through the local phone book and found the … number there and rang them and went to a meeting the next day.

Like those with substance use issues, most of those who did not experience these issues did not learn about their respective SHSGs through service providers (75.47%). In fact, the largest proportion of those who did not experience substance use issues self-initiated contact with their group (27.03%). They responded to promotional material, used local telephone directories or the internet, networked widely to learn of available support options, or used prior knowledge about the groups. Many spoke of difficulty in finding a group; the extensiveness of their search demonstrates the effort they took in attempting to locate and access a SHSG:

Collectively, these findings suggest that, while most of the research participants had accessed service providers prior to group involvement (75.47%), most did not learn about their respective SHSGs through this contact (67.92%).

DISCUSSION
This paper has examined the trajectories that led to SHSG-involvement among young people with mental health issues. Through interviews with 53 young people, it has identified the types of support that were accessed prior to group involvement and the ways the research participants become aware of their respective groups.

A methodical analysis of the research material indicates that the research participants had varied paths into the SHSGs. Prior to group involvement, they had attempted to access support from a myriad of sources, including family members, friends, educational institutions, places of employment and religious organisations. Yet, one of the more popular options was to seek support from a service provider. In fact, over three-quarters of the research participants had accessed a service provider to address the mental health issues they experienced. This finding is reflected by other studies concerning participants of SHSGs (Brown et al. 2001; Hohman & LeCroy 1996; Toumbourou, Hamilton & Smith 1994). For instance, an Australian study on GROW participants found that most had sought the assistance of service providers before they joined (Young & Williams 1987).

Interestingly, almost half of the individuals in the GROW study rated the help they received as beneficial (Young & Williams 1987). This contrasts with the comments offered by the young people in this study, as most were somewhat tainted by their experiences with service providers. The young people spoke of problems they had encountered in having their mental health issues assessed and treated. Although this was often because of communication difficulties or inappropriate treatment models, it suggests that conventional services were not always appropriate to meet their needs.

In their search for an alternative source of support, the young people suggested that it was not always easy to learn about SHSGs. In addition to the dearth of public information, some service providers acted as gatekeepers to groups and did not consider the group as appropriate for the young person.

Admittedly, those with substance use issues who had contact with a drug and/or alcohol service seemed to have had an easier pathway into a SHSG, relative to those who experienced other issues. In accordance with existing literature (Bukstein 1995; Marshall et al. 1994), this was because conventional treatments typically involved participation in a 12-step fellowship.

Yet, regardless of the mental health issue experienced, it appears that most of the young people in this study did not come to their respective groups through the advice of service providers. While most had accessed conventional services prior to group involvement, less than one-third
of the young people were informed about SHSGs by a service provider.

However, this study is limited by its exploratory nature. First, there is no claim that the young people form a representative sample. Second, qualitative research is limited by time, context and the nature of individual perspectives. Third, the findings reflect the interaction between the researcher and the young people. They also reflect the researcher’s interpretation of these interactions, and are thus influenced by the lenses the researcher brings to the project. The construction of themes from the interview material may, therefore, not adequately encapsulate the perceptions voiced by the young people. Fourth, given the epistemological dilemma associated with interpretive methodologies, the present findings, which were the result of a cross-sectional design, have a limited lifespan.

Notwithstanding these considerations, the study makes an important contribution to the literature on youth mental health care in Australia. It suggests that, although the mental health system cannot meet the current needs of young people with mental health issues (MHCA 2005; Sawyer et al. 2000), service providers might not be working with, or referring to, community-based networks to strengthen the web of support available to their clients. This is despite current government policies that highlight the need to utilise these networks (Commonwealth DHA 2004; Australian Health Ministers 2003; NSW Health Department 2002).

Lessons for policy development

While it is not the purpose of this paper to debate the merits of current mental health policy in Australia, the research findings here presented do offer some valuable direction. More specifically, they highlight the need for further research.

While current policy appears to link the mental health system with community-based options (Australian Health Ministers 2003), this study suggests that these links are not always made. This begs the questions, why, and what conditions help to facilitate and maintain these links? Arguably, those who work with young people need to engage more effectively with community-based sources of support, so that they might extend the networks available to young people. But there is little research to demonstrate how this might be achieved.

A holistic approach to mental health care, which complements conventional treatment with community-based support, increases the likelihood that positive mental health is sustainable in the long term. Not only is this good news for young people with mental health issues, but also for their families and for human service providers who may struggle with limited resources.

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**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The author would like to thank Assoc. Prof. Meg Smith and Assoc. Prof. Natalie Bolzan from the University of Western Sydney, the Mental Health Association of NSW, as well as the young people, all of whom supported the study.
Policies for youth participation and the development of new political identities

By Philippa Collin

In Australian research, policy and practitioner literature, youth participation has come to represent diverse aims such as ‘the rights of young people to participate’, ‘positive youth development’ or ‘social inclusion’. This paper reviews the policy discourses that have shaped the practice of contemporary ‘youth participation’. Then, drawing on empirical research conducted in Australia and reflecting on Henrik Bang’s theory of culture governance, this paper will argue that the involvement of young people in organisations must be critically examined in the context of broader changes in governance practices, policy discourse on youth citizenship and the changing nature of political identities.

INTRODUCTION

This paper considers the relationship between policy discourses of youth participation and young people’s experiences of participation as an expression of their political identities. It begins by arguing that the different fields in which youth participation has been theorised and studied complicate both the experience and reading of youth participation. Participation is then considered in the context of citizenship, with particular attention being paid to theories on what citizen participation looks like and what it is mobilised in relation to. Henrik Bang’s theory of new forms of political identities provides a framework in which to analyse interviews conducted with young people who participate in an Australian non-government organisation (Bang, 2004b). It is argued that youth participation policies are contributing to important shifts in the way that young people participate. This study finds that youth political identities are project-based and are mobilised in relation to issues. It also finds that youth participation policies have the potential to create elite forms of participation, but can also challenge this tendency by privileging diversity and everyday participation.

Youth participation is emerging in youth policy within a broader tradition of social and public policy. As the public, private and community sectors become increasingly interdependent (Bell & Park 2006, p.65), there is a need to understand the role of youth participation policies in the non-government sector and the impact of these policies on young people’s participatory experiences and political identities.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION POLICIES – MEANINGS AND PRACTICE

The phrase youth participation has enjoyed revived popularity in policy and organisational practice in Western democracies during the last decade (Kirby et al. 2003; Reimer 2003). In its broadest sense, youth participation refers to the involvement of young people in decision-making processes from which traditionally they have been excluded (Wierenga et al. 2003). The shift towards youth participation has occurred in different fields, influenced by the child rights movement, developmental approaches, participant-centred approaches, and the new sociology of youth (Reimer 2003; Sinclair 2004). Youth participation has come to mean different things in different contexts, and central to this area of research is the still unresolved question: “what do we mean by participation?” (Sinclair 2004, pp.108-09).

The dominant approach to youth has been manifest in an interventionist state creating legislation governing
parental responsibilities, compulsory schooling, juvenile justice and participation in the work force (Bessant et al. 1998; White & Wyn 2004). In this policy tradition, youth participation is employed to promote “youth development” as an intervention to address social problems (Bessant 2003) and has perpetuated beliefs that young people are “becoming”, rather than “being”. The “naturalness” of these interventions has been challenged by arguments emphasising the discourses which frame young people as deficient (Roman 1996; Bessant 2004), and the structures in society that position young people as different to adults, requiring policies that ensure their supervision, surveillance and regulation (Furlong & Cartmel 1997; Jones 1988; Wyn & White 1997, 1998; White & Wyn 2004).

The use of a rights framework has been a popular method for redressing the inequality of children and young people in societies across the globe (Crimmens & West 2004). While the rights-based approach has strengthened capacity-based arguments for youth participation, some argue that continued focus is on the “protection” and “development needs” of children and young people – not their political rights (Moosa-Mitha 2005). Additionally, a rights framework is problematic because it doesn’t stipulate who owns the obligation to ensure involvement occurs (Bessant 2003). This allows governments and other organisations to verbally support “youth rights to participation” without creating any obligations to include the opinions of young people in policy.

The new sociology of youth has also played an important role in the emergence of a youth participation agenda by demonstrating that young people are often excluded from social processes, rather than being incapable of participating (White & Wyn 2004, pp.93–95). In this context, youth participation policies seek to combat exclusionary processes. UK-based research on the role of youth participation in public decision-making (Kirby & Bryson 2002) found that where meaningful participation takes place and young people’s participation is integral to the effective practice of the organisations (government or NGO), there is also enhanced social inclusion of young people (Kirby et al. 2003).

PARTICIPATION AS CITIZENSHIP
The concept of youth citizenship is consequently problematic. The dominant discourse takes a “deficit” approach whereby young people are situated as “citizens-in-the-making” and are the subjects of socialisation strategies seeking to create “good citizens” (Owen 1996, p.21; White & Wyn 2004, p.87; Smith et al. 2005, p.425). Influenced by liberal theories of democracy, social policy often focuses on socialising young people for “minimal” (Evans 1995) or “passive” (Bang 2005) citizenship. Declines in participation in traditional institutions of democracy (Australia: Civics Expert Group 1994; Lean 1996; Europe: Banks et al. 1992) feed normative arguments about the “capacity”, skills and political literacy required for political participation (for example: Prime Minister’s Youth Pathways Action Plan Task Force 2001). Critiques of this account of citizenship object to narrow definitions of political participation (Norris 2003; Vromen 2003), the normative construction of the citizen-as-adult (Moosa-Mitha 2005; Smith et al. 2005), the assumption that participation opportunities are equally distributed regardless of structural factors (Moosa-Mitha 2005) and the failure to explain how political socialisation is achieved (Frazer & Emler 1997; Henr et al. 2002; Coleman & Rowe 2005).

Civic republicanism has recently become more influential, also emphasising participation in the public sphere and in existing political institutions and processes (Stokes 2002), but promoting “active citizenship” (for example: Prime Minister’s Youth Pathways Action Plan Task Force 2001). Active citizenship occurs when citizens respond to their responsibilities by participating in managed deliberation and decision-making opportunities.

The civic republican and liberal traditions conceptualise political identities primarily in terms of their relationship to the state: as either legitimating (consenting to state domination) or oppositional (struggling against state domination) (Bang 2005, p.169). However, recent theories on the individualisation of politics have re-conceptualised the role of the state and civil society for policy production, with significant implications for citizenship theory. Theories of “network governance” (Rhodes 1997; Considine 2005a), or “culture governance” (Bang 2004a), argue that policy networks have changed, expanding from functional networks in government departments to include other actors from the private and voluntary sectors (Rhodes 1997, p.45). This has created a shift away from “government” to “governance” and the emergence of new partnerships that traverse old boundaries between public, private and voluntary sectors. Under these conditions, governments, leaders and managers need to involve ever-more people, communities and organisations in the production and implementation of public policy (Bang 2004a, p.159). Networks are, therefore, thought to be energising old institutions of public policy production and stimulating new forms of public participation (Considine 2005b).

CITIZENSHIP AND PARTICIPATION IN THE INDIVIDUALISED RISK SOCIETY: EVERYDAY MAKERS AND EXPERT CITIZENS.
Henrik Bang argues that the trend towards governance networks is bringing together authorities and lay people with increased participation of non-government organisations. He suggests that civic engagement is mobilised less in support or opposition to the state, and more in relation to governance networks (Bang 2004b, p.5). In this context, “project-oriented” political identities are evolving. These political identities do not focus their energies on
the state, but on the building of networks and reflexive political communities that respond to issues rather than structures. As such, they are not oppositional or legitimising identities, in the “passive” and “active” (Turner 1990) or “maximal” and “minimal” (Evans 1995, p.16) sense. Project-oriented identities demonstrate how the political has become personal and self-reflexive, about “choice” and responding to one’s own need to take action on a cause. Project-oriented participation indicates how, “… ethics, personal integrity and mutual confidence become central elements in the democratic life (cf. Rabinow 1994)” (Bang 2004b). Bang calls these new political identities “Expert Citizens and Everyday Makers” (Bang 2004b).

**Expert Citizens**

“Expert Citizens” take a discursive approach to “the political”, whereby participants create their own political realities through action. This action involves accessing existing processes and structures of governance by assuming professional roles in voluntary and non-government organisations. They are strategic in their pursuit of these roles to inform and take part in decision-making processes because they seek political influence. Participation is an integral, almost logical, extension of their identity and they consider themselves part of the system. Expert Citizens have, or can access, the skills and resources that enable them to influence agendas and decisions, so they place negotiation and dialogue over opposition or confrontation (Bang 2004b, p.21). Bang warns that Expert Citizens represent a new republican elite that may further alienate ordinary citizens from the political process (Bang 2004b, p.4). In the Australian youth sector, Expert Citizens might be found in the youth affairs peak bodies, youth councils and representatives to government departments and agencies, and as staff or volunteers in youth-serving non-government organisations.

**Everyday Makers**

“Everyday Makers” are also politically disposed, but their activities are directed at a wider range of targets. They are cause-oriented, but are not inclined towards collective action (for instance, as part of a social movement), favouring individualised or micro-political participation instead. They see potential for political action in everyday activities, such as writing for a local youth magazine, ethical purchasing or running an arts festival. They seek to effect small, profound change through their daily interactions, rather than shift grand narratives. Everyday Makers operate beyond the “professionalised” spheres where Expert Citizens are networked into governance structures. However, they are willing to “do it” with the system to achieve the desired outcome (Bang 2004b, p.26). They write weblogs on government aid, sit on the local organising committee for the Reclaim the Night March and mobilise their neighbours to protest a local council decision to remove trees from their street. They are defined by finite projects which are aimed at a range of political targets (state, corporate, community figures).

These new political identities are important because they challenge the political vs. “civil society” dichotomy. They mobilise in relation to networks and partnerships between private, public and voluntary organisations engaged in public policy production (Bang 2005, p.160). As such, youth participation policies may be creating the space for these identities to develop in young people. By searching for evidence of Expert Citizens and Everyday Makers among young people participating in non-government organisations, I examine the role that youth participation policies play in the development of contemporary youth political identities.

**METHODOLOGY**

In 2006, thirteen young people involved in a national non-government organisation, the Inspire Foundation, were interviewed. The foundation was chosen as a site from which to recruit participants based on its national reach, its use of the internet and its explicit youth participation policy. The Inspire Foundation is a national non-profit organisation that uses information communication technologies to deliver three national programs for young people aged 16–25 years of age. Young people have been involved since 1999 through specific participation programs and informal, unstructured mechanisms. Formal mechanisms include acting as youth advisers, youth ambassadors, project partners and interns. Informal participation occurs via interactive features on the web-based services run by the foundation. These websites utilise user-generated content, online public forums and feedback mechanisms, including polls, to facilitate youth participation in the development and delivery of these services.

Face-to-face, in-depth interviews explored the attitudes and experiences of participation of the 13 participants. Interviewees were aged 19–24 years and the sample was constructed to be consistent with key informant interviewing (Blee & Taylor 2002, p.105). Interview subjects were sourced from two Inspire Foundation initiatives. Reach Out! (www.reachout.com.au) was launched in 1998 and since 1999 more than 330 young people from around Australia have directly contributed to the development and delivery of the service. ActNow (www.actnow.com.au) was launched in May 2006 with 100 young people contributing to its design and development. Because this research is interested in the role of structural factors in constraining or enabling participation, people with specific characteristics were invited to participate. There were six males and seven females. They were recruited from different parts of Australia and from rural, regional and metropolitan locations: three from Queensland, two from New South Wales, five from Melbourne, two from a regional city in Victoria and one from a rural Victorian location. It was also considered important to have a mix of past, long-
and short-term participants. All interview participants had either attained or were enrolled in a tertiary degree, and were employed in either a part-time or full-time capacity.

**DISCUSSION**

These interviews with young people raise three important issues for the theorisation of youth political identities. First, these young people demonstrate project-based political identities. Second, their experiences challenge assumptions that underpin traditional notions of “youth” and “participation”, mitigating the tendency to reproduce elitism through the creation of Expert Citizens. Thirdly, they are mobilised through networks, though their perspectives on participation are still informed by traditional hierarchies.

**PROJECT-BASED IDENTITIES: BEYOND OPPOSING OR LEGITIMISING POLITICS**

The concept of the project-based identity is central to Bang’s theory. Project-based identities are mobilised by causes (Norris 2003), they direct their energies into developing networks for action (Bang 2004b) and the forms of action that they take are often embedded in daily activities. The young people in this study were cause-driven: “youth suicide”, “education issues”, “doing something positive for the community”, “issues that are important to me”. They are also strategic: meeting new people, generating networks and doing something that would provide them with experience “for the future” were important to me”. They are also strategic: meeting new people, generating networks and doing something that would provide them with experience “for the future” were also important.

Although some used the language of volunteering, most described their participation as “just something that they did”, whereas politics was equated with traditional structures and hierarchies, which these young people either felt alienated from or indifferent to.

**Interviewer:** Do you think your involvement in Reach Out! is political?

**Paula** (aged 20): Not really, I don’t know. I think that if something political happens, like funding is cut to mental health services, then we can use RO! to stand up for what’s right. But other than that, no, I don’t think so.

**Interviewer:** So it’s more just a part of your daily life?

**Paula:** Yeah, it’s just a part of who I am and what I do. If someone goes, “What do you do with yourself?”, I say, “I’m a uni student, I work and I volunteer for this site”. It’s on my resume, even though it’s not an employed job, it’s still something that I do.

Paula understands how policies are shaped and believes that organisations can influence government policy, but distances her own beliefs and actions from “the political”. She considers “knowing as doing” and participation is her way of addressing issues “… concretely and personally rather than abstractly and ideologically” (Bang 2005, p.167). Like Paula, Louise, 22, is from a regional part of Australia. She got involved with ActNow because “… it seemed to be this online forum, which I’d never had anything to do with. So that was a personal challenge for me. And it just seemed like this really interesting way to form connections with other young people”. She had previously instigated small projects in her community, for example, researching commercial recycling options and then raising these issues with her boss (a nightclub owner) and the local council. Louise disengaged from formal participation with Inspire at the end of her term as a project partner but “It’s not something I’ve ruled out doing, I’d just like to feel inspired and go ‘oh! I could put that on ActNow’”. Being able to control how and when they’re involved, and see concrete outcomes, is very important to these young people:

“I could contribute whenever I wanted, whether that was at 2am, or after I’d been thinking about something for 24 hrs to get my thoughts straight and type it so it felt like what I was doing was meaningful. So it was on my own time, and terms” (Kate, 23).

The ability to “log on when ever they wanted”, to link in with projects, disengage or re-engage when they wanted to was critical to their participation. Harry, 21, describes how the program responds to his need for flexibility, choice and variety in the range of participation opportunities. His participation is driven by his interests – not the skills or knowledge that he possesses. Many young people referred to the absence of hierarchy and provided a range of examples of how young people contributed across the organisation including writing content for the websites, fundraising and promoting the services in the community, deciding on marketing strategies and sitting on interview panels for paid staff positions at the foundation. Interviewees repeatedly stated that young people were able to influence agendas and make decisions that had real consequences. For some, their involvement was short term and finite, but for others it was sustained because it could be constructed as multiple small projects that fitted in with their lifestyle.

Most of the interviewees embody an Everyday Maker approach, seeing their participation in the Inspire Foundation as a way to create change in a way that is relevant to their lifestyles. However, some take on the professional, full-time or strategic identity of Bang’s Expert Citizen. Three participants have taken up employment within youth-servicing organisations – in one case, at the Inspire Foundation. For these young people the *cause* is not only mental health, racism or obesity, but *youth participation*. Being able to navigate the
structures of governance networks and hold a legitimate role within these systems is important to these young people. Whereas for the others, their ability to engage in a way that fits in with other interests and allows improvisation and creativity are more important.

**REPRODUCING ELITISM**

There is a need for organisations with youth participation policies to understand and redress the way that adult-centric systems and processes can privilege those with the greatest structural advantage (Wierenga et al. 2003, pp.24-25; Kirby & Bryson 2002, pp.29-31). The Inspire Foundation involves a wide range of young people from different backgrounds, including those with mental health difficulties. Like many of the participants, Ruth’s personal experience led her to want to get involved:

> I guess generally, a lot of my friends have always had mental health issues and I’ve had a few myself. I guess those personal experiences mean that there are still a lot of people who just want to run away because they don’t know how to deal with that stuff … I just want to help people to understand that it [mental health difficulties] isn’t something to be afraid of (Ruth, 22).

Many of these young people are sensitive to the discourses that frame participation as “representation” and influence assumptions about who makes a “good representative”:

**Kate:** Ah, there was a link on the site which was for the youth advisory board. I thought I had no hope, and just sent off an application anyway after spending heaps of time on my application – after school – I sent it off and then got an email from Jono.

**Interviewer:** Why did you think you wouldn’t be selected?

**Kate:** Because it sounded like a really special opportunity – which it was – but I just thought I wouldn’t get picked because I’d applied for other things before and never got picked – like, I wasn’t school captain at school, I’d never really had opportunities like that before (Kate, 23).

Though Kate expected selection to be based on skills and experience, the foundation looks for applicants who demonstrate commitment to “making a difference” and values diversity over “objective scales” of merit. Equal numbers of males and females, young people from rural, regional and metropolitan locations and some with disclosed mental health issues (ranging from having a chronic illness, suffering bullying or sexual assault or a mental illness) are selected.

The issues-based nature of youth participation at the foundation represents a shift from the “representative”, civic republican model evident in many other mechanisms, such as youth representatives on councils, youth roundtables, advisory boards to ministers and departments and youth arms of political parties. Nevertheless, among youth participants at Inspire, those with the most experience in formal youth participation processes questioned the ability of youth participation policies alone to challenge this tendency.

I think it’s always going to be limited, but if you look at it in terms of participation of the rest of the community, then people often talk about young people being involved in “x” level or “y” level in government. But are Indigenous people involved? What about people with a disability or the elderly or just ordinary people in some way? In some respects young people are more involved in some of those policy-making processes because people have made an effort through youth engagement policies … but it’s not as though all young people have the same access because often it’s the same group of 15 or 20 people (Alana, 24).

Alana was one of three highly connected young people who had extensive experience in government and non-government organisations through youth participation policies. She believed that the criteria for participating in formal decision-making processes favour those who benefit from high levels of education, safe environments such as stable families and communities, financial security and English-speaking backgrounds. For Alana, self-reflexivity, combined with a strategic approach to influencing social change from within governance networks, informed her personal trajectory, from non-participation through formal participation policies into paid employment in the youth sector.

Though the Inspire Foundation is an example of where participation policies seek to avoid reproducing elitism, working with diversity was seen by some as problematic. This played out most clearly when considered in the context of mental health:

> Because of the way people hear about the program I think that there are a number of young people who have been consumers of mental health services or tough times themselves. And then I think there’s another group of young people who haven’t necessarily been through similar experiences and, to put it on a spectrum that probably isn’t very accurate, are the overachieving, president of the SRC-type young person versus the young person who has experienced extreme disadvantage through living in a remote rural area with a parent with a mental illness. So these people have two very different perspectives on life, and I think it’s awesome that they come together, but I think [it’s hard] in terms of structuring a program that can actively support and continue to engage with those young people who are at different
ends of the participation spectrum, who have different skill sets and are operating at different levels and from different perspectives (David, 20).

David reflects a wider tension in policy discourse and practice on what the purpose of youth participation is, who should be involved and in what kinds of decision-making. These tensions complicate young people's own reading of their participation:

I was always very careful – I don't know why – to separate myself from a user of the site, and as someone who helped to create the site. So I guess, just in my language – consciously I guess – I would say that I work alongside the crew to help “those people” who are struggling with tough times. I'd never included myself as a user or a member of the group that used the site – but rather as a member of the group that helped develop it (Jade, 23).

Jade stated that she personally had benefited from using the site (www.reachout.com.au), but by the end of the interview had reconceptualised herself as a contributor only. Empirical studies show that young people are sensitive to civic republican discourses and strongly associate “socially constructive participation” with citizenship status (Smith et al. 2004, pp.436-39). This study also finds that young people are still sensitive to the discourses of “difference” and “deficiency” prominent in narratives of youth and participation.

As well as having a legitimate place either “inside” or “alongside” governance networks, interviewees expressed a desire to determine the structure of these networks (who is involved and how). This makes them particularly sensitive to discourses of youth as deficient (Bessant 2002, 2004), associated with governments and politicians. When asked why he thought governments weren't interested in involving young people, Phillip said:

Well I'm sure that for one they argue that young people are still learning, that they haven't experienced the world and haven't been in the work force and don't know what it's like to manage the blah blah blah. I suppose they'd also say that youth are a bit flippant; they're easily persuaded by certain promises. They might say that we don't see the whole of what's going on (Phillip, 22).

Though Phillip feels alienated from governments and politicians, he doesn't feel disempowered. In fact, he argued that the greatest challenge to effective youth participation was not hierarchy and authority, but being strategic and using skills effectively. He stressed the need to be tactical, creative and versatile:

You've also got to ask yourself: why would someone want to listen to me? Am I talking to the right people? I know that that's one of the hardest things about taking action: who do you talk to, how do you get things done, how do you make your voice heard, how do you measure your results? What do you want to achieve and by when? I don't think people always have that in mind. I think often people just say “we want this” without really working out a solution or how to go about it (Phillip, 22).

For others, the interplay between discourses of deficiency or “risk” and governments and politicians clearly drove their choice to engage with non-government organisations, rather than government:

Ruth (aged 20): Howard is nearing 70 or something isn’t he? And the only time you ever see him with young people is when he goes to schools to get on the news! He doesn’t really care.

Interviewer: Why do you think he doesn’t care?

Ruth: Well, there’s just never any action around youth problems I guess.

Interviewer: So it’s all talk and no action?

Ruth: There’s not even that much talk! Just the – well the only talk that there is, is that we’re lazy and we bash our grandmas and go around in gangs and started the Cronulla riots.
Despite her cynical view of politics and politicians, Ruth demonstrates a deep sense of commitment to raising awareness of depression and a strong belief that her participation in non-government organisations will make a difference in the lives of ordinary people. For her, taking action through the Inspire Foundation is a logical and strategic approach to creating change.

**CONCLUSION**

This exploration of young people’s experiences of youth participation policies in the non-government sector reveals some of the shifts and transformations in political identities proposed by Bang. There are still many unresolved theoretical and empirical questions on youth participation, political identity and citizenship. However, this study exposes some ways in which youth participation policies are shaping the development of young people’s political identities.

First, these policies are contributing to forms of participation that disrupt existing models of active/passive, thin/thick or minimal/maximal citizenship. For some young people, participation policies provide opportunities to access decision-making structures and they pursue these opportunities as part of their “life project”. For others participation policies are mechanisms to carry out short, finite projects for action. However, both groups are still influenced by discourses on youth citizenship that emphasise the “child-student-apprentice” and the “adult-worker-citizen”. Consequently, a project-oriented identity may not yet be sufficient to override social, economic and cultural characteristics of participation which frame current notions of youth citizenship.

Second, youth participation policies have the potential to either reinforce structural inequalities – by recreating adult-centric structures and processes which favour those with the greatest structural advantage – or promote agency as the defining mechanism through which young people participate. Strong participatory identities are produced for an elite group through access to existing power and decision-making structures. However, where organisations are able to respond to what Bang refers to as “the politics of the ordinary” (Bang 2005, p.175), they may also be strengthening other forms of “everyday” participation.

Third, young people express strong views that old, adult-centric forms of government are no longer where political participation “is at”. But far from being politically disengaged, young people in this study identify non-government organisations as legitimate sites for participation, be it the strategic and professionalised engagement of the Expert Citizen, or the spontaneous, self-situated, fun and culturally relevant actions of Everyday Makers.

**NOTES**

1. Bang (2005, p.165) argues that by participating in non-government organisations, young people are creating political realities, rather than mirroring or representing or acting in the name of “objective interests”. 2. This “child-student-apprentice” and “adult-worker-citizen” model draws on the following work: Owen 1996; Bessant 2003; White & Wyn 2004).
S. Staggenborg, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.


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LEARNING WITH AND FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

The Learning Partnerships project is based on the notion that adults need to learn with and from rather than just about young people. Too often those training to enter the health and education professions learn only about young people via a curriculum devised by fellow professionals. This curriculum may be biased towards the theory rather than the practice of effective communication, and may lack a youth-centred perspective on the challenges that their young clients or students encounter. Similarly, once teachers and doctors assume their professional roles, they enter a institutionalised world in which their roles set them apart from young people, and thus communication can be constrained by the limiting assumptions that each party makes about the other.

The Learning Partnerships project is a program in which tertiary students of education (or medicine) participate in drama workshops with classes of school students (Cahill 2005). These workshops aim to equip teachers and students (or doctors and patients) to communicate more effectively with each other about the social, emotional and family issues that can impact on learning and wellbeing. The process involves the participants as action researchers. The drama methods are used as research tools, structuring enquiry into social and political issues of immediate relevance in the professional, personal or institutional lives of the participants (Cahill 2006a).

Drama is used as the means through which to investigate common predicaments and challenges affecting learning or wellbeing. The young people are positioned as actors (improvising in the role-plays together), co-investigators (inquiring into issues of shared concern), key informants (reporting their views, identifying problems and appraising solutions), and coaches (advising the adults as they trial, rehearse and discuss possible solutions).

The work is located in curriculum and in timetable for each of the three groups of students. This helps to ensure that the work is attributed the desired status as part of core learning, which also helps to ensure program sustainability.

The project is in place at the University of Melbourne (Australia) and involves all final year medical students as part of their study of adolescent health, and a growing number of education classes of tertiary students preparing to become primary or secondary teachers.

While the project is currently expanding, the data I report on in this article is drawn from one school which...
is a case study for my doctoral research in which I employ a reflective practitioner methodology, gathering data in the form of reflective notes, interviews, surveys and videotaping of the classes (Cahill 2005). Within the study I examine the use of drama as a method through which to structure participation and to develop personal and professional skills and capacities. The students referred to here are 15–16 years of age and attend a state school located close to the University of Melbourne (Australia), serving a predominantly middle-class clientele. They are enrolled in a half-year community drama elective designed to facilitate involvement in theatre activities which serve the community (Cahill, Wales & Sanci 2004).

LOCATED IN TEACHER EDUCATION

The pre-service teachers focus on how societal issues, school structures and school policies can impact on student engagement, behaviour and learning. They consider how schools can best assist students to deal with social problems such as racism, bullying, family pressures and mental health concerns. They do this by problemsolving around fictional scenarios which represent common school situations, rehearsing possible actions and solutions, and gathering feedback and coaching about effective teacher interventions. The students are co-investigators in this work.

LOCATED IN MEDICAL EDUCATION

The medical students engage in the work as part of their study in adolescent health. A key learning in adolescent health is that young people are most likely to need medical help in relation to issues such as sexuality, substance use and mental health. The doctor needs to be able to assist adolescents to talk about sensitive issues of this nature and to learn how to question in such a way as to support the patient in telling their story (Sanci & Young 1995). To be effective, the doctor must be skilled at asking suitably framed questions and be able to offer a listening that is free of judgment or moralising advice (Bonomo & Sawyer 2001). The workshops give the medics a chance to rehearse the use of the HEADSS interview tool, designed to assist them to conduct a structured conversation about home, education, activities, drugs, sex and mental health (Goldenring & Cohen 1988).

The drama students play a fictional role, which has been specially devised for this exercise (Cahill 2005). The character’s story is designed to give the medics a chance to engage with issues relating to problems encountered as a result of unprotected sex, alcohol and cannabis use. The students participate as actors in a mock medical conversation, working in role as the fictional character. The young people give feedback and coaching to the medical students on how well the communication is progressing in their scenario and engage in general discussion about help-seeking in relation to adolescent health issues.

Earlier work using these processes demonstrated that students gain a sense of community and feel connected and empowered through their participation in shared and purposeful forum theatre projects (Cahill 2002). Research using this methodology has also shown that experienced general practitioners gain a significant and lasting improvement in their ability to conduct effective consultations with adolescents as a result of engaging in role-play exercises in which they both practise with adolescent actors and receive feedback and coaching from them (Sanci et al. 2000; Sanci, et al. 2002).

This work can be seen as part of a broader tradition of using client-representatives as simulated patients in medical education (Denholm & Wilkinson 1997; Eagles et al. 2001; Henderson & Johnson 2002; Knowles et al. 2001; Luck & Peabody 2002), and drama and theatre techniques to build community capacity for social change (Boal 1985; Nicholson 2005; O’Toole & Lepp 2000; Taylor 2003; van Ments 1999).

LOCATED IN THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

A growing number of primary and secondary schools participate in the project with students engaging in the work as part of their Drama, English, Civics or Personal Development curriculum. Students develop their discipline-based skills (for example in Drama or English), while also enhancing their social and personal skills and their sense of value and purpose. The whole class participates, thus communicating the message that all students are capable of fulfilling this leadership role and of making a contribution. This sets the work apart from models that use only select students for leadership roles.

GENERATING NEW POSSIBILITIES

FOR INTER-GENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIP

The students report that participating in the process generates an experience of contribution and power and a rethinking of their own and others’ identity. Through analysis of their responses, I have identified six key factors that seem to be integral to their engagement and learning. I discuss them in this article as they are potentially of value to others who aim to devise new ways of working across the youth/adult divide or to position young people as agents of change in projects addressing social, environmental or political goals. The six factors include: working within a shared sense of civic purpose; making a meaningful contribution; being assigned to powerful roles; working across the boundaries associated with youth/adult and school/community; engaging via the interactive process of the drama; and generating multiple perspectives on shared problems.

1 THE SENSE OF PURPOSE

Contributing as the co-teacher is a transformative experience for the students. Peter (15) explains this by offering a contrast between the way society tends to treat teenagers and the way he is regarded when he becomes
the “teacher” of adults. When others view him in a limited or negative way, this cuts into his confidence and sense of self-worth:

Sometimes you have to feel that teenagers are not appreciated, for example – if you walk into a supermarket, there might be a guy watching you – like they don’t trust you or they don’t appreciate you. It annoys you and makes you feel bad – makes you feel like you’re not good enough for them. And that changes your personality and makes you feel less confident about who you are, and what to say, just in case people like that are judging you (Peter, 15).

In contrast, when he is appreciated, as in this project, then he finds that his way of thinking changes and he is able to become a different sort of person:

When you feel as if you’re being appreciated, I guess that does make you think and then you mature. As time goes on your ideas go deeper, that is – you know – your ideas change, and everything changes about you (Peter, 15).

The experience of being valued for his contribution changes Peter’s sense of himself. This is a reminder that the roles we allocate to young people have an influence on their identity and on their capacity to “mature” (Kelly 2003). Others have written about the tendency for adults to relate to youth through the categories of victim, perpetrator or deviant, and the way in which this confines the policies and programs relating to youth (Bessant & Watts 1998; Wyn & White 1997). Here, Peter points out the effect that this can have at an individual level. Being given a position of value leads to him seeing himself as a person of value.

2 MEANINGFUL CONTRIBUTION
The students gain a sense of pride as a result of contributing to others. Being involved in important work makes them feel useful. This sense of purpose sets the project apart from the regular schooling experience, making it more meaningful and rewarding. Nell (15) says:

It’s like the first time you have been useful … We are actually helping people … helping them understand young people better and it’s sort of our responsibility to make sure that we do that well.

The students report that to contribute in this way is meaningful and uplifting:

It’s intended to help people and, it just goes on a whole different kind of track and it’s kind of like fulfilling and stuff (Susie, 15).

This sense of being useful is what they enjoy most about the project. Far from feeling exploited by being asked to contribute their time to assisting others, they feel good about being useful and about seeing each other being useful. Similar findings are made in other studies which show that when young people contribute within service projects that they care about, they gain a sense of community belonging and social responsibility (McGuire & Gamble 2006).

In this project, the students share a sense of the importance of the work because they have their own knowledge of a world in which young people would be better served if the adults who worked with them could communicate more effectively. This can be heard when Natalie (16) points out that poor communication on the part of adults can lead to teenagers feeling alienated and withdrawing from the services the adults provide:

I don’t think enough emphasis is put on actual communication skills. Because how many doctors have I been to that just do not understand at all how to communicate and just make me feel alienated and like a typical teenager? And it is just revolting. It really puts people off going to doctors (Natalie, 16).

One implication for people designing projects to serve the needs of youth is that there is great value in including the target group in the design as well as the implementation phases of the project. A sense of shared ownership and purpose is empowering.

3 POWERFUL ROLES
The students relish being assigned to the powerful role of coach as well as to the more playful role of actor and the responsive role of key informant. They find that it is this role that generates an elevated sense of status. Their comments on their role inversion from students to co-teachers shows that their positioning as coach is integral to the contribution they can make:

Well, for once in our lives we’re kind of telling the adults what to do instead of them teaching us stuff. We’re in – like – the position of power, we have this kind of control, they have to listen to you (Robert, 15).

Here, Robert talks about listening as if it is an obligation or duty that goes with the position that the adult participants have been located in. In this he points to the inter-related nature of positioning. It is assumed that the “learner” must listen to the “teacher”.

For Susie (15) the experience of agency is equated both with being valued (being listened to) and giving value (making a contribution):

[This drama work] It’s a lot more like satisfying because it’s like – yes – I’m being listened to, my opinions are being heard you know, and you feel really important – like – this is something that’s really good
for the community, it’s going to benefit everybody so it’s more satisfying than just mucking around in drama (Susie, 15).

The experience of value can be understood here as involving both the experience of being given value (being listened to) and the experience of giving value (providing coaching). The two experiences are interdependent as it is through being assigned a useful role that one can make a contribution. Simon (15) points out that:

If they’re not interested then you are not as willing to give advice because you don’t think they’re listening.

Thus the space provided for him by the adults he works with moderates the contribution that he can make. He perceives that he is able to give more to those who allow this:

I had one who looked really interested in what I had to say and that gave me more confidence to give more advice (Simon, 15).

In this, his perception of their receptivity generates his confidence and capacity to contribute. Here it can be seen that powerful roles allow for significant contributions to be made. Limited roles invite smaller contributions.

4 PARTICIPATION ACROSS BOUNDARIES

The fourth distinction that emerges in my data collection relates to the risks and rewards associated with participating with those you do not ordinarily associate with. The students find that participation requires a form of courage. Greg (15) points out that:

You have to sort of meet these people that you’ve never met before and play this character that isn’t you, and to do that without sort of feeling at all kind of embarrassed and stuff, like that takes sort of a bit of courage.

Simon (15) finds that an additional risk must be taken to step beyond the norms associated with their socially ascribed role as student and adopt the role of co-teacher or coach. The courage required to step into the role can be heard in Simon’s comments:

It’s kind of awkward in the space between acting and then going on to teaching … you’re thinking, ‘Do they really care what we’re saying? Will they take this on board?’ … You are nervous about how they will react (Simon, 15).

Part of the challenge relates to the concern about whether the other party will accept the inversion of roles from student to co-teacher and therefore allow you to be who you need to be in order to say it. This is a reminder of the co-created nature of opportunity. One cannot give unless the other will receive. Here the adult recipient can moderate the contribution the young person will make. This understanding is inherent in the design of the project. Before young people can contribute as co-teachers of adults, they must be invited into this role. The listening invites the speaking.

What is also apparent is that this is a learning environment rich with risk. I use the term “rich” because the students have pointed to the integral nature of risk and learning. Without risk (taken as contributors) they would not have the experience of mastery, courage or contribution. Their sense of accomplishment is connected to the challenge of crossing the boundaries associated with their social roles, of feeling unsure, but working on regardless. Meeting high expectations, and proving one can master a challenge, build the sense of efficacy and agency (Seligman 1995). Too often in discourse about youth, “risk” is considered as a negative; either a set of faulty conditions or risk factors within the individual (France 2000), or a set of unfortunate challenges in the environment as in the “risk society” (Beck 1992). What tends to be forgotten is that risk is also part of learning. It is inherent in the challenge or opportunity which one pits oneself against, in order to become bigger than one’s constraints, or to acquire new skills or capacities.

The students are aware that the medics and teachers are learners too, and thus there is an element of risk for them as well. Peter (15) sees the encounter as helping the medics to get over their fears and, therefore, as integral to their learning. Here fear is seen as an impediment to learning, and a barrier to effective relationships; a hurdle that must be overcome before real change can occur.

We’d walk in and they’d all be scared of us for a while, real scared, so I think they learnt that they can talk to us, we’re not that scary, teenagers aren’t scary (Peter, 15).

In this Peter points out that there is more for the medics to learn in this project than simply the interviewing skills. There is way of thinking to be learnt, a re-thinking of who teenagers are, and of what is possible when communicating with them.

From the adult perspective, Jane (24) describes how she has seen students at school as scary and a mob. Through participating in the Learning Partnerships workshops she discovers the personhood of the students and thus can benefit from their wisdom:

I liked the speaking to the students because it gave you a chance to meet them as a person and see them not this scary group of students … to speak one on one with the students was great because I saw they’ve got expectations of teachers and they can tell you what those expectations are, and they can tell you what
makes for them a bad teacher and what makes a good teacher (Jane, 24).

The structure of the workshops places the players together as co-learners. Liz (24) describes the benefits of being able to talk to them on an equal footing. This opportunity sits in contrast to role-bound encounters on teaching placement in which she feels under pressure to fulfil the confining role of disciplinarian:

Every interaction that you have with students you are in this role with the teacher and to some degree or another you’re a disciplinarian and then to be able to meet and interact with them as people instead … I got a lot out of it in terms of being able to talk to them on equal footing and find out what their point of view was in that kind of perspective (Liz, 24).

Here we can see the importance of designing activities that have an inbuilt requirement for interaction between young people and adults. This interaction can lead each group to a new understanding of the other. Putnam (2000) describes the importance of “bridging” as well as “bonding” experiences in the creation of social capital. Bridging experiences are those in which people connect with those who are different from them, working across role, gender, age, status, cultural or occupational boundaries. While the protective role of bonding or connectedness is often emphasised when considering the needs of young people (McNeely, Nonnemaker & Blum 2002), it may be the lack of opportunities to engage in bridging experiences which feeds a sense of fear or meaninglessness. Our current schooling structures keep students contained with their peers and offer very few opportunities for connection with the adult world. In this project, the sense of agency and hope, and the humanising of the other, is associated with interacting across role divides. It is a form of boundary crossing which is necessary if we are to position young people as citizens rather than as consumers or clients (Giroux 1992).

A clear implication here is the need for young people to participate in inter-generational projects, rather than only to engage in youth-specific interactions. Perhaps there is a particular need to build bridging opportunities for young people in an era that sees breakdown in community participation and diminishing social capital.

5 THE PROCESS OF THE DRAMA
The fifth distinction relates to learning and teaching through the inquiry-based process of the drama. The drama provides the process through which much of the interaction is managed. It brings the participants together as co-players and allows them to generate material that they can then reflect on. Justin (15) describes the importance of the fictional play as a tool for himself as teacher. He points out that showing the problem and/or the solution is much more effective than just talking about it. The fictional play thus assists him to articulate in his work as a teacher. It gives him additional ways to express or show what he means:

When you chat with people you can’t really express it completely … so if you were saying how you hate it when teachers don’t listen to you … you can’t really describe it, so you have to almost show them rather than just talk about it … you can show them in a few movements and a few words (Justin, 15).

The teachers and medics also appreciate being able to engage in an applied way with issues relating to their professional learning. Jane (24) notes that to just talk about something is not the same as to do it or to actually see it or feel yourself in that situation. In this she distinguishes between theory and practice and between cognitive and embodied forms of knowing:

I think you needed to do the role-play because a lot of times you can talk and talk about something but until you actually see it or feel yourself in that situation you don’t have an understanding of it (Jane, 24).

The drama techniques assist players to investigate, at a very practical level, how they could communicate and how their behaviour is likely to be read by others (Cahill 2005). One implication for those leading projects involving youth is that there is benefit in bringing an interactive design to the dialogue. Traditional meeting structures can be a very limited and boring way to consult people about their views and this can discourage participation. Participatory techniques using inclusive and interactive approaches bring forward the voices and experiences of the people and allow room for them to shift and evolve in the process. They can support a form of action research (Cahill 2006a; Kemmis & McTaggart 2005). Often focus group and interview approaches only ask young people for their opinions or personal experiences. When they are asked to respond as members of a broader society (with connections to adults, families, services, institutions and employers), and are involved in generating solutions as well as identifying needs or problems, then they can more readily leave the limiting youth-specific positions more commonly allocated to them and show up as contributors.

6 MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES
The sixth theme points to the way in which the drama-based participatory techniques generate a deeper thinking and shifts in perspective. Natalie (16) believes that engaging in the drama assists the adults to gain to access to the young person’s perspective and the students to gain an insight into the concerns of the doctor or teacher:

It was kind of teaching a two-way process almost and trying to work out where teachers are actually coming
from … in a school environment you don’t normally think about, you know, the teachers’ perspectives, it is just they’re the enemy and I’m right … it is kind of teaching you to see the other side of the story in a way. [We saw] how tolerant they could be to certain stuff, whereas we don’t see that side of it prior because we just assume that they’re not (Natalie, 16).

This exchange is a form of boundary crossing. Instead of being in opposition, teacher as the enemy, the students re-narrate. Instead of being in a “war” story they are in a story in which people are coming from somewhere and tolerance to certain stuff is possible. Thus Natalie re-frames and re-interprets the teachers’ behaviours. Her previous assumptions (or story about teachers and students) had prevented her from seeing the tolerance of teachers.

As a result of this process, the students seem to be able to see differently. The same signs can be interpreted differently. A new lens enables viewing not just from a different angle, but into a different story. Natalie’s comments suggest that the process assists students to create a new storyline about who teachers are. This new storyline disrupts the discourse in which teachers and students are located as binary opposites and cast in opposition to each other (Davies 1994). In this new story the characters are re-located to share a common humanity.

In a mirror to this, the teachers and medics report a similar shift in thinking about young people. Katrina (25) points to the real appreciation she gets of the individual student:

I saw a whole different side to students and I was amazed by their maturity. I think if anything out of that class I’ve got a real appreciation for the individual student.

Thus Katrina re-imagines who young people are, and re-constructs the identity of ‘student’. Similarly, working with the students has Liz (24) re-appraise the impact of her role-based assumptions:

I think it’s easy when they’re students to forget that they’re people and just speak to them … like they’re a bit stupid or whatever … The kids go, ‘oh it’s really embarrassing and you know it really upsets me [when teachers talk like that to us]’; and you kind of have to think oh well they’re just the same as me you know (Liz, 24).

Once Liz realises they’re just the same as me, she finds she can no longer treat them like they’re a bit stupid. Thus a different way of seeing the students can inform a different stance on the part of the teacher.

These responses highlight the importance of designing processes that assist participants to interact outside of their usual roles. The drama provides a way to investigate sensitive social issues within the frame of the fiction, protecting players from the need to reveal their own stories and allowing them to rehearse options and experiment with different approaches in a penalty-free zone (Cahill 2006b). Along the way participants gain some perspective on their own situations, finding moments of humour as well as compassion as they recognise aspects of their own experience in the fictional characters. Julia (28) points out that it is this type of interaction that enables the participants to humanise each other:

It is a great leveller, because it is not a power relationship that is set up … It kind of humanised both the role of the teacher and the role of the student. And that can tend to be de-humanised in institutions because you are so busy with your agenda (Julia, 28).

This process helps people to see the human being inside the role. It also helps people to bring some perspective to the things that happen, thus helping them to plan better for change.

CONCLUSION

In this program the teacher/student and doctor/patient binaries are straddled when the stakeholders participate in a shared inquiry. As a result of this process the participants see differently, looking not just from a different angle, but into a different story about each other’s identity.

Both adults and young people describe the work as something that meets their needs. The students need a sense of purpose. They have long been institutionalised into recipient roles, and want to be useful and thus become someone of value. Teachers and doctors, as they enter the profession, are in the process of adopting a new identity: This makes them vulnerable. They too are in transition. They do not want to become some terrible authoritarian or some cold professional. They need to learn how to relate well with young people while also fulfilling their professional roles. Both parties value the use of the drama techniques to help them interact in a safe but challenging way. The design of the process is integral to the results that it produces.

This project demonstrates that if we want young people to have a voice and to contribute to social change, we must consider how the roles, positions and tasks they are assigned will enable or constrain the contribution they can make. Equally, if we want to generate a dialogue that is deep enough to drive and sustain change, we must consider the mechanisms and modes through which we will conduct our conversations. We must consider the “art” in participation, and design active and challenging roles for all participants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Five key recommendations can be drawn from this research to inform those devising policies and programs directed at youth:
1 Build ownership and shared purpose
Involves young people with other relevant stakeholders in the design and implementation of the projects that are directed towards meeting their social, educational and health needs.

2 Learn together
Provide opportunities for adults who are working in the human services professions to learn with and from rather than simply about young people.

3 Use protective and empowering participatory processes
Use interactive methodologies to investigate problems, generate solutions and promote a sense of community.

4 Cross the boundaries
Work across institutional boundaries to involve young people in inter-generational participatory projects so as they can connect with, learn from, and contribute to their communities.

5 Assume potential and assign powerful roles
Plan projects directed at youth inside a frame of possibility about their capacity, rather than inside assumptions of deviance, difficulty, risk or failure.

The final recommendation, relating to assuming potential and possibility, is perhaps the most critical of all. This is the assumption that the adults most need to make in order to take the risk of doing things differently.

NOTES
1. At the time of writing, 10 schools were involved in the project.

REFERENCES
— 2006a, ‘Research acts: Using the drama workshop as a site for conducting participatory action research’, NJ (Drama Australia Journal), v.30, n.2, pp.61-72.

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Powerful participation

BY ROD BAXTER & EMMA HAXTON

This paper is a collection of thoughts and ideas that seek to grapple with the concept of power, how power influences youth participation and how youth participation can influence power. It is intended for people and organisations with experience in involving young people in the phenomenon known as ‘youth participation’. It could also be appropriate for young people to read this paper and actively challenge or reflect on times they’ve participated in something. Relationships between organisations, workers and youth are discussed in relation to metaphorical theatre frameworks. Potential pathways in addressing oppressive power issues are also considered.

It's all about power, aye. What power we have to make decisions.
Matt, 17 years, community youth advisory group & youth councillor

The young people of today love luxury. They have bad manners, they scoff at authority and lack respect for their elders. Children nowadays are real tyrants, they no longer stand up when their elders come into the room where they are sitting, they contradict their parents, chat together in the presence of adults, eat gluttonously and tyrannise their teachers.
Attributed to Socrates, circa 399 BC

INTRODUCTION
Power lies at the heart of youth participation in decision-making. The nature of power dynamics, however, can be challenging to unpack in a practice context. Understanding how such dynamics translate in the relationships between young people and adults, workers and management and between young people themselves is fundamental in ensuring effective participation. If we sincerely believe young people have “a part to play” in participatory decision-making, we need to assess positions of power before defining the role(s) available; what exactly is the part young people can play?

For the purpose of this paper, we define power as the potential to influence something. It is not considered as something to be quantified, cut up and dished out in equal dollops. Instead we view it as a fluid entity that, when nurtured in a positive way, can build individual and collective capacities to change both society and ourselves.

This paper explores the nature of power and the consequences of power dynamics in both oppressive and empowering youth participation processes. We consider how dominant discourses about young people in Western society contribute to the practice of oppressive youth participation activities which reinforce the powerlessness of young participants. We explore a participative approach to youth participation, based on the understanding of youth participation as a mechanism for social change, individual and collective empowerment.

The nature of both oppressive power and participative power processes is analysed in the context of a theatrical metaphor. Two practical assessment tools to assist with the unpacking of the power dynamics in youth participa-
tion practices are offered. The first of these tools considers the process transitioning from oppressive to participative modalities. The second tool unpacks the specific layers of power in more depth. This is intended to appeal to a variety of audiences, hopefully revealing some applicable substance for active practitioners.

**YOUNG PEOPLE’S CONTRIBUTION**

The spark which led us on an exploration of power-in-youth-participation was ignited by young people and their experiences in youth participation in Aotearoa New Zealand. Over the past year, a series of informal interviews and chats with young people involved in youth participation activities was undertaken. Most of these young people were either youth councillors within a local government context or members of various youth advisory group members, both with the community and government sector.

Repeatedly, young people were observing that a core factor in determining the effectiveness of their participation was the nature and extent of power experienced by both young people and adults in the participatory process. Their words, scattered throughout this paper, work as a springboard for the ideas we have expressed, and serve to highlight issues around power dynamics from young people’s perspectives. We thank them for sharing their experiences and knowledge as “insiders” to the youth participation world in this exploration of power.

**SETTING THE SCENE: DEFINING PARTICIPATION, DEFINING POWER**

The common understanding of youth participation among academics and practitioners is one in which young people are engaged in a process of societal change. These views appear in various youth-focused publications:

Youth participation means actively involving young people in all areas of our society – the family, school, workplace, place of worship, social group and wider community (Ministry of Youth Development (New Zealand) 2003, p.6).

Youth participation is about this involvement of young people in issues that affect them. It is about having a say or playing a part in something that matters. It is about change (Minister for Youth (South Australia) 2003, p.3).

It is about believing in yourself and your ability to change your world. It is about being part of something (O’Donovan 2003, p.1).

Issues of power are inherently present in participation in subtle and covert ways. Starhawk (cited in Hunter, Bailey & Taylor 1999, p.53) maps three types of power: power-over, power-from-within and power-with. John Heron’s (1990, p.6) authority-autonomy dichotomy resonates alongside this model. Furthermore, these concepts can easily translate in a youth participation context to help us better identify power dynamics.

When adults exercise authoritative power over young participants, we expect leadership rather than dictatorship. This is about facilitation and not abuse. At the other end of the spectrum, the autonomous power within young people permits their fundamental right and capacity to shape their own decisions by themselves and without interference. Youth participation approaches allow these two distinct realms to merge momentarily as we create shared power together.

Society arguably finds it easiest to disproportionately inflate the authoritative power dimension at the expense of shared power with young people, or even their own autonomy. This paper seeks to rectify this imbalance, focusing more attention on the extension of young people’s existing autonomy.

**YOUNG PEOPLE: ON THE EDGE OF THE STAGE**

Who’s got the power? I mean, adults ask us to talk to them when THEY make decisions. We talk, they maybe listen, but they always decide (Scott, 16 years, community youth advisory group).

Western power frameworks that allow oppression and exclusion to flourish have a direct impact on the nature of youth participation. It was over 30 years ago that Arnstein (1969) wrote her pioneering work, the Ladder of citizen participation, which advocated the sharing of power to allow “have-not” citizens to participate in decision-making processes from which they were commonly excluded. Issues of power still permeate every facet of Western society, let alone our participatory practice.

Traditional power structures are very much based on a hierarchical model where one’s ethnicity, gender, sexuality, faith and class (among numerous other factors) determine whether one is allowed centre stage or even
on stage at all, whether one writes the script or reads someone else’s words and whether one gets credit on the program or is confined to backstage anonymity. Our social identities are shaped by dominant discourses which either privilege or oppress us. Foucault’s work (1980) makes clear how embedded discourse is within our society as an instrument and effect of power.

Age is another “category” which has been allowed to thrive as a social identity by which society marginalises both the young and old. Young people live in a society where adults hold most of the resources, rights and rule-making in a “power-over” structure which alienates and excludes young people as “less than” adults (Camino 2000, Stacey 2001, Bessant 2003, 2004, Zeldin 2004).

There’s always going to be the young people less than the adults. Less power, I mean (Sarah, 18 years, youth advisory group member).

The dominant discourse of young people runs rife with concepts and images which characterise young people as less than adults, and thus justifies their lack of voice and power. You only need to read a few newspapers to see that young people are commonly viewed as threatening, irresponsible, mindless and unstable. Young people are represented as “unfinished”, incompetent (Zeldin 2004), “not yet capable of fully responsible action and rational judgment” (Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat 2005, p.111). They are, in a sense, viewed as incomplete, biologically and socially. Unable to vote, they are not truly full citizens. They are dependent on adults for resources, hold little social position and political influence and have fewer legal rights than adults.

**THE NATURE OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION: SOCIAL CONTROL OR SOCIAL JUSTICE?**

The empowerment and social justice ideal within youth participation is often thwarted by the prevalent perception of young people permeating through society. The common reason for youth participation in a youth development framework comes tangled with the view of young people as “adults in the making” with an emphasis on “becoming” rather than “being” (Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat 2005). The result is that youth participation gets diverted to being more about social conformity than social change. Bessant (2003) argues that youth participation can act to further regulate young people under guise of encouraging young people’s capacity as citizens. Instead of challenging society, youth participation can conceal the “hidden agenda” of cajoling young people into conforming to the role of the “good citizen” (Stacey 2001).

I’ve learned to expect less in youth participation things. I used to think ‘YES!’ That we [young people] will be able to organise stuff and make real decisions. Then you discover that the decisions have already been made … important ones. The best thing is to make sure that young people know the rules that they have to work within otherwise we get let down (Jeff, 18 years, former youth councillor).

**THINKING THEATRICALLY ABOUT POWER**

Let’s imagine for a moment that the relationships between organisations, workers and young people are a theatrical production. This is a metaphorical exercise. By utilising a theatrical metaphor to unpack some of the power dynamics present within youth participation processes, we hope to reshape and rebalance the application of power in young people’s favour. In traditional theatre, there are three key players: a director, some performers and an audience. Let’s analyse each of these in turn …

![Figure 2 Oppressive Power (Labels Read From Left: Directive Organisation, Performative Worker And Passive Young People)](image-url)
A worker may truly wish to work collaboratively with young people but become caught into placing young people in passive roles as the audience or selecting one or two young "special" people as "representatives" in the process.

When you looked at the group of young people there, we were all top at our schools, really academic and all that. I don't think we were all the right people to be involved . . . I had no clue about the youth centre or what to do about teenagers hanging out in the mall. Don't ask me what they need, ask them! (Matt, 17 years, community youth advisory group member and youth councillor).

Hart (1997) comments that tokenism is a common issue in youth participation when "articulate and charming" young people are selected by adults to represent and speak for their "peers" (p.41). Workers undertaking "audience participation" are faced with the issues which come with appointing a select few young people who will come to the stage. Two significant issues are: how can young people who are selected by adults be "representative", and which audience member(s) indeed feel confident enough to take up this role and be plunged into the limelight?

There is often stuff about this politician talking to young people but really they are only looking at the people who have done something really big like are really brainy or talented in something. But say you are what they call as 'at-risk' . . . [n]o-one will listen to you 'cause they don't think you have anything to say, like you are too thick or something (Rose, 16 years, from a program for "at-risk youth").

Many young people do not have the self-confidence to move through the "fourth wall" and climb onstage. Young people's self-confidence and self-esteem are closely linked to how young people perceive power in themselves and thus their capacity to act. Hart (1997) comments that young people's sense of self is a significant factor influencing whether young people are keen and able to become involved in community projects.

OPPRESSIVE POWER PLAY: PASSIVE YOUNG PEOPLE

The audience has a passive power, largely separate from the core action. Their purpose is to observe and learn. Engagement with the performers is limited; audience participation may be demanded when it fits the script or director's agenda. Often, audiences find it intimidating to cross the "fourth wall" and climb onstage. This suggests such participation is manipulated and not always voluntary.

The audience is allowed to enjoy the final performance product, but is not present for the rehearsal
process. Once they are assembled, they behave as in uniform, without diversity or individuality. They laugh together, clap together and find it difficult to break such patterns. In many ways, they are trapped until the curtain falls and they are permitted to leave.

When required, young people can effortlessly behave as passive audiences. Having to constantly deal with adults in positions of power in their everyday life in school, home, sports clubs, workplaces and public spaces, young people are well versed in being the passive observer and student.

(During the committee meetings) It was hard not to react like you do in school — [p]utting your hand up to speak is like a kids’ thing and like you have to wait for the adults to finish speaking before they will turn to you and say, ‘YESSSSS!’ (Jen, 16 years, health board advisory group member).

The archaic attitude of “adults know best” also contributed to young people playing the passive and non-critical audience in youth participation processes. Young people may feel like they have little knowledge or expertise to offer in comparison to adult “experts”.

… sometimes in a meeting the adults would start talking in their own language … We would all just go silent. Most of us are pretty confident people but enough of us would say, “hey there you guys, we don’t know what you are talking about”. Who wants to look dumb? (Jen, 16 years, health board advisory group member).

I felt way out of my comfort zone. They didn’t see the normal me – I got quiet and didn’t say much. I am normally the one with the most to say! (Anaru, 17 years, youth representative on adult board).

Those young people who do venture out of the passive audience role, expecting to have a voice, keen to participate will often find themselves returning to their seat or leaving the theatre of youth participation altogether. This can occur when young people are invited to make decisions that are undermined, re-adjusted or ignored.

Most of my friends … thought it was going be a waste of time – that nothing they said would be listened to, so why even go? I mean, how many times do we really get listened to? So if you’ve never had [the experience of being heard] why would you suddenly believe differently? (Katie, 16 years, youth forum participant).

As mentioned, one area of power that can be seized at this point lies in attendance. Young people can choose to avoid participation, but this does not aid in holistic youth development or that of society.

An oppressive approach to participation has a staunch, unidirectional power flow. Directive organisations assume position as ultimate power source, channelled through performative workers and dumped on a passive, youthful audience. Sadly, the result of such intense investment is disempowerment.

Moving from oppressive power play in a youth participation context to harnessing and growing participative power is not an easy feat. This next section offers some ideas about how to build participative power in youth participation practices.

OBLITERATING OPPRESSION: PRACTICING PARTICIPATION

Bessant (2003) offers the question: “Does youth participation contribute to enfranchisement of young people and help secure their fundamental human rights?”. We say that in order for this to occur, we need to address the power dynamics within youth participation practices.

Going back to the heart of why we practise youth participation in the first place is key in challenging oppressive power play. Hart (1997, p.3) defines youth participation as “the means by which a democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured. Participation is the fundamental right of citizenship”. It is not just about young people being listened to or consulted, but actually influencing decision-making. Arnstein, the inspiration behind Hart’s Ladder (1969, p.216), states that “[participation] is the redistribution of power that enables the have–not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future”.

Youth participation relocates from thinking about children as recipients to accepting them as active participants in social change. Young people’s positions in the stalls, on the fringes of society and in the dominant discourse about young people are challenged through youth participation. Young people’s views and opinions are seen as valid in their own right. Young people are viewed as competent to make and implement decisions themselves. Youth participation becomes the process through which empowerment occurs (Treseder & Crowley 2001).

… [E]mpowerment refers to individuals, families, organisations, and communities gaining control and mastery, within the social, economic, and political contexts of their lives, in order to improve equity and quality of life (Jennings et al. 2006).

Unless I am able to analyse the unconscious aspects of the society in which I live, I cannot know who I am, because I do not know which part of me is not me (Fromm 1993, cited in Young 1999, p.86).

A PARTICIPATIVE APPROACH

Youth participation requires a shift in traditional roles between adults and young people (Zeldin 2004). The partici-
Participative approach aims to change traditional power dynamics between young people, workers and organisations. A key question becomes: how can we move from a unidirectional force into this transformative triadic relationship?

We advocate three key movements:

1. Being creative means participation is purposefully creating something.
2. Being active is about actually doing something and taking action.
3. Being collaborative describes the nature of united, respectful and mutually inclusive and interdependent relationships.

Returning to our theatrical metaphor, beginning to employ this approach is to identify a new stage for our production. Rather than building a “theatre” that we expect young people to attend, participative workers locate existing “stages” that young people already inhabit. If students are at school, we can connect there. If young people are riding public transport, we can engage them on the train. Martin (2002, p.123) suggests that if participative relationships exclusively occur in adult contexts, young people will usually feel inadequate.

There is a notable absence of the backstage here, so organisations must come out and become more active. Performative workers will have reduced rehearsal time as the process alongside young people becomes as important any performances. Workers need to develop their improvisation and facilitation skills. Young people are invited to jump out of their fixed seats and dance with workers and organisations onstage. When this happens, society becomes the audience, and is offered a new view of young people.

**Putting this into practice: The POWER*O thermometer**

The transition between the theatrical representations of oppressive and participative power is a process of powering up and generating power. Effective youth participation is unlike a battery that reaches a certain limit. The continuum from powerless to powerful ability has no definitive end. Power commonly “seen as something to be divided rather than shared, like the slices of a cake when the more power one person has, the less everyone else has” (Alderson 2000, p.110) is re-defined as an endless potential for individuals and groups.

Identify how powerful your participation plans, processes or projects are in relation to this POWER*O thermometer:

The POWER*O thermometer is somewhat structurally similar to other models of youth participation, such as Hart’s Ladder (1992, p.9), Treseder’s Wheel (cited in Treseder & Crowley 2001, p.13), Rocha’s Ladder of Empowerment (1997, p.34), Westhorp’s Continuum (1987, cited in Wierenga 2003, p.23) and Barnett’s Steps. The difference with POWER*O is that it specifically targets power dynamics in relationships between young people, workers and organisations. It can, however, complement these models.

POWER*O is not necessarily a set of stages like Hart’s paradigm, nor is it a list of strict principles. It is a measurement tool. POWER*O asks a series of questions to help us reflect on the power present in (and the power of) our youth participation efforts. We measure how well we’re doing in our attempts at actioning anti-oppressive approaches. We measure our roles, the roles of others and the relationships between these roles. We measure and map our work.

**Oppressive**

The very bottom of the thermometer measures zero power. Here sits oppressive, manipulative and misguided attempts at involving young people. This is a powerless position. We can identify initiatives operating at this level, if organisations are being exclusively directive, workers are performing like puppets and young people are passive, if they’re even engaged at all.

- Do we believe young people are competent to make and implement decisions?
- Do we envisage young people playing a part?
- If young participants walked past the organisation’s CEO in the street, would they feel like they could say hello?

**Star**

We must move up from here. The POWER*O thermometer transforms powerlessness into powerfulness. The star breaks oppression away from the other five stages. Perhaps this is a starting point, from which we can move up the thermometer, boosting the participatory power of young people.
Ready
The first cluster of questions measures our readiness:
- Are we prepared to give young people power?
- What roles are we currently assuming?
- What role(s) can young people adopt in decision-making?
- How are our existing relationships with young people?
- Is this an appropriate process to involve young people in?
- How can this process benefit and improve young people’s lives?
- Do we have adequate resources to make this happen?

Readiness asks about roles, relationships and resources. It also asks if this is right (appropriate), relevant and if this is real (meaningful).

Clarifying the roles we play can be a challenging process. However, it is crucial if we expect authoritative-directive organisations to step out from behind the scenes and submissive-performative workers to assertively facilitate new roles. Shen (2006, p.3) states that: “youth workers assist and manage the transfer of power from adults to youth in the organisation”. Workers can reclaim power in humble ways, advocating for improved processes in their organisations and encouraging young people to become involved.

The triadic relationships between young people, workers and organisations are essentially what distinguish oppressive and participative power. The literature indicates that processes such as these are fundamental in youth development, providing meaningful connections between adults and young people (Withers & Batten 1995, cited in Martin 2006, p.11).

Easy
The second cluster of questions measures ease and accessibility:
- Who decided young people should be involved in this?
- Do young people want to be involved?
- Are young people treated as equals?
- What are the boundaries of choice for all participants?
- Where do we engage with young people?
- Is this process exciting?

Ease asks if young people are eager, enthusiastic and energised. It also challenges issues of equity, experience, engagement and empowerment.

The primary step in young people’s involvement is that they freely choose to be involved. Participation is voluntary (Davies 2005, p.7). Organisations do not coerce, manipulate or demand participation. Young (1999) outlines three conditions in helping young people make the choice to participate: an explicit intention and process, young people having a real understanding of their involvement, and “young people [giving] their conscious and informed consent to engage” (p.85).

Participation and engagement are more sophisticated than simply having young people attend a meeting or event. It is more than “taking part” or “having a say” or even being party to decision-making. Participation involves a process of “conscious critical engagement and committed self reflection” (Young 1999, p.86). This process is the responsibility of all players: workers, organisations and young people.

The most complex element of “ease” is the concept of equity. Young people and adults may not be equals, but the rebalancing of power is an act of equity. Therefore, it is the responsibility of workers and organisations to “acknowledge and shift power towards inclusiveness [sic], accessibility, equity and social justice” (Shen 2006, p.10).

Weight
The next cluster of questions measures the weight of power:
- What impact do young people’s decisions have?
- How do we value young people’s contributions?
- Are young people involved for the whole process?
- Who holds the most power in this group?
- Do we welcome innovative, creative and off-the-wall ideas from young people?

Weight asks deeper questions about who young people are involved, what happens to their contributions and who holds power. It allows for weird, wacky and wonderful ideas from participants.

Ownership
These final questions measure who owns the process:
- Do young people feel a sense of belonging?
- Are young people actively taking leadership roles?
- Who primarily promotes the process?
- Does it feel like young people were always involved?
- Is there space for spontaneity?
- How/when is feedback given to young people during/after involvement?
- Where could this go in the future?

Ownership investigates how open the process has become and if it is ordinary to involve young people. It is another chance to observe, and gain outlook for the future.

Participative
This could also be considered as a transformative mode. Even if we have journeyed from an oppressive approach, through the POWER’O thermometer’s measure, into more powerful participation, we have not finished. Our own thermometer, understanding about youth participation and its complexities, continues to grow. Participation is a dynamic, lively process that requires regular review. A continuous process of reflection on power in our work is needed for participative participation is be upheld.

PUTTING THIS INTO PRACTICE:
REFLECTING ON THE CIRCLES OF POWER
To provide opportunities for young people to claim power, we need to look at who holds power, what types of
power are operating and what ways power is being used. Shen (2006) states that anti-oppressive work “provides young people with the tools to unpack the systemic factors that affect their lives. It challenges them to explore other ways of being and learning” (2006, p.10).

Utilising an anti-oppressive framework, the Circles of Power is a reflective tool to help us unpack the factors influencing the power dynamics between ourselves as facilitators of youth participation processes, the organisation we work for and the young people involved. Freire’s (1997) concept of “critical consciousness” is also central here. We need to reflect on how our own biases, assumptions and cultural world views affect the ways we perceive difference and power dynamics (Freire 1997).

There are three areas of power examined here:
• Practiced power (the actual power we have)
• Perceived power (power we think we and others have)
• Potential power (power we never knew we had, empowerment).

Within each of these realms of power, we also need to consider three influences which affect how we practice and perceive power as well as our potential for further empowerment.

Outside influences are those societal influences, discourses, structural factors and social identities within which young people are situated. Inside influences are the effect our own self-esteem, assumptions and personal values have on our practiced, perceived and potential power. Group influences are group dynamics and the way in which the power of groups shapes our own power.

Working around the circles of power to consider the ramifications of the influences on the nature and potential of power can occur at any time in a youth participation project. As we mentioned earlier, we view power as a fluid entity. The nature of our and young people’s practiced, perceived and potential power is always changing. When we explicitly reflect on the power dynamics in which we are enmeshed, we open up opportunities to change the nature and possibilities of power.

Below is a set of questions which could be used as a start to prompt self-reflection or group reflection on power dynamics in youth participation activities. Some of the questions could be used in discussions with young people about power dynamics during a youth participation process. Some of the questions are also directly related to working face-to-face with a group of young people in an ongoing youth participation project.

The Circles of Power framework is designed as a starting point rather than an exhaustive list and we encourage those working in youth participation to develop their own set of questions to examine power in their work.

**Practiced power: Some ideas for reflection**

*Outside influences* on the power we practice:
• How might stereotypes about young people influence your organisation’s attitude towards youth participation?
• What broader structural issues might be influencing how young people behave in youth participation in your organisation?

*Inside influences* on the power we practice:
• What internal issues might be going on for young people who are invisible in youth participation?
• How could you support them to access youth participation?
• How do your own values determine your role in youth participation processes?

*Group influences* on the power we practice:
• What methods of utilising power do you habitually turn to in your own life, work and in the participation process?
• What stage of group development is the group of young people involved in youth participation at? What is going on in terms of leadership, cooperation and other group power dynamics?

**Perceived power: Some ideas for reflection**

*Outside influences* on the power we perceive:
• What kind of power do the young people feel they have in their outside lives and how might this affect their involvement in youth participation?
• What stereotypes might the key decision-makers young people come into contact with in your organisation and others have about young people?

*Inside influences* on the power we perceive:
• When you think about young people, what immediately springs to mind?
• Where in the continuum from powerful to powerless do you feel you are in terms of power in your organisation and the youth participation process you facilitate?

*Group influences* on the power we perceive:
• What power might young people assume you have in the organisation?
• How might young people perceive their power in the process?

**Potential power: Some ideas for reflection**

*Outside influences* on the growth of potential power
• How could you facilitate a process through which young people are equipped with the tools to “unpack the systemic factors that affect their lives” (Shen 2006, p.10) during youth participation?
• How can you work with adult systems to ensure young people’s voices have space and value?
Inside influences on the growth of potential power
- How can you support young people to speak, to have a strong voice?
- How could you support marginalised young people who do not see themselves as having the capacity to act and direct their own life to get involved in youth participation?

Group influences on the growth of potential power
- How can you support young people to grow their collective power?
- How can you support healthy group dynamics with youth groups involved in youth participation which allow all those involved in tap into new power domains?

CONCLUSION

Notions of all children as weak, irrational and dependent are like a house of cards which support one another with no firm foundation. Remove one card and the whole edifice might fall down and, with it, much adult control and professional prestige (Alderson & Montgomery 1996, cited in Alderson 2000, p.57).

The “old school” assumption of ignorant, immature, inadequate youth is no longer relevant. We are experiencing a global movement, encouraging young people to help shape decisions that affect them now and in the future. It is time to take participation to deeper levels, directly addressing oppressive power imbalances and adopting transformative techniques. Arnstein (1969) states that participation without redistribution of power maintains the status quo. In other words, the powerful benefit and the powerless stay immobilised. She also stated that “citizen participation is citizen power” (Arnstein 1969, p.216).

Youth participation has the potential to harness the power of young people, workers and organisations in working to improve young people’s position, value, equity and quality of life in our communities, institutions and society as a whole.

It is clearly still a challenging prospect to clearly unpack power dynamics in a practice context. We suspect the process of assessing positions of power and redefining roles with young people requires ongoing commitment and review from organisations and workers alike. Empowerment, community and social change are all outcomes of an effective youth participation process. One young woman who ended up lobbying her council for better youth recreation facilities said: “I never thought I would do such a strong thing. We took on the council! I was nervous, but us all together was a big force and they had to sit there and listen to our voice … Now we do lots of stuff for the young people here” (Tash, 18 years, provincial youth action group member).

By ensuring a participative approach in which power dynamics are made transparent, reflected upon and confronted, young people such as Tash are able to become a “big force” in re-defining their world.

Whakatauki: Ka pu te ruha ka hao te rangatahi.

Proverb: Life is ever-changing. Let go of the old to create space for the new.

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NOTES
1. We refer to ‘Barnett’s Steps’ as the process of involving young people in boards and committees prepared by Kate Barnett & Associates, outlined in the Minister for Youth (South Australia) 2003, Youth participation handbook for organisations, 2nd edn, Government of South Australia.

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Introducing YES: Young people’s democratic participation – Towards developing a youth democratic voice

BY KATHY EDWARDS

The Youth Electoral Study (YES), conducted between 2003 and 2006, is to date the most comprehensive research project carried out in Australia on youth participation. Although YES focuses primarily on youth participation through voting, the project also examined multiple and varied aspects of participation as well as young people’s attitudes towards politics and democracy more generally. Funded by a Linkage grant from the Australian Research Council with the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) as partner investigator, YES differs from previous studies not only in respect to its breadth but also its methodology. Using both quantitatively based surveys and focus group research with young people (ages 15–25) in schools and youth organisations from 16 disparate electoral divisions across Australia, YES aimed to give young people a free voice to discuss aspects of participation in their own words.

As well as providing a general overview of YES, this paper aims to challenge current thinking in regard to youth electoral participation. Young people are currently considered to possess a ‘civic deficit’ and to be ‘apathetic’ about politics and voting. I reveal not disassociation but disillusion among young people. At the same time I show a commitment to the ideals and values of democracy.

Given this evidence, my paper asks, ‘what factors prevent young people from exercising their democratic rights through participation at the polls?’ Revealed are many structural, procedural and social barriers. I consider access to voting as a social justice issue and I ask what can be done to empower young people such that they are not ‘democratically disadvantaged’. In other words, I consider not young people but a non-inclusive democracy as the problem requiring redress.

INTRODUCTION – YOUTH AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION THROUGH VOTING

A current concern of many democratic nations is the lack of participation by young people in political, democratic and community life. Attention has been drawn to the under-participation of young people as voters in elections, as members of political parties, as volunteers and in communities more generally. Commentators have drawn attention to the future fragility of democracies and the decline of communities on the one hand and the disenfranchisement and weakening of social capital of young people on the other. Such pronouncements have sparked debate, with other commentators arguing that such concerns are overstated, or that young people do participate, but not in conventional or normative ways.

In this paper, rather than asking broader questions about whether young people participate and how, I focus specifically on one “conventional”, but also fundamental, aspect of participation – voting. Here the “discourse of concern” focuses on statistical evidence that young people are not registering as voters or turning out at the polls. Concern has been raised about low youth turnouts in the United Kingdom (TEC n.d.), the United States (Lopez et al. 2005) and Canada (Pammett & Le Duc 2003).
The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) highlights the particular “growing dissatisfaction and apathy among young people in new and old democracies alike” based on global turnout statistics of youth turnout (Ballington 2002, p.111).

Some warning signs indicate that young people may be eschewing voting in Australia also, despite Australia’s compulsory franchise. For example it is estimated that only around 80% of eligible young Australians between the ages of 18 and 25 are enrolled to vote, compared with 95% for the eligible voting age population as a whole. Put another way, this means that around one-fifth of this age cohort is not participating in the first step toward electing their democratic representatives.

“Youth participation” in general terms is a focus of policy in Australia. To this end there have been a number of initiatives at all levels of government designed to foster the participation of young people in their communities and in decision-making processes. In terms of approaches to voting, however, the policy literature has largely attributed lower than the population average enrolments to apathy about this form of democratic participation and cynicism about democratic institutions more generally.

The discussion paper Education for active citizenship in Australian schools and youth organisations (Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training (SSCEET) 1988) described the “pervasive ignorance” of young Australians regarding democratic institutions and principles (SSCEET 1988, p.10). Highlighted was a 1983 AEC study that explained this lack of participation as arising from the fact that young people “do not see any direct link between the Government or Government institutions and their own lives” (SSCEET 1988, p.6).

This, it was concluded, results in apathy, defined as lack of “any feelings toward or knowledge of our political system and what it means to live in a democracy” (SSCEET 1988, p.6).

The resulting policy paper, Education for active citizenship (SSCEET 1989), described young people as displaying “indifference” to government institutions and as having a “sense of exclusion” from democratic life (SSCEET 1989, p.15). The policy recommendations arising from the report suggested education through schools and youth organisations as a remedy and as a way of encouraging a “positive attitude towards participation in Australia’s democratic system” (SSCEET 1989, p.34).

Whereas some initiatives have been made to publicise voting and make enrolment more accessible (particularly through the presence of the AEC at youth events such as the Big Day Out), and despite a wider discourse about youth participation more generally, similar themes prevail some 20 years later when voting is discussed.

In 2006 the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) called for a public inquiry into the under-enrolment of several groups of Australians, including youth, as voters. The inquiry specifically aimed to investigate the “quality of education provided to”, and improve the “electoral awareness” of, these Australians, including youth, who were described as having “little interest in Australian political affairs” (JSCEM 2006).

This policy literature thus delineates “civically deficit” from “civically active” young people. There is a majority tendency in the policy literature to attribute lower than the population average youth enrolments to a lack of education. Indeed, as the title of the discussion paper that framed the original policy model indicates, education was in fact proposed as the solution before the problem was even investigated. However, despite the “education solution” being proposed in most policy models and Civics and Citizenship Education being a part of the curriculum in most Western democracies, low youth electoral turnouts prevail. There are now “rumblings” about the inadequacy of education in providing a pathway to youth participation more broadly and in an international context (Iyengar & Jackman 2004; Levine & Youniss 2006). YES research shows that the “education solution” to lower than the population average youth electoral enrolments must be challenged in Australia also.

NEW APPROACHES TO YOUTH ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION – INTRODUCING YES

In this paper I address the issue of youth electoral participation in a different way. I take the view that it is generally a good thing for both youth and Australia’s democracy that young people do participate through voting. I also do not dispute that more and better education about democracy and politics is generally a good thing. However, I challenge some of the assumptions of the policy literature and introduce a new angle to the debate about electoral participation.

To this end I add my voice to those who argue that young people are in fact participatory. I highlight the interest of many young people in political issues and their commitment to the principles of democracy. I then ask what may prevent young people from exercising their democratic right to enrol to vote and render them “democratically disadvantaged”. In other words instead of casting non-participatory young people as “the problem”, I consider electoral participation in a social and political context and examine the democratic structures in which young people participate as voters. I suggest that both the “apathy problem” and “education solution” overlook major contributing factors to lower than average youth enrolments. In this context I explore three intersecting barriers facing young people with respect to the exercise of their democratic right of the franchise. These barriers are: political barriers where young people are given the right to vote but also remain politically marginalised, structural barriers contained within the Commonwealth Electoral Act itself, and social barriers faced by marginalised young people (particularly those with compromised access to a home). Crucially I also explore the issue of youth electoral participation through the voices of young people.
themselves. Finally I provide some foundations for a new framework of young people’s participation as voters.

Data for this paper come from the Youth Electoral Study (YES), a four-year project funded by an Australian Research Council ‘Partnerships with Industry’ grant, as well as by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC). The core aim of YES was to investigate why many young Australians between 18 and 25 years do not register on the Australian Electoral Roll. To this end, YES explored young people’s attitudes towards enrolling and voting and aimed to understand what motivates them to, or prevents them from, enrolling and voting. In this context YES examined how young people themselves regard and define politics and participation, as well as how they conceive of democracy and voting. Here, the project opened new ground in research into young people and democratic participation in Australia. YES also moved beyond the framework offered in the policy literature to consider it an open question as regards how young people participate and why they may choose to, or not to, participate. Of importance in YES, then, was allowing young people a free voice with which to discuss their attitudes and perspectives.

YES METHODOLOGY
Participants in YES’s qualitative research came from 16 disparate Commonwealth Electoral Divisions across Australia. Inclusive in this total were divisions in rural and remote areas, major regional centres, inner-city and outer-suburban areas. This paper focuses on research conducted with school students (aged 15–18) as well as with young people (aged 17–25) who were identified as in some way marginalised through poverty, unemployment, homelessness or similar circumstances.

School participants were interviewed over two years, first when they were in Year 11 and second when they were in Year 12. Across the 16 participating divisions we selected a full range of schools from the public, Catholic and independent systems. Although most were comprehensive co-educational schools, our sample included single-sex schools, selective high schools and specialist schools. A total of 476 students from 55 schools participated in the study.

Participants described as “marginalised” were approached through a number of service organisations in a smaller selection of our divisions representing inner city, outer suburban, rural and remote areas. Targeted organisations included drug and alcohol counselling services, employment assistance agencies, street beats, drop-in centres, accommodation provision services, youth centres and recreation facilities. In total 55 young people participated in this research. In addition, further information regarding marginalised youth was gathered by way of interviews with 15 youth workers and other professionals familiar with their circumstances.

The research team decided that the best way to explore young people’s voices was by the use of focus groups. This was our sole method in our school research and our preferred method when gathering responses from marginalised young people. For logistical reasons some interviews with marginalised young people were conducted as written surveys. Focus groups enabled participants the opportunity to interact with and respond to others and assisted in circumventing power relationships between older researchers and younger people. Further, they allowed for texture, that is, for a multiplicity of views within a group.

Interviews utilised semi-structured questions, were audiotaped, and were conducted with focus groups consisting of between five and eight young people. Written surveys were administered either by researchers, or, in some cases, youth workers who had been fully briefed by project staff. Survey instruments were adapted from the focus group instrument in order to allow for cross-comparison. We adopted an approach that was conversational in style and which aimed as much as possible to put interviewees at ease. All participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity and were informed that the survey was not a test, but simply a forum for them to express their opinions.

Interviews with youth professionals were audiotaped and conducted as semi-focused individual or small group interviews. These interviews were designed to find out about some of the broader issues or social circumstances generally facing the young people who were their clients. Participants were assured of confidentiality and it was specified that we were not asking them to identify or comment on individual cases. The object of these interviews was to gather broader social context and to allow us to put data gathered through our research with young marginalised people themselves in this context.

Post-interview, all tapes and written surveys were analysed using an analysis sheet that encapsulated the major themes of the interview questions. All participants, schools, organisations and divisions have been given unique pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. Where quotes from participants have been used they are verbatim, but may have been edited slightly to preserve anonymity and to improve readability.

POLITICAL BARRIERS TO DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION THROUGH VOTING
Contrary to the claims of the policy literature, YES research has revealed that young people are interested in a variety of political issues of personal, local, national and international importance (Edwards 2005; Edwards, Saha & Print 2005). There were, of course, varying levels of political interest expressed. However, most participants, when asked, could name a political issue of interest to them. Also revealed is that young people have “feelings toward” democracy as a political system. Revealed was not a lack of interest but instead a scepticism of the scope of democracy in Australia today (Edwards 2007, forthcoming). Here we add our voices to others (Henn,
Weinstein & Wring 2002; Henn, Weinstein & Forrest 2005; O’Toole et al. 2003; O’Toole 2003; Vromen 2003) who dispute that young people are disengaged from politics. Bessant’s argument that there remain few and limited channels through which young people can participate is also noted (Bessant 2003, 2004). YES’s contribution to this literature was in discussing with young people in Australia their attitudes specifically about one form of participation open to all citizens – voting.

Other common themes that arose in YES research were expressions of feelings of powerlessness, marginalisation as young people and of the limited efficacy of voting. These provided significant political barriers to electoral participation. Participants were asked whether they thought that by voting they could influence issues (previously identified in a separate question) that were of interest to them. Whereas some considered that voting could have an effect, others indicated that “real” power lay elsewhere. This is best illustrated by giving voice to participants. A school participant, Breanna, said, “in the end it is the people you vote for” who have the real decision-making power, and she was therefore dubious about the value of voting. Sez, a client of the Smithtown Drug and Alcohol Addiction Service, was highly articulate and interested in political issues. Although she described democracy as “very important”, she also indicated that she was not enrolled to vote. She described voting as “pointless” because it did not change things. Dylan, from the Seaside Youth Centre, was highly interested in political issues. In describing his own lack of desire to participate through voting he said, “it’s not that I really don’t care, it is just that I don’t think I can [effect change], which means that I will sit back and see what happens”.

One issue that demonstrated both interest in things political as well as perceptions of the powerlessness of voting was “the war” in Iraq. Usually referred to simply as “the war”, this conflict was discussed with passion and in great detail by many participants. Although some supported the war, the most common perception was that it was an unjust war and one entered into despite the will of the people. Louis described the war as “just the Prime Minister’s decision”. At Cheltenham College, students were particularly passionate in their opposition to the war. When the issue of the possible effect of voting was raised, the general view here was that voting could not do much because “they don’t take out a ballot box every time they declare a war”. Cillian, a participant from Saints Youth Accommodation Service, said, “you vote for one person and one person can’t change a war”.

For marginalised young people, feelings of powerlessness and perceptions of lack of efficacy were also linked with very personal experiences. Mia had left home and dropped out of school at 14 to live on the streets. At the time of her interview Mia was only 17, but she was ambivalent about enrolling and voting and agreed that if she did so it would only be to avoid the fine. Her partner, Alfie, described his powerlessness in terms of being forced, against his will, to “work for the dole” in a job that he considered taught him nothing and where he felt he was exploited. Neither Mia nor Alfie thought that by voting they could change things. They saw the world as made up of “old people” who were “in power” and “young people” who were powerless. Voting in their eyes would change nothing because it would not alter this fundamental hierarchy of power.

Some participants complained that young people were not represented in parliament and that young voters were not “listened to”. In describing politicians, one school participant said, “they’re all old men”. Others said that the issues discussed by politicians tended to be those that affected working people, like taxes and interest rates. One said that politicians needed to “take our views into consideration”, another asked for “a representative who will listen to youth concerns”. At Our Lady Of Lourdes Catholic College, lack of consultation with young people was raised by a number of participants. Jana said, “if young people knew their voice would be heard it would be a hell of a lot more appealing to vote”. Mala agreed, saying, “how often do we speak to the Youth Minister?”.

A brief survey of the 2004 federal election demonstrates some of the political barriers that young people face. Two dominant themes of this election were interest rates and “the family”. Indeed, in announcing this election, Prime Minister Howard asked voters, “who do you trust to keep the Australian economy strong and to protect family living standards?” (Howard 2004). He also asked who “do you trust to keep interest rates low?” (Howard 2004). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates that few young people under the age of 25 own, or are in the process of buying, their own homes, and that the likelihood of a person living in a home that is owned or being purchased “usually increases with the age of the household reference person” (ABS 2003). Further, attaining the age of majority is a time when many young people begin to think of themselves as “individuals” and separate from their families. Certainly young people did not describe either interest rates or “the family” as issues they were interested in. Finally, this election resulted in a “middle-aged” parliament where the youngest member is now 28 and there are no members between 18 and 25 (Miskin & Lumb 2006). Whereas the policy discourse sees young people as “civically deficit” for not voting, a reassessment of the issue through their eyes and voices indicates that young people are being chastised for not voting in a system that constructs barriers to participation as voters in the form of marginalisation of young people’s interests and issues and lack of representation in parliament.

**STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION THROUGH VOTING**

As well as conducting the abovementioned inquiry into youth and voting, the JSCEM also recently recommended
some aspects of social marginalisation on the ability of (Levine & Youniss 2006; Winter 2003). The effect of capacity to partake in other forms of participation resource-based links between marginalisation and lack Commission 2005). Researchers have also explored the link between social marginalisation and minority democracies is well known (Lijphart 1997; The Electoral vote and to remain enrolled and thus create structural barriers to youth enrolment. While the JSCEM raises the failure of youth to enrol hard for young people to enrol to vote, and people who had changed their address to update their details. An adopted recommendation of the JSCEM is that the roll will now close on the day the writs are issued for new voters and three days after for those on the roll, but wishing to change their address. The JSCEM contends that this will contribute to the integrity of the electoral roll by giving electors less scope to move to incorrect addresses that may advantage some party interests over others (JSCEM 2005 pp.31-32, 35). Although this amendment is both ostensibly neutral and universal, there is evidence to suggest that it may have a disproportionate effect on young people, and create for them a structural barrier to the franchise. Above it was noted that the ABS estimates that few people under the age of 25 are purchasing, or own, their own home. Most young people, after leaving the family home, and before most purchase their own home, live in rental accommodation, often shared, and where they are frequently mobile (Casey 2002, p.2). Given this, it is more likely that older rather than younger Australians will have stability of address and it is easier for those with stability of address to enrol, remain on the electoral roll and vote. While the JSCEM raises the failure of youth to enrol to vote as issue of concern, then, they recommend policies that actually make it harder for young people to enrol to vote and to remain enrolled and thus create structural barriers to youth enrolment.

SOCIAL BARRIERS TO DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION THROUGH VOTING

The link between social marginalisation and minority status and the tendency not to vote in voluntary democracies is well known (Lijphart 1997; The Electoral Commission 2005). Researchers have also explored the resource-based links between marginalisation and lack of capacity to partake in other forms of participation (Levine & Youniss 2006; Winter 2003). The effect of some aspects of social marginalisation on the ability of some individuals to vote in a compulsory democracy has also been explored. For example, researchers at the Public Law Information Clearing House (PILCH) have studied the effects of homelessness on the ability of eligible citizens to enrol and vote (PILCH 2005). Evidence from YES suggests that young people who have compromised access to safe, stable and secure accommodation experience social barriers to the franchise. Although access to housing is a fundamental human right, it has been estimated that there are around 100,000 Australians who are homeless. Of these, 26% are between the ages of 12 and 18, and 10% are between 19 and 25 (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003, p.4).

Where eligible citizens have no fixed address it is possible to enrol as an itinerant elector. In this case an individual is required to enrol in the first instance in last division in which they were enrolled, second in the same division as their next of kin, third in the division in which they were born, or, fourth, in a division that they have an emotional connection with. However, should they establish a residence and live there for a period of one month, they are required to register as an ordinary elector. Evidence from YES data suggests the inadequacy of these requirements.

YES encountered many different facets of homelessness. Youth professionals described both the transience of their clients and the difficulties encountered in finding them accommodation. Described were inadequate public housing, couch surfing and high rents. Palmville was facing a more generalised property crisis due to an influx of workers from a nearby mining operation. Alice, from the Palmville Youth Drop-In Centre, reported that great numbers of young people there often slept in cars or on local beaches.

Young people told similar stories. At the Seaside Youth Centre, Maya was unable to tell us how many times she had moved because she had lost count. Toby and Batya had moved eight or nine times. The least that anyone here had moved was three times. Alfie and Mia, a couple from Palmville, described constant mobility. When it was available, and when they had the financial resources, they lived in various rental accommodations. At other times they stayed with friends and relatives. They had also lived in Alfie’s car for eight months when they had no other options. When asked to estimate the number of times they had moved in the last three years, Alfie said he had “lost count at 25”.

This reveals the complexity of housing for many young marginalised people. Few had security of housing and almost all were highly mobile. Changes of address and, crucially, only limited time in each abode were frequent. In many cases participants would not fulfill the criteria of one month’s residency in any abode to allow them to enrol and vote as ordinary electors. In others maintaining correct enrolment would require constant amendments to their address. However, many were also resident at addresses for more than one month, technically precluding them from maintaining enrolment.
as itinerant electors, should they wish to enrol this way.

Other aspects of the itinerant voting procedures also pose logistical issues for many marginalised young people. The division they are required to enrol in (for example that of a next of kin) may not be one that is convenient to cast a polling day vote in or one that the elector has even visited. Voting out of one's division can be a complex procedure, especially if one is not resident in the state or territory in which they are enrolled. This may require a visit to a pre-poll voting station or a postal vote, which, of course, necessitates an address for the voting papers to be delivered to.

There was a marked tendency for marginalised participants not to be enrolled to vote. For example, of the group at Seaside Youth Centre, only one, Talcott, was enrolled, and he had only voted once. Talcott told us that since enrolling he had moved eight or nine times through three different states and had found voting difficult as a result. He said, “I've got a heap of fines built up. It is just that I move so much and you have to vote in the area that you live so I could not vote”. Of the group at the Palmville Youth Drop-in Centre, only Alfie had enrolled. Alfie thought he was still on the Electoral Roll. However, he also reported that he had found out he was not enrolled when he last went to vote.

Lack of access to stable housing also raises other social barriers to the franchise. Enrolling takes time and energy, precious resources in a daily struggle to acquire the basics of living. Where enrolling necessitates constant amendments, this task is made all the more arduous. None of our participants reported being enrolled as itinerant electors. Many told us they “had other things to worry about”, such as finding employment, dealing with personal issues or simply finding a meal, and that voting was, in relation, “not important”. Most evocatively, Dylan, from the Seaside Youth Centre, told us, “politics was pushed back at the furthest part of my brain, my safety was my issue”. Sandra had enrolled to vote, but she had since moved house (six times in the last three years) and was unsure if she was still enrolled. She didn’t know how to re-enrol and was not interested in finding out, indicating that with a recent pregnancy she had other priorities. Indicated here is not a lack of caring about enrolling or voting but instead a situation where time and energy are sapped by day-to-day concerns of a survival nature that must take priority.

Demonstrated by the above is that some social disadvantages may prevent young people from accessing the franchise. Eligible Australians are guaranteed the right to vote; however, they are not guaranteed an equality of access to the vote. Those most disadvantaged socially face barriers that inhibit access and which may “democratically disadvantage” them.

**CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A NEW FRAMEWORK**

In this paper I have suggested that the current policy discourse of youth participation through voting is limited in its ability to understand the issue of young people and electoral enrolment and also in its presupposition that greater degrees of electoral participation can be effected through education. Education is empowering and its virtues should not be overlooked. But it alone is not a solution to youth disenfranchisement because “lack of education” is not the sole cause.

When we listen to the voices of young people we hear both that they care about political issues and that many are interested in participation through voting. Preventing them are political, structural and social barriers inherent in Australia’s representative democracy. By considering these barriers, rather than assuming that failure to enrol to vote results simply from a deficit of individuals, related to either personal failings or “lack of education”, I have painted a rather different picture of voting to that of the current policy literature.

I have shown that the franchise may be a straightforward civil right, (and a duty in Australia), but it is a right embedded in a social context that can detrimentally affect the realisation of this right. To this end not all Australians have equal access to enrolling to vote. In fact, young people, and some more than others, are being disenfranchised by the very democracy that chastises them for their disassociation. I argue here that it is consequently time to develop a new framework through which to view young people and electoral participation. This involves reconfiguring the context and language of electoral participation.

In contemplation of this new framework I first propose that access to the franchise be taken seriously as a civil right. When amendments to the Electoral Act are mooted, ease and equality of access should be a primary concern. Access to the franchise should also be considered as a social justice issue and embedded in a social justice framework with other issues of human rights. Rarely is access to the franchise considered as a concern of social policy, yet social policy approaches in respect to many issues can make access to the franchise easier or harder. Above, access to safe, affordable housing that allows for constancy of address has been discussed as one issue impacting on the ability of many youth to realise their right of the franchise. Other potential social barriers also need to be considered.

I also contend that electoral participation is better viewed through the language of advantage, disadvantage and discrimination. The use of these terms serves to provide an alternate description of youth disenfranchisement that takes it out of an individualist “civic deficit” model and places it in a social and political framework characterised by aspects of advantage and disadvantage as well as relations of power. This allows for both structural and social barriers to be highlighted. These pose democratic disadvantages for young people, and, where they exist, young people can be considered to face “democratic discrimination”. These terms are also especially useful for describing some of the political
barriers to the franchise that young people face. Where young people and their issues are marginalised, this can be described as democratic disadvantage. Where young people are under-represented in parliament, this can also be considered as democratic discrimination against young people as a group. Both lack of electoral participation and the impetus to participate take on different meanings when viewed in this context. Most importantly, the problem of electoral participation becomes a broader one where the functions and scope of Australia’s democracy are put under the spotlight, not the failings of youth.

To this end, I also contend that attention should be paid to the structures and practices of the democracy that young people are entering as enfranchised citizens. The policy literature emphasises the necessity to educate young Australians toward a more positive attitude to this democracy. Instead of dismissing the concerns of young people as “negative attitudes”, their feelings of powerlessness, lack of efficacy and exclusion should be taken seriously, as should their criticisms of the scope of Australia’s democracy. Indeed it is legitimate for adults to examine and critique our democracy, why not youth?

The most important lesson learned from YES, and fundamental for any new framework, is the necessity to involve youth as subjects and not merely objects of research, and to encourage and listen to their voices. When asked, youth describe a very different picture of their electoral participation to that painted within the policy literature. Failing to involve youth, or pay attention to their voices, not only further disadvantages youth, it is counterproductive because it results in the wrong problems and solutions being posed.

NOTES
1. This paper is based on research conducted as part of the Youth Electoral Study (YES). YES was principally funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC) with Industry Partner funding and in-kind contributions from the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC). Acknowledgments are due to the chief investigators for the project, Murray Print from the University of Sydney, Lawrence Saha from the Australian National University as well as to our partner investigator, Brien Hallet.

In addition, YES’ research staff, Susan Bassett, Mia Christensen, Susan Gilbert, Jen Hayward, David Heath, Sarah Howe, Amy Kuchel, Kris McKraken, Jacqueline Mikulsky, Kate O’Connor, Kate O’Malley, Tony Smith, Kerri Weeks and Michael Willis contributed to data collection and/or analysis. This paper acknowledges the group effort of researchers. However, opinions expressed in this chapter are solely those of the author.

2. These data were obtained from the Australian Electoral Commission and are the best that current methods of modelling of enrolment data can provide. Figures quoted, however, are approximate only and may be subject to future revision.

3. This is despite there being any substantial evidence that such movements occur (Sawyer 2006).

4. The subject of homelessness and voting in age non-specific terms has been addressed in other Australian Studies (PILCH 2005; AEC 2005).

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INTRODUCTION
It could be said that modern Western culture has, as two of its defining characteristics, a consumer culture marked by materialism and a focus on individuality, also called individualism. There are varied opinions as to the effects these cultural characteristics may have upon the lives of young people. Some would argue that materialism breeds a culture of competition within schools because materialism is about gaining advantage over another for material gain. Others may argue that focusing on the self works to the detriment of community-building because the attention is on individual needs and desires rather than the ways in which people can help each other to live together. Yet community is important to young people’s wellbeing because it can foster a sense of belonging. Spirituality has a role to play in community-building because it could be about the ways in which people support each other for a common good. However, what is meant by spirituality and the role it could play in secular education systems is unclear. This paper will examine the possibilities for spirituality within secondary schools using a case study from my research project into young people and spirituality. The paper will explore some initial thoughts about what is meant by spirituality, why we need spirituality within schools and how we could go about incorporating spirituality into education systems.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND SPIRITUALITY
RESEARCH PROJECT
Research method
This project was designed to explore young people’s understandings of spirituality in order to gain some idea of where the common parameters lie. For this reason, young people with a pre-existing interest in spirituality were approached. The young people were asked to either a) complete an online survey which can be found at: (www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/yrc/survey/s2.html) and/or b) partake in a one-hour (maximum) in-depth interview exploring personal understandings and expressions of spirituality. The young people were assured that their answers would remain anonymous and for that reason all names in this paper have been changed. The young people were also assured that the interview was not about right or wrong answers, but simply an exploration of their understandings of spirituality and what it means to them. A variety of organisations and faith groups were approached in order to gain as broad a spectrum of meaning as possible. From blanket invitations to participate, faith groups and individuals could then self-select to be part of the project.

The following paper explores some of the issues raised from initial responses to the survey and interview questions. One young woman responded early on to...
the survey and I will use her answers as an example of the role I perceive spirituality could play in education systems. There was no way of knowing which school this young person attended. This young woman's responses will be used for illustrative purposes and to argue my case for spirituality within schools and, it is for this reason, that I ask that her answers be seen as indicative rather than representational. The data collection process is still on-going so it is not possible to more fully explore the data at this time.

**FLY’S SCHOOL EXPERIENCE**

Felicity, “Fly” to her friends, is a 16-year-old high school student who describes her life as “hectic, busy, stressful” because of “family issues, friends, school, adolescent issues” (Student survey response 2007). She goes on to describe one of the defining experiences of her school year so far:

> My reputation and the people I hung out with changed the teachers’ opinion of me, treated me differently. Then I just gave up on schoolwork (Student survey response 2007).

Behind this snapshot of Fly’s school experience lie many questions. What are the culture of the school and the nature of the teacher/student relationships that create these attitudes? What does “reputation” really mean and who cares about it anyway? Some of the teachers may have cared about “reputation” and therefore changed their attitude towards Fly. How could the situation have been handled differently so that Fly did not have to feel as if she needed to “give up on school work”? If the school community had accepted and valued Fly for who she was rather than what she did, would the situation still have occurred? How could an awareness of the spiritual domain have improved the quality of this relationship? In attempting to answer some of these questions within a broader framework, it is important to first discuss what I mean by spirituality.

**WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?**

Understanding the role spirituality plays or could play in schools is difficult because spirituality and what it means to be spiritual are vague and elusive concepts. Furthermore, spirituality is defined in personal terms and within each person’s frame of reference. Also, spirituality is often defined in terms of what it is not, rather than what it is. For many people, spirituality is not about religion. I interviewed “J” at a metropolitan drug and rehabilitation centre where spirituality plays a role in recovery and he expressed the view that:

> I know whenever someone talks, at first, now it’s different, whenever someone spoke about spirituality, I automatically thought … religion. And to me religion’s just a load of shit. That’s religion. I believe all religions at their base are the same. They’re just a set of rules and guidelines to live a spiritual life, like I said before, having respect for others, honesty, open-mindedness, willingness, whatever you want for the world to interact (J, interview 1, 2007).

Modern understandings of religion and spirituality see these concepts as separate, sometimes opposite, entities (Mason et al. 2006). But what spirituality *is* is much harder to pinpoint.

Even though spirituality may be impossible to define, it is necessary to have some understanding of its nature in order to argue the case for spirituality in schools. For this reason, I use a quote from Hart (in Roehlkepartain et al. 2006) as a basis for this discussion. Hart describes spirituality as:

> “Spirit is not in the I but between the I and you. It is not like the blood that circulates in you, but like the air in which you breathe”, wrote Buber (1923/1970, p.89). Spirituality is often lived out at the intersection of our lives – at the meeting between you and me. It is the quality of these human encounters that is the basis of a relational spirituality (p.172).

It could be that the basis for understanding spirituality more deeply and grappling with the issue of spirituality in schools is found in this notion of relational spirituality. However, what is it that determines the “quality”, as Hart suggests, of those encounters? J thinks that:

> Before coming here, I was living in a country town and there was still that sense of community because it was still small enough that you could incorporate it into living life – growing up in the suburbs, there’s not that sense of community. No-one knows anyone, whereas years ago, there was that, you knew your next door neighbour, you knew everyone who lived in proximity of your house, everyone knew each other (J, interview 1, 2007).

What is it that would support the quality of human encounters so that at the intersection of our lives, positive relationships occur? The answer could be found in recognising the need to reflect upon the quality of these encounters. The problem is that in modern Western culture, many factors work to undermine spirituality, but the need for spirituality, I would argue, is necessary now, more than ever before. This issue is discussed in the next section.

**WHY WE NEED SPIRITUALITY**

A spiritual dimension for schooling is needed in order to counter the damaging effects of two strong cultural influences, namely, materialism and individualism. It is also important in developing community within a school
so that the damaging effects of these influences are lessened and in order for positive relationships to be built. It is in this way that young people can gain feelings of belonging and acceptance.

**MATERIALISM AND INDIVIDUALISM**

Materialism and individualism infiltrate daily life in many ways and they can undermine the wellbeing of young people and society as a whole (Resnick, Harris & Blum 1993; Eckersley, Wierenga & Wyn 2006). Eckersley (2004) believes that materialism "seems to breed not happiness but dissatisfaction, depression, anxiety, anger, isolation and alienation" (p.40, with reference to Kasser 2002), and that individualism "encourages a perception that we are separate from others and the environment in which we live, and thus from the very things that influence our lives" (Eckersley 2004, p.41). Materialism and individualism not only affect a person at the individual level but, by influencing values, they impact on society's wellbeing as well (Eckersley 2004). Further, Crawford & Rossiter (2006) note that what is of concern is a preponderance of "nihilistic thinking – a tendency to believe there is no meaning to life" (2006, p.11) because, when young people look around them, there is little to hope for (Crawford & Rossiter 2006). Young people therefore find themselves growing up in a society where ties are loose and where people may not necessarily feel responsible for others because they perceive themselves as separate from, rather than part of, another's life.

Further, the drive to gain material possessions (materialism) forges a wedge between members of a community because it focuses on the drive to gain more things, which in turn makes people protective of the things they do have and therefore less willing to share. This further breaks down trust and concern (Eckersley, Wierenga & Wyn 2006) and these are vital ingredients for a community's sustainability.

Moreover, individualism can be considered the opposite of community when autonomy and independence are confused and a person sees themselves as separate from and not responsible to the community in which they live (Eckersley, Wierenga & Wyn 2006). Purpel (1989) believes that one of the greatest issues facing society is this juxtaposition between "individuality/community" (p.31). The understanding here of individuality is that of "egocentricity":

... a belief that the individual is the basic and most important unit of decision-making (p.31).

The group can become a place for competition rather than support – particularly in the race to gain material acquisitions (Purpel 1989). This can set up a tense situation between a person's desire to belong (Crawford & Rossiter 2006) and the reality of being forced to view group members as competitors in a material race, because community becomes "orientated around class rather than humanity" (Purpel & McLaurin 2004, p.31). The value of success in this society is measured in material outcomes, to the detriment of deep, intimate and satisfying relationships (Crawford & Rossiter 2006). Eckersley (2004) believes that individualism "encourages a perception that we are separate from others and the environment in which we live, and thus from the very things that influence our lives" (p.41). The question then becomes, how do we attempt to assuage these effects? Building community through spirituality is one way forward.

**COMMUNITY**

Young people have, in addition to a desire to foster their own individuality, a "yearning for community and a sense of belonging" (Crawford & Rossiter 2006, p.215). Meeting the need to belong can be instrumental in diminishing the effects of alienation and disengagement from school (Patton et al. 2000), and a sense of belonging to school can serve the needs of those students for whom other avenues of belonging have been closed off. In this sense, schools play a pivotal role. But what factors foster positive community-building? Spirituality could be instrumental in building positive community experiences.

"S" describes how she came to take part in a mental health program run independently through a metropolitan centre:

Yeah, there's this disconnection and it's like we're all out there looking after ourselves and everything in our culture is catering to the me, me and I want it now and I will have it now and I'll buy it now and it's … that's … our culture alienates me (S, interview 1, 2006).

S sees a direct link between a culture that concentrates solely on "me" and the "disconnection" manifest in society. Eckersley et al. (2006) believe that spirituality is about connection:

At the most fundamental, transcendent level, there is spiritual meaning: a sense of having a place in the universe. Spirituality represents the broadest and deepest form of connectedness. It is the only form of meaning that transcends people's personal circumstances, social situation and the material world, and so has a powerful capacity to sustain them through adversity (pp.37-38).

Kessler (2000) believes that a "meaningful connection includes respect and care that encourages authenticity for each individual in the group" (p.22). S echoes this sentiment when she explains what she would have like to see happen at her school:

I was just going to say … I think in schools maybe there might be something basic like every single person is special to the universe, like, I'm not a
and special. In Fly’s case, it is possible to imagine her that we do not act alone and that we are all connected “I”. Spirituality when understood as “we” reminds us a person’s response to the world in terms of “we” not (p.172). Hart’s understanding of spirituality can frame something like nurturing what is it that they’re passionate about and that will make them feel special for something. And then that’s important in this universe, together, and we’ve each got something to contribute, that, it’s as basic as that sounds. ‘Cause there was nothing like that … [at school] … (S, interview 1, 2006).

Kessler (2000) goes on to argue that belonging could almost be equated with a “spiritual hunger” (p.22) and that the moves she has noticed in the United States to build up community “reflect[s] a growing awareness of the profound need of children and adolescents to feel a part of something larger than themselves and their families” (p.23). Calvert (2000) affirms the importance of belonging when she says:

I think we can accept that the best way to enhance the wellbeing of children and young people is to ensure that they have strong connections with their family and with the institutions of their community, especially with schools. Strong caring relationships are the best way to maximise the possibilities that children will grow up safe and healthy, that they will be able to participate in education, culture and employment, and that they will not become involved in violence and crime (p.30).

J sees a direct link between building community and spirituality when he says:

Well, in order for a community to come together and interact as one, I think spirituality is a big part of it because I think a lot of it is do with respect, not only yourself but others, if you can’t respect yourself, how are you going to respect other people? And if that is then thrown out the window, well, the community’s going to be up shit creek! (J, interview 1, 2006)

Hart (in Roehlkepartain et al. 2006) reminds us that spirituality is “often lived out at the intersection of our lives” (p.172) and that the quality of these encounters can form the foundation of “relational spirituality” (p.172). Hart’s understanding of spirituality can frame a person’s response to the world in terms of “we” not “I”. Spirituality when understood as “we” reminds us that we do not act alone and that we are all connected and special. In Fly’s case, it is possible to imagine her teachers abdicating responsibility for Fly’s behaviour and that of the “people she hung out with” because that is, in essence, seen as “her” problem rather than a community’s problem. However, Fly’s problem was not solely her own. Many issues affected her situation, as she indicated herself, problems that are indicative of the wider social forces operating in Fly and her friends’ lives. In denying Fly and her friends the support they needed, the school community failed to provide the sense of belonging needed for Fly to not “give up on school work”. However, importantly, I believe we need some understanding of the spiritual within schools. Is this a role that schools should play, or even can play, particularly secular state schools?

HOW DO WE TALK ABOUT SPIRITUALITY IN SCHOOLS?

Historically, the Australian constitution provided for the separation of church and state; however, various government policies have not kept to this strict separation. For instance, recent Federal Government policy has seen the government fund a National Chaplaincy Programme (Department of Education, Science and Training 2006). While schools are free to choose whether they take up the monetary offer to employ a chaplain, there are many contentious issues that arise. Some schools believe the money would be better spent on funds for counsellors or social workers rather than chaplains and some question the government’s motives in providing money for religious workers linked, spuriously as they may be, with the recent push for a Values Education Package in schools (Difference of opinion 2007). In the context of this paper, however, it is arguable whether a religious worker could address a whole school’s needs for a spiritual dimension. Instead, what is needed is a broader conceptualisation of the role spirituality could play in supporting the wellbeing of young people through community-building.

The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century (Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs 1999) provides a mandate for discussion of the spiritual within school environments when it states that:

Schooling provides a foundation for young Australians’ intellectual, physical, social, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development (p.1).

The government seems to have focused its attention on religious aid to schools, but for many people, religion is a closed door. Attempting to reach the spiritual through traditional religious means is problematic. First, Generation Y rejects traditional institutional religion even though they retain a sense of the spiritual albeit in rather secular terms (The spirit of things 2006). Second, much of Generation Y’s spirituality is secular and a direct result of the influence of their secular parents and the society that influences them (Mason et al. 2006). Tacey (2003)
describes this spirituality as a “new spirituality” based on young people’s “attitudes and assumptions [which] bear the marks of a secular society, and their spirituality is modern and secular, not religious and traditional” (p.80). He notes that a “gap” exists between religion and secular society (Tacey 2003). Many whose authority rests with the church may argue against these claims, but there seems to be a consensus among many scholars that we are witnessing the rise of a new expression of spirituality, which is not served by traditional understandings of religion – a religious generation gap (The spirit of things 2006).

However, talking about spirituality is important for the reasons outlined in this paper and also because, as Crawford & Rossiter (2006) believe, we are talking more broadly about the “personal relevance of schooling” (p.18). Crawford & Rossiter (2006) among others (Purpel 1989; Kessler 2000; Purpel & McLaurin 2004; Eckersley, Wierenga & Wyn 2006) argue that young people value talking about meaning, and that schools should be places where this can occur. Furthermore, schools are a reflection of the society around them, but this in turn means that they can act as part of a solution to a perceived need (Crawford & Rossiter 2006). Schools are often called on to solve many of society’s problems and it is not the intention of this paper to add more to an already overcrowded curriculum (Crawford & Rossiter 2006), but I am advocating reflection on the roles schools play in young people’s lives and the role that spirituality could play in underpinning the lives of young people.

ROLE OF SCHOOLS

Schools are often required to act as communities for students and adults (Purpel & McLaurin 2004); however, on the other hand, schools are also required to transmit the dominant political forces of the time. When that time is one in which economic goals take precedent, this can have a damaging effect on the role schools play as communities (Purpel 1989). Young people’s wellbeing is compromised because:

… the social, health and physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of young people therefore exists in an awkward, difficult and marginal relationship to the primary goal of developing young people’s human capital in such a way that it matches the needs of the economy (Wyn in press).

Educational systems that manifest the culture of materialism and individualism deny young people’s yearnings for community because they are often taught to compete rather than cooperate (Purpel 1989). This approach is at odds with what young people often want and need. Young people’s dreams are not solely material (Eckersley 1996). Crawford & Rossiter argue that a “constructive role for education” is exploring “reasons for living” (2006, p.12), that is, “thinking critically is central” and thinking about meaning and “consider[ing] positive reasons for living” is important (p.12). Wyn (in press) believes that education is vital for young people to explore and “achieve those things they value and in enhancing individual and community wellbeing”.

Schools are also places where the quality of the encounters between teacher and student can have significant implications for the participants – particularly for the young. Palmer (1999) asserts that we “teach who we are” (p.10) and that:

… as long as we take ourselves into the classroom, we take our spirituality with us! (p.10)

This is the crux of the issue of how spirituality can play a role in schools. Spirituality is about providing a space for reflection on how we can improve, or even just on wanting to improve, the quality of our encounters, because we recognise our interdependence with others and our social responsibilities to the school community. As Eckersley, Wierenga & Wyn (2006) note:

This [spirituality] may be the subject matter that most fundamentally underpins conversations about success and wellbeing (p.38).

Spirituality has a role to play when we consider Fly’s story. Fly needed to feel accepted in order to belong within the school environment. The result of her interaction with her teachers depended on what both she and her teachers brought to that interaction. It was imperative that what the teachers brought was an awareness that this young person needed to feel accepted in order to belong. Spirituality has a role to play in terms of reminding us that what we bring to our encounters with others shapes the outcomes of those encounters.

CONCLUSIONS

It is perhaps not fair to expect schools to “add” something more to an already overcrowded curriculum (Crawford & Rossiter 2006, p.257), and to expect schools to reverse the attitudes of mainstream culture, because the problem of materialism and individualism is a societal problem rather than an educational one. However, while many factors significantly influence the interactions that occur in schools, this does not mean that individuals can act in isolation from their attitudes or actions within the school setting. To come full circle to the questions that Fly’s case study raised, what could have been done in this school, to support Fly?

• Perhaps some time or space to pause and reflect on how young people could be supported to feel as if they belong within a school community. (Whole school)
• Reflection on what each person brings to the interactions they encounter. (Whole school/personal development)
• Using the concept of spirituality to foster acceptance, belonging and community. (Whole school)
• Schools should not be all about competition and “narrow, utilitarian approach[es] to educational curricula” (Wyn in press). *(Policy level)*

Schools have significant roles to play in young people’s lives and it is therefore imperative that we examine the ways in which we can support schools to provide the best opportunities for young people to live and make their lives. Spirituality has a crucial role to play because it focuses us on the heart of the matter – the quality of those encounters where our lives intersect.

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Are we on the right track?
Mapping the terrain of anger management

BY SUZANNE EGAN

A small-scale, practice-based research project on anger management and young people produced a number of themes that are explored in this paper. The research examined the literature on the efficacy of anger management programs, including the conceptual basis of the issue, and drew on the experiences and knowledge of local practitioners and of young people themselves. The paper concludes that the complex social and political issues surrounding ‘anger management’ and young people require ongoing discussion, analysis and research. Key issues identified include the conflation of the concepts of ‘anger’ and ‘violence’, the intersection of anger management research and representations of young people as increasingly violent and dangerous, and the potential for ‘anger management’ to be used to re-individualise structural issues affecting young people.

The paper makes several practice suggestions. First, programs need to adopt an approach that includes the key systems in which young people and their difficulties are located. Second, young people will respond most effectively to activity- and skill-based content that they are confident will be effective in their own environments. Third, quite detailed discussion between the service, the young person and the referrer may be necessary to ascertain whether anger management is an appropriate and useful intervention. Finally, consideration should be given to the development of programs to benefit young people with internalised anger issues.

INTRODUCTION
This paper will explore the main themes that have emerged from a small-scale, practice-based research project on anger management and young people. The project was conducted by Rosemount Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service, which is located in the inner west area of Sydney. The impetus for the research came from the practice experiences of the adolescent and family counsellors. First, there had been an increase in counselling referrals to the service for this issue. Second, the counsellors experienced difficulty engaging a significant proportion of the young people in traditional counselling and considered a targeted group-work program might be more effective. Finally, there appeared to be a lack of clarity in how the term the anger management was used, with the consequence that there was often a diverse range of issues affecting the young people referred for this issue. Therefore, the aims of the research were to examine the literature on the efficacy of anger management programs, including the conceptual basis of the issue, and to expand on this by drawing on experiences and knowledge of local practitioners and of young people themselves.

Moreover, the research was conducted with awareness that, at a social and political level, young people are increasingly subjected to punitive policies and legislation and often portrayed in the media as dangerous and out of control. Therefore, an essential focus was to move beyond an individualised approach and situate both the issue and resulting interventions in a social justice framework. This paper will explore the main themes that have emerged from the research, including the diverse and often-unar-
ticulated assumptions underpinning the use of the term anger management, and, on the basis of the findings, discuss future directions for practice interventions.

ANGER AND ANGER MANAGEMENT: THE CONCEPTS
Defining and measuring anger

First, it is important to highlight the fact that anger is an emotion rather than a behaviour or personality trait (Del Vecchio & O’Leary 2004; Edmonson & Conger 1996). Within a Western psychological framework, anger is defined as “... a person’s (mostly learned) internal experiences such as thoughts, fantasies, and images, verbal behaviours, and bodily responses to the aversive behaviour of others, these vary in frequency, intensity and duration” (Kassinove & Tafrate 2002, p.24). Although there is a correlation between anger, hostility and aggression, they are not synonymous and represent quite different concepts. Hostility is an attitude that can direct one towards aggression, while aggression is an observable behaviour, and anger an emotional state that may underlay both hostility and aggression (Del Vecchio & O’Leary 2004). As Howells (2004, p.189) points out, the emotion of anger is neither necessary nor sufficient for human aggression or violence and the vast majority of anger episodes do not culminate in either behaviour.

There are a range of psychological theories about the nature of anger and its component processes. However, while there are differences in detail, theoretical approaches generally share the following concepts: episodes of anger are commonly understood to be triggered by events and to have a cognitive (thought), physiological (bodily) and experiential (the individual’s subjective experience) aspect, which results in an expressive component, for example, yelling. The review of the literature found that these components form the basis of both the assessment methods and the content of anger management courses (Howells 2004, p.2; Kassinove & Tafrate 2006, pp.14-15).

In addition, there are several self-report and observational methods currently used to measure anger. A commonly used tool is Spielberger’s State Trait Anger Expression Inventory (STAXI), a self-report measure that assesses both the frequency and mode of expression of anger (Edmonson & Conger 1996, p.272; Kassinove & Tafrate 2006). However, some clinical researchers believe that adequate measurement requires formal diagnostic criteria and have developed a series of diagnostic categories which they aim to have included in future versions of the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (DSM) and the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10-1992) (Kassinove & Tafrate 2006, pp.19-27).

ANGER MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORKS

According to Kassinove and Tafrate (2002, p.1), in Anger management: The complete treatment guide for practitioners, anger management refers to the “... reduction of disruptive, excessive angry arousal and expressions”, with the goal being “... to teach clients to react to life with minimal infrequent anger and, when it is experienced, to express the anger appropriately”.

Most anger management programs use a cognitive behavioural approach and are based on Novaco’s anger management treatment for adult males, developed in the mid-1970s (Beck & Fernandez 1998, p.64). Although these approaches have been modified for use with adolescents, their basic principles still guide the therapeutic process (Humphrey & Brooks 2006, p.6).

A cognitive behavioural approach will typically first involve clients in identifying situations that precipitate their anger. They then learn to identify and change the thought patterns (cognitions) that typically occur in these situations. Relaxation skills are taught as a means to calm themselves physically during an anger episode. The final phase involves exposure to anger-provoking situations, generally in the form of role-plays in the group where the techniques are applied and practised until the new mental and physical responses become automatic. In addition to this basic model, some programs will also use problem-solving, conflict management or social skills training (Beck & Fernandez 1998, p.64).

Anger management programs have become increasingly popular and are commonly found in a range of settings including school, community mental health and correctional facilities (DiGiuseppe & Tafrate 2003, p.70). According to Del Vecchio and O’Leary (2004, p.16), the popularity of these programs is the result of changes that have occurred in psychological understandings of anger over the past 20 years. For example, the shift from a belief that catharsis or venting one’s anger is helpful to an understanding that “venting” generally increases rather than diminishes anger levels. Consequently, interventions now aim to control or manage anger. While changes in the discipline of psychology’s understanding of anger may well explain the change in the type of intervention, it does not provide an adequate explanation for the growing popularity of interventions focusing on anger, or what Smith (2006, p.56), refers to as “the burgeoning anger management industry”. To explain this, it will be argued, requires moving the issue beyond the confines of an individual discipline and into a social and political context.

ANGER MANAGEMENT: THE VIEW FROM THE LITERATURE

The outcome studies

The increased use of anger management programs has resulted in concerns about the effectiveness of these interventions (DiGiuseppe & Tafrate 2003, p.70). Consequently, a number of meta-analytic (systematic) reviews of anger management outcome studies have been conducted (e.g. Tafrate 1995; Edmonson & Conger 1996; Beck & Fernandez 1998; DiGiuseppe & Tafrate 2003). The outcome studies reviewed by Beck & Fernandez (1998) indicated that the outcome of anger management interventions is generally positive as measured by a number of global indices of anger including anger expression, anger frequency, anger intensity and duration. However, while these approaches have been modified for use with adolescents, their basic principles still guide the therapeutic process (Humphrey & Brooks 2006, p.6).

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2003; Del Vecchio & O’Leary 2004; Sukhodolsky et al. 2004). Although young people are the focus, the project was interested in reviewing the studies of both adolescent and adult populations. There were two reasons for this. First, there is a paucity of research focusing specifically on adolescents or young people (Feindler 1995; Ricci 2006). Second, it is increasingly common for youth services to increase the upper age limit of their target group from 18 to 24 years. Consequently, a significant percentage of agencies now provide services to (young) adults as well as to adolescents.

The meta-analytic reviews examined between 18 (Tafrate 1995) and 50 (Beck & Fernandez 1998) outcome studies on anger management treatments. The overwhelming majority of studies used cognitive behavioural interventions, while a smaller number used either cognitive or behavioural approaches. Overall, they found that these interventions had moderate or moderate to high effects on anger. This is a result that is congruent with the effectiveness of cognitive behavioural interventions for issues such as anxiety and depression for adults (Beck & Fernandez 1998, p.70) and with other broad-based meta-analysis of the effectiveness of psychotherapy with children (Sukhodolsky et al. 2004, p.262).

However, there are further findings from individual reviews that are important to consider. Sukhodolsky et al.’s (2004) review of studies on children and adolescents found that the more behaviourally focused interventions were most effective. For example, skills training was more successful than strategies that aimed to educate or increase knowledge about the emotion of anger. DiGiuseppe and Tafrate’s (2003) analysis of adult studies and Sukhodolsky et al.’s (2004) review found that group-work formats were as effective as individual interventions. Although the latter do point out that, as group work is the standard approach for children and adolescents, there were few studies using individual interventions to use as a comparison. DiGiuseppe and Tafrate (2003, pp.79–81) further refined their analysis by examining the effectiveness of programs in relation to the different variables, that is, in relation to different facets of change measured in program participants. They found the largest effects were on decreased levels of aggression, which was also the measure that showed the most sustained improvement over time. The least change occurred in relation to measures such as increased self-esteem or improved relationships. Finally Sukhodolsky et al. (2004, p.264) found that anger management programs were most successful for children and adolescents with moderate anger problems, rather than those with either a history of violent behaviour or with very mild anger difficulties.

On the basis of the existing body of research, it can be said that the standard cognitive behavioural approach to anger management can assist clients with anger difficulties and that the use of group-work formats is supported. For young people though, the more behaviourally oriented approaches appear to be most useful. However, the studies suggest that the use of anger management programs as a method of reducing young people’s violent behaviour needs to be questioned, as do any assumptions that participation in such programs will also assist with a more general range of issues such as poor self-esteem or difficulties with interpersonal relationships.

MOVING BEYOND THE OUTCOME STUDIES

An obvious limitation of the outcome studies is that they take place in well-controlled research conditions. Consequently, questions remain about the extent to which these findings can be exported to clinical or community-based practice; indeed ecological validity has been identified as the goal of most anger management outcome research (Beck & Fernandez 1998; Sukhodolsky et al. 2004). A commonly cited barrier to achieving this is the poor motivation of those with anger management problems, coupled with the action orientation of cognitive behavioural approaches (DiGiuseppe & Tafrate 2003, p.80). That is, approaches that start from a premise that the client is actively ready and wanting to change. However, unlike other issues, such as depression or anxiety, where cognitive behavioural therapies are commonly used, anger might not distress the individual, and may even prove quite functional in terms of getting the individual what they want. Therefore, anger might become congruent with their self-concept (DiGiuseppe & Tafrate 2003, p.81; Howells 2004).

Howells (2004) argues that the term “motivation” is limited, not only because of its individual focus, but also because it fails to capture the complex processes within the individual that impede change. Rather than motivation, Howells and Day (2003) use the concept of readiness, which they define as the characteristics of both the individual and the environment that can facilitate engagement. Using this conceptual framework, improving readiness (and therefore improving the chance of program success) involves not only change in the individual, but also requires program modifications to be made so that they meet the goals of the individual. Interestingly, there has been little research that looks at the congruence between the goals of anger management programs and the participant’s goals (Howells 2004, p.194). However, Lynch (2003 cited in Howells 2004, p.194), in a South Australian study, found a marked incongruence between the anger management program’s goals and the participant’s needs and expectations. More specifically, she found that while the program’s goals (implicit and explicit) were abstract and psychological, the participants’ were concrete and practical, that is, to find and keep a job.

Finally, as Howells (2004) points out, utilising the concept of readiness requires a recognition that a program cannot be divorced from the social climate, culture and beliefs that prevail in the individual’s environment. Humphrey and Brook’s (2006) British research found the school environment to be the key environment...
Similarly, the expected outcomes of anger management program for adolescents. For example, the young people identified teacher provocation as one of their main anger triggers and a key barrier in implementing the strategies learnt during the program. These findings prompted the researchers to advocate the adoption of a whole-of-school model in which teachers as well as students are included in the program. Using the concept of readiness in anger management programs for young people has the potential to move beyond the individual as the sole focus of intervention and to implement a systemic approach in which the key systems are involved.

It is important to acknowledge, at this point, a local South Australian program for adolescent boys that does employ a systemic approach, *GetOverIt*, an initiative of the Men and Relationships Program (Lifeline), adopts a three-pronged approach involving a group-work program, family therapy and the active involvement of the young man’s school. Moreover, it utilises a social constructionist framework that assumes that young men’s behaviour is not inherent or biologically determined but the result of being socialised to think and act in ways that are culturally and socially sanctioned. The program does not neglect empirical research and does incorporate a cognitive behavioural approach into the group-work component (*GetOverIt* 2006, p.2). However, the social constructionist framework and systemic approach move this program significantly beyond the standard approach to anger management.

**ANGER MANAGEMENT: THE VIEW FROM THE FIELD**

In order to capture the views of service providers and service users on the “need” for anger management programs, a number of research studies were designed. A series of focus groups were run with practitioners employed in a variety of settings that brought them into contact with young people experiencing anger management problems. Focus groups were also run with young people participating in Rosemount’s educational programs. These involved young people who had attended anger management programs, but this was not a requirement of participation. In addition, a questionnaire was developed to capture the views of a wider cohort. These were sent to a broad range of agencies and completed by both staff and young people using the services. The questions were designed to elicit respondents’ understandings of the term “anger management”, their expectations in terms of the outcomes of anger management programs and their views on the issues affecting young people who present with anger management problems.

To a large extent, both practitioners’ and young people’s understandings of the term “anger management” conformed to the literature and focused on the control and regulation of disruptive expressions of anger. Similarly, the expected outcomes of anger management programs mirrored the standard cognitive behavioural interventions and focused on the ability to regulate anger expression via the recognition of cues, triggers and body sensations. Although not all the young people were cognisant with the specific terminology, most of their comments indicated a familiarity with the main concepts of anger management. A significant proportion of practitioners were using cognitive behavioural interventions in their work, but some were incorporating other approaches, such as strengths-based models and the popular *Rock and Water* program. Based on these responses, it was apparent that the concepts from the literature had been absorbed in the field.

Interestingly, there were some wide-reaching criticisms made of the concept of “anger management”. First, it was pointed out that interventions typically target a specific expression of anger (externalised anger) rather than engage with the full range of ways anger can be experienced and expressed. For example, one young person identified self-harm as a way of expressing anger and saw this as, potentially, an expression of anger both towards oneself and towards others. A point strongly emphasised by several participants was that anger can be a healthy reaction to a situation and should not automatically be seen as a problem. Some practitioners raised issues about the individualised nature of anger management interventions and highlighted the potential for broader social issues to either be ignored or mislabelled as an individual problem of “anger management”. An example was given of a child who, subject to racism from peers, had been referred for “anger management” on the basis of his/her response to this discriminatory treatment. There was some concern voiced about the potential to reinforce anger as the cause of young people’s difficulties, while structural issues such as racism, domestic violence or bullying recede into the shadows.

The study found that young people were referred to practitioners for anger management for diverse reasons, ranging from relatively minor issues, such as swearing or being argumentative, through to cases of physical assault. In some instances, young people were referred for reasons where anger was not clearly involved. Examples included young people who were involved in graffiti or who had bullied other young people. These patterns are both of interest and concern given that, according to the findings of outcome studies, neither violence nor minor expressions of anger nor other tangential issues are positively affected by anger management interventions. It does need to be made clear that, in general, the practitioners viewed the above as examples of inappropriate referrals and were highly critical of this pattern. Therefore, despite the referrer’s request or assessment of the issue, it should not be assumed that these young people would have been exposed to this intervention. However, it does suggest that further exploration is warranted of the views and understandings of the wide
range of professionals and service providers with whom young people come into contact.

Both practitioners and young people pointed to environmental influences as key factors in young people’s problematic experience of anger, although individual factors, such as learning disabilities and low frustration tolerance, were also identified. Some practitioners regarded problematic anger as an effect of different forms of childhood abuse, such as living with domestic violence, neglect or physical abuse, rather than a problem within itself. Others focused on school environments, peer group norms or family situations where frequent shouting and yelling was an accepted mode of communication. Some young people referred to the proliferation of violent films and a desire to be like the movie stars in these films. As one young person said: “It’s like growing up with people who are violent. You want to be like the movie stars so you act like them.”

The responses of practitioners compared to those of young people varied markedly on the issue of factors to consider if running an anger management program. The young people’s comments focused on, and demonstrated a sound understanding of, the importance of programs working in real life settings, that is, ecological validity. They provided many insightful examples of instances to illustrate their points. For example, one young person made the rather pertinent point that “just walking away isn’t always possible”, while another commented that “counting to ten doesn’t work”. A general theme was that “doing” rather than “just talking” was by far the more useful approach. Several gave examples of unhelpful interventions in which counsellors spent long periods of time talking and imparting information. As such, the young people’s views supported the research on the efficacy of behavioural rather than educative approaches.

The practitioners focused on the importance of moving beyond an individual approach and highlighted the need for a systemic approach, involving young people’s families, schools and, where relevant, other service providers. Their comments and suggestions resonate with Howells’s (2004) conceptual work on the centrality of the relationship between the individual and their social and cultural environment. They also reflect the approach taken in the Men and Relationships Program’s (Lifeline) GetOverIt program. Finally, it must be acknowledged that some practitioners questioned the legitimacy of an approach that targets ‘problematic’ young people and isolates a single emotion as the focus of intervention. Of more benefit, they suggested, would be a program geared toward assisting young people to deal with emotions in general, and which, most importantly, was provided to all young people rather than only to those defined as problematic.

UNPACKING ANGER MANAGEMENT REFERRALS: SOME ISSUES

The conflation of anger, aggression and violence

What is absent or not seen as problematic can often usefully illuminate the way in which an issue has been constructed. As noted by some of the local practitioners, anger management targets the overt expression of anger. Few studies have examined effective interventions where the problem is suppression rather than expression of anger (Del Vecchio & O’Leary 2004, p.29). Yet internalised anger can have equally serious consequences. For example, Cautin, James, Overholser and Goetz (2001) found that adolescents who had high–internalised anger were much more at risk of suicide than those who externalised their anger or had low–internalised anger. However, as they point out, internalised anger often goes unnoticed, as it is much less dramatic and obvious. As Averill (1983, p.1177), one of the first to research anger management, noted over two decades ago, it appears that “… anger is only important if it leads to aggression”. Indeed, despite the careful attention paid to distinguishing anger from aggression, the focus of most research remains on issues of aggression (Del Vecchio & O’Leary 2004, pp.29-31). This could prompt one to question whether programs might be more aptly referred to as aggression management rather than anger management interventions.

Moreover, there is a worrying slippage not only between the concepts of anger and aggression, but also between the concepts of aggression and violence. For example, Del Vecchio and O’Leary (2004, pp.16-17) refer to domestic violence, child abuse, assault and murder as acts of aggression. Domestic violence, for example, is reframed as spousal aggression while child abuse becomes an act of parental aggression. Others (e.g. Demosthenous, Bouhours & Demosthenous 2002; Margolin, Youga & Ballou 2002) use the concepts “aggression” and “violence” almost interchangeably. In the case of Margolin, Youga and Ballou (2002), the slippage is nicely encapsulated in the title of their research, Voices of violence: A study of male adolescent aggression.

This blurring of terms also occurred in the local practice context. For example, the young focus-group participants referred to the influence of the stars of violent films. In addition, a significant proportion of practitioners identified different forms of violence, such as domestic violence and child abuse, as factors that result in problems with anger management. Consequently, the question needs to be asked whether, in both the research and in the field, the concepts of anger and violence have been blurred or even conflated; and it is an issue that would benefit from further research and discussion. For example, the identification made by some practitioners between difficulties with anger and exposure to violence appears unusually close to the “cycle of violence thesis” (e.g. Downey 1997), a theory that understands domestic violence as the result of exposure to violence in childhood.

Moreover, within the literature, several authors ground their work on anger management in unsubstantiated and at times almost apocalyptic discussions about escalating rates of youth violence (e.g. Beck & Fernandez...
ANGER/VIOLENCE/YOUNG PEOPLE: THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

The second, equally worrying, concern is the unsubstantiated assumption in the literature that youth violence is escalating and, therefore, of increased societal concern. Within NSW, there has been no increase in juvenile crime over the last two years and violent offences (as measured by number of appearances in the Children’s Court) appear to be decreasing (Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 2002). However, common representations portray young people as dangerous and out of control. This raises concerns that, in such a context, anger management could be used as an intervention to further control and silence often already marginalised young people who may be quite legitimately angry with a number of issues.

There is little in the standard anger management approach that considers that anger, even when “frequent and elevated”, may be a legitimate response to an injustice. For example, Thomas’s (2006, p.85) research exploring the sources of women’s anger found that, for black women, anger was the result of the day-to-day stresses of racist treatment in everyday life and that, in contrast to white women, they actively encouraged anger in their daughters as a strategy to cope with being black in “white America”. Further, as Thomas (2006, p.82) points out, what is defined as the valid or invalid expression of anger does not exist in a vacuum but is closely tied to one’s social status. That is, anger (overly expressed anger) is more readily seen as acceptable if one is of high rather than low status. For example, it is generally more acceptable to express anger to one’s peers or subordinates than towards those with higher status. Given that social welfare agencies such as Rosemount provide services to many marginalised young people, these are crucial factors to consider. Is the young person’s anger a response to ongoing racism or the everyday grind of poverty? Is the way they express their anger problematic per se or has it been deemed problematic because they are young and disadvantaged?

THE WAY FORWARD: PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

The complex social and political issues surrounding “anger management” and young people require ongoing discussion, analysis and research. The youth service sector, with its strong tradition of advocating for the rights and needs of young people, is in a prime position to ensure this occurs. Key issues that have been highlighted in this paper include the conflation of the concepts of “anger” and “violence”, the intersection of anger management research and representations of young people as increasingly violent and dangerous and the potential for “anger management” to be used to re-individualise structural issues affecting young people.

However, services within the youth sector are also ideally located to ensure the implementation of sound and effective programs to assist young people experiencing anger difficulties. Based on the research findings, from the field and from the literature, the following issues are essential to consider. First, programs need to adopt an approach that includes the key systems in which the young person and their difficulties are located. Potentially, this means including schools and families not only to support the young person (though this is important), but as an essential part of the program or intervention. Second, young people will respond most effectively to activity- and skill-based content that they can effectively.
the youth sector) or the specific intervention (individual, group, community work).
2. Rock and Water is a self-development program for boys which has become popular in Australia over the last five years, particularly in school settings. It was developed by the Dutch educationalist Freek Ykema (2004) in response to his perception that traditional education systems were not supporting boys in key areas of development. The program focuses on the development of verbal and emotional expression, emotional regulation, impulse-driven tendencies, and the ability to manage aggression in both themselves and others. There is a strong physical component to the program (based on self-defence) and body awareness is seen as the precursor to the development of emotional awareness and self-understanding (Raymond 2005, p.35).
3. For example, Katz and Marquette (1996) found a cohort of young American men convicted of murder were indistinguishable from a non-violent cohort on a range of measures, including level and frequency of anger.

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Economic reforms, social inequality and education in Sri Lanka

BY SIRI HETTIGE

Education has long been a highly valued public good in Sri Lanka. The influence of socialist ideology on national politics at the time of independence persuaded policymakers to introduce free education at all levels as a strategy to promote social justice, equality of opportunity and the upward social mobility of disadvantaged youth. Private educational institutions were not promoted and education provision remained a virtual state monopoly until liberal economic reforms were introduced in 1977.

The economic reforms have produced both economic growth as well as unprecedented social inequality in terms of income distribution, rural/urban disparities and private consumption. The demand for higher-quality private education increased rapidly after 1977. The result has been a proliferation of private educational institutions in Colombo and other major urban centres where wealth is increasingly concentrated. The young people who are the products of these private educational institutions are in great demand in the expanding corporate private sector where English is the language of business. In contrast, the young people educated in public educational institutions rely by and large on a stagnant state sector for employment, which leads to high rates of unemployment among young people educated in the native languages Sinhala and Tamil.

The social and political unrest among educated young people has been a persistent phenomenon in Sri Lanka over the past two to three decades. It is partly due to the marginalisation of educated but disadvantaged young people in the emergent liberal economic environment, and partly a result of the structure and content of the public education system.

The paper examines the changes and continuities within the country’s education system over the past two decades and how these impact on the life chances of different youth constituencies. The paper relies on data drawn from several studies undertaken by the author over the past four years, with financial support from the Department for International Development in the UK, the International Labour Organization in Geneva, and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in Colombo. It argues for a proactive youth policy and youth service to help young people overcome educational disadvantage.

INTRODUCTION

Education became a major source of social mobility in Sri Lanka even before the country gained political independence in 1948. Following the granting of limited self-rule in 1931, which accompanied the introduction of universal adult franchise in the same year, the demand for greater equalisation of educational opportunities grew in strength. In response to this demand, the introduction of free education for all children, irrespective of their class, creed or ethnic background, was a landmark in the recent history of education on the island. Post-independence education policies were also decisively influenced
by the emerging economic as well as political trends, in particular the shift towards state domination over the economy and the social sectors. In fact, private sector involvement in the provision of education at any level was discouraged and the entire education system became a virtual state monopoly by the mid-1960s. While many schools were established by religious missions in different parts of the country during the colonial period, most of these were integrated into the state education system in the early 1960s. The two universities that existed in the country prior to independence were financed by the state, as were universities that were established later.

Greater state control over the education system led to increasing equalisation of educational opportunities in the country. Adoption of the mother tongue, Swabhasha, as the medium of instruction in schools, and later in the universities, no doubt contributed to the process of equalisation. This does not mean that the existing inequalities between different types of schools, in particular between privileged urban schools on the one hand and underprivileged rural schools on the other, became less significant. In fact, some of the measures taken to ensure equality of opportunity, such as the Grade 5 Scholarship Scheme, reinforced the importance of privileged urban schools. In addition, the adoption of Swabhasha as the medium of instruction did not lessen the importance of English, which continued to be the almost exclusive preserve of a small, anglicised minority living in cities. And, in fact, the adoption of Swabhasha reinforced the trend towards monolingualism, which had serious social and political implications as it contributed to greater ethnic cleavages in the country in subsequent decades.

State domination over the country’s education system remained unchallenged until the introduction of liberal economic policies in 1977, which have freed the economy from state domination and control. Many former state monopolies have succumbed to market competition. This is true not only in areas of commodity production, but also in many areas of service provision, such as health and education.

While there has been considerable political resistance to privatisation in general, the resistance has been strongest in the area of education. The establishment of a private medical school in the mid-1980s led to violent protests, which eventually forced the government to integrate it into one of the state universities. In spite of such opposition, private sector participation in providing education at all levels, and in diverse forms, has become a reality. Today the entire education sector has become highly diversified. While the state-funded education system continues to be the dominant provider of primary, secondary and tertiary education in the country, persisting inequalities within the system and the proliferation of private institutions and agencies have led to greater competition for educational opportunities on the basis of social class. This paper examines the changes that have taken place in the country’s education system as a consequence of economic liberalisation. It also explores the social consequences of such changes. Many researchers elsewhere have also examined the connection between economic liberalisation and educational provision, and many of these studies have pointed out that liberalisation has led to greater inequalities in educational outcomes (see, for example, Aston & Green 1996; Lowe 2000; Tidky 2007; Wood & Ridao-Cano 1996).

THE GROWING ENROLMENT OF STUDENTS IN PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS

As noted, the state-run education system was not a monolithic structure before economic liberalisation. Many urban schools established by Catholic and Christian missions, and Buddhist and Hindu schools established after independence, continued to be well-equipped and more privileged than most rural schools and underprivileged urban schools. Affluent and more influential parents could find places for their children in these schools far more easily than their poorer, rural counterparts who had no social influence. Well-organised old boys’/girls’ associations and influential parent–teacher associations could divert more and more public and private resources into these schools, which naturally attracted some of the best teachers in the country. The concentration of many middle- and upper-class children in these schools enabled students to acquire a good knowledge of English, in spite of the fact that the medium of instruction in the schools remained the mother tongue. Therefore, unlike their underprivileged rural counterparts attending ill-equipped rural schools, they could more easily find their way into better streams of higher education, such as medicine and engineering. Those who did not want to attend or failed to find places in the institutions of higher learning could secure employment not only in the public sector but also in the private corporate sector, which favoured English-speaking applicants from privileged, urban schools. Thus, the demand for places in the privileged public sector schools far outstripped the number of places available and led to severe competition. Even though clear rules, guidelines and objective criteria had been developed over the years to ensure a fair distribution of places, manipulation of the admission process by politicians, influential parents and officials became the order of the day. The process also became conflict-ridden, which provided opportunities for school principals and public officials to accept bribes from parents willing to pay.

The rapid expansion of the private sector after the liberalisation of the economy in 1977 (Hettige 1996, 2002) created a number of new income opportunities for a range of social groups. Many people with entrepreneurial skills embarked upon new business ventures. Large businesses could offer very high salaries to their managerial and professional staff, which led to the creation of a new upper middle class. The liberal economic environment allowed those who possessed
professional skills to sell their services and accumulate considerable wealth. In short, the expansion of the market economy after 1977 not only led to the emergence of a significant stratum of affluent people, but also resulted in the concentration of considerable wealth in the hands of the "new rich". The establishment and rapid expansion of private and international educational institutions in Sri Lanka over the past two decades is indicative of the magnitude of the demand originating from parents in affluent social strata. This demand would have been even greater, if not for the widespread popularity of privileged state schools.

Available data clearly show that enrolments in private, fee-levying schools have steadily increased since economic liberalisation while there has been a marginal decrease in enrolments in state schools over the past 10 years. As is evident from the data in Table 1, the total number of students in private schools declined from a high of 98 in 1966 to 38 by 1977. There was a slight decrease in the early 1980s, no doubt due in part to the outbreak of ethnic violence in the country, which led to a major dislocation of civilian life. From the late 1980s onwards, the number of schools increased. However, it should be noted that the number of private schools in the country has never exceeded the total number of public schools. The private schools cater to a small minority of affluent people, particularly people in Colombo and a few other major cities. In 1977, students in private schools represented just about 1% of the total student population. In 1983, the corresponding figure was above 2%. It is interesting to observe that in the mid-1960s the proportion was just over 2% (see Table 1).

The increasing student enrolments in private schools after economic liberalisation only partly reflect the strong tendency towards greater reliance on private institutions for educational advancement. While affluent parents tend to rely more and more on private schools, not so well-to-do parents also spend money on private tuition for their children. Pupils preparing for national examinations, particularly in urban areas, often stay away from schools to attend private tuition classes. These classes usually accommodate several hundred or even several thousand pupils and are conducted by popular teachers.

### Table 1: Number of Students by Type of School 1966–1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item/Year</th>
<th>1966</th>
<th>1976</th>
<th>1986</th>
<th>1996</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government schools</td>
<td>2,398,968</td>
<td>93.50</td>
<td>2,461,503</td>
<td>95.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private fee-levying schools*</td>
<td>24,862</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>11,072</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private non-fee-levying schools*</td>
<td>32,525</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>28,924</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pirivenas†</td>
<td>33,088</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>21,330</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estate schools</td>
<td>74,330</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>50,816</td>
<td>1.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other schools (special and night schools)</td>
<td>2,118</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total no. of pupils</td>
<td>2,588,502</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>2,573,645</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-year population (000)</td>
<td>11,439</td>
<td>13,717</td>
<td>16,127</td>
<td>18,336</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* Note: These are officially registered private schools. They do not include numerous international schools that are not registered with the Ministry of Education.

† These are traditional Buddhist temple schools open to both clergy and lay students. They continue to operate in most parts of the country and receive state assistance.

From the 1960s to the early 1970s, the number of private schools in the country declined from a high of 98 in 1966 to 38 by 1977. There was a slight decrease in the early 1980s, no doubt due in part to the outbreak of ethnic violence in the country, which led to a major dislocation of civilian life. From the late 1980s onwards, the number of schools increased. However, it should be noted that the number of private schools in the country has never exceeded the total number of public schools. The private schools cater to a small minority of affluent people, particularly people in Colombo and a few other major cities. In 1977, students in private schools represented just about 1% of the total student population. In 1983, the corresponding figure was above 2%. It is interesting to observe that in the mid-1960s the proportion was just over 2% (see Table 1).

The increasing student enrolments in private schools after economic liberalisation only partly reflect the strong tendency towards greater reliance on private institutions for educational advancement. While affluent parents tend to rely more and more on private schools, not so well-to-do parents also spend money on private tuition for their children. Pupils preparing for national examinations, particularly in urban areas, often stay away from schools to attend private tuition classes. These classes usually accommodate several hundred or even several thousand pupils and are conducted by popular teachers.

### Increasing Enrolments in Private Institutions at Post-Secondary Level

The expansion of university education in Sri Lanka over the past several decades has not been commensurate with
the rapid expansion of school education over the same period. As a result, only a small proportion of students qualifying for university admission find places in the local universities (see Table 2). A government policy shift to allow private universities has not been possible due to strong student protests against what protesters call “moves to privatisate university education”. As mentioned earlier, the single private medical college that was established in the mid-1980s had to be nationalised because of such protests.

TABLE 2 UNIVERSITY EDUCATION: ENROLMENTS 1950–2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of new enrolments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>1,885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>4,688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>5,707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>6,143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>8,015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>11,805</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


There have been several public and private responses to this situation. The decision by the government in the 1980s to establish colleges of education to train teachers in several streams was instrumental in diverting a significant number of General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Level (A/L) qualified students away from the universities, thereby relieving some pressure on the latter. Many well-to-do parents started sending their children overseas for university education. Apart from Western universities, which are certainly beyond the reach of most prospective students, countries like India and Russia also became popular destinations for university education. As is well known, educational and living costs in these countries are much lower than in countries like Australia and the United Kingdom.

Increasing enrolments in the Open University of Sri Lanka and external degree programs of several local universities indicate a growing demand for tertiary education that cannot be fully met by conventional state universities. Both these are the least expensive options available to non-affluent parents. The other major sources of post-secondary education available in the country are technical colleges, the Law College and private institutions and agencies preparing students for management, accountancy and similar professional courses. These are mostly concentrated in and around Colombo.

The growing demand for post-secondary education has to be examined in the context of changing livelihood opportunities in a liberal economic environment. Production and service-oriented private firms are looking for young people with specialised skills at different levels. It is in this context that the demand for vocational and technical training courses has been growing. In the universities, the demand for management, accountancy and commerce courses has recorded a significant upward trend (see Table 3). In fact, these subjects have also become very popular at the Advanced Level in secondary schools.

The shift toward private sector dominance following economic liberalisation is no doubt a major factor contributing to the rapid increase in the demand for English, computing and IT skills. The mushrooming of institutions offering courses in these fields is very much a reflection of this trend. Suppliers of such skills range from poor-quality private classes in rural towns to well-endowed, internationally connected institutions in Colombo. It is young people from affluent families who usually have access to the latter.

It is widely known that a good working knowledge of English is a prerequisite for white-collar employment in the private sector. Yet, most children attend state schools that rarely provide students with English language skills. Because only a small number of urban state schools have facilities for imparting English language skills to their students, there has been a mushrooming of private classes and institutions offering English language training. Yet, the latter do not seem to make much of an impact on the younger population.

In spite of a widespread and growing desire to acquire a good knowledge of the English language, only a minority of children from Colombo and several urban centres appear to make significant progress in their endeavours. This is evident from the GCE (Ordinary Level (O/L)) results over the past 10 years. English language papers are not set to test competency at a high level and even a distinction pass is not necessarily indicative of a very high level of achievement. Nevertheless, performance at this examination is indicative of the kind of opportunities that children have had to learn the language either in schools or their demographic area. The data on examination results over the past 10 years show that most children in remote districts, such as Monaragala and Nuwara Eliya, do not obtain even an ordinary pass mark (see Table 4). By contrast, children in Colombo have done very well; a large proportion has even obtained distinctions. While there is some improvement in overall performance during the period, it is clearly more marked in Colombo (see Table 4).

These results indicate that the opportunities for learning continue to be distributed very unequally, with a much greater concentration of resources in Colombo and a few other urban centres. The facilities in remote rural areas are either very poor or non-existent.

It is this situation that encourages parents to send their children to Colombo for education. Interviews with personnel at English-language institutes in Colombo reveal that pupils attending their classes come from a
distance and they are usually children from not-so-poor families – travelling, accommodation and fees amount to considerable expense. Some courses, such as those offered by the British Council and private colleges, like the Royal Institute in Colombo, are far more expensive than those offered by state-funded universities or some private education services, which usually accommodate not-so-affluent children.

The conclusion we can draw is that today children all over the country feel the need to acquire a good knowledge of English, as the latter is a prerequisite for upward social mobility in the new liberal economic environment dominated by big business and transnational corporations. This situation has contributed to a rapidly rising demand for language learning opportunities, which, in turn, has led to a proliferation of English language classes. Yet, those who really gain a knowledge of English are still heavily concentrated in Colombo and a few regional urban centres. They are, by and large, children from more privileged social backgrounds, as it is the children who attend privileged schools who usually reach a higher level of language competency. The tendency of affluent parents to send their children to private schools, colleges and international schools is reinforced by their desire to provide their children with an education in English. Enrolments in these institutions have risen rapidly over the past decade or two.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No%</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and oriental studies</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>50.76</td>
<td>1377</td>
<td>71.35</td>
<td>1764</td>
<td>56.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce and management</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>6.36</td>
<td>741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>20.64</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>10.93</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>13.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>7.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>18.94</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>10.31</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>7.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental surgery</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterinary science</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality surveying</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>3146</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education regions</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distinction</td>
<td>Ordinary pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Sri Lanka</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>20.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombo</td>
<td>23.69</td>
<td>23.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kandy</td>
<td>6.78</td>
<td>22.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurunegala</td>
<td>6.88</td>
<td>21.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galle</td>
<td>5.99</td>
<td>20.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalutara</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>21.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N’Eliya</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>19.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monaragala</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>13.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puttalam</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>19.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data files 1999 and 2000, Department of Examinations, Colombo.
IT and computer education is another area that has shown a remarkable expansion since economic liberalisation. This is understandable in view of the fact that many institutions, even state institutions, have begun to use computers and IT for various purposes. Email is becoming quite common and several email and internet service providers are functioning in the country. The banking sector is perhaps the most highly computerised area of business activity. All these and related developments have impressed upon the country’s youth the fact that familiarity with computers coupled with a good working knowledge of English is a sure way to find lucrative employment in a changing economy that is increasingly integrated into the global system. The increasing use of computers, even for simple functions such as word processing, sends out a clear signal to the younger generation that computer literacy is as important as educational qualifications when competing for employment, even in the state sector.

Unlike English language competency, which can be objectively assessed by student performance at island-wide examinations, there are no similar objective measures to assess the availability of and access to opportunities for acquiring computing and IT skills in Sri Lanka. Nor have there been any national surveys on the subject. Our understanding of the area is based on data collected from several institutions offering instruction in IT and computing. Available evidence shows the enrolments in private institutions in Colombo increased from 400 in the early 1980s to over 54,000 in 2000.²

Given the fact that there is a wide gap between rural and urban areas in terms of income distribution, educational facilities and social infrastructure, it is reasonable to assume that the opportunities for acquiring IT and computer skills are also unequally distributed. Few schools in Sri Lanka have computer laboratories, and in rural areas there are no institutions providing computer-learning opportunities. In urban centres, many upper-middle-class and upper-class homes have personal computers, often with email and internet facilities, but many rural homes do not even have electricity let alone telephone connections, so do not have access to either email or internet facilities. Non-affluent children, even in urban areas, may attend not-so-expensive computing classes, which provide a basic knowledge of common computer application programs, but they have little opportunity for hands-on learning at home or in schools. This, coupled with their poor knowledge of English, places them in a distinctly disadvantaged position in the emergent, private-sector-dominated employment market.

The rapid increase in demand for IT and computer training is evident from student enrolment data available from selected training institutes covered by the present study. These are all based in and around Colombo and usually cater to higher-income groups, as the course fees are considerable. As is evident from the data in Table 6, student enrolment at some well-established institutions, such as the TEC Group of Companies, the Institute of Data Management (IDM) and Singapore Informatics, has increased rapidly over the past two years. For example, in 2000, total enrolments in the seven institutions where information was collected exceeded 50,000—a very large number for a single year. In comparison, in the late 1990s, the 63 computer centres functioning within the public school system throughout the country accommodated only about 18,000 students.

SHIFT OF CURRICULUM POLICIES REGARDING ENGLISH AND COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY

The developments outlined in the previous section of the paper have provoked a national debate about the importance of English and computing in the process of human resource development in the country. Since employers are already favouring young people with computing skills and English language ability, the position that many have almost fatalistically taken is that more and more opportunities should be provided within the school system to offer such training. It has not taken the government long to adopt this position as state policy.

Post-independence Sri Lanka has not had a consistent state policy on English education that has stood the test of time. Instead, state policy has undergone many shifts. The policy adopted in the early 1950s was to commence compulsory teaching of English from Grade 3 onwards; by 1960, the year of commencement was shifted to Grade 5. By the early 1970s, this was shifted further to Grade 6. This policy did not change till the late 1970s when Regional Boards of Education were empowered to commence English teaching in earlier grades, depending on the availability of resources. The next policy shift took place in 1981 when it was again decided to commence English teaching from Grade 3. This policy did not undergo any significant change till the mid-1990s when, as part of general education reforms, a decision was taken to use English in Grade 1 for communication purposes. Though formal teaching was to commence in Grade 3, it was also decided to introduce English as a core subject at the GCE Ordinary Level while a general English paper was introduced for GCE Advanced Level.

The most recent policy changes introduced by the government are based on the assumption that there is an urgent need to raise the level of English language competency of the younger generation, in particular those who sit for national examinations. The greater emphasis placed on the need for training English language teachers points to official recognition of the fact that there is a dearth of competent teachers in the country. On the other hand, the most recent decision by the government to allow English instruction in some subjects at the GCE Advanced Level is likely to expose the wide resource gap that exists between the few privileged public schools and the overwhelming majority of non-privileged public schools in the country. Government policy on IT and computer education adopted in 2001 appears to be
ambiguous. A policy document published by the Ministry of Education in that year affirms the government’s commitment to promoting IT education in schools:

The national policy on information technology in school education (NAPITSE) affirms the commitment of the government to providing the state of the art knowledge in IT to Sri Lanka’s younger generation to prepare them to face the challenges in the 21st century. As a whole, the nation will achieve computer literacy thus equaling the achievements in general literacy and numeracy. As the world develops further, the most lucrative employment opportunities will be in the IT sector.

The government in implementing education reforms is committed to preparing the younger generation for the eventual leap into IT revolution, which is daily unravelling itself (Ministry of Education 2001, p.3).

Given the limited resources and other constraints already mentioned, the implementation of such a national policy is going to be much harder than its official adoption. In fact, when one looks at the data on the establishment of school computer centres throughout the country in the 1990s, it is not difficult to imagine how daunting a task the implementation of the national policy would be (see Table 5).

Since 1994, nearly 64 school computer centres have been established in different parts of the country, where they provide access to computers for approximately 18,424 students. Given the fact that there are over 10,000 government schools in the country, and a student population of over four million, it is not difficult to imagine the amount of materials and human resources required to reach even the school population, let alone the entire nation, the population of which currently stands at over 19 million. On the other hand, market-driven, profit-oriented institutions surveyed as part of the present study have already recorded a student population of over 50,000. However, the latter cater only to those who can pay for their services. As mentioned, the most recent shifts in government policy with respect to English and IT reflect a widely held belief among policymakers that school leavers in general will find it easier to fit into the changing economy if they are computer literate and have a good knowledge of English. In other words, the high rate of unemployment among educated youth is at least partly attributed to deficiencies in these fields. It is true that, today, people with such competencies find employment in the expanding private sector. In fact, the demand for such people has been more than fulfilled by privileged state schools, private schools and international schools. It is, however, difficult to comprehend how several hundred thousand school leavers could find such employment, even if they possessed IT and English language skills, unless the economy expanded rapidly within a short period of time.

Almost 50 years after the adoption of Swabhasha as the medium of instruction in schools, there has been a serious re-evaluation of English as a potential medium of instruction at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Many people argue that knowledge of the English language among students, teachers and administrators is poor because school and university education has been in Swabhasha. It is strongly felt by many that the only way to raise English knowledge is to re-introduce English as the medium of instruction in schools and universities. This remains, however, a highly controversial issue. Those who are against the introduction of English as a medium of instruction argue that it is not necessary and children will learn English if their schools are provided with the necessary facilities to teach English from primary school onwards. In fact, the main obstacle today is the lack of resources, such as effective teachers, good textbooks, language laboratories and opportunities for practical use. Moreover, most of the country’s 200,000 or so school teachers can hardly speak even a few words of English, let alone teach in the English medium. The time, effort and resources required to retrain or replace them would be so prohibitive that it is hard to imagine how the changes could be achieved in a socially just manner. The government’s decision in 2001 to allow schools with the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>No. of computer centres</th>
<th>No. of students 1994–1997</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North-Central Province</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1,681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Province</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1,018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Province</td>
<td>9</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabaragamuwa Province</td>
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<tr>
<td>Western Province</td>
<td>23</td>
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<td>Uva Province</td>
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<tr>
<td>North-Western Province</td>
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<td>North-Eastern Province</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>4,647</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data files on computer centres 2001, Ministry of Education, Colombo.
resources to conduct Advanced Level classes in English is likely to reinforce the existing inequalities by adding a few more to the small number of English-medium students studying at private and international schools.

The issue of the medium of instruction at tertiary level has been more complex. Even though the Swabhasha policy was adopted in respect to universities as well as schools, certain faculties continued to teach in both Swabhasha and English. This has been true of the medical, engineering, law and science faculties. Since most of the teachers in these faculties are bilingual, they can teach in both languages depending on the situation. For instance, in first year, students are taught largely in their own language and gradually shift to English in later years. On the other hand, in faculties, such as arts, social sciences and humanities, teaching has been mostly in Swabhasha, particularly at the undergraduate level.

Even those faculties providing instruction in both English and Swabhasha have not been able to raise the standard of English among their graduates because students come to the university with a poor knowledge of English. Though some students fully overcome this barrier while studying at university, many other students’ knowledge of English leaves much to be desired. This is, no doubt, a product of a range of complex circumstances, such as the social background of students and the inadequate facilities for teaching English in universities.

ENROLMENT OF STUDENTS IN PRIVATE AND INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Trends in enrolment in the state sector, as well as in officially registered private schools, before and after economic liberalisation have been discussed at some length. The present section focuses attention on enrolment in international schools that were established after economic liberalisation.

The words “international school” are a very recent addition to the vocabulary of the Sri Lankan general public. The Board of Investment Act, enacted in 1978, provided for the establishment of firms engaged in the provision of services such as health and education. Educational institutions established under the Act are not regulated by legislation governing the educational field in such areas as curricula, testing, medium of instruction etc. In other words, international schools established under the BOI Act can have their own curricula, medium of instruction and prepare children for examinations conducted by testing authorities in other countries. For instance, students in international schools generally sit for GCE Ordinary Level and Advanced Level examinations conducted by British authorities. Some of their students may sit local examinations as private candidates, if they wish to do so.

Since the establishment of international schools, their enrolments have risen steadily. A survey of the international schools in and around Colombo conducted as part of the present study revealed that the number of students enrolled in these schools increased rapidly from a few hundred in the late 1980s to nearly 10,000 by the year 2001. If we take into consideration all international schools in Colombo and other regional towns in the country, the number would certainly be much higher now.

Most of the international schools in the country have been newly established under the BOI Act. It is also noteworthy that some older private schools that pre-date economic liberalisation have also been converted into international schools in recent years. The motivation for such conversion may be twofold. First, conversion avoids regulation by legislation that covers national schools. Second, the owners of these schools must have noted the demand for international schools that provide instruction in the English medium, have their own curricula and prepare students for international examinations.

Of the large number of international schools that have been established since economic liberalisation, only a few cater to the expatriate community, and even they are not exclusive to foreign students. In fact, most of the schools do not have foreign children. As part of the present study, we collected data from 10 schools and found that they differ considerably from each other in terms of student numbers, the number of years of schooling they offer and the fees charged from students. Table 6 gives data on admission fees and average term fees charged by the selected international schools.

As is evident from the above data, there is a wide variation in the fee structure; the highest term fee is as much as five times the lowest fee of Rs.8,000. Therefore, it is obvious that these schools do not cater to a single social stratum. It is, however, difficult to figure out who could afford to send their children to which international school simply by looking at the term fees charged. There are other important factors that play a part. For instance, even when the term fee is as low as 8,000 rupees, other expenses, such as transport, uniforms, food, facilities fees,
admission fees etc., may amount to a considerable sum, making it difficult for parents who could otherwise have afforded to pay the term fee to send their children to that school. It is also noteworthy that many parents have more than one child of school-going age, making their actual family expenditure on education much higher than the term fee for a single child.

In view of these factors, it is reasonable to conclude that it is only parents belonging to the middle class and above who can afford to send their children to international schools. Apart from one international school, not listed in Table 6, which charges in US dollars, there is only one international school that can be classified as “upper class”. It is located in one of the most affluent residential areas of Colombo, which indicates that it attracts children from the vicinity, though some students come from afar in chauffeur-driven cars. While there are two schools that appear to cater to children from the upper middle class, the rest no doubt cater to mostly middle-class families. These include the children of small businessmen in and around Colombo, though it is likely that some children from the provinces also attend these schools. It is difficult to imagine how a lower middle-class family, deriving a fixed monthly salary from activities such as teaching, clerical work or nursing, could afford to send their children to any of the international schools covered by the present survey. It would not be easy for them to raise the funds needed to pay even the admission fee, which is a non-recurring payment.

### PUBLIC INVESTMENTS IN EDUCATION

Table 7 gives data on educational expenditure in the country from 1973 onwards. Given the fact that public sector educational institutions have dominated the educational scene in the country since political independence, the level of public expenditure on education is an indication of the extent to which the public education sector provides opportunities for children and youth. As the data in Table 10 indicates, investment in the educational sector has lagged far behind the other areas. For instance, between 1973 and 1999, government recurrent expenditure increased over sixtyfold while the recurrent expenditure in the educational sector increased only nineteenfold during the same period. The situation with respect to capital expenditure in the education sector has been worse. While the total government capital expenditure increased over one hundredfold between 1973 and 1999, the increase in the education sector has been just nineteenfold. It should, however, be noted that since the early 1980s an increasing amount of public expenditure has been diverted into defence because of the escalating political violence and ethnic conflict within the country.

While it is important to note that the private education sector has expanded substantially since economic liberalisation, the setback in the public education sector in terms of capital and recurrent expenditure cannot be explained solely in terms of the growth of private educational institutions. The latter emerged in the urban centres, while the public education sector setback adversely affected educational opportunities in rural areas.

### CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This paper has examined several dimensions of change in the educational system of Sri Lanka since economic liberalisation. The analysis of available data leads to the conclusion that increasing student enrolments in private schools since economic liberalisation only partly reflect the strong tendency towards greater reliance on private institutions for educational advancement. While affluent parents tend to rely more and more on private and international schools, even not-so-affluent parents are compelled to spend money on their children’s education by way of private tuition. Pupils preparing for national examinations, particularly in urban areas, often stay away from schools to attend private tuition classes, which are often mass tuition classes conducted by popular teachers.

In regard to international schools, it is reasonable to conclude that it is only parents belonging to the middle class and above who can afford to send their children to these schools. Excluding an extremely expensive school
that charges fees in US dollars, there is only one school that can be classified as “upper class”. While there are two schools that appear to cater to children from upper middle-class backgrounds, the rest cater to mostly middle-class families. It is difficult to imagine how lower middle-class families on fixed monthly salaries could afford to send their children to any of the international schools covered by the present study.

Available secondary data points to the fact that demand for IT and computer training has increased rapidly over the past two decades. Institutes offering instruction in these fields are mostly based in Colombo and usually cater to higher income groups, as the course fees are considerable. It is evident from data that student enrollments at some well-established institutions have increased rapidly over the past 10 years. For example, in the year 2000, total enrollments in the seven institutions from which information was collected exceeded 50,000.

In regard to local universities, it is noted that even those faculties providing instruction in both English and Sinhala have not been able to raise the standard of English of their graduates because students come to the university with very low levels of English. While some students manage to overcome this barrier, the knowledge of English among most undergraduates leaves much to be desired. This situation is a product of a range of complex circumstances, such as their social background and the inadequate English-teaching facilities in schools and the university. Graduates with poor English cannot compete with those with a good English education in the context of a steadily expanding market economy dominated by large business firms.

In the absence of detailed data about the students who attend private schools, international schools and IT institutes, it is not possible to provide a breakdown of their socioeconomic backgrounds. However, detailed interviews with key personnel associated with many agencies confirmed that students who make use of these facilities are from middle-class, upper middle-class and upper-class backgrounds.

While it is important to note that the private education sector has expanded substantially since economic liberalisation, the setback in the public education sector, in terms of capital and recurrent expenditure, cannot be explained solely in terms of the growth of private educational institutions. While the latter flourish mostly in urban areas, the lack of expenditure in the public education sector has adversely affected educational opportunities in rural areas, and has significant equity implications. In other words, social justice appears to be the trade-off for increased market competition in education. Young people from disadvantaged social backgrounds continue to rely on publicly provided education, which does not necessarily provide them with the knowledge and skills demanded by the expanding private corporate sector, while those from well-to-do backgrounds increasingly rely on private and overseas educational institutions. The young people who are the products of the latter institutions easily find lucrative employment in the private sector and international institutions. On the other hand, young people educated in public educational institutions continue to rely on a stagnant state sector for employment.

Increasing costs and competition for education have marginalised lower-class young people, particularly those in undeveloped rural areas. There are no significant youth service programs to address the problems faced by disadvantaged youth. Though there is a ministry of youth service, its programs have not paid any attention to educational disadvantages faced by poor rural and plantation young people. Nor have the non-governmental organisations or development association agencies paid much attention to the needs of young people in a changing social–economic environment. The present need is to develop youth policies and services that address issues of educational inequality and the emerging digital divide. Not only is the neglect of the needs and aspirations of a majority of young people in conflict with the idea of equality of opportunity, but it can also be a trigger for youth revolt, as the country has witnessed in recent years.

REFERENCES


NOTES

1. Indigenous language (lit. own language).
2. Based on the data collected by the author as part of the Globalization, Qualifications and Livelihood project 2005.

AUTHOR

Siri Hettige is a professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka.
Prior to its de-funding in 1998, the Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition (AYPAC) had taken the concept of a National Youth Roundtable (NYR) to the Minister for Youth, Amanda Vanstone (Federal Minister for Youth, 1996–1997) as a mechanism to enhance youth participation at all levels of government. AYPAC had secured significant funding from private sources to fund the Roundtable to run alongside the peak structure. The Roundtable would be sourced and run at a state level and then feed into a national structure, enhancing accessibility and responsiveness. This was not to be.

The Australian Government took the idea of the NYR and developed its own. Each year, 50 young people are appointed to the National Youth Roundtable for a period of 12 months. During that time they are flown to Canberra for two face-to-face meetings of all of the participants (usually held in March and September). The period flanked by the meetings is when participants research and write up their community projects (also referred to as ‘topic areas’). The young people who successfully gain a place on the National Youth Roundtable are initially attracted by what the government offers, namely, a unique opportunity to participate in forming policy about young people. David Kemp (Minister for Youth, 1997–2002) reiterates this theme: ‘... the desire for greater inclusion of young people and their empowerment in the society’ (1999, p.3).

This paper explores the participants’ expectations of the NYR experience, taking into account what the government promised for the Roundtable. It then tracks what they felt they actually achieved, and the ensuing emotional impact of these processes.

**INTRODUCTION**

Every year the request goes out to Australia’s young people to come to Canberra, the nation’s capital, and have a significant voice in shaping policy for young people. The government claims that the Roundtable is “hotly” contested, that you will be among “a select group if you are successful” (Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) 2005). Passionate young people are lured to the Roundtable as a unique opportunity to have a voice at a national level regarding the issues that are important to young people, and what the Government seems to offer coalesces with that passion. As indicated by one young participant on The Source website:

We all had one underlying element uniting us, this was our passion and dedication towards our communities and, more so, our dedication to the betterment of this land of ours. This, added to our enthusiasm and optimism, linked us in this journey that has culminated to this point … (FaCS 2005).

**THE STUDY**

Due to the potential sensitivity of the material being presented, careful attention has been drawn to the research processes. The majority of the seven young people chosen for the study were from Western Australia and were members of the National Youth Roundtable.
between the years 1999 and 2005. I interviewed two members from the 1999 inaugural Roundtable, one from the 2000 Roundtable, one from 2002, two from 2003 and one from 2005. Some of the young people were known to me previously through my role with the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) and AYPAC. All the young people were chosen due to their ongoing involvement in youth issues and social activism, and range in age from 21 to 30 years (although they ranged in age from 15 to 24 years when they were on the Roundtable). In this sense, the sample of seven young people was purposive (Swanson-Kauffman & Schonwald 1988).

DATA COLLECTION
Data collection included diverse sources: documentary evidence, in-depth interviews, a focus group and observation.

a) Documentary evidence
The documentary evidence included a number of documents from the National Youth Roundtable website with regards to achievements of the Roundtable over the past five years. Topic area reports and individual participants’ final reports have also been scrutinised. Further to this, the speeches of Dr David Kemp and Larry Anthony (Federal Minister for Youth from 2001–2004) were examined.

b) In-depth interviews
A pilot study was carried out with one young person prior to the commencement of the data collection to trial the questions and technique. Information from the pilot study was subsequently included as part of the study. All the young people were interviewed once. Coding and analysis of the themes began as soon as the pilot interview was completed (Colaizzi 1978).

The young people all participated voluntarily and did not want payment. The interview style that I adopted was semi-structured, allowing for flexibility. In several of the interviews, my questions opened the “floodgate”, whereby they began to report many experiences and perceptions that they had felt unable to express anywhere else and reported at the end of the process that it had been refreshing to be able to talk without fear of judgment or reprisal.

Due to my growing knowledge of interviewing techniques and the principles of phenomenological and participatory action research, I became aware that at times in my initial interviews, I was leading in my questioning techniques. I had to adapt my style, acknowledge my failure and ensure that my interviewing style adapted to reflect this new knowledge. Hence, I became acutely aware of my own biases, experiences and professional opinion throughout the process. Prior to each interview I acknowledged them to myself and endeavoured to put them aside so that I could really “hear” what the young people were trying to say. I was conscious of the fact that many of them had not felt “heard” through the process of the Roundtable, so I was extremely careful to treat the information that they provided with responsibility and care and to ensure that they were heard in the process with me. It was important to monitor my own reactions to the information being presented at all times, because reactions from me could taint the young people’s ability to speak freely.

c) Focus group
In addition to the in-depth interviews, a focus group was chosen as a way to synthesise themes which had already emerged and to add richness to the data collected. The focus group comprised a dinner and then a group discussion. I enlisted the help of two “independent” observers and transcribers through the process of the focus group. This helped in ensuring that I was consistent with my methods throughout the group and allowed me to totally focus on the group process rather than having to be concerned with keeping field notes. Both of the transcribers were also experienced researchers who regularly worked with young people.

Morse and Kreuger both suggest that the information collected in the process of a focus group can be richer because it is enriched by the group experience and by “bouncing” ideas off each other (Morse 1994; Kreuger 1988). This was certainly true for the group as they took the opportunity to elaborate on many different areas of concern and comment extensively on emerging themes. Often one comment would trigger a cascade of responses from other participants.

d) Observation
My observation included participant observation at the National Youth Roundtable meetings in Canberra in March 2004. There were a number of issues with regards to participant observation. While there, I was deliberate in observing the following: the setting; the human/social environment; activities and behaviours; informal interaction and unplanned activities; the language of program participants; non-verbal communication and observing what did not happen and other surprise findings (Quinn Patton 2001). Observation was needed in order to assess what mechanisms were in place to ensure that the formal reports from the participants became part of the policy-making process for the government. A careful note was made regarding the language and discursive patterns that emerged throughout the event and how the structure of conversations influenced proceedings (Foucault 1983).

DATA ANALYSIS
The methods used allowed for triangulation of the emerging research data which strengthened the validity of the study and further minimised the need for bracketing (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). Many of the young people disclosed personal disappointments at the process they
had engaged in and that they had not had a chance to debrief. They all reported that the in-depth interview process had been positive as they had been given a chance to tell their stories. Some reported that the process had re-ignited their passion to get their information out into the public arena again and that they felt privileged to be chosen to take part in the study. All the young people concurred that they felt empowered as they realised that their experiences of the National Youth Roundtable were not isolated. Their collective hope was that, through my research, their experiences would contribute to the National Youth Roundtable becoming a more integrated participation mechanism for young people. They also suggested various strategies to ensure that their message would be heard through my research and offered to help in getting the message out.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS
Fundamentally, phenomenology and PAR (participatory action research) methodologies claim that the participants are the experts in their situations and that they can give meaning to their experiences (Moustakas 1994; Stringer 2004). My concern with the research becoming distant from the young people was indeed real, and West (1999) stresses that there are fundamental issues with the participatory research paradigm that include people’s rights of ownership over the research, their lives and ideas.

My research was approved by Edith Cowan University’s Ethics Committee. Assumptions regarding the literacy of the participants were carefully considered with regards to access to the research documentation and consent forms. Issues concerning confidentiality, the handling of sensitive material and anonymity were also cautiously observed.

At the outset of the focus group, I needed to clarify that each participant’s contributions would be shared with the others in the group as well as with me and the transcribers. The young people were encouraged to keep confidential what they heard during the meeting and I had the responsibility to anonymise data from the group. I explored that issue with them and it became apparent that they did not want to remain anonymous, but chose to have their full names included. This emphasised how committed they were to see my research change processes that they saw as being in need of significant modification.

The question of the universality of my research findings was a significant consideration, given that I interviewed a small number of young people (Russell & Gregory 2003). My intention was not to produce a generalisable account, but a deep, valid account of a few young people. The insights from this could inform more extensive, generalisable research (Russell & Gregory 2003).

GOVERNMENT PROMISES REGARDING THE NATIONAL YOUTH ROUNDTABLE
Each year, the Government promotes the National Youth Roundtable as one of the key processes in the development of its youth-related policies. Media releases are circulated widely and information and application forms for the Roundtable are distributed through the internet, major national newspapers, schools, TAFEs and other youth-focused media (FaCS 2005). A 2005 Australian Government media release explains this:

Roundtable 2005 – A voice for Australia’s youth
Applications for membership of the National Youth Roundtable 2005 are now open. If you’re aged between 15 and 24 you can apply to be part of this prestigious group of tomorrow’s leaders.

“The Roundtable is the centrepiece of the Australian Government’s youth consultation mechanisms and it brings together young people to discuss issues that have an impact on youth,” Mrs Ley said.¹

“Members address issues of importance to the Australian Government relating to youth and work in collaboration with relevant Government departments and Members of Parliament, in consultation with their communities.

Last year over 660 young Australians from across the country applied for one of the seats on the hotly contested Roundtable” (Ley 2005).

Successful applicants have every reason to believe, from what they are told prior to travelling to Canberra, that they are vital to the government in the policy development process regarding young people and that they will be resourced at every stage of the process:

The Government will work with the members to provide them with the practical tools and the confidence needed to bring forward their views on youth issues of national importance (FaCS 2005).

The government also talks about personal growth and participating in youth policy development, which seem attractive to young people. In his opening speech for the 2001 Roundtable, David Kemp alluded to the value that his fellow parliamentarians place on the Roundtable participants and the outcomes:

I know when I talk to my parliamentary colleagues how much they look forward to the opportunity to interact with you, because this is an opportunity for them which they don't have every day. They talk with young people in their electorates but they don't often have the chance to talk at length with people who've had a chance to reflect very deeply on what it means to be a young person in Australia today and to express the great diversity of young Australians (Kemp 1999).

In this statement, Kemp acknowledges that the young people chosen possess insights on which the government
relies. He emphasises that young people are an authoritative source of information regarding youth issues. This claim is cognisant with the government’s choice of the Roundtable as a mechanism to increase the participation of young people (Martinez 1999). Kemp continues to explore this:

And that is really the view of the government itself, that we have a chance to learn from you about what it is like to be a young person in Australia today in the whole variety of circumstances that have made up your lives and your experiences. But, in one way or another, all those achievements are being brought together here to assist the government to think through more carefully how we put in place policies that are going to affect not only your lives, but the lives of many other young Australians (Kemp 1999).

This is a considerable claim, that the young people chosen will indeed influence policy that potentially affects the lives of numerous young people (Martinez 1999; Mutebi 2005). Many of the young people expressed this specific desire in their interviews. For Participant Three, this was a major factor in him applying for the Roundtable:

I hoped that I would have a role in being a voice for the voiceless … a conduit. I hoped that I would have an opportunity to voice my opinions and those of other young people. Young people at that age have no other ways … they can’t vote. Consultations tend to avoid young people, but there aren’t many things that don’t affect young people, but they have no voice.

So then, how does the government influence young people to participate? By offering such things as an opportunity to be authentically heard, the chance to make a significant difference to national youth policy development and the lives of numerous young Australians and to be among the chosen few who can claim to have done this.

**WHAT THE PARTICIPANTS HOPED TO ACHIEVE**

Moving on from the enticements of government, it is imperative to examine the participants’ expectations of the National Youth Roundtable. The young people interviewed elaborated on a number of personal expectations which included the anticipation of being heard, with all its associated meanings, by government.

A degree of confusion emerged regarding what they did actually expect. Participant One expresses some of this uncertainty:

There were times I thought that maybe being from the bush or being caught up in traditional culture, that there could be some barriers there that might affect me being in the National Youth Roundtable. But it ended up being something totally different to what I thought it was going to be.

When I probed this question further with Participant One with regards to his expectations, he found it difficult to elaborate as he felt that the preparation prior to going to Canberra had been patchy and he was unsure about what to expect at all. He had only a few perfunctory phone calls with the organisers before attending his preparation weekend in New South Wales. This was his first trip out of Western Australia.

Participant Two, in contrast, due to various prior experiences, had very specific expectations:

… I expected the government would listen and actually wanted to listen. I had this definite expectation that I was actually going to be able to have an impact and that that they were pulling me all the way over to Canberra for a reason you know [that] I was potentially [going to] make it.

Participant Two had a clear agenda about wanting to be seriously listened to by government. When I asked more about her understanding of the phrase “potentially [going to] make it”, she expected that her views would have a clearer impact on government decisions regarding young people. For Participant Two, the Roundtable represented the highest level of participation in government decision-making for young people in Australia. Prior to the NYR, Participant Two had participated in two significant forums: she won the state award for the ABC’s (Australian Broadcasting Commission) Heywire competition for rural young people, the prize for which was to attend the National Youth Issues Forum in Canberra a week before the Roundtable. She was also a youth delegate at the Australian Constitutional Convention in 1998.

For other participants, such as Participant Three, a familiar expectation emerges and connects with the rhetoric presented by the government:

My expectation was that we would have a lot of direct contact with the government and that they would see us as being really important. I assumed that we would have a captive audience.

Participant Four’s expectations were similar:

… I was attracted to the glossy approach! You go there with high expectations about spending time with ministers etc … So I thought that I would get to meet ministers and other important people and that they would listen to what I have to say. I also liked the idea of finding out about the political processes.

For Participant Five, the expectation regarding debate and discussion is a familiar one, but he also looked forward to meeting peers of a similar calibre:
I recall being keen on having the chance to express opinions directly to government as well as of the prospect of meeting some amazing and interesting young people. I expected respect, support and genuine opportunities for debate and discourse.

In contrast to these participants, who all had high expectations of the Roundtable, Participant Seven, a current Roundtable member, had this to say:

I went into NYR with incredibly low expectations. Having known quite a few delegates from previous years, I was expecting the first residential to be eight days of talking, to be followed up by six months of project work, and a second meeting of being ignored by government.

Participant Seven’s more pessimistic expectations were born out of previous participants’ observations. This participant was friends with previous participants and had detailed knowledge of what to expect. For many of the participants without this exposure, however, language around issues such as consultation, being heard, having impact and having direct contact with government ministers emerge, fuelled by the idiom of the government. It appears that while some participants were very clear about what to expect, for instance, Participant Two, who had recent experiences on which to base her expectations, others were less clear. This was the case for Participant One, as he had not experienced forums such as the Roundtable before.

Participant Two also had other expectations around personal outcomes:

… yeah … the other expectations was that I was going to learn some skills for myself and I guess learn about the project process and you know go through the many steps in consultation and all those kinda things and so on.

She was clear that, in addition to an unambiguous agenda regarding being heard by government, she also had some outcomes that she wanted to achieve for herself. For some of the older participants who were more established in work or study, being a participant on the National Youth Roundtable was a prime opportunity for them to advance their own agenda. For Participant Six, it was simply a stepping stone, an opportunity to get national exposure to his issues and to make the links necessary to further his own goals. Participant Six recounts:

To be honest, my expectations was that this is just a junket – and it was a great opportunity because it led me to get on to other councils and things like that such as the National Disability Advisory Council where I can further my OWN agenda in disability movements, ethnic disability movements and then mainly equity and equality.

Hence, clear themes emerge such as: personal development, being heard, having an impact, meeting with government ministers and meeting other young people who shared similar convictions.

WHAT THE PARTICIPANTS THOUGHT WAS ACHIEVED

The participants reported that they all achieved a range of things, some different to what they expected. These included: having political impact; gaining leadership skills; communication with government ministers; and linking their passion with their topic area research.

Finding out from the inside how to manipulate political processes was important for Participant Four, especially being the son of career bureaucrats and very involved in student politics at university:

He [Brendan Nelson, the then Federal Minister for Education] remembered me from student demonstrations at Curtin [University]! … in reality you get all of eight seconds with ministers that aren’t even connected with your topic area … what’s the point? No-one takes it seriously and you find yourself crashing back to reality.

Participant Four came away from the Roundtable believing that his expectations were not realised and wondering whether his time in Canberra was meaningful at all, leading to significant disenchantment for him. It could be argued that a young person with Participant Four’s background may be more experienced in manipulating the political process and that his expectations were more realistic, but he came away quite disturbed.

For Participant Four, though, perhaps more knowledge meant that expectations were higher and that left him further to fall when his expectations were not realised. For other participants, such as Participant One, the influence of others was persuasive, namely his school principal and teachers. Participant One was encouraged to apply so that he could develop his leadership skills, which had further implications considering his Aborigi-

ality. Participant One described how this affected his decision to apply for the Roundtable:

Yes, there was support from teachers and the [school] principal he was very supportive. He really wanted to help me with my leadership skills … and for me to be a role model not just only for Aboriginal students at the school but also non-Aboriginals and in the wider community.

In addition, for most young people, simply the chance to be away from home, stay in hotels and visit Parliament House was indeed alluring and attractive. Being part of
official functions, attending receptions at Government House, and sightseeing around Canberra were all very enthralling. Many of the participants reported this:

For the participants … the trip to Canberra was fantastic and getting to go to Parliament House was a buzz and see how it works from the inside. We’re exposed to it all and made to feel special (Participant Four).

The flights to Canberra, staying in hotels, being able to go to Parliament House … they’re all amazing opportunities (Participant Three).

Even though it is often assumed that issues around independence are important to young people (Jeffs & Smith 1998), this did not emerge as a central issue with the participants. The chance to be away from home and visit important places was mentioned by several participants, but did not rate as highly as outcomes, such as personal development, leadership and entrepreneurship, as they considered these outcomes to be more significant.

As their interviews progressed, participants indicated that they became increasingly disenchanted with the Roundtable process. For Participant One this was a considerable issue, not only for him, but for his Aboriginal culture:

… the field of the topic … I was … researching and looking at [what] was the effect that mining has on Aboriginal people … spiritually, physically, mentally, and also environmentally as well and because it was such a wide range of things. I think it was hard for them to assign me to a certain minister. But to this day I don’t really think that my message was really heard.

Participant One expressed frustration and concern that the impact of mining on Aboriginal people, even though he thought it was of national significance, was deemed to be too big and difficult to address. Hence, for Participant One, and some other participants, disenchanted set in when they felt like their chosen topic was not given the prominence it deserved. He said that doing the interview had reignited a passion in him that had been snuffed out by government. He found that his frustrations re-emerged. Participant One felt strongly that his issue had not been addressed. David Kemp had attempted to address Participant One’s issues (because he did not have a minister to whom he could refer Participant One), but had sidestepped them, which only increased Participant One’s frustration. For Participant One, a softly spoken, attentive individual, dissatisfaction emerged increasingly as he recounted his experiences:

I don’t know if my views have impacted on government. As I said before, there wasn’t any feedback. What can you do? Yes, very disappointing…

Participant One explored in our interview an exciting but frustrating time in his life, and it became obvious throughout the process that he was doing his best to put words around his feelings and to express his pain for the first time. The hurt was palpable and reflects on him as a young person, carrying a culture that seems to be undervalued, and the experiences of the Roundtable emphasised that yet again. For Participant One, his chosen topic was far more than simply a topic area, it was an issue at the core of his being, his meaning. It appears that the government has no understanding of the depth of the passion of Roundtable participants.

Another important factor to consider in this example is Indigenous modes of communication. There is significant literature showing that different cultures have identifiable dimensions, goals and expectations, and that variations in learning styles, modes of communication and participation impact on the effectiveness of communication (Ryan 1992; McDonald 1993). This is a consideration for which the NYR could prepare. Participant One’s final comments indicate this:

… my expectations have not been fulfilled. I thought I was going there … [and] I would be heard … but maybe, you know, there’s a time and place for these things. I don’t know. But I don’t feel as though my expectations of my topic that I brought forth to the Roundtable I don’t think it has been fulfilled. Maybe there’s another time and place for it I really believe that because it’s something that I really want to speak my mind because growing up in the bush as a young boy. Speaking the language and growing up within the culture it has I’ve got the passion I know what it’s like to go out like when the mining people go out there they see a dollar sign. But me I see a whole different culture a world out there I see out there it’s my home this you know I’m not made to be in the city.

It would seem that the government is trying to grapple with this issue, as they are attempting to integrate some of the processes that work with Indigenous young people that they have gleaned from the National Indigenous Youth Leadership Group into the NYR (FaCS 2005).

Participant Two’s passion was for rural young people and their access to post-secondary education. She went through exhaustive processes to ensure that the information she was gathering was comprehensive. As she
details, she was highly motivated to make her message public and for it to be the voice of rural young people:

*What I really hoped to achieve was what I did which was get this report with some really solid information. It's a 100-page report with 180 case studies of regional young people and their experiences with Youth Allowance. I guess what I was focusing on was the fact that some regional kids are just not getting to uni because they just can't afford to and they aren't eligible for Youth Allowance and their parents can't afford to support them. For me the regional campus is not such a big issue as being supported to go to uni.*

Participant Two assumed that, by gathering all of this information into a detailed report, the government would take advantage of this information and reassess eligibility criteria for rural young people. A major aggravation for Participant Two was that once the report was completed, she could not get anyone to actually read it and take it seriously.

*… Yeh, we did chat to ministers. I actually met with … I mean, this was disappointing as well because … the person who was responsible for the area my project was involved in was Larry Anthony [then Minister for Youth] but I didn't meet with him. I met with John Anderson [Minister for Transport] and the Department of Transport and Regional Services … it wasn't his area or youth portfolio or anything to do with the Youth Allowance.*

These frustrations then spawned a range of different approaches. What impressed me was the level of energy that Participant Two sustained over the Roundtable term. It is one thing to undertake such an exhaustive piece of research at no financial cost to government, but to have the work so slighted was very disheartening. This dissatisfaction certainly emerged for Participant Two:

*… well, I look at it like this … I did this free bloody review of their system for them and surely they should take something like that and get a bit excited by it!!*

It emerged that Participant Two had undertaken this life-consuming process, only to have her report sit idle and unread. When probed about this, she was quite philosophical, but also determined to maintain her integrity and value in the whole process. Participant Two’s passion is very much alive despite her repeated disappointments, and she is creative; if she cannot get her message to government via the Roundtable, she will find another means. It was important that again, I let her story emerge, her passion resurface and allow it to breathe again. From that point it would create a life of its own. The message is not dead, the issues are still real for rural young people.

The following quote exemplifies how she has managed to survive political processes so far, displaying a maturity far beyond her years:

*… bureaucracy … as I have learnt more and more about it, I find it really frustrating, but I guess it is a reality and it is part of the whole system and we have to work with it. It has jaded me a bit. Every time I speak to a politician I think, "are you really listening do you really care or are you here just about your own workload?". I do have quite a cynical point of view when it comes to politicians actually. And just in terms of their representation of us and of my voice. Our country has elected [this politician], does he actually listen to what I am saying? And I'm jaded about that. And certainly or, disappointed really, I just work so hard and I've got 180 people who work hard with me and gave me their stories and just feel like they haven't been able to really get it out there and do what could have really happened with it.*

Like Participant Two, Participant Four had high hopes and expectations:

*… you go there with high expectations about spending time with ministers etc., but in reality you get all of eight seconds with ministers that aren't even connected with your topic area … what's the point? No-one takes it seriously and you find yourself crashing back to reality.*

As Participant Four’s hopes were in no way realised, his defence was to become somewhat facetious in his approach. He quickly became realistic about what to expect. While his topic area was important to him, it soon became obvious that it was of little or no importance to the government. However, during his interview, he spoke about the fact that despite frustrations and disappointments, the Roundtable process has been life-changing and has led him to where he is today. He is still passionate, committed and is making a real difference in the passage that his life is currently on, as he is working towards travelling internationally with the United Nations Youth Association. During the Roundtable he continually felt disappointed about the impact of his topic area and the work he put into it. It seemed like his work fell on deaf ears and resulted in a range of hopes and expectations:

*… I did the transition to tertiary education and the support networks that were around. Seventy per cent of young people don't know where to get support. I stalked an advisor of Larry Anthony’s for ages to get a letter of support … still haven't got it! You'd think it would be the number one issue for Larry Anthony … but no!*
These issues seemed to dominate for Participant four:

So I thought that I would get to meet ministers and other important people and that they would listen to what I have to say. I also liked the idea of finding out about the political processes. I got my 12 seconds of fame. We got to meet Brendan Nelson … there were nine of us in the room and we had 20 minutes in total, so I had eight to 10 seconds in the whole time. The biggest thing was who was keeping time and what was the right way to greet a minister!

Participant Four wasn’t interested in the finer points of meeting etiquette, for him it was about getting his message across to government. That was why the government had selected him to be on the Roundtable. This frustration with timing and etiquette was a recurring theme for Participant Four; of all the outcomes of the Roundtable, this is what seemed to have the most significant impact on him.

Another strong theme emerged around the issue of those who control processes being concerned about the outcomes of those processes. The notion that passionate young people were repeatedly disappointed with the lack of space and time to meaningfully dialogue with government is, for Participant Four, a very serious issue. There are consequences that need to be heeded:

It was a huge learning experience for me about the reality of things. It has shattered my illusions of government. However, it’s also been an integral part of my journey … I wouldn’t be here now if it wasn’t for that experience. If you’re promised a chance to be listened to … then that needs to be followed through on. If not, you end up with very jaded young people.

For Participant Four, the foundation of the Roundtable is flawed and, with Westhorp (1987) and Hart (1992), he questions the authenticity of young people’s participation. At best according to Westhorp it is “structured consultation” (p.3) and, for Hart, it falls into the category of non-participation, embracing aspects of “tokenism and decoration” (p.7).

Is the Roundtable a legitimate mechanism for youth participation, whereby young people are valued and respected for their various insights and experiences? Participant Four strongly suspects that the answer to this is no, and in fact the impact of the Roundtable is that it further alienates and disenfranchises young people. Participant Seven concurs with these thoughts and encourages the government to:

… stop “consulting” young people and start engaging with them … To think before acting, to stop operating as bureaucrats all the time and to start communicating with young people in ways that they can understand.

CONCLUSION

Having examined the various enticements offered by government to young people to participate on the National Youth Roundtable, this paper has become a cautionary tale. The emotional impact on the participants of the experience of the Roundtable needs to be taken seriously. Themes such as disillusionment, disappointment, hurt and apathy emerge as the aftermath of the Roundtable. When these themes are coupled with
attendant issues to do with youth participation, namely representation, consultation and legitimacy, then the effects of the National Youth Roundtable are significant. Participants reported that they went from being engaged, excited and hopeful to being hurt, disillusioned and disenchanted. The effect of this is further exclusion, a ramification that must be honestly considered. This is indeed the secret life of the National Youth Roundtable.

Further work on this issue is needed to explore the current modes of participation of young people. Young people are no longer participating in ways that even traditional literature on youth participation articulates. Additional work needs to be done on how participation can be brokered with young people via emerging technologies, and it needs to be the subject of ongoing research.

NOTES
1 “Mrs Ley” refers to Mrs Sussan Ley, former Australian Government Parliamentary Secretary for Children and Youth Affairs.

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Transitioning from state care: 
Young people’s journey to independence

BY PHILIP MENDES & BADAL MOSLEHUDDIN

Young people leaving state care have often been described as experiencing multiple disadvantages resulting from their abuse or neglect prior to entering care, their often negative experiences in care, and the lack of support provided to them as they transition from care. However, some parts of the leaving care literature tend to concentrate on the individual pathways of care leavers, rather than emphasising the significant structural disadvantages they have in common. In contrast, this paper argues that an affirmative action plan is necessary to assist all care leavers to overcome their earlier disadvantages and achieve better outcomes. At the very least, the state as parent should be seeking to approximate the supports that a typical parent in the community provides to young people leaving home up until the age of 25.

Leaving care is formally defined as the cessation of legal responsibility by the state for young people living in out-of-home care. But in practice, leaving care is a major life event and process that involves transitioning from dependence on state accommodation and supports to so-called self-sufficiency. According to a recent UK Government report:

Every young person needs continuing help to make a smooth transition to adulthood. Any good parent continues to offer love and support to their children well beyond 18, giving them the greatest head start in life that they can. We should demand no less for young people in care (Department for Education and Skills (DES) 2006, p.84).

Young people leaving out-of-home care are arguably one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society. Compared to most young people, they face particular difficulties in accessing educational, employment, housing and other developmental and transitional opportunities. Care leavers have been found to experience significant health, social and educational deficits including homelessness, involvement in juvenile crime and prostitution, mental and physical health problems, poor educational and employment outcomes, inadequate social support systems, and early parenthood (Community Affairs Reference Committee (CARC) 2004, pp.160-70; CARC 2005, pp.104-06; Courtney & Dworsky 2005; London 2004; Raman et al. 2005; Sinclair et al. 2005, pp.210-13; Stein & Dixon 2006).

Yet, despite these poor outcomes, there has been only limited public concern in Australia with the plight of care leavers. This silence reflects a number of factors. First, care leavers are a small, dispersed and relatively powerless group. Only about 1,700 young people aged 15–17 years annually exit the out-of-home care system. Some return to the family home while others move into independent living. They comprise less than 10% of the 21,795 children currently in care (CARC 2005, pp.82, 104).

Second, advocacy for care leavers has generally been led by a coalition of peak child welfare provider groups, such as the Victorian Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare and the New South Wales Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies (ACWA), some non-government agencies, a few activist academics, and consumer groups such as the Create Foundation, the national consumer group for young people in or who...

While all four components of this coalition have lobbied long and hard on humanitarian, practical and, more recently, economic rationalist grounds (Raman et al. 2005), their advocacy had only a limited impact on state government programs and legislation. New South Wales remains the only state to have introduced uniform state-wide support services for care leavers, although Western Australia, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria have made significant recent progress in this direction (Mendes & Moslehuddin 2004; Department of Human Services (DHS) 2006a).

For example, Victoria recently legislated, via the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, for the provision of leaving care and after-care services for young people up to 21 years of age. The 2006–2007 state budget has allocated $2.09 million in 2006–2007 growing to $3.73 million recurrently to support care leavers. The Act appears to oblige the government to assist care leavers with finances, housing, education and training, employment, legal advice, access to health and community services, and counselling and support, depending on the assessed level of need, and to consider the specific needs of Aboriginal young people. However, the relevant sections of the Act will not be proclaimed until March 2007, and as yet the government has not established a service model with clear standards and responsibilities (London & Moslehuddin 2007).

One reason for this relative lack of success is that leaving care seems to be a less polarising or emotive issue than other commensurate social problems such as mental health or disability or substance abuse, although some care leavers fall into those categories. Care leavers also seem to lack a vocal and influential professional (e.g. doctors or psychiatrists) or mainstream support network (e.g. middle-class parents) within the broader community. In addition, most young people don’t vote, and the majority of the parents of children in care are poor and marginalised. A consequence of this limited support constituency is that, with minor exceptions (Farouque 2005; Gooch 2005), the specific plight of care leavers rarely reaches the media.

A third problematic factor is the emphasis of sections of the academic literature on promoting the individual resilience of care leavers, rather than addressing the collective structural disadvantages faced by all care leavers. This argument suggests that many care leavers display considerable resilience in overcoming the odds and recovering from earlier trauma.

The positive agenda behind the application of resilience theory is a concern to emphasise and promote the capabilities and achievements of care leavers, rather than underplaying or even undermining their potential. And, to be sure, some authors interpret this concept broadly as reflecting the interaction between internal individual and external social, cultural and environmental factors, and involving structural and social supports and resources for children and young people in and leaving care that help to counter negative and stressful experiences (Broad 2005, p.127; Gilligan 2001, p.6; Harvey & Delfabbro 2004; Maunders et al. 1999, p.53; Raman et al. 2005 p.11; Stein 2004, pp.113-17).

But others seem to view resilience narrowly as being about the personal characteristics – the capabilities, the temperament, the competence or the moral fibre – of the young person (Osgood et al. 2005, p.12; Rayner & Montague 1999, p.40). This definition arguably blames the victim for failing to be successful, and helps to give governments an excuse to avoid their responsibilities to provide adequate programs and supports to all care leavers.

THE MULTIPLE DISADVANTAGES OF CARE LEAVERS

Many care leavers have experienced, and are still recovering from, considerable physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect prior to entering care. This process can reasonably be compared to undergoing rehabilitation from other significant traumatic experiences such as violent assault, torture, rape, and/or the murder of close relatives.

Associated challenges include coping with separation from natural families and associated anger and loss and grief, making peace with their biological families, relating to new families, and establishing connections with other significant adults in their social environment (Maluccio 1990, pp.7-8; Moslehuddin & Mendes 2006, p.50).

In addition, the extent to which young people blame themselves for their entry into care is likely to negatively impact on their psychological and emotional well-being (Cashmore & Paxman 1996, p.xiii). These experiences of separation and rejection may contribute to ongoing social, emotional and psychological disturbances, developmental delay, and significant behavioural difficulties compared to children and young people from a supportive family background (Mudaly & Goldard 2006, pp.83-86).

Second, many young people have experienced inadequacies in state care, including poor quality caregivers and constant shifts of placement, carers, schools and workers. Some have also experienced overt abuse, including sexual and physical assault, and emotional maltreatment. For example, the Forgotten Australians report on the experiences of children in out-of-home care from the 1920s to the 1970s, documented numerous examples of neglect and deprivation, and overt emotional, physical and sexual abuse (CARC 2004). Specific reference was made to separation from extended families, separation from siblings, suppression of identity and individuality, sexual and physical assault, forced adoption of babies, lack of education, unmet health needs, exploitation of children’s labour, medical experimentation, placement in adult mental hospitals, and the lack of any
preparation for leaving care or after care support (CARC 2004, pp.85-126). The overwhelming consensus was that children in care were not provided with the “love, affection and nurturing” necessary for adequate personal and emotional development (CARC 2004, p.xv).

This lack of stability, continuity and consistency undermines their social and educational/training opportunities and hinders their capacity to make a successful transition to independence following discharge from care (Cashmore & Paxman 1996, pp.158-59). Conversely, children who experience supportive and stable placements, including an ongoing positive relationship with social workers and significant others, are far more likely to overcome the adversities resulting from their pre-care and in-care experiences, and prosper when they leave care (Cashmore & Paxman 1996, pp.2-4 & 158-59; 2006a, pp.21-23; 2006b; Green & Jones 1999, pp.18-19).

Third, many care leavers can call on little, if any, direct family support or other community networks to ease their movement into independent living (Cashmore & Paxman 1996, p.3).

In addition to these major disadvantages, at 16 to 18 years of age, many young people currently experience an abrupt end to the formal support networks of state care. Care leavers are literally abandoned by their substitute parents and expected to transition directly from childhood dependence to adult self-sufficiency (London 2004, p.19; Propp et al. 2003; Raman et al. 2005, p.9; Sergeant 2006, pp.74-75).

In contrast to the accelerated transition to independence of care leavers, most young people still live at home till their early 20s and continue to receive social, practical, emotional and financial support. For example, a recent US study found that most Americans don’t expect their children to complete the transition to adulthood until the age of 26 years (Shirk & Stangler 2004, p.15).

The movement towards independence through leaving home generally involves a long transition period during which young people may leave and return home on three or more occasions. There is also, not infrequently, an intermediate or halfway stage between dependence and independent living during which young people may reside with extended family, or in a supportive institution such as a college or hostel (Maunders et al. 1999, pp.10-11).

The key factor here is the continued availability of most family homes as a “safety net” to which young people can return over a considerable period of time. It is this safety net of extended support which is currently not available to most young people leaving care. Graduation from care needs to become a far more gradual and flexible process based on levels of maturity and skill development, rather than simply age (Cashmore & Paxman 2006a, p.23). Researchers recommend use of the term “inter-dependence” rather than independent living in order to reflect a notion of shared care and responsibility between young people, their families, friends, workers and the broader community (Propp et al. 2003, p.265).

PATHWAYS TO POOR OUTCOMES
Research consistently depicts care leavers as being particularly disadvantaged and as having significantly reduced life chances. In drawing this connection, we are not suggesting a simplistic causal relationship between any experiences of state care and poor later outcomes.

Care leavers are not a homogeneous group and have varied backgrounds and experiences. But we are arguing that the structural disadvantages experienced by care leavers compared to other young people (Stein 2004, p.53; Broad 2005, pp.14-16) leave them more vulnerable to these outcomes.

Using mainly Australian research, some of the specific concerns identified include:

Homelessness
Studies have found a high correlation between state care and later homelessness (Johnstone 2006, pp.96, 246). This reflects the high mobility of many young people while in care, the unplanned and unprepared nature of many departures from state care, the absence of sufficient life skills required to live independently, and the lack of an option to “return home” if the initial independent living arrangements do not work out (Beihal & Wade 1999, pp.86-87; Bonnive 2003, p.6; Horrocks 2002, p.331; Maynard 2006).

Drug/alcohol use/abuse
Research suggests that care leavers are more likely to use, and occasionally abuse, drugs and alcohol. Such behaviour often serves as a form of escape from past childhood abuse, and associated emotional disturbance (Maunders et al. 1999, p.20; Owen 2000, p.78; Raman et al. 2006, p.41; Stein 2004, p.50).

Poor mental and physical health
The emotional effects of physical, emotional and sexual abuse often predispose young people in care towards psychological disruption, depression and suicide. Poor physical health is also prevalent (Maunders et al. 1999, p.49; Moslehuddin & Mendes 2006, p.51; Stein & Dixon 2006, p.420). For example, one study found that a significant number of former state wards had thought about or attempted suicide (Cashmore & Paxman 1996, pp.149-50).

Education and employment deficits
Due to a number of factors, such as stressful pre-care and care experiences, often resulting in learning and behavioural problems; lack of continuity in placements and schools; and low expectations from social workers, teachers and carers; young people in care are less likely to succeed academically (Beihal et al. 1994, p.241; Burley & Halpern 2001, p.9; Casey Family Programs 2001, pp.45-46). And often those who wish to complete their final years of school or attend university are forced to do so without government support (Green & Jones 1999,
Poor social support systems
Young care leavers tend to lack a functional social support network upon which they can rely during the transition from child welfare dependence to adult independence (Cashmore & Paxman 2006a, p.19; London 2004, p.29; Wilson 1997, p.91).

Juvenile prostitution
A number of studies have identified a linkage between care experiences and prostitution. Many care leavers see prostitution as a legitimate choice in view of their minimal education, and lack of employment-related skills (Mitchell 2000, p.11). A recent study of 30 drug-dependent sex workers found that 16 had been in the state care system, and stated they had been introduced to sex work and other harmful high-risk activities while in that care system (Child Wise 2004, p.6).

Crime
Research suggests that care leavers are over-represented in the criminal justice system, and particularly in juvenile detention facilities. Contributing factors appear to include inadequate accommodation or homelessness, poor educational experiences, underlying anger and resentment towards the state care system, and the absence of effective legal advocacy and support (CARC 2005, pp.169-70; Community Services Commission (CSC) 1996; Moslehuddin & Mendes 2006, p.52; Owen 2000, pp.85-86).

Early parenthood
Early pregnancy and parenthood is particularly common among young people leaving care, especially young women who have experienced sexual abuse. Other contributing factors include lack of support and education around sexual health and relationships, peer pressure within residential care settings, difficulties in accessing contraceptive and sexual health services, and loneliness and isolation (Chase et al. 2006). A number of local studies found that a significant number of young women were pregnant or had a child soon after leaving care. A number of these women had already experienced protective intervention with their own children (Bonnice 2002, p.37; Cashmore & Paxman 1996, pp.144-45 & 174, 2006a; Raman et al. 2006, pp.23, 40).

Indigenous care leavers
There is evidence that Indigenous young people are over-represented within the out-of-home care system (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2006, pp.50-52), that they experience disproportionate abuse when in care (Liddell et al. 2006), and there is also some limited documentation that Indigenous young people face particular challenges when leaving care (Maunders et al. 1999, pp.39-40, 66, 79-80). The Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS 2006b) has noted, in particular, the high use of kinship care with Aboriginal children, their distance from communities of origin, and their high rates of placement (DHS 2006b).

Rural care leavers
Rural and regional care leavers may experience specific locational disadvantage compared to their urban peers (Maunders et al. 1999, p.42). Many young people in the country appear to face significant barriers in accessing social and economic services and opportunities. Some of the disadvantages cited include higher unemployment, lack of access to health services, poorer school retention, loss of peers to the city, higher rates of illness including suicide, and greater isolation due to inadequate transport (Alston 2005). The pilot assessment conducted by Bonnice (2002) for St Luke’s Children, Youth and Family Services found that rural care leavers lacked sufficient accommodation options and other support services compared to their urban peers.

AN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PLAN TO PROMOTE BETTER OUTCOMES
Affirmative action supports and programs are needed to compensate care leavers for the disadvantages produced by their traumatic pre-care experiences, their lack of family support and, in some cases, their less than supportive substitute care experiences (Cashmore & Paxman 2006a, p.24; Green & Jones 1999, p.4). At the very least, state care authorities should aim to approximate the ongoing support that responsible parents in the community typically provide to their children after they leave home. The aim of this support would be to promote the participation of care leavers in mainstream social and economic systems (Broad 2005, p.14; Pokempner 2006). The provision of the following assistance during and following the transition from care is essential:

Transition period
Many care leavers characterise their departure from care as abrupt, depersonalised and irreversible (Martin 1996). Conversely, effective transitions from care should be well-planned, undertaken in consultation with the young person, and reflect developmental maturity rather than solely age (Biehal & Wade 1999, pp.87-88). For example, the UK Government has suggested that young people be given a veto over any decisions about legally leaving care before they turn 18 years (DES 2006, p.84). All the evidence suggests that those who leave care at an older age are likely to do better because they are provided with greater ongoing social and economic support (Courtney & Dworsky 2005, p.15).
Housing
A number of authors have noted that care leavers are expected to rely on inappropriate supported accommodation and assistance programs (SAAP) that were actually designed as short-term transitional housing programs, with a significant crisis component for those who are already homeless or escaping from domestic violence (Bonnice 2002, p.8; Green & Jones 1999, p.33; Maunders et al. 1999, pp.19, 43).

In contrast, we believe care leavers require ongoing accommodation within the family home, or, alternatively, assistance with accessing and maintaining affordable and stable alternative accommodation. Given that 95% of the Australian children in care reside in home-based care – either foster care or kinship care – (CARC 2005, p.83), the easiest solution would be to provide continuing financial support to maintain these placements (Cashmore & Paxman 2006a, p.23; 2006b, p.239). Where this is not possible, care leavers should preferably be offered specific accommodation designed to meet their needs. A good example of such a model is provided by St Luke's Children, Youth and Family Services in Bendigo which offers care leavers access to secure and safe housing via a flexible range of housing options including subsidised rental properties and a boarder/provider program (Bonnice 2005).

Similar models of supported accommodation have been developed by local authorities in the UK (DES 2006, pp.88-89; Stein 2004, pp.100-01).

Social supports and relationships
Many care leavers face independence alone and isolated, despite attempts to reconcile with their family of origin. Care leavers should be assisted to renegotiate relationships with family members, and also to develop wider informal support networks and friendship groups, including a mentor or advocate (Biehal et al. 1995, p.245; Broad 2005, p.126; London 2004, p.29; Raman et al. 2005, p.10; Sinclair et al. 2005, pp.212-13).

Physical and mental health
Many young people leave care with poor physical and psychological health. Care leavers should be provided with access, if necessary, to ongoing counselling in order to address unresolved feelings of anger and grief from their childhood. For example, the Forgotten Australians report noted that counselling was beneficial in terms of promoting good physical and mental health, offering a supportive relationship in times of crisis, building self-esteem, helping to overcome depression or stressful situations, and developing meaningful relationships (CARC 2004, p.305). Care leavers also require support to have regular medical check-ups and develop healthy lifestyles, plus ongoing assistance with the costs of their health care including dental care and other specialist treatment (Saunders & Broad 1997; Stein 2004, p.96).

Early parenthood
Many care leavers become parents, but seem to receive little support from state care systems. Holistic programs of parent support should be available to assist care leavers who become young mothers. There needs to be a particular emphasis on providing them with the skills and resources that will prevent their own children being placed in care (Biehal et al. 1995, p.141; Cashmore & Paxman 1996, p.174; Rutman et al. 2002).

Education
Care leavers have to overcome significant barriers to achieve academic success. Many will require ongoing support and encouragement to complete further high school education and/or training, including specialised teaching and tutoring (Broad 2005, p.32; Stein 2004, p.98). They also require substantial assistance to undertake higher education. At the very least, Australia should follow the lead of the UK Government which has introduced a national bursary of two thousand pounds minimum for each care leaver undertaking higher education. Some local UK authorities provide even greater financial support (DES 2006, pp.85, 90-91).

Finances and income security
Due to poor educational experiences, many care leavers are likely to be unemployed and reliant on the independent rate of youth allowance. Those moving into independent living should be provided with financial assistance to access appropriate furniture and household items, and to pay advance rent and bond if necessary. This assistance should not be limited to a one-off payment (as with the current Transition to Independence Allowance scheme) given that some young people may move on a number of occasions before they attain stable housing (Biehal et al. 1995, p.55; Bonnice 2003, p.10). Care leavers may also need specialist assistance in their dealings with Centrelink in order to ensure that they are not unfairly subject to payment breaches and associated fines and suspensions.

Indigenous care leavers
Given adverse historical experiences, such as those of the Stolen Generation, the disproportionate number of Indigenous young people in care may require specialised assistance to reconnect with their family and community. Arguably a specialist leaving-care service is required to address their particular cultural needs. The state-wide Marungbai service currently operating in New South Wales suggests one model whereby such a service is established in collaboration with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies and communities (Maunders et al. 1999, p.80).

Rural care leavers
The locational disadvantage of rural and regional care leavers means that specialised supports and services are
needed to facilitate their participation in the social and economic mainstream. For example, the leaving-care and after-care support service established by St Luke’s Children, Youth and Family Services provides a model of an effective and holistic service to meet the housing and support needs of care leavers in rural areas (Bonnice 2005).

CONCLUSION
Young people leaving care experience a number of structural disadvantages as a result of their pre-care and in-care experiences. Many face substantial social exclusion in terms of lacking access to adequate income and resources, being denied entry into employment or training, and struggling to establish supportive social networks. Yet too often, the state, as parent, abandons them when their care order ceases, irrespective of their ongoing needs or level of maturity. In contrast, if the state acted as a responsible parent, it would aim to redress those disadvantages by providing care leavers with the same ongoing resources and opportunities that other responsible parents offer their children.

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‘Play hard, play fair’. Using sport to engage young males in social action

BY NEIL HALL

This paper will summarise some of the author’s findings from his doctoral research into sport, young males and civic engagement, with particular reference to how sport helps young males form a sense of belonging and a sense of contribution to their community. The paper will also explore barriers to getting young males involved in community development projects and activities, and show how youth development organisations can utilise sport (despite some of its negative associations) as a pathway for young males to be civically and politically engaged.

INTRODUCTION

I am passionate about sport, having been involved in various ways for most of my life. I am also passionate about social justice and the process of community development in addressing social justice issues. Throughout my professional and academic life, I have been active in working with young people through inclusive community development processes in a bid to enhance youth participation.

My research topic first began to take shape during my Masters studies (Hall 1995), during which I investigated the alcohol culture of residential students at the University of Western Sydney (UWS), where associations with sport emerged as a strong element of the student alcohol culture. The topic was re-invigorated a few years later while conducting a community safety action research study (Hall & Banno 2001; Hall 2004). I found that sport emerged as a key factor in a number of the participants’ experiences of feeling significant and part of community life. Sport became a useful pathway for engaging young males in strategies related to the action research process. This study resulted in a funded project to develop leadership in young males using a sport focus. This engaged with a cohort of young males that had not before been involved in community-based activities. The project showed that young males were enthusiastic about engaging with their community through the medium of sport where they would not engage through any other medium.

Eventually I found myself wanting to formally answer the question of whether young males’ involvement in sport might contribute to aspects of civic engagement such as participation in community life, an understanding of their reasons for participating, acknowledgment by their community, a sense of belonging, and development of social networks/social cohesion.

Literature (e.g. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2004; Wright et al. 2005) shows that, in Australia, sports participation for males is highest during high school, and there is a significant drop in physical activity after this point. Some literature that explores the connections between young males and sport outlines the general benefits of sport to the individual (e.g. higher self-esteem, communication skills, learning to work in a team) and the flow-on benefits in areas such as schooling and family or peer relationships (e.g. West 1996).

Some literature argues the link between sport and the construction of gender identity in males (e.g. Beal 1996; Burgess, Edwards & Skinner 2003; Hickey, Fitzclarence & Matthews 2000), although the works of Hemphill (1998) and Burstyn (1999), for example, address more negative aspects of sports culture and males, which are often related to body image, drug use or violence. To date, there has also been a small amount of literature that
explores notions of social capital (e.g. Lopez & Moore 2006; Hyppä & Mäki 2003; Ruston 2003) and social exclusion (McKay 1990; Bryant 2001) in connection with young males and sport. Other inquiry into sport is often related to out-of-the-ordinary phenomena (e.g. Rojek 2006; Giulianotti 2004), with little attention paid to people’s everyday “grassroots” experiences of sport. It was young males’ local, everyday experience of sport that was explored in this study.

The literature on civic engagement encompasses a broad spectrum of political positions, which makes it challenging to reach a meaningful definition since there are so many alternative views. On the other hand, as Youniss et al. (2002) demonstrate, this broad range of definitions can easily accommodate a variety of forms of civic engagement. There is also a sense that civic engagement is a process by which people learn or understand the way their community/society works and then become involved in social or public activities based on that new understanding. On one hand, there is an intellectual and emotional engagement, and on the other, a more practical engagement. For the purposes of this research, civic engagement was taken to be any form of participation in community life undertaken with a conscious reason. This was an attempt to be as inclusive as possible, and to allow for political/ideological variations of the participants. Some literature relating to sports and civic engagement is North American and often relates to whether young people enrol to vote, a perspective that is not directly relevant in a country with compulsory voting, such as Australia.

Over the past 20 years, I have often seen youth development organisations attempt to provide opportunities for young people to contribute through attendance at management committees or advisory groups. This formalised participation has often served to include the already included young people and further marginalise the excluded. Sport has sometimes been used to engage with young people, with skateboarding being the most common type of sport used. At other times, sports (male team sports in particular) have been avoided for a number of reasons. First, because there is a perception that sports reinforce negative male stereotypes. Second, because sports are considered to be representative of male-dominated social structures and, therefore, supporting or celebrating values/behaviours that reinforce violence, oppression or isolationism. Third, a sports focus excludes all those young people that are not really into sports. Last (and pragmatically), sports pose administrative problems in the area of workers’ compensation, professional indemnity and public liability insurance.

As a result of these ponderings, this research set out to examine the possible connections between local sport and meaningful civic engagement by young males.

THE RESEARCH

This piece of qualitative research was conducted within a framework mostly concerned with exploring the lived experience of young males in terms of their participation in sports and involvement in their communities. Alston and Bowles (2003) and Finlay (1999) refer to this process of exploring the lived experience of participants as phenomenology. In this research, stories were collected and documented from the young male participants using semi-structured interviews.

Volunteers were recruited through youth organisations, “word of mouth” advertising through the researcher’s networks (e.g. sporting clubs/organisations, churches and non-government organisations), through sporting activities of UWS, and through contact with UWS students from Social Work and Community Welfare degrees. A number of informal conversations also occurred during the study. Some of the content of the conversations was useful in understanding the connections between sport and civic engagement in the opinions of the volunteers. For those informal contacts who did not participate in a formal interview, verbal consent was obtained to refer to their ideas in the context of the study. The difficulty in obtaining written consent in this context, or of engaging the young males in formal interviews, had mostly to do with the location and time of the conversations, which primarily occurred on the sidelines of sports fields and in pubs.

By the end of the study, the formal sample consisted of 12 young males aged between 18 and 22 years, all of whom had moved on from secondary education, with another 10 having been engaged in informal conversations. All participants either resided in Greater Western Sydney or were undertaking tertiary studies in the region. Some of the participants were employed in full-time, part-time or casual positions. The majority of participants were from an Anglo-Australian background, with a small number born in Australia to families from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. In terms of socioeconomic indicators, no specific demographic data were collected from the participants, but the majority of their home suburbs represented what could be termed working-class and middle-class areas. It should be noted that it was not my intention to measure or compare forms of civic engagement across socioeconomic indicators. The participants had a broad range of sporting involvements. In addition, they were able to demonstrate some aspects of civic engagement, which may have contributed to their decision to volunteer in the first place.

THE FINDINGS

A number of different themes have emerged from the data. There were approximately 40 different labels that emerged in the raw data. They represent a range of ideas that have been found in other literature, but there are also a number of themes that appear to be unique to this study. Given that both the previous literature and the participants’ experiences indicated a clustering around sport being something that helped young males feel a sense of belonging and also feel that in some way they
contribute to their community through sports participation and associated activities, I have grouped together sets of six to seven of the more common themes according to aspects of belonging and aspects of contribution.

**Aspects of belonging**

**Teams and clubs**

There were a number of ideas expressed that related participants’ preference for team sports over individual sports. Those who played both types of sport felt that the feeling of being part of a team was one of the best things about playing a sport. For many, this tied in with the broader concept of “the club” as well as the team and, interestingly for players of individual sports (for example, boxing), the club environment was also reported as part of their experience. Experiences of “the club” were not always positive ones, however, with a number of participants describing conflict and clashes (of values or personality) with club coaches or administrators. These experiences varied according to the sport played. For example, those involved in rugby league reported significant clashes with adult club members over the “win at all costs” attitude perceived to be part of the club culture. These clashes, for numerous participants, resulted in changing clubs or changing codes of football. Many who had switched to rugby union experienced a club atmosphere that was more to their liking, in terms of fair play, respect for players and officials, and simply having fun with the game.

This relates to a further theme of differences in understanding about what it means to be competitive. There is no doubt that the desire to win was strong in all the participants, exemplified by such phrases as “nobody likes losing”. However, for these participants, being competitive seemed to be much more closely related to “doing your best”, “not going out half-hearted” and “bringing out the best in yourself and your team mates”. Winning was important, but not as important as knowing that they had tried their hardest, and been involved in that endeavour with a group of trusted team mates.

**Having fun and feeling good**

Sport provided an opportunity to have fun. Many participants questioned the point of playing sport at all if the playing experience did not include a strong element of fun. The specific aspects of having fun meant different things to different participants. However, the common element was described as “enjoying the game”. For some this included the physical contact involved in their chosen sport. The corporeal experience of tackling and being tackled, for example, and for one or two even engaging in minor on-field fights heightened the fun of playing the game.

The notion of “having fun” was also related to the experience of feeling good through sport. Feeling good was achieved in a number of ways. For example, winning made them feel good. Of equal importance in their experiences was feeling good from knowing they had done all they could to achieve their goals even if they did not win (e.g. “making a big hit”). Feeling good was also derived from helping others to play their best, and commonly from the sensation of being part of a team. For some participants, the team environment also provided opportunities to feel good by playing well and “earning the respect of the older guys”. The recognition and respect of peers, both within the team and with the broader peer group, was an important source of feeling good.

**Health and relationships**

Participants listed a number of benefits to sport that included health and fitness, fun, and being active. Overwhelmingly, though, all participants related the experience of positive social relationships as the best part about playing sport. Terms like “mateship”, “camaraderie”, “networks” and “being with friends” were commonly used to describe the benefits and advantages of playing sport, regardless of whether it was an individual or team sport that they were involved in.

**Identity**

Many participants saw themselves as being identified or defined by either their level of skill or the weight of their involvement in their chosen sport. Their reflections did not commonly associate sport with their masculinity, although they weren’t asked any specific question related to this aspect of identity. Some inference could be made in relation to gender identity based on their comments, but in their stories the notion of identity was of a more generic nature. Comments like: “sport’s me life”, “sport is pretty much what I do”, “everyone sees me as the footy player” and “sport helps me realise who I am” indicated that if they were asked to identify who/what they were, they would see themselves as sportsmen.

**Positive relationships with adults**

A number of participants reported that integral to their experiences of sport were positive relationships with significant and trusted adults, whether that adult was their father, a high school teacher or a coach. The category of the adult may have varied, but the quality of the relationship with the adult was commonly held as an important part of their sport experience.

**The role of ‘place’**

“Place” was viewed differently depending on the type of sport concerned. For example, for those involved in court sports such as volleyball and basketball, their community was, to some extent, defined by the sports venue itself. The venue as “place” was significant as a central point for meeting, socialising, competing, and being a focus for the defined community of court sports players. A similar feeling existed about the gym for those who were into boxing. For others who were more involved in team sports, “place” was more closely aligned with the
local suburb in which they lived, especially if the club for which they played their sport was suburb-based. Many felt strongly that they were representing their suburb when they played.

From a different angle, those that played for teams outside their local suburb (whether a different suburb or a larger district/regional team) did not feel the connection to "place as community" as strongly because they connected community more to team and social networks, but they still felt that it was important to do their best for their defined community.

Recognition
Being valued and respected was important to the participants. They enjoyed the feeling of being recognised for their skill – or sometimes just for their membership of a sporting team – by any or all of the following: team mates, close peers, broader circles of young people, family members and the broader community. This theme of recognition tied in closely with their sense of having their place/belonging acknowledged by the community, and was also an underlying aspect of having their contribution to community life valued by their community.

Aspects of contribution
Passion
Passion – for sport in general and, for some, their sport of choice – was evident in the descriptions of the participants' experiences. Passion was demonstrated by a strong interest in, or emotional commitment to, sport.

For those who had played a number of different sports during their life (or even in the last two to five years), it was clear that they had more positive comments to make about certain sports. Comparison was often made between rugby league and rugby union, with rugby union usually receiving a glowing positive account as opposed to reports of sour experiences with rugby league.

Values
Many participants reported that "fair play" and "respect" were central values that contributed to the way they play sport. There was some overlap between the two terms which corresponded to playing by the rules, not cheating, respecting one’s opponents, respecting referees (their word is final), playing to the best of one's ability, but not striving to win at all costs. There was some amount of agreement in the idea that “what happens on the field stays on the field”, and that in post-match proceedings it is customary and in fact an enjoyable part of the shared competitive experience to “have a drink with the other side after the game”.

The origin or evolution of these values systems was unclear in the reflections of the participants. They were not able to delineate whether sport taught them these values, whether they already had these values, whether they came from their family environment or whether they came from elsewhere. Finding a cause and effect relationship was difficult because the majority of participants had been playing sport from a very young age.

From sport to life
In terms of what they had learned from sport and taken into their life in general, participants reported a number of different factors. Apart from well-worn statements about sport building character, two of the main carry-overs related to confidence and communication. Many had learned to be more confident in their own opinions and to be more confident in communicating in a non-aggressive manner. This was particularly the case for those who had been given positions of responsibility within their sport, team or club (e.g. team captaincy, trainer or assistant trainer, or coaching junior teams). One participant noted that he now “uses sporting analogies for explaining everything”.

Other prominent responses were the development of attitudes related to the notions of fair play and respect. Having learned to respect referees, officials and opponents through sport, this attitude had become part of the way they viewed people in their workplace and their community, and many had an expectation of being treated with respect in return. Respect generally meant acknowledging the right of others to their opinion, even if you disagreed with it, and “giving people a fair go”.

Hard work and discipline were factors that also came up. The idea of reward for effort was strong among these young males, as was the approach to disciplining yourself to get the job done well. For some of the participants, these attitudes particularly applied to the workplace, as did the concept of teamwork – having learned team work in the sporting context, participants described the experience of working together where everyone has a specific role and they do their best to get a job done.

The development of leadership through sport enabled some participants to apply to that to other settings (work, study, community) in terms of bringing out the best in others and looking after others (e.g. injuries and first aid).

Contributing to community life
There were a number of ways in which participants viewed themselves as contributing to the life and vitality of their community. The first was that they felt they were contributing to community life simply by playing their sport – that is, being part of an activity that was seen publicly on the playing fields in the middle of their suburb. There was also an overwhelming sense of responsibility amongst the participants for “giving back to the game”, whether that was by helping the development of younger players within their chosen sport (e.g. coaching and managing junior teams – often where their younger brothers were playing), or by promoting sport in the broader community (e.g. involvement in fundraising or attracting new players to the club). Many also spoke of representing their area when they played their sports in other areas of Sydney.
Some also spoke of being able to help their team mates, not just in sport-oriented activities but beyond that into other areas of life where they might be having problems.

Intellectual engagement
The intellectual/emotional dimension of civic engagement emerged in a number of ways. First, many of the participants had an underlying altruism that had developed during time spent in their sport and with their team mates. They simply wanted to help if they could. The more marked experiences of these came from those who, because of their sporting experiences and relationships with team mates, had changed their attitudes from being fairly intolerant, for example, of juvenile lawbreakers, to being quite open to a more progressive approach to such issues.

Another aspect of this related to the emerging passions of the participants as they matured and progressed in their sporting experiences. Learning more about nutrition, for example, led one young male to be quite vehement about the need to address availability of food in schools. Another was animated about drugs in sport (and drugs in general), and another passionate about the role of umpires in weeding out cheats. These examples all demonstrated a growing capacity for thinking and talking politically that they said had come from their sporting involvement.

Practical engagement
On the more practical dimension of civic engagement, there were a number of key contexts in which these young males were able to express their contribution. The first and most obvious has been through their team/club in fundraising and promoting sport locally. For many, though, their engagement first began to emerge in high school (e.g. mentoring, peer support, helping with younger sports teams), which was also where their sports participation was highest. It was at this stage, too, that a number of the interviewees participated in a sports-based leadership development project, which provided opportunities to organise community events, get involved in mentoring, and provide some input to the management committee of a local NGO. Many of these young men reported that if the project had not involved sport, they would have had no interest in participating.

A number of the research participants are now also pursuing careers which could be considered more civically engaged (e.g. social work/welfare, teaching, police, defence force and fire brigade). Others are pursuing sports-related careers (e.g. personal trainer). For a significant number of the young men, their interest in these careers has emerged as they progressed through their sporting experiences.

One interesting aspect that emerged was a feeling amongst some of the participants that even though they were passionate and knowledgeable about some issues, they felt that they were not able, qualified, prepared, or old enough to engage in practical social/political action. This meant that for some, the depth of their civic engagement seemed to be limited by their self-perception.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS
FOR SERVICE DELIVERY
Self-determination
The first issue of relevance is related to the young males’ own definition of contribution. Youth participation strategies (such as management committees, advisory groups, youth councils, etc.), do not seem to recognise and value the contribution of young people as they define it. These young men felt that they contributed to community life simply by playing a sport in or for the local community. For some, this was enough and they were sufficiently engaged in community life. This reinforces other research (e.g. Hall & Banno 2001; Hall & Mason 2000) that suggests this same relationship between boys’ engagement and sport and, interestingly, was a principle that also applied to girls’ engagement and dancing, or indeed the nature of participation for any group of young people who meet and talk in shops, parks and street corners. This is not to say that young people should not be encouraged to move to a deeper level of civic participation, but that the youth-defined level of participation, as opposed to the worker/government definition, needs also to be appreciated and celebrated rather than denigrated. This process also begins to connect with a young male’s sense of identity. If their identity is derived from sport (as seemed to be indicated in my research), and their contribution through sports participation is unappreciated or even mocked, this can leave them with the impression that they as people – as men in the making – are in fact unappreciated and, therefore, they become marginalised.

Discovering passion
In the same way that youth-defined participation needs to be acknowledged, the direction that youth social action can take, according to Eden and Roker (2002) needs to be driven by their passions. It is simply untenable to ask young males to get involved in an issue in which they have no interest, no matter how passionate the worker may be about the issue. Many of the young males interviewed in my research got involved in community activities only because they were related to sport. This has since become a pathway for pursuing other forms of civic engagement, but it had to begin with something related to their own passion. Once engaged, they can then be taught how to channel their energy and skills into a broader range of issues.

Biddulph (1997) suggests that this growth/learning process often happens because of a positive relationship with a significant adult. In the case of sport, this significant adult is often a coach. The young males in my study responded particularly well to positive relationships with adult males. In a number of instances, the young person’s non-sporting and social/political interests
developed as a result of understanding the adult’s broader passions. This type of mentoring relationship, in which civic engagement develops, is a key element in the literary definitions of mentoring (e.g. Biddulph 1997; Hall 2004; West 1996; Yates & Youniss 1999). It embraces an intellectual/emotional dimension not beholden to any one particular political perspective, thus avoiding the possibility of ideological conflicts between young people and workers. Youth workers need to maturely assess their current or potential role as a mentor in this learning process.

**Barriers to getting young males involved**

There are a number of issues emerging from my research that relate to the difficulty of getting young males involved in community development and social action. The first is obvious: time. Wright et al. (2005) show that participation in sports declines in senior school years and beyond mostly because of less available time and competing priorities such as work, study and relationships. Lopez and Moore (2006) suggest that the same holds true for participation in broader civic engagement, with a number of my research participants indicating they did not have time at the moment even for sport, let alone getting involved in other community activities. Asking young males to be involved in community development and social action may, therefore, prove a costly experience for them. For workers/services who want to engage with young males, the first question must be: why do you want to do it? It is important that the service exists for the target group, rather than the other way around. If there is a genuine need that can be met or a practical service that can be offered that young men are not receiving from other sources, then there is some basis for action. If, however, the motivation for engaging with young males is to make service statistics look better or for some other tokenistic or self-involved reason, then this needs a rethink. Civic engagement is a demand, and all demands on young people’s time need to be respected.

This relates to the second barrier, which is young males’ time of life. A number of participants said they would like to follow up on their politically-oriented interests and passions in a few years, after completing study or having their business up and running. In their mind, this would make their efforts more noticeable and, therefore, more effective. Some, though, had great-sounding ideas, but lacked the self-confidence to take the initiative in any kind of community/social action. Therefore, despite the confidence learned from sports participation, self-perception becomes a third barrier to civic engagement, although I suspect that the two are closely connected. Lack of self-confidence may underlie the “time of life” barrier. Either way, self-perception is one barrier that applies to young males, whether or not they are considered “marginalised”. On this front, one of the drawbacks of this particular piece of research is that none of the participants could be thought as marginalised young males, since through sports they were connected in some way to their community. However, many of them noted that if they didn’t do sports they wouldn’t do anything.

In terms of addressing the “time of life” barrier, workers can choose to take them at their word and wait a few years before expecting their involvement. If, however, it is the self-perception and lack of self-confidence which are at play here, then workers can have a key role by maintaining interest through sports-based programs and gradually building young males’ confidence for broader social action.

As Youniss et al. (2002) intimate, mismatched politics is a fourth potential barrier, particularly where the definition of civic engagement is an all-embracing one. Some of the participants in this research had what could arguably be called conservative opinions (e.g. zero tolerance on drugs), but were still interested in community action. Workers with a more left-of-centre position need to consider how important their politics are and whether they can still collaborate with enthusiastic young males with whom they disagree politically or ideologically.

The final barrier relates to workers’ negative associations with sport. My experience has been that, at an interagency meeting for example, the mention of male team sports produces groans of frustration, annoyance or mocking from the predominantly female youth workers present. While it is true that there are many negative aspects of sport (as mentioned earlier), my research suggests that sports participation has become a pathway for many of these young males into community involvement and civically engaged careers. The barrier here is that young males pick up on worker negativity, and so they become aggressive, or they may feel they are not wanted or that their masculine identity is being put down. None of these possibilities are good options.

**CONCLUSION**

The findings from my research suggest that sport is a particularly useful way for young males to engage in community life. Sport provided them with a source for a sense of belonging and recognition, a means of contributing to the life of their community, and a pathway for civic engagement at both an intellectual/emotional level and a practical level. Despite some of the barriers, there is real potential for youth services to use sports not just as recreational activities, but as avenues for connecting with young males and engaging them in community development and social action processes.

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Youth work students mentoring young people at risk of homelessness: A partnership between a youth work degree program and a local youth agency

BY TRUDI COOPER AND ORIETTA SIMONS, WITH ANDREW HALL, MELISSA PORTEUS & AMY HACKET

This paper describes a collaborative action research project between Joondalup Youth Support Services (JYSS) and the Edith Cowan University (ECU) youth work degree program team to develop effective strategies for mentoring young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The project investigated how mentoring was integrated into existing agency structures and gathered data from a variety of sources to identify the benefits and difficulties inherent in developing successful mentoring relationships with transient young people. The paper makes concrete recommendations about strategies that enhanced the success of the project and will discuss lessons learnt.

STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM
The purpose of the research was to resolve several practical problems previously identified in the literature in relation to provision of mentoring programs for young people at risk of homelessness. In particular, this research project sought to develop, test and describe procedures that could be used by other agencies that might want to establish voluntary mentoring programs for transient young people. An outcome of the project has been a “mentoring kit” that contains documentation, policy and procedures that have been developed, tested and refined during this research project. The principal practical problems identified in the literature included how to recruit, train and support suitable mentors, how to match mentors and mentees and how to help mentors sustain relationships with mentees who have transient lifestyles. The primary purpose of the research was to develop, test and report on a program that would resolve these issues. Therefore, the research used an action research methodology that went through two iterations of the cycle.

BACKGROUND
The mentoring program described in this research was a voluntary program intended for young people aged 15–21 years who were clients of JYSS services, primarily the services relating to the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). The focus was on the development of an additional complementary service delivery strategy to enhance protective factors associated with crime prevention and young people. Factors associated with reduced involvement in crime include the development of self-worth, self-efficacy, stable accommodation, pro-social participation in community activities and meaningful day activity, such as employment, education or training. The Office of Crime Prevention (OCP) in Western Australia and JYSS provided funding for this research project. JYSS took responsibility for the day-to-day management of the project.

This project built upon research findings from a survey and review of literature on mentoring in SAAP, previously conducted by Joondalup Youth Support Service with funding from the Department of Family and Community Services (Koepke 2004). In summary, this report concluded that:

• Young people without stable accommodation and who lack positive adult community connections are at greater risk of involvement in crime, of recidivism, and of becoming victims of crime, than young people who have stable accommodation and access to positive community networks.
• Mentoring is a potentially useful means of providing positive community connections to young people whose circumstances place them at risk of both involvement in crime and of victimisation.
• Success or failure of mentoring programs is highly sensitive to program infrastructure and especially the adequacy of mentor screening, training, and the adequacy of the process used to match mentors and mentees (Koepke 2004).
• Although it is acknowledged that training of mentors is necessary, there is no clear agreement on the nature of the training required (Koepke 2004).

According to other literature and consultations, recruitment of sufficient numbers of appropriate mentors is an ongoing challenge for many programs (ARTD Management and Research Consultants 2002: Sipe 1996, p.13).

Previous research on school-based mentoring and community mentoring of young people examined the optimum length of the mentoring relationship. There is an orthodox view based upon experience in the USA, particularly related to the Big Brother Big Sister program, that argues that maximum gains occur from mentoring relationships in excess of 12 months. Some argue for a three-year mentoring relationship. This represents a very big commitment by both the mentor and the mentee. Although there appears to be a consensus on this, many authors, directly or indirectly, reference the same research on the Big Brother Big Sister program reported by Rhodes and Dubois (2006). They found that the greater the length of mentoring relationships, the greater the gain. They also reported that mentees whose relationships lasted less than six months had worse outcomes than the outcomes for controls. At first sight this appears to imply that mentoring relationships must last longer than one year to be useful, and preferably two or three years, and that relationships that last less than six months must be harmful.

This interpretation is simplistic, however, because all reports of mentoring programs acknowledge that many relationships fail. In other words, many, sometimes most, do not last for 12 months. In the mentoring projects studied, the relationships were voluntary. Young people could choose to disengage. Young people who chose to remain in mentoring programs for 12 months or more made that choice because mentoring was useful to them. Young people who leave programs within the first six months are most likely to be young people who do not find mentoring useful. These two groups of young people may be qualitatively different. In other words, an alternative explanation is that mentoring is a strategy that is useful for some groups of young people, and that young people for whom it is not useful are more likely to leave the program within the first six months. The orthodox interpretation is valid only if we tacitly assume that mentoring is a universally useful strategy, and we have not found any programs that make this claim.

An alternative approach was taken in a study by Black et al. (2006) who assigned mothers randomly to a control group or a matched treatment group and then had a visiting mentoring program for the treatment group. Although it was intended that the young women would be visited up to 19 times over a twelve-month period, when they evaluated the interventions they found that 60% of the treatment group actually received fewer than eight visits, because of the “complex living situation” of the mother and difficulties in matching the schedules of mentors and mentees (Black et al. 2006, p.e1096). Despite this, the evaluation showed that women in the control group were three times more likely than women in the treatment group to have given birth to a second child, provided the women in the treatment group had had at least two contacts with the home mentor. This second study indicates that even small interventions, if they have clear goals, can sometimes have positive effects.

With this alternative interpretation in mind, we followed the advise of the Scottish Mentoring Network “Mentoring schemes should have realistic and achievable outcomes” (Wood, 2003). Many potential mentors are reluctant to commit themselves for a one to three-year time period. Likewise, many potential mentees living in emergency accommodation are unable to realistically envisage their life circumstances one to three years into the future because of the present insecurity of their accommodation and uncertain options. The mentoring intervention was designed to suit the circumstances of both mentors and mentees. The intention of the program was for the mentors to support the mentees to achieve some fairly short-term personally identified goals. The mentor coordinator made clear to potential mentees the constraints within which the program operated.

The research was undertaken by a partnership between JYSS, a community-based youth agency that provides multiple services to young people who are at risk of homelessness, and the Edith Cowan University (ECU) youth work degree program. The partnership was intended to be mutually beneficial to the primary work of both organisations and to produce outcomes required by the OCP. This collaboration was intended to address problems faced by all organisations. Recruitment and maintenance of suitable mentors was an important concern for JYSS. The youth work degree (like other youth work education courses) often finds it difficult to locate a sufficient number of high-quality placements where student youth workers can gain well-supervised real experience. The OCP supports partnerships between universities and service delivery agencies to enable better articulation between research and practice. A shared goal of the mentoring program, therefore, was to document and develop a suitable training and support process to enable second-year youth work degree students to act as mentors to JYSS clients and, in the process, gain benefits for both mentees and mentors.
The research program used an action research methodology to refine practice, to report and resolve implementation problems and to share our learning from this process. The project has also produced a “kit” that includes policies and procedures to be adapted by other organisations considering similar partnerships.

From the beginning, as partners we acknowledged that although the goals for the project were mutually compatible, each partner had different primary concerns within this project, and we were mindful that conflicts engendered by this had to be resolved constructively. For JYSS, the mentoring program was provided as an adjunct supportive service to complement existing provisions and to work synergistically with existing programs provided by JYSS. These programs included emergency accommodation, employment support, alternative education and emergency relief.

For the OCP, the primary concern was the development of a well-tested transferable model; for JYSS, the primary concern was the support provided by mentors for mentees; for ECU, the primary concern was the learning and support for the mentors. We recruited a steering committee for the project to help us ensure that the multiple goals for the project remained appropriately balanced.

**METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

The section briefly outlines the research methodology for the project, including the theoretical framework and assumptions, the methodology, the methods, the participants and the ethical considerations. The research tools used in the research will be available in the research report.

An action research methodology was chosen for this project because it gives priority to problems that emerge from practice, and seeks ways to improve practice directly within a given context (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1993, p.12). This is well-suited to the intended project goals. Practitioners have a wealth of tacit knowledge about what they do (Anderson, Herr & Nihlen 1994, p.4), but it can be difficult for practitioners to “step back” from their practice and dispassionately evaluate its significance beyond their own context (Anderson et al. 1994, p.4). Action research provides a process that facilitates this kind of analysis. The partnership between JYSS and ECU brought together practitioners and academic researchers to address an issue of concern to practitioners through an action learning research methodology where the project worker and staff at JYSS contribute the “insider” perspective, and the ECU partners act as “critical friends”. All participants within the mentoring scheme were partners within the research process.

At its simplest, action research is cyclic, based upon multiple iterations of the cycle: plan, action, observe and reflect (Dick 2002). We ran the action research cycle through two full “iterations”. There were two cohorts of mentors and mentees. The number of iterations was determined by the parameters of the funding scheme, which had a two-year maximum duration, and constraints that arose from the structure of the degree program. We reviewed progress quarterly in each cycle and made adjustments on the basis of observations, discussion and analysis, to rectify problems identified. After the first cohort had completed the program we undertook a full review and took action to make changes to the program in time for the second cohort.

The JYSS project worker and the ECU researcher collaboratively devised processes to gather data relevant to the evaluation of the project. For ethical, practical and financial reasons we did not directly gather formal evidence about mentees’ involvement in crime. We gathered quantitative and qualitative data about the relationships between mentors and mentees and their perceptions of benefit. We gathered data about the longevity and intensity of the mentor/mentee relationships, and mentoring activities. We also collected data about the perceptions of benefit from mentors, mentees, other JYSS staff and from case notes. Some mentees provided self-reports of involvement in criminal activities and whether they had been victims of crime. The project was part of the formal program of learning for the mentors, so the evaluation also included feedback from the mentors about their learning, and observations from other ECU and JYSS staff about what the mentors had learned during their involvement with the project.

Mentees were young people aged between 15 and 21 years who were either at risk of homelessness or were homeless, who accessed JYSS services, and who volunteered to be involved in the mentoring project. Mentors were second-year students enrolled in the youth work major at ECU and completing their second practicum placement. The timing of the research project was influenced by the availability of mentors and this was determined by the academic calendar. We initially estimated that the length of the mentoring project should be as long as possible. With amendments to the youth work course structure, the realistic maximum time span for mentor availability was from Easter until the end of October. This time period included mentor orientation and preparation, and allowed mentors to complete their commitments before their exam period.

The ECU ethics committee approved this research project. The committee accepted that the mentees were “mature minors” and could provide consent to participate in the project without additional parental permission being sought.

The first group of mentors maintained relationships over a maximum period of five months because various difficulties delayed the start of the project, while the second group mentored over a maximum period of seven months.
**DISCUSSION OF KEY METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS**

A key methodological challenge for this project was to define clearly what constituted success. The purposes of the mentoring program were to strengthen “protective factors” that reduce involvement in crime and, where possible, to reduce factors that increase the risk of involvement in criminal behaviour and to complement other services offered by JYSS. We used as our primary measure of success the degree to which mentoring facilitated a meaningful relationship with an adult outside each mentee’s immediate circle of peers, and the degree to which this relationship enabled stronger connections to diverse community social, educational, sporting, voluntary or employment activities.

Theoretically, the justification for this choice was based upon research that identifies protective factors that lessen the risk of involvement in crime. Several meta-studies have analysed data on offending by young people, and have identified social, community, family and individual factors (Communities that Care 2005; National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center 2006). Risk factors include unemployment, early departure from education, poverty and low self-efficacy. Protective factors included having a sense of purpose, being positive about one’s future, having a commitment to training or education, and being able to act independently with some sense of ability to control one’s destiny. Other social skills like problem-solving skills, conflict resolution skills and the ability to empathise with others were also found to be protective (National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center 2006). The review by Communities that Care (2005, pp.137-38) concluded that for young people at medium to high risk of offending, multiple service interventions were the most effective approach. These programs should aim to strengthen social skills, and promote reasoning, critical thinking and perceptions, rather than just behaviour modification. All programs should have clear goals.

In this project we based the approach to mentoring on the premise that the purpose was to increase individual protective factors and to reduce risk factors where possible. Practically, our choice was influenced by the need for efficient data collection and the requirements that data collection should not ethically compromise the rights of JYSS clients or adversely affect their progress on their program. The data had to be adequate for the intended purpose, which was to resolve practical issues concerned with the use of mentoring with this type of client group. Finally, the choice of methodology reflected the circumstances of the research, both practical and ethical. This was small-scale participant research rather than large-scale experimental research, and this meant that the researchers did not have the option to control variables, to match treatment and non-treatment groups or to isolate the effects of one program from the influences of other programs. Ethically, the holistic philosophy of the agency would not align with a reductionist approach that objectifies their clients for the potential later benefit of others, such as is required by experimental procedure of “matching” and “non-treatment” groups.

**KEY FINDINGS**

This section of the paper presents some of the key findings from this research; a more complete account can be found in the final research report. There are several different participants and stakeholders in this project and we will briefly present some of the findings for each group of participants and the implications for collaboration. Discussion follows in a separate section.

**Comparison between cohort 1 and cohort 2**

In 2005, the mentoring program recruited 17 young people and six mentors. Initially there were 11 mentors but five left the course before the start of the mentoring program. In 2006, 36 young people and nine mentors were recruited to the program. In 2005, the total number of mentors/mentee meetings was 59, compared with 176 meetings in 2006.

**Mentees**

Our research shows that the mentoring success rate, as measured by the length and intensity of the relation-

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**TABLE 1 PROJECT TIMELINE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 2005</td>
<td>Staff appointment, induction and project design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April–June 2005</td>
<td>First team of mentors recruited and matched.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2005</td>
<td>First project review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2005</td>
<td>Collate data on first team of mentors/mentees. Second project review;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>evaluation of outcomes of first team of mentors. Identify any changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to selection matching or training of mentors or selection or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>preparation of mentees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January–March 2006</td>
<td>Make any changes to project infrastructure. Prepare for second team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of mentors. Second team of mentors recruited and matched.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April–June 2006</td>
<td>Second mentors group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2006</td>
<td>Third project review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2006</td>
<td>Collate data on second team of mentors/mentees. Final project review;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>evaluation of outcomes of second team of mentors; identify any changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to selection matching or training of mentors or selection or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>preparation of mentees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2006</td>
<td>Final report: data analysis and recommendations for dissemination.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ship, was higher for young men. The preliminary analysis of data collected in 2005 indicated that most benefit was gained from long-term mentoring relationships, and generally little benefit was gained from short-term relationships of less than one month. In 2006, a greater number of mentees established medium- or long-term relationships with their mentors (see Table 2) and the relationships were of greater intensity. The data collected in 2005 indicated there were important differences in mentoring outcomes for male and female mentees, so the data for 2006 are presented showing gender differences. The 2006 data confirm the impressions on gender difference from 2005.

We asked both mentees and mentors what they thought of the mentoring program, and mentees who completed the evaluation were positive about the program. Mentees reported a variety of positive outcomes including:

- appreciated “having someone to talk to and do fun things with”;
- reported “improved relationships with friends and family”;
- felt “very positive about the mentoring program”;
- improved mood and “helped me learn things”;
- improved my fitness level and helped me have a healthy lifestyle; and
- assisted with transition from crisis to medium-term accommodation.

In addition, some mentees stated that through the mentoring they felt their confidence, identity, empowerment and communication skills had increased.

In general, mentors also believed that the mentoring relationships had been beneficial and had assisted mentees in several areas of their lives including:

- providing mentees with opportunities to access computers to update resumes and look for employment;
- doing fun things with mentees like going to the movies and kicking the football in the park;
- providing mentees with study skills and positive relationships;
- helping mentees to gain support to achieve their goals and develop life skills;
- increasing mentees’ participation in positive recreation activities within the community;
- increasing mentees’ ability to understand their problems and respond to these positively;
- increasing mentees’ self-confidence, communication skills and social competence;
- providing mentees with someone constant in their lives who they can talk to and have fun with;
- developing mentees’ self-worth and self efficacy; helping them become less dependent upon damaging relationships.

We will discuss these findings further in the next section of this paper.

We gathered data on the reasons why mentoring relationships ended. Where possible, we asked both the mentee and the mentor. Some mentees gave more than one reason for their decision to cease the mentoring relationship. In some instances it was not possible to gather this data because mentees left the agency and ceased contact abruptly. In these instances we had to use information from other sources. The data gathered in 2005 is also not directly comparable with the 2006 data because we refined the data categories used and also collected gender-differentiated data. We collected gender-differentiated data because gender differences emerged in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length</th>
<th>1 month or less</th>
<th>More than 1 month but under 3 months</th>
<th>More than 3 months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>8 (47%)</td>
<td>4 (24%)</td>
<td>5 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 (f)</td>
<td>9 (50%)</td>
<td>5 (29%)</td>
<td>4 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 (m)</td>
<td>2 (20%)</td>
<td>4 (40%)</td>
<td>4 (40%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>2005 (%)</th>
<th>2006 (%) (f)</th>
<th>2006 (%) (m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completed mentoring program</td>
<td>5 (29%)</td>
<td>3 (14%)</td>
<td>2 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forcible “exited” from accommodation</td>
<td>5 (29%)</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
<td>3 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved</td>
<td>14 (82%)</td>
<td>3 (14%)</td>
<td>2 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in life circumstances</td>
<td>9 (53%)</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
<td>1 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time work/training</td>
<td>3 (14%)</td>
<td>3 (25%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disengaged from JYSS programs</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left before initial meeting or after one meeting</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
<td>1 (8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/personal/health issue</td>
<td>3 (14%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had received sufficient support</td>
<td>3 (14%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor left</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2005. We refined some categories ("moved" and "change in life circumstances") because they were too broad.

**OUTCOMES FOR MENTORS**

The efficacy of the mentoring program for mentors entirely depended upon whether they were able to establish a stable mentoring relationship with at least one young person in the course of the mentoring program. The outcomes for mentors were assessed by self-report through the mentor feedback sheet to the mentor coordinator at JYSS and through evaluations conducted at the university during normal unit evaluation. Mentors who were able to establish a stable mentoring relationship with at least one young person reported that their learning had increased in three main areas:

- improved basic counselling skills, including active listening skills;
- increased confidence in working with transient young people; and
- increased knowledge of youth issues.

Some mentors in each cohort did not experience any medium- or long-term mentoring relationships. These mentors generally met their mentees only once or twice. Sometimes the initial meetings seemed promising, but then the mentee did not return calls, cancelled appointments, did not arrive for scheduled meeting or mentors and mentees could not find a mutually convenient time to meet. Youth workers who have experience in working with transient young people realise that this pattern is not uncommon, and is not usually a reflection of the skills of the youth worker. Youth work students reported that these experiences were difficult to accept, and that they felt under pressure because they were required to demonstrate their use of one-to-one skills through this placement. Students tended to believe that they were to blame for the failure of the mentoring relationships, especially if they experienced repeated failure and this was not offset by subsequent successful mentoring relationships. Several students who did not have any long-term mentoring relationships reported to ECU staff that they had doubts about their suitability for youth work. Students in this position included some very capable students who subsequently did well in other placements and in employment. A second consequence of repeated short-term or failed mentoring relationships was that students gained few opportunities to extend their skills in working with young people.

The mentors were matched by gender, so female students were disproportionately more likely to experience a succession of short-term superficial mentoring relationships, and to become less confident about their skills as a youth worker and about their suitability for youth work.

**Outcomes for JYSS**

For JYSS, there was a balance of benefits and liabilities. The initial establishment and ongoing management and monitoring of the mentoring program was time consuming. The establishment phase is complete, but there will be a continuing management, support and supervision liability. Evaluation of this project indicates anticipated outcomes have been achieved for some young people. The mentoring program has provided additional personal support, positive peer influences, encouragement to mentees to pursue educational and employment related activities, and support for mentee engagement in pro-social leisure activities and a healthy lifestyle for some mentees. On the basis of this experience, JYSS management have decided that the program provides a useful complimentary service and are currently seeking funding for ongoing mentor matching, supervision and support, with a view to mentoring becoming a part of the agency's ongoing SAAP service model.

**Outcomes for ECU**

For ECU, there was also a balance of benefits and liabilities. ECU youth work staff anticipated that the mentoring program partnership would require changes to the curriculum of the youth work degree program and changes to the structure of the course. The curriculum changes were easily made, but approval for structural changes (changing the practicum unit from a single semester unit to a full-year unit) was delayed by national regulatory constraints and was difficult to negotiate. Approval was eventually granted but compromised arrangements had to be made for the first cohort. There was an unusually high attrition rate from the first cohort and this was a cause for extreme concern. It is still unclear whether the unusually high attrition rate was coincidental and unconnected with the mentoring program or whether it was influenced by project delays, the unsatisfactory transitional structural arrangements during the first year, or practical problems experienced during the first year of the mentoring program. In the second cohort, only one student left the course and this was for personal reasons unconnected to her placement with the mentoring program. We conclude that even if the high attrition rate in the first cohort was due to adverse features of the program, these have now been resolved. For the second cohort, the program was clearly beneficial for students who experienced long-term mentoring relationships. Where students did not have this experience, they did not get sufficient opportunities to extend their one-to-one skills and tended to lose confidence. We see this as a serious limitation to the current arrangements. The research has shown that female mentors are more likely than male mentors to be in this position. We have considered some ways to address this problem for the next cohort.

**THE MENTORING MODEL AND KIT**

One of the substantial outcomes of this project has been the development of a "mentoring kit", which includes advice on preparation for mentoring, procedures and
policies that are necessary support a successful program, advice on interagency collaboration, and processes for mentor selection, training, support and supervision.

The mentoring model has been developed upon the assumptions that the mentoring program should complement existing programs, that new programs require thorough preparatory work by both agencies if they are to succeed and that all participating partners will need to review their existing policies, procedures and practices prior to a new mentoring program and make changes where necessary to support the program. The mentoring kit contains a sequenced checklist of things to do in preparation for the mentoring program, and a set of sample documents to support the mentor matching process, mentor supervision, program monitoring and program evaluation process. The mentoring kit will be available as an appendix to the published research report.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Several interesting themes emerged from this project. The research findings confirmed previous observations that it is difficult to engage transient young people in mentoring programs. In this study, even with high levels of support, only about 30% of mentoring relations were long-term and intensive, and almost 50% of mentor matches dissolved before they got started. The gender differences found in this study were not expected, and, if replicated, have implications for service delivery, mentoring programs and for future research. We found some interesting differences in the success rate of mentoring for clients from different types of services (for example short-term accommodation, medium-term accommodation), and this was especially noticeable for young women. Some of our data also suggested that there might be an optimal length for the mentoring relationship of about five months. We are aware that our data is drawn from a single agency and these findings may not be replicated elsewhere.

This project also demonstrated that successful interagency collaboration is not easy, and that it is especially difficult to maintain an equitable balance between the priorities of each partner. Effective solution-focused interagency problem-solving and conflict resolution strategies were essential to the success of this project. Without these, the project risked failure in the first year despite an established, close relationship between the two partners, when neither partner’s expectations were being fully met. Instead, we successfully applied solution-focused, problem-solving techniques to address the structural causes of the difficulties and, in doing so, strengthened the project.

Research by Baldwin, Grossman & Garry (1997) indicated that matching by race, gender or culture was not one of the major factors in successful mentoring, but we decided that because both mentors and mentees were mostly close in age that gender matching was important to ease relationship-building and for the protection of both the mentors and the mentees. This policy decision was established at the beginning of the project and we adhered to it through the research project. We did not attempt to match by race or culture. There were bicultural mentors and mentees, but we chose to match on interests rather than cultural background.

In this paper we will discuss in more detail the gender differences found in this research, and the related issues for future research. We do not have space in this paper to discuss all these findings in detail. Other issues will be discussed in the forthcoming report.

In the first cohort, we found that the mentor relationships between the male mentors and their male mentees seemed to be easier to establish. This pattern was repeated in the second cohort. The pattern was unexpected, and we believe it is important to try to understand what these data mean and to examine the possible implications for mentoring programs and mentor recruitment and support.

When we examined the data about the length of the mentoring relationship (Table 2), we saw that in 2006, more female mentees than male mentees initially enrolled in the mentoring program. Female mentees, however, were more likely than male mentees to leave the program after one or two meetings with their mentor. Similar numbers of male and female mentees maintained long-term relationships with their mentors (four in each case), and medium-term relationships (five female and four male). The difference emerged primarily from the early attrition rate of female mentees from the program.

What should we make of this? The mentee evaluation forms give no indication of possible reasons for this difference, but the forms are not a good source of information because the mentees who left the program early were less likely to complete the final evaluation forms. In the absence of solid evidence, we considered three possibilities. The discussion that follows is speculative. We considered the possibility that the difference may arise from differences in both feminine and masculine socialised gender roles, and we also examined the possibility that difference is a subtle consequence of the relative over-supply of female mentors. Each of these possibilities is discussed and we conclude this section with a discussion of the potential implications of this trend for future mentoring collaborative arrangements in this instance and in general.

First, we considered how the socialised feminine role might affect enrolment and commitment to the mentoring program for young women. In terms of the culturally prescribed gender roles, young women are more likely than young men to be socialised to please significant others, to avoid direct conflict and to value interpersonal relationships. Feminine gender socialisation might mean that young women were initially more willing to volunteer to participate in a mentoring program to meet a temporary deficit in their social needs, but to withdraw from the program when their peers could satisfactorily meet their social needs. This interpretation...
is consistent with some mentee feedback. Feminine gender socialisation might also mean that female mentees were more likely to enrol to please staff, or because they thought it was expected of them and they did not want to refuse directly.

Second, we considered how the socialised masculine roles might affect enrolment and commitment to the mentoring program for young men. In terms of the culturally prescribed gender roles, young men are more likely than young women to lack access to supportive relationships from their peers, especially from other young men. Male socialisation encourages competition, and for many young men this can mean that they have no supportive interpersonal same-gender relationships. Mentoring provides a safe means by which young men can have access to supportive relationships with other men, and might mean that young men felt greater motivation to continue mentoring relationships. The mentor program coordinator noted that male participants were more likely to be socially isolated than female participants, and this would be consistent with this explanation.

Finally, we considered the possibility that these results emerged from the relative over-supply of female mentors relative to the target population of female mentees. This would produce subtle pressure to recruit more female mentees to meet the expectations from mentors and the university and the program that all mentors should be matched as soon as possible. This may mean that, possibly unintentionally, young women were more frequently offered a place on the mentoring program, that young women were more strongly encouraged to enrol in the program, or that more compromises were made in matching mentors and mentees.

A consequence of the relatively higher early attrition rate for female mentees has been that female mentors have found it more difficult to establish long-term mentoring arrangements, some female mentors have had fewer opportunities to develop their mentoring skills and have been more at risk of losing confidence in their professional suitability. We are not able to come to any firm conclusion about the reasons for our findings on the basis of the data we have, but it is clear that we have to develop a response to this issue, in order to avoid this unintended gender bias in opportunities for mentors. We stress, once again, that these suggestions are speculative, and further research would be required to corroborate our findings and to determine whether these explanations are tenable.

We have considered how this might be addressed in the future and we are examining the possibility of providing students with the opportunity to mentor in two contrasting environments, including one placement where it is easier to establish long-term relationships. We think this might successfully overcome the problems identified because students who were placed in schools instead of JYSS (including one student who was not accepted by JYSS because she was very shy) found it easier to establish and develop relationships with young people in a more structured environment. We are also aware that it is necessary to be vigilant about any structural or socialisation influences that might skew mentee recruitment, to be aware that the needs of male and female mentees may differ in ways that require structural differences in the programs, and to remember that despite higher early attrition of female mentees, similar numbers of female and male mentees established long-term relationships with mentors through this program.

**CONCLUSIONS**

At the end of the two-year program, we concluded that this form of goal-focused mentoring was worth continuing with this client group. The action-research process allowed the program to identify problems and to resolve these through changes to procedures, policies and practices. For example, during the first year, mentors were provided with mobile phones to ease communication problems. We believe that there is sufficient evidence to question the dominant assertions that only long-term mentoring is worthwhile, and we believe that this conclusion is based upon an unsound interpretation of the evidence. Further research is needed to determine whether the gender patterns we found were peculiar to this program, and the possible reasons for our observations. With the next cohort of mentors, we have recruited some first-year students to enable the mentoring relationship to extend over a longer period of time, if young people find this useful. It will be interesting to see whether this changes the length of engagement.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

We make five recommendations based upon our research experiences in this project:

**Recommendation 1**

In collaborative projects, clarify the roles and expectations of each partner and have solution-focused problem-solving strategies.

**Recommendation 2**

Collect data about processes and outcomes so that there is an evidence basis for program evaluation.

**Recommendation 3**

Collect gender-differentiated data about mentoring processes and outcomes.

**Recommendation 4**

Apply action research and action learning processes to ensure regular monitoring, review, interpretation and improvement.

**Recommendation 5**

Have a look at our mentoring kit to see whether there is anything you can adapt to your circumstances.
REFERENCES


Koepke, S. 2004, *Mentoring in SAAP: How mentoring models could be incorporated into Youth Supported Accommodation Assistance Program*, Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services/Joondalup Youth Support Services, WA.


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Young people in rail environs: An interagency approach to conflict reduction and crime prevention

By Trudi Cooper, Erin Donovan & Terry Love

This presentation reports the outcomes of an action research project to promote interagency collaboration on safety and crime prevention in rail station environs. The presentation outlines problems encountered and outcomes achieved; evaluates processes used; and presents a model for interagency collaboration developed and trialled in this project. The processes used in this project began by building mutual understanding of the differing goals and priorities of partner organisations that interact with young people who ‘hang out’ around rail stations. Participants in each location have developed local solutions they can implement locally. The presentation reports on the research processes, outcomes and conclusions.

Rationale
Western Australian Government policy seeks to encourage people to transfer from private car usage to public transport for a significant proportion of their journeys. Concerns about personal safety mean that some sections of the community avoid public transport. To address this problem, the Public Transport Authority has increased the presence of transit guards on trains. This has been welcomed by some young people, as this research shows, but in some locations the increased presence has led to increased conflict between young people and transit guards. The idea for this project emerged from the very different concerns of each of the collaborating partners. Youth work agencies had been concerned about poor relationships between some young people and some transit guards. Transit guard managers were concerned about a range of issues, including safety issues, in areas where young people trespassed on the tracks; welfare concerns, when young people travelling late at night were stranded at stations without any means to get home; and, in one location, the increase of physical assault by young people on transit guards. The Office of Crime Prevention (OCP) in conjunction with the Public Transport Authority and four local governments funded the research project.

The Research Problem
The purpose of the research project was to develop and trial a model of interagency collaboration to support the formation of relationships between the Public Transport Authority of Western Australia (PTA), local government youth and community services, community safety personnel and relevant local non-government organisations. The purpose of the collaborative relationships was to enable the development of constructive responses to young people in rail environments.

For young people, this issue has several different facets. Some young people use public transport because they have no alternative transport choices, but they report that they feel unsafe. Some young people use public transport and get into conflict with transit guards over fare issues or conduct issues, often with consequences that go beyond the original offence. Some people (including some young people) avoid public transport because they fear other patrons, including groups of young people.

The project assumed that well-managed interagency collaboration had the potential to offer benefits to various groups of young people. Other research indicated that it is very difficult to establish and maintain interagency collaboration between agencies and organisations with
different priorities and world views in a way that serves the purposes of all parties.

This paper will primarily discuss the process for the development of interagency collaboration and the safeguards required to ensure that the process is not coopted by any single agency to meet its own purposes at the expense of those of other participants. This was an important consideration because the issue was highly political and was driven primarily by fears expressed in the media about the antisocial behaviour of young people in and around rail stations. The full report will contain discussion of the many other issues that arose from the project.

**BACKGROUND**
The research project had multiple stakeholders. The Office of Crime Prevention in Western Australia (OCP), the PTA, the City of Armadale, the City of Gosnells, the City of Joondalup and the City of Swan all contributed towards the funding of this project. The project also had stakeholders beyond the funding agencies, including other community agencies, and, ultimately, different sections of the community. Partner organisations became involved in the project because they believed that through collaboration they could address issues of importance to their agency that they could not resolve in isolation from each other. By the end of the two-year project, 28 partners were involved at four different locations on three of the four major metropolitan rail lines. Two of the outcomes required by the OCP as a condition of funding were that the research should produce practical outcomes and that the outcomes should be sustainable beyond the life of the research project. Because of this, the project was developed within an action research methodology, discussed fully in the forthcoming project report. In this paper only those elements that relate to the collaborative process are discussed in detail.

Participants included youth workers, youth work managers from both local government and community-based agencies, local government community safety officers and planners, community services managers, an alternative education program manager, shopping centre management, police, Aboriginal police liaison officers, and PTA transit guard managers. Some agencies were involved from the beginning of the project, whereas others became involved at later stages. The PTA identified the four locations based on incident statistics collected over the previous year.

**YOUNG PEOPLE’S PARTICIPATION**
The researchers made the decision to ask youth workers to represent young people. This was a difficult decision, and is controversial with some researchers and some youth workers. Three reasons informed this decision. First, at the start of the project we did not know whether the interagency collaboration process would be successful. The process was intended to facilitate collaboration between organisations in ways that equalised power differences and enabled equality of participation. The model required that participants took part as representatives of their agency, to explain its purposes and priorities, and to present an overview of the issues from within the perspective of the agency. The focus of the model was to examine how different organisational priorities aligned or conflicted, and the consequences of this for interagency collaboration. Within this approach, there was no place for direct representation of individuals not representing organisations. We relied on advice from the local government representatives about which organisations to invite to the meetings. It was open to participants to nominate young people’s organisations to participate, for example, the youth advisory councils. None of the local governments chose to do this, but they did report back from Youth Council meetings where relevant and, in one instance, formally canvassed their opinions through a survey.

Second, if we had decided to include secondary constituents, it would be complicated because each of the organisations represented secondary constituents. Potential secondary constituents included young people living in a particular area, but also community members, rail users, people who did not use rail services because they did not feel safe, local business owners, and people who lived adjacent to the rail line. If young people were included directly in the process, we could not see any reason why we should not include all the other secondary constituents. It was not possible to draw conceptually clear lines about which individuals to include and which to exclude. We argue that direct representation is valuable, but it is a different project from the one we undertook, and outside our brief. Participating organisations could choose to organise direct representation meetings in their areas, if they felt it was useful to do so and if it was within their remit. During the project, the PTA transit guards attended various public meetings with the community and reported outcomes to the project meetings.

Finally, even if these issues could be resolved, we could not see how the diversity of young people’s views could be represented through direct participation, and we believed that direct representation of young people would be unrepresentative and tokenistic.

We had already identified that different groups of young people held different opinions on this issue, some favouring an increase in transit guard presence and some hostile to transit guard presence. We believed that facilitation of equal representation and participation of the multiple views of young people would have been a difficult task – of the magnitude of the task of interagency collaboration. It was open to youth workers to do this, if they wished, and PTA staff were willing to attend and meet with young people. There were some meetings between PTA transit guards and managers and groups of young people arranged as a result of this project, but they did not form part of the purposes of the project.
ETHICAL ISSUES
The first question raised by this research was whether youth workers and youth researchers ought to get involved in this kind of research. This is an ethical question, and as with all ethical questions there are diverse perspectives and possible answers. Collaboration is fraught with difficulties, especially when some participants expect other agencies to share their own priorities and values. One ethical position is for youth workers to avoid collaboration with agencies whose work is premised upon different values and practices. As a young youth worker, one of the authors was involved in discussions about whether youth workers should be involved in police liaison committees and, at the time, rejected collaboration with agencies whose work was premised upon different values. This position enabled the youth worker to remain “ethically untainted”, but limited their sphere of influence over other agencies that also work with young people. As a much older youth researcher, the same author now believes that dialogue between youth workers and other agencies is essential to effective community-based youth work. This dialogue, however, must be built upon a mutual understanding of the different roles and responsibilities of participant agencies and a mutual respect for their different purposes.

DIALOGUE ACROSS VALUES
A major problem posed by this project was the need to devise an approach to interagency collaboration that would enable participants to develop constructive relationships across value differences. This required development of a process that would foster understanding and mutual respect and promote mutually beneficial collaboration, but would also enable participants to do this in ways that would not compromise the central goals of their own organisations.

The primary purpose of dialogue between people who hold different values begins with the assumption that respectful dialogue can help each party gain insight into the applicability and limitations of their own world view and hence deepen their own understanding of issues (Hinman 2003). From this perspective, the purpose of discussion is to help participants enhance their understanding of issues in their locality rather than to persuade others of the rightness of a singular interpretation of local events. A pluralist perspective also accords with Freirian practices for consciousness-raising, which insist that when new ideas or different perspectives are introduced, agreement should not be forced, and participants should always have opportunities to discuss ideas and to disagree without fear of rejection or censure by others in the group (Hope & Timmel 1997). The purposes of discussion are exploratory rather than combative. This is the position taken by the research team in this project, and these values determined the approach taken to the collaboration process developed for this project.

The research team needed to engage people who had an activist approach to issues because of the required outcomes of the project. This also meant that discussions needed to be solution-focused and activist, in the Freirian tradition. These requirements had implications for the structure and climate of the collaborative approach.

THE INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION PROCESS
The research project had three stages, and these are outlined in Table 1.

These stages are labelled as Stages 0–2. Stage 0 took place before the project was finalised and before funding was agreed. In Stage 1, two elements were required of the process. First, the process needed to enable participants to share their understanding of their own roles and priorities with others in their locality group. Second, the process needed to enable participants to share their differing perceptions of local issues. In Stage 2, the requirement was for participants to discuss how they could respond

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<th>Stage 0: Pre-project</th>
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<td>Final report</td>
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<th>Activities</th>
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positively to issues identified as locally important. During this phase, local initiatives were developed and trialled. Stage 2 concluded with a local evaluation, followed by a final project presentation, which all participants were invited to attend.

During the preliminary stage (Stage 0), there were many individual discussions by phone and face-to-face to explain the purposes and processes for the project and to negotiate funding from partners. This stage took longer than anticipated, but was crucial to the subsequent success of the project. Once agreement had been reached and funding had been secured, key people in each locality recommended other participants from their organisation or from local youth and community agencies. The key participants were local government officers (either youth work managers or community safety managers) and the team relied on their judgment and knowledge to recommend appropriate local participants. The team followed the same process with the PTA Manager of Security and Customer Service, who recommended the transit guard managers who were involved in this project.

The groundwork for positive collaborative relationships was established during Stage 1 of the project. The meetings in this stage had both “process” and “task” goals. The process goals were designed to help participants gain a good understanding of each other’s priorities, concerns and “world views” to establish culture of respect.

The task goals were to gather data to build a “rich picture” of the issues in the locality; for participants to share and explore alternative perceptions of issues and priorities in each locality; and for participants to use an analytical method based upon soft-systems to identify underlying causes for locally important issues. In many ways, this was the hardest stage of the project, because there had been no previous contact between the PTA and local youth and community groups and there was a high level of mistrust and potential hostility on both sides and the groups had only a short time to complete quite a difficult task.

When the research team made decisions about how to structure the consultations during this stage of the project, it was necessary to decide how many meetings should be held in this stage of the project. It was decided to achieve these outcomes through a single meeting with the PTA participants, a meeting with youth and community work participants in each locality, followed by a joint meeting between PTA and youth and community staff in each locality. Ideally, in task terms, it would have been preferable to undertake the tasks in the first joint meeting (Workshop 3) across two separate workshops. The team decided against this, however, because it was felt that it would be difficult to ensure continuity of participation, and there was a risk that the project would lose momentum if this stage was too protracted or too fragmented. To overcome this difficulty, the team used a very structured process for data gathering, sharing and discussion during this stage of the project.

Workshop 1 was intended to gather information from the PTA about the transit guards’ roles, transit guards’ perceptions of the issues in each of the localities, about what they saw as the causes of the problems they identified, and about who they thought could act to make a positive difference. The PTA nominated an experienced transit guard manager to provide this information. This manager had been well briefed by his manager. He understood the project purposes and processes and was able to answer questions very fully and explain the background and the priorities of the PTA and their expectations for transit guards.

Workshop 2 was held with nominated youth workers and the community agency representative in each of the four localities. These meetings were well attended. The research team asked this group the same questions as were asked of the PTA, but in relation to young people and rail usage in their locality. The discussion in these workshops was tightly facilitated to ensure that all participants contributed and to try to prevent some participants from dominating the meetings. This process was generally successful. Not all participants who attended these workshops had been well-briefed about the purposes of the project or its intended methods or outcomes. At some locations quite a lot of time was spent explaining the project to participants, explaining the values and processes that would be adopted in the project and discussing the outcomes expected by the OCP. In most locations, participants were pleased that this was not going to be just another “talking shop” and that meeting would have outcomes. In one location, however, one person tried to subvert the meeting process and to renegotiate the purposes and methods of the project. When they did not succeed, they decided not to return.

The information gathered in Workshops 1 and 2 was collated for each locality and presented back to participants at Workshop 3.

Workshop 3 was the first joint meeting between local community groups and the PTA representative. In each location, this was the meeting where the potential for hostility was the greatest. This difficulty was compounded by the fact that the transit guard manager who was initially interviewed had been transferred to other duties and the research project leader had not met his replacement before the first meeting. Again, the team used a very tightly structured meeting format to ensure adherence to the process chosen for this project.

The first joint meeting in each locality was opened with an explanation of the process for the meeting, and the importance of respect for the diverse purposes of different agencies and the different roles and priorities of participants and the potential benefits of successful collaboration. Participants were also reminded about the action orientation of the project. At the first joint meeting for each group, all participants were asked, in turn, to describe their own roles and the purposes and priorities of their agency. After this, participants began to examine and analyse the locality data.
This meeting was highly structured to ensure that each participant had opportunities to participate. The meeting began with each person speaking in turn for an allocated period of time to explain their role and the priorities of their organisation. Each participant was then asked to share their interpretation of the data without interruption, discussion or questioning by other participants. Participants were reminded that it was not the purpose of the meeting to reach agreement or consensus. The purpose was to listen and to attempt to understand. The highly structured meeting format was successful because it allowed all participants to explain their roles, and to gain an understanding of the similarities and differences in the priorities of different participants. The data sheets for each locality presented data gathered from both previous workshops and organised under thematic headings in a rich picture. The discussion was again tightly facilitated to ensure that all participants had opportunities to correct factual errors and comment on their own interpretations of what they saw.

The evaluation completed at the end of the project indicated that this workshop had been most useful to participants because it enabled them to understand each other’s roles better and it got rid of several mistaken assumptions and stereotypes that participants had about each other’s work practices or the values and priorities of other agencies. In particular, youth workers were surprised to learn that transit guards offered welfare support to young people, especially those who were stranded late at night. They were also surprised to learn that transit guards viewed arrest as a last resort, that they would avoid if there were other options. The transit guard manager was surprised to learn that youth workers did not automatically accept at face value everything every young person told them, and did not condone violent behaviour by young people.

The meetings in Stage 2 became less formalised as each group developed greater trust and mutual liking, and the group was able to discuss even sensitive issues openly and with respect. In Stage 2, the tasks of the groups followed the standard requirements of action research. Each local group reviewed progress, discussed the reasons for successes and failures, and revised their action plans. The facilitator maintained the group process and, where necessary, offered encouragement, reminded participants of the action focus of the project and the importance of solution-focused processes and resolved interpersonal conflicts, as required. By the end of the project there was no need for facilitation in most groups, as these roles were shared between participants. Stage 2 is discussed in less detail than Stage 1 because the facilitation roles were conceptually much simpler.

OUTCOMES FROM COLLABORATION
Two types of outcome were achieved through this project: practical outcomes, where the groups addressed particular problems, and relational outcomes, where the groups successfully enlarged their networks to enable them to address future problems more effectively.

Several practical problems were successfully addressed through this collaboration process; some are described in this paper. Because of issues discussed during project workshops, the PTA representative learned that stolen identity was a problem for some young people. This occurred when individuals provided another person’s details when they were caught without tickets. Because of this, one young woman faced substantial fines incurred from other people using her identity. The transit guard manager investigated this case, and the fines were waived because it was accepted that the young woman was a victim of stolen identity. A password procedure was put in place to prevent re-occurrence and is now available to anyone who fears they may be in a similar position.

Unrepayable fines emerged as a significant practical issue. From discussion within two of the groups, it became apparent that some young people had incurred fines that were not, realistically, ever repayable in their lifetime. For these young people, there was no incentive ever to buy a ticket because additional fines were, in effect, meaningless. The WA Government introduced a scheme to the cancel driver’s licences of people who have unpaid fines. This policy was intended to avoid incarceration for non-payment of fines but to exert an alternative form of pressure. Individuals are not able to obtain a driver’s licence until all outstanding fines are paid. Young people who have incurred unrepayable fines cannot gain driver’s licences, and an unintended consequence of this is that they are likely to drive unlicensed and incur serious criminal convictions. The PTA has put in place a process whereby, under some circumstances, fines can be reduced and even eventually waived after an individual case review. This can be recommended if a young person has not incurred further fines, and is making regular repayments commensurate with income.

The PTA appointed a community education officer midway through this project. Her task was to develop an education program for young people that focused on rail safety. The role of the community education officer was to organise educational programs about the dangers of rail trespass and used contacts developed through these meetings to gain access to young people in schools and in youth centres. The issue of track safety had emerged in the discussions during this project in some locations. As a consequence of the project, the community education officer joined two locality groups and the networks developed through this project enabled her to gain better access to both schools and young people in youth centres.

In one location, the group decided to conduct a survey of young people and their experiences of rail travel. The survey gathered information about young people’s interactions with transit guards, and their knowledge of their rights and responsibilities as passengers. The results of this survey showed that some young people had had negative experiences with transit guards, but many commented
favourably about help they had received. Young women in particular welcomed the presence of transit guards on trains and asked for an increased transit guard presence. The reason they gave was that the presence of transit guards made them feel safer. Frequently they feared other passengers, especially those who were intoxicated. Young women also felt vulnerable waiting at stations for lifts or for bus connections and were pleased when transit guards at stations watched out for them. The PTA Community Education Officer now addresses the issues that emerged from the survey in her work in schools and with youth groups. As a result of the survey, Drug ARM WA, an agency that works with intoxicated young people, gained funding for a pilot project to provide services on trains on Friday and Saturday nights.

This survey provided confirmation of an issue discussed in several locality meetings—that young people did not have a good knowledge of the consequences of giving a false address when they were issued with a fare infringement notice. This was a matter of concern because a ticket infringement is not a criminal offence. It can easily escalate, however, into a criminal offence if a young person gives false details and, potentially, escalate to more serious criminal offences, if conflict follows. The survey confirmed that some young people believed that transit guards would not find out if they gave a false address. They were unaware that transit guards have a direct link to the police computer and are able to check names and addresses in real time.

In two of the locations, “Zip cards” were developed that provide information for young people and for transit guards about local services for young people, about young peoples’ rights on the trains, and about the responsibilities and powers of transit guards. The relationship between Indigenous young people and transit guards was an issue that emerged as a concern in several workshops. The transit guard manager explained that the PTA was keen to recruit Indigenous transit guards and to increase the relevance and effectiveness of cultural sensitivity training in the transit guard pre-service training course. Through connections and networks developed at one of the locations, an Aboriginal police liaison officer (APLO) has become involved in the cultural awareness training offered to pre-service transit guards. This has increased the relevance and effectiveness of the training process because APLOs have direct experience of the kinds of situations faced by transit guards, and they are able to provide an Indigenous perspective. The issue of recruitment was discussed. Through networks of participants, an Indigenous-owned not-for-profit company operating a community development employment project (CDEP) in Perth was contacted to discuss the feasibility of a pre-selection training course for transit guards. This project will require contact with an appropriate training provider to accredit and operate the training element.

The workshops produced significant relationship outcomes. In all locations, new connections were established between the PTA and the most active youth work agencies in each area. In some locations, transit guards built better relationships with young people through voluntary involvement with youth centres and through invited voluntary attendance at local youth and community events, such as a skate park opening and a barbeque at an independent community-based secondary school for young people who do not attend mainstream school. Surprisingly, the project also facilitated better intra-organisational relationships between participants from different departments within large organisations. This was true for both the PTA and local government organisations. These aspects of the project are discussed more fully in the research report.

**FUTURE CHALLENGES**

The key benefits from the interagency collaborations developed in this project have been that contact has increased mutual understanding of the purposes and priorities of other agencies, and has provided a better understanding of their operational practices. This has meant that agencies can now more easily avoid inadvertently causing problems for other agencies. In the project evaluation, participants commented that the networks developed during this project had increased their knowledge, understanding and appreciation of each other’s roles, purposes and priorities, and they became more sympathetic to difficulties and constraints faced by other agencies. Participants stated that the project had increased trust between transit guards and community agencies at all locations. Information shared as part of the collaboration process has eliminated many previously negative perceptions based upon uninformed stereotypes. The interagency collaboration process has also defused potential tension between agencies and provided a useful means for successful resolution of practical problems.

The key future challenge for groups in each location is how to maintain trust between staff as personnel change within the various organisations. In three of the localities, participants took ownership of the facilitation process before the end of the project; this will enable participants to maintain collaboration as long as all current participants remain in-post. However, links between agencies are strongly dependent on inter-personal connections developed between participants, and there is a high turnover of staff in many youth work positions. In the longer term, continuation of collaboration cannot rely solely on interpersonal connections. This challenge was discussed at the evaluation meeting in each locality, and there was agreement that maintenance of inter-agency relationships should be formally included in the role specification for key individuals in all partner agencies. This has already been actioned by some of the local government managers.

**LEARNING FROM THE PROJECT**

This final part of the paper discusses conclusions from the project that are of particular relevance to youth workers. Two issues have been selected and further discussion of
other issues can be found in the project report. The first of these issues is concerned with youth workers and their capacity to influence other agencies working with young people. The second issue is about diversity and young people.

On the first issue, youth workers frequently complain that their perspective is marginalised within the discourse about young people. This project demonstrates that, with appropriate facilitation, youth workers who clearly understand the purposes of their agency can effectively use interagency collaboration to affect how other organisations perceive and respond to young people. The interagency collaboration process developed in this project allowed all participants to influence the practices of people outside their own organisation and to change their perceptions about young people. This meant that youth workers had opportunities to influence the practices of transit guards, and also that transit guards had opportunities to influence the practice of youth workers. All participants involved in the evaluation identified that their own decision-making now included dimensions that were not previously present. This has occurred as a result of increased understanding gained through discussion with other participants.

A crucial factor in the success of this project was the use of a collaboration process that equalised the power of participants. Without this, there was a risk that powerful participants would have imposed their purposes and world view onto the collaboration process. When this occurs, the voices of youth workers usually become marginalised. Influence, unlike power, is only effective where participants can see the benefit of change in terms of their own purposes and values. The change in perspective identified by participants was voluntary, because no agency had the capacity to impose its own agenda, and because “learning” was prioritised over “agreement” in the norms established by the collaboration process.

On the second issue, whenever youth workers discuss young people and public space there is a tendency to homogenise the interests of young people. This project clearly demonstrated that young people had multiple interests that were not necessarily compatible. For example, the survey of young people who used youth services in one locality showed that most conflict between young people and transit guards arose in connection to the revenue protection duties of the transit guards. Young people who did not buy tickets did not welcome the presence of transit guards because this meant they would receive infringement notices. However, transit guards also have a public safety role. A sizable proportion of the survey sample, especially young women who used trains alone or at night, asked for a stronger transit guard presence, because this increased their feeling of safety.

The workshop groups made suggestions about possible responses to this issue. The first was that the transit guard roles should be disaggregated, so that the safety role is separated from the revenue protection role. By the end of this project, the PTA had already done this to some extent as part of an overall response to address the issue of staff shortages, possibly influenced also by discussions in these groups about the need to reduce the role conflict for transit guards. A second more radical suggestion was that public transport should be fully funded by means other than fares. This would abolish the revenue protection role for transit guards, reduce the major source of conflict and allow transit guards to focus upon the community safety role. This would address the issue from a practical perspective, but is unlikely to be politically acceptable.

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

Conclusions from the evaluation of this project were that the project produced worthwhile outcomes in all locations, and that the collaboration process worked well in three locations out of four and was partially successful in the fourth location.

We learnt several things from this project. We developed and tested a process for interagency collaboration that enabled agencies with different purposes and priorities to work together successfully across these differences. The key to this success was that the process prevented any organisation from imposing their purposes on other participants. A minority of potential participants decided not to take part because they objected to aspects of the process that prevented them from imposing their agenda on other participants. These participants generally withdrew after the first meeting. We judged that the project was successful because by the end of the project several practical problems had been resolved, good working relationships had been achieved between key agencies, and participants had a clearer understanding of the roles and priorities of other agencies and had been able to find ways to collaborate without compromising their own purposes.

The process we used is easy to explain, but in practice required skilful facilitation to be successful. There were several instances when conflicts arose in the group and the facilitator had to attempt to enable the group to resolve the issues so they could proceed. Given skilful facilitation, this process should be replicable in similar circumstances.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

This section briefly summarises final recommendations about the collaboration process used in this project. On the basis of this, the research team recommends:

**Recommendation 1**

In interagency collaboration, adequate consideration must be given to process as well as task. Interagency collaboration between agencies with different world views is worthwhile, but difficult to establish and maintain.
Recommendation 2
The collaboration process must ensure that power differences between organisations are equalised and that no organisation can impose its priorities or world view on other participants.

Recommendation 3
Some conflict should be expected. The collaboration process should support solution-focused problem-solving; inhibit discussion where the primary purpose is to allocate blame to others; and have agreed to an effective mechanism for conflict resolution before conflict arises.

Recommendation 4
There must be informed management and organisational support throughout the collaboration. This will enable participants to negotiate necessary changes to procedures or practices, and it provides continuity. Where practical, liaison with other agencies, including development and maintenance of partnerships, should be built into relevant job descriptions.

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INTRODUCTION

The transition from school to work can be problematic for young people from low-income families; it is a subject of considerable public attention and also of interest to the youth service sector (Bynner & Parsons 2002; Chuprov & Zubok 2000). Without a job or the opportunity to study, these young people may encounter financial, social and, eventually, mental and behavioral problems (Creed 1999; Schaufeli 1997). However, the present paper argues that there are opportunities for them to thrive, despite their deprived backgrounds. The identification of the factors that underlie such success is important to help those young people gain autonomy and steady careers, and to perpetuate a prosperous future for them and for society.

Very little research data are available, either in Hong Kong or overseas, concerning the factors relating to the success of young people from low-income families. A review of the literature reveals that these young people are at greater risk of experiencing problems because of their economic disadvantage (Kmec & Fustenberg 2002; Rich 1999). This disadvantage arises from financial problems in their families that undermine their social networks and social capital. Research indicates that the contextual factors and, notably, the economic factors, in a young person’s family shape the life path of that person. A culture of poverty can entrench adverse family conditions and perpetuate the intergenerational transmission of poverty and failure (Corcoran & Adams 1997). The identification of low-income families as a source of problems for young people is an important first step in the provision of help and services to them, but what is more important, both for research and for practice, is the identification of the factors that are relevant to these young people and that are conducive to their success.

Two significant indicators of the success of young people are academic and vocational achievements. Past research has shown that the academic achievement of young people from low-income families is less likely to be favorable (Ainsworth 2002; Gregg & Machin 2000) and they are less likely to find a job (Cooksey & Rindfuss 2001; O’Regan & Quigley 1998). However, young people who participate in programs to enhance their personal development, including social work programs, are more
likely to be successful in education (Campbell & Ramey 1994; Huston et al. 2001). Young people with a higher level of social support and social capital, which includes encouragement from teachers, are also more likely to succeed academically (Hewitt 1995; Lee & Smith 1999). Moreover, attending vocational or technical school and training may be more effective in helping young people to find employment (Cooksey & Rindfuss 2001; Schaufeli 1997). Having greater social capital through involvement in school activities can also increase the school leaver’s chance of finding a job (Caspi et al. 1998).

Social capital and social integration are important factors in the positive development of young people. As stated, a factor that is conducive to the acquisition of social capital and social integration appears to be the engagement of young people in organisational activities (Larson 1994). Nevertheless, because of the paucity of research on young people’s development of social capital, not much is known beyond these factors. Families are important sources of financial and social capital for adolescents, but their contribution is found to be limited in low-income families (de Haan & MacDermind 1999).

In Hong Kong, the transition from school to work has attracted some notable research attention. For example, a study has shown that youth mental health problems are related to unemployment and job search behavior (Lai & Chan 2002). Others have indicated adverse work conditions during the economic recession of the late 1990s as a factor (Chiu, Ho & Lui 1997; Kwong 1997). At a macro level, the occurrences of serious youth problems are attributable to the economic climate (Estes 2002; Lilley 2001), and thus youth poverty is a significant issue that needs tackling. According to local research (Social Sciences Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong 2004), the median monthly income of working youth aged between 15 and 24 is HK$6,500 (approximately A$1,080), which is below the median monthly income (HK$10,000/A$1,550) of the working population. Moreover, the number of both senior secondary and postsecondary students receiving financial assistance (such as fee remission assistance and means-tested grant and loan assistance) has been rising dramatically in recent years. All these studies indicate that the problem of poverty among young people is escalating (Wong 2006).

In sum, although there have been some vital findings in past research, existing gaps in the research data prevent a thorough understanding of young people’s success in school, work and in the transition from school to work. Based on the preliminary findings of a quantitative study, this paper examines a range of indicators of, and necessary conditions for, the positive development of young people who are economically disadvantaged. These indicators and necessary conditions include education, career achievement, financial adequacy, mental health and pro-social behavior. They go beyond simple access to a job, income and educational opportunity.
use of the services to enhance their developmental success.

Social capital is comprised of components that illuminate the input, process and output of social capital (Chan, Cheung & Peng 2004). The inputs of social capital refer to an individual’s engagement in civic organisations and activities, social networking and the provision of help to others (Hofferth, Boisjoly & Duncan 1999). The process of social capital refers to the dynamics that are inherent in the social networks that the individual weaves (Wollebaek & Selle 2002). Such dynamics depend on the size, density, proximity, homogeneity and multiplexity of the social network. Accordingly, an individual will benefit more from his or her social network when the network is larger, denser, closer, homogeneous and versatile. The output of social capital refers to past and expected help from the social network, organisations and community. Whereas past help can anticipate continuing help, expected help reveals the individual’s trust in people. This conceptualisation of social capital maintains and elaborates on the original conception of social capital as comprised of the social network, civic engagement, trust and the norm of reciprocity (Putnam 2002). Our conceptualisation adheres to the definition of social capital as a kind of social resource based on sustained relationship (Pargal, Gillian & Hug 2002).

The core of social capital includes the structural aspects of social networks and the functional aspects of the help that is experienced and expected, which involves such alternative terms as trust and the norm of reciprocity. Many studies have measured social capital intensively and extensively (Hofferth, Boisjoly & Duncan 1999; Putnam 2002; Wollebaek & Selle 2002), and have measured social networks, civic engagement, investment in relationship building, trust and the norm of reciprocity. Another perhaps more expedient approach to the measurement of these factors is to investigate the status of people in social networks (Lin 2001). This approach was adapted as the basis for the measurement of social capital in our study (Chan, Cheung & Peng 2004).

The measurement of the functional part of social capital involves questions about the experience and expectation of help that is received from and given to other people. The impact of the social capital that is derived from family relationships appears to be a crucial area for research. On the one hand, families that are plagued by economic hardship may be limited in the support that they can provide for their young members (de Haan & MacDermid 1999; Vander Ven et al. 2001), or the families themselves may be a cause of problems, such as family abuse and stress (Hauser 1999). On the other hand, even low-income families have the potential to provide social support and social capital for their young members. Because previous studies have often relied on case studies (Hauser 1999), it is necessary for the present study to clarify the quantitative impact of low-income families on social capital.

The main focus of this paper is the way in which the factors of service participation and social capital shape the success of young people from low-income families. The findings from this line of inquiry led to concrete recommendations as to how social services and other agencies can help these young people more effectively.

METHODS

We are currently conducting a survey of 500 young people from deprived families. The purpose is to explore the factors that are relevant to the development of these young people and that are conducive to their success. The participants are aged between 17 and 21 and have completed their pre-matriculation secondary education. This is the critical age range in the transition to young adulthood, and is a time that is characterised either by employment or engagement in higher study (Cramer 2000). It is also the target age range for local services that help young people to participate in the labor market. These young people may be studying, receiving training or working, or not in education, employment or training (Bynner & Parsons 2002).

Data collection for our study has not yet been completed; the present paper is based upon the responses of 206 research participants who have been recruited from five secondary schools, 12 integrated youth services centres and two outreaching social work teams located in different districts. All of them grew up in low-income families. In this study, low-income families are defined as those with monthly family income at or below 55% of the Median Monthly Domestic Household Income (MMDHI) (see Table 1). In Hong Kong, the Social Welfare Department uses this criterion to assess which families can receive full-fee waiving for some social services.

A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from the participants. There were five parts to the questionnaire, including a composite measure of youth development: academic achievement (13 items), work performance (11 items), financial adequacy (8 items),
TABLE 2 SUBJECTS’ BASIC DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father education</td>
<td>Primary or below (53.8%), Junior secondary (32.4%), Senior secondary (11.0%), Matriculation (2.3%), University or above (0.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother education</td>
<td>Primary or below (52.5%), Junior secondary (30.1%), Senior secondary (12.0%), Matriculation (2.7%), College (1.6%), University or above (1.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father employment</td>
<td>Employee (65.8%), Employer (4.2%), Self-employed (18.2%), Long-term unemployed (18.2%), Housework (3.0%), Student (0.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother employment</td>
<td>Employee (33.5%), Employer (1.7%), Self-employed (1.7%), Long-term unemployed (4.0%), Housework (58.5%), Student (0.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of residence</td>
<td>Private permanent housing (21.1%), Private rental housing (4.4%), Public rental housing (69.6%), Room (2.0%), Squatter (2.5%), No stable living place (0.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family income</td>
<td>Family on Comprehensive Social Security Assistance: 38.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Household size = 2 &amp; family income ≤ HK$7,150 (A$1,109): 4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Household size = 3 &amp; family income ≤ HK$9,350 (A$1,450): 9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Household size = 4 &amp; family income ≤ HK$11,385 (A$1,765): 30.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Household size = 5 &amp; family income ≤ HK$14,300 (A$2,217): 16.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

mental health (7 items), conduct (16 items), resilience (8 items), participation in vocational, social work or other similar services (10 items), social capital derived from friendship (4 items), family background (6 items) and demographic data of the participants.

According to Lerner and Dowling (2002), there are several indicators, such as success in school, maintenance of good health, helping others, resistance to danger and overcoming adversity, which can be used to assess whether young people are thriving. While the present study focuses on the transition from school to work, in addition to the aforementioned indicators, the factors of work performance and financial adequacy should also be taken into account. All these indicators have been measured in our previous research, such as those studies that dealt with school achievement (Cheung & Kwok 2001; Cheung & Rudowicz 2003), work performance (Cheung 2000), mental health (Cheung & Bagley 1998; Ngai & Cheung 2000) and behavioral competence (Cheung & Ngai 2000, 2003). To summarise, two dimensions were identified for each indicator. The first dimension used a group of five-point rating items to measure the participants’ perceptions of their academic achievement, work performance, financial adequacy, mental health, conduct and level of resilience. The second dimension comprised more “objective” measures, namely their academic results in schools and public examinations, incomes and durations of employment, loans, frequencies of seeking counselling and psychiatric treatment, and frequencies of participating in antisocial and prosocial activities.

Social capital is often defined as networks, norms and understandings between people that enable them to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives (Field 2003; Putnam 2002). This research focuses on the social capital derived from friendship and family. The former was measured by indicators concerned with the size of friendship networks and their friends’ employment situations, educational qualifications and social experiences (Kao 2004; Markward, MacMillan & Markward 2003; Wong 2006). The latter was measured by the marital status of participants’ parents (together, divorced/separated or widowed), number of siblings, their parents’ educational qualifications and employment situations (Caspi et al. 1998; Coleman 1988; Kao 2004).

Data analysis involved a series of linear regression analyses to evaluate the prediction of various measures of youth development from the factors of service participation, social capital generated from friendship and social capital generated from family. We can thus achieve a better understanding of how young people from low-income families walk along the road to success despite their unfavorable socioeconomic status.

RESULTS

Of the 206 participants in this study, 42.4% were male and 57.6% were female. Their average age was 18.24 years. About 63% had completed senior secondary education, and nearly 24% had their matriculation educational qualification. The average number of household members was 3.81, which was greater than the population average of 3.0 in 2006 (Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR 2006). The participants had been living in Hong Kong for 14.4 years on average. Among them, 10.7% were employees, 74.6% were students, 2% attended job training programs, and 12.2% chose the item “others” at the time of data collection. Their family income and other family backgrounds are summarised in Table 2.

As mentioned previously, this study focuses on the functions of service participation, friendship networks and family supports of young people with economic disadvantage. As such, the hypotheses to be tested are that service participation, social capital derived from friendship and social capital derived from family have their own explanatory power in regard to the participants’ opportunity to flourish. Linear regression models were used to estimate the relative strengths of the impact of
these factors on various measures of youth wellbeing. The standardised coefficient (Beta) of each variable is reported in Tables 3, 4 and 5 (see appendix).

The participants’ involvement in job training programs ($M = 1.62$) and services provided by other professionals (not social workers) ($M = 1.95$) had no significant effect on their wellbeing; however, their participation in social work services (including individual counselling, family counselling, groups and mass programs, $M = 2.89$) positively affected their vocational development ($\beta = .153$), mental health ($\beta = .161$) and conduct ($\beta = .194$). It also supported the hypothesis that the use of social work services positively impacts on the opportunity to thrive ($\beta = .235$) (see Table 3).

Social capital comprises the set of resources that inhere in family relations and in friendship networks and which are related to the cognitive, psychological and social development of young people (Coleman 1988; Field 2003). Regarding the social capital derived from friendship (see Table 4), the linear regression analysis demonstrated that the size of the friendship networks had no significant impact on any aspect of youth development. It also showed that neither the educational qualification nor the employment situation of friends was associated with the youth development. Nevertheless, the findings revealed that having friends with positive social experiences (such as being police, teachers and volunteers) contributed to the conduct ($\beta = .198$) and level of resilience ($\beta = .220$) of the participants.

Furthermore, the regression analysis evaluated the prediction of youth development from social capital derived from family. The marital status of participants’ parents had significant effects on the financial adequacy and conduct of these young people. It is noteworthy that, with the exception of mother’s educational qualification, and their children’s behavior, no positive association can be found between the number of siblings or parents’ educational attainment and employment situation and the various indicators of youth development (see Table 5).

**DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The economic and social conditions of Hong Kong change rapidly, and the problem of intergenerational poverty puts many young people at risk; however, their fate is not sealed. The results show that when those with economic disadvantage are given adequate resources and opportunities, they can alter their lives and avoid failure and social exclusion. These findings lend support to the call for the development of effective policy and practice strategies to help the target group. Moreover, the results indicate that while many local and international studies have focused on the risks and difficulties encountered by the disadvantaged youths (Bynner & Parsons 2002; Chuprov & Zubok 2000), there is a need to go further and examine the factors that help buffer these young people against the adverse effects of their financial conditions and assist them to flourish in different ways.

The findings of this study assist in the evaluation of the way in which social services and programs contribute to the success of young people with low family income. Social workers are keen to provide services and run programs to empower this vulnerable group. They adopt different approaches to equip young people with a set of attitudes, knowledge and skills required for meeting life challenges and participating in the civic life of the community (Cheung & Ngai 2000, 2003). The results also show that these young people’s participation in social work services has a considerable effect on their success. Furthermore, while the Hong Kong Government has in recent years actively set up youth training schemes, such as the Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme and the Pre-employment Training Scheme, with a view to helping young people leave poverty and unemployment, the present findings indicate that taking part in job-training programs has no significant impact on youth development. It can thus be argued that there is a need for a comprehensive review of the effectiveness of these training programs (Ngai 2002; Wong 2006).

The social capital thesis suggests that both the quantity and quality of social networks are associated with young people’s performance, and this is seen as particularly true for those with low socioeconomic status (Coleman 1988; Field 2003). Nevertheless, the results show that the size of friendship networks had no significant impact on the development of the participants, while having friends with positive social experiences appeared to lead to an improvement in their conduct and level of resilience. As such, more effort should be put into enhancing the quality of friendship networks of deprived young people. Programs that can increase bonding with healthy peers and supportive adults are a useful strategy. In fact, mentoring has become a popular form of intervention (Philip & Hendry 1996), and research indicates that having a constructive adult role model enhances young people’s emotional and social development, helps improve their academic and career motivation and achievement, expands their life experiences, redirects them from risk-taking behavior and fosters an improved self-concept (De Anda 2001; Hamilton & Darling 1989; Thompson & Kelly-Vance 2001). More mentorship programs are recommended to enhance the quality of social capital of the target group.

The majority of Hong Kong people are Chinese, and, without a closer look at the cultural factor, the investigation of the relationship between social capital and the success of young people from low-income families is incomplete. Chinese custom gives a privileged place to the family as the paramount form of social institution. Some intellectuals hold that the educational qualification and occupational status of parents play an important role in the creation of human capital in children (Caspi et al. 1998). Others argue that the presence and strength of relationships between parents and children provide valuable sources of social capital (Coleman 1988). The
results of this study indicate that having both parents present in the home has a positive impact on some aspects of youth development, and that this factor is more important than other factors such as parents’ educational level and employment situation. These findings support the idea that social capital may be weakened in single-parent families or in families characterised by parents’ marital discord (Caspì et al. 1998). Extra social resources and supports should be mobilised to help disadvantaged families maintain the function of providing material, emotional and social support to their children. Collaborative efforts between government officials, community members, school personnel, social workers and other professionals are also necessary to address the problems and needs of young people growing up in such families.

There are some possible explanations for the paucity of significant associations between various measures of youth development and social capital. Although the findings show that not all the social capital inputs covered by the present study are important for young people to thrive, there is a question of whether such an interim result reflects the whole picture, given that only half of the projected number of participants has been surveyed. Moreover, there is a lack of agreement in the existing youth research literature regarding the establishment of valid and reliable measures of youth development and social capital (Dekker 2004; Ostrom & Ahn 2003; Shek et al. 2006). There are few comprehensive Chinese measures that relate to most of the discrete measures developed in the West. This research attempted to construct a composite measure of youth development and social capital in the Hong Kong context. Further research, with improved design and measurement techniques, is desirable to verify and elaborate on the present findings.

This study has several limitations. First, the possible influence of the sites from which participants were identified should be taken into consideration. The survey recruited participants from secondary schools, integrated youth services centres and outreaching social work teams. The data collected might be affected by the fact that the primary relationship in those sites was with a positive adult role model (teacher or social worker), and that this might over-determine the survey responses. Second, even though the sample size of our study will be larger when the data collection is completed, it is still limited to a single birth cohort growing up in Hong Kong, and caution should be exercised in generalising our findings to other cohorts in other regions. Furthermore, other means of extending the present research could include launching a longitudinal study to examine the stages of development of these young people, and using in-depth interviews and focus groups to collect qualitative data. Third, this paper focuses on testing hypotheses about the predictors of service participation, social capital derived from family, and social capital derived from friendship. The study omits a comparison of the proposed models with alternative models as well as an investigation of other potential mechanisms that generate these predictions. These unanswered questions may serve as future research directions.

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APPENDIX

| TABLE 3 LINEAR REGRESSION OF THE FUNCTIONS OF SERVICE PARTICIPATION IN HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE THRIVE OUT OF LOW-INCOME FAMILIES (STANDARDIZED COEFFICIENT BETA) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Service_SwK                      | Aca  | Voc  | Fin  | Men  | Beh  | Res  | Dev  |
|                                 | .108 | .153*| .126 | .161*| .194**| .029 | .235**|
| Service_nonSwK                   | -.052| .085 | .073 | .126 | .049 | .073 | .104 |
| Job_training                     | -.063| .038 | -.066| -.036| -.172| -.027| -.114|


* p < .05, ** p < .01
### Table 4: Linear Regression of the Functions of Social Capital Derived from Friendship in Helping Young People Thrive Out of Low-Income Families (Standardized Coefficient Beta)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aca</th>
<th>Voc</th>
<th>Fin</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Beh</th>
<th>Res</th>
<th>Dev</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friend_no</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>0.117</td>
<td>-0.66</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>0.075</td>
<td>0.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend_employ</td>
<td>-0.106</td>
<td>-0.073</td>
<td>-0.71</td>
<td>-0.089</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>-0.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend_student</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.090</td>
<td>-0.187</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.131</td>
<td>0.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend_mid_ed</td>
<td>-0.125</td>
<td>0.083</td>
<td>-0.113</td>
<td>0.140</td>
<td>-0.050</td>
<td>-0.052</td>
<td>-0.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend_hi_ed</td>
<td>0.075</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>-0.097</td>
<td>0.162</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
<td>0.054</td>
<td>0.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend_pos_socexp</td>
<td>-0.144</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>-0.144</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0.198*</td>
<td>0.220**</td>
<td>0.081</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Friend_no = number of friends. Friend_employ = number of friends who are employers, self-employed or employees. Friend_student = number of friends who are students. Friend_mid_ed = number of friends who have senior secondary or matriculation levels of education. Friend_hi_ed = number of friends who have college or university levels of education. Friend_pos_socexp = number of friends who have positive social experience. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

### Table 5: Linear Regression of the Functions of Social Capital Derived from Family in Helping Young People Thrive Out of Low-Income Families (Standardized Coefficient Beta)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aca</th>
<th>Voc</th>
<th>Fin</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Beh</th>
<th>Res</th>
<th>Dev</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent_mar</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>-0.095</td>
<td>0.227**</td>
<td>-0.043</td>
<td>0.145*</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>0.123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling_no</td>
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<td>-0.082</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>-0.021</td>
<td>-0.104</td>
<td>-0.086</td>
<td>-0.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father_ed</td>
<td>-0.122</td>
<td>-0.021</td>
<td>-0.029</td>
<td>-0.067</td>
<td>-0.062</td>
<td>-0.060</td>
<td>-0.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother_ed</td>
<td>-0.029</td>
<td>0.128</td>
<td>-0.029</td>
<td>-0.042</td>
<td>0.147*</td>
<td>0.066</td>
<td>0.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father_employ</td>
<td>-0.089</td>
<td>-0.134</td>
<td>0.143</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>-0.012</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother_employ</td>
<td>-0.037</td>
<td>-0.111</td>
<td>0.083</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.146</td>
<td>0.102</td>
<td>0.120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Parent_mar = parents’ marriage. Sibling_no = number of siblings. Father_ed = father’s educational qualification. Mother_ed = mother’s educational qualification. Father_employ = father’s employment situation. Mother_employ = mother’s employment situation. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$
INTRODUCTION
During a visit to a school in country NSW in June 2006, our research team overheard a student ask, in effect, “How much longer is left of this stupid lesson?” It was a Year 8 class, period one on a Tuesday, mathematics, on the topic of measurement. The lesson struck us as fairly normal – questions on the board, a worksheet, and the teacher asking questions and moving around to answer questions – perhaps not especially engaging or exciting, but not particularly boring or “stupid” either.

The student’s question reminded me again of the difficult situation both students and teachers find themselves in: schooling is compulsory for these Year 8 students, the content of this schooling is prescribed to a large extent in syllabi, and the processes for both teacher and student behaviour seem to follow certain routines. Both teachers and students are caught up in the schooling game (Thomson 2002). Yet, if schooling is compulsory up to age 15 or so, and generally seen as necessary well beyond that, then it should be at least constructive, not “stupid”.

In this paper I will begin with some background about ways in which schooling and certification have become increasingly important for young people in Australia. All too often discussions about young people, and especially about early leavers, take on a negative tone (Ayman-Nolley & Taira 2000; Roman 1996; Te Riele 2006). This paper aims, at least partly, to address this by focusing not only on how schooling can be problematic for young people, but also on possible positive experiences for early school leavers.

BACKGROUND
In the past two decades, the purpose of formal education has been tied increasingly to the perceived requirements of the economy. Government policy in relation to post-compulsory education (see, for example, MCEETYA 2005) has suggested that the types of jobs found in the knowledge economy have changed, so that senior secondary education, and more, is needed to provide the prerequisite skills and knowledge. In this context, the Prime Minister John Howard (2006, para.5) recently asserted:

We know that tomorrow’s prosperity is not assured.
We know it must be earned through further reform.
However, although there is an increasing proportion of people with further educational qualifications, this does not mean that higher-level skills are fully utilised in employment (Kenyon & Wooden 1995). Rather, research across the Western world demonstrates that employers tend to use educational qualifications as a screening device to rank and sort potential employees (Kenyon & Wooden 1995; Killeen et al. 1999). This means that the kinds of jobs, and TAFE courses, which used to be available to Year 10 leavers, now all too often "require" Year 12.

Nevertheless, for the past two decades, Australian Federal Government policy has been aimed at increasing school retention to the end of senior secondary education (Year 12). The current Federal Minister for Education Julie Bishop (2006, para.34) explained the role of a Youth Pathways program as follows: "We must be clear that the mission here is to reduce the number of early school leavers".

Whether or not as a result of government policy, apparent retention rates from Year 7/8 to Year 12 have increased from 49% in 1986 to 75% in 2005 (DEET 1993; ABS 2006). Despite this increase in school retention over the past two decades, early leavers continue to be drawn, in unrepresentatively large numbers, from low socioeconomic backgrounds, rural areas and Indigenous peoples (Lamb, Dwyer & Wyn 2000).

As Beck (1992, p.35) argued, risks and insecurities are not distributed evenly across society, rather they are partly distributed along lines of poverty and wealth:

Poverty attracts an unfortunate abundance of risks.
By contrast the wealthy (in income, power, or education) can purchase safety and freedom from risk.

Although it may be impossible for anyone to "purchase" complete safety from risk, when a young person does not have access to many "opportunity structures" (Te Riele & Crump 2003), for example through social networks, inside knowledge or wealth, then educational qualifications become relatively more important.

The increased pressure on young people to stay at school longer and gain more qualifications brings with it an onus on schools to make the learning experience they offer worthwhile for students. Teachers and schools are thus also under pressure. Education systems, schools and teachers have made an effort in recent years to improve the school experience, for example by broadening the curriculum to include vocational subjects in the senior years and adapting teaching processes to a more diverse student body. Nevertheless, school does not always work very well for all students. The following section outlines how school can be problematic for students, while the next section discusses a more positive approach.

The data for the remainder of the paper are drawn from three separate research projects:

1 'Changing schools in changing times: Stabilising and sustaining whole school change in communities experiencing adverse conditions', an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage project led by Associate Professor Debra Hayes, which is still in progress;

2 'Alternative education for marginalised youth: Negotiating risk and hope', funded through a University of Technology Sydney (UTS) Early Career Researcher (ECR) grant, still in progress; and

3 'Senior colleges for a second chance: Marginalisation, transition and re-entry education', the author’s completed PhD research.

These projects all are located in New South Wales. Project 1 works with four public schools that are part of the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) Priority Schools program. Three of these schools are in Sydney and the fourth in country NSW. This project is the source of the student comment in the title and start of this paper. Project 2 works with an alternative school in the non-government sector, in a regional town. Project 3 involved two public senior colleges, one in Sydney and one in a regional town.

All three projects use a mainly qualitative methodology, with interviews with staff and students and observations generating the bulk of the data. More detailed methodological information does not suit the purpose of this paper, but can be provided by the author upon request. The paper will refer to Project 1, Project 2 and Project 3 to indicate the source of data used.

SCHOOL AS A PROBLEM
School can be problematic or even alienating for students – sometimes despite the best efforts of teachers and other school staff, other times because of their actions. Experiences that may be alienating for one young person may be fine for another, and experiences may combine to have different effects. Below I outline some common problematic experiences, but how these affect an individual young person, or how they combine with other experiences will, of course, vary.

The relationship between students and teachers
The quality of students’ relationships with teachers has been acknowledged as an important factor in student marginalisation in much previous research (see, for example, Batten & Russell 1995). In particular, lack of respect and a sense of inequality are seen to create problems in teacher–student relationships.

The authority that teachers have over students, simply through their position, can create resentment in students, whether warranted or not. Jane (Project 3) asserted that
often teachers’ only argument for getting students to do something was: “I am the teacher, you are the student, do as you are told”. This sense of inequality was also evident in comments by Ben (Project 2) who said teachers at his previous school “just treat you like kids and that … Trying to learn to be an adult and stuff, trying to grow up and you’ve got teachers who treat you like kids all your life”.

Students in all three projects agreed with the boys studied by Trent and Slade (2001, p.43) that they wanted to be treated with respect, equity and fairness — conditions accorded adults but “usually denied to children ‘because they are children’”. For many high school students, there is little else as annoying as being treated like a child.

**Punitive discipline**

Discipline is an important but complex area; previous research has suggested it is the way regulations are implemented, rather than the regulations themselves, that makes a major difference (Batten & Russell 1995; Smyth et al. 2000).

Perhaps not surprisingly in a class with up to 30 students, teachers sometimes pick on the wrong person, much to the annoyance of students (focus group Project 1):

**Student:** I got in trouble in science cause someone turned on the power point, I was turning it off and he’s automatically put me up on the board for detention.

**Researcher:** So what would’ve helped that situation?

**Student:** If the teacher paid attention to what I was saying.

Students also object to the enforcement of disciplinary regulations for what they consider to be minor transgressions. Carl (Project 3) said he “got suspended once for having my shirt hanging out, and I thought that was just too much of a joke”. Angie (Project 2) found teachers would put too much pressure on students to get work done, using punishment as a threat: “if you didn’t do your work, you’d have detention. Or suspension, which was pointless”.

**Teaching styles**

Previous research makes it clear that the importance of teachers for the quality of students’ educational experiences cannot be overestimated, with teaching style being one aspect of this (Batten & Russell 1995; Smyth et al. 2000; Trent & Slade 2001).

Year 7 students in focus groups for Project 1 shared a dislike of teachers requiring lots of writing, especially copying off the board. Over-reliance on the textbook was also commented on:

**Student 1:** We always have to do work and we always do it from the textbook. Like, every single lesson we have the textbook and we have to write down stuff.

**Researcher:** Is that good or not?

**Student 1:** Not good.

**Student 2:** The textbooks are boring …

**Student 3:** The teacher’s not explaining it to you so you wouldn’t know …

**Student 1:** Cause when I read it, I don’t understand any words or what it means.

These students suggested that they should be allowed to work with their peers more, to help them understand and get work done, but as one of them explains: “Whenever I try to do well in English I don’t understand and I need to ask my friend but like I’m not allowed to talk and I get in trouble for it and I get detention for it”.

Ben (Project 2) thought teachers were too overwhelmed by dealing with perceived discipline problems, taking time away from actual teaching and learning:

The teacher writes up on the board then she like stops, turns around, rouses for five minutes, sends them out of the room, then they’ve got to [work] something out for the principal, there’s 10 minutes gone, you could’ve learnt something in that 10 minutes.

Research findings by Trent and Slade (2001) suggest that teaching style may be more important than the curriculum, because the way a subject is taught can make it interesting and relevant to students. Comparisons students in these projects made between different teachers for the same subject confirmed this point.

**School culture and school support structures**

Although the importance of relationships with individual teachers cannot be overestimated, the school as a whole also contributes to students’ educational experiences. When schools lack the flexibility to accommodate different students or they respond to problems with punitive disciplinary methods or neglect, students are marginalised (see, for example, Batten & Russell 1995; Smyth et al. 2000).

Michelle (Project 3) continued to be angry at the lack of support for her ill health (she had Chronic Fatigue Syndrome) from her old school. She finished Year 10 at her old school, as she said, more or less through “distance education”. Not only did she feel the school did not support her, she claimed teachers’ reluctance to understand and accept her illness further impaired her health:

Because with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome stress affects it, as far as I can tell. The more stress you have the worse you feel, the more tired you feel. When you get teachers on your case who don’t believe you and want doctors’ certificates all the time it is not very nice.

The result of such experiences can be summed up by Hannah (Project 2) who explained: “If you go to a school and you don’t like it then you’re just not going to do well”.
The role of teachers and schools

While these examples from the projects form little more than a snapshot, they highlight the direct or intermediary roles schools and teachers may play in placing young people at the margins and “activating or enabling the risk of some young people” (Strategic Partners 2001, p.16). At the same time, schools are able to play a role in reducing alienation. Students’ marginalisation by schooling can be “as much a struggle for the schools and teachers as it is for the young people” (Smyth & Hattam 2001, p.403).

As argued by Gewirtz (2003), there has been a growing recognition within the sociology of education that schools not only contribute to reproduction, but also have the potential to contribute to more socially just practices. In particular, different schooling practices can contribute to positive pathways for would-be early school leavers.

COUNTER DISCOURSES – POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

Much research has demonstrated that, statistically, early leavers have worse employment outcomes than Year 12 completers, both immediately and in the long term. For example, Lamb, Wyn and Dwyer (2000) showed that in the mid-1990s, one year out of school, 34% of early school leavers were unemployed compared with 12% of Year 12 completers. Across all ages, unemployment for those without senior secondary education was 9.5% in 2000 compared to 7.2% for those who had completed Year 12 and 4.4% for those with post-school qualifications (ABS 2000).

However, there are nuances to these broad statistical pictures. For example, male early school leavers tend to find work more easily than females, especially through apprenticeships (Lamb, Wyn & Dwyer 2000; Teese 2000). Research in Western Australia found that most boys who had left in Year 11 and moved into work or apprenticeships thought they would have gained nothing by completing Year 12 (Taylor 2002, p.519). Gorgens & Ryan (2006) demonstrated that when early school leavers completed formal vocational qualifications after leaving school, this significantly improved their employment outcomes by the time they were aged 22. For early school leavers who left before Year 11, Marks (2006, p.33) found that:

Early school leaving appears to promote full-time work rather than participation in study … Early school leavers were more likely than completers to be in full-time work than in part-time work or unemployment.

Thus, the outcomes for early leavers are not homogeneously bleak. In addition, findings from Project 3 indicate that for mature-age, senior high school students, Year 12 completion is not always necessary for university entry. For example, Susan, an adult re-entry student in her early twenties, planned on gaining entry to university as a mature age student after completing Year 11. Teachers in Project 3 said they frequently assisted students to “fast track” into university. However, they noted the paradox of assisting students with this pathway:

According to our school records, that shows we have had another leaver, but if that leaver is getting somewhere that they want to go, more quickly, we have achieved the desired effect. They did not need an HSC [Year 12 certificate] for where they wanted to go.

Therefore, without denying that for many young people there are instrumental and other benefits of formal schooling and certification, we need to acknowledge that school completion is not an absolute prerequisite for success in work or further study.

Hard-to-measure outcomes

Part of the attraction of economic and instrumental purposes of education may be that they are, or at least seem to be, measurable. Statistics on the proportion of unemployed youth, for example, are widely used, despite some of the complications outlined above. An array of tests and measurements has also entered schools. In New South Wales, statewide standardised testing takes place in Years 3, 5, 7, 8, 10 and 12. Depending on how they are used, these tests may all have merit, but it is also useful to remember their limits, as Wrigley (2000, p.3) points out in the UK context:

Michael Fullan, I believe, coined the slogan, “We should measure what we value, not value what we measure”. Of course, we also need to value what we cannot possibly measure – a salutary reminder given current obsessions with testing and comparative data.

Similarly, Newell and Van Ryzin (2007, p.1) protest that, “the rapid growth of state testing systems is complicating matters rather than simplifying them”. They suggest that to decide the effectiveness of schools, concepts are needed “that value ‘personhood’ over ruthless efficiency and encourage student self-directedness and teacher/student ownership instead of top-down hierarchies” (p.1).

Staff and students in the three projects also considered social and personal benefits important. The value of personal outcomes was emphasised by many staff in Project 3:

The welfare side of it, you cannot measure numerically. You cannot measure by “they achieve this in their exam results”. And that’s the sad thing here, because maybe departmental heads outside, would maybe look at “what did you get in your HSC, what did you get in your school certificate result? What are you actually
These schools is made up of young people who have other states, some alternative schools try to do exactly that. Qualifications is not easy. Nevertheless, in NSW, as well as in mental and personal benefits of formal schooling and experience in mainstream schools and the possible instru

Bridging the gap between the difficulties some students wanting to be able to read. This teacher actively used a vocabulary of hope (Halpin, 2003) by working with the student’s own reason for difficulty with reading, and lived prospectively in the past and present by recognising the student’s previous present by using the student’s wish to do scuba diving. Angie (Project 2) was looking forward to getting her HSC so she could say: “I’ve done it, proved everyone wrong”.

Another important non-instrumental, and hard to measure, outcome of schooling is the generation of hope. One conceptualisation of hope is as “a way of living prospectively in and engaging purposefully with the past and the present” (Halpin, 2003, p.14, original italics). A practical example from Project 3 of this conceptualisation is provided by a specialist literacy teacher:

One of my students, I believe that I’ve really, really succeeded with him because when he came I asked him to identify why he wanted to read and he wanted to do a scuba diving course and he realised that he couldn’t read the questions on the paper. So I actually taught him to read the scuba diving manual, that was his reading. And we sat there every week and went through the scuba diving manual and he, look, he was reading words like compression and depressurisation – getting it all right, it was great . . . And he got 90% in that exam. You know, he got everything right he could do, which was fantastic and then the last 10 questions the fellow read through with him and he got four of those right so he actually ended up with 94%.

The teacher and student engaged purposely with the past and present by recognising the student’s previous difficulties with reading, and lived prospectively in the present by using the student’s wish to do scuba diving. This teacher actively used a vocabulary of hope (Halpin 2003) by working with the student’s own reason for wanting to be able to read.

Alternative schools

Bridging the gap between the difficulties some students experience in mainstream schools and the possible instrumental and personal benefits of formal schooling and qualifications is not easy. Nevertheless, in NSW, as well as in other states, some alternative schools try to do exactly that.

A large proportion of the student population in these schools is made up of young people who have opted out or been pushed out of other schools. A teacher in Project 3 estimated that: “Probably 70% or 80% of the students who are here, if they weren’t coming here they wouldn’t be going anywhere”. These young people may have experienced bullying or been bullies, had health or academic problems, moved around a lot or been in juvenile detention. Often they have missed out on school intermittently through suspensions or truancy, or, in the longer term, as early school leavers. Angie (Project 2) says a lot of the students are “drop outs and all that”. Hannah, at the same school, argues that: “this school is the only school that will give a kid a second chance”. Michelle (Project 3) suggested that if the alternative school had not existed, “I probably would have left school, totally”.

The alienation many students felt in relation to schooling tended not to occur so much in the alternative schools in Projects 2 and 3, as a teacher (Project 3) explained:

Parents come to interview nights saying ‘at their previous school my son or daughter wouldn’t have given you anything. I am amazed they have handed in four assignments this term’. So it obviously is working and the students feel that it is a different environment.

Matthew (Project 3) observed with some sense of wonder: “I would have never thought that I’d say I like school, but I like school here”. In other words, despite their previous difficulties, these young people are able to have positive schooling experiences. This is partly due to the different approaches in the school, and partly to changes in the young people themselves. In relation to the latter, Susan (Project 3) explained: “I really believe it is because I left the school system and had a lot of life experience”. A teacher (Project 3) agreed:

Something a student said to me years ago has stuck with me. There is the traditional idea that school prepares you for life. This person said that life had prepared her for school. I think that is what makes a difference in this place.

The schools in Projects 2 and 3 had also made changes themselves. One of the teachers in Project 3 explained:

I see students come in here who have made a choice to come here because it is different, or because they are different. I see that the purpose of the [school] is to meet their needs, what ever they may be. To me that is not offering them what they have had before. If they haven’t succeeded at what we call a normal sort of school then we wouldn’t want to offer them the same again.
These changes relate to each of the topics addressed in the previous section: the relationship between students and teachers; discipline; teaching styles; and school culture and support structures. For example, Hannah (Project 2) explained that the whole culture of the school is different:

And that’s what I like about this school because you can be an individual and no-one will judge you, you can wear or do or say whatever you want and no-one will judge you because you’re your own person.

Students often focused on the teachers being different. A student in Project 3 wrote that what she liked about the alternative school was that “teachers can relate to you, they don’t think they are better than you because you are a student”. In Project 2, Ben explained:

I was actually quite surprised to find teachers like this in a place like this, they say this school is, you know, you’ve got no hope or nothing; it’s all the drop-outs and stuff. When you think about it, they’ve got some of the best teachers in this school. I think of the teachers up at [previous school], I can’t think of one that I liked. I can think of plenty that I don’t like. And out here, I don’t know, there’s not a teacher here that I don’t get along with. They’re all good teachers.

Andrew (Project 3) commented that what he liked about the alternative school was that teachers “make a real effort to see that work is fun but very educational”. Teachers themselves also attained a sense of pride from being successful with students who had not succeeded in other schools, as is obvious in this description by a teacher from Project 3:

I don’t think the Department recognises how important we are. Someone said “oh you go around saving souls”, and we don’t save souls, but we all make an effort to allow people, who would not under normal circumstances be able to get somewhere, the opportunity to get somewhere.

These schools also tried to contribute to students’ opportunity structures (Te Riele & Crump 2003) not only by providing access to formal qualifications, but also by connecting students with support and work networks. One of the schools in Project 2 had succeeded in arranging for a mobile Centrelink office to attend the college once a fortnight. The school in Project 2 had established strong links with local employers through work placements and traineeships, as noted by a teacher:

Now, this is where the success part of this college really comes to the fore. These kids are out there in the workplace and they’re showing the employers what they can do … Like last Friday I heard a bloke, a kid, come in, in Year 12, who said, “there’s a talk of an apprenticeship” and that’s how well he’s going in the business. And now that’s when it doesn’t matter, really, if you’ve got your piece of paper saying School Certificate or HSC, if these employers can see how good you are, you like the employment where you are and they have a position becoming available, there’s a strong chance they will offer that.

Particularly for young people without connections through family or friends, or the insight into how to access to services, or even which services to access, such school-based provisions can be vital. This was the principle underpinning the Full Service Schools program (Strategic Partners 2001), which unfortunately was not extended.

CONCLUSION
Despite government policy over the past two decades aimed at keeping young people in formal education longer, about a quarter of young people continue to leave school before Year 12. Many of these early leavers, as well as some of their peers who stay, have negative experiences in school. Despite common perceptions, not all early leavers fare badly in the labour market. Nevertheless, formal schooling and credentials can have both economic and personal benefits for young people, especially those who have limited access to other opportunity structures. Some schools are succeeding in making those benefits available to young people whose previous experience of school has been problematic.

The main conclusion from this paper is a warning against negative stereotyping. First, early leavers have been perceived in deficit terms, as lacking not only the educational credentials, but also the maturity and commitment to successfully move into the labour market. More nuanced research has shown that while, on the whole, early leavers have a higher likelihood of unemployment, some do rather well, especially those who gain apprenticeships and other vocational qualifications. Second, early leavers, as well as others who experience problems in school, have been blamed for their negative experiences. Findings from the three projects discussed in this paper demonstrate that, with a different approach to schooling, these young people are able to enjoy learning and do well. A change in attitude towards young people in general, and early school leavers in particular, is an important beginning, as Williams (1983, pp.268-69, in Halpin 2003, p.127) points out:

It is only in a shared belief and insistence that there are practical alternatives that the balance of forces and chances begins to alter. Once the inevitabilities
are challenged, we begin gathering our resources for a journey of hope. If there are no easy answers, there are still available and discoverable hard answers, and it is these that we can learn to make and share.

We are not there yet. Policy needs to enable schools to respond creatively and flexibly to the variety and complexity of reasons that have, in one way or another, made schooling unsuited to students' needs. A greater diversity of pathways, both in secondary and vocational education, and in the workplace, is necessary to support the diversity among young people in Australia.

REFERENCES


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AUTHOR

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**NOTES**

1. ARC Linkage project ‘Changing schools in Changing Times: Stabilising and sustaining whole school change in communities experiencing adverse conditions’, led by A/Prof Debra Hayes.
2. The student actually said: “How much longer is left of this shit lesson?”.
3. The Changing Schools in Changing Times project was funded through the Australian Research Council’s Linkage program. It is a partnership between Griffith University, the University of Technology, Sydney, and the NSW Department of Education and Training. The members of the research team include (in alphabetical order): Narelle Carey, Debra Hayes, Ken Johnston, Ann King, Rani Lewis-Jones, Kristal Morris, Chris Murray, Ishbel Murray, Kitty te Riele and Margaret Wheeler.
Factors affecting the acceptance of social work services: Evidence from two focus groups with social workers working with youth-at-risk

BY NGAN-PUN NGAI, CHAUG-KIU CHEUNG & STEVEN SEK-YUM NGAI

The effectiveness of social work in helping young people is contingent on their acceptance of the services. The relevant literature on the acceptance of social work services among young people is scarce, and exploration on this issue is obviously important for the improvement of professional help. This study investigates factors affecting youth-at-risk in seeking help from social workers. It is based on qualitative data generated from two focus groups with social workers working with youth-at-risk of crime or delinquency conducted in Hong Kong in 2005. According to social workers, the determinant factors include: personal factors; parental factors; peer factors – learning, regulation, and companionship; social workers’ factors; and agency factors. Implications for practical services and policy development, aiming to enhance the acceptance of social work services among marginal youth by using various intervention strategies, will be discussed.

Effective social work services, including youth work helping youth at risk of crime or delinquency, require at-risk youth to accept and adhere to the services, for example, by completing treatment sessions, participating in goal-directed activities, and doing what is expected from the services. Theoretically, acceptance is a similar concept to adherence, attachment, compliance, cooperation, service completion and utilisation of services. The effectiveness of helping depends on young people’s acceptance of services. However, acceptance does not mean just using social work services, signing a contract with the services and attending some of the activities. Contracts with youth tend not to be binding, as the young people have no obligation to abide by such agreements. Thus real acceptance of social work services not only starts with the engagement of youth in the services, but also involves the youth using the services continuously. Hence social workers’ insider observations and insights about factors that influence young people’s acceptance of services are particularly useful for generating practical knowledge for professional intervention, which will help in the cultivation of factors conducive to acceptance and undercut those impeding acceptance.

This study illuminates the details of qualitative data obtained from two focus groups conducted with social workers and capitalises on the strengths of social workers in interacting with and providing services for at-risk youth and their families, and, more importantly, their reflections on factors that affect young people’s service acceptance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Past studies have found some personal characteristics of young people and formats of service delivery that affect young people’s acceptance of services; however, the research findings may not provide much help for social workers trying to understand the factors that promote or hinder marginal youth engagement with services. For example, past studies have found that a young person who is female, employed, motivated or not a member of an ethnic minority (De Leon, Uelnick & Hawke 2000; Hohman 2000; Sechrest 2001) is more likely to accept the service. Other studies have also indicated that service acceptance differs according to the problems young
people are experiencing (Hohman 2000; Milton et al. 2002; Sechrest 2001). For example, young abusers of drugs or alcohol, with the exception of marijuana, are less likely to accept services. Service duration also influences young people’s acceptance. In addition, acceptance is less likely the longer a young person has had problems (Milton et al. 2002; Hohman 2000). Alternatively, when young people are receiving services in a residential setting, acceptance is higher (De Leon, Uelnick & Hawke 2000). Many of the above factors are not under practitioners’ discretionary control, so they can only respond passively to them. The factors do not provide guidance for day-to-day practice. For example, while young people who have been using the service for a longer time show higher acceptance of the service, the finding begs the question: how can practitioners prolong young people’s service use? Apparently, duration in the service and acceptance are issues involved in a circular way. One cannot prolong young people’s use of a service without cultivating their acceptance. Thus, evidence-based research on factors that affect young people’s acceptance of services is obviously required.

Because of the scarcity of research and theoretical investigation of at-risk young people’s acceptance of social work services, research on young people in general seeking help from social workers would be a reference point for proposing a research framework (Cheung & Liu 2005). Prominent among the theories and research findings are those suggesting that young people’s rational calculation and their vulnerability to coercive and normative influences are factors that affect their seeking help from social workers. Rational calculation, in particular rational choice theory and exchange theory, as well as utilitarian theory, emphasise young people’s consideration of the costs and benefits from seeking help and thereby accepting help from social workers as a factors in their choice (Pescosolido 1992). The theory and findings suggest that social workers can facilitate young people’s service acceptance by increasing the benefits and reducing the costs expected from service use. The benefits and costs can also have bearings on the young people’s parents, family members and peers as they represent sources that affect young people’s realisation of benefits and costs.

The second factor – coercive influences – reflects the power theory, which suggests that powerful sources can facilitate or impede young people’s use and acceptance of services (Pescosolido 1992). If the young person is a capable and competent service seeker and user, these sources can be internal. The importance of internal power signifies the merit of empowering young people for service use and acceptance. The sources can also be external to youth, for example, when powerful figures push or hinder young people’s access to services. These powerful figures can include parents, family members, peers, gang fellows and leaders, social workers and other service professionals.

The third factor has to do with normative force, which involves persuasion and non-coercive influences (Lopez et al. 1998). It involves young people’s parents or family members and peers. In fact, people around young people can pull and push them toward acceptance of services through providing incentives, coercive force or normative encouragement. The essential question for this study is: what are the specific pulling and pushing factors?

METHODS
The study into the factors that influence young people’s use and acceptance of social work services was based on a synthesis of interview data collected from two focus groups. One recruited eight (four male and four female) and the other nine (five male and four female) social workers in Hong Kong in the summer of 2005. The social workers were affiliated with various outreach social work teams and probation service units for young people at risk of crime or delinquency. The at-risk young people that they served were young people identified as standing at a margin about to fall into the trap of criminal and delinquent affairs. The social workers varied in their experience of working with marginal young people; some had over 20 years of experience and others were new workers. The questions for the two focus groups included:

1. What kinds of social work services are more and less acceptable to young people?
2. How do young people behave when they accept or don’t accept various social work services?
3. What behaviour do you expect of young people who accept social work services?
4. Which kinds of factors will influence young people to accept social work services?
5. Do young people have any faith or values that influence them to accept social work services?
6. Do mood and behavior influence young people to accept social work services?
7. Is personality a factor that affects young people’s acceptance of social work services?
8. Are families a factor that influences young people to accept social work services?
9. Do peers influence young people’s acceptance of social work services; if so, in what way?
10. Does experience influence young people’s acceptance of social work services? If so, in what way?
11. Can social service organisations do anything to increase young people’s acceptance of social work services? If so, in what way?
12. When engaging with social work services, how will young people appraise and experience the service and what expectations will they have of the service? What factors affect their experience of the service?
13. Of all the above-mentioned factors, which most influences young people to accept social work services?
14. What changes will you expect to see in young people who have accepted social work services?
RESULTS
Factors related to parents/families, peers, social workers and agencies that affect at-risk young people’s acceptance of social work services were identified from the two focus-group discussions. These factors and their influence on marginal young people’s acceptance of social work services are discussed below.

Personal factors related to service acceptance
According to the social workers, personal factors related to acceptance of social work services included young people’s willingness to comply, spontaneously disclose, offer help, and relate intimately.

Compliance refers to young people abiding by regulations set by the social workers and the services. Regulations include the proper type of clothing, use of appropriate language and abstinence from substance use. The violation of such regulations resulted in disturbances that not only ruined the client’s use of the service but also interfered with other clients’ use of services. This was most problematic in the use of services in the agency centre, which integrated different kinds of young people for varying types of service provision. The services would not give way to the marginal youth’s personal desire to behave in his or her own ways. The marginal young people’s stable participation in services depended on their willingness to join with the other young people in the agency centre in complying with the regulations. A social worker noted:

They would keep attending group activities for the whole year and abide by the regulations of the group (Tu).

Spontaneous disclosure refers to young people voluntarily and spontaneously disclosing their thinking or secret likes or dislikes to the social workers – was an indicator of acceptance. Even though the marginal young people had complied with certain service components, they might not have had a strong commitment to the services because the compliance might have been involuntary and passive, such as designated sessions for clients in the probation social work service or for young offenders under the police superintendent’s discretion. The young people’s souls would emerge when they disclosed in a spontaneous way. Disclosure was a marker of young people’s trust in the social workers. A social worker commented:

The building of a committed relationship not only is conformity, but also is telling you what s/he has not done, in order to show his/her trust in the social worker. For example, s/he would phone you to explain why s/he has not missed the appointment (Carrot).

Offering help refers to marginal young people doing something more than merely attending service-related activities. For example, young people might invite their peers to attend activities when the number of participants in the activities was insufficient. The intention of such assistance is to help social workers conduct the services properly. Mobilising participants in these activities enhances the effectiveness of the services. In this case, the young people become partners or collaborators in sustaining effective service delivery. A social worker said:

When the number of participants in activities is not enough, they would take the initiative to attend (Apple).

Intimate relationships refers to marginal young people using nicknames when they address social workers. For example, they refer to social workers by their aliases, such as Joe, Christine and Peter. Sometimes, they call female social workers “mother” to indicate their trust in and intimacy with the workers. This address is more intimate than calling the worker “miss” or “madam”. Moreover, young people also displayed their intimacy with social workers through intimate behavior including hugging and clinging to the social workers. Verbal behavior and body action are vivid indicators of young people’s acceptance of a service. For example, a social worker observed:

They would call you by a nickname. If the relationship is close, they will call you Joe or Miss Joe (Joe).

Parental or family factors related to acceptance
Parental factors related to the marginal young people’s service acceptance were: parental expectation of the service, labelling of clients, and experience with social security staff.

Parental expectation related to parents’ knowledge, anticipation and hope of the social work service fulfilling the young people’s and parents’ needs for help. According to the social workers, parents might not be totally ignorant of the service, but might have an unrealistic expectation of the service’s ability to help their children and even the whole family. They thought that social workers were omnipotent and able to offer them resources for solving their problems and meeting their needs. Some parents would even shift much of the responsibility for taking care of the children to social workers. However, the children might resist both the parents’ demand and the assumed social worker’s role of caring. This created much pressure on establishing satisfactory worker–client working relationships. Moreover, the parents’ unrealistic expectation might eventually undermine the youths’ service acceptance. Specifically, a social worker said:

It is worth discussing the relationship with parents. Sometimes in some extreme cases, parents hold an overly high expectation. Seeing the parents together with children with whom the worker is not yet
familiar would give a poor experience. Subsequently, children would avoid social workers just as ghosts (Tai).

Parents’ labelling refers to a parental misunderstanding that the clients of social work services are all deviant and problematic. Believing that their children are not problematic, parents resisted efforts by social work services to help their children. As such, a misunderstanding of the services was a cause of parents’ resistance, which posed a coercive force blocking marginal young people’s access to the services. A social worker noted:

Parents very often think that the outreaching service only contacts problem youths. As such, they are unwilling to let their children accept the service (Kennix).

The negative experience of parents or family with social security staff was another force inhibiting marginal young people’s service acceptance. Usually, in Hong Kong, the parents or families who depend on social welfare have to report to social security staff regularly. Sometimes, meetings with social security staff are unpleasant as staff may interrogate welfare recipients in an impolite manner. This unfriendly manner may deter people from relying on or abusing social welfare. When parents have such negative experiences with social security staff, they may think that social workers, like social security staff, are unhelpful. The negative experience of their parents may give young people a negative impression of social workers. Eventually, an atmosphere of resistance to service acceptance could spread through the families and result in them avoiding encounters with social workers. A social worker suggested:

The negative experience of families on welfare with the social security section would make youths misunderstand social workers’ image. It is because they do not know whether staffs in the social security section are social workers or not. It creates an impediment more or less (Lee).

Peer factors related to service acceptance
Peer influences on service acceptance stemmed from learning, regulation and companionship. While marginal young people played an active role in learning, peers played a more active role in their regulation and companionship, with marginal young people playing a passive role in response.

Learning refers to marginal young people learning about social work services from their peers who have used the services. The experience of peers with services appeared to be a comprehensible and credible source of information about the services. A social worker pointed out:

If somebody in young people’s peer group has used our services, if they regard social workers as being able to help them, and they are knowledgeable about our services, they will be more ready to accept (Ko).

Regulation or control comes from the leader of the peer group, other peers, gang fellows and the triad. According to the social workers, these parties tend to resist marginal young people’s acceptance of social work services. Marginal young people may worry that social workers work with the police to subvert gangs and peer-groups with deviant behaviors. They and their peers may mistakenly believe that social workers are undercover agents of the law enforcement authority. This belief is influenced by movies about undercover policemen fighting against the triad and criminal activities. As a result, peer or gang leaders and fellows exert coercive force on marginal young people to not accept social work services. The marginal young people are, in turn, closely observed by their peers or gangsters. Under such surveillance, marginal young people have to pay attention to peer views during encounters with social workers. Peers and the peer leader often intervene to prohibit marginal young people from accepting social work services. Such interactions are apparent in the following quotes:

When they need to join activities of the triad, they will face conflict. They wish to share they worry with social workers, but they are afraid that other people in the peer group criticise them (Ko).

Recently, there are problems with the undercover. They would have doubt about our identity. Many of them would not mention illegal things, because they are unclear about what are social workers and do not want to mention things related to the triad (Lung).

Companionship involved peers accompanying the marginal youths to attend social work services. The need for companionship stemmed from the marginal young people’s life history, which was devoid of secure social relationships. For instance, many young people lacked support from parents and other family members and had to resort to friends for support. Friends who accompanied the young people to services were valuable social resources that the young people typically lacked. The following reveals the story:

They would fail to keep appointments, depending on whether they have security amongst peers, probably stemming from their stories of growing up. It is difficult to build trust or a relationship with social workers. If there are friends attending activities together, they will be open. Only together with companions would they go out (Iris).
Social workers’ factors related to service acceptance

According to the focus group discussions, a number of the social workers’ practices sustained marginal young people’s service acceptance. These practices capitalised on the influence of worker–client relationships, attitudes toward marginal young people, and professional practices.

The worker–client relationship involved caring, empowerment and relationship-building. Caring was valuable because many marginal youths were devoid of care from their primary groups. These young people were, therefore, sensitive to the social worker’s care and attention. Care that addressed problems worrying the youths was likely to promote the young people’s acceptance of the services. A social worker said:

A general problem of outreaching social work clients is having a poor relationship with society. Their self-image is ambiguous, without goals. Their outlook is very strong, but they actually want somebody to take care of them. Because the world is realistic, their friends would not treat them sincerely, and the society has an image that social workers are sincere, together with social workers’ motive to take care of them, they would accept services (Apple).

Empowerment refers to the social worker’s efforts to raise marginal young people’s confidence, self-efficacy and social cohesion, which supposedly contributes to the youths’ acceptance of the services. Social workers realised the importance of giving marginal young people an opportunity to voice their concerns. Inviting marginal young people to participate in decision-making related to services that affect themselves was regarded as a notable means of empowerment. Although social workers recognised that empowering marginal young people would sometimes complicate the services, for example when young people were not compliant, they believed that the benefit of empowering outstripped the cost in regard to young people’s acceptance of the service. A social worker said:

It should increase the youths’ participation in decision-making, in order to strengthen their sense of belonging (Eric).

In addition, relationship-building was essential during initial contact with marginal young people. It appeared to encourage marginal young people’s disclosure, which was an important element of acceptance. Relationship-building pertinently addressed the young people’s lack of secure relationships. A social worker said:

I think that acceptance roots in the relationship-building in the beginning. Youths by nature have their self-defence. They would be sensitive to certain

Attitudes toward marginal youths relate to companionship, arousing interest, and labelling-related practices. Social work practice sees companionship as important for clients, therefore social workers encouraged marginal young people to attend services with their peers. It was usual for marginal young people to attend the services in company rather than alone. Therefore, promoting mutual support among marginal young people was important to bolster their acceptance of the services. This case is transparent in the following quote:

We also would let them attend with their friends. When they have friends attending together, they will be more active. Comparatively, when they do not have friends joining together, their motivation will decline (Madam Lee).

Interest-arousing usually involved exploring marginal young people’s interests and providing them with services or activities to arouse their participation in the services. Recreational activities were common service components for arousing young people’s interest. Social workers often employed recreational activities as a means for service entry because marginal young people’s access to recreational facilities was usually limited. A social worker explains:

The region that we work is relatively impoverished. Therefore, some youths do not have opportunities [facilities and equipment] to play at all. As such, we start with recreational activities to allow us to contact them easily (Apple).

Labelling-related practices are activities intended to dispel the negative image of marginal young people and reduce the emphasis on marginal young clients as problematic. By adhering to the strengths perspective, these activities focus on the strengths of marginal young people. It is hoped that, as a consequence, marginal young people will not regard acceptance of social work services as only necessary in the presence of problems. A social worker suggests:

We should reduce the labelling effect on service users to let them realise that not only someone with problems needs social workers’ assistance (Kennix).

Professional practices involved cooperation, goal clarification, matching marginal young people, and need-fulfillment and problem-solving. Cooperation among social workers is important because a single social worker is unlikely to be versatile enough to handle a young person’s complicated problems. Social workers need to work together in order to cater to a marginal young
person's different needs. Cooperation and coordination among social workers in the delivery of services are thus necessary to engage young people. A social worker pointed out:

At times, their different problems require different social workers to tackle. Only cooperation among social workers can help the youths (Jenny).

Goal clarification helps marginal young people understand the goals of accepting social work services and the benefits of services. The practice of goal clarification capitalised on young people's rationality in doing something with specific purpose and as planned, including the reason for making changes for improvement and adhering to the services. The youths appeared to be rational when they were calculative about the benefit and cost of accepting the services. A social worker argued:

It is important to know how to make youths clear about the contents of services and set goals jointly with them to make them know what is required for them to improve (Madam Lee).

Matching marginal young people to social workers was necessary because of the differences in needs and preferences of different marginal young people and social workers. When the matching was appropriate, marginal young people would accept the services, because of their acceptance of social workers. A social worker noted that:

Social workers' characteristics are more important than service targets' emotion and behavior. It is because the unique feature of the outreaching service is its dependence on personal relationship. Different social workers can attract different youths. The impacts generated by the matching of two parties are more important than youth's characteristics (Tu).

Need-fulfillment and problem-solving were important aspects of the provision of social work services. Very often, marginal young people had their needs rooted in their problems and distress. Identifying needs and problems was therefore essential in social workers’ practice. Such value was transparent in the following quote:

I think that acceptance roots in their needs. If they have problems or distress in the innermost, they will be quickly willing to share, not requiring a long time before entering the stage of counselling (Joanne).

Agency factors related to service acceptance
Agency factors dealt with the issues of staff labelling, physical location and regulations. They involved the practices of staff other than social workers who worked with marginal young people.

Staff labelling was an issue in the agency or centre when staff appeared to hold a negative impression of marginal young people. As marginal young people were sensitive to the attitudes and manner of the staff, their service acceptance would suffer due to the disrespect that they felt. The following extract described the issue:

It depends on the different levels of acceptance in the manner of clerical staff in talking with youths. It is easy to label youths. Many marginal youths do not know the proper manner. Therefore, it is necessary to raise staff's awareness to let youths not feel they are being discriminated against (Lee).

Location was a factor that affected marginal young people's use of agency services. The physical location of the agency centre was at issue because of the restructuring of youth services, which combined smaller service areas into larger ones. The agency's centre in the larger area would be farther away from the marginal young people's locus of daily life. Hence, the centre became less accessible to marginal young people, especially those spending their time at the periphery of the service area. The problem was apparent in the following quote:

After the restructuring of the outreaching service, the responsible area becomes larger. The locations where social workers contact youths are often far away from the agency. Therefore, youths' sense of belonging drops. They accept services simply because of their relationship with social workers. Only those youths around the agency would go to the agency (Carrot).

Regulations set in the agency centre tended to be an impediment to marginal young people's acceptance of services. These regulations required marginal young people to dress and behave properly in the centre. One of the reasons for the regulations involves the restructuring of the services to integrate services for marginal young people with services for other young people. Because many young people and their parents were not tolerant of marginal young people's undesirable behavior, regulations were necessary to constrain marginal young people's behavior inside the centre. However, the regulations discourage marginal young people's service acceptance. A social worker revealed:

Many services have regulations on clothing, which discourage the youth coming to the centre a second time (Luk).

DISCUSSION
Social workers working with marginal young people at risk of criminal and delinquent involvement recognise, in their daily practice, factors related to the young people's service acceptance. Their understanding succinctly substantiates theory and research that outline the
significant factors of acceptance of social work services with reference to the domains of personal, parents, peers, social workers and agencies. The identification of these factors in the various domains reveals social workers’ understanding of the logic related to rational calculation, coercive compulsion and normative conformity.

**Rational calculation** generally occurs when marginal young people weigh the benefit of service acceptance against the cost. Obviously, the financial cost of service participation is of concern in rational calculation. As such, social workers tend to offer subsidies for services or activity participation to reduce the cost. Meanwhile, the benefit of services is greater when the services address the young people’s needs or problems. A feeling of insecurity, which is common among delinquents (Kelley 1996), reveals young people’s need for social support. On the other hand, the physical distance and regulations of the agency centre can be a cost that affects marginal young people’s acceptance of services. Psychologically, the negative label given to service users is also a cost. Both clerical staff of the agency centre and parents of marginal youths may be responsible for this labelling effect (Johnson et al. 2004). Conversely, social support from friends accompanying marginal young people to services would benefit them.

**Coercive power** is apparent in the peer or gang leader who is likely to dissuade marginal young people from accepting the social work services. Resistance forces also emerge from other peers and parents, especially when they are suspicious of the role of the social workers. A concern that social workers serve as undercover agents for police is a pervasive source of the resistance of peers involved in crime or delinquency. In all cases, parents, peer leaders and other peers are powerful enough to drive marginal young people away from social work services. To reduce the resistance from other people, social workers can adopt a divide-and-conquer strategy to shield marginal young people from the influence of parents and peers. Conversely, empowerment is a way to enhance the marginal young people’s capability to resist other people’s manipulation. A means of empowerment involves inviting the participation of both marginal young people and their friends. In addition to collective empowerment, young people can be personally empowered by encouraging their participation in decision-making related to services.

**Normative conformity** is something that marginal young people are most likely to learn from their peers. When peers view social work services favourably, marginal youths can learn about the merits of the services and accept the services accordingly. Another possibility for social learning comes from the experience of the family with social welfare. If a family has had a negative experience with the social security service, marginal young people are likely to hold a negative attitude toward social work services, even though they are categorically different from the service dealing with social security. Another source of learning is movies, particularly those that portray triad, criminal offences and offenders’ heroic acts (Snyder 1995). These movies can create a misconception that social workers help police to penalise marginal youths. The misconception would be an obstacle to marginal young people’s service acceptance.

**IMPLICATIONS**

The identification of factors that affect marginal young people’s acceptance of social work services means that social workers need to focus on cultivating those factors conducive to acceptance and undercut those impeding acceptance. Social workers may use various strategies to make services attractive to marginal youths, such as encouraging rational calculation of the benefits of acceptance, insulating young people from powerful influences that deter their service acceptance, empowering the youths to exercise their autonomy in accepting services, and preventing adverse normative influences. Essential issues of concern in the implementation of the strategies include the cost and subsidies for service participation, the satisfaction of the young people’s needs and the solving of their problems, the empowerment of young people by involving them in decision-making and mobilising social support for young people, and dispelling negative images of service users. These strategies require coordination among a range of social workers to cater to marginal young people’s different needs.

Apart from scrutinising the factors that facilitate the engagement of marginal young people at the practical level, re-engineering at the policy and planning level would also be beneficial. The policy and planning at issue is the integration of services that help different kinds of young people into an enlarged service area and an integrated centre. The enlargement of the service area creates a problem of accessibility, which deters service acceptance by marginal young people who live far from the centre and who resist regulations that prohibit their usual practice in the centre. Another issue beyond the practical level of social workers is the attitudes of clerical staff toward marginal young people. This issue is essentially one of societal disdain for marginal young people and welfare recipients. Promoting a positive image of service users in society is therefore another policy level issue.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

The work described in this paper was fully supported by a grant from the Research Grants Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (Project No. CUHK4150/04H).

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The Global Connections program –
A model of meaningful youth participation and action

BY SAMANTHA RATNAM

Abstract
Young people are increasingly required to understand, and participate in, the broader world beyond their local and national communities. This involvement helps them understand the diversity within their own communities, increases their awareness of their peers’ differences and similarities, and develops their skills to engage with people across cultures and countries. As new technology and media provide more and more communication opportunities, the importance of this cross-cultural understanding and awareness becomes even more pressing. To address this need, young people are often presented with opportunities to learn about global issues through text-based curriculum programs delivered through schools. However, these programs are often extractive in nature, that is, they elicit information from developing communities that are presented to or studied by students who are not active participants in this process. This presentation will critically analyse ways in which young people meaningfully engage with and participate in their world through direct connection with young people in other communities.

Introduction
In a rapidly changing world, young people are living vastly different lives to young people of previous generations, and they have markedly different opportunities and choices to make. The demands, rights and responsibilities of young people are also rapidly changing, especially in terms of employment, education and independence. Concurrent to these trends is the globalising aspect of lifestyle and livelihood. Industrial and economic globalisation – combined with internet-based communication and information availability – make the world much more accessible to young people, particularly in economically prosperous countries. This has resulted in young people wanting, and being required, to learn more about other countries and cultures – often referred to as global learning or education. The demands of “globalised” employment and education opportunities also require young people to become more aware of global issues, and acquire the skills to manage cross-cultural communication and relationships. Tsegaye (2006) argues that globalisation demands innovation, creativity and energy and thereby demands this input from youth (p.11). This demand becomes even more pertinent when considering young people in Australia. Australian youth are growing up in an increasingly multicultural (multi-ethnic) environment (Harris 2006); many have first- or second-generation migrant parents or are immigrants themselves. It could be argued that these young people may even possess an advantage in the task of developing the cultural awareness and skills to manage the demands of the changing socio-political and economic climate.

Simultaneously, and perhaps in response to these trends, changes in education curriculum standards (particularly the Victorian school curriculum) have resulted in secondary schools being required to deliver programs that prepare young people in the domains of civics and citizenship. In a seemingly appropriate and necessary response to the changing needs of young people, the education sector has identified the need for young people not only learn about their world, but also use this information to shape their own identity and values. The new Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) furthermore aim to develop young people’s skills to enable them to effectively participate (and contribute)
to civic life as well as gain knowledge, skills and opportunities. In terms of knowledge, the focus of learning is on: political and legal systems and processes; young people’s rights and responsibilities as citizens; and democratic values and principles, such as democratic decision-making, representative and accountable government, freedom of speech, equality before the law, social justice and equality. Skill development is focused on fostering citizenship skills, and the exploration and development of values and dispositions to support citizenship and the empowerment of informed decision-making. VELS also asks that students be provided with opportunities for learning through action, such as active interaction with the community (Civics and citizenship 2006). Importantly, this domain also explores the area of personal identity and frames this learning within a community participation framework. The standards attempt to teach “why citizens need a sense of personal identity within their own community and how they can contribute to local, national and global communities” (Civics and citizenship 2006). This raises an important issue concerned with the implementation of these standards and similar initiatives – the element of “participation.”

The ensuing discussion therefore draws together three important aspects when considering how young people are best supported to adapt to their changing world through knowledge, skills and opportunities for action. This paper will explore how a particular model of working with young people offers the potential to achieve all this, while tackling the important aspect of “participation”. The exploration will focus on how the Global Connections program aims to meet the demands of rights-based participation and highlights some of the challenges in this process. It will present the findings of two successive years of the evaluation of the program to illustrate the challenges of implementing the program. The discussion will also identify the strengths and challenges of the model, with exploration of the potential for similar programs to be implemented.

**YOUTH PARTICIPATION**

In order to identify how meaningful participation can be achieved, it is necessary to explore the debate about participation more deeply. For the purpose of this discussion, I will focus on rights-based participation as it has attracted significant attention in current practice settings. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), declared by the United Nations, fundamentally reshaped perceptions of childhood, and positioned participation firmly on the agenda of children’s rights. It formalised the “entitlement of children and young people to participatory rights” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 1989) and framed young people as active citizens. Despite participation being considered a fundamental principle of active citizenship, prior to the CRC, the argument had not been formally extended to children and youth participation (Clarke & Percy-Smith 2006).

Children and youth were subsequently considered essential actors in social processes such as school, work, families, friendships and consumption choices. Some view youth as competent citizens with a right to participate, and the responsibility to serve their communities (Tsegaye 2006, pp.7, 10). This view sits in stark contrast to historically pervasive views that youth are synonymous with risk, self-indulgence and antisocial behaviour (Tsegaye 2006, p.11).

Since the CRC was adopted, child and youth participation has been defined and valued in various ways. Hart (1992) defines participation as the process of sharing decisions which affect one’s life and the life of the community in which one lives. He argues furthermore that the “essential aspect of participation is that people are free to involve themselves in social and development processes, and that the individual involvement is active, voluntary and informed” (Hart 1992, p.32). The CRC mandated that participation be to be explored for all people, particularly children and youth who were previously omitted from the participation debate. As such, the exploration of what makes “good participation” had to be extended to what constitutes “good” youth participation.

Since the CRC came into force in 1990, youth participation has received increased attention with some central theoretical frameworks and understandings now being widely acknowledged and applied to youth programs. However, defining youth and thereby the rights and responsibilities of this group is still subject to various interpretations. For example, Tsegaye (2006) defines youth as the period that characterises the physical, psychological and social transition to adulthood (p.7). Conversely, it has been argued that young people must develop further before taking their place in society (Tsegaye 2006). These contrasting views explain the different messages that are often delivered to young people and that have historically posed serious challenges to their opportunities for participation.

With the increasing emphasis on participation for all citizens, young people are becoming the focus of discussions on participation and citizenship. The benefits of participation include increased skills, capacity, competence and self-esteem (Greenwood & Levin 1998; Morrow 1999 in Graham et al. 2006, p.233). It can also promote resilience, increase program efficiency, elicit unique perspectives (of youth), impact adults powerfully, strengthen academic achievement and increase young people’s sense of social responsibility. With increasing acceptance of the value of participation, Harris (2006) asserts that the key question is not how to increase opportunities for participation, but how to make participation meaningful for children and young people (p.222). Wilson (2000) argues that deep participation is when “[I]t (participation) is active, authentic and meaningful. Young people should be experiencing elements of citizenship and democracy in their everyday lives with meaningful outcomes” (cited in Tsegaye 2006, p.11).
Until recently, discussion on how to facilitate youth participation has tended to focus on what adult-run institutions can do to include young people or facilitate their participation. However, it also argued that this discussion should be broadened to be about how young people can also take independent action (Mokwena 2003, p.9). Forms of such participation include leadership, activism, organisng and entrepreneurship (Mokwena 2003, p.10). The UN General Assembly breaks youth participation down into four dimensions: economic (e.g. work and development), political (local, national, regional and international decision-making), social (community activities) and cultural participation (arts, culture, values and expressions) (UNDESA 2004 cited in Tsegaye 2006, p.15).

There is much discussion about how we can effectively facilitate the participation of youth in the various dimensions of their lives. For the purpose of this discussion, I will explore the notion of participation within a specific context – the school. The education and socialisation of young people takes place in many different spheres, yet Mokwena (2003) asserts that the most important institution is school. Despite attempts to facilitate participation, questions have been asked about the extent to which schools can equip young people for citizenship and engagement by teaching civics and organising mock elections (Harris 2006, p.7). Holdsworth (2001) states that there is strong evidence that young people in schools and other educational settings learn more effectively when they are involved and engaged. Many educators argue for more participatory methodologies based on the idea that young people bring experiences and perspectives to the learning environment (Holdsworth 2001 cited in Harris 2006, p.7).

Harris (2006) argues simultaneously that children and young people are increasingly required to be responsible and engaged in civic life, but that the markers, indicators and requirements of citizenship are more difficult to achieve (p.222). She further identifies the emerging contradictions and complexities in the lives of youth in the region of Australia and New Zealand, where young people are thought to be increasingly disengaged from political and civic life, and to lack civic knowledge (Harris 2006, p.223). The apparent civic disengagement of young people has generated further interest in encouraging their participation. In turn, this focus on participation has created an increasing challenge for institutions and settings with which youth engage. While it is acknowledged that youth participation is increasingly recognised as an integral part of preparing young people for their participation in society and, therefore, their citizenship, the question remains as to the responsibility and role that schools have in preparing students for active citizenship.

In a local context, we see that the Victorian curriculum is attempting to meet the challenges of preparing young people for citizenship through its civics and citizenship domains of learning. However, participation does not receive the same focus. In the attempt to bridge this gap, and involve young people in issues that concern them globally, the children's international development agency Plan piloted the Global Connections program in 2005. The program aimed to facilitate the participation of young people in global issues, particularly issues facing young people in other countries. However, implementing the program within a formal educational setting posed an interesting challenge for the facilitation of meaningful participation.

Thomson and Holdsworth (2002) identified that some participatory programs in schools focus on teaching young people to become self-managing subjects by asking students to identify social issues, take responsibility and fix them (Harris 2006, p.223). Conversely, previous models of “global education” have often been extractive, whereby information about “issues” has been researched, packaged and presented to students in formal education settings. The Global Connections program aimed to foster “meaningful participation” in young people’s learning about global issues.

MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

McNeish and Newman (2002) identify the indicators of good participation as the provision of a personal or social benefit to the young people involved and the achievement of tangible outcomes. Most models of participation are said to analyse participation in terms of outcomes (e.g. level of engagement as a result of certain participatory processes). Consequently, there are several models of participation that are often contrasted and debated. For the purpose of evaluating the extent to which the Global Connections model achieves meaningful participation, the Lansdown checklist (2001) seemed to offer a simple yet comprehensive set of criteria (in Graham, Whelan & Fitzgerald 2006, p.235). Participation is viewed as meaningful when:

- Children and young people understand what the project or process is about, for example, what it is for them and their role in it.
- Power relations and decision-making structures are transparent.
- Children and young people are involved from the earliest possible stage of any initiative.
- All children and young people are treated with equal respect regardless of their age, situation, ethnicity, abilities or other factors.
- Participation is voluntary, and children and young people are entitled to respect for their views and experiences.
- Ground rules are established with all participants at the beginning of the process.

THE GLOBAL CONNECTIONS MODEL

The Global Connections program grew in response to a desire by an organisation to engage young people meaningfully in its work of international community
development. Plan adopted a “child-centred community development” framework to apply to its program work in 2003 (Plan Australia 2003). A pillar of this approach was “participation”, particularly child participation. Coinciding with the application of this new approach was the growth of development education as a program area, particularly in countries where Plan had previously focused solely on fundraising. In Australia, for example, Plan began focusing on development education as a “process of increasing knowledge and providing opportunities to people to take an active role in addressing the issues of poverty and vulnerability, which prevent disadvantaged children in the developing world from realising their full potential” (Plan Australia 2003). The organisation decided to use a youth participation coordinator to steer the process of developing pathways for young people to learn and be involved in the work of Plan.

The Global Connections program was designed to facilitate communication and learning opportunities between young people in Australia and young people overseas. The program aimed to achieve this by connecting groups of young people in Australia (e.g. school class or community youth group) with a youth group overseas that Plan already worked with in a community development capacity. Plan then facilitated communication between these groups by providing facilitators to work with their assigned group. Facilitators conducted weekly or fortnightly sessions and helped participants learn about their partner groups and the issues that affect their community and lives. Each group also developed communication pieces that they exchanged with their overseas peers, identified and discussed the similarities and differences between their lives, and reflected on their learnings and the impact that they had on their lives. The objectives of the program were as follows:

- **Form personal bonds and a sense of global connection** with their peers overseas by mutually sharing experiences, stories, pictures, dreams, ideas, films, concerns and priorities with each other.
- **Increase their understanding** of issues facing young people in a different community overseas.
- **Develop invaluable skills**, such as leadership, expression and communication (especially visual literacy), project planning and implementation.
- **Raise awareness** about the lives and experiences and issues of young people from around the world in their own community.
- **Develop common agendas, joint solutions and collaborations** for issues of concern with young people overseas.
- **Learn more about Plan** and integrate their ideas, visions and needs into the processes, operations and philosophy of Plan’s work and build the capacity of Plan to actively engage and listen to children in its work (Plan International 2003, p.5).

The pilot phase of the Global Connections program began in July 2005 and involved connecting three groups of school students in Australia with three children’s groups in Indonesia. Each group was facilitated by Plan staff, university (youth) facilitators or peer facilitators (those who had been involved in the program in the previous year). These groups prepared, sent and received up to three communication pieces to each other in the broad areas of personal introduction, community issues and global concerns. The groups overseas in Indonesia were selected in collaboration with the Global Connections Coordinator in Indonesia. These groups of young people were groups that Plan was already working with in a community development capacity. These included a group of young people who are currently in detention who Plan works with in the areas of life skills training, reproductive health, education and social reintegration, a group providing learning assistance for children, and a peer education and children’s study group designed to strengthen education programs and learning. The pilot program was evaluated by the Youth Research Centre at the University of Melbourne. The pilot year aimed to implement and evaluate the program model. Feedback from the evaluation was then used to refine the program model in successive years.

**CHALLENGES TO ACHIEVING MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION**

**Understanding program and roles**

The program prioritised participation, particularly providing opportunities for young people to base their activity on ideas they generated themselves. In contrast to formal, often non-participatory education modalities, the Global Connections program attempted to get young people to “own” the information that was generated, as reflected in this statement of program principles:

Young Australians are almost daily fed on myth, hype and agendas driven by the media and organisations that are “supplying the information” and that are interpreting the messages and lives of children in the developing world to fit into their own agendas. They are disempowered by this process. Young Australians are not given the space and the means to “realise the reality” of young people’s lives and experiences in the developing world. They are not given the opportunity to develop genuine, real understanding that is based on a true connection, mutual learning, the building of friendships, a sense of unity, of shared responsibility with young people overseas, especially from economically poorer nations (Bolotin 2004, p.4).

An integral aspect of the program was the use of young adult facilitators to guide groups of youth participants through the program. Armed with a sound understanding of the program aims, facilitators encouraged young people to contribute to discussions during regular
sessions at schools. Students were encouraged to voice any questions they had concerning their overseas peer (partner) groups, feed into topic selection, and contribute ideas about communication pieces, which were central to creating relationships with overseas groups. Despite the program’s intentions of eliciting maximum participation, the exercises proved challenging (Wierenga 2006b, p.51). Facilitators reflected that many participants were unsure of “how” to participate in generating ideas, selecting topics and contributing their thoughts and opinions. The evaluation of the program explored these findings further and questioned facilitators about why they thought young people, when provided with the opportunity, experienced difficulty in contributing ideas. This feedback suggested that these secondary students did not have the skills necessary for participation because they had had limited opportunities to be involved in similar activities before.

Many students said they were unclear about the aims and mechanics of the program although the details of the program were discussed at length in introductory sessions. While this issue highlights an area for improvement in future program design, it also further suggests that young people in formal education settings rarely choose learning topics or subjects and are not used to participatory discussions. This poses a significant barrier to participation. What Global Connections offered – the opportunity to “choose” which topics they wanted to learn about and the chance to evaluate their experience – was something very different to students’ usual experience. This feedback was used to strengthen participants’ preparation and understanding of objectives; however, this barrier to participation will require greater attention when attempting to engage young people meaningfully within formal settings. As Tiegaye (2006) writes, “cultural norms can favour hierarchical relationships between the old and the young” (p.4), such as those observed during this program between teachers and students. Young people will need to have the skills and opportunities to participate (for example, analytical thought, confidence and communication skills) in order for programs designed to facilitate their participation to be effective.

In this setting, meaningful participation did not mean that young people were given “choice” without boundaries. Young people spoke of wanting some structure in which they could be creative and contribute their thoughts, as this evaluation statement highlights: “The overarching themes that came out here were ‘participation’ and ‘creativity within clear boundaries’. Feedback from most stakeholders highlights the need for clear definition of their own roles. Also people have named the resources they need” (Wierenga 2006b, p.9).

POWER AND RELATIONSHIPS

The Global Connections program aimed to create equal relationships and partnerships between young people in Australia and Indonesia as stated in this excerpt from this program design document.

We’d like to facilitate equal group–group relationships, by engaging interested groups of children in Australia (or by creating new groups) to form lasting, long-term relationships with Plan’s children’s groups or clubs overseas, building solidarity, friendship and understanding (Bolotin 2004, p.3).

Power relationships between young people and facilitators were discussed early in the sessions and participants were aware that they could determine topics and activities, with guidance provided by facilitators. However, as discussed in the previous section, participants found it difficult to make decisions at times even though they had been given this decision-making power. Nevertheless, over time, they did make more decisions. Facilitators reflected that with more opportunities and encouragement, participants began to acquire the skills and confidence to contribute their ideas. Facilitators were also given significant decision-making powers in the genesis of the program design. Through numerous consultation meetings, facilitators (who, being young, represented the youth voice) worked with the program coordinator to design and shape the program philosophy and structure. This structure was then refined at regular intervals on the basis of evaluation feedback gathered both formally and through informal discussions with participants, facilitators and teachers. Some challenges to decision-making transparency arose when the roles of the teacher and facilitator were unclear. At these times, participants were unclear who had ultimate authority and fell back on existing relationships where the teacher was regarded as the authority figure.

CONSULTATION AND EXPECTATIONS

Plan staff, partner organisations and groups of children overseas played an integral role in developing the Global Connections concept. They contributed their hopes and expectations in the development stage of the project. For example, children in East Timor expressed hope that through the project they would: receive some assistance, especially in the area of information and communication; learn valuable lessons in order to strengthen their organisation; make friends in another country; share and explore things being done in other countries; learn skills in managing their organisation from the different experiences; and learn about other people’s culture. The intention was that these skills and experiences would continue to serve young people well after their involvement in this program (Wierenga, 2006b, p.5). The pilot phase of Global Connections involved in-depth and wide consultation. Young people were asked about what they wanted to learn and experience. Initial program descriptions capture some of the underpinning values:

By supporting and facilitating young people to develop their own ideas about global issues, asking
their own questions, planning their own actions, initiatives and collaborations, Plan would like to develop its capacity not only as a development organisation working with children and youth overseas, but a leading organisation in fostering global awareness amongst young people here in Australia (Bolotin 2004, p.3).

Working within a formal education setting posed a serious challenge to early involvement by young people. Despite extensive consultation with young people in the program design phase, these were not the same young people who were involved in the program (with the exception of youth facilitators who continued their involvement). The program design was, therefore, intentionally flexible and aimed at nurturing young people’s interest and ideas throughout the program, not only at the commencement phase. Young people were given time during their sessions to speak with facilitators informally, ask about the program, brainstorm what they wanted to communicate to their partner group overseas, decide topics, decide the form of communication (e.g. letters, posters, videos etc.) and were ultimately responsible for completion of their project.

However, these activities had also to be tempered with young people’s desire for some structure and guidance. As such, broad topics were pre-determined with participants informed that they had flexibility within each to decide sub-themes or topics of personal interest. This flexibility played out in situations such as young people discovering commonalities with their overseas peers and developing these relationships further. For example, one young person found out that his peer overseas also liked music, so he compiled a CD of his favourite songs and sent it to him.

EQUALITY AND INFORMED PARTICIPATION
The decision to implement this program within a formal education setting posed a challenge to the commitment to voluntary participation. Over the two years of implementation, several models of voluntary and mandatory participation have been trialled. Options have included participants volunteering to be involved in regular Global Connections sessions during lunch breaks; participants being involved as a part of core curriculum class, for example English or SOSE; and participants volunteering to be involved through an extracurricular program offered during subject periods. Participants spoke of requiring structured time to complete their task and projects and, as such, were frustrated when the program was delivered out of class time. The most engaged participation occurred when students had a choice in their participation, but were given structured time during their school day. The process of evaluation has resulted in program implementers acknowledging gaps identified as priority areas by young people and improving the program design on the basis of this feedback.

Freeman, Nairn and Sligo (2003, cited in Harris 2006) argue that participatory initiatives often target youth who are considered to be “achievers” rather than “troublemakers”. This, in turn, is said to limit representation and exclude less noticeable groups of young people (Freeman, Nairn & Sligo 2003, cited in Harris 2006, p.226). In order to address this situation, the preferred form of program implementation was as a component of students’ core curriculum. In addition, schools were chosen for the program to represent a wide socioeconomic profile of young people. Although the reach of the program was limited to some extent by its small scale, students who would not otherwise have been exposed to similar opportunities were provided with the opportunity to participate. A limitation of this approach, particularly in groups where participation was mandatory, was that there were varying levels of interest in the program, which sometimes resulted in a dilution of the energy and momentum of sessions. However, this limitation was outweighed by the benefits. For example, young people were able to trial participation in Global Connections, and a number of participants discovered a dormant interest in the program’s activities that blossomed once they began the program. As indicated in some of the previous discussion, participants often had to learn the skills of participation before they were able to engage meaningfully in the program. Similarly, interest in the program often grew from experiencing the program, working with peers and discovering new skills and interests (Ratnam 2007, p.29).

CONCLUSION
While the Global Connections program offers a model of engaging young people in meaningful participation to learn about global issues, there are many challenges to achieving full participation. While young people were consulted in the design phase, those particular young people did not participate directly in the program. However, continuity was ensured by the presence of young adult facilitators who were involved in the design phase and the implementation of the pilot and second year of the program. Participants were given a very flexible structure in which to be creative and direct their own inquiry. However, their feedback indicated that they wanted further guidance and direction. The program attempted to reach a wide range of students through delivery in structured class time. However, equitable participation had then to be balanced against personal choice, as some students were required to participate while others were able to choose whether or not to participate.

The implementation of the Global Connections program also highlights the challenges of using a wholly theoretical framework to facilitate youth participation. The two successive years of evaluation have indicated that the model offers a good space for young people
to evaluate how they experience certain elements of the program and make suggestions for change. The evaluation has also revealed that while some elements of the program, such as representation, voluntary participation and choice, are considered best practice for ensuring participation, they need to be balanced by other needs, such as boundaries, guidance, practical timing and equity. Perhaps the most significant lesson learnt from the design and implementation of the program was that young people are best placed to let us know what ‘meaningful participation’ looks like. In order to capture these voices, an evaluation loop of learning became a particular strength of this model, and it is hoped that as a result of continued feedback, the model will keep providing opportunities for young people to engage meaningfully in their world and the issues that concern them.

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Developing identities: Young people and their involvement in radio training at JOY Melbourne

BY HELEN STOKES & ADAM QUAYLE

Young people draw on a range of influences, practices, relationships and experiences in the development of their identities and subjectivities. The workplace has been identified as one of the principal sites in the formation of identity (Miller & Rose 1995). This paper will discuss the role of the radio training program that is currently being conducted at JOY Melbourne. The Generation Next training program was set up in 2003 to increase the connection of same sex attracted young people (SSAY) to the gay and lesbian community. As a broadcaster, JOY Melbourne was considered to be a good avenue to promote this connection through a training program that would give young people the skills to broadcast about SSAY issues and then be further involved in JOY through volunteering and management.

One of the aims of the program is to have a positive impact on the lives of same sex attracted young people by providing opportunities for meaningful participation in and connection to their community. Discussion of the processes and outcomes of the program leads to an analysis of how sites of employment and training can provide meaningful practices and experiences for young people in the development of their identities and subjectivities.

INTRODUCTION
This article provides an insight into the experiences of same sex attracted young people (SSAY) as they inhabit the multiple lifeworlds of education, training, family, leisure and work. Young people draw on a range of influences, practices, relationships and experiences in the development of their identities and subjectivities (McLeod & Yates 2006). The workplace, identified as a principal site in the formation of identity (Miller & Rose 1995), can provide a space for young people to access some of these influences, practices, relationships and experiences.

The article will discuss the experiences and perspectives of same sex attracted young people in regard to the development of their identities and subjectivities through involvement in a workplace-based radio training program. In some cases, it was the first situation in which young people had experienced a cultural context that did not reflect the oppressive practices that they had encountered previously in both school and the community. The young people identified a number of significant factors that impacted on their development of identities and subjectivities and enabled them to engage with the program, the workplace and the gay and lesbian community. The program, and subsequent involvement at JOY Melbourne, have provided these same sex attracted young people with the opportunity to acquire a range of transferable skills and build positive relationships in an environment that is supportive and celebrative of their sexual identity. While this paper focuses on experiences of same sex attracted young people, and significant factors that they identified, they mirror both the active investments that many young people make in constructing their identities and the support they need to do this (Dwyer et al. 2005; Stokes, Wierenga & Wyn 2004; Stokes & Wyn forthcoming).

The data were drawn from qualitative research conducted for the ongoing evaluation of the Generation Next training program.
Next Radio training program (Stokes & Turnbull 2007). In 2006, at the completion of the first training program, interviews were conducted with six participants, the two trainers and the coordinator, and an outcomes survey was completed by 15 of the 22 participants. The majority of the participants were aged between 18 and 24, and a number of them were students in tertiary institutions. The young people were asked questions in regard to the aims of the program, including: skills gained, connection to the gay and lesbian community and provision of information for same sex attracted young people. The young people responded with comments about their identity development and the support that the training program provided in regard to this process.

BACKGROUND
In 2003, the Generation Next training program was set up at JOY Melbourne (a gay and lesbian radio station) to increase the connection of same sex attracted young people to the gay and lesbian community. The program aimed to give young people the skills to broadcast about SSAY issues, and to be further involved in JOY Melbourne through volunteering and management.

The overall mission of JOY Melbourne is to provide a voice for the diverse lesbian and gay communities; to enable freedom of expression; to break down isolation; and to celebrate gay and lesbian culture, achievements and pride. The aims of the Generation Next training program are in line with this mission, and include having a positive impact on the lives of same sex attracted young people by providing opportunities for meaningful participation and connection to their community, and providing information to young people on a wide range of issues related to sexuality and general youth issues and interests. Other aims of the program are to provide opportunities for gaining new skills and experiences in a radio broadcasting environment and for young people to play an integral role in the development and direction of JOY Melbourne (Stokes & Turnbull 2007).

The Generation Next training program has been conducted three times since 2003. The most recent course was in 2006. The majority of the course participants completed the practical side of the course and became involved in radio production at JOY Melbourne; however, some completed the Certificate III in Broadcasting, which provided them with a portable qualification for use in the radio broadcasting environment.

The training program for Certificate III in Broadcasting drew directly on the standard Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) package, with modifications (as authorised by the station's auditor) to suit community needs and to take into account specific gay and lesbian broadcasting issues. Course content included: digital editing; media law and codes of practice; writing for radio and preparing pre-recorded segments; sponsorship announcements and advertisements; using the panel; and presentation styles and techniques (Stokes & Turnbull 2007).

The training program has been supported by ongoing funding from the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), the International Youth Foundation and Lucent Technologies. The funding has ensured that engaging young people is now a clear focus at JOY Melbourne, with the number of young people involved at all levels of JOY Melbourne having risen dramatically over the past four years of the training programs. The involvement of young people at JOY Melbourne has been at all levels of the organisation, including management through involvement in the Youth Steering Committee and the JOY Committee of Management, and on radio programs through researching, presenting and program support.

One of the young participants noted that, “None of us would have had the experience and training we have had (for free) if it weren’t so generously offered to us. We have all benefited so much and have acquired skills we can use in all areas of our lives”.

DEVELOPING IDENTITIES AND SUBJECTIVITIES
Engagement with the concept of identity development improves our understanding of how young people are experiencing their lives (Stokes & Wyn forthcoming). Although identity and subjectivity are often used interchangeably, the concept of identity enables us to understand how young people see themselves in regard to personality, gender and sociological category, whereas subjectivity refers to how subjects are formed (McLeod & Yates 2006). This distinction indicates that, “Identities are never unified … never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions … and are constantly in the process of change and transformation” (Hall & Du Gay 1996, p.4).

Young people are positioned within multiple discourses in their everyday practices, for example as student, consumer and as flexible worker (Wyn & Woodman 2006). The workplace has been identified as one of the principal sites in the formation of identity (Miller & Rose 1995). In Australia, one of the ways that young people experience the workplace is through vocational training programs that include work placement. The Generation Next training program, which includes the Certificate III in Broadcasting and opportunities to be part of the programming at the station, is one example. But the workplace-based training program at JOY Melbourne has aims that are broader than purely vocational; it also provides a site for the development of identity (including career identities) in an environment that is supportive of young people’s sexual identities.

One young man commented on the skills gained and the support offered:

It is a brilliant course. I have gained so many practical skills. The teaching was very participatory. It was a great opportunity to work in small groups as well. I found it confidence-building to be able to work on my
communication skills. The environment was also very supportive of everybody's sexual identity.

Subject positions may be multiply constructed, but they are not limitless; they are constrained by the social, political and economic contexts in which the young people live (Davies 2004). So in discussing the development of their identities and subjectivities, what are the ranges of influences, practices, relationships and experiences that the young people identified in relation to involvement in JOY Melbourne and the training program?

PROVIDING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

The core of the program, and of the involvement of young people at the station, was the provision of a supportive environment. Many other significant factors that supported young people in the exploration of their identities and subjectivities were built upon this foundation. They included opportunities for relationship-building, informal mentoring, decision-making and skill-building.

The need for and access to support have been identified as key concerns by same sex attracted young people (Crowhurst 2004). The most useful support commonly identified by young people was access to a support group that was able to affirm and support diversity (Crowhurst 2004). These findings were echoed in the training program at JOY Melbourne. One of the greatest challenges for and concern of the trainers at JOY Melbourne was supporting young people in need during the training program. As one of the trainers commented:

We recognise that a lot of the kids bring baggage with them – sometimes we don't have the resources to handle that baggage. Management says, "That's not your problem, you're just there to teach", but you can't ignore them. We need to provide help and counselling in some cases. We've lost a couple of kids – others come and go. One kid was a bit disruptive – he's still involved but he's been disenfranchised and I think that could have been handled better.

The youth coordinator comments about his role as a support person for the young people:

The role of the youth coordinator is to provide administrative support for the training course and to ensure young people are meaningfully involved in the station's activities. Young people contact me with their ideas and concerns and I seek to address any issues they may have by representing them to management and other relevant staff and key volunteers. I sit on the Programming Advisory Committee where I represent our young program makers and ensure they have appropriate access to the airwaves and I also produce the flagship youth affairs show 'Generation Next' and coordinate 'Fresh Meat and Tofu' which gives new trainees the opportunity to produce and present their own programs as part of the training program.

I also coordinate social events for the trainees. The 2006 group formed a very tight-knit group, which I feel very much a part of. I am able to assist trainees find appropriate assistance if they are struggling with their coursework and I am also there for trainees who may be experiencing other difficulties at the station. It is my job to make sure young people feel welcome and that they are achieving what they set out to achieve. I am confident that most of the young people who have gone through the program have had a very fulfilling experience at JOY and many of the trainees have gone on to present and produce their own programs with which I am also available to assist.

Fine and Bertram (1999) describe the term "free spaces" as those spaces "in which historically marginalised youth and adults can reclaim identities … [and] … sculpt real and imaginary spaces for peace, solace, communion, [and] personal and collective work …" (pp.157-59). Many spaces can act as "free space"; however, it has been noted that they function most effectively when they are structurally supported but not necessarily labelled as a support group (Crowhurst 2004), as evidenced in the radio training program at JOY Melbourne. Crowhurst (2004) comments that “free spaces are places where we can be and become who we want to be … meet others … and where we offer respect to others and experience being respected ourselves as we are going about doing such work” (p.174). As Crowhurst (2004) notes: “Subjectivity is constructed as subjects go about the enactment of social practices and the construction of cultural contexts” (p.178). Subjects take shape as they themselves shape cultural contexts. One young woman describes how she identified with JOY FM as a "free space":

I was very comfortable with who I am. I felt no need to involve with the community. Now I can't imagine living without JOY. It has helped with my self-identification. You're able to meet people like you and, in the process, learn about yourself … We were lucky in the learning environment – the balance was good – young people, older people, loud, quiet, serious, silly, girls, guys and people from varied educational backgrounds.

One young person described a learning environment in which he felt he belonged:

I was at the end of my degree and looking to do something completely different. The course has been great because it's opened the world of JOY. As a student, I expected to find the learning environment reasonably comfortable, but as part of the JOY
community, I have felt really comfortable, safe and warm … Getting radio skills has been great, but the social side has been fantastic and more important. I wouldn't have predicted that at the outset.

Another commented that the training program was, “a great way to empower people. The teachers are very interesting, fun … honest. It's great being able to be on air, contributing to something public”.

Involvement in the radio program and the support offered through this environment has assisted the young people with an important aspect in the development of identity: having the capacity to respond to the multiplicity and contradictoriness of the elements at a given moment (Melucci 1996). Production of identity is a process of negotiation among different parts and times of the self and among different settings (Melucci 1996). A number of young people mentioned the multiple and often contradictory discourses that they inhabit. For these young people, subjectivity is multiple and potentially contradictory and allows for “multiple subjectivities, multiple lifeworlds or multiple layers to everyone’s identity” (Chappell et al. 2003, p.15).

One of the young women found that her experience “on air” assisted her to negotiate the multiple discourses she inhabits:

> It's really great to find this new avenue for expression. And while it's not a big deal being around other gay people, it's nice. As result of my on-air experience, I came out to my Dad ... My family is happy for me ... my friends love listening to me on radio. I have a lot of straight friends who listen in and want to become members of JOY.

Another young woman found that her relationship with her mother improved because: “She listens to the program. JOY is a good way to explain who I am”.

As part of the Generation Next project, the Youth Steering Committee (YSC) is planning a radio play for 2007 that will involve YGLAM (a drama group) and the Gay and Lesbian Chorus in its production. The arts, in particular drama, provide an avenue for young people to respond to how they are experiencing the world. The arts allow young people to interpret the different discourses they inhabit because they allow for multiple outcomes, a multidimensional focus and different interpretations rather than right and wrong answers (Waldorf 2002). Through their engagement with the artistic process, young people develop the capacity for self-regulation, identity and resilience (Fiske 1999).

DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS

The provision of a supportive environment improved the likelihood of the young people developing relationships with other same sex attracted young people. Many of the young people identified the “social aspect” as the best part of the training program, and highlighted the opportunities afforded by the course “to meet people that are the same”, “to feel part of a concrete organisation within the community” and “to be able to share experiences with others”.

The majority of the trainees were post-school age, but still encountering the experience of being “othered” in the community, as they had in school, where heterosexuality is often constructed in the classroom as the unspoken norm and other forms of sexuality (and gender identity) are constructed as the “other” (Crowhurst 2004).

Involvement in the training course made a difference to the lives of the young people in this regard. For example, one young person commented that, “It is a wonderful project to improve the confidence of people and to skill people up who are still from a group of people that is ‘othered’ in the community”.

For one trainee, a full-time student with few previous connections to the same sex attracted (SSA) community, the course provided contact with, “a lot of different people … I have learned how to interact with a diversity of people … I think I have become more tolerant to the ‘more colourful aspects’ of the community, where previously I may have been a little ‘resistant’”. In his view, these connections had been facilitated by location, that is the fact that the course operated at the radio station itself, while JOY Melbourne was also the focal point for social activities with other SSA young people.

Most of the participants identified “wanting to meet more SSA youth” as a primary motivation for having undertaken the training. As one young man commented:

> The fact the course was youth-oriented was important. It was not so much about being on air as about being involved in the community and I feel absolutely more connected to the community.

For another trainee, who describes herself as, “… not into clubs or pubs. I don’t meet people that way”, the JOY experience had proved:

> … absolutely life-changing. I've made good friends there. I spoke on air on the coming out program Out Stories … I like the people – the classes are always fun. Students turn up early just to sit and talk. I'm kinda sad it's ending.

The young people found it was important to connect with other young people going through similar experiences. They spoke about the positive the interactions with “people in the same age group, going through the same experiences – moving out, going to uni, and so on”.

PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR INFORMAL MENTORING

The informal mentoring influence of trainers and the broader JOY Melbourne community, which the young people experienced through both the training program
and the subsequent volunteering, cannot be underestimated.

The youth coordinator noted that, for a few of the young men, it was their first involvement in a community group. Their previous experience of the gay scene had been through clubs and bars. For these young men this meant that they had had little involvement with lesbian women. These young men had gained social skills throughout the training that included respect of all others in the group, and appropriate behaviour and language to include all members of the group.

Both trainers have been teaching the certificate course since its inception in 2003. The opportunity to provide young people with a “free space”, and with a chance to connect better with their community and develop skills in broadcasting, have helped provide the motivation to continue the training programs. The trainers cited a mutual desire to “teach young people some skills” and provide them with opportunities that they themselves hadn’t had. One of the trainers described how his own experiences inhabiting contradictory discourses motivated him in his role with young people. He commented that he was:

… specifically motivated to give to young people. I came out in a hostile time and environment, with no social outlets, support groups. Even today the social scene for young gay and lesbian people is [limited]. I saw the need for generational change at the radio station – providing something that didn’t involve sex, drugs and alcohol.

The youth coordinator also commented on the informal mentoring process. He described what initially happened for him as a trainee and how he moved from trainee to volunteer to employee at JOY Melbourne:

There has been a great deal of informal mentoring at JOY. Existing program makers at the station are strongly encouraged to allow trainees to sit in on their programs to learn practical skills, such as panelling, and there are 10 presenters who regularly do this. The trainers who teach the course go above and beyond their roles and do a lot of informal mentoring outside of class time. As youth coordinator, I am often contacted by trainees with issues and concerns and also to assist with their coursework. There are many avenues for support for the young people at JOY.

I came to JOY when I heard about the initial grant at the end of 2002. I wanted to give back something positive to the project while gaining the qualification so I joined the Youth Steering Committee which was set up to ensure the station was fulfilling the terms of the grant as well as organising social activities for the young people at the station and providing adminis-

trative support for the training course and welcoming new young people into the station.

We were supported by the Program Manager who attended many of our initial meetings and guided us all through the process of developing the strategic plan and terms of reference for the committee. This was a period where we learnt a great deal about the inner workings of the station and we were given the opportunity to attend Committee of Management meetings to report on our activities. This meant we got to know station management from the early stages of the project and the channels of communication were open for us to express our concerns and ideas to the key decision-makers at the station.

This meant we were truly involved in the process and a sense of ownership over the project was fostered. It was very important for our project that young people themselves were highly involved in the decision-making process – we oversaw the development of the first training course as well as being part of it as trainees, we collaborated with Committee of Management on a strategic plan to meaningfully involve young people in all levels at the station and we got to organise lots of fun events for young people to socialise and develop friendships.

I have been particularly involved throughout this process and I decided to run for Committee of Management in 2004. I was elected to the committee and at the time I was the only young person represented. When the opportunity for paid work as youth coordinator came up I thought it would be a great chance for me to make an even bigger contribution. I have a close working relationship with the other staff at the station (two of whom are former trainees – the Promotions Coordinator and the Program Manager) and I am very proud to be part of a young dynamic team that the FYA [Foundation for Young Australians] project has directly influenced.

I consider a number of people at the station to be my mentors – the senior trainer of the FYA course and the Station Manager in particular have offered me a lot of support over the years and I have learnt an extraordinary amount from both of them. The Station Manager is also the President of the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia and when I was Youth Representative on the CBAA National Committee in 2006, I also learnt a lot about the wider community broadcasting sector, which was extremely beneficial to me personally. The whole experience has definitely inspired me to pursue a career, or at least ongoing volunteer opportunities, in the community.
broadcasting sector and the non-profit sector more broadly.

I know first-hand that our project works and is a very valuable resource for our community and it has been personally fulfilling for me to be able to contribute to that over the past five years in a number of different capacities.

IN VolvEME IN DECiSiON-MAKiNG

Integral to young people and their feelings of belonging and self worth is their role in the decision-making processes in the situation in which they are participating (Holdsworth 1998). This was recognised in the design of the program at JOY Melbourne, and a significant part of the program was concerned with the role of the young people in management roles at the station.

At the beginning of the third training program in 2006, a part-time youth coordinator was employed to support the activities of the Youth Steering Committee. He has been a driving force in implementing the training program.

In an interview, the coordinator provided an example of where young people made a difference in the decisions made at JOY Melbourne:

Young people have been involved in decision-making at a number of different levels at JOY. Last year three young people were elected to the Committee of Management, boasting many more established members of the community for those spots. This is a clear demonstration of the willingness of the JOY membership base to place their trust in young people to make decisions at management level. Since our initial grant in 2002, we have built up a program that is not only beneficial to the young people it has set out to serve but also the wider JOY community. The older people at the station really appreciate the fresh perspectives young people can bring to the table.

Recently during Youth Week some young trainees co-presented JOY’s program for older members of the community ‘Been there done that’. It was a cross-generational discussion about some of the issues that were important to the older people when they were growing up contrasted with the stories of the young people of this generation. The topic of young people at JOY came up and all three of the older presenters commented about how vibrant JOY is now that we have so many young people involved and they all mentioned that they truly value the contributions of young people on committees, the committee of management, and as staff and volunteers.

The current Committee of Management is working on relocation of the station and a fundraising drive to achieve this and also the upgrading of our equipment. Young people are very much involved in this process and their contributions are very much valued by the rest of station management. The young people on the committee are involved in making financial decisions, decisions about our future and developing policy and procedures for the station. I have been told that the young people on the Committee are among the most vocal members of the Committee.

I personally have been heavily involved with assisting the Program Manager and I recently drafted a comprehensive set of programming policies. I was also responsible for drafting various other programming documents when I sat on the Programming Advisory Committee back in 2003–2004.

To ensure continued youth involvement in other management functions of the organisation, a Youth Steering Committee (YSC) was set up with six young people from the 2006 training course. The YSC undertakes a range of activities including reviewing the terms of reference, organising social events, including Karaoke and Halloween, as well as planning for Youth Week in 2007 and putting out a newsletter.

One of the young women commented that involvement in the YSC was a way for young people to make a difference at JOY Melbourne. Through the YSC it was possible to contribute ideas and expertise to projects that can be initiated and managed from beginning to end by young people.

DEVELOpiNG GENieRC AND TRAmsFERABLE sKiLLs

Research into career education has found that young people need to develop generic and reflexive skills to enable them to negotiate their world and balance the many and varied aspects of their lives (Stokes, Wierenga & Wyn 2004). The young people reported that the course and the trainers had enabled them to acquire and nurture a range of valuable and transferable skills. They were given the opportunity to develop a range of practical radio broadcasting skills, as well as the chance to improve their social skills, their ability to work in a group and their communication skills.

One of the trainers commented that the young people were “well on the way” to completing Certificate III: “We have been successful in providing kids with the opportunity to learn skills and go into radio”. More importantly, the course had, “got the kids involved in the community … empowering them to make better work choices”.

Completion of the course and working at a radio station were connected to the development of career identities in the young people. Most of the participants viewed the course as a possible stepping stone to a career in media, either in production, radio news presentation or the provision of training. Only one interviewee regarded the program as strictly “extracurricular”. One of the young people with a journalism background described the JOY program as: “A chance to build on existing skills … The
course itself has been an invaluable experience. It’s also great to have on your resume … [It] enhances any qualification you might have”.

CONCLUSION
The young people interviewed for this research provided rich stories as to how involvement in the training program and at JOY Melbourne enabled them to develop identities that are not “othered” in the community. The program provided a safe space for their voices to be heard which, as other researchers have noted (for example, Wierenga 2002), acknowledges that they have messages they can tell others.

The same sex attracted young people identified a number of significant factors that have influenced their construction of identities and subjectivities. The program and subsequent “on air” experience provided a vehicle for them to not only explore the multiple discourses that they inhabit, but also to make links across what are sometimes contradictory discourses.

While the training program was designed for the needs of the same sex attracted young people, it has many factors that are also present in other programs that engage with young people. The provision of a supportive environment described as a “free space” provides an environment in which young people feel safe to explore their sexual identities. This enables young people to develop relationships with other same sex attracted young people going through similar experiences, while the trainers and other workers at the station are able to support the young people through both the provision of informal mentoring and in their training role.

For the trainers, the program is not just an opportunity to deliver skills, but also to assist young people develop their narratives and stories. While the young people identified the social aspect of the training program as most important, the training program also provided them with a range of transferable and generic skills as well as possible career narratives they had not previously entertained. JOY Melbourne acknowledges the importance of a decision-making role for the young people, and provision is made for young people to contribute to the management of the station.

Delivering programs “on air” enables the young people in this program to claim their space and celebrate who they are while at the same time using the range of skills they have developed to further their active investment in their identity construction.

REFERENCES


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‘Jacks (& Jills) of all trades’? So why is DV so difficult?

BY JUDY KULISA

The findings of a Perth-based West Australian study exploring the practice of drop-in centre and detached youth workers working with young people living with violence draw attention to the difficult environment in which practitioners often operate and the lack of professional identity currently surrounding the youth work field in Australia. The study adopted a participatory action research methodology with youth work participants who had previously indicated concern about their ability to effectively support violence-affected young people. This paper provides an overview of the study; it outlines the prevalence and hidden nature of violence within the family as well as some externally imposed limitations to practice that hinder youth worker achievements with this group of young people. It also presents an argument for the professionalisation of youth work.

INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on the findings of a West Australian study of the practice of a small group of drop-in centre and detached youth workers working with violence-affected young people. The study set out to discover what youth workers were doing and what they could do differently to more effectively serve the needs of young people living with violence. The findings draw attention to the difficult environment in which these practitioners operate and the lack of professional identity currently surrounding the youth work field. Thirteen detached and drop-in centre youth workers employed in a range of services across metropolitan Perth agreed to take part in the action research project; a further three executive managers were interviewed to provide an understanding of the strategic and structural focus of the services in which six of these workers are employed. The paper will discuss family and domestic violence as it relates to this study. It will provide an overview of the study, the externally imposed limitations and expectations that hinder youth worker achievements with this group of young people, together with a discussion on the professionalisation of youth work.

BACKGROUND

About the study

The study was conducted over a four-year period and adopted a participatory action research methodology. In 2001, in response to concerns raised by youth work practitioners about their ability to effectively support young people living with violence, a group of seven drop-in centre youth workers employed in four different agencies across metropolitan Perth, Western Australia, were invited to take part in the study. Later, in 2003, a team of detached youth workers operating in the inner city of Perth joined the study as a separate group of informants. Around the same time the executive (non-contact) managers of three of the services (in which six of these drop-in centre workers were employed) were invited to join the study. The detached youth work team were invited to join the study at a point where it seemed important to explore whether the issues raised by the first group of practitioners were specific to these individuals or whether similar concerns might be raised by other workers employed in a different environment with a similar target group. The team leader had discussed with me previously the concern her team had expressed about effectively supporting the large numbers of street-present 'Jacks (& Jills) of all trades'?
young people living with violence who use their service. Many of the young people they work with daily are experiencing or have experienced violence either at home or as part of the street culture in which they exist. The executive managers were added as informants to substantiate claims made by drop-in centre workers about the contradictory expectations of their management.

**FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: THE HIDDEN EPIDEMIC**

**Children and young people’s exposure to violence at home**

There are many reports documenting the problem of young people living with violence (see for example Draper et al. 1991; Blanchard, Molloy & Brown 1992; Seth-Purdie 1996; Gilding 1997; Blanchard 1999; Murray 2005; People 2005). Prevalence rates across Australia suggest that as many as 30% of young people (aged 12 to 20 years) have witnessed physical violence in their home (Australian Attorney General’s Department 2001). In particular, young women are the most vulnerable to ongoing violence in intimate relationships (Crime Research Centre, University of Western Australia (CRC) & Donovan Research: Marketing and Communication Research Consultants 2001). Not only are large numbers of young people exposed to violence daily (McIntosh 2003), but many of them believe that there are circumstances under which violence is okay. For example, the mainstream group of young people interviewed during the Australian Institute of Criminology’s research (CRC & Donovan Research 2001) maintained that the “use of ‘fair’ physical violence by adults to children for the purpose of discipline within the family unit” is okay (p.29).

**The hidden nature of family and domestic violence**

Domestic or family violence is experienced by as many as 2.1% of Australian women annually (CRC & Donovan Research 2001, p.11) and one in four women in the UK (Kearney 2003), but it often goes unrecognised or unnoticed. Violence in the home comprises deliberate and controlled acts designed to dominate and intimidate. It is, according to Seth-Purdie (1996), fear and concern for the wellbeing of others, or “perceived consequences” (Kulisa 2000, p.94), that keep young people from telling others about the violence. Even when they recognise the perpetrator’s behaviour to be unacceptable, attempts to tell an adult may result in that behaviour being minimised (Seth-Purdie 1996; Kulisa 2000; Johnson 2002). The adult either does not believe them or does not know how to respond. For example, in previous research (Kulisa 2000), one participant claimed that when she had told a primary school teacher that she was being beaten by her father, the teacher suggested that what was happening was within a normal range of discipline. But the participant insisted that:

> It wasn’t normal stuff … I don’t know, it was kind of normal for me by the time … He used to use a piece of wire, fencing wire, across the backside and um – uh just throwing rocks and things like that when you’d done something wrong … [When I was little] Dad would grab me and basically just throw me, but I always used to come back and then eventually he just started hitting me across the face and the head; even across the legs, backside. A lot of the time it was just huge slaps or punches in the stomach. But Mum said that I never used to cry. I never, never said anything. It was just you never felt any pain.

This young woman did not attempt to tell anyone else about her experience of violence for many years.

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The conceptual framework informing this study is based on a world view that incorporates social constructionism, critical theory and socialist feminism. The study was developed from the premise that how the individual experiences the world is influenced by the culture which surrounds them; that our social and political structures are negatively affected by what socialist feminists refer to as “dual systems theory” (the combining of capitalism and patriarchy) (Walby 1990); and that violence in the family is commonplace (see for example Seth-Purdie 1996; Blanchard 1999; Johnson 2002; McIntosh 2003; Murray 2005).

**METHODOLOGY**

Using the feminist assertion that participatory action research is “empowering”, the methodology chosen adopted a critical approach, using participatory action research as its primary method. This approach foregrounds the active participation of what others call research subjects in all stages of the research process. A total of 16 participants were involved in activities encompassing individual interviews, focus groups, conceptual mapping and reflective journal writing. Participants comprised three separate groups: drop-in centre youth workers; executive officers responsible for the strategic planning of these drop-in centres, and detached youth workers. The data collection period began in April 2001 and finished in December 2003. Data analysis followed a Colaizzi-style method (as described by Colaizzi 1978 and Crotty 1996) and an adaptation of Novak and Gowin’s (1984) process for analysing conceptual maps. Throughout the research process, ongoing analysis informed development of the research design to include triangulation. Triangulation of findings necessitated increasing the number of participants, from the original seven drop-in centre youth workers, by the introduction of the executive officers managing the services employing six of these youth workers, plus a team of detached youth workers. The methodology ensured that participants directed each stage of the research process and together the researcher and research participants developed
an understanding of the research problem. Focus groups provided participants with the opportunity to reflect on their own practice and work environment and the practice and work environment of others in a supportive but critical setting. Some of the themes that emerged during these processes are outlined below.

FINDINGS
The study set out to discover how youth workers could amend their practice to better meet the needs of the violence-affected young people who use their service. The workers agreed to be part of the study on the basis of their concern that the needs of these young people were not being addressed. The workers were also concerned that a lack of knowledge or skills implicit in their practice was the problem. The following section discusses some of the issues raised and identifies the externally imposed structural limitations or expectations that hinder the workers’ ability to meet the needs of these young people. It also raises questions related to the definition of youth work and professionalisation of the field.

“JACKS OF ALL TRADES”: YOUTH WORKERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLE

Keynote addresses by Watts and Palmer (unpublished) at the 2005 Youth Affairs Council of WA conference suggested that not only is youth work undefined as a discipline (see also Bessant, et al. 1998), but also that youth work practitioners themselves are often unable to define what youth work is. Bowie (2004) provides insight into the myriad of skills youth workers are required to demonstrate, particularly in smaller community-based agencies. These include “financial skills, fundraising, public relations and media skills, submission writing and policy development, political analysis and lobbying. Problem solving, counselling and group-work skills …” (pp.34-35). One of the detached workers identified that he and his colleagues were expected to be “Jacks of all trades”. The list of skills he identified included “problem solving, counselling, crowd control, mediation in aggressive interactions between clients [or between clients and police/community members], welfare and mental health assessor”. Although not specifically related to domestic violence, these skills are necessary when working with young people affected by violence – on the street or in the home. Youth workers need to be “specialist generalists” (Bowie 2004, p.35). The nature of youth work is “diverse and disparate” (Banks 1999, p.6) and therefore difficult to define. In attempting to do so, Banks claims that youth work is “part of the ‘welfare system’” (p.6) as well as being “informal education” (Jeffs & Smith 1987; Smith 1988; Banks 1999).

When quizzed on their understanding of why they work with young people in the setting they do, participant youth workers talked about developing young people’s skills and knowledge – “steering them in a direction where they can obtain assistance for themselves”.

What they articulated reflected the empowerment model of practice, but they did not encourage young people to take direct (political) action to improve their social wellbeing. They also claimed to be “passionate” about what they did, and to work alongside others who also have “passion”. As one drop-in centre worker claimed:

“I’ve gotta be crazy to work the unsociable hours I work; to work in the conditions I work in; it’s freezing here in the winter, boiling here in the summer, there is no halfway point. The mosquitoes carry you off the backyard … It’s a passion.

Roughly half had received their training in programs endorsing social justice, social change and empowerment models of practice. Ten participants are university graduates: from youth work (n = 5), social work (n = 1), leisure sciences (n = 1), women’s studies (n = 1) and psychology (n = 2).

Study findings suggest that approaches to practice are influenced by the environment, the skill level of the young people and an understanding of how power imbalances impinge on the ability of those they work with to have their needs met. This meant that although they retained a keen awareness of negative social influences surrounding their clientele, they adopted a range of models of practice dependent upon the particular circumstances at the time.

Street-present young people, according to the detached youth work team leader, move out of an environment of violence within their family of origin into a different but all-encompassing violence on the street. Her team claimed to operate within an environment that reflects the constancy of the violence with which the young people they work with live. These workers claimed to have become desensitised to the level of violence they witness on a daily basis and frustrated by often futile efforts to assist young people to recognise and then move on from the violence. Much of the time of these practitioners is taken up by “complex and time-consuming activities … intended, not so much to change the world but to address the worst excesses of unequal distributions of societal resources and alienated youth behaviour …” (Poynting & White 2004, p.44).

According to drop-in centre workers, the young women on whom the study focused offered “A window of opportunity – lost (‘Boom – and then they’re gone!’)”. Experiences of disclosure were of fleeting comments – “She’s so quick. She makes these comments and then she’s gone!” – made as if the young women were “testing” the workers. So, even though the young woman may “… follow you into the office and shut the door and – Boom!”, or “lean over and whisper in your ear …”, she is likely to quickly disappear or move into a crowd so that it is difficult to continue the conversation. This type of disclosure appeared to be a typical experience for all participants.
“WHAT IF WE ARE WRONG?”: WORKING WITH VIOLENCE

As a youth work practitioner, I have often heard other youth workers express fear that they are not equipped to deal with young people living with violence and don't know how to identify them. Unlike many presenting issues, family violence does not come with a set of indicators that make detection of young people living with violence easy. Family violence is complex and often masked by other more pressing presenting issues such as aggressive or acting-out behaviour (Caughey 1991), poor achievement at school, or alcohol or other drug use. All of these may be indicative of violence at home (McIntosh 2003), but they are not the only indicators and they may be indicative of other underlying issues. Youth work participants claimed to feel confused and frustrated and unable to respond appropriately.

Drop-in centre workers were concerned that their suspicions about a young person's home life might be wrong. One said, “What if we make this assumption and we tackle it head on and we are just plain wrong?!” Others agreed: “That’s why you've got to wait, I think … You've always got to believe it unless you just know … “. The consequences of getting it wrong and making unfounded accusations against a young person's family concerned them; the consequences for young people of making a substantiated allegation was of concern to the participants claimed to feel confused and frustrated and unable to respond appropriately.

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We know it's gonna be an extremely fruitless and very hard road to go down. And if a young person says, "NO, don't worry about it", I think that my inclination would be to go, 'Okay then, leave it at that'. Because I know that if a young person says, "Yes, I'm abused at home and yes I do want to go to DCD about it", the chances are the situation is not actually gonna improve from the process that you are about to enter into.

Most of the young people the detached youth workers are involved with are homeless as a result of family violence:

... so it's kind of conditioned them before they even get to us. And then they enter the street culture which says this [violence] is the best way to handle your problems, this is the only way …

So if we want to ground our work on the streets in a philosophy of non-violence and empowering young people who are victims of violence, then it's just so far out of their sphere of what they deal with everyday that it just doesn't compute!

The violence affecting young people at the drop-in centre is less evident and possibly more difficult to deal with because it hasn’t been named. However, the ability of at least three drop-in centre workers to support young people living with violence was undermined by the executive officer employing them. Her concern was that they “would not have the skills” and that they were not employed to have the skills. She claimed to “be concerned for any young person disclosing at the youth centre because the youth centre is "a safe place” and that disclosing family violence or abuse would negate that sense of safety. The drop-in centre youth workers were concerned that young people continued to live with violence without the necessary support to develop effective coping strategies.

DEFINING YOUTH WORK: CONFLICTING EXPECTATIONS

Youth workers and their employers often have quite different expectations of the purpose and practice of youth work. The executive officer in one of the local government authorities initially claimed that anyone involved in their work with young people could be considered to be “a youth worker”, as the interview progressed and he began to think more carefully about his understanding, he acknowledged that there is a difference between “youth workers” and “workers with youth”. When the interview began, council “rangers” and “security officers” were included in the group of people he claimed were employed within the local government authority (LGA) in a “youth work” capacity. The other two managers agreed that youth work had as its primary concern the “needs” of young people; however they did not agree on how this translated into practice. Among the commonalities are notions of community involvement and a sense of a safe environment for young people. Local government aims in the provision of services to young people were articulated as:

- identification and provision of recreation and leisure services and personal development activities for young people;
- enhancement of community perceptions of young people; and
- encouraging links between the community and young people (confidential LGA document).

Local government youth service provision located young people as being a risk to the community and to “good public order” (Poynting & White 2004, p.40). The role of the youth worker within local government is to ameliorate such risks through engaging young people in meaningful activities and highlighting the more positive aspects of “youth” within the community.

The focus of service provision for the local government authority is “the community”, which means that the aim of youth work in this environment is to meet the needs of the community. This focus can quite
significantly restrict youth work practice, although still requiring considerable organisational and communication skills. The focus of service provision for youth workers is “young people”, which means youth workers require complex and disparate skills. The youth workers in this study employed in local government are all graduates of Edith Cowan University’s youth work program which is among the degree-level training courses for youth workers in Australia that has been described as “left of centre … advocating empowerment, community development, equity and so on” (Poynting & White 2004, p.40).

The primary purpose of youth work practice for the two local government youth service providers appeared to be to reduce conflict in the community and to engage young people in meaningful activities. Dealing with issues (such as accessing accommodation or counselling) appeared to be the responsibility of someone else:

A local government could not provide the resources to a young person in emotional crisis …

Local government is not best placed to provide them and could never provide them and should not provide them because it’s not appropriate and they don’t have the resources.

Equally inhibiting to effective practice is the expectation of the community-based executive officer that her workers (two full-time youth work practitioners) would provide support not just to young people, but also to their families, other service providers (such as Juvenile Justice, Department for Community Development, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and the police). For example, this agency was:

… the lead agency for Safer Families … an initiative [pilot] of Safer WA … facilitating … agencies to sit around the table … with clients. In this case it’s a mum with two boys, one’s 16 and one’s 18 … We have grassroots contact with the family. We see this family just about every second day; see how they’re going, and if they have any issues.

The drop-in centre coordinator claimed that his capacity to deal with the situation was stretched beyond his training; however, he did not know of any other service that would or could take over the family support role he had developed:

I’m not a specialist … This family has really serious issues and we’re struggling with just the whole procedure stuff.

This worker did have available to him clinical supervision, through a pro bono arrangement with the social work department at a local university. None of the other drop-in centre workers had the support required to effectively meet the needs of young people living with violence. The remaining drop-in centre participants relied on informal debriefing opportunities during quiet times at the centre. The executive officer at one of the LGAs claimed that it was an inability on the part of the organisation in which she worked to provide clinical supervision to youth work practitioners, among other supports required, that dictated the direction of service provision at the centre.

Youth work participants identified a number of structural concerns inhibiting effective practice – the sheer numbers of young people, the complexity of the youth worker role, and the intensity of their practice at times. For example, drop-in centre workers noted that there were as many as 50 young people using the centre at any one time but only two workers rostered on. With large numbers of young people using the service regularly, youth workers found their time taken up with crowd control or social control. The community-based youth workers also found that they were required at the same time to support young people, parents with whom a young person may be in conflict and, possibly, the police or other government agencies whose agenda is different to that of the young person. They were also often required to be available to others in the community (to be a “community resource”) and to complete time-consuming administration duties. Often the intensity of the presenting issues, in an environment where practice is tightly controlled or in an environment where the worker’s capabilities are overextended, is inhibiting in itself. Either there is no room for the practitioner to move to provide appropriate support, or the worker is so overextended they do not have the capacity to do what is required. All workers were concerned that there was not enough time to just be available to young people.

WORKING WITHIN CONSTRAINTS

The youth work practitioners who took part in this study demonstrated a commitment to young people – working creatively to meet their needs and adapting practice to fit within the constraints of management directives. They talked about “passion”, “creativity”, “teamwork” and developing professional consciousness and identity. For example, working as a cohesive team provided support and debriefing opportunities (professional supervision was only available to two participants), which reduced the risk of burnout. During the final group discussion, one detached youth work participant discussed the ways in which Youth Link (which has a mandate to work with youth workers on issues of mental health for young people) had been:

… very helpful and gave me a very different kind of way to think about it [borderline personality disorder] than what most other mental health professionals had given me.

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This worker also said that Youth Link:

… gave me a lot of feedback about how I was feeling about it as well, which was really good. And about how that was affecting how I was dealing with it.

Others found that mental health workers generally “won’t respect anything you are saying” unless they know you:

I’ve talked to the psychiatrist and social worker at the community mental health service and they’ve actually understood my role and see my role as important; which means that they can also facilitate the crisis stuff if I need it …

Another worker claimed that as long as workers were “getting the results”, management didn’t really care how workers were getting them. Others attempted to work more closely with their service management to encourage a better understanding of what they do at the centre.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONALISM/ISATION**

It seems, then, that there is not a deficiency in the ability of youth workers to identify and support young people for whom violence at home is a fact of life. Youth work professionals do not necessarily lack the skills and knowledge base to deal with the issues presented by these young people, although they are cautious about identifying domestic violence. However, the environment in which they work does not enable them to develop the confidence required to address these issues. It seems that they are prevented from doing so by the complexity of their work, the numbers of young people and the intensity of their practice. The problem lies with stereotypical views of youth work and youth workers that fail to recognise what Bowie has identified as the “specialist generalist” (2004, p.35) nature of youth work, and which see the role of the youth worker as either recreational or miracle worker.

As youth worker participants in this study identified, the youth work role is not respected in the community or by professionals from other disciplines. There is a lack of recognition and understanding of the role of the youth worker that is not helpful. Detached youth work participants maintained that a “lack of respect for the youth work role” resulted in “difficult referrals” and this lack of respect, they claim, resulted from youth worker “discourse” (language); “costume” (youth worker casual dress); and “lack of knowledge re youth worker role”.

The casual dress and language typically adopted by youth work practitioners, appropriate to work with young people in many settings, suggests to others that youth workers as individuals are more closely aligned to the young people they work with than professional service providers.

This conference asks, “Are we there yet?” with the professed intention of getting practitioners to think about the nature of youth work and where it is heading. If youth workers, like nurses before them, want to ensure that they are properly resourced and supported to provide appropriate care for their client group, it is essential that they are recognised as professionals who are properly educated in the skills of the trade. It is no longer acceptable to expect practitioners or young people to operate in an environment that reflects a view of young people as “disruptive”, comprising the “new urban ‘dangerous’ classes” (Poynting & White 2004, p.40). A change of image is required.

Nurses began their image shift by demanding greater responsibility and appropriate education to ensure that they could meet the increasingly complex demands of technological development (Bloomfield 1999). Nursing, social work, teaching and psychology demand such professional attributes as “critical thinking, therapeutic interventions and communication” (Beauregard et al. 2003, p.510). They also expect their members to promote their professions through active involvement in the community as committee members or community developers (Beauregard et al. 2003). Youth workers already do this and more, they are involved on management committees and advisory committees, they work with the community and they work in the community.

The three Cs of critical thinking, communication and community development are important aspects of the work of many youth work practitioners. What other professions also require of their membership is continuing education (Beauregard et al. 2003) as well as the formulation of a body of knowledge specific to their discipline (Bloomfield 1999). The professionalisation of youth work can be advanced in similar ways. Tertiary education across Australia provides the opportunity for workers in the field to continue their education and to get involved in research and develop the theoretical perspectives required in any developing profession. The challenge then is for youth work practitioners to take these first hesitant steps towards professionalisation.

This paper has provided commentary on a West Australian study which set out to identify the level of support youth workers are able to offer young people living with violence and concluded that barriers to good practice are focused around conflicting perceptions of the role of the youth worker and lack of professional identity among youth work practitioners. The paper provided an overview of the methodology adopted, an indication of the prevalence and hidden nature of violence within the family, and discussed some of the themes raised through the reflective process embarked upon by participants. Based on these themes, the paper concludes by challenging youth work practitioners to take action to secure better service provision for young people and professional recognition for the youth work field.
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Teaching, learning and the ‘dilemma of difference’ for parenting students in school settings

BY GEOFF SHACKLOCK, LYN HARRISON & JENNIFER ANGWIN

Pregnant and parenting young people are not often found in mainstream educational pathways in schools and similar settings. More often than not, they are excluded or eased-out, or they self-select an exit, from pathways leading to the completion of Year 12. Where they do continue their school education, it often tends to be an individual journey. Schools that seek to include groups of pregnant and parenting students within their Year 11 and 12 programs face a range of policy, financial, educational, welfare and public relations (PR) problems. The paper draws on international and Australian case studies of school-based programs for pregnant and parenting students to highlight systemic, curricular, pedagogical, transition and image issues that confront schools, teachers and young people who are dealing with the dilemma of difference in mainstream educational settings. In particular, the paper reports on a support program for parenting students in a school that has established a childcare centre on-site as a means of removing a major obstacle to the students’ sustained participation. The paper explores the question of what makes effective teaching and learning for teachers and parenting students in mainstream school settings.

INTRODUCTION

Early parenthood is a significant factor in early school leaving for teenage girls. The younger the pregnant teenager is, the more likely it is that she will never complete a senior school qualification. Given that later social and financial wellbeing are related to school completion, schools are in a unique position to provide both retention intervention and efforts to ameliorate the life-chance consequences of non-completion by teenage parents.

However, pregnant and parenting young women are not often found in mainstream educational pathways in schools and similar settings. More often than not, they are excluded or eased-out, or they self-select an exit, from pathways leading to the completion of Year 12 (Smyth et al. 2000). When they do continue their school education, it often tends to be an individual story of triumph or tragedy. Schools that seek to include groups of pregnant and parenting students within their Year 11 and 12 programs face a range of policy, financial, educational, welfare and public relations (PR) problems.

The provision of in-school childcare may enable a speedy return to study after childbirth. It can also help teenage mothers, who sometimes have fragile personal resources, maintain a sense of educational competence and motivation, which is necessary for school success and completion. Our review of the literature suggests that a successful program for parenting teenagers is one that adopts a multidimensional approach. It provides child care; equity in treatment; health services, including contraception, prenatal care and nutrition; social support, including transport and case management; mentoring and counselling. It also fosters high aspirations and supports opportunities to graduate through negotiated, realistic, supportive academic programs.

This paper draws on international evidence and an Australian case study of school-based programs for pregnant and parenting young women to highlight systemic, curricular, pedagogical, transition and image issues that confront schools, teachers and young people in managing the dilemma of difference (Minnow 1990,
in Kelly 2000) in mainstream educational settings. In particular, the paper reports on a support program for these students in a school where a child care centre has been established on-site as a means of removing a major obstacle to sustained participation by parenting students. In doing so, it explores the question of what makes effective teaching and learning for teachers and parenting students in mainstream school settings.

SOCIAL CONTEXT
Although lower than rates in both the United Kingdom and the United States of America, the Australian birth rate for females aged 19 or younger was ranked 11th highest of 28 OECD countries in 1999 (Social Exclusion Unit 1999). In 1998, the birth rate in Australia was 18.1 births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1999). While this figure was lower than the previous decade and, proportionally, birth rates for young mothers are falling in Australia (Laws & Sullivan 2004), they can be much higher than the average in specific locations. For example, in Corio (in Victoria), the 2001 birth rate exceeded 92 births per 1,000 for women aged 15 to 24 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001).

Corio, a suburb of Geelong, has been identified as one of the most disadvantaged communities in the state of Victoria (Brady 1999; Schubert 2007). Factors including low income, low educational achievement, long-term unemployment and dependence on social security undermine the health and wellbeing of individuals, which in turn has an effect on the community. The impact of young motherhood on the social welfare system is high and without direct educational opportunities and assistance, young mothers are more likely to experience poor employment outcomes and be dependent upon welfare (Bradbury 2006; Littlejohn 1998).

Teenage mothers in Corio face a complex challenge. Not only do they face the same tasks as other teenagers in negotiating the risks of school completion and transition from school to sustainable employment and/or further education and training, but they also face the challenges of negotiating the transition to adulthood and first-time parenthood under conditions of social and economic disadvantage. The Young Parents Access Project (YPAP) at Corio Bay Senior College (CBSC) is one local response to this multi-faceted challenge.

In response to this challenge, the objectives of the YPAP are to:

• retain, re-attract and support young parents into the education system
• improve education levels and future educational and employment opportunities for this target group
• improve the parenting skills of the students
• provide positive role modelling for the parents and their children, and life skill education to the parents and
• develop opportunities for CBSC childcare students to utilise the centre for work placements (Armstrong 2003).

POLICY CONTEXT
Following patterns evident in the United Kingdom, the Victorian Government has instituted policy reform and departmental reorganisation that now favours an interagency approach in finding local solutions to local problems. While there are a number of different models of partnership, described as “interagency, multi agency or joined up”, planning that is “deliberate, conceptualised and coordinated”, with stakeholders negotiating new ways of working collaboratively together as equal partners for a common goal, is not as evident (Warming et al. 2005).

The strategic nature of these new policies, along with an apparent lack of departmental articulation, has created a context where schools are expected to engage in partnerships and networks with community agencies and education providers to support young people in new ways.

In Victoria, the Kirby Report into Post-Compulsory Education and Training (Kirby 2000) advocated that schools further develop partnerships with local community agencies to support students to successfully complete their schooling and make effective transitions into further education, training or employment.

Research indicates that transitions continued to be highly gendered, with teenage parenting remaining a significant factor for early school leaving (Osler & Vincent 2003). Yet the irony remains that, despite the northern suburbs of Geelong having one of the highest rates of teenage parenting, there is still no direct policy provision for young parents who need to complete secondary schooling before they can begin to undertake vocational training, further or higher education, leading to future employment.

Within this policy climate for partnerships and networks with community agencies and education providers, a major initiative has been the establishment of Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) (Department of Education, Victoria 2002). These networks cover the whole state, linking education and training providers, industry, local government and other stakeholders in a shared responsibility for young people in the post-compulsory system and their transitions into employment, further education and work.

In Geelong, the LLEN (SGR LLLEN) has been instrumental in facilitating new networks and in sponsoring further development of vocational opportunities and pathways. In recognising that young parents need to complete secondary schooling before they can begin to undertake vocational training or further education directed toward securing employment, the SGR LLLEN provided strategic support for the development of the YPAP and some initial funds for the establishment of the childcare centre at CBSC (Harrison et al. 2004).
THE CHILDCARE CENTRE AND THE YPAP
The need for a response to teenage parenting in the Corio area had been apparent to the staff at CBSC for many years. The school had always encouraged pregnant teenagers to focus on continuing their education regardless of their pregnancy and had developed flexible solutions to practically support them in this. Prior to the YPAP this included modified Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) programs, welfare support assistance with transport, interaction with childcare providers, flexible attendance arrangements, change and breastfeeding facilities and so on.

Although as a rule it was not supported, because of the disruption caused to other students, many teachers would accept the presence of children in classes when a lack of childcare was a barrier to attendance for a teenage parent. This accommodation of children in classrooms was problematic because it placed pressure on teenage parents to minimise the visibility of the child, was distracting for teachers and other students and did not allow any attention to the needs of the ongoing childcare and developmental needs of the child.

Access to child care can be the factor that makes the challenge of parenting and schooling too difficult, particularly for those adolescent parents living independently. However, CBSC understood that access means not only availability but also feasibility – even if places are available in community child care, adolescent parents often live in the vicinity of the school and the logistics of taking up an available place without access to transport creates a disincentive to school attendance.

The seeds of YPAP were planted in a meeting convened by the LLEN when Centrelink and Department of Human Services representatives expressed interest in supporting the establishment of in-school child care. A working party was formed in May 2002 and representatives from local, state and federal government agencies (working with parents and children) attended that first meeting. From this beginning, a long and difficult journey characterised by policy, funding and logistical tensions – reported on elsewhere (Angwin & Kamp 2007) – culminated on 14 June 2004, when the Young Parents Access Project was officially launched by Jacinta Allan, the then Victorian Minister for Education Services and Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs. At the launch, the minister announced state government funding for the capital works of the project. In 2006, 25 students were taking part in the YPAP program and 40 children were attending the childcare centre at CBSC.

INTERNATIONAL CASE STUDIES AND EVIDENCE
The United States leads the world in the education of teenage parents, where provision is often framed by a high degree of surveillance and control (Bos & Fallerath 1997) and an imperative to have teenage parents take responsibility for actions and consequences (Luttrell 2003). While these have not been the motives of educational provision through the YPAP, there are many parallels between the challenges at CBSC and those reported on by recent North American research accounts about the education of teenage parents.

For instance, in analysis of a study of two secondary schools that run programs for pregnant and parenting teenagers in the Canadian province of British Columbia, Deirdre Kelly (2000) makes use of the dilemma of difference to interpret and analyse the contradictions and tensions that are produced through the inclusion of teenage parents in mainstream schooling. The dilemma is presented as a question: “when does treating people differently emphasize their differences and stigmatise or hinder them on that basis? And when does treating people the same become insensitive to their difference and likely to stigmatise or hinder them on that basis?”. This concept is highly transferable to an Australian context because the contradictions and tensions are common to the politics of inclusion found in such programs irrespective of the setting. The dilemma of difference goes to the heart of how young parenting students navigate their personal and educational lives both within and outside school. Moreover, it also goes to the heart of the educational and welfare efforts that administrators, advocates and teachers deal with in supporting and teaching them effectively.

In addition, by way of example, the international research highlights the following that further resonates with the CBSC experience:

- Wendy Luttrell’s (2003) five-year study demonstrates how pregnant and parenting students are subject to particular and insidious shaming and pathologising practices that diminish their sense of self and profoundly affect their chances of success in and beyond school. While Luttrell’s study is set in a different social and cultural milieu to CBSC, similar practices are evident in the educational experiences of young women participating in the YPAP.

- Strong stereotypes related to this group – poor, working class, failing in school – are produced and reproduced in the school setting, making them scapegoats for a range of social ills. On top of this, pregnant and parenting bodies are “unfit” for schools and this means that these students are forced to cope with tainted identities at the same time as they are returning to school and balancing both student and mother identities (Luttrell 2003).

- Wanda Pillow reports that there is an integral connection between how a school defines the “problem” of teenage parenting and the policies and services they put in place. She argues that two metaphors describe educational approaches to parenting students: pregnancy as a cold (something that you get over) and pregnancy as a disability/disease (something that you don’t get over and requires major intervention). There are limitations in these models, as pregnancy is sometimes neither
a cold nor a disability and sometimes it is both. The theme “pregnancy as a cold” leads to parenting students being treated as any other student. “Pregnancy as a disease” discourses also restrict educational opportunity. Under this discourse, the parenting student is only afforded additional support or special modifications by first being identified as deficient by virtue of being a teenage parent. This metaphor can be seen in statements and practices about pregnant and parenting students not “fitting” into the regular school (Pillow 2003).

- A range of discriminatory practices can occur at both administrative and classroom levels. For example, policies around attendance are “often the first site of trouble” – if schools do not have written policies explicitly addressing how to make decisions about absences for parenting students, the decision will rest on individual discretion. This does not work to provide equitable access (Pillow 2003).

School administrators, teachers, support workers and pregnant and parenting students at CBSC face these same challenges in responding to the dilemmas for ensuring successful participation by learners who are both different to the rest and just like all the rest.

**RESEARCH PROJECT**

Since 2002, we have been conducting interview studies with pregnant and parenting young people (Shacklock et al. 2005) and undertaking case study inquiries into the establishment of the childcare centre (Harrison et al. 2004; Angwin et al. 2004) and the YPAP at CBSC. The following data and analysis is taken from a recently completed study of teaching and learning at CBSC for YPAP students (Shacklock et al. 2006) where 12 young mums and 10 members of the school staff were interviewed in a combination of focus groups and individual interviews.

**STORIES FROM THE FIELD**

This section of the paper presents two case study narratives, or stories, of the teaching and learning experience at CBSC for students who are a part of YPAP. The narratives are constructed from data collected during interviews and focus groups conducted with students and staff as part of our research. Given this, they are composite portrayals of “being there”. They are neither documentaries nor fictions, but somewhere in between. They are an interpretation of what has been reported in “a narrative that requires both imagination and an idea of what will reach and touch readers persuasively” (Coles 1998, pp.90-91).

The stories in these case profiles are presented in ways that recognise the complexity of the lives and work of those involved: students, teachers, managers and support staff. Parallel stories present an opportunity for multiple readings of the same event and people. In what follows we present, on the left-hand side, the student’s story and, on the right-hand side, a story from those who work with them in the school setting. The parallel stories can be read together or separately, either wholly or in fragments. Different readings will likely invoke different interpretations and questions (Stronach & Maclure 1997) – and that is the intention of presenting them in this way. Our aim is not to simplify the issues, but instead to present dilemmas, contradictions and accounts of lived experience in ways that invite interpretation and further discussion (Shacklock et al. 2006).

**Dawn’s story**

As the first case study, we present Dawn’s story. As researchers, we met Dawn when she was 17 years old, nominally in Year 11 at CBSC, the mother of a toddler and soon to be pregnant with her second child. Alongside her story we present a staff member’s story of Dawn, elicited from a separate interview conducted around the same time.

**Annie’s story**

As the second case study, we present Annie’s story. As researchers, we met Annie when she was 19 years old and in Year 11 at CBSC. Alongside her story, we present a staff member’s story of Annie, elicited from a separate interview conducted around the same time.

From these (and other) stories of student and teacher experiences of learning and teaching, it is possible to identify practices that are effective and practices that do not work within the YPAP context. Identification of events, decisions, successes and failures in the experience of the YPAP at CBSC allowed the research team to focus on issues that need to be addressed in new or different ways in order to achieve and realise the aims of the YPAP initiative.

**THE STUDY RESULTS**

In this section of the paper, a set of focus topics is presented. These arose from the research team’s thematic analysis of data and a process of participant checks. These focus topics refer specifically to teaching and learning at CBSC and to systemic and school policy and organisational practices that impact upon teaching and learning experiences for YPAP students and school staff.

The topics are listed below in like-groups but there is no implicit priority or importance in how they are ordered.

- Previous educational histories
- Individual re-entry challenges
- Readiness assessments and subject choices
- Pathway counselling and planning
- Induction to school as a learning site
- (Re)induction to learning practices
- Transitions and early success
- Flexible modes of learning and assessment
- Progress monitoring and review
I've never liked school. No, I did when I was at primary school, but Mum made me go to City West High School and I didn't want to go there. She said I had to go there because my sister and my nanna did. So I went, but it didn't turn out for the best.

In Year 7 I did well, but after that I was what you could call pretty average. In Year 7 I got As and Bs, but after that I was just an average C. The teachers, they weren't nice, well some of them could be nice, but these were very few, most of them tried to be very strict. I don't like that hard-nosed way teachers have and only just tolerated it when I went to City West.

I didn't like it when you did your work and they gave you more, the same again, to do. And then if you did it all, you got more for homework. It was boring and I just didn't do it. I hate that, I really do.

After a while, I didn't particularly want to go to school and I found better things to do … socialise and whatnot. Some of my friends – we just wagged a bit and we would go into town and shop, or go down to the beach, or meet up with friends, or anything rather than do school work. At school, they said that if I kept doing it, that it might be better if I found somewhere else, but I just kept doing it and they never told me to leave. They sent notes home and stuff like that.

It didn't bother me that much because I thought that I would leave at the end of Year 10 anyway, because I didn't want to do Year 11 and 12. I wanted to get at least my Year 10 because I knew for a lot of courses you need it and there are a lot of jobs that like that, but I ended up leaving school in first term of Year 10. I found out I was pregnant and that sort of sealed the deal. I told them at school and they said that I could stay there and, like, I didn't have to wear the uniform once I got too big for it and they would try and accommodate me as best they could, but I knew there wasn't really much that they could do.

Mum knew I hated school and that nothing she could do would keep me there so ... yeah, there was not much she could do, and so I just left.

I did try and get jobs for about the first three months but most employers, as soon as they found out I was pregnant, it was sort of, 'No, sorry, this job isn't suitable for you'. I stayed at home or, 'cause my sister had just had her baby in January, I'd go around to her house and help her with him or we'd go into town or something like that.

After my baby was born I got bored. Staying home every day is very boring. There wasn't a day care for him and it was hard for me to go anywhere 'cause I haven't got a car or anything.

A lady from BAYSA rang me up and she just asked if I could come in for a chat and she said she would help me. She found out if Dawn's just new to us this year – a very bright young woman and seems to be very motivated, particularly in some subjects. She's got potential, but we have to be careful because she's got attendance problems in a couple of classes and that's where we need early intervention if that starts dropping away – but she has the potential to do well.

I did a little bit of checking and found that she wasn't attending all of her classes, although her attendance has improved. She hasn't missed one of mine and as I've said she's going to finish the year's work in half a year. She arrives on time and she stays right to the end.

She has been required to do some things that she resists. I spoke to her about it and she said, “They suggested I might do it because you know I hadn't finished Year 10”, but I think that she could have handled it without that. She doesn't find the other work hard. She is a girl able to cope, I think, with whatever she's doing.

She said that she likes the self-paced learning thing because it's much easier to just come and say, “Right, what am I doing today?” and slot in and do your own work and then leave.

I think she realises that she has to support her child and get back into the workforce and so she sees this as a way of getting a job. And so she is going to do it and that is why she doesn't miss a class.

I really think it's just incredibly difficult. It's difficult enough for a student anyway, a teenager, to do VCE and they've got someone at home to cook their meals and do the washing and they don't have to worry about paying bills and all that sort of stuff. You know, for most you just come to school and go home. But these young mums have got to do all that themselves.

Just to get back into the swing of it, plus all the responsibilities of looking after a child, getting here in the morning and then at the end you got to go home and
there were any places going at Corio and any child care as well and we just arranged an appointment and we came up here and they showed us around.

I decided to give it a try 'cause it's not exactly a school, you don't have to wear uniform and you don't have classes every single lesson. And you are, oh, until I came here you were, allowed to go to the Village and stuff. They have stopped that now, you're not supposed to go to the Village in your spares, not that I listen, I still do it. I don't think some teachers know who I am anyway. Spares are good because I can do things that I don't have time to do when you have a baby … if I have to pay a bill or go to Medicare, I can just duck over there and do it.

I still don’t like school much 'cause it’s just school and I have to do things that I’ve done before. I should pass my subjects but I have some catch-up classes to do 'cause I have a lot of absences because of my son. He was in hospital and I had catch-up classes to do here but I had to miss them 'cause I was up there for three days. Now it will be, "Oh, Dawn I’ve been looking for you, where have you been?". For one subject I have only missed one class, but that’s a 1.25 to 4.30 class.

Next year I'm doing Year 12 subjects, but I'm not doing Year 12 'cause I've only done half a year this year. I'd have to do another year after next year, but I'm not coming back another year after that. I'll be back next year 'cause I have nothing else to do … but I'm gonna plan on looking for a casual job or something in between school next year … see what happens.

feed the baby and all that sort of stuff and then if you’re going to do any homework you’ve then got to set that aside and do that when you’ve had a full day anyway.

I don’t know for what reason, but they’ve picked up a workload that’s too heavy, I think, for them. They should have had a reduced workload and they should have been eased back into it. It’s hard enough anyway coming back.

So I think, I think along the way there is a misleading impression that they can get their VCE in two years, but they should be looking at a three-, maybe four-year VCE. In Dawn’s case, she realises it’s going to be a three-year VCE, and she’s now saying, “No, I don’t want to come back next year”. For her, this is really daunting.

A lot of students are back in that two-week timeslot at the end of the school year doing extra work to catch up. I did ask her to stay back there one week and she didn’t make it. She didn’t turn up.

- Positive teacher–student relationships
- Support and advocacy
- Attendance
- Same-yet-different tensions

Eight of these topics that resonate with the stories from the field – reported above as Dawn’s and Annie’s stories – are discussed below with the intention of raising questions about practices and constraints that may lead to a teaching and learning issue or dilemma for the school, for teachers, for students. It is envisaged that the discussion will allow informed and critical reflection on the success, or otherwise, of current and future practices.

Previous educational histories

Students enrolling at CBSC arrive with different educational histories. Some enter Year 11 from Year 10 following a continuous experience of compulsory secondary education. Others are returning to formal education after a period of absence from schooling – which may be weeks, months or years. An absence from education in a school setting may, or may not, mean participation in other forms of education and training or in workplaces. YPAP students are likely to fit each of these patterns, but given pregnancy, birthing and parenting, most will be returning after some absence from education.

The nature of previous educational participation impacts significantly on the transition into learning and organisational environments at CBSC. Information about each student’s educational history is important for enrolment personnel, student managers and support staff in making decisions about subject choice, pathway planning and the identification of need for specific support. This may vary from student to student and typically (but not exhaustively) this may involve asking questions like those below:

- How much compulsory schooling has the student completed?
- Has the student experienced success at school?
- Which forms of teaching and learning has the student experienced?
- What are the student’s strengths and weaknesses as a learner?
- Does the student have specific and identifiable learning problems?
- Has the student a history of non-attendance, alienation or inappropriate behaviour?

The answers to these, and related questions that appear under headings that follow, are required to map prior learning and enhance the success of likely transition into courses, classrooms and the organisational climate of a senior college such as CBSC.
Students and staff referred to the role played by non-disclosure or absence of information about educational histories that led to poor choices, inadequate support and insurmountable hurdles during the transition phase. Of course, students may not wish to make available information because they seek to start afresh and leave previous problems behind. However, sensible study loads, effective induction, targeted support and successful transition are dependent upon reliable information about such things.

The questions that need to be addressed are: how can the collection of information be systemised and managed, and how can this information be used in ways that benefit and respect the students, without students facing disadvantages from the legacies of past educational participation?

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Annie’s Story

**Story 1**

I’d seen Corio Bay College on the news. It was the childcare centre and it didn’t matter what age you were. So, I decided to enrol at the school while I was pregnant.

I didn’t even have a tour, didn’t get spoken to, I just enrolled. I knew what I wanted to do. I knew what I wanted for my family and my future.

I was out of school a year before I got pregnant. I had started Year 11 but there was a family trauma happening. I had to redo it as I just couldn’t handle it that year.

When I found out I was pregnant, I decided that my child was going to need a future and that I was going to need one. I want to be a mechanic but I don’t know if I will get there.

**Story 2**

I was getting behind because I had to stay home because my boyfriend expected me to have the house clean, the washing done and his dinner on the table before he got home from work.

And I got really behind in my history and English classes and I spent every night trying to catch up.

After school, when he got home from work, I’d give him Hayley to look after. Because I’ve got my licence, I used to take his car around to Wendy’s house which is just near here. I’d stay at Wendy’s place until eleven, twelve o’clock doing my history work.

But I couldn’t leave him at home with her because I’d come back and she’d be screaming her head off and he’d be asleep in bed.

I had to get out of there. Then I had nowhere to live, so I had to move back to Mum’s and then I had no way of coming to school or anything.

For girls like Annie, it’s daunting to go back into the school system. They’re so vulnerable because they’ve been out of it for a while, especially if they’re a little bit older. To come back into classes with younger ones is a big challenge.

We’ve got to keep in mind the things that may affect how young parents that are returning to study see themselves.

They are given such negative messages at times. I’ve heard people say to them, “you’re just dumping your child in care”.

If they’re not comfortable leaving the child here, for whatever reason, they’re not going to be thinking what they’re doing in study. They’re going to be thinking about their child.

They might have had a bad night with the child and next day the last thing they want to do is go to school and study. But, even if they don’t have school that day, they can still bring the child here. It gives them a bit of time for themselves to do a bit of homework, study or [an] assignment and know that their child is happy and being well cared for, so it’s a great benefit to them.

Most of the young mums in our program have quite insecure housing. For Annie, and others, finances are reliant upon some form of benefit and they don’t have any extended family support. So it’s really hard, they’re always worried about life things. About being safe, do they have a house, do they have food? With all of this happening, it’s difficult to then think about being educated and where you want to go.

This is the reality for Annie. And then there is a view out there that young mums like her have resources and extra energy put into them at school and that this is perhaps even at the expense of other students in the general school community.

I think it gets very blurred at times.
**Individual re-entry challenges**

Directly related to the above are challenges for individual learners that arise from their previous educational experiences. For YPAP students, this particularly relates to the time-gap in educational participation. It also relates to recognition of prior learning, skill levels, expectations and attitudinal dispositions.

Assumptions by the school, teachers and advocates that all students re-enter school with similar attributes as learners are likely to lead to problems that may have been anticipated. Practices built on such assumptions have the potential to weight failure higher than success and are unfair to all concerned.

The identification of learning and participation challenges for individual students can assist students, their teachers and advocates in preparing and responding to strategies geared to enhancing induction to learning and organisational environments.

The question that needs to be addressed is: how can individual profiles of re-entering learners be constructed so that they are simultaneously acceptable and useful to both students and their teachers?

**Induction to school as a learning site**

Students returning to formal education after an absence and especially after prior unsuccessful participation in school settings require (re)induction into school as a learning site. In particular, this should include attention to expectations and responsibilities of students, teachers and other staff. This requires information about organisational structure and etiquette – both at school and system levels.

It would be risky to assume that students will find out what they need to know through informal networks and peer interaction. Disappointments and indiscretions through unfamiliarity with process and protocol in the early stages of a return to school can lead to frustration and anger that can impact on motivation and relationships with teachers and peers.

It is recognised that CBSC does provide support in this area through input from the Parent Support Worker and through orientation activities and camp for YPAP students. A question that warrants discussion is: how can this be implemented and monitored in measured ways that are not superficial?

**Transitions and early success**

In any new endeavour, early success is the key to ongoing optimism, motivation, commitment to goals and confidence to keep pushing boundaries. Depending on the resilience of the individual and the support available from others, non-success can reduce any, and all, of these things.

The markers of early success are likely to vary considerably from individual to individual. For some, this will be small steps and for others more substantial achievements can be expected. Understanding this requires an understanding of the transition in learning and life experience that the individual student is undertaking.

Comments from students and some teachers reveal that many YPAP students are fragile learners and highly vulnerable to significant losses in confidence and motivation when early success is not achieved or acknowledged. This is most likely to occur when students are presented with (for them) unreasonable hurdles or when teachers fail to recognise that significant stages in progress have been reached. Assisting students to acquire “identities of competence” (James et al. 2001) should be a key objective for all staff.

A commitment is required for building achievable goals and markers of success with students based upon understandings of previous educational histories and the nature of the transitions being undertaken. These need to be clearly stated and capable of being monitored by both the students and their teachers.

Questions that need to be considered include: how is early success monitored, recorded and then acknowledged for the student and the program? For instance, is a system of rewards and school community recognition appropriate within YPAP? Another question is: how can non-achievement of early success markers be dealt with? Should non-completion of agreed milestones lead to changed enrolment and short-term expectations?

**Flexible modes of learning and assessment**

The data from students and teachers has revealed that some students produce much more work and obtain better results in subjects where flexible modes of learning and assessment are in place. There appear to be two reasons for this.

Some YPAP students have irregular attendance and benefit from learning which is not tightly connected to classroom presence and activities. That is, in classes where missed work can be made up easily during intense periods of self-directed study, these students are less likely to fall behind or experience discouragement due to the time needed to catch-up. Secondly, students who have not recently experienced school settings may prefer applied and adult approaches to learning over approaches based upon assumed continuity between junior and senior secondary school.

An important question that needs careful consideration is: how might senior school subjects be organised and taught so that work requirements can be completed through intense engagement when time is available as well as through sustained, paced forms of structure and instruction? For example, learning modules that are competency-based rather than time-based do not irrevocably lock achievement into attendance patterns. It is recognised that this is simultaneously a curricular and pedagogical question and that it is not easily answered within a context of state wide content and assessment.

**Positive teacher–student relationships**

The data shows that some YPAP students believe some teachers to be unsympathetic to the program and possibly
antagonistic to the establishment of the childcare centre at the school. This appears to be linked to views on the allocation of resources and the suitability of young parents for a mainstream school setting.

Research about successful ways of working with at-risk students indicates that teachers who are perceived to be helpful, patient, fair, friendly and empathetic are more likely to be effective in motivating, challenging and disciplining such students (James et al. 2001). School cultures where judgmental social values are communicated to students, even implicitly, are not conducive to conditions for effective teaching and learning of pregnant and parenting students (Milne-Home et al. 1996).

Deidre Kelly portrays teachers as distributed along a continuum, with the hard-liners at one end and those with a social work/welfare orientation at the other. Programs that have more teachers situated toward the social work/welfare end of the continuum appear to be more successful (Kelly 2000). This means that CBSC has to make some tough decisions about who teaches these students.

The question that presents itself is quite difficult: how does the school match teachers and students, where possible, so that poor teacher–student relationships do not impact on significant gains in other areas?

**Attendance**

The collected data shows that the key educational issue is irregular attendance. It is the one issue constantly mentioned and returned to in every interview and it generated powerful and often stressful feelings amongst all participants both at professional and at personal levels.

The bottom line is that if these students are not at school, their chances of achieving successful educational and life outcomes are severely diminished. Deidre Kelly, Wendy Luttrell and Wanda Pillow – as reported earlier – discuss tensions between discipline, punishment and positive inducement in teachers' efforts to ensure educational success for pregnant and parenting students. Given system imperatives, and the existence of strong and often opposing ideological investments amongst the various players – often existing in tension in one person – regarding how YPAP can deliver on its aims. A question needs to be considered: where do same-yet-different tensions become contradictions that produce conditions under which YPAP students are more likely to experience failure?

**Same-yet-different tensions**

Through the YPAP, CBSC supports young parents as students different to the rest but, whether intended or not, or explicitly stated or not, the school's teachers operate from an expectation that students need to conduct their participation in learning as if they were not pregnant or parenting. This is a contradiction and sets up conditions for failure (Harrison & Shacklock 2007).

It is important to recognise that YPAP students have the same desires for learning and school success as other students but that this desire is translated into practice through different life circumstances. While the school may be good at providing personal support, it may also struggle to provide the necessary educational support through additional (or extended) opportunities to do work missed and to complete and hand-up work on different timelines. This is crucial because it is about working to ensure success as opposed to hoping that these students can marshal the stamina and personal resources to cope like any other student.

This same-yet-different tension is described as the dilemma of difference and is central to what Deidre Kelly calls the politics of inclusive schooling. The dilemma of difference works in both visible and invisible ways through assumptions and practices in mainstream school settings. Schools deal with this in different ways; some emphasising the difference, others ignoring it. To do only one or the other produces problems because both tactics need to be deployed strategically and flexibly.

The dilemma of difference is fundamental to understanding how YPAP can deliver on its aims. A question that needs to be considered is: where do same-yet-different tensions become contradictions that produce conditions under which YPAP students are more likely to experience failure?

**Observations on Good Practice**

Many issues identified from the data about teaching and learning in the YPAP at CBSC can be linked to themes present in literature about learning in alternative settings and working effectively with at-risk students. While not surprising, it is a reminder that insights from experience and research in diverse settings can speak to specific contexts. The congruence between issues at CBSC and those reported in Australian case studies (Pittaway 2005; Boulden 2000), and by Luttrell, Pillow and Kelly from North American settings, is evidence of that connection.

The key principles for sustainable programs for at-risk students in alternative settings described by Cole...
(2004) for the Dusseldorp Skills Forum reflect the topics identified from the CBSC experience (and discussed above). They are that young people at-risk:
- can learn and want to be appreciated and successful
- must be provided with learning options
- must be provided with programs that cater for their individual development needs
- must be provided with programs that are sufficiently flexible to respond to individual needs and circumstances
- must be provided with programs that are effectively linked to vocational pathways.

While arguably already present to some extent at CBSC, most of these characteristics can be developed further through reflection, innovation and experimentation.

**SUMMARY**
The discussion of identified issues presented here has not sought to provide answers, but to provoke further discussion and to raise specific questions in order to point YPAP/CBSC stakeholders towards the development of good practice through application of the principle of local problems requiring local solutions.

One of the pitfalls in research of this kind is that it deals with a dynamic and evolving situation and can only ever be presented as a snapshot in time. As such, those involved in the day-to-day administration of the project may well be aware of the issues and questions discussed above and may have been working to address and answer them.

A final list of recommendations was not presented to CBSC and the findings from this project are, therefore, open. However, at the core of the discussion of issues and questions is the principle that the school itself needs to take charge of defining success for these students, a success that is achievable for the individuals involved and is cognisant of their life circumstances.

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NOTES
1  Pseudonyms are used in all case study stories.

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