INNOVATIONS AND CONTROVERSIES: INTERROGATING EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

Interrogating Conceptions of "Vulnerable Youth" in Theory, Policy and Practice

Kitty te Riele and Radhika Gorur (Eds.)

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FAZAL RIZVI

FOREWORD

A community cannot regard itself as a moral community unless it has a clear sense of its social responsibilities to all of its members. Of course, we readily recognise the responsibilities we have to our family and friends. But what about those whom we might never meet, or who are not directly related to us? How do we determine our broader obligations to the community as a whole? Are there some within our community who have a greater claim on our sense of moral responsibility? What is the scope of our moral community? Does it include those who are not our compatriots? Is it possible to regard the humanity as a whole as our moral community?

These issues of morality are as complex as they are old. They have been central to ethical deliberations in every cultural and political tradition since time immemorial. Their complexity lies in the fact that our social and economic resources are always limited to meet the moral claims of everyone. Indeed, questions of distributive justice arise only in conditions of scarcity. In the context of limited resources, we have to decide how we might meet the needs of those who are more deserving. How do we determine who is deserving, in any case? And how should our limited resources be distributed in manner that is fair and equitable?

Over the years, moral philosophers, such as John Rawls and Robert Goodin, have suggested that vulnerability should be regarded as the main criterion with which claims of justice should be assessed. Those who are most vulnerable should receive our greatest moral attention. In socially democratic societies, policy makers have widely used this principle to allocate public resources. However, the translation of generalised moral principles into effective policy and programs has never been easy. Political interests have invariably intervened, leading to complex debates about how vulnerability should be defined, classified, measured and represented.

In recent years, these debates have become further complicated, as nation-states around the world have preached austerity – the mantra that the state should withdraw from many of the responsibilities it had once assumed to look after the disadvantaged. Moving beyond the redistributive principles associated with the Keynesian Welfare State, this neo-liberal ideology has attempted to shift the state's responsibilities to the vulnerable to their families or to philanthropic organisations – or indeed to the individuals themselves. The idea of collective responsibility has been eschewed. In a sense moral discourse itself has been 'individualised', with individuals now asked to become responsible for their own welfare – become 'self-reliant' – on the one hand, or develop an attitude of charity on the other.

Of course, the state can never be in a position to entirely abandon the vulnerable. There has thus emerged in recent decades a language of 'safety net', which has substantially weakened the stronger sense of moral responsibilities that the state had once assumed. The neo-liberal state has increasingly sought to shift these responsibilities to the market, leaving the vulnerable to even greater vulnerability. This shift has accompanied an administrative technology of 'managing' vulnerabilities, rather than addressing them in the language of morality. In an era when a focus on self-interest and self-regulation has become supreme, the question of how the vulnerable might be protected has become ever more important and urgent.

This timely book suggests that the responsibility for protecting the vulnerable cannot be left to individuals, but demands collective action, through institutions such as education, health and welfare. It examines some of the ways in which public policies and programs represent those who are vulnerable, involving a range of assumptions about the social, economic and political conditions that produce their vulnerabilities. The authors are critical of the ways in which these assumptions, in recent definitions of vulnerability, have become narrowed with attempts to enforce 'self-reliance'. In response, this book points to the need to enlarge our social and political thinking so that, in so far as this can be avoided, no one is forced into a vulnerable or dependent position. Even if this utopia cannot be realised, the book suggests, it should nonetheless steer our moral imagination.

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We are also grateful to Professor Fazal Rizvi. His role as co-Convenor ensured we met the essential requirement that convenors must include a Fellow of the Academy. Far beyond that, however, we appreciate his wisdom, which guided both the workshop and the development of this book. Hendrik Jacobs provided his creative insights for the book cover, Freya Lance helped with the style formatting, and Luke Swain created the comprehensive index. In addition, Kitty would like to thank Stephen Crump, without whom none of this work would have been possible. Radhika would like to acknowledge her family for their support and encouragement.

KITTY TE RIELE AND RADHIKA GORUR

INTRODUCTION

As a group, 'youth' have become a 'matter of concern' – the target of various policies, schemes, interventions and strategic attention. A review of 198 countries across all continents found that only 43 did not have a national youth policy (youthpolicy.org, 2013). In particular, the perceived vulnerabilities of youth are being elaborated in fine detail – physical and mental health, poverty levels, family support, engagement with community and school, education outcomes, even their spiritual lives and their sense of connectedness with the environment have come to be theorised, worried over, monitored and measured. However, the complexity, range and interconnectedness of the issues that appear to conspire against some groups and individuals are such that no clear-cut solutions are readily visible or even possible.

For youth who are vulnerable (or 'at risk', disadvantaged, marginalised or disenfranchised – terminology varies) the interconnectedness of various indicators of vulnerability are a phenomenon of life. They experience all of these mutually-reinforcing issues at once. But given the nature of administrative systems, a young person might be dealing with a variety of agencies and organisations, each with a different approach, a different philosophy, a different measure and a different preferred outcome. Such profusion of policies and confusion of approaches may serve not only to dilute the good that could come of interventions, they could also fail to reach many that require support. Of course, funds, too, are always limited – many services to youth are provided by non-government, not-for-profit and philanthropic organisations, usually with the help of volunteers. Competing for funds could mean that approaches might diversify, as each organisation feels the need to show how they are unique in their approach. Even with government services, policies change with government priorities, and this lack of consistency can be quite detrimental to young people who are already facing many challenges.

If there is little coherence between departments such as the health, education, justice and social services departments, there is also little communication across disciplines about the theories that could usefully inform policies and practices. In many cases, the requirements of numeric measures to monitor progress, allocate resources etc. lead to the development of thin and unsuitable measures which ignore the complexity of the situation, often reducing it to a single economic measure. Such policy practices not only fail to produce good solutions, they fail to harness the resources available to the youth themselves and to the community.

When developing policies for young people, there is now considerable agreement that it is important to listen to their voices – not only to elicit their perceptions and points of view, but also to develop interventions that are more likely to succeed in realising their objectives. Young people are often surveyed to

generate their understanding of the issues that affect them. However, because experiences of vulnerability are complex and often the particular mix of issues are quite individual, case study and qualitative approaches and narratives from young people themselves provide a much richer picture than a larger-scale survey. But the translation from such efforts to 'give voice' to actual policy influence does not always occur.

To sum up, we share concerns around three issues. First, while it is often emphasised that any effective policy that seeks to address the needs of vulnerable young people needs to be holistic, the various agencies and organisations and government departments that deal with young people have little opportunity to exchange notes, engage in interdisciplinary and cross agency deliberations to probe the underlying theories that inform their practices, or to explore the challenges and dilemmas they face. Second, academics, policy makers, practitioners and service provides all recognise the complexity of the issues involved – yet aspects of their practices ignore these complexities, particularly when critiquing policies or evaluating practitioners. Finally, while the voices of young people are considered vital to inform policy and practice, there is not adequate attention to how such elicitation of stories might occur in forums where they are most likely to have policy impact.

To explore (and perhaps even begin to address) these issues, together with Professor Fazal Rizvi we convened a forum in August 2013 where policy makers, people from philanthropic organisations, academics, service providers and young people could gather and inform and interrogate each other. This gathering was made possible by a grant from the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (Te Riele, Gorur, & Rizvi, 2014). Complexity was not a conclusion, but rather the starting point of the discussions. To that extent, there was a pragmatic focus on how we might 'go on together' (Verran, 2007). Exploration of such techniques as photovoice and a panel discussion provided examples of how we could go beyond tokenistic nods towards including the voices of young people, and elicit experiences and opinions that could enrich policy debates and practitioner actions. This book arises from that forum.

The book is organised in four sections. In Section 1 'Setting the scene' Radhika Gorur explores the concept of vulnerability and Kitty te Riele analyses the conundrums posed by this concept in relation to policy and practice for young people. The final chapter in the section, by Roger Slee, paints the bigger landscape of exclusion within which the arguments outlined across the book take place.

Section 2 'Policy approaches' includes four chapters analyzing relevant youth policy in different fields. Johanna Wyn focuses on policies that connect young people's participation in learning with their economic productivity, and argues that this nexus is increasingly problematic. Rob White explains the understandings of risk and protective factors in policies and research regarding juvenile justice, and the relevance of broader social patterns. Lawrence St Leger and Julie White both explore health policies in their chapters – the former through a focus on health promotion and the latter through a critical analysis of policies in relation to the education of young people with serious health conditions.

Section 3 ‘Practice narratives’ similarly traverses various fields that are of relevance to ‘vulnerable’ young people, but the five chapters here take a practice perspective. Anne Hampshire and Gillian Considine outline how a major national Australian charity is moving beyond the concept of financial vulnerability in their work to improve the educational outcomes of disadvantaged children and young people. Kristy Muir, Lyn Craig and Bridget Jenkins tackle the concept of young people who are ‘NEET’, i.e. ‘not in education, employment or training’, and provide insights to better understand the experiences of such young people. Liza Hopkins and Tony Barnett explore the ways in which one particular service works across the intersection of youth, chronic illness and education. David Farrugia, John Smyth and Tim Harrison critically explore the intersections and disjunctions between the assumptions made by social policy regimes and differently positioned young people to show how these distinctions contribute to the construction of youth subjectivities in regional Australia. Ros Black and Lucas Walsh contrast approaches to developing young people’s active citizenship, with particular attention for those young people whose experience may include markers of marginalisation and exclusion.

Finally, Section 4 turns to ‘Young people’s voice’. Alison Baker and Vicky Plows discuss the ethical and methodological challenges for academics in representing the lives of the young people they research, particularly in the context of participatory research approaches. Four young people provide the final chapter: Geskevalola Komba, Jesse Slovak, Billy White and James Williams. They had been invited as experts for the workshop (see above), to offer us insights into the lived experiences of young people who might be considered ‘vulnerable’. The chapter is an edited version of the transcript of their contributions. For this book, it is fitting to give them the last word.

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PART 1

Setting the Scene

RADHIKA GORUR

1. VULNERABILITY: CONSTRUCT, COMPLEXITY AND CONSEQUENCES

INTRODUCTION

The term 'vulnerable' is now very widely used to describe individuals and groups in a range of academic disciplines and policy fields, such as economics, disaster management, health, education, social welfare, justice and environmental science (Alwang, Siegel, & Jørgensen, 2001). It is also widely in use in relation to children and youth in policies and practices in several OECD nations, including Australia. For instance, the Australian states of Victoria and South Australia both have a 'Vulnerable Youth Framework' as a guide to youth policy. OECD policy documents make routine use of the term 'vulnerable' in relation to youth who might experience unemployment or other negative economic outcomes.

As can be expected with any term so widely in use, the meaning and definition of 'vulnerability' are not stable across fields, or even within fields. How the abstract concept of vulnerability is understood, conceptualised and measured is of serious consequence to policy development, to those classified as 'vulnerable' and to those who are not. For example, if vulnerability is seen as an individual attribute, the target of intervention is the individual, and policy remedies might include attempts to increase the skills, capacities or outcomes of individuals. If, on the other hand, vulnerability is seen as the consequence of a complex, inter-related set of circumstances external to the individual, the targets of policy interventions might involve those external factors that are deemed to cause vulnerability. For this reason, it is important to understand and make explicit how vulnerability is conceptualised, constructed and measured.

Drawing upon theoretical resources from a range of disciplines, this chapter attempts to map out different conceptualisations of vulnerability, and explore the policy consequences of these understandings. It then focuses on 'vulnerability' as it relates to youth policies. The aim is to elaborate vulnerability as a complex issue and to evaluate its potential as an analytical device.

VULNERABILITY: DEFINITIONS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

Vulnerability in policy discourses is frequently associated with the notion of 'risk' and its management (Alwang et al., 2001). The World Bank, for example, has advanced the notion of 'Social Risk Management' as part of its Social Protection Strategy, and the Bank's 2014 report is titled *Risk and Opportunity: Managing Risk for Development* (World Bank, 2013). With the advancement of contemporary

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society as the 'risk society' (Beck, 1992) the notion of risk as a chronic and ever-present phenomenon has become pervasive in policy discourse. In tandem, efforts have proliferated at identifying, calculating, managing and minimising risk. 'Vulnerability', in this policy context, refers to the likelihood of harm from exposure to risk. In other words, vulnerability is the probability of an individual or group being affected by risk factors. An understanding of vulnerability therefore involves an understanding of risk, the ability to respond to risk, and the outcomes of the risk situation.

Vulnerability may be determined by environmental or economic factors as well as social and political factors that might diminish the 'capacity to withstand and recover from adverse events' (Bankoff, 2003, p. 8). The extent of the risk and the response to the risk determine the outcome of the risk (Alwang, Siegel & Jorgensen, 2001). Policy and governance may involve identifying and managing risks, identifying vulnerable populations and introducing measures to protect or insulate them from risks; alleviating the effects of harm from risks; increasing the capacities of vulnerable populations to protect themselves from harm; or increasing the resilience of vulnerable populations so that they are capable of withstanding the harm from risks to which they are exposed.

Vulnerability is understood in quite varied ways in different disciplines and policy fields. A framework that involves risk, response and outcome underpins both epistemic understandings of vulnerability as well as policy responses to it. In some cases, the focus is more on the 'risk' aspect of vulnerability, whilst in others the emphasis is on the 'outcome' (Alwang et al., 2001). By virtue of age, gender, particular behaviours or attributes or location (being homeless, HIV positive, a substance abuser or sufferer of a health condition), certain individuals or groups may be thought of as 'vulnerable'. Those identified as 'vulnerable' may become the focus of policy interventions and institutional attention – perhaps of multiple institutions and agencies. These may include the provision of allowances, counselling, educational or employment support, the allocation of foster care, the provision of medical facilities and so on. The effort here could be to increase individuals' capacities to identify and avoid risks; to develop the ability to withstand the risk; or to be resilient and overcome the exposure to risk.

Vulnerability is often the result of multiple issues – poverty, ethnicity, illness and homelessness, for example – which might reinforce one another. Vulnerability can thus be conceptualised in a more holistic or ecological sense, where the socio-political and historical aspects of vulnerability are recognised. Socio-political and historical factors, for example, may limit the capacity of individuals or groups to respond to risks. The degree of vulnerability is a combination of the exposure of individuals or groups to risk, and their ability to gather resources and assets, in the broadest sense, to respond to these risks. In this construction, addressing vulnerability requires a much broader scope and would involve efforts to address a wider range of actors and institutions. Indeed, they may call for sustained campaigns and long-term efforts. The two views – vulnerability as individual attribute and vulnerability as a socio-political and historical production – are not necessarily in opposition to each other – in many instances both views are

simultaneously held and efforts to address vulnerability include measures that address individuals as well as their socio-political contexts more broadly.

Alwang et al. (2001) provide a view of how 'vulnerability' is conceptualised in three disciplines: economics; sociology; and disaster management. They examine how different approaches result in different ways of measuring vulnerability. According to them, in economics, vulnerability is conceptualised 'as an *outcome* of a process of household *responses* to risk (p. 5, their emphasis). As a result, economists measure vulnerability by examining the variability in outcomes, especially income variance. Whilst income variance, a metric premised on money, offers a convenient way to compare across different outcomes, Alwang et al. argue that this is too simplistic a measure, and it neglects important factors such as physical violence and illness, which contribute significantly to welfare losses to households. However, they concede that 'a universal concept of vulnerability (one that aggregates all outcomes) might not be attainable, and instead we might need to settle with measures of vulnerability to different outcomes (vulnerability to measurable welfare loss, crime vulnerability, etc.)' (p. 5). Even these single factor measures are not straightforward – efforts to develop indicators that attempt to translate a complex world into numbers are bound to face numerous challenges (Gorur, 2011, 2014). While a single metric has the advantage of facilitating comparability across contexts and time, such comparability comes at the cost of accepting a very narrow and inadequate conceptualisation of vulnerability, one that would provide little to guide any ecological or holistic policy approach to addressing vulnerability.

Because vulnerability is seen as *the probability of adverse outcomes*, identifying and quantifying vulnerability requires a benchmark to determine adversity of outcomes. One such benchmark is the poverty line. The probability of a household falling below the poverty line, for example, determines the vulnerability of a household to poverty. The convenience of such measurement of vulnerability is explained by Prictchitt, Suryahadi and Sumatro (2000, p. 1):

> We define vulnerability as a probability, the risk a household will experience at least one episode of poverty in the near future. A household is defined to be vulnerable if it has 50-50 odds or worse of falling into poverty. Using these definitions we calculate the "Vulnerability to Poverty Line" (VPL) as the level of expenditures below which a household is vulnerable to poverty. This VPL allows the calculation of "Headcount Vulnerable Rate," the proportion of households vulnerable to poverty, which is the direct analogue of the "Headcount Poverty Rate."

The convenience offered by this simplistic metric is neutralised by its inadequacy – it does not consider any factor other than the monetary. Asset-based approaches describe vulnerability in terms of the *ability of populations to respond to risk*. Policies and remedies are thus focused on the use of 'asset portfolios' and the allocation of assets before and after adverse events (Alwang et al., 2000). These offer a more nuanced approach than one that is merely based on the poverty line.

Davies (1996) makes a useful distinction between 'structural vulnerability' (households with underlying characteristics similar to structural poverty, such as age, headship etc.), which makes poverty a chronic condition; and 'proximate vulnerability' in which vulnerability changes from one year to the next. The concept of 'proximate vulnerability' is important as it recognises the changing dynamics of vulnerability. For example, adaptations to vulnerability might see a brief respite from adverse outcome, but might lead to depletion of assets, which in turn could lead to structural vulnerability. Thus capacities and vulnerability are both emergent phenomena.

Sociology and anthropology, Alwang et al. note, offer 'social vulnerability' as an alternative to 'economic vulnerability'. The concept of 'social vulnerability' allows for the identification of a range of individuals and groups as vulnerable using a variety of indicators beyond the monetary. Here, broad household characteristics, rather than measures of economic outcomes are in use. These characteristics might include 'groups such as "children at risk", female-headed households, elderly and disabled, and deal with intra-household relations' (Alwang et al., 2001, p. 17). Sociologists also extend the definitions of assets to a broader notion of 'social capital' based on such factors as 'strength of household relations'. The conceptualisations require the development of a range of indicators to establish vulnerability, capacity, resilience and risk. Such indicators may be based on assets and access to assets. Such measures offer alternatives to the economic common-metric models based on income and consumption.

The idea of vulnerability as a collective phenomenon is explored in the field of disaster management (for example, Dilley, 2000). They regard vulnerability as a function of social ties, institutional arrangements, social capital, environmental risk and social vulnerability. In disaster management, vulnerability is conceptualised as the pre-disposition to hazards such as famines or floods. In this sense the conceptualisation is of vulnerability as a structural phenomenon. The role of household assets, access to opportunity, and the resilience of groups are also factored into understandings of vulnerability in the field of disaster management. The concept of *resilience* gains prominence in disaster management, and it encompasses coping, which is composed of 'the capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist, and recover from the impact of a natural disaster' (Alwang, 2001).

The field of nutrition epidemiology expands the notion of vulnerability in a number of ways. A range of indicators of nutritional vulnerability have been elaborated which, aggregated over populations, allows for the development of nutritional profiles. In these measurements, the concept of nutritional vulnerability is linked not only to malnutrition, but to a range of other outcomes, such as educational attainment, probability of mortality, socio-economic status and productivity (Alwang, 2001).

This exploration of vulnerability in a variety of fields shows that vulnerability is a complex phenomenon and is difficult to measure. While simplistic understandings facilitate consistent measurement, such measures are conceptually impoverished and almost certain to misguide policy and planning. Vulnerability involves many factors which are difficult to quantify or 'value' and for which

indicators are difficult to develop. Because it is a complex phenomenon, multiple measures, which may not lend themselves to monetization, are required to quantify vulnerability.

YOUTH VULNERABILITYAND YOUTH POLICIES

Children and youth regarded as inherently vulnerable (Daniels, 2010). Children are recognised by UN Charter as requiring special protections. They are seen as vulnerable to abuse and neglect, and unable to protect themselves, and therefore, as a category, vulnerable. At the same time, youth are seen as the future of a nation and the well being of youth is seen as being of vital importance to the future prosperity and the well being of the nation itself. The influential annual *Youth Survey* by Mission Australia, for example, states:

> The hopes and dreams of today's youth are a window to our nation's future. When young people dream big and believe they can achieve those dreams, the possibilities for our country are endless. But when our youth feel their dreams are out of reach and limit their goals for adulthood, Australia's future prosperity is at risk. (Fildes, Robbins, Cave, Perrens, & Wearing, 2014, p. 2)

As a result, youth are increasingly becoming a focus of policy globally. A recent survey on youth policy, *The State of Youth Policy in 2014* (Youth Policy Press, 2014) found that of the 198 countries in the world, 128 have a specific youth policy. Between 2013 and 2014, this number rose by 39, as more countries are developing these policies. The UN designated 2010-2011 as the International Year of Youth, and each year, August 12 is observed as International Youth Day, to draw attention to cultural and legal issues surrounding youth.

Since contemporary society is theorised as inherently full of uncertainties and challenges (Beck, 1992), all contemporary youth are seen as facing 'unprecedented challenges' and therefore at some level of risk. According to the *National Strategy for Young Australians* (Australian Government, 2010, p. 2):

> For this current generation, being young involves tackling some unprecedented challenges including climate change, terrorism, ageing societies and infrastructure, changing job markets, technological advances, the increasing influence of popular culture and changing family and social structures.

If these factors point to wider social and political issues, such as climate change and terrorism, others point to more specific factors, related to the immediate experience of youth. Indeed, in such discourses, the 'risks' are not external, but closely associated with the youth themselves. These include considering adolescents as confused, full of self-doubt, prone to questioning authority and to experimentation – and thus exposed to – perhaps even inviting – a range of risks. In Australia's *National Strategy for Young Australians*, youth is described as:

> … a period of enormous change in how young people relate to themselves, each other and the world around them. At this time, most young people

> question their identity, values, interests and relationships. In the quest to find answers to these questions young people experiment and re-negotiate multiple relationships. They navigate transitions from home to independent living, school to work, single to partnered and form families of their own. (Australian Government, 2010, p. 2)

With the focus on the uncertainties and complexities of life in contemporary times, and of childhood, adolescence and youth as a period of questioning and transition, all youth are seen as inherently vulnerable. The cost of 'making a successful transition to adulthood' and becoming 'self-sufficient' are seen as challenging for some youth (Fernandes, 2010, p. 161). Based on research in the US, Fernandes finds that parents support children financially to a significant extent – providing about $2,200 a year to their children between the ages of 18 and 34 'to supplement wages, pay for college tuition, and assist with down payments on a house, among other types of financial help' (p. 161). Despite so much support, Fernandes asserts, 'the current move from adolescence to adulthood has become longer and increasingly complex'. This transition to self-sufficiency is much more problematic for those without such financial support:

> For vulnerable (or – at-risk) youth populations, the transition to adulthood is further complicated by a number of challenges, including family conflict or abandonment and obstacles to securing employment that provides adequate wages and health insurance. (Fernandes, 2010, p. 161)

Youth vulnerability is often associated with 'disconnectedness' from education and employment. Such disconnectedness is seen as producing poor outcomes not only for youth themselves, but also for national productivity and for society at large. The negative outcomes for these youth can be quite wide-ranging:

> These youth may be prone to outcomes that have negative consequences for their future development as responsible, self-sufficient adults. Risk outcomes include teenage parenthood; homelessness; drug abuse; delinquency; physical and sexual abuse; and school dropout. Detachment from the labor market and school – or disconnectedness – may be the single strongest indicator that the transition to adulthood has not been made successfully. Approximately 1.8 million noninstitutionalized civilian youth are not working or in school. (Fernandes, 2010, p. 161)

These negative outcomes could also reinforce each other to create a complex set of inter-related responses and outcomes that could become stubborn and difficult to displace.

The year 2010 saw the UN launch the International Year of Youth. A significant feature of this year was the System-Wide Action Plan (SWAP) on Youth. Five thematic areas formed the core of this Action Plan: employment, entrepreneurship, political inclusion, citizenship and protection of rights, and education, including on sexual and reproductive health.

In youth policies, vulnerability appears to be quite loosely theorised and calculated. There is little explicit understanding in terms of risk, response and outcomes. There is little evidence that the complexity of the 'assemblage' of poverty – the interconnectedness and the ways a range of external factors impact and limit individuals' capacity to respond to risks and challenges – is understood. Often the 'risks' in youth policies – substance dependencies and abuse, dropping out of school, being unemployed or suffering from certain types of diseases or disorders – are located within individuals. As a result, such risks – and their associated outcomes – may be seen as avoidable risks which youth almost voluntarily 'bring upon themselves'. This view complicates the apportioning of responsibility for the alleviation of these problems.

Approaches to the vulnerability of youth range from therapeutic approaches involving the diagnosis of abuse and supporting the vulnerable through therapy, to a legal approach which seeks to establish a case for intervention (Parton, 2008). These approaches lead to a focus on safeguarding youth and the development of anticipatory and preventative measures to protect vulnerable youth from adverse outcomes.

Profiling 'vulnerable youth' helps policy makers and administrators to focus interventions and funding. In the US, for example, those who are deemed 'vulnerable' include:

- Youth emancipating from foster care
- Runaway and homeless youth
- Youth involved in the juvenile justice system;
- Immigrant youth and youth with limited English proficiency (LEP);
- Youth with physical and mental disabilities;
- Youth with mental disorders; and
- Youth receiving special education. (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2014)

Other groups identified as vulnerable include 'young unmarried mothers, high school dropouts, and disconnected (e.g., not in school nor working) youth' (Fernandes, 2010). Vulnerable youth may be identified by membership in a category (immigrants, those with disability) and by behaviour (substance abusers, runaways).

In Australian policy documents, factors that place young people 'at risk' of poor outcomes include 'gender, Indigenous status, educational attainment, work status, income levels and health status' (National Strategy for Young Australians, p. 2). Profiling vulnerable youth in this way allows policy and governance provisions to be instituted to focus on particular populations and protect them from adverse effects. On the other hand, it may also single out certain populations for policy intervention and perpetuate certain stereotypes and tropes in youth vulnerability, and so it has the potential of being detrimental and problematic

The need to respond to youth vulnerability is couched in the language of the rights of children and youth, with several private or government sponsored youth advocacy organisations in play. These activists and youth support groups promote the idea the policy makers must attend to the voices of the youth themselves to

develop policies which are both relevant effective. For instance, in Australia, Mission Australia has conducted annual surveys since 2001 to elicit the views and experiences of Australian youth to inform policy makers. Youth involvement is also sought in reaching out to other youth and to engage them in the priorities and programs being promoted by policy makers. Encouraging youth to be engaged citizens is also a policy priority in many countries.

VULNERABILITY AS AN ANALYTICAL TOOL: PROMISES AND PROBLEMS

Since 'vulnerability' is widely used as a basis for analysing a variety of social situations and phenomena in various disciplines and policy fields, it is important to assess its potential as an analytical tool. Cardona (2003) provides a comprehensive account of the contribution of the concept of 'vulnerability' to understandings of 'hazard' and 'risk', and also to the mathematisation of vulnerability and risk. He argues that despite the fuzziness and elasticity of the term 'vulnerable', the concept has proven to be useful in its capacity to clarify notions of 'risk' and 'disaster' in the field of disaster management. Tracing the historical development of the concept of 'vulnerability', Cardona argues that 'risk' and 'disaster' were both previously connected with uncontrollable physical phenomena, but the concept of 'vulnerability' provided a distinction between day-to-day difficulties and specific external hazards. He defines vulnerability as 'an internal risk factor of the subject or system that is exposed to a hazard and corresponds to its intrinsic predisposition to be affected, or to be susceptible to damage' (p. 37). This conceptualisation encourages a focus on 'the physical, economic, political or social susceptibility or predisposition of a community' to destabilising phenomena, and the capacity of particular social groups to adapt to or face challenges.

One outcome of this conceptualisation, Cardona suggests, is that both 'hazard' and 'vulnerability' can be mathematically expressed. Hazard is calculated as the probability of an event, of a calculated intensity, occurring at a particular geographic and temporal location. Vulnerability is calculated as the probability of a subject being exposed to the threat or hazard. Risk is calculated as the potential loss to the exposed subject. Importantly, in these conceptualisations, hazard and vulnerability are mutually constitutive. Damage from hazards are understood not only as a function of the severity of the external phenomenon, but a product also of the conditions of those exposed to the phenomenon. Damage from natural disasters such as earthquakes, for example, depend not only the severity of the phenomenon, but on the conditions of the exposed subjects. The concept of vulnerability enabled risk and disaster to be understood in a more holistic way.

Rendering 'vulnerability' and 'risk' calculable facilitated their participation in a range of fields such as developmental economics and the insurance industry. It has also provided new ways to think about reducing the effects of adverse conditions to exposed subjects. For example, where hazards themselves could not be controlled or modified, the focus shifted to risk reduction by changing the conditions that contribute to vulnerability. Factors contributing to the vulnerability of the exposed

subjects, such as the economic, social, cultural and educational conditions of the exposed populations, came into greater focus.

The field of disaster management saw calculations of risk and damage become more and more sophisticated, with notions such as 'transfer of risk' employed by insurance companies. This notion took into account technologies and systems devised to mitigate some of the effects of disasters. Such understandings followed the recognition that 'disasters' were not only 'natural', such as earthquakes, but also involved technological systems, particularly in urban locations.

Cardona suggests that empirical data as well as probabilistic statistics advanced understandings of risk and vulnerability. The mathematics around these notions, in calculating such things as estimation of potential loss in case of earthquakes in urban centres began to include 'damage matrixes, loss functions or curves, or fragility or vulnerability indices' (p. 42) which related the 'phenomenon' with the degree of expected harm.

The ramifications of such calculations of vulnerability, risk and harm are widespread and consequential. Cordona points out that quantification and probabilistic modelling, and the linking of such calculations to cost-benefit ratios, have allowed such calculations to participate in standard setting, benchmarks and codification of practices. In the case of earthquakes, for example, cost-benefit analyses could influence 'building codes, security standards, urban planning and investment projects' (p. 42).

It is, however, in the mid-20th century, according to Cardona, that the social theory of disasters came to life, following US government interest in the 'behaviour of the population in the case of war' (Cardona, 2003, p. 42, citing Quarantelli, 1998). This interest brought into focus the importance of attending to individual and collective perceptions in managing risk and disaster. The focus on perceptions, reactions and responses of those affected in applied social sciences, especially in the field of geography, he adds, provided the springboard for the concept of vulnerability.

As vulnerability came to be appreciated as a socially constructed phenomenon, more factors began to be considered in the make-up of vulnerability, including family fragility; access to social utilities; the collective economy; access to property and credit; ethnic, racial or political discrimination and oppression; literacy levels and educational opportunities (Cardona et al., 2012; Marskrey, 1998).

Conceptual models inspired by neo-Marxist approaches recognised vulnerability as affected by social pressures at global, intermediate and local levels. Thus vulnerability might be affected by 'root causes' such as the social, economic and political structures at the global level; 'dynamic pressures' such as population pressures, unethical practices or environmental degradation at the intermediate level; and 'unsafe conditions', such as poverty, social fragility and exposure to harm at the local level (Cannon, 1994). Such a conceptualisation assists in clearly addressing issues at multiple levels to reduce vulnerability and mitigate risk.

The differential effects that the same hazards have on different populations have led to a focus on the differential in access and capacities to withstand and respond

to harm (Sen, 1981). One issue with this understanding and focus is that there has been a tendency to link tropicality and development with vulnerability, so that large portions of the globe are written off and conceptualised as disaster-prone, poor and riddled with disease (Blankoff, 2001). The type of 'profiling' of vulnerable youth described in the section above is another example of the tendency to anticipate vulnerability perhaps pessimistically and in detrimental ways.

This historical account of the development of the notion of risk can be analysed as proceeding in two directions – a realist perspective, often adopted by epidemiologists and economists, that conceptualises risk as objectively measurable; and a 'constructivist' approach adopted by sociologists, that sees vulnerability as tied up with individual and collective perceptions. Understanding and assessing vulnerability is contingent upon which of the two perspectives is adopted.

Constructivist social scientists would seek to engage with young people themselves to understand their perceptions and the wider conditions in which they might encounter adversity, their capacities, the resources they access and the support they are able to draw upon to elaborate the extent of their vulnerability. However, these forms of assessment are also not infallible. Moreover, such assessments are expensive to make and so cannot be repeated to keep pace with changing perceptions and situations. Such assessments are not easily quantified – and as a result they are more difficult to utilise for allocation of resources and determination of the nature of assistance and care required, particularly in situations where resources are scarce. Moreover, vulnerability is a futuristic concept – it is the probability of being affected by future hazards – and by definition, this restricts the possibility of empirical work. The particular methods used in evaluating risk and vulnerability depends, then, on the context in which the decisions will be utilised, as Cardona clarifies:

> The selection of appropriate vulnerability and risk evaluation approaches depends on the decision-making context (high confidence). Vulnerability and risk assessment methods range from global and national quantitative assessments to local-scale qualitative participatory approaches. The appropriateness of a specific method depends on the adaptation or risk management issue to be addressed, including for instance the time and geographic scale involved, the number and type of actors, and economic and governance aspects. Indicators, indices, and probabilistic metrics are important measures and techniques for vulnerability and risk analysis. However, quantitative approaches for assessing vulnerability need to be complemented with qualitative approaches to capture the full complexity and the various tangible and intangible aspects of vulnerability in its different dimensions. (Cardona et al., 2012, pp. 67, their emphasis)

Several epistemological and ontological issues arise in apprehending and understanding vulnerability as an issue in the field of youth policy. Translating understandings into policies to govern youth are even more fraught not only with issues with assessment and measurement, but also with moral and ethical dilemmas.

To begin with, there are issues of privacy and the rights of parents and children, which sometimes come in conflict with the government's obligation to protect children from harm and abuse (Daniels, 2010). Even if the moral mandate to protect children is assumed to be very clear, notions of 'adversity', 'risk' and 'vulnerability' are quite slippery when it comes to children and youth. This creates a problem for assessing and quantifying vulnerability. But assessment and quantification is imperative if there is to be a basis for making a decision about protecting children and youth, especially when the family's rights and the children's or youths' perceptions are in conflict with those of the protection agencies.

Indeed, the notion of 'childhood', 'adolescence' and 'youth' as specific, definable categories characterised by vulnerability is itself challenged (cf. Stainton Rogers, 2001). Designating certain categories such a childhood as inherently vulnerable casts those categories as problematic. The 'branding' of young people as 'vulnerable', dependent and needing care and support might itself be detrimental to their well being. Studies of 'resilience' challenge the fatalistic assumptions about developmental pathways and the predictability of behaviours and outcomes.
Issues linked with youth vulnerability include mental and physical illness, poverty, homelessness, fragile family situations, being in foster care, poor educational outcomes, substance abuse and addiction and criminality, to name only a few issues. With such a wide range of factors involved, there are links to a variety of fields, so youth vulnerability is likely being approached by a combination of both realist and constructivist understandings, without a close examination of either the ontological and epistemological underpinnings or the consequences of adopting a particular stance.

However, unlike in the case of disasters such a earthquakes, where 'victims' are easy to identify, any potential intervention would require some sort of benchmarks or indicators that can assist in locating vulnerable young people and in assessing the nature and the extent of their vulnerability. That such an exercise is fraught is readily apparent. Realist approaches that require quantification and objective measurement will seek to develop a set of indicators to designate youth vulnerability. This could take the form of the typology used in Victoria's 'Vulnerable Youth Framework', where various combinations and degrees of poverty, unemployment, being a school drop-out, substance abuse and so on are used to create a framework to classify youth as minimally vulnerable to severely vulnerable (see Te Riele, this volume). Such efforts seek to assess, quantify and grade levels of vulnerability. These ratings are of great consequence as they could determine whether or not particular groups or individuals qualify for certain types of interventions, funding or care. Conversely, they may perforce bring certain groups or individuals under certain forms of care. The very classification is itself only possible if certain forms of surveillance are in place. These measures and classifications take little account of the perceptions of the concerned individuals or groups considered vulnerable. Moreover, many who might consider themselves vulnerable to particular harms may not fall into the classifications of vulnerability and thus they may not get the assistance they require.

A frequently raised issue is the effect on young people of being labelled 'vulnerable'. A tension is identified between identifying those needing special provision and the effect on already fragile subjects of such labelling. When vulnerability is extended to whole groups on the basis of colour, ethnicity and so on, this tension becomes even more acutely manifest. Assessments of vulnerability might also ignore or supress understandings of the strengths and resources available to young people.

Risk and vulnerability have a predictive element, and policy and governance aims not only to address harm where it occurs, but also identify the possibility of harm and prevent it from occurring. Judgements with regard to the possibility of harm require an element of 'fortune telling' – and whether this is done subjectively based on experience by child protection workers and similar personnel, or on the basis of mathematical calculations, the results are often inaccurate and unreliable (Munro, 2007). Since vulnerability assessments are prone to error and inaccuracy, Munro suggests that a high level of institutional tolerance for inaccuracy is necessary.

Despite these drawbacks, the concept of vulnerability has been useful in a variety of ways. It has served to complexify notions of risk and harm and offered a range of factors as relevant to research and policy that were previously not available. It has served to enlarge the scope of intervention. The ways in which vulnerability is used and the ways in which it participates in policy and practice are elaborated in the chapters in this volume.

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KITTY TE RIELE

2. CONUNDRUMS FOR YOUTH POLICY AND PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION

By virtue of their age, young people as a group are the object of both practice interventions and policy attention 'done' to them on premises based on adult perceptions. Sweeping generalisations about ways on which 'young people these days' behave badly have a long history. The quote below is commonly attributed to Hesiod, in the Eighth Century B.C.:

> I see no hope for the future of our people if they are dependent on the frivolous youth of today, for certainly all youth are reckless beyond words. When I was a boy, we were taught to be discrete and respectful of elders, but the present youth are exceedingly wise [disrespectful] and impatient of restraint. (cited in Scales, 2013, p. 228)

As Bessant (2008, p. 347) points out with considerable dismay, more recently neurological science has been used to argue that young people as an entire cohort are "a 'high risk group' who are irresponsible, troublesome, rebellious, and even criminally inclined, and that this can be explained in terms of the biological development of the human brain".

Of particular interest for this book, however, are the ways distinctions are made within the youth cohort: "a central problem, accepted broadly, is the marginalisation of *some* groups of young people" (Wyn & White, 1998, p. 27, my emphasis). In much research, policy and service provision, certain young people are identified as being more in need of support, more at risk, or more vulnerable than others of the same age. A policy document in the Australian state of Victoria exemplifies this: *Positive pathways for Victoria's vulnerable young people: a policy framework to support vulnerable youth*. The framework uses a 'traffic light' approach to identify layers of vulnerability (Victorian Government, 2010, p. 4):

- Green: All young people (age 10-25). "The majority of Victoria's young people cope well with vulnerabilities that arise during adolescence".
- Yellow: Young people who "experience additional problems that require an early service intervention".
- Orange: Young people who are "highly vulnerable" and "require comprehensive and coordinated interventions from a range of support services".

K. te Riele & R. Gorur (eds.), Interrogating Conceptions of 'Vulnerable Youth' in Theory, Policy and Practice, 17–32.

- Red: "Young people who are at high risk" and "require intensive support services".

The framework is a good example of politicians and public servants aiming to "ensure better coordination of services on the ground and to facilitate mechanisms for cross-portfolio work across government" and to support "vulnerable young Victorians achieve their full potential, within strong families and vibrant, inclusive communities". It also highlights some of the conundrums of categorising young people in terms of vulnerability. In this chapter I discuss two core dilemmas, related to the locus of attention, and the focus on a minority. For the first one, I will return to this policy document. For both, the discussion also draws on my own (individually or with colleagues) research with flexible education programs across Australia. These programs typically provide education at secondary school level (with Year 12 being the final year of high school in Australia) for young people for whom conventional schooling has not worked well. Importantly, however, the discussion applies equally to other sectors that affect young people, such as health, housing and welfare.

LOCUS OF ATTENTION

The first conundrum relates to where attention is focused. For policy and service provision, that locus is usually the individual young person. For example, in *Positive pathways for Victoria's vulnerable young people* (Victorian Government, 2010, p. 1) vulnerability is defined at the level of "young people who […] are at risk of not realising their potential to achieve positive life outcomes".

Human Rights

A potential benefit of focusing attention at the level of the individual is recognizing the right of each young person to a happy and fruitful life, enjoying what Fraser (2009) refers to as parity of participation in society. The Victorian Government (2010, p. 3) explains:

> The actions contained in the framework seek to ensure that vulnerable young Victorians are supported to achieve the same outcomes that are sought for all young Victorians – that they have a strong sense of belonging, are motivated to create and share in opportunities and are valued for their contributions and influence in their communities.

The document explicitly refers to the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* as a key policy that underpins the framework "to ensure that the rights of vulnerable young Victorians, who are often disengaged and disenfranchised, are protected" (Victorian Government, 2010, p. 7). This connects with the finding of my recent national research on flexible learning programs (Te Riele, 2014) that a commitment to each student's needs, interests and rights is a

foundational principle of high quality FLPs. Staff members from two different sites highlight this perspective:

> For young people in South Australia, the SACE [Year 12 Certificate] is the core accreditation and not only should you do it, but it should be an entitlement. (Bill, staff, in Te Riele, 2014, p. 61)

> I have a very strong belief that all young people have the right to a good quality education. (James, staff, in Te Riele, 2014, p. 61)

Identifying Barriers

Problems arise when the barriers to fulfilling these rights are perceived as being located at the personal level – within the actions and choices of individual young person (their behaviours) and their immediate context (their experiences). For example, risk factors listed for the 'yellow' category (see above, Victorian Government, 2010, p. 4) are:

- Low-level truancy
- First contact with police
- Emerging mental health issues
- Experimental alcohol or other drug use
- Family conflict
- Unstable peer group
- Isolated from community
- Pregnant/teenage parent

In the education arena, Australian policy identifying young people at risk of disengaging or disconnecting from school focuses on "issues with behaviour, educational performance, socialization" as well as "high rates of absenteeism" and "frequent suspensions/exclusions" (DEEWR, 2011, pp. 16-17).

These lists are a considerable improvement on explanations of the poorer outcomes for certain (for example working class or ethnic minority) young people that are based on their perceived lack of intelligence, deficient language, and low aspirations (Smyth and Wrigley, 2013). Nevertheless, such lists of attributes continue to locate problems at the personal level, borrowing a diagnostic model from epidemiology that is of limited usefulness in social fields such as education, housing and welfare (France, 2007). Yet such individualised perspectives on vulnerability or risk have become self-evident in contemporary developed nations, where "the discourses of youth at-risk seek to individualise the risks to the self that are generated in the institutionally structured risk environments of the 'risk society' (Beck, 1992)" (Kelly, 2001, p. 23).

The concern is that overlooked or underplayed in these accounts are the ways in which environments (including a more individualistic society, see Eckersley, 2011) actively generate vulnerabilities. This is not to deny the significant problems individual young people may face but rather to recognise that these problems often

have a wider social dimension (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001) based on external economic or social conditions that exert significant influence to shape the actions and choices of young people.

Young people do not simply possess low, medium or high vulnerability (as per the traffic light approach outlined above, in Victorian Government, 2010). Any person's real life is more complex than that, both at any one time and over time. Various 'risk factors' are likely to cluster together, operating together on one person at one time, and not at all at other times, as well as in varyingly complex sequences over time (Batten & Russell, 1995). Foster and Spencer (2011, p. 138) note that:

> 'disadvantaged,' 'disaffected,' or 'homeless youth' are not homogeneous categories. Each of the people we spoke to had different experiences, different ways of talking about and dealing with trauma, and different ideas of what constituted a good job and a desirable future.

In addition, there is no straightforward, causal relationship between risk factors and outcomes. France (2007, p. 5) points to the concept of false positives: young people whose experiences include various risk factors but who are nevertheless doing well. Others experience complex difficulties that evade capture in lists and frameworks. As Batten and Russell (1995, p. 50) emphasise: "Relationships need to be viewed as forming a dense and complex web of interrelated, interacting, multi-directional forces". This was recognised by Murray (2012), the then Director of the Youth Partnerships Secretariat in the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD):

> One of the conundrums facing us is that state interventions, intended to improve young people's lives, sometimes miss the mark, failing to achieve the health, education or wellbeing outcome intended. Moreover, families, children and young people who experience multiple vulnerabilities are often unable to benefit from the available community resources and supports. They experience periods of intermittent or chronic disadvantage as a result.

In recognition of such complexities, many researchers as well as policy makers and practitioners prefer an ecological model (see the chapters in this volume by Hampshire and Rob White). The ecological systems theory conceived by Bronfenbrenner (1994) highlights the environmental and societal influences on child development, as well as the influence of changes over time. Similarly in the field of youth studies, Wyn and White (1998, p. 34, original italic) argue that: "If the issue of young people's marginalization is explored from a contextual framework, the first feature that becomes apparent is *complexity*". This contextual perspective connects the experience of youth to "wider relations of social division and of social control" (p.28). It means that vulnerability or marginalization does not simply reside within a young person, and that it is constantly being re-shaped in response to both external factors and young people's agency and change.

In my research with flexible learning programs (FLPs), a core question in different FLPs always is why young people attend the FLP rather than a

conventional school. The responses from adults (staff and community stakeholders) and young people (students and graduates) mention some of the factors listed above (see Victorian Government, 2010) but they tend to point to external circumstances. Overall, they locate vulnerability less within the young person and more within their environment. Schools figure prominently:

> Because of bullying. And I kept getting in trouble for fighting back. (Kane, student, in Te Riele, 2012, p. 44)

> If you ask them for help they'd be looking at you just saying 'I just explained it to you I'm not going to do it again'. […] I just couldn't get it. Everyone else in the class could but he'd just move on and then there's me left there. Trying to do the work and I'm like 'I can't do it'. (Kelli, graduate, in Te Riele, 2012, p. 42)

Schools are commonly perceived as a component of young people's environment that offers a solution to vulnerability. The suggestion by the Victorian Government (2010, p. 17) is characteristic of this view:

> Education is the most effective means to enable young people to thrive, learn and grow to enjoy a productive, rewarding and fulfilling life. It is also an avenue to break cycles of disadvantage and a powerful way to reduce exposure to harm or participation in risky behaviours or crime.

Kane and Kelli (above) represent young people for whom, in contrast, certain schools are part of the problem by "activating or enabling the risk of some young people" (Strategic Partners, 2001, p. 16). Tackling vulnerability requires substantial change in such schools rather than policy makers simply "link[ing] vulnerable young people into education" (Victorian Government, 2010, p. 17) as a 'one size fits all' solution.

Arguing for this shift in focus is not, however, an argument for shifting the blame from young people onto teachers and schools. Students' marginalisation in and 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) since this marginalisation is ultimately based in structural societal inequalities. This is evident in quotes from staff and community stakeholders in FLPs:

> They're very much kids from often disadvantaged backgrounds so that there are normally multiple problems of a social type in their backgrounds, not the least of which is poverty. (Mr Pitt, community, in Te Riele, 2012, p. 47)

> With the Aboriginal students, we find that some business people in the town won't take them on [for work experience]. (Mr. Lawson, staff, in Te Riele, 2012, p. 48)

Poverty and racism pose barriers that cannot be solved by intervention in young people's lives, their families and schools – but require substantial change in society both to reduce those barriers and to enable constructive work in schools (and other youth services) to endure into these students' adult lives. Despite widespread

concern about rising social inequality (see the popularity of the book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* by Piketty, 2014) there is resistance to enacting and financing the social responsibilities such change entails (Garner, 2014).

Moral Panic

Finally, a concern with identifying personal risk factors for vulnerable young people is that it may contribute to moral panic about the threats posed by these young people to themselves and society (Cohen, 1972; Roman, 1996). This is evident in relation to "earn or learn" policies for young people in Australia (also see Wyn, and Black and Walsh in this volume), with some young people perceived as making bad choices that impact negatively both on their own future life chances and on the nation's economy. The current Prime Minister Tony Abbott (2014) has stated that:

> … the interesting thing is that if a young person wants to receive a government benefit there's a very easy way to do that and that is to actually go into further education or training. I say to people who are about to leave school: earn or learn. What is unacceptable to our community and what should be unacceptable to you is leaving school to go on a welfare benefit. That is no way to begin your life – it is no way to begin your life as a constructive contributor to the Australian community.

Expectations that young people will either be in paid employment or in education during periods of high (youth) unemployment ignore structural constraints (such as the availability of suitable jobs and affordable transport) and risk demonising young people who do not meet these requirements as 'lazy' and as (in the words of the current federal Treasurer) 'leaners' rather than 'lifters' (Hockey, 2014). This leads to concerns about stigmatisation, which are taken up in the next section.

FOCUS ON A MINORITY

The second conundrum is created by the common tendency to identify a minority of young people as vulnerable. For example, *Positive pathways for Victoria's vulnerable young people* (Victorian Government, 2010, p. 3) notes that:

> While the majority of Victoria's young people are faring well, there is a small but significant number of young people aged 10-25 years who, through a combination of their circumstances, stage of development and barriers to participation, are at risk of not achieving positive life outcomes.

This fits with a tradition in policy that places the cut-off point for disadvantage so that it refers to a minority (Connell, 1994) and with research that aims to measure the size of the group that is 'at risk' (see Wyn & White, 1998). This approach enables provision of targeted intervention to the small number of young people who need support. An example is provided by the guidelines for Youth Connections providers, which were part of a national policy platform between

2009-2014 to raise educational attainment at upper secondary level in Australia. The guidelines distinguish between three connection levels. Providers had to assess the level relevant to a young person, and provide services relevant to that level. The levels were (DEEWR, 2011, pp. 16-17, original underline):

> Connection Level 1 applies to young people who are attached to/attending school/education on a regular basis, but who are at risk of disengaging from school/education. […]
>
> Connection Level 2a applies to young people whose attendance record at school/education is poor and they are at risk of disconnecting. […]
>
> Connection Level 2b applies to young people who have been continuously disconnected from school/education for longer than three months.

The positive intention of this kind of identification of (small) groups in need, is that this will lead to better service provision. A common critique, however, is that it will lead to increased stigmatisation of young people. For example, Foster and Spencer (2011, p. 128) argue:

> Social scientific knowledge has played an enormous role in responding to, facilitating, and legitimating the kind of thinking that makes 'prevention' a desirable way of governing populations (France 2007), and this has undoubtedly improved the lives of certain people at certain times. Granted, the language of risk and resilience does, in some ways, relieve young research subjects of responsibility for factors that might be beyond their control. However, this vocabulary is not much less stigmatizing or normative than labeling some young people 'problems,' 'hoodlums,' or 'delinquents'.

This quote highlights the dilemma that focusing on the potential problem of stigmatisation may lead to a too cavalier dismissal of the potential benefit of better service provision. After all, those "certain people" whose lives were improved are real human beings whose experiences also matter. In this section I address both of these potentials: better service provision and stigmatisation – and also the counter-intuitive possibilities of targeted intervention leading to worse service delivery and to reduced stigmatisation.

Service Provision

The argument that the focus on a minority leads to better service provision is based, first, on a recognition that resources (funding, time, professional expertise) are scarce. Identifying some young people as vulnerable – rather than providing a particular service for everyone – enables these limited resources to be targeted at those who need them most. This is reminiscent of the practice in emergency medicine of triage: the decision-making process about the priority different patients should get for treatment. More generally, triage can be defined as a process aimed at making the best possible choices in a complex situation, to meet many people's needs with limited means. For example in education, the problem of limited

resources in the face of much student need is well-established (see Gonski et al., 2011) and the issue of poor educational outcomes for specific young people has been persistent (Smyth & Wrigley, 2013). Diamond (2006) describes the use of triage to offer particular supports to supports students' literacy.[1]

Distributive justice is served by targeting resources and services to those young people who most need them (Fraser, 1996, 2009). In our research on flexible learning programs (FLPs), my colleagues and I (Mills et al., 2015) recognise that "the benefits of schooling are distributed quite unjustly" (p. 157). We show that the provision of flexible learning programs goes some way to redressing this, since "many of their students would not be engaged in schooling if it were not for the existence of such alternatives" (p. 158). Similarly, in her research comparing views about literacy of children (aged 11) from affluent and poor backgrounds, Kellett (2009) found that the latter group had few of the opportunities available to the former. She concludes homework clubs are a "lifeline" (p. 405) for children living in poverty.

Secondly, service provision may be better when a minority is targeted if that means services are more suitable and relevant. Kellett (2009, p. 405) provides suggestions for running homework clubs in ways that address the importance identified by the children from poor backgrounds of "access to adult expertise and […] reading opportunities that promote private confidence building and enjoyment". Drawing on Fraser (1996, 2009) we (Mills et al., 2015) refer to the recognition aspect of social justice that is fostered by flexible learning programs. Education in these FLPS was made more relevant because "curricula and structures took into account marginalised cultures" and more appropriate through "Flexible arrangements [which] ensured that the 'different' adversities that many of these young people faced could be accommodated" (p. 161). Students in FLPs highlight the way staff contribute to the quality of education, for example:

> 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 (Ben, student, in Te Riele, 2012, pp. 55-56)

On the other hand, there are some risks that service provision may be worse when it is set up to target a particular minority of young people. Scarcity of resources reduces the sustainability of such services, no matter how beneficial they are. As an Australian review of educational innovation (Strategic Partners, 2001, p. 93) noted: "Without systemic change, effective practice that serves marginalised young people will mostly remain isolated, and eventually disappear when the personal energy or funding runs out". This requires policy reform, moving services from the margins of pilot programs, short-term tenders, and special initiatives, into comprehensive and continuing provision. In my research on flexible learning programs, the provision of systemic support and resources was also found to be a key condition for enabling programs to do good work (Te Riele, 2014). When funding depends on a snapshot of enrolments on a census date or on short-term

tenders, programs find they are "under more regulatory pressure to seek other funding" (Jason, staff, in Te Riele, 2014, p. 67). This is exacerbated when:

> … even when it's at full tilt, you're still not receiving the same kind of funding a secondary school receives, while working with people who need much higher levels of resources. We do breakfasts and lunches and camps at no cost. We do not have student fees. (James, staff, in Te Riele, 2014, p. 67)

In addition, a concern is that when provision for 'vulnerable' young people separates them from their peers this may lead to stigmatisation of those young people (see below) and to a diminished democracy for everyone (Fielding & Moss, 2011; Slee, 2011). In his proposals for reframing the field of inclusive education, Slee (2011) refers to schooling as an "apprenticeship in democracy" (p. 154) which requires an inclusive community rather than segregation.

Stigmatisation

As Foster and Spencer (2011, see the quote earlier in this chapter) exemplify, a major critique of identifying some young people as 'at risk' or 'vulnerable' is that it leads to stigmatisation. Bourdieu (1990, p. 28) points out that "the logic of the classificatory label is very exactly that of racism, which stigmatises its victims by imprisoning them in a negative essence". The concern is with a "false distinction" (Dwyer and Wyn, 2001) between a supposedly 'normal' mainstream and 'problematic' minority. In his examination of 'special education' for students with disabilities Slee (2011, p. 12, original emphasis) challenges the term 'regular' schools, because it is:

> … code for the implied *normal school*. It follows that there must be *normal or regular students* for whom these schools exist. And, as the logic proceeds, there are other children who are not normal, regular, or valid.

Similarly, identification of vulnerable youth may be informed by normative assumptions (usually based on understandings drawing from developmental psychology) about what is 'normal adolescence' (Foster & Spencer, 2011; Kelly, 2001; Wyn & White, 1998). Foster and Spencer (2011, p. 128, original emphasis) suggest that while use of the phrase 'youth at risk' rather than 'deviant' is part of a broader impetus toward more sympathetic studies of young people's lives:

> The transformation of the language youth researchers and policy makers use to deem some young lives acceptable, and others in need of intervention, has *not* led to a redefinition of acceptability. It is no coincidence that the same kinds of behaviors, living conditions, choices, attitudes, and values that were once categorized as 'problems' are now considered 'negative outcomes,' with which 'at-risk youth' are correlated via statistical models.

Drawing on Bourdieu, a core part of the argument by Foster and Spencer (2011) is that the imposition of labels such as 'at risk' to some groups of young people is a form of symbolic violence.[2] As labels – and their implications of deficits

and individual blame – become "taken-for-granted in everyday life" (p. 132) service providers and young people themselves accept and reinforce them. This is illustrated by Farrugia (2013) in relation to homeless young people and also in my research with flexible learning programs:

> You need to assume that every student here has come here because they're having difficulties. And that is the case. Every student you talk to says they're here because they've got problems of some sort. (Ms Hirst, staff, in Te Riele, 2012, p. 39)

> Everyone comes here for a reason because they can't cope in other schools, they all come here, some of them tell you why they're here, some of them don't. Some kids don't seem like they've got a problem in the world, they just come here for some reason, who knows? There's something wrong with them. Well, like not wrong with them physically and mentally but, I don't know, problems with other schools, they just come here. (Ben, student, in Te Riele, 2012, p. 39)

On the other hand, the quote from Ben above also shows how separate provision for a minority may – counter-intuitively – lead to less stigmatisation. Within that setting the sense of all being 'in the same boat' can generate feelings of belonging, camaraderie and affinity. As another student in Ben's program expresses it:

> Just everyone's perception of it at the moment is wrong. They look at it as being a school for those who can't handle school which I guess in a way it is but people here are doing what they want to do, they're doing their work, they're doing it when they have to have it done by, they're not here to bum around and do nothing, they're here to do it. (Angie, student, in Te Riele, 2012, p. 50)

The benefits of recognition and belonging are also evident in an Anglicare (2014) survey of young people using their services, highlighting that "if we want young people on the edges to feel they belong to society, rather than suggest that they are simply not trying, we need to create welcoming and accepting places". Moreover, within flexible learning programs it is common to adopt a strength-based approach, which works to counteract deficit perceptions that others (or young people themselves) may hold and embraces a diverse definition of talents:

> These young people have such gifts to bring. (Sue, staff, in Te Riele, 2014, p. 62)

> [Students] might express themselves in a physical way rather than in an academic way and that's clearly their expertise". (Peter, community member, in Te Riele, 2014, p. 62)

The second quote relates to a program that uses young people's interest in sport as the hook to enable them to learn. Collaboration with high profile (state and

national) sporting organisations also means this program shows signs of not only countering stigmatisation but even replacing it with prestige.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

By their very nature, conundrums are not easily solved. The primary purpose for this chapter therefore is to make visible some of the particular issues for youth policy and practice that result from identifying certain young people as being vulnerable, and thus contribute to professional discussion and reflection. In addition, in this concluding section, I also propose some possible ways forward. I take as a starting point a commitment to distributive justice. Justice and fairness can be defined differently, as is well explained (in the context of research ethics, but relevant much more broadly) by the Belmont Report (DHEW, 1979, part B.3):

> There are several widely accepted formulations of just ways to distribute burdens and benefits. Each formulation mentions some relevant property on the basis of which burdens and benefits should be distributed. These formulations are (1) to each person an equal share, (2) to each person according to individual need, (3) to each person according to individual effort, (4) to each person according to societal contribution, and (5) to each person according to merit.

All formulations except the first one above require a distinction to be made among people to decide who gets what. Distributive justice as I use it draws on the second formulation above, and this means it is necessary to identify young people's needs. The key question is: how can we capitalise on the benefits of policies and practices that target some young people (who have particular needs), while minimising the potential negative effects of such targeting? One promising strategy is to embrace Fraser's entire framework (2009), rather than only the distributive justice component. To illustrate this I will draw on the research on flexible learning programs by Mills, McGregor, Hayes and I (see Mills et al., 2015) which applied Fraser's framework of social justice.

Fraser (2009) argues that distribution, recognition and representation are interrelated components of justice, and that all three are necessary to achieve parity of participation for all people in society. Distribution focuses on the economic dimension of justice, and requires a redistribution of resources towards those who most need them. For young people experiencing adversity and marginalisation, distributive justice means they should have access to material goods (for example emergency housing, funding for textbooks and school uniforms, and health and youth work services) that enable them to participate in education, work or other activities. Applying this to flexible learning programs in our research (Mills et al., 2015), we highlight how these programs cater for basic needs, which conventional schools may assume have been met in students' homes:

> They know that our school is a place where they can come and get fed. You know, if they're not too embarrassed they can have a shower, they can brush

> their teeth, they can get a new set of clothes. (Julian, staff, in Mills et al., 2015, p. 160).

Recognition addresses the cultural dimension in Fraser's framework. She argues cultural injustice happens through cultural domination, non-recognition, and disrespect (Fraser, 1996, p. 7). Recognition involves acceptance and valuing of differences. For young people this means accepting that one person's 'normality' may be different from another's and (as demonstrated earlier in this chapter) recognising strengths rather than focusing on deficits. Young people often do not recognise themselves in labels or descriptions of 'vulnerable youth' or 'youth at risk' (Foster and Spencer, 2011) since these offer only a partial (and possibly skewed) perspective on their lives. An example of recognition from our research in flexible learning programs is provided by a staff member:

> I think the other strength that this place offers is a place where difference is accepted, where alternative viewpoints are accepted, alternative lifestyles are accepted in a safe and respectful environment. (George, staff, in Mills et al., 2015, p. 162)

In Fraser's later work (2009) she added the component of representation, addressing the political dimension of justice. This requires that people have the opportunity to make representations on matters that impact on them. In youth studies, this is reflected in the well-established interest in enabling 'youth voice' and 'agency' (see Coffey & Farrugia, 2014; Fielding, 2007; Smyth & Hattam, 2001; Wyn & White, 1998). The suggestion by Foster and Spencer (2011, p. 139) to actively seek the input of participants in research equally applies to a role for young people in policy development: "In order to resist characterizing certain people as 'at risk' based on pre-determined risk factors for pre-determined negative outcomes". Building on Wyn and White (1998, p. 35), representational justice for young people means:

> … the voices of young people need to be heard if we are to appreciate fully the ways in which social constraints and institutional structures both impinge upon them, and provide possibilities for personal and collective development.

In our research with flexible learning programs we found that young people's marginalisation was frequently caused or exacerbated by rigid structures in conventional schooling which inhibited their efforts to have a choice or make their views heard – for example in relation to preferred (by students) learning styles and activities or perceived (by staff) breaches of school discipline (Mills et al., 2015; also see Te Riele, 2014). In contrast, in flexible learning programs students tend to have more choice and input as well as a sense of equality.

> Here you will choose what you learn about and then they'll support you and find ways to make that help you in the long run. (Aden, student, in Te Riele, 2014, p. 55)

> They do the community group meetings and stuff, bringing everyone together and sorting out conflicts and everyone having their say. And these little meetings is a really good thing they do, because it lowers the chances of anyone having any sort of fights or arguments, so everyone has their own opinion – so it brings people together as one community. (Leanne, student, in Mills et al., 2015, p. 164)

Representational justice also shifts the focus of intervention from doing things to or for young people, to enabling and empowering them. Eckersley (2011, p.635) refers to "developing the social and cultural, as well as economic and material, resources available to young people" in order to improve young people's health and wellbeing. In my research, a commitment to empowerment was evident in staff avoiding the temptation to solve issues for students but rather acting to support students to develop skills themselves so that:

> … they can become independent and be able to overcome those barriers that are going to prevent them from continuing on in the course and then further in work. (Dionne, staff, in Te Riele, 2014, p. 65)

Applying Fraser's framework to policy and practice aimed at supporting young people who experience adversity would enable meeting young people's human rights and providing appropriate kinds of support where needed (especially through distributive and representational justice). It would also assist in reducing negative outcomes outlined above, such as moral panic and stigmatisation (especially through recognition), and worse service provision due to lack of sustainable funding (especially through distributive justice).

In addition, it is useful to explicitly address the concern that problems and solutions should not be located entirely at the personal level by focusing on what can be changed in young people's environments, such as education and housing, not just in individuals and families to help them 'cope' within existing environments. Unfortunately, this can be perceived as just too hard. For example, in education the persistent "grammar of schooling" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 85); the "sequential assemblage of habits, traditions, beliefs, practices and organisational preferences" (Slee, 2011, p. 13) and the "widespread and resilient logic of practice" in schools (Johnston & Hayes, 2008, p. 110) are cited as obstacles to finding more democratic and just ways of schooling.

However, there is a history of successful reform in education as well. Wyn and White (1998, p. 30) point to the achievements of the Disadvantaged Schools Program in Australia during the 1970s and 1980s to foster more engaging school environments and "provide young people with a positive, relevant and appropriate school environment within which they would be successful" (also see Connell et al., 1992). A contemporary example of system-wide change is the South Australian strategy for Innovative Community Action Networks (ICANs) which support education for the state's most disadvantaged students through case management and the provision of and Flexible Learning Options. The regionally-based ICANs "bring together young people, families, schools, community groups, businesses and

different levels of government to find solutions to local issues that prevent young people from completing their education" (DECD, 2013). Within service provision in education, flexible learning programs demonstrate approaches of changing educational provision to suit students, rather than trying to change students to suit conventional schooling (Mills et al., 2015; Te Riele, 2012, 2014). Such programs respond to the challenge posed by Blakers and Nicholson (1988, p. 46):

> Schools [must] ask a different question about each student: not, as at present, Where does this student fit into our categories and processes?, but rather, How can we build on the interests, capacities and experiences which make her or him a unique individual?

Moreover, finding ways to improve societal environments can benefit all young people and all of society. In relation to health, Eckersley (2011, p. 635) suggests "recent 'progress' has harmed a substantial and growing proportion of young people" and therefore "a much broader effort is needed to change social conditions". In relation to my research in flexible learning programs (Te Riele, 2014), reforms that make schooling work better for marginalised students in those programs can improve schooling for most students in conventional schools as well. As Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) demonstrate, equity is better for everyone in society.

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NOTES

[1] On the other hand, Hess (1986) and Gillborn and Youdell (2000) warn that triage can also be used to exclude young people with high levels of need because they are perceived as holding low promise of immediate improvement from support.

[2] Even supposedly positive labels, such as 'gifted and talented', can impose stress and inflict symbolic violence.

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ROGER SLEE

3. EXPERIENCING EXCLUSION

Since the dismantling of a US military installation and the hosting of Japanese war crimes trials in 1950-51, Manus Island, with a population of around fifty thousand people off the northern coast of Papua New Guinea, has had infrequent Australian media and political attention (Sydney Morning Herald, February 22nd 1950). This changed when Australian governments saw it as a suitably removed outpost for people seeking political asylum in Australia. The then Labor government's announcement of returning asylum-seekers to Manus Island as another solution for the intractable challenge of stopping the flow of asylum seekers by boat and the collateral drowning of displaced people returned it to the Australian broadsheets and tabloids.

A reinstalled Prime Minister Kevin Rudd secured an agreement with Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister Peter O'Neill to re-commission an immigration detention and processing centre on Manus Island for those he called "economic refugees" (The Australian, July 15th 2013). In its makeover for the September 7th 2013 federal election the Labor government presented itself after having served six years in government office, ironically, as a *new* choice for the Australian electorate. *New* referred to both its leadership switch from Julia Gillard to Kevin Rudd, and with it to an election-directed policy ensemble. Not surprisingly the lexicon of the reinstalled Rudd leadership and policy offerings was deliberate. Following Fairclough's (2000) analysis in *New Labour, New Language?*, Ball elaborates the purposes of political discourse:

> Slogans, recipes, incantations and self-evidences … are part of the process of building support for state projects and establishing hegemonic vision … the statements and fragments do make a coherent joined-up whole. They do not have their effects by virtue of their inherent logic. Discourses often maintain their credibility through their repetition, substantive simplicity … and rhetorical sophistication. (Ball, 2007, p. 2)

Political discourse eschews *uncomfortable truths*, to coin a phrase, to reassure the collective disposition.

The Rudd government (Mark II) gave no quarter either to people smugglers, or to so-called immigration queue-jumpers. "Asylum-seeker" and "refugee" are established pejoratives in Australian public discourse. The major political parties attempted to outflank each other announcing tougher stances on boat arrivals and temporary immigration visas. David Marr suggests that we have got ourselves into a *panic:*

K. te Riele & R. Gorur (eds.), Interrogating Conceptions of 'Vulnerable Youth' in Theory, Policy and Practice, 33–45.

> *We are in a panic again. This golden country. So prosperous, so intelligent, so* safe and orderly, is afraid of refugees arriving in fishing boats. This is the great Australian fear, one that never really goes away: the fear of being overrun by dusky fleets sailing down from the north. Every time refugee boats appear on the horizon in any numbers, we panic. Facts then count for little. Hearts are hardened. Terrible things are done in the name of protecting the nation. Though this is not the first wave of boats and won't be the last, the politics are more rancorous than ever. Panic has been with us from the start. It's so Australian. Panic over the Chinese was the midwife of Federation and we have been swept by panics ever since. (Marr, 2011, p. 1)

While the moral imperative of the *asylum seekers debate* is for this observer straightforward, let me not be reductive; the issues that surround it are complex. They warrant deconstruction, albeit brief and incomplete.

Conservative politicians, representing both the Labor Party and the Conservative Coalition parties, are insistent that opposition to the dangers of people trafficking underscores their stance on the asylum issue. The growing inventory of drowning at sea of men, women and children made good their case. People do perish namelessly and the acceptance of payment to dispatch desperate and displaced people to treacherous seas in unseaworthy vessels is unconscionable. Staying put in hostile and dangerous conditions is not an option for these people either.

Prime Minister Rudd declared that stringent measures were necessary to dismantle the people smugglers' business plan. Opposition leader Tony Abbott offered the trump card of taking away existing provisions for people seeking to appeal administrative decisions against their submission for asylum and withdrawing the hitherto right to legal advice and representation.

The debate about political asylum in Australia for displaced people should neither be distilled to a mode of transport, nor to the dangers of people trafficking. Like other complex social phenomena it comprises a matrix of interconnected elements that form the whole. Nikolas Rose (2007, p.9) reminds us that this is the principal lesson from Michel Foucault's analysis in *The Birth of The Clinic*:

> … understanding the epistemological, ontological and technical reshaping of medical perception at the start of the nineteenth century came about through a series of dimensions, some of which seem, at first sight, rather distant from medicine.

Lateral analysis aids more complete understanding of the assemblages that constitute public life.

Let's dissemble asylum-seeking policy. As Marr (2011) attests the long shadow of racism lurks behind questions of immigration in Australia. Ours is a history of:

- Colonial invasion and genocide committed against the indigenous inhabitants of the continent (Reynolds, 1999, 2013).

- Race wars exacted on Chinese immigrants through the mid to late nineteenth century and indenture and slavery of Melanesian people on Queensland cane-fields (McQueen, 1970; Clark, 1973).
- The promulgation of the restricted immigration Act, or White Australia Policy as it was colloquially known.
- Attacks on minority ethnic groups in major cities and the growing expression of hostility towards Muslim people.

Segmenting racism into events and epochs distracts from its everyday pervasiveness and from its persistence over time. A stubborn foe, racism demonstrates both its resilience and a deep hold that fractures and transmutes the discourse of social inclusion. Ours is a community that breathes deep '*the atmosphere of ambient fear*' (Bauman, 1997, p. 22). As opinion polls turned against another former Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard and her government, she opportunistically utilized the constancy of racism and fear of outsiders by promising to restrict temporary work visas to recruit overseas workers to the populist mantra of "*Australian jobs for Australian workers*".

Political asylum summons questions of humanitarian immigration quotas and international obligations to the plight of displaced people. The treatment of people while applications for asylum are processed demands scrutiny. The conditions of the often indeterminate periods of detention, both on the Australian mainland and at offshore centres, have attracted international scrutiny and have been found wanting (UN News Agency, 2013). Reports from peak associations of doctors, psychiatrists and psychologists (The Australian Psychological Society, 2011; Murray, Davidson, & Schweitzer, 2008; The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, 2012) are unified by the expression of grave fear of immediate and long-term compromises to mental health and wellbeing posed by often-unspecified periods of detention in seriously inadequate living conditions.

Paradoxically *The Australian Curriculum* (ACARA, 2013) declares the importance of educating Australia's children to become good global citizens without precisely stipulating what this entails. As it stands, educating young Australians to the challenges of a globalising world translates to teaching knowledge and skills that enable them to see the world as their holiday itinerary, employment agency, and marketplace.

Detainees have asserted their agency enlisting hunger strikes, sewing their lips together to symbolise being silenced by isolation in remote detention centres, or damaging detention facilities (Slee, 2011). For some, these resistances act like a guilty conscience reminding us of the obligations of global citizenship, for others it is a catalyst to move the problem of difficult and disruptive people offshore. The forfeiture of the humanity of this *surplus population* (Bauman, 2004) saturates the discourse of reportage. They are reduced to numbers of 'drownings', 'boat-people', 'asylum-seekers', and 'refugees'. The language applied detaches people from established rights of citizenship and community obligations, deepening their exclusion and alienation. Ours is fear and anger over small numbers (Appadurai, 2006) based on flimsy notions of "national ethnos".

> No modern nation, however benign its political system and however eloquent its public voices may be about the virtues of tolerance, multiculturalism, and inclusion, is free of the idea that its national sovereignty is built on some sort of ethnic genius. (Appadurai, 2006, p. 3)

Collapsing asylum into a debate about people trafficking deflects from the broader set of questions that beset public policy. Saturation of media space and time with people smuggling panics and the disturbing imagery of deaths at sea occludes all else. Centring election debate on 'stopping and turning back the boats' distracts public attention from the suite of asylum issues and sustains the exclusion of displaced populations. Unwittingly or deliberately we become spectators, and thereby agents, in a global and local project of exclusion.

CODA 1

Bianca Hall (2013) reported in *The Sydney Morning Herald* that:

> Immigration Minister Scott Morrison has instructed departmental and detention centre staff to publicly refer to asylum seekers as "illegal" arrivals and as "detainees", rather than as clients.

How we describe phenomena establishes the structure and texture of our responses. Language is a window to epistemology, values and political intent. It is important to examine discursive shifts; they signify and/or form the public mind. For now I simply want to allow the adjustment to speaking of *illegals and detainees* to hang as a backdrop for our consideration of the language of student exclusion and inclusion. Manus Island forms a metaphor for deliberate and systematic exclusion and for the enlistment of the general populous to carry that project forward.

Education too creates processes and regulates *surplus populations* (Bauman, 2004). Students whose differences or behaviour poses a risk to the good order, or to the attainment ranking of a school, are vulnerable. They are at risk of being categorised according to psycho-medical classifications that assign them to differential education and social trajectories. Their public assignation to different student categories and academic tracks is described with reference to their special educational, individual or exceptional needs (Jordan, 2007; Farrell, 2006 & 2008) and the benefits that accrue from special interventions, supports or paradoxically, from *inclusive* education. Sally Tomlinson (1982) described this form of school stratification as *benevolent humanitarianism*. Under a veil of doing good, it often repels analysis and critique.

CRISES IN SCHOOLING: THE UBIQUITY OF EXCLUSION OF LOW STATUS STUDENTS?

Those who have read David Berliner and Bruce Biddle's (1995) text *The Manufactured Crisis* or observed debates around public education over time,

both locally and globally, know that crises in education are not new. In 1995, the same year as the publication of Berliner & Biddle's text, Mike Rose (1995, p. 1) wrote:

> We seem to be rapidly losing hope. Our national discussion about public schools is despairing and dismissive, and it is shutting down our civic imagination. … We seem beguiled by a rhetoric of decline … There are many dangers in the use of such language. It blinds us to the complex lives lived out in the classroom. It pre-empts careful analysis of the nation's most significant democratic projects. And it engenders a mood of cynicism and retrenchment, preparing the public mind for extreme responses: increased layers of testing and control, denial of new resources … and the curative effects of free-market forces via vouchers and privatisation.

Rose (1995) then set out on a grand qualitative research journey across America to document and present more nuanced accounts of life in schools. His report on this project, a powerful counter-balance, is published in an educational travelogue called *Possible Lives*. Vignettes of hope; of teachers and students learning in classrooms in schools in very difficult circumstances are offered to bring balance to public discourse.

Scanning the titles of government-sponsored reports, NGO and consulting house pamphlets, together with media headlines on education attests to a perceived continuing crisis in public education and to the urgent need for reform. In England where apparently *Every Child Matters* (Office of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, 2003), a tabloid headline in *The Daily Mail* on October 8th declared: "*Schools go backwards: Pupils are worse at maths and literacy than their grandparents*". The journalist Andrew Levy (2013) reported that not only are English pupils lagging behind their grandparents, but that according to the OECD they are now ranked below countries such as Estonia, Poland and the Slovak Republic.

I am not suggesting that schooling is free from serious challenges. Clearly the gap between the attainment levels of high and low SES student cohorts, students from minority population groups remains an indictment of the underachievement of many jurisdictions around the world (Teese and Lamb, 2007; Gillborn, 2008). The Millennium Goals (United Nations, 2002) remain a long reach:

- The importance of education for the girl child is still not universally accepted or guaranteed.
- Children in areas of conflict experience long periods of interruption to their schooling and outbreaks of peace do not readily deliver the infrastructure required to compensate for the loss of education.
- Jurisdictions across Europe have turned away from traveller and Romani children who are condemned to hawking for money from tourists in the shopping districts of the capitals.
- Other forms of child labour and child marriage threaten the education of too many children.

- Disabled children – notwithstanding the UN Conventions on the Rights of People with Disability – continue to experience an educational lottery as the report Held Back (Victorian Equal Opportunities & Human Rights Office, 2012) declared.

The Council of Australian Government's (COAG) Report: *Education 2012* reveals mixed findings including the obstinacy of systemic educational underperformance. Key findings include:

- Participation in preschool remains high and school performance in the early years is improving.
- The average scores improved in Years 3 and 5 in reading and in Year 5 in numeracy. No improvements were registered in Years 7 and 9.
- Australia under-performs behind top countries in these key areas.
- While year 12 attainments have increased, particularly for Indigenous students over one quarter of young people are not fully engaged in work or study after leaving school. This represents deterioration over a five-year period.

The Mitchell Institute at Victoria University hosted a roundtable discussion on education and health policy in 2014. The unpublished discussion paper also points to minimal yield for increasing Federal, State and Territory governments' investment in education over the last decade. International research reflects flaws in the measurement of student outcomes (Stobart, 2010; Slee, 2011) and this undermines the precision and veracity of interpretations of student progress. Levels of student disengagement, as evidenced in indicators such as retention, absenteeism and non-enrolment, remain high. School systems reflect greater divisions within a hierarchy of schools determined by examination results and escalating mechanisms of accountability (Ball, 2013).

The crisis in schooling is officially ascribed variously to a composite of factors.

This representation of causes of educational crises in Figure 1 is too still a representation; the boxes are too neat and separate, the lines are too straight and unidirectional. I offer it as a sketch to which we need to apply a great deal more ink. Policy analysis requires the representation of the messiness of context, players, ideology and implementation contests (Ball, 2013; Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). This chapter will not undertake such a task. Rather, I will point to some perverse effects of education policy that impact profoundly on vulnerable students or construct vulnerabilities that attenuate social opportunities and inclusion.

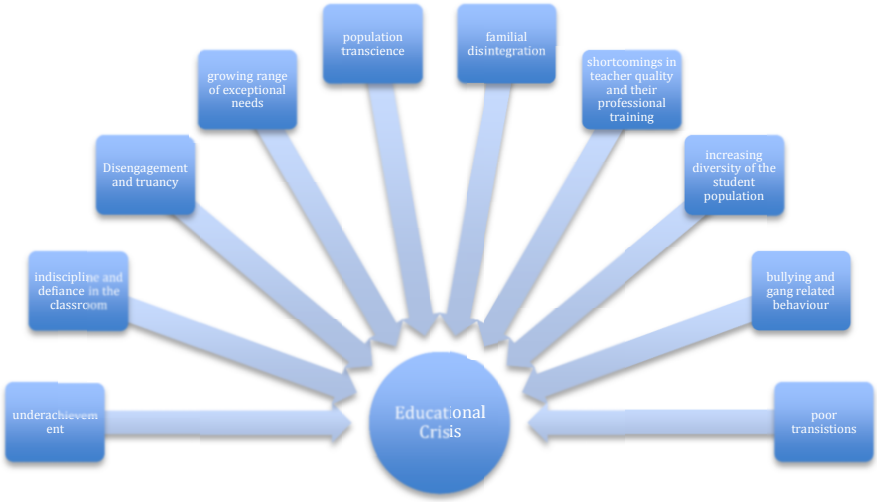

Figure 1. Causes of educational crises.

COMMISSIONING INDIFFERENCE, CREATING STRANGERS

Jeffrey Sachs' (2005, p. 9) presentation of the struggle of a doctor to save the lives of men, women and children who perish from treatable illnesses "*but for the want of a dollar a day*" is stark. "*The world*", he writes, "*has decided to* ***look away***". A United Nations Envoy to Africa, Stephen Lewis (2005), describes his perpetual rage against the interventions from developed countries that deepen suffering in Africa and benefit those who claim to be helping. Like Jones (2006) he cites the *structural adjustment programme* that underwrites World Bank and "its sibling" the International Monetary Fund aid. Let us explore the act of looking away and its broader applications. This can be explained in a number of ways. First, the scale of the problems invites a sense of hopelessness leading to inactivity. Second, embarrassment by our abundance, that we seek to protect, expresses itself in indifference. Third, distance builds immunity from suffering. Fourth, the machinery of the development industry, and professional interest therein, leads us to understand that poverty is not everybody's business.

Geographies of injustice and exclusion (Sibley, 1995; Harvey, 1996) have inscribed themselves across the globe. Conflict, disease, drought, disasters prompted by climate change, prompt such suffering. In our enclaves of privilege we do look away from the distant disaster. Our indifference doesn't draw attention. Obviously the distance between privilege and disadvantage is not at all great. *They walk amongst us* (Slee, 2011, p. 22). Dorling (2010), Toynbee and Walker (2008), Wilkinson and Pickett (2009), Rainwater and Smeeding (2003) and Kozol (1991) collectively chart the dimensions of the antecedents of exclusion in affluent

countries. Sennett (2006) exposes *The Culture of New Capitalism* in his Castle Lectures at Yale University that begets social fragmentation; *a crowded city of lightly engaged people. The spectre of uselessness* (Sennett, 2006, p. 181) and redundancy deepens the separation of people and fractures communities as individuals seek to avoid encroaching poverty. Bauman (2004) describes this process in detail. New formations of capital produce flawed consumers estranged from the marketplace. The intensification of competition builds fear of outsiders and constructs, metaphorically and literally, walled communities. We seek refuge from those whose presence threatens our relative privilege. In an act of absolution from responsibility, the causes of social atrophy are rendered technical, standing outside deliberate decisions by human actors.

> … the production of human waste has all the markings of an impersonal, purely technical issue. The principal actors in the drama are 'terms of trade', 'market demands', 'competitive pressures', 'productivity' or 'efficiency requirements', all covering up or explicitly denying any connection with the intentions, will, decisions and actions of real humans with names and addresses. (Bauman, 2004, p. 40)

Whatever the causes, the multiple impacts of exclusion are devastating and very human.

In *The Irregular School* (Slee, 2011) I suggested that confronted by the ubiquity and antiquity (Levitin, 2010) of exclusion, a condition of collective indifference to a growing raft of vulnerable and marginal students is fuelled by an ethic of competitive individualism. Students, in an era of high performance and high audit cultures, are reduced to the bearers of results. They directly impact on a school's overall results, and in turn, their position on rankings. Students represent either value or risk to schools contingent on their academic potential. Schools engage in a form of academic triage (Gillborn & Youdell, 1999) as they manage enrolments and stratify students (Gamoran, 2010; Oakes, 2005) according to projected academic attainment. As has always been the case there are winners and losers. There are those who are in and those who are out.

Of course, as Bauman (2004) observes in the larger social sphere, in education this activity of within school stratification and exclusion is rendered benign within a discourse of care, support and special educational needs. In order to excuse young people from school-based and national testing programmes, special educational needs classifications can be applied. It is assumed that this will be of benefit to so-called special needs students. In the Australian state of Victoria, bodies such as the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO, 2012) and the Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (2012) have indeed questioned this assumption. There is a growing body of evidence (Keslair, Maurin, & McNally, 2011) to suggest that the time-honored practices of segregated provisions of special education ameliorate the condition of educational and social exclusion. However, the common sense is that marginal young people's education is improved through their separation from their peers and interventions administered by expert professionals. The regular classroom teacher has permission to "look-

away". Even within programmes of inclusive education, students assigned to categories of disability frequently spend their days with teacher aides who become social chaperones and *de facto* teachers (Kearney, 2011).

PERMANENTLY TEMPORARY

The revision of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders - DSM* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) stands as testimony to the expanding lists of disorders and syndromes that are discovered and diagnosed in the community. Reading the annual reports of large and politically powerful self-help groups such as *Children and Adults with Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder* (ADHD) is salutary. Some researchers point to the improvement of countless children through the discovery and treatment of ADHD (Barkly, 2006; Cooper, 2008), others disagree and urge caution (Greenberg, 2010; Rose & Rose, 2013; Rose, 2005; Whitaker, 2010; Frances, 2013). Nikolas Rose's (2007) observations of the ubiquity and uncritical acceptance of brain sciences should be of concern for educators.

We are told by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare that 1 in 4 young people experience mental health problems (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare). This is a very large number. My purpose or interest is not to prove or disprove psychiatric disorders. I am however moved by the warnings of people like Allen Frances who led the fourth revision of the DSM. He writes:

> Because it sets the crucial boundary between normality and mental illness, DSM has gained a huge societal significance and determines all sorts of important things that have an enormous impact upon people's lives – like who is considered well and who is sick; what treatment is offered; who pays for it; who gets disability benefits; who is eligible for mental health, school, vocational, and other services; who gets to be hired for a job, can adopt a child, or pilot a plane, or qualifies for life insurance; whether a murderer is a criminal or a mental patient; what should be the damages awarded in lawsuits; and much, much more. (Frances, 2013, p. xii)

He goes on to sketch the dimensions of over-diagnosis and mislabelling:

> Because of diagnostic inflation, an excessive proportion of people have come to rely on antidepressants, antipsychotics, antianxiety agents, sleeping pills and pain meds. … One out of every five U.S. adults uses at least one drug for a psychiatric problem; 11 percent of all adults took an antidepressant in 2010; nearly 4 percent of our children are on a stimulant and 4 percent of our teenagers are taking an antidepressant; 25 percent of nursing home residents are given antipsychotics. In Canada between 2005 and 2009, the use of psychostimulants went up by 36 percent and SSRIs by 44 percent. (Frances, 2013, pp. xiv-xv)

The challenge for educators is that mental illness or attention disorders are not applied as a proxy for problems within the structure, culture and activity of

schooling (Slee, 1995). Students publicly assigned to lower academic or to special education tracks are academically compromised. There is a school to prison pipeline that is facilitated through student support structures. Inclusion has become the agent for exclusion.

This regulation of student populations is not simply administered through these SEN processes. Scrutiny of alternative, second-chance and home schooling activity reflects another process of population regulation and exclusion in schooling. As researchers such as Parsons (2009), Parsons, Godfrey and Hayden (2001), Mills and McGregor (2013) and Te Riele (2009) argue, such provision, though indicative of deep flaws in the organization of mass education, could be instructive to education policy makers, school administrators, teachers and school support personnel in redesigning more inclusive schooling. In the absence of such an effort schools will continue to consign young people to educational and social exclusion. Alternative schools do not attract the status they deserve, lying as they do in the educational periphery along with their students and teachers. Thinking about such forms of schooling and student calibrations returns me to thinking about Manus. Travelling from Queen Alia airport in Jordan to the city centre, the taxi driver noticed in his rear-view mirror that I was staring out across a large expanse of poor and crowded housing on the margins of the city. Children were playing on the dusty ground between the precarious buildings. "*That is Widhat*", he informed me. Seeing I was none the wiser for this intelligence, he expanded. "*Widhat is a temporary settlement for Palestinian refugees*". "*Oh*", I replied. There followed a long silence. He resumed talking after letting the information settle. "*It was made in 1948*".

CODA 2

Might it be said that the architecture and culture of schooling is a mirror to society? Alain Touraine (2000) has observed that the measure of the spirit of a society can be gained from examining its legal and education systems. Australian schooling embodies deep divisions along class lines, postcode having established itself as a useful proxy for academic attainment (Teese, 2013). Any discussion of *closing the gap* between Indigenous and European Australia soon turns to the stubborn question of educational underachievement and exclusion. The exclusion of students with disabilities within and outside of Australian schools has been repeatedly catalogued (Victorian Equal Opportunities and Human Rights Commission Victoria, 2012; Slee, 2011). Detailing exclusion as a feature of the organization, policies, practices and cultures of schooling (Ball, 2013) reflects our acknowledgement of the antiquity and ubiquity of exclusion. The appetite for establishing bio-identities as a first step for improving the population, and therein the achievement of young people (Rose, 2007), is large. Notwithstanding the desire to do good, this project of improvement establishes dividing practices, summons the shadow of eugenics, and yields perverse effects.

Touraine (2000) also suggests that while schools reflect deep social divisions, education holds the key to building a new social imaginary. Like Bernstein (1996)

he suggests that education is the key to building democracies and dismantling oppression and exclusion. Pearl and Knight (1999) explore the cultural, organizational and pedagogical requirements for establishing schools as an apprenticeship in democracy. Of course tinkering at the margins of education policy won't suffice. The clamor for improving education standards ignores the obvious. This is not just a drive for better test scores. New lines of interrogation need to be brought to the table, including a recognition that the experience of exclusion is a valuable planning tool.

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PART 2

Policy Approaches

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4. YOUTH POLICY AND THE PROBLEMATIC NEXUS BETWEEN EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

INTRODUCTION

I start with a personal note. In over a quarter of a century of researching with and about young people I have found that their goals have remained remarkably constant. Young people are desperately eager to learn; to build stable lives; do work that is valued and that earns them enough to live well and healthy lives; and to be connected with people they trust (see Cuervo & Wyn, 2012; Andres & Wyn, 2010; Wilson & Wyn, 1986). Today, although the Australian economy has fared better than many in the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), nonetheless young people experience high rates of unemployment, especially in some areas, and it is increasingly difficult to see the immediate benefits of (costly) education as insecure and precarious work becomes a feature of the Australian labour market. This situation extends the problem of youth transitions that was discovered in the early 1980s, when the youth labour market collapsed. Thus the problem of youth transitions persists despite young people's strong orientation to succeed in education and work.

In my role as director of the Youth Research Centre over this time, I have documented the work of programs that address the chronic challenge of engaging young people that are alienated from education and at risk of being unemployed to harness their creativity, enthusiasm and hope (Murphy, 2011; Holdsworth, 2007). While there is no agreed measure of alienation from education, the 22% of young people aged 15 – 19 who are not in education, training or work (FYA, 2013), provides an indication. Many of these programs have a long history of building respectful relationships with young people and delivering programs that give young people a sense of meaning, build their capacity to act and engage positively and support their connection to people and institutions through positive relationships, and have lead to policy and program developments that take a positive approach to youth development and engagement (Cahill, 2013; Wierenga & Wyn, 2014, 2011).

Yet it is often difficult to see these developments reflected in Australian youth policies that aim to increase young people's participation in learning and ensure that they play a productive role in Australia's workforce. This chapter focuses on the nexus between education and employment for young people; a central driver of youth policies. Education is seen as a private responsibility and a tool for creating an economically competitive workforce. An 'epidemiological fallacy' creates the impression that because some groups of young people do gain eventual labour

K. te Riele & R. Gorur (eds.), Interrogating Conceptions of 'Vulnerable Youth' in Theory, Policy and Practice, 49–61.

market security from educational credentials, therefore all young people would achieve such security and prosperity if they were able to be coerced or coaxed into completing post-secondary education. Recognising that the nexus between education and work is increasingly problematic (for young people and for governments), this chapter argues that it is timely to rethink policy frameworks.

AUSTRALIAN YOUTH POLICY

Australian youth policy has, since the 1980s been strongly aligned with OECD countries in making the transition from school to work its central focus (Wyn, 2009). In general, this has reflected the widespread understanding that young people's educational participation and engagement with work would meet the need for new skills in service and knowledge economies, and flexible human capital that will enable national economies to be competitive in an increasingly global context (OECD, 2013). Informed by this approach, Australia has tended to follow the UK in developing policy measures that increasingly target specific age groups in order to align all young people with standard trajectories through education and into work. As many researchers have pointed out, this approach has lead to the creation of increasingly finely tuned binaries of worthy/unworthy and at risk/mainstream youth within the social and welfare benefits that are intended to support young people (Mizen, 2004; Kelly, 2006; France, 2007). Worthy youth are those who conform to standard trajectories of transition from education into work in time and by age. Standard trajectories include for example the completion of secondary education by the age of 18 or 19 and the entry into a full-time job or into an education or training position. The unworthy and at risk are those who miss a step in the transition process by leaving secondary school before they have completed Year 12 or the equivalent, or who do not have a job and are not in an educational or training institution. New categories have emerged to describe risky trajectories, such as 'not being in education or employment', resulting in the increasingly common use of the acronym NEETS to describe young people who are deemed to be at risk. More recently, the categories of underemployed and overeducated have also been coined, in an implicit recognition of the rise of insecure work that is part-time and short-term (even for the educated) and the increasing challenge of matching the skill sets that young people have with labour market needs (ILO, 2013).

This process of refining the expectations on young people who are in receipt of welfare support has been analysed by Mizen (2004) who demonstrates how UK youth policy in the 1990s and 2000s created expectations of age-appropriate transitions (e.g. secondary school completion by age 18/19) and full-time engagement with further education or employment beyond that. As opportunities for full time employment have reduced (for young people and increasingly for older workers as well), policies have increasingly placed the onus on young people to conform to prescribed patterns of engagement with education and work, with the aim of limiting government responsibility for income support. In Australia, Kelly has described this as a form of governance over youth, arguing that youth policies

aim to create a particular kind of subject – one that is reflexive and autonomous, described as an Entrepreneurial Self (Kelly, 2006). Against this backdrop, it is worth reflecting on how youth policies create a language that constructs deficits and inadequacies in young people that derive not from the young people themselves, but from increasingly unresponsive educational systems and insecure labour markets.

In January 2010, Australian youth policy was revised under the Learn or Earn policy framework (COAG, 2009). This meant that in order to be eligible for income support (the Youth Allowance) young people needed to hold a Year 10 Certificate or equivalent, be engaged in 25 hours a week of education or training in full-time education or in paid employment until they are aged 17, restricting income support to young people under 21 who have not attained a Year 12 or equivalent qualification. This development made income support dependent on conformity to a sanctioned engagement in education or employment.

In 2014 the focus on education to work was intensified, placing the onus on young people (rather than governments or business) to respond to a global downturn in employment for the young (ILO, 2013). Unemployed youth over the age of 21 became eligible for income support through a new allowance called Newstart. At the time of writing this chapter, the Australian Parliament was considering changes to youth policies announced in the Federal Government's 2014-2015 budget (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2014). Although the outcome was unclear at the time of writing, it is instructive to analyse this particular policy proposal, because it highlights the intensification of a blaming and punitive approach to youth through policies. Eligibility for unemployment benefits (Newstart) would be raised from 22 years, (which is the present age of eligibility) to 24 years, with the effect that income support for young people under the age of 24 would significantly reduced. The Youth Affairs Coalition of Victoria (YACVIC) calculated that under this model young people would lose around $48 a week (YACVIC, 2014). But perhaps the most striking element of the proposed legislation is that young people under the age of 30 would not be eligible for any income support for the first six months of their unemployment, and then their receipt of income support would be dependent on participation in 'work for the dole'. It was also suggested that during this time young people would be required to apply for 40 jobs a week, but after an outcry from youth and community organisations and the business community, this requirement was dropped (see for example YACVIC, 2014). However, young people would only be eligible for income support for six months at a time, after which payments would be cut off for a further six months. This means that young people would be ineligible for income support for 12 months out of every 18. The only implication one can draw from this proposal is that the government is labouring under the misapprehension that there are enough jobs for everyone; that young people who are unemployed are not making enough effort to secure one of these jobs, and therefore need to be driven into the labour market by hardship.

There are several further elements that support this view. Firstly, the government has withdrawn crucial federally-funded programming and partnerships

to support young people. This programming, which includes the Compact with Young Australians (offering a guaranteed place in education or training until the age of 17); the Youth Connections Program (connecting disadvantaged young people with activities to support their re-engagement with school, community, work, and family); the School Business Partnership Brokers Program (supporting student engagement with education); the Special Assistance Schools Legislation (providing funding for alternative learning programs) and Smarter Schools (supporting teachers to improve literacy and numeracy). At the State level, where responsibility for education is held in Australia, there has been a systematic reduction of public funding for Technical and Further Education, further reducing young people's opportunities. The proposal to withdraw systematic, programmatic support for young people means that they are 'on their own' in facing the challenge of making the right educational choices and in finding employment.

Secondly, the proposals make no acknowledgement of the reduction in jobs available for young people. In this respect, the proposals stand in stark contrast to the broader youth policy environment in which there is acknowledgement that globally the issue of youth unemployment is in crisis, and of the wider role of education as a site for social inclusion, cultural expression and creativity and civic engagement (OECD, 2013). This is addressed in the next section.

THE TRANSITION FROM EDUCATION TO EMPLOYMENT IS A GLOBAL PROBLEM

A raft of reports has identified an existing global downward trend in youth employment, a trend that was exacerbated significantly by the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) (ILO, 2013; OECD, 2013). Globally, the number of employed young people (16-19 years) fell by 4.6 million in OECD countries between 2007 and 2011 (OECD, 2013, p. 6). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report notes that those not in education, employment or training (NEET) are likely to be in poor communities, to be experiencing poor health, and to be young women (OECD, 2013, p. 6). Although Australia has not experienced the extreme youth unemployment rates of some countries (such as Greece, Portugal and Ireland), nonetheless unemployment has increased since the GFC. In 2012, the unemployment rate for Australian 15-19 year olds was 17.7% compared with 8% for young adults (FYA, 2013, p. 6). Only four out of five students who start school complete their secondary education (FYA, 2013, p. 6), and although the rate of school completion is increasing slowly, chronic rates of non-completion of schooling point to the persistence of a group of highly marginalised young people. Overall, unemployment was 11% for young Australians aged 15-24, and 20% of all casual workers in Australia are young people aged 15-19 years (FYA, 2013:15). Underemployment and labour force underutilisation rates for 15-24 year-olds are considerably higher than for the whole labour force population (FYA, 2013: 16). These figures reflect the impact of global processes on education and labour markets. Studies of youth transitions in many countries by the OECD and the International Labour Organisation (ILO)

confirm that it is now taking longer for young people to get into employment after completing post-secondary education, and for some groups in areas of economic deprivation, this can take up to three or four years (ILO, 2013). In Australia, recent research also confirms that it is taking a longer time for young people to get employment (FYA, 2013).

A recent report by the OECD highlights the serious (global) challenge of youth unemployment. A working party on social policy generated a scoping paper *Social Policies for Youth: Bridging the Gap to Independence* (OECD, 2013). This report reveals that "the total number of employed young people (aged between 16 and 29 years) fell by 4.6 million in OECD countries between 2007 and 2011, despite a rise in the youth population of 1.8 million over the same period" (OECD, 2013, p. 8). As discussed below in more detail, the report notes that not enough is known about the most vulnerable young people, but highlights the risk of withdrawing income support for the most vulnerable, because "where no safety nets are available, the young have to rely on their families which tends to increase inequality" (OECD, 2013, p. 9). It also points to the long-term (or scarring) effects of long term unemployment on young people's capacity to work in the future. The scoping paper focuses on the implementation of programs that support young people to be in education or training, apprenticeships and also involve mentoring. The paper also highlights the strong correlation between youth and poverty, finding that "poverty rates for youth are higher than for the working-age population (19% compared to 16%). While NEETs are overrepresented among poor youth (accounting for 32% of this group), the large majority of poor youth is in education (44% of all poor youth) or employment (24% of poor youth) (OECD, 2013: 10).

Yet current youth policy frameworks in Australia, that fail to recognise the needs of the most marginalised, the poor and those who face the challenges of mental health issues or physical disability, are therefore likely to exacerbate existing inequalities. In 2009 young people aged 20-24 years from disadvantaged backgrounds (those in the lowest 20% of socio-economic status) were found to be one third less likely to have undertaken a bachelor's degree, compared to their peers in the most advantaged 20% (ABS, 2009). Young indigenous people were 32% less likely to complete secondary school than their non-indigenous peers (ABS, 2012a). Even amongst those attending higher education inequalities persist. Figures show that young people from lower socio-economic circumstances are less likely to attend prestigious universities (James et al., 2004) and after graduation, patterns of inequality also appear. Although women represent the majority of university graduates, employment patterns and pay rates for graduates continue to favour men (ABS, 2012b).

As with most OECD reports, there is an underlying logic that needs to be scrutinised: the assumption that increasing the level of skills and education levels of a population will necessarily be reflected in an increase in rates of employment in work of quality and security, that enables young people to secure a livelihood. While increasing levels of education is a public good, and will render many benefits to those who are educated, it is far from clear that this will in itself create jobs. The logic that because those who are unemployed are the most likely to be

those who have poor levels of education, and those with the highest levels of education tend to be amongst those who have secure, well paid work creates an epidemiological fallacy. The fallacy is that if everyone were to have high levels of education, everyone would be employed in secure, well-paid jobs. Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2014) refer to the flawed narrative of "schooling, economics and productivity" that assumes that widespread conformity to educational pathways will guarantee both national economic prosperity and individual prosperity. Research shows that the nature of the relationship between educational credentials and employment is far from straightforward. For example, longitudinal research on Australian and Canadian youth during the 1990s and early 2000s by Andres and Wyn (2010) found that men tended to benefit the most from their educational investment, and this finding is reinforced by the analysis of Australian longitudinal data by Cuervo et al. (2012). Andres and Wyn (2010) also found that the work that people ended up doing was often only tangentially related to their educational qualifications. Yet the premise of a strong link between education and employment persists, and may be obscuring the reality of a far more complex relationship between these two domains.

TRANSITION REGIMES AND PRECARIOUS WORK

Despite its complexity, the relationship between education and employment plays a significant and increasingly dominant role in the lives of young people on a global scale. In all countries there is a concerted push by governments to increase levels of education. This in turn has increased the mobility of young people, as they respond to global education markets (for those seeking to gain the most prestigious education) and as young people in rural areas shift to urban and metropolitan areas to be educated. These forms of mobility are themselves contributing to new inequalities, as those who have the resources to be mobile are able to access opportunities, but those who lack the social and economic resources to be mobile see their disadvantage entrenched. Global employment markets also have a direct impact on young people's opportunities and risks. As Brown et al. (2011) explain, employers are increasingly seeking to get the best price for qualified youth in global markets that see the young qualified competing internationally for jobs.

One way of looking at these trends is to recognise that young people in all countries are subject to the transition regimes of education and work that transcend national borders. Transition regimes, a term employed by du Bois-Reymond and Stauber (2005, p. 63), refer to the institutional processes, practices and discourses of education systems, labour markets and welfare systems that shape the meaning and experience of youth through the implementation of standard institutional transition points and statuses, such as the completion of secondary education or the entry into full-time employment. Universal completion of secondary education is a reality in developed countries and a goal in developing countries, and tertiary education is increasingly normative. As young people in different countries and locations spend longer in education, they experience common generational effects, including increased or new forms of dependence on their families, or the state, for

a longer time than the previous generation, and increased levels of financial stress as they strive to finance their education and to meet debts incurred during their education years (ILO, 2013). A recent report on young Australian (FYA, 2014) concludes that young people will struggle to maintain the levels of economic status achieved by their parents, and that many are likely to be worse off than the previous generation. The mobilities referred to above are also creating generational effects, as young people experience the risks and opportunities of mobility (or immobility) to gain an education or to get work. For example, analysing the experiences of young Koreans in Canada, Yoon (2014) argues that processes of flexible global and local labour markets have redefined 'employability' to include the demonstration of the capacity to be mobile. In this context travel creates forms of cultural capital that are marketable, and travel contributes to 'the economy of experience'.

Thus transition regimes reflect both the institutionally condoned trajectories that align age with set markers of achievement (leaving school, participating in postsecondary education or training and gaining employment) and responses by young people to these challenges (being mobile to access education and work and to demonstrate experience of travel). However, although institutionally sanctioned transition regimes reinforce linear trajectories, the patterns of young people's lives reflect a breakdown of 'regular' transitions.

This is especially highlighted by the spread of precarious work. Although definitions of precarious work vary, there has been increasing interest in understanding the rise of unstable labour markets and their impact on young people. For example, Scarpetta and Sonnett's (2012) analysis of precarious work amongst young people in OECD countries reveals the widespread scale of temporary work. On average, nearly 40 percent of young people in the OECD aged 15 – 24 were employed in temporary work, and the percentage is as high as 50 percent in Slovenia, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Portugal, France, Germany and Switzerland (Scarpetta & Sonnett, 2012, p. 7). They argue that other countries, such as the Netherlands, would also have higher rates of precarious work if the focus was on full-time employment, rather than on the mix of education and part-time work.

Precarious work has a long-term impact on young people, often in the form of a foreclosure of the linear transitions that governments expect. For example, Chauvel (2010) identifies the "scarring effect" of unemployment and underemployment amongst young people in France. Chauvel's research shows that there are long-term effects of precarious work and of unemployment, both on individual lives and for welfare regimes (which depend on high levels of labour market engagement by the young). Chauvel argues that a *génération précaire* is emerging in France, made up by well-educated young people who are the children of upwardly mobile Baby Boomers. This generation, he argues, will bear the (scarring) effects of reduced opportunities for employment throughout their lives.

This discussion has drawn attention to the problematic logic of policies that assume a causal link between education and the kinds of jobs that enable young people to secure their livelihood. The focus on global changes in education and

youth labour markets underlines the challenge of developing national policies about youth when young people themselves are subject to – and engage in – transnational developments in education and work. In the following sections the discussion focuses on the implications of these developments for youth policies and for young people.

IMPLICATIONS

There is mounting evidence that the foundations of the policy frameworks that have supported youth policies for the last thirty years are now on shaky ground. Social change that is transforming the nature (and meaning) of work, the role of education and the way that adulthood is lived is yet to be reflected in youth policy frameworks. The two premises on which Australian youth policies rest are a) that youth is primarily a developmental stage towards adulthood and b) secure adulthood can be achieved by using educational credentials and skills in workplaces. Yet, the evidence presented in this brief discussion suggests that the idea of youth as a transitional stage is far too simplistic, and a focus on youth as a developmental period alone obscures the changing nature, meaning and experience of adulthood. As so-called transitions into adulthood become more and more extended and blurred, at what point does one recognise that there is no longer a standard adulthood? The insecurity, mobility and precarity traditionally associated with youth now characterises adult life. An economic framework that assumes a close relationship between the acquisition of educational credentials and the achievement of secure work is also difficult to sustain, except with a very broad-brush view. Although educational credentials and skills are important, the relevance and use of educational credentials and skills in contemporary labour markets are not transparent. These developments mean that the idea of the transition from education to work is a serious problem for young people – and for youth policies.

Drawing on the arguments presented in this chapter, policy frameworks that place the emphasis on youth transitions risk demonising young people and produce thin policy.

Demonising Young People

The focus on youth transitions tends to be one-sided because it focuses on individual youth at the expense of recognising societal and economic change. An example is found in the response to the Global Financial Crisis, which had the immediate and far-reaching effect of increasing unemployment rates for young people. Many commentators have argued that the GFC simply exacerbated an existing trend towards insecure and precarious labour markets for young people (Standing, 2011). Precarious work, short-term contracts, non-standard working hours and job insecurity have become a regular feature of increasingly globalised labour markets, and these conditions impact particularly on young people (Campbell, 2004). Young people are not responsible for creating these conditions,

and it is unlikely that enforcing young people to live in poverty if they cannot obtain work is going to contribute to more sustainable labour markets for youth. The overwhelming focus on changing young people obscures the reality that global capital pushes down the price of labour and at the same time fractures the components of jobs so that individuals are increasingly unlikely to be able to sell their labour as a full-time and secure proposition (see Brown et al., 2011, for a discussion of this dynamic). These developments mean that it is timely to reconsider the policy frameworks that address the conditions that create vulnerable youth.

Thin Policy

The forward orientation of the idea of transitions, and its imagery of moving through a space are highly relevant to the conditions that dominate young people's lives today. However, the focus on the achievement of institutional markers of education and work alone as indicators of trajectories and achievements are too narrow to generate either an understanding of young people's transitions or of the conditions that might address vulnerabilities. Returning to the scoping report of the OECD (2013), this report focused on what it called 'vulnerable' youth (or 'NEETS') – those who were living in poverty and (but not always) not in work or in some form of formal education or training), but also tended to experience high rates of physical and mental illness and were more likely to have disabilities than their more affluent peers (OECD, 2013). Yet, while focusing exclusively on the transition through education and into work, this report acknowledges the complex web of relationships that impact on young people's capacity to access education and work. The OECD scoping paper argues that policies need to target individual characteristics (such as cognitive skills and personality traits as well as educational attainment), but also noted that policies need to address social outcomes, including mental health, substance abuse, and crime. Focusing on trajectories through education and into employment, influential reports such as the Scoping Paper (OECD, 2013) resort to individualised measures and characteristics, including personality traits and cognitive capacities that provide a picture of which individuals are lacking the traits and capacities to complete education and enter a secure labour market. Yet there is a sense of déjà vu about the reciting of these elements and the amassing of data to describe what the vulnerable and marginalised look like, comparing them to the individual traits and cognitive abilities of their 'mainstream' peers. This technology, which has been in use for the last 30 years (to describe in detail the deficits of the same groups of young people – the poor, those with mental and physical health problems, Indigenous youth and those from rural areas) has failed to change patterns of disadvantage.

Successful Interventions Promote Quality Relationships

As is common, when the OECD report turns to identify interventions that are successful in supporting young people to achieve stable, productive lives

(particularly through active engagement in learning and employment) they turn to examples of specific programs. These include school-based interventions (that involve a higher ratio of teachers to students than in mainstream classes, or that involve systematic mentoring of students by staff and other students and opportunities to be involved in community-based activities); second-chance learning opportunities that enable young people who have previously left school to engage with learning in an adult-focused environment; apprenticeships that enable young people to learn occupational skills in a practical environment; and mentoring that links young people to others in the community whom they trust (OECD, 2013, p. 101).

What all of these initiatives have in common is that they focus on the quality of relationships that enable young people to belong. While the aim is successful 'transition', the emphasis is less on measuring the achievement of predetermined markers of transition and more on enhancing the nature and quality of the relationships that connect a young person with their world. The relational focus of the kinds of programs identified above share a capacity to answer the question posed by Richard Sennett (2006, p. 5): what values and attitudes can hold people together as the institutions in which they live fragment? From young people's point of view, especially in relation to their participation in education, this question can be as simple as 'do I belong here'? As Challinor (2012) points out, the statement 'I belong here' is deceptively simple, and should not be taken at face value. What does it take for a young person to belong? To answer this question it is necessary to take account of the young person's personal and social context (past); the quality of relationships (including trust) that exist in the present; the personal and material resources they can draw on and the capacity to imagine a productive future. This framing of transition as a product of belonging enables the recognition of the quality and depth of connections, resources and relationships that enable young people to build productive lives. In one way or another, these are the key dimensions that make programs such as the ones identified by the OECD (2013) report successful, but making these dimensions visible requires a thicker, richer policy framework than transition from school to work.

While the nature and quality of relationships and their role in facilitating learning and improving educational engagement within the fields of inclusive and alternative education is widely acknowledged (te Riele, 2007; Keddie, 2014; Cooke & Muir, 2013), current educational measures favour school attendance, school retention and completion and tend to focus on the proportions of students in the top and bottom levels of performance in international testing of academic outcomes (e.g. Program for International Student Assessment [PISA], Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study [TIMSS]) (AIHW, 2014; OECD, 2013). Although these are important, there is an emerging consensus that crucial information about the processes and outcomes that are widely acknowledged by educators as fundamental to keeping young people connected to learning are missing. An extensive international literature on resilience, connectedness and belonging, for example, establishes that successful programs are based on positive interpersonal relationships, create a sense of belonging and instill young people

with a sense of self agency and ongoing engagement with learning and community (O'Brien & Bowles, 2013; Smyth et al., 2013; Libbey, 2004; Anderson et al., 2004). This is particularly true for young people who are disengaged from their existing learning environments, although all young people thrive when their capacity to form and sustain respectful relationships is improved (te Riele; 2014; McGregor & Mills, 2011; Thomson & Russell, 2007; Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004).

CONCLUSION

Drawing on the emerging dissatisfaction with the preoccupation by current frameworks with individualised and narrow measures of outcomes from learning (and into work), stakeholders drawn from university research centres, non-government organisations and not-for-profit programs have begun to identify what an alternative model for framing programs that address the needs of disadvantaged and marginalised youth might look like (Wyn et al., 2014; O'Donovan et al., 2014). Using the guiding principle of promoting respectful relationships (that enable young people to belong), this research has identified three common or shared organising principles that underpin successful programs. These programs are designed to enhance control (capacity to act), meaning (making sense) and connection (beneficial relationships), in varying combinations, depending on the focus of specific programs. For example, programs that aim to support young refugees to belong tend to focus on control, or capacity to act; programs that focus on building understanding of possible career options through connection with employers tend to focus on meaning, or making sense, and those that are focused on providing an alternative educational setting for students (which may include a community-oriented element) tend to focus on connection.

While the main focus of that project (Wyn et al., 2014) is on providing resources for educational programs that serve the needs of young people who are (or are at risk of being) alienated from mainstream school, the conceptual shift from narrow transition measures of outcomes and achievement to relational indicators has significant implications for youth and education policies. As young people's pathways to belonging become more complex and non-standard policies that focus on the resourcing of young people to manage transitions in ways that acknowledge diverse needs and circumstances will be required. The expectations of a strong relationship between education and employment that were espoused in the early 1990s need to be reviewed in the light of a far more complex set of dynamics that drive the relationship between education and employment for young people. Policies framed by a commitment to see young people belong (locally and globally), rather than simply 'transition' will provide a richer basis for addressing the challenges of these times.

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5. JUVENILE JUSTICE AND YOUTH VULNERABILITIES

INTRODUCTION

In juvenile justice systems 'vulnerability' is generally framed in terms of the concept of 'risk'. As discussed in this chapter, such framing tends to individualise the nature of vulnerability and to reinforce the idea that juvenile offending is primarily a personal responsibility. Yet, as this chapter demonstrates not only are there social patterns to youth offending but these take shape and are over-determined by developments within the wider society. Indeed, the youth vulnerabilities associated with juvenile justice are both long-term and historical (the working class and Indigenous young people have always been over-represented within the institutions of Australian criminal justice) and short-term and conjunctural (three decades of neo-liberalism constitutes a period within which the conditions that generate and exacerbate youth offending have substantially worsened). How to respond to these trends is important in constructing positive interventions in the juvenile justice arena.

This chapter argues that, by and large, the existing academic models of juvenile justice intervention are useful and worthwhile precisely because they are holistic and systematic. Experience and evidence informs us that specific applications can and do work in fostering desistance in youth offending. However, contemporary social circumstances are proving to be beyond the capacity of these models to adequately respond. For instance, reality bites when communities endure deep government cutbacks, program funding is reduced, opportunities for youth development are diminished, and social control agendas are promulgated.

The negative effect of these tendencies is most apparent in the case of Indigenous youth in Australia. This is because the dislocations and social marginalisation associated with colonialism has had particular ramifications for Indigenous young people. This is evident in recent social indicators in the 'Closing the Gap' report which shows that (Australian Government, 2014):

- By most health status measures, the health of Indigenous people is poorer than that of non-Indigenous people (e.g., life expectancy is estimated to be 10 years less than that of non-Indigenous people)
- Indigenous people have a higher exposure to health risk factors than non-Indigenous people, and higher than average child mortality rates
- Indigenous people have lower levels of educational access, participation and attainment, and lower secondary school retention rates, than non-Indigenous people

K. te Riele & R. Gorur (eds.), Interrogating Conceptions of 'Vulnerable Youth' in Theory, Policy and Practice, 63–77.

- Indigenous communities have experienced higher levels of unemployment than the total Australian population

It is also the case that the majority of Indigenous people have low incomes, especially those living in rural areas, and that the standard of accommodation remains lower than that experienced by other Australians.

As recognised by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Johnston, 1991), among other more recent reports (Gooda, 2010) and studies (Cunneen et al., 2013), the explanation for these trends relates to the severe impact colonialism has had on indigenous culture and ways of life, and the continuing effects of discriminatory policies and practices on indigenous life chances within the mainstream social institutions. If the concern is with disadvantaged young people in the context of juvenile justice, then Indigenous young people provide the exemplar of how vulnerability is penalised by criminal justice systems. Even with regard to Indigenous young people, however, there are nonetheless several initiatives which are worth considering as possible intervention measures. These, in turn, depend upon contestation over rights and self determination and their impacts upon the exercise of political will.

RISK, VULNERABILITY AND YOUTH OFFENDING

The standard social ecology approach to juvenile justice situates the problem as one that demands attention at varying levels of the social structure – for example, the individual, families, groups, neighbourhoods, communities, mass media, politics and industry. It is the interaction between individuals and their social (and natural) environments which is viewed as most important in shaping options and choices for that young person. Accordingly, crime and youth offending is explained as being a consequence of a particular person-context exchange (Ungar, 2011).

For instance, it has long been established that there is a close connection between socio-economic status and offending (Cunneen & White, 2011; White & Cunneen, 2015). This is related to the influence of various factors pertaining to the social location of young people:

- *Structural factors* such as the overall state of the economy, levels of unemployment generally, welfare provision and so on;
- *Situational factors* relating to the personal characteristics of offenders relative to their opportunities in the competition for jobs, and how marginalisation and the attractions of the criminal economy contribute to offending; and
- *Factors relating to social disorganisation*, as manifest at family and community levels, as for example when the intergenerational effects of the unemployment-criminality nexus translates into less knowledge about ordinary work and concentrations of similarly placed people in the same geographical area.

From an intervention viewpoint, the task is to identify how these factors can be manipulated in favour of the young person achieving a crime-free life. Typically, this is presented in terms of 'risk' and 'protective' factors, which operate at multiple levels (see for example, Toumbouru, 1999).

Risk Factors

That increase the likelihood of an offence occurring or being repeated.

- Characteristics of an *individual* (e.g., a child's impulsivity),
- The *family* (e.g., a parent's harsh discipline or weak supervision),
- The *social group* (e.g., peers that encourage or tolerate the occurrence of crime), and
- The *community* (e.g., a community that is disorganised and offers few alternatives to crime as a source of money or activity).

Protective Factors

That reduce the chances that people will start on a path likely to lead to breaches of the law, and that promote an alternative pathway.

- Responding to the needs of the *individual* (e.g., active promotion of self esteem),
- Enhancing *family relationships* (e.g., advice and information),
- Fostering positive social *group activity* (e.g., sport) and
- *Community* building (e.g., facilities and social structures that support involvement and attachment).

Sophisticated analyses of youth trajectories also include examination of multiple phases and transition points in a young person's life that have a bearing on their development (Developmental Crime Prevention Consortium, 1999). This generally involves discussion of two elements of transition:

Pathways

Developmental perspectives view life as a progression through various stages and transition points. These include, for example, movement of a child from the family as the prime setting for their activity, through early education, primary school, high school and adolescence, and adult life. Positive experiences in each setting and transition point will foster pro-social behaviour.

Vulnerabilities

At each life stage or transition point there is the risk of possible negative experiences that may put individuals on an at risk pathway. These might include,

for example, experience of failure in schooling, alienation, becoming involved with an anti-social peer group, and unemployment.

The hallmark of multi-factor approaches is that they usually stress the need for multi-dimensional and holistic ways of working at the local community level. They also acknowledge the crucial role of community members, including children and young people themselves, in the social development process (Krisberg, 2005; Cunneen & White, 2011). In other words, the theoretical framework gives rise to the use of multi-pronged methods and involving a wide number of agencies in addressing social problems. Many causes require many tactics and strategies operating across a number of fronts. This is a fairly standard way in which to conceptualise intervention, especially youth crime prevention, at the present time. Developmental crime prevention, for example, is frequently mapped out to include of a wide range of community-based programmes (such as those that open doors for youth involvement) in combination with early intervention programmes (such as parent support programmes).

Over time, however, the notion of risk has become so integral to official institutional responses to young offending that it now permeates the juvenile justice field. Indeed, prediction of risk has emerged as one of the most far-reaching changes in theory and practice in relation to juvenile justice in places such as Australia, Britain, the US and Canada (Muncie & Goldson, 2006; Priday, 2006; MacDonald, 2006; Case, 2007). There are at least four different ways that the concept and measurement of risk is used (Cunneen & White, 2011):

- In the context of risk and protective factors associated with offending behaviour
- As an assessment tool for access to programmes for young people under supervision or serving a custodial sentence
- As a classification tool for young people in custody to determine their security ratings, and
- As a generic measure for activating legal intervention (for example, 'three-strikes' mandatory imprisonment).

When combined with government attempts to get tough on crime, especially when these efforts relate to juvenile offenders (for example, moral panics about so called 'ethnic youth gangs'), the emphasis on risk can open the door to highly punitive and highly intrusive measures. It also displaces attention away from consideration of the whole community (which underpins holistic appreciations of risk and protective factors) and re-focuses it on the individual (who is then assessed on the basis of their particular 'deficits' and personal characteristics).

Closely linked to the concern with risk is the employment of actuarial methods of assessment, in which potential problems and problematic youth become the focus of government attention through *a priori* categorisation of young people based upon standardised risk assessment. For example, certain features or characteristics of young people (such as homelessness) are statistically linked to certain behaviours (such as shop lifting, theft or vandalism), and so every person classified as being 'homeless' is simultaneously considered 'at risk' of offending.

The street-level activities of young people, particularly when it involves alcohol and illicit drugs, is similarly framed in the language of risk, both in regards to notions of risk-taking and persons being at-risk because of their behaviour.

Adaptations of the social ecology approach to offending is central to this process since risk analysis generally involves the charting up of specific risk and protective factors that are seen to influence how individuals negotiate particular transitions and pathways in their lives. Specific factors are thus statistically correlated with certain types of behaviour and certain types of people. The implication is that if certain factors are added together there will be a predictable certainty that deviancy (or pathology) will result (see for example, Allard et al., 2013). Importantly, this kind of risk assessment is not simply being used as a diagnostic tool (i.e., to pinpoint a person's specific needs and deficits), but also in a prognostic manner, to determine which young people are most likely to offend. Specific profiles of young people are constructed whereby all young people within a certain range of empirical indicators (e.g., age group, school record, type of family, previous criminal record) are dealt with according to the risk that they (presumably) pose now and into the future. It is a process of homogenisation wherein all people with certain similarities are treated similarly. Such analyses are also used to justify pre-emptive action involving children and young people who have been so identified, for example in targeted policing of particular groups of young people on the street (White, 2013).

By their very nature, these kinds of assessment tools fail to capture the historical dynamics of societies. The tools reinterpret certain characteristics as representing the failings of individuals. This is because they are constructed on the basis of *individualised* data, rather than analysis of, for example, how state policy affects particular groups. The formation of specific kinds of groups and specific kinds of individuals, as the outcome of inequality, discrimination and the absence of opportunity, is basically lost in such analysis (Cunneen & White, 2011). In its stead, it is the consequences of these processes that are central to who is or who is not deemed to be at risk.

The identification of 'at risk' youth typically involves three steps: the identification of specific indicators of the problem, the use of indicators to identify a target group, and the implementation of an intervention to bring the target group into line with the mainstream. This process overlooks the ways in which institutions and policy processes contribute to social problems involving young people, and instead focuses on changing the young people themselves. The paradoxical element of this process is that the 'at risk' come to be stigmatised, adding to their sense of difference and marginality (White & Wyn, 2013).

Moreover, the phenomenon of 'false positives' means that individuals may suffer the negative consequences of unwanted and unneeded intervention solely due to their membership of a 'high risk' group rather than due to their individual risk profile or actual behaviour (see Case, 2007). Race and ethnicity is an important component in this process. For example, being an Indigenous person is counted as a 'risk' factor in some assessment processes (Palmer & Collard, 1993; Palmer,

1999). When this occurs, one's heritage and community identity is degraded through its assessment as a contributing factor to youth deviancy (Priday, 2006).

This individualised framing of risk factors has occurred in the context of significant social, economic and political changes over the past three decades – particularly the phenomenon of neo-liberalism (Harvey, 2005). The crime problem has likewise been re-cast as part of these broad changes. For instance, an emphasis on the exercise of individual agency has been fostered through the neo-liberal re-organisation of institutions (school, family, welfare, criminal justice): the key focus now is on *personal responsibility* for 'success/failure', doing 'good/bad' and 'advantage/disadvantage', rather than shared structural conditions, opportunities and experiences. Accordingly, the crux of state intervention is how best to manage the problem of disadvantaged groups (their presence and activities), rather than to eradicate disadvantage.

NEO-LIBERALISM AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY

The degree and depth of social inequality has implications for the social composition of those most likely to end up within the juvenile justice system. Inequality has been exacerbated and further entrenched over the past three decades of aggressive neo-liberalisation (Harvey, 2005). The main policy and practical trends associated with this are familiar, including user-pays, privatisation, and de-regulation. Contemporary notions of 'human nature' are expressed in terms of competition, self-interest and possessive individualism.Institutionally the policies and ethics of neo-liberalism are reflected in reliance upon the market for the allocation of goods and services, the shrinking of the welfare state, assertion of the role of the state as 'night watchman' (albeit with little government oversight for those at the top), and an emphasis on strong law and order and defence of private property (that includes strict control over those at the bottom).

Neo-liberalism has created major problems and difficulties for communities, and thereby been a major force in undermining 'protective' factors while increasing 'risk' factors for many young people. The net result of neo-liberalism is impoverishment for many at the same time that social privilege has skyrocketed for the few. Accompanying this there has been deterioration in public services and services for the public, increased costs associated with fees and co-payments, and feelings of a democratic deficit and political disenfranchisement. On the other hand, social privilege has been on the rise, as manifest in the further concentration of wealth and power, and powerful interests have been served through the cutting back of state regulation designed to protect citizens, consumers, workers, and future generations. Recent consternation at the 2014 federal budget in Australia because of its perceived unfairness highlights the inequities accompanying neo-liberal policies, as well as growing resistance to them.

Trends at the collective level are having a devastating effect on young people. In this regard, class has rarely been more relevant to social analysis and to any consideration of juvenile justice in particular. Class, as defined here, is basically a *social relation.* It is directly associated with economic, social and political power,

and is evident in how laws are framed, institutions are organised and societal resources are distributed (White, 2008). Class is also a lived experience. People act in the world in accordance to their relationship with other people around them, and as shaped by the communal resources available to them (see for examples, Chatterton & Hollands, 2003; White & Wyn, 2013). Such resources are both material and cultural in nature. The class situation of young people is, therefore, contingent – it very much depends upon family and community resources and it changes over time.

Typically, young people's class situation is defined and distinguished on the basis of: the type and geographical location of their housing; the capacity of their parent/s to provide material support; the nature of their education – state school or private school; the age at which their formal education terminates; their age at entry into the labour market and the nature of their employment (if any); and the type of leisure activities that they pursue (Jamrozik, 2001; White & Wyn, 2013). Community resources are distributed via the market, the state, and informal community and family networks. For young people, what happens in each of these spheres has a huge bearing on their class situation. The phenomenon of unemployment is the biggest single factor in the transformation of young people, their families and their communities. In a wage-based economy, subsistence is largely contingent upon securing paid employment. If this is not available, then a number of social problems are often invoked, including and especially crime (Wacquant, 2008).

The context within which concern about juvenile offending is occurring, and is perceived to be a growing problem, is defined by the reconfiguration of economic and political relations, one consequence of which is the increasing polarisation of rich and poor, both between countries and within countries. Wealth and power are increasingly concentrated into fewer and fewer hands. Simultaneously, there is the impoverishment of many communities, neighbourhoods and families around the globe, and the escalation of unemployment (and under-employment) worldwide (Wacquant, 2008; Standing, 2011). The global financial crisis of 2008 further exacerbated the unemployment problem. The jobless rate among the 34 countries of the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development, for example, was predicted to be around 8 percent at the end of 2014, leaving some 48 million people out of work (OECD, 2013).

For young people in particular, the collapse of the full-time labour market has been devastating. The decline in manufacturing employment, use of new labour-saving technology, the movement and flight of capital away from inner-cities and regional centres, changing workplace organisation based on casualised labour, massive retrenchments by private and public sector employing bodies, and competition from older (especially female) workers have all served to severely diminish the employment opportunities and conditions of young people in Western countries (White & Wyn, 2013). Young people continue to face record unemployment levels in many countries, with rates in 2013 exceeding 60% in Greece, 52% in South Africa, 55% in Spain and around 40% in Italy and Portugal

(Goldson, 2014; OECD, 2013). This is the context within which youth crime routinely occurs.

Why is it that the profiles of 'young offenders' tend to look basically the same throughout youth justice systems in 'advanced' industrialised countries? The profile consists predominantly of young men, with an over-representation of youth drawn from minority ethnic groups, with low income, low educational achievement, poorly paid and/or casualised employment (if any) and strained familial relations (Goldson & Muncie, 2006; Goldson, 2011). These are the standard defining characteristics of children and young people most frequently found in juvenile detention centres and custodial institutions. In other words, the processes whereby identifiable groups of young people are criminalised tend to follow a distinctive social pattern. In effect, the criminal justice system has a series of filters which screen young people on the basis of both offence categories (serious/non-serious; first time/repeat offending) and social characteristics (gender, ethnic status, cultural background, family circumstances, education, employment, income). It is the most disadvantaged and structurally vulnerable young people who tend to receive the most attention from justice officials at all points of the system.

Neo-liberalism is now an ingrained aspect of public policy and material provision. Institutionally, each individual is being forced to fend for themselves, and this has been elevated to the level of *moral good* – to fail at getting a job, an income, suitable welfare, and an education is construed as personal failure *in* the marketplace, not a failure *of* the marketplace. The credo is 'you deserve what you don't get!' For young people living in vulnerable communities, this makes them even more susceptible to the attractions, benefits and dangers of crime, as well as provides a context for anti-social behaviour.

The response of the state to these trends is to clamp down on this selfsame young people. Entrenched economic adversity has been accompanied by state attempts to intervene in the lives of marginalised groups, usually by coercive measures, which is itself a reflection of a broader shift in the role of the state, from concerns with 'social welfare' to renewed emphasis on the 'repressive' (Goldson, 2005; Wacquant, 2008; White, 1996). The problems of vulnerable young people (which are well charted in social ecology approaches) are translated into the issue of problem youth. These young people are subject to extensive surveillance based upon various risk assessment measures utilised by police services, juvenile justice agencies and welfare service providers.

States that have the greatest levels of inequality also tend to be the most punitive in their criminal justice responses (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Thus, those states that have most fully embraced the neo-liberal agenda like the USA, Australia, New Zealand and the UK have simultaneously adopted more punitive penal policies, particularly compared to some European jurisdictions that have sustained more social democratic and corporatist forms of government and more moderate criminal justice policies (Goldson, 2005; Lacey 2008; Muncie, 2013).

The intrusiveness of the state is, in turn, biased toward some groups of young people more than others. This is indicated, for example, in the extreme over-representation of Indigenous young people in the criminal justice system in Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2013). The history and dynamics of state intervention in particular communities varies considerably, but institutionalised racism has been, and will continue to be, extremely damaging to these young people. This used to be called blaming the victim. Insofar as this is the case, it demonstrates that juvenile justice is basically framed by politics, not by evidence-based analysis. Poverty is not a technical exercise that can adequately be responded to solely by applying new models, metrics and approaches – fundamentally it is about political economy and wider political decisions (for example, try comparing the USA with Scandinavia on the provision of welfare, education, and health and then in relation to crime rates, measures of happiness, social respect).

JUVENILE JUSTICE AND INDIGENOUS YOUTH

From an analytical viewpoint, transitions of self for young people can, and should, be understood in the context of transitions of society. Otherwise, as we have just indicated, specific children and young people become the 'problem' rather than the social processes and institutions that make them vulnerable (White & Wyn, 2013). Children change not because of what they do, but as a consequence of what their environment provides. Youth experience is intrinsically context bound insofar as each young person's 'way of life' is determined by where they live and the resources available to them. Individuals are already and always members of families, households, neighbourhoods and communities. Our ideas, knowledge and practical capacities are grounded in social relationships that predate us and that cut across generations, as well as being shaped by forces and factors well beyond the local. This gives valuable leverage, still, for positive intervention. But fundamentally the change has to come at the community, as well as the individual level. This is no more evident than in the case of Indigenous young people, families and communities.

Juvenile justice is generally institutionalised as separate from adult corrections, and as involving departments of health and human services, rather than criminal justice departments. The rationale for intervention tends to accept that young people in society are more vulnerable relative to adults, and that there is a need to devise positive developmental pathways for young people rather than punishments and retributive justice. Every jurisdiction in Australia has embraced some form of 'restorative justice', usually in the form of juvenile conferencing that allows particular offenders and particular cases to be dealt with in less coercive settings and with reparative objectives (White & Cunneen, 2011), although recent changes in Queensland appear to be undermining this in that state (Hutchinson, 2014).

Nonetheless, the overarching focus of juvenile justice today seems to be less about the welfare, support and/or rehabilitation of the young person than with making them accountable and ensuring a modicum of community safety. A hybrid

system that combines punitive features (such as juvenile detention) with reparation philosophies (such as juvenile conferencing) makes sense only insofar as it reflects a differentiated profile of young offenders. The serious and persistent offender is liable to be punished up to and including the use of detention. The low-risk offender is asked to make amends for their wrongdoing by repairing the harm and perhaps making an apology. Meanwhile, the potential offender is dealt with through deployment of risk assessment technologies and ongoing surveillance in order to prevent future deviation. All of this is over-laden by clear racial and class biases in the system.

For example, recent figures on the number and rate of young people under supervision in Australia (both in the community and in detention) show a significant fall in the number of young people under supervision in 2012-13. Yet of those under supervision, young people aged 10-17 from the areas of lowest socioeconomic status were more than 5 times as likely to be under supervision as those from the areas of highest socioeconomic status (AIHW, 2014a, p. 7).

Meanwhile, between 2008-09 and 2012-13, the level of Indigenous over-representation in supervision on an average day *increased* in all states and territories for which data were available, except in South Australia and Tasmania (AIHW, 2014a, p. 1). Furthermore, in 2012-13, Indigenous young people were 17 times as likely as non-Indigenous young people to have been under supervision and they were also, on average:

- Younger (27% were aged 10-14, compared with 13%)
- More likely to complete multiple periods of supervision (22%, compared with 14%)
- Spending longer, in total, under supervision during the year (195 days, on average, compared with 180) (AIHW, 2014a, p. 1).

To put these figures into further perspective, the Indigenous youth population comprises less than 5% of the total youth population in Australia. Yet, 49% of all young men held in youth detention were Indigenous (that is, almost half), and 54% of all young women held in youth detention were Indigenous (that is, more than half) (AIHW, 2014b, p. 1). Indigenous young people under supervision were more likely than non-Indigenous young people to have lived in remote or very remote areas before entering supervision (10% compared with less than 1%), and also more likely to have lived in areas of lowest socioeconomic status before entering supervision (44% compared with 35%) (AIHW, 2014a, p. 15).

Existing juvenile justice systems in Australia thus tend exhibit a particular kind of bifucation: 'soft' cases dealt with leniently, developmentally and at front end of system; 'hard' cases are dealt with harshly, involve targeted populations, and shift particular young people toward the back-end of the criminal justice system. This occurs in relation to juvenile conferencing as well. Restorative justice measures are usually located at the front end of juvenile justice systems, as a form of diversion from deeper into the criminal justice system, and reserved for first-time offenders and trivial offences**.** The system then filters out the 'hard' and the 'chronic' – i.e., Indigenous young offenders, those who most need assistance, those who could

benefit from 'doing something' rather than having something 'done to them' – and places them in the harshest reaches of the system.

Given that one consequence of this bifurcated system is extreme over-representation of the socially disadvantaged and especially of Indigenous young people, how then should juvenile justice systems address these issues? One response that is finding increasing favour is 'justice reinvestment'.

> Under this approach, a portion of the public funds that would have been spent on covering the costs of imprisonment are diverted to local communities that have a high concentration of offenders. The money is invested in community programs, services and activities that are aimed at addressing the underlying causes of crime in those communities. (Gooda, 2010, p. 3)

Theoretically, 'The community has to be involved and committed to not only taking some ownership of the problem but also some ownership of the solutions. In my view, Justice Reinvestment if done properly also provides offenders a form of accountability to their community …. Accountability to community is about making communities safer' (Gooda, 2010, p. 5).

The importance of community and of local communities in particular, is reflected in research that demonstrates that:

- Children and young people's lives are enabled through *high quality connections* to people, institutions and places;
- Where young people do not have high quality connections, *local services* can play a supporting role in keeping young people connected if they work in a coordinated way;
- Responsibility for young people's well-being and welfare must be exercised at the *local level;*
- Services, advice and support must be relevant to the *young person's cultural, social and geographical milieu;*
- Children and young people will accept advice and support from *adults who they know and trust*, and this takes time to establish. (White & Wyn, 2013, p. 262, emphasis added).

Addressing vulnerability, therefore ideally calls forth certain practical measures that ought to be part of any youth engagement process. These include the essential role provided to young people by services (as social connectors), programs (as social includers) and groups (as social supporters), all essential elements of a social ecology approach to addressing youth vulnerability. Where these exist, and where they are robust, there is greater chance for vulnerable young people to attain relevant protective factors. For Indigenous young people they are especially vital.

Not surprisingly, then, in Australia, the favoured justice reinvestment model is based on the idea of re-directing money from prisons (or for present purposes, youth detention centres) to *communities* that feed directly into the prisons. Analysis is already being undertaken of which places detainees come from, and how best to redirect funds back into those communities (see for example, Gooda, 2010, and McKenzie, 2013; see also Allard et al., 2013). However, by focusing the spotlight

on these communities in this way (that is, in a manner that portrays them as dysfunctional and deviant), the door is open for further stigmatisation of both community and individuals within them, and for coercive 'outside' intervention in these same communities. Moreover, the justice reinvestment focus on reinvestment as crime prevention and a decarceration strategy may obscure the broader social justice issues centring on employment, education and social inclusion that underpin much youth offending to begin with.

Justice re-investment as an idea and potential practice thus carries with it certain hopes and dangers. Overall, it tends to deal with the symptoms of social disadvantage without addressing the structural causes underlying much juvenile offending. Moreover, in the context of tight government budgets, while the need for community development is growing rapidly (as the hard times hit), the resources for this are shrinking (due to government choice of priorities). Over-burdened services and practitioners can, at best, only hope to manage the social fallout of high levels of youth unemployment. Without dedicated job creation strategies and efforts to improve overall educational outcomes, the success of justice reinvestment seems less than assured.

Yet for Australia justice reinvestment has had particular resonance in relation to the situation of Indigenous young people and their relationship to juvenile justice. In some instances, and in some communities, allocations of funding away from detention to community building 'makes sense' to local populations and communities that are already struggling to come to grips with severe disadvantage. Rather than a general panacea or response to gross (or mass) incarceration, as in the United States (see La Vigne et al., 2014), justice reinvestment is seen in Australia to be most relevant to select groups of young people. Overall detention rates and numbers are not high within this country; yet, over-representation rates of Indigenous youth continue to be untenable. In the light of this, justice reinvestment approaches have garnered significant political support within Indigenous communities and advocacy bodies precisely because of the dire nature of the contemporary policies and practices affecting Indigenous youth across the country (see Gooda, 2010; Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2009).

In assessing justice reinvestment it is essential to put Indigenous youth offending into historical and social context. The history of Australia is a history of colonial penality in which subjugated populations have suffered hundreds of years of imprisonment and punishment. Mainstream punishment has always been directed against particular subjects and in the Australian context penal excess has been marked by racialised penal regimes developed specifically for Indigenous peoples (Cunneen et al., 2013, p. 37). This in linked to the overall place of Indigenous peoples within the Australian social mosaic. For example, Carrington and Pereira (2009, p. 98) make the observation that:

> It is precisely the historical construction and persistence of a racial divide and the exclusion of Aboriginal communities from civic, political and economic life in many rural Australian localities that helps to explain why Aboriginal

> youth are persistently over-represented in the juvenile justice system. It is the status of Aborigines as Other, as excluded from and threatening to these communities – and not just Aboriginal crime rates – that is integral to law and order discourses in these localities.

Yet within mainstream criminological analysis (Weatherburn, 2014) the basic power relations of colonialism are largely ignored in favour of detailed exposition of the multiple factors that constitute the essence of Indigenous criminality and criminal record. This reproduces an individualised account of youth offending, one in which particular risk factors and personal characteristics are elevated above and beyond communal context as explanations for individual offending. The net result is to 'blame the victim' by ignoring their wider circumstance and historical location.

In response, Cunneen (1999, p. 137) has asked in regards to the stolen generation, 'What did criminology do while this genocide was taking place?' His answer is that mainstream criminology has largely been complicit in this insofar as it has provided a 'scientific' foundation for the taking of Indigenous children from their families. A critical question for contemporary criminology is to what extent and in what ways it continues to sustain this sort of activity (such as the Northern Territory 'intervention'), as well as how best it might contribute to addressing the more fundamental social harms.

CONCLUSION

Addressing youth vulnerability in a juvenile justice context entails critique of both 'risk' discourse and the applications of risk assessment to particular social groups. This is because of the ways in which 'at risk' youth become constituted within such discourse – predominantly in individualised and pathologising ways – and with little attention paid to the wider social context.

Models of intervention pertinent to working with vulnerable young people are, abstractly and theoretically, worthy and of practical benefit. This is certainly the case with social ecology approaches that attempt to provide a holistic understanding, and response to, the situation of particular young people and their communities. Yet, if 'community' continues to be undermined by neo-liberal policies, practices and ideologies, then such models will count little for what happens at the coalface of intervention. The same young people have occupied the coercive spaces of juvenile justice since the late 19th century when specialist children's institutions were first brought into being. Without fundamental transformation in the conditions which generate working class and Indigenous disadvantage, it is unlikely that this will change significantly in the 21st century.

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6. INVESTING IN YOUTH HEALTH ASSETS

INTRODUCTION

The policies and practices to build the health and wellbeing of youth occur largely outside the health sector. Yet there is a prevailing mistaken belief in society that youth need to be given messages about appropriate health behaviours such as healthy eating practices and responsible drinking, and that, as a consequence, they will become healthier and less vulnerable to disease. This paper asserts that this is not the case.

There is also a perception in the community that health is primarily a physical state of being. This ignores the other building blocks of health, such as social, emotional, spiritual, environmental and intellectual, and oversimplifies the interventions needed through policies and practices to reduce the vulnerabilities of youth.

All youth should be considered vulnerable when it comes to promoting and enhancing their health. Policies and practices that are necessary for building their health apply to all young people. Yet, some youth are more vulnerable than others. It is argued here that vulnerability increases when youth become disengaged from the settings in which they live, learn, work, and play, or are in locations where services are limited.

This chapter begins by examining the current status of the health of Australia's youth. People have different conceptions of health, as do certain sectors engaged with youth such as education, health, welfare, and justice. These different perceptions of health are explored with a particular focus on how the concept of health originated. The chapter then probes the four factors that shape youth health (biological, behavioural, environmental and social determinants) before considering the evidence-based policies and practices that are needed to enhance youth health and reduce vulnerability.

Three issues (food and eating, alcohol, and education) affecting the health of youth now and into the future are discussed, with particular reference to what policies and practices are needed in the next two decades.

THE HEALTH OF AUSTRALIA'S YOUTH

The most recent comprehensive review of the health of Australia's youth (age 12-24) is presented in the 2011 report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) namely, *Young Australians: Their health and wellbeing, 2011.* Seventy-one indicators were used to provide the picture of youth health. It is worth

K. te Riele & R. Gorur (eds.), Interrogating Conceptions of 'Vulnerable Youth' in Theory, Policy and Practice, 79–95.

assessed. It is not merely through examining morbidity and mortality information. Topics examined include:

- Health status and wellbeing
- Factors influencing health e.g. weight, physical activity, eating behaviours
- Family and community factors e.g. social capital, crime, parental health, homelessness
- Socioeconomic factors e.g. education, employment, income, SES status
- Health system performance e.g. preventable hospitalisation, cervical screening rates
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people as a sub population group

The report shows a reasonable picture of the health of youth with some important disparities and emerging issues. These are summarized in Box 1 below.

Box 1. Disparities and emerging issues in youth health

Key findings

Many young Australians are faring well according to the national indicators presented in this report; however, there is considerable scope for further gains, particularly among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

The good news

- Large declines in death rates (mostly due to declines in injury deaths).
- Declines in asthma hospitalisations, notifications for hepatitis (A, B and C) and improved survival for cancer, with survival for melanoma very high.
- Favourable trends in some risk and protective factors, such as declines in smoking and illicit substance use, and most Year 10 and Year 12 students using contraception.
- The majority of young people rate their health as 'good', 'very good' or 'excellent'.
- Most young people are achieving national minimum standards for reading, writing and numeracy, are fully engaged in study or work, and have strong support networks.

Things to work on

- Rising rates of diabetes and sexually transmissible infections (largely chlamydia), and high rates of mental disorders and, among males, road transport accident deaths.
- Too many young people are overweight or obese, not meeting physical activity or fruit and vegetable guidelines, are drinking at risky or high-risk levels for short-term or long-term harm, are victims of alcohol- or drug-related violence, or are homeless.
- Although there have been improvements in some of these areas, the rates remain too high.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people

Indigenous young people are far more likely to be disadvantaged across a broad range of health, community and socioeconomic indicators compared with non-Indigenous young people. They are:

- Twice as likely to die from all causes (6 times as likely from assault and 4 times from suicide).
- 10 and 6 times as likely to have notifications for sexually transmissible infections and hepatitis.
- 6 times as likely to be teenage mothers.
- 6-7 times as likely to be in the child protection system.
- 15 times as likely to be in juvenile justice supervision or in prison.
- Twice as likely to be unemployed or on income support.
- 3 times as likely to live in overcrowded housing.
- 2-3 times as likely to be daily smokers.

Young people living in remote areas

- Have higher death rates.
- Have more dental decay.
- Are less likely to access general practitioners.
- Are less likely to be meet minimum standards for reading, writing and numeracy and to be studying for a qualification.
- Are more likely to be in jobless families and live in overcrowded housing.

Data gaps

- There are still a number of indicators for which there is a lack of national data, data for relevant age groups or recent available data such as sun protection, sexual and reproductive health, community participation, sexual assault, oral health and mental health.
- Some indicators require significant indicator and data development – family functioning, and school relationships and bullying – and there are other areas of emerging concern that may require future indicator development. These include sleep disorders, media and communications, and the effects of climate change.

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011, p. vii)

Further details about the health of youth emerged in a section of the 2014 Report on Australia's Health (AIHW, 2014). It stated the most common chronic health conditions for youth were hay fever and allergic rhinitis (18.8%) and shortsightedness (18.7%). It also claimed that in the 18-24 age cohort, 12% had high and very high levels of psychological stress. Further evidence has emerged from this report about increasing levels of overweight and obesity in Australia. In the 15-24 age range, 33% are either overweight or obese, 46% exhibit sedentary behaviour and only 4% follow the guidelines for the daily intake of fruit and vegetables.

But what actually is health? And how is youth health constructed? The next sections examine these two questions.

DEFINITIONS AND DESCRIPTIONS OF HEALTH

The word health has been derived from Old and Middle English words such as 'helth' and 'haelth'. These referred, in their original settings, to wholeness, sound, well, prosperity, happiness, welfare, of good omen. All these descriptors are positive constructs. In time the word 'health' came to be more associated with sickness and disease as inventions such as the microscope occurred. The microscope enabled the identification of bacteria in many diseases. What followed was the development of scientific methods that were used to identify the causes of disease and to appreciate the workings of the human body.

Health departments around the world spend well over 90% of their financial resources on treatment and cure approaches through hospitals and various clinics. resources on treatment and cure approaches through hospitals and various clinics. The dominance of this construction of health led Ivan Illich, in his seminal publication 'Medical Nemesis', to claim the word 'illth' would be more apt to describe the focus of most health organizations (Illich, 1985). However there have been attempts to return to the original positive concept of health in the last seventy years. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defined health in the 1940s as: "*A complete state of physical, mental and social wellbeing, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*" (WHO, 1948, p. 1). When the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion was developed under the auspices of WHO in 1986, a broader definition was created, namely "*A resource for everyday life, not the object for living. Health is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources as well as physical capabilities*" (WHO, 1986, p. 1). Similarly, the Alliance Institute of Integrative Medicine focused on wellness in its definition of health:

> We view wellness as much more than a state of physical health. It also encompasses emotional stability, clear thinking, the ability to love, create, embrace change, exercise intuition and experience a continuing sense of spirituality. (AIIM, 2010, p. 2)

The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Council Health Organisation defines health within a community context:

> Health means not just the physical being of an individual, but refers to the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community in which the individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being thereby bringing total wellbeing of their community. (NACCHO Constitution, 2006, p. 5)

When thinking about youth in particular, they are the population group in our community with the most health and the least 'illth'. It is therefore important to construct health in a positive way. This means focusing on the health assets of youth and determining what is needed to build and maintain these assets, particularly for vulnerable youth. Such a focus is more relevant to youth and how they see themselves during this phase of their life, than just focusing on ill health.

It is argued that health for youth, and indeed the whole population, is made up of six components. These are:

- Physical health: When the body is functioning as it was designed to function.
- Emotional health: Self-esteem, security, self-actualization, and the expression of emotions in assertive and respectful ways.
- Social health: The relationships and interactions an individual has with others and with social institutions.
- Spiritual health: The way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred.
- Environmental health: The components of the natural and built environments (physical, chemical, biological) affecting individual behaviours and physical states.
- Intellectual health: The cognitive capacities, particularly the ability to access knowledge, understand, analyse, synthesise, evaluate and create.

It is all these six components of health on which we need to focus when we promote and nurture the health of youth.

THE FACTORS THAT SHAPE YOUTH HEALTH

During the years 12-24, all youth will experience times of vulnerability. But some will be more vulnerable for much of that time. There are a number of definitions and descriptions of 'vulnerable youth'. The one used in this chapter is from the South Australian Vulnerable Youth Framework – Consultation Paper, 2011.

> Young people experiencing vulnerability come from a variety of backgrounds and require responses that are tailored to their particular needs. They can be socially excluded, disenfranchised, experience social inequality and geographical isolation. They are often denied the opportunity to participate in the social, economic, political and cultural systems which contribute to the integration of individuals into the community. (p. 3)

There are four factors that influence the health and wellbeing of youth. They are, in no particular order, Biological, Behavioural, Environmental and Social. They are all interconnected and many of these interrelationships are complex and not often understood. The evidence of how each of the four factors influences health is well established. Ongoing international research is continuing to add levels of depth and understanding to how these four factors shape the health of particular population groups such as men, women, indigenous people, rural and remote populations, urban communities and different age groups, such as children, adolescents and adults (young, middle and older age).

Biological Factors

We cannot choose our biological parents, yet our genetic makeup plays a large part in how our lives turn out. The genetic mapping work of the last few decades suggests that much of our morbidity and mortality is predetermined. Health care practitioners want to know about the incidence of various histories in the biological family for example heart disease and certain cancers. If an individual has a family history of a particular health issue, regular screening is often advised to manage risk reduction. One of the paradoxes of youth is that during this age range of 12-24, they are often in the era of the best health of their lives and their perceptions of vulnerability are minimal, as is their individual belief about, and commitment to, adopting behaviours that are health enhancing such as regular physical activity and healthy eating.

Behavioural Factors

There is over fifty years of extensive research about our day-to-day behaviours and how these influence our health. Some seventy years ago, numerous doctors were advising their patients to smoke, believing it would improve their health. Today there is irrefutable evidence about the dangers of using tobacco. This evidence has led to the development of policies such as increased taxation on tobacco, point of sale restrictions and marketing limitations. These policies have contributed to reducing smoking rates from above 70% of the adult population to just over 10%. These and other policies have also seen the uptake of smoking in early youth decrease dramatically.

Similarly, the food we purchase and eat influences our health status now and into the future. Parents used to control most of the daily food intake of youth, certainly in the years 12-18, and if young people lived at home, often up until 24 years. Now youth have access to a vast range of food, frequently high in sugar and unhealthy fats. They usually have financial resources to purchase such food. These purchases are influenced by the marketing of images and lifestyle directed at segments of the youth market e.g. 12-14, 17-20. Youth now behave with more autonomy and control over their food choices than three decades ago. This has implications for their future food and eating practices and subsequent health status, particularly if they have not learnt basic food and eating skills of growing and harvesting, purchasing (reading labels and price literacy), food preparation and sharing and eating food in relationship settings such as with family and/or friends.

Technological advances in communications have also influenced behaviours of youth. Screen time has increased considerably and the way we develop and define 'friends' has altered. For youth having many connections to people the same age and to those slightly older and younger is one of the strongest protective factors for health, now and into the future (Blum, 2004; CDC, 2009). But these connections were researched in the context of face-to-face relationships, not via screens or with virtual friends. Some researchers claim this may actually reduce face-to-face connections and redefine friendship groups and networks resulting in increased

isolation and lower self esteem (Greenfield, 2011; Eckersley, 2011). Also there is some evidence to suggest increased screen time correlates with an increase in sedentary behaviour with implications for possible risks of overweight and obesity and consequently increasing the risk of heart disease and diabetes.

Environmental Factors

The various environments in which we live impact our health. Air pollution, noise pollution and crowded living spaces all have the potential to increase the health risks of youth. Evidence tells us that it is important for all people to connect with nature (Maller, Townsend, Pryor, Brown, & St Leger, 2006; Bell, Hamilton, Montarzino, Rothnie, Travlou, & Alves, 2008; Pretty et al., 2009). Humans have traditionally lived in rural areas close to fresh water and land where they can grow crops and graze and hunt animals. There is a natural biological connection to such environments as this is where people have survived since humans evolved. Winslow called this natural affinity with nature the Biophilia Hypothesis (Winslow, 1984). It is only since the Industrial Revolution in the mid nineteenth century that humans have lived in cities and large towns. Put simply, we are not biologically adapted to urban living, particularly in large and densely populated areas. Urban living changes our perception of our land and our sense of place. Many of our youth have little experience of nature. This is where families and schools can play a role by enabling youth to hear birdsong; explore forests, savannah, wetlands, coasts; observe and appreciate animals in their natural surroundings; and to spend regular time in nature by feeling it, enjoying it and caring for it. There is strong evidence to show that being in nature is a protective factor for health and wellbeing and a key building block in shaping the social and emotional health of youth (Maller et al., 2006).

Social Determinants

Over the last thirty years Michael Marmot, Richard Wilkinson and Ichiro Kawachi and their colleagues have examined the social determinants of health in detail and explored the evidence of influence on health. They interrogated the evidence from many fields, including, psychology, economics, epidemiology, sociology medicine and neurobiology. A WHO report entitled '*Social Determinants of Health: The Solid Facts*' claimed that in order to be healthy we need friends and more sociable societies to feel useful and to exercise control over our lives (Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003). The authors argue these determinants are fundamental to building the health and wellbeing of youth and should therefore be reflected in policies and practices. They are described briefly below:

- Social gradient: One's socioeconomic status (SES) can be seen as an incline from low to high. A person who is down the gradient near the bottom, has twice the risk of serious illness and premature death than a person near the top.

- Stress: High levels of stress lead to insecurity, continuing anxiety, low self-esteem and social isolation.
- Early life: The time from conception to the first three to four years of life has a major influence over how we are as young people and adults. For example very low birth weight is connected to high levels of diabetes in adults in their sixties.
- Social exclusion: Evidence shows those who live in poor environments, who are deprived of resources and services and who experience social exclusion, are more likely to be sick and die prematurely than those who are not.
- Work: Being usefully employed is better for one's health than having no job; and having some autonomy in work is healthier than having no control. Health suffers if there is little opportunity for workers to use their skills and to experience some autonomy in their work.
- Unemployment: Job security increases one's health. The evidence shows those who are unemployed or who are dependents in families where breadwinners are unemployed risk premature death.
- Social support: Health is enhanced if one has a number of friends, good social relations and strong and supportive networks.
- Addiction: Addictions to any of alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs lead to poor health outcomes. These are interconnected with social and economic disadvantage.
- Food: "Because global markets forces control food supply, healthy food is a political issue. Poor people tend to substitute processed food for fresh food".
- Transport: "Healthy transport means less driving, more walking and cycling backed up by better public transport".

Considerable evidence also exists about the health influences of the various settings in which we live, work and play. These include: educational settings (early childhood, primary school, secondary school, tertiary locations – technical institutes, colleges, universities); work settings; health care locations (clinics, community health, hospitals, palliative care); aged care establishments; sporting, cultural recreational and faith based organisations; local communities; and prison and corrective services. Interventions such as policies and programs to build the protective factors for youth health and to address risk factors are frequently delivered at the settings level. There are international movements and networks with labels such as Health Promoting Prisons, Healthy Islands, Health Promoting Worksites, Health Promoting Schools, Healthy Towns and Cities, Health Promoting Hospitals, Health Promoting Universities. All of these have a history of developing policies and practices based on evidence that show, in most cases, it is possible to build the health and wellbeing of those engaged in the setting by developing 'health assets' and reducing health related risks. Some of the settings where youth live, work and play are explored later in the chapter.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES TO ADDRESS THE HEALTH OF YOUTH

Gains in public health, which includes the population group of youth, occur mainly outside the health sector. The ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans all realized the importance of having infrastructure that enabled sewerage to be removed from communities and access to fresh water made easy. Aqueducts, the importance of washing and bathing, and sewerage disposal provided these three societies with a reasonable level of health. But sadly, what worked in these times became lost in the Dark Ages [from approximately the 6th to the 13th Century]. The Industrial Revolution saw the emergence of large towns and cities and the movement of thousands of people from rural village areas to take advantage of the new employment opportunities. In England in the mid 19th century, cholera and typhoid were killing many of the citizens of these new cities and large towns. Careful and methodical epidemiological work of people such as John Snow and William Budd traced how these diseases were transmitted. Once policy makers accepted the scientific evidence, large infrastructure work took place to eliminate wells as a source of water and replace them with pipes carrying fresh water. Similarly, sewerage was removed from houses and businesses regularly, and taken away from areas where people lived. The health of people improved dramatically with these public health measures, which were enshrined in the legislative policies of the time.

Internationally, in the last forty years we have seen policies to reduce traffic deaths and injuries through seat belt legislation, requirements on car design, speed limits, blood alcohol legislation and limitations on mobile phone use whilst driving. And Australia has played a leading and pivotal role in tobacco reduction through taxation measures, severe restrictions on advertising and retailing with purchase restrictions for young people and the limitations imposed on the promotion of tobacco products, and strong restrictions on where and when people can and cannot smoke. Smoking rates have declined from about 70% in the middle of the 20th Century to the low teens in the second decade of the 21st century.

Government policies and associated resources to improve immunization rates, build cycling paths through suburbs, quarantine and facilitate access to nature through parks and nature reserves, noise restrictions and workplace safety, are just some of the areas where action to protect and promote health occurs outside the health sector. Policies and programs to ensure youth are engaged in education and training are health enhancing. There is a strong association between the levels of education young people receive and their health status.

The age range of youth has about a 12-year span – from 12 to 24. For most youth an education setting is where they will spend much of this time. Clearly, education has the potential to reduce the vulnerability of youth and to build their health and wellbeing now and for the future. But do educational experiences actually make a difference to health outcomes? The next section examines the evidence, and the potential for schools in particular, to make a difference.

Schools as a Setting to Enhance Health

Schools are exciting places to be. Students in secondary education sites (from age 12 to 18 approximately) experience many challenges and opportunities. One of the most important priorities for schools is to ensure all students have a sense of connectedness to their fellow students, teachers, the school ethos and the school environment. Robert Blum and colleagues in the USA followed large numbers of young people from the age of 12 until 22. They found that pivotal to good health outcomes was a sense of connectedness. Simply put, the more connections a person has to colleagues at school, horizontally (of the same age) and vertically (younger and older students), the less likely they are to engage in health risk behaviours such as experimentation with drugs, unhealthy eating and sedentary behaviour (Blum, 2004; CDC, 2009). Similar results have been found from other international studies (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002; Patton et al., 2006; Wells, Barlow, & Stewart-Brown, 2002). This evidence implies that schools can not only empower young people by building knowledge and skills and giving them realistic experiences in designing and implementing activities in their school and local community, but also by creating opportunities for students to interact across age groups. Health has been taught in the school curriculum for over 100 years, initially as Health Instruction, and more recently as part of the Health and Physical Education key learning area of the curriculum where the focus is now on knowledge acquisition and cognitive skills such as understanding and analysis (St. Leger, Kolbe, Lee, McCall, & Young, 2007). Students have generally been passive recipients of information which, it was assumed, would change their health behaviours. This is not the case.

The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (OCHP), developed under the WHO auspice, took a more holistic view of health. It has five key components. These are:

- Build healthy public policies
- Create supportive environments
- Strengthen community action
- Develop personal skills
- Reorient health services

Based on this holistic view of health, work in Europe and North America in particular in the late 1980s, along with some exciting programs in Australia, adapted the WHO Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, to create the Health Promoting School (HPS) (also known as Comprehensive School Health or Coordinated School Health) movement. The six components of the HPS Framework are outlined in Box 2 below.

Box 2. The Health Promoting School framework

Healthy School Policies

These are clearly defined in documents or in accepted practices that promote health and well-being. Many policies promote health and well-being, e.g. policies that enable healthy food practices to occur at school and policies which discourage bullying.

The School's Physical Environment

The physical environment refers to the buildings, grounds and equipment in and surrounding the school such as: the building design and location; the provision of natural light and adequate shade; the creation of space for physical activity and facilities for learning and healthy eating.

The School's Social Environment

The social environment of the school is a combination of the quality of the relationships among and between staff and students. It is influenced by the relationships with parents and the wider community. It is about building quality connections among and between all the key stakeholders in a school community.

Individual Health Skills and Action Competencies

This refers to both the formal and informal curriculum and associated activities, where students gain age-related knowledge, understandings, skills and experiences, which enable them to build competencies in taking action to improve the health and well-being of themselves and others in their community and that enhances their learning outcomes.

Community Links

Community links are the connections between the school and the students' families, plus the connection between the school and key local groups and individuals. Appropriate consultation and participation with these stakeholders enhances the health promoting school and provides students and staff with a context and support for their actions.

Health Services

These are the local and regional school-based or school-linked services which have a responsibility for child and adolescent health care and promotion through the provision of direct services to students including those with special needs.

Source: IUHPE (2009, p. 4)

Unlike the traditional Health Education approach used in schools, the focus is now on promoting the health assets of young people through addressing the factors that shape their health.

It is useful to examine how a school community can address a health issue such as healthy eating using the HPS Framework and utilizing the strong research evidence about connectedness to empower youth, and to build lifelong skills

fundamental to health. For example, poor dietary practices are major risk factors for heart disease, many cancers and stroke. Rather than simply addressing the issue in the curriculum, which it is argued would have very little impact on youth health, a comprehensive approach to healthy eating would address the following dimensions:

Healthy school policies

- A school garden for growing produce
- No high sugar, high fat foods sold on site
- Time allocated for all students of different ages to prepare and share meals

The school's physical environment

- Pleasant spaces for eating and conversation
- Gardens that have fruit, vegetables and herb plants
- A place with facilities to prepare and cook food and with round tables to eat the meals prepared

The school's social environment

- Students, teachers and, where relevant, parents and community members sharing meals prepared by students
- Using a range of healthy food and shared eating, to accompany cultural and sporting events

Individual health skills and action competencies

- Students able to use kitchen utensils and equipment, create recipes, prepare healthy meals, read labels, purchase a wide variety of food on a low budget

Community links

- Students engaging with local retailers, restaurants, farmers (where present), in developing partnerships to underpin the school's food program

Health services

- Collaborating with local dieticians and health surveyors to ensure any meal composition and food handling is based on scientific and evidence-based procedures

Many schools use the HPS Framework to address healthy eating in this way. Governments have funded such initiatives, for example, the Kitchen Garden program, and evidence suggests it builds the food and eating assets of youth, provides opportunities to establish cross age and same age connections and gives a real sense of empowerment of those involved in these programs. The health outcomes will occur later, that is, reduced heart disease, diabetes, stroke and some cancers, if youth carry these assets throughout life. Building food and eating assets is analogous to schools developing high-level skills in numeracy and literacy.

These and other outcomes of education are protective assets that reduce the vulnerability of people as they go through life.

Schools do have a pivotal role to play in the life of youth, more so than other educational and training experiences in, say, universities, colleges and technical institutes where the educational experience is more focused on the fields of study and not on the whole person. But schools are limited in what they can do to build the health assets of young people. The literature tells us that the most important health topic for schools is social and emotional wellbeing (sometimes referred to as mental health). It is far more important to address this area than drug education, sex education, hygiene, or safety. Evidence tells us that the best health outcomes are from initiatives in social and emotional wellbeing. There is some evidence that suggests initiatives in healthy eating and physical activity can have some health impact if done holistically (see above). The other topics have little or no impact on student health behaviours (Stewart-Brown, 2006; IUHPE, 2009).

When youth leave school many go on to further education and/or become employed. Different settings apply to where they live, learn, work and play. Schools are one setting through which all youth move. Other settings where youth exist are the local community, worksites, sporting and cultural groups. Internationally, in the regions of the world, there are major initiatives often sponsored by organisations such as WHO and the International Union of Health Promotion and Education (IUHPE). These initiatives are called Health Promoting Worksites, Healthy Cities/Towns, Healthy Islands, Health Promoting Clubs, Health Promoting Hospitals, and even Health Promoting Prisons, (Dooris, 2013; Kokko, Green & Kannas, 2013). Considerable research has emerged in the literature about the policies and practices developed in these settings to improve the health of various population groups (Dooris, 2013). The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion has shaped the way polices are developed in these settings and how effective practices are implemented as is the case with the Health Promoting School. Youth, as they traverse the 12-24 age range, become part of these settings at different times.

All the above evidence suggests there are a number of realistic and factually based approaches that impact on the health of youth now and throughout their lives. Most lie outside the influence of the health sector, yet the health outcomes are considerable if policies and practices with adequate resourcing are created and implemented. This chapter concludes by examining some of the most important priorities.

PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT TWO DECADES

Ichiro Kawachi is an international leader in the field of human development and health. He argues that health outcomes are influenced by poverty, inequalities in income, educational opportunities, community cohesion, social networks, social class, race and ethnicity, neighbourhood environments and work, more than by hospitals, doctors and medical technology (Kawachi & Subramanian, 2008). Youth are vulnerable if they do not experience environments with adequate income, social

connectedness, cohesive communities and education choices. They are also vulnerable in a number of cases because of their ethnicity. What can be changed in the future to reduce such vulnerability? It is useful to return to the AIHW report identifying the health issues in the 12-24 age bracket and to examine the evidence of effectiveness of selected interventions seeking to build the health of youth and reduce their vulnerability. The poor health behaviours identified above for some youth, are usually the result of not adequately addressing the social determinants of health and the environments in which they live. Attempts to close the poverty gap and empower youth with supporting policies do make a difference. It is a whole of government approach, probably more to do with sectors other than health, for example, education, transport, social services and local government.

Three areas are addressed to explore necessary policies and practices. In doing this it is recognized that there are many others of substantial importance. The three areas include two so-called health issues, Food and Eating, and Alcohol use, plus Education and Training. All three areas intersect with a number of sectors making interventions complex to design and implement.

Food and Eating

The AIHW youth health report of 2011 and the AIHW report of Australia's Health in 2014, both identified increasing trends in youth being overweight and obese and not following physical activity or fruit and vegetable guidelines. Clearly, examples such as The Kitchen Garden Program, which is conducted in holistic ways and involving peer lead and participatory approaches, do make a difference. Students do build a set of competencies based on hands on experiences about the joy of growing, harvesting and preparing healthy and enjoyable meals. But these attributes for children and youth will only make a small difference to the increasing levels of obesity in youth and the future adult population of which they are part. The history of public health achievements has constantly shown that the main gains occur through policy interventions, particularly those supported by laws and regulations. Such policies have worked in tobacco control, road safety, and sanitation. Yet governments are loathe to address the policy domain to tackle the increasing trend of the citizenry being overweight and obese. We need to make 'the healthy choice the easy choice' for youth. Early interventions in their lives such as the restriction of the advertising and promotion of high sugar and high fat foods in the media when youth are children will make a difference. Ensuring food labels are easy to read and are informative in a simple way, such as clear and unambiguous information about calorie levels, will also assist parents and youth to make better choices when purchasing food. The logic underpinned by research evidence is clear: if the environments in which youth live are supported by healthy policies and associated services, then those youth who have experienced a kitchen garden program or something similar in an educational setting, will bring food literacy and practical skills of cultivation and preparation, (a set of food assets), to own and shape healthy practices in food and eating. They will be empowered and less vulnerable to the influences of the obesogenic environment.

Alcohol

There is considerable choice about alcohol availability for youth. Health related harms to oneself and to behaviours putting others at risk, such as violence and road safety, are of major concern to the community. Policies have shown some success such as zero blood alcohol for 'P' plate drivers and 0.05 blood alcohol for vehicle drivers. But much more can be done. Access to alcohol is easy. Reducing the number and variety of outlets that sell alcohol will make a difference. Norway is an example of such successful policies in action.

However, the culture of alcohol being part of everyday living is very difficult to address. Certainly restricting tobacco companies being associated with sport and cultural events contributed to the decline in smoking rates. Such a restriction on alcohol is well worth implementing. Also taxation levels on alcoholic beverages can be increased to be part of a mixture of interventions to reduce the incidence of youth and the community using alcohol in ways that put their health and safety, and the health and welfare of others, at risk. However, the current political will and community support for such actions is low and sadly the evidence-based interventions to reduce vulnerability in this area are unlikely to be achieved.

Education and Training

There is a strong correlation between educational attainment and meaningful employment. The more education and training a person has, the more likely they will be healthy. Their chances of obtaining satisfying and meaningful work and securing financial independence are directly related to education. Reducing vulnerability in youth is very much about keeping them engaged in learning environments for much of the youth window (12-24). Also, being in educational settings increases social networks. The more face-to-face connections individuals have with the same age, and with younger and older people, the less likely they are to be involved in health risk behaviours when they are young adults. Therefore, in addition to the knowledge and skills one achieves through education which facilitates employment opportunities, youth engaged in learning opportunities with others in schools, universities, technical institutes and colleges will actually be building protective factors for their health now, and into the future. They are more likely to establish cohorts of friends and colleagues and find increased opportunities for social inclusion and available networks for social support. Providing access to education and training opportunities for youth at no or very low cost is one of the best policy investments governments can make for health, let alone economic development and building social capital.

The influences on young peoples' health are many. During their time as youth, they are in one of the best states of health in their lives. Promoting their own health is of little importance to them. However, they are vulnerable to factors beyond their control such as marketing of food products, their place of residence, the SES of their family, and educational opportunities. Society needs to think carefully and strategically about how to build their physical, emotional, environmental, spiritual,

intellectual and social health. This can be done effectively by looking at the four factors which shape their health (biological, behavioural, environmental and the social determinants) and using the considerable evidence of what works and what does not, to develop policies and practices with appropriate resources to build the health assets of youth. Successful actions require a commitment of the community to rethinking health as a positive attribute and not only about so-called aberrant behaviours such as binge drinking, sedentary behaviour, poor diets. Future actions also need youth to be given a voice in how policies and programs are shaped. Then we may begin to see the growth of relevant and effective actions to build youth health and reduce their vulnerability.

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7. LEARNING IN 'NO MAN'S LAND'

Policy Enactment for Students with Health Conditions

INTRODUCTION

School-aged children and young people who live with serious health conditions face challenging educational as well as health issues in Australia. Through consideration of ways in which social inclusion, disability and education policy are enacted at the intersection of health and education, this chapter examines educational possibility for these young people. The intention of this chapter is to focus on the theme of 'vulnerability' through examination of key issues related to young people who are of school age and who live with long-term health conditions. Four main groups have been identified as vulnerable for the purposes of this discussion: (1) the young people who live with chronic health challenges who are enrolled in schools, (2) the parents of these young people, (3) state education systems and (4) government-funded special schools and education facilities associated with paediatric hospitals. Before these vulnerabilities are explored, medical and educational contexts and legal frameworks pertaining to this particular group of students are considered. Discussion about the vulnerabilities of the identified groups forms the final section of the chapter.

The 'no man's land' in the title refers to World War I trench warfare where land between the opposing sides lay unclaimed (Ayrton, 2014). In this chapter, I develop the argument that the intersection between health and education is a similarly desolate and barren space, for which nobody is claiming responsibility.

WHO ARE THESE STUDENTS AND WHY IS THIS NOW IMPORTANT?

In recent years significant advancement in biomedical science has resulted in substantial extension of life for children and young people who live with serious long-term health conditions. Those who would have previously died are now living into adulthood and even into old age. The prognosis for surviving childhood cancer, for example, is much improved from 25% in the 1970s (Griffiths, 2009) to 82% in the years 2006-2010 (Thursfield et al., 2012) with 75% of those surviving childhood cancer living for at least another 20 years (Baade et al., 2010). For those born with cystic fibrosis, the survival rate has increased by 700% over the past few decades (Morad et al., 2004), with the adult survival rate doubling since 1998 (Cystic Fibrosis Australia, 2013).

K. te Riele & R. Gorur (eds.), Interrogating Conceptions of 'Vulnerable Youth' in Theory, Policy and Practice, 97–110.

There are many different causes of long-term and serious health challenges for Australian children and young people. Apart from more obvious conditions like cancer, cystic fibrosis and diabetes, other conditions such as immune system disorders, organ transplants, stroke and Crohn's disease need to also be on the list. The Royal Children's Hospital's (2014) website provides an indication of how very long a comprehensive list of conditions would need to be (see reference list for a link).

In addition to the wide range of medical causes, there is also variation in how individuals are affected. And for some children and young people, their health condition is intermittently challenging, while for others, their challenges remain constant. How each individual is affected by their health condition also differs considerably. Nevertheless, the numbers of these children and young people are growing (Sawyer et al., 2007) due to dramatic improvements in biomedical science. And these children and young people are also students who are enrolled in schools.

Smith et al. (2013) estimate that 20% of American children and young people have chronic illness. Guided here by the more conservative estimate that at least 12% of young people live with a chronic health condition (Sawyer et al., 2007, p. 1481) and combining this with official student enrolment numbers, it appears highly likely that of the approximately three and a half million students (3,545,519) enrolled in Australian schools, nearly half a million (437,462) live with serious health challenges (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014).

Interestingly, this is a significantly higher figure than the annual number of international tertiary education students (Australian Government Department of Education, 2014), a group that has been the focus of considerable research and media attention over the past ten years.

By contrast, students with serious health challenges are rarely considered as a collective group in education, despite their high numbers and significant levels of absenteeism from school (White & Rosauer, 2015). Likely explanations for this begin with the number of different medical conditions, which doesn't readily lend itself to consideration of these students as an *educational* group. Secondly, these students are scattered across the country in individual schools in all three education systems: government, Catholic and independent. And thirdly, many of the health conditions these students live with are not visible, thereby limiting school-level awareness of their health conditions and perceptions of entitlement to special consideration or assistance.

Societal knowledge and structures have not kept pace with substantial improvements in medical care and there is little evidence that equivalent support for the success of these young people in education is provided. In contrast to health systems, education systems do not sufficiently acknowledge these young people in policy nor do they monitor, accommodate or support them towards participation or success in any systematic way. Most schools remain inexperienced and ill equipped and operate without guidance from government departments of education for such students. System level policy and expectations of accommodation for these students are minimal (White, 2014). Schools do not automatically know

about the health challenges these students face and communication with and within schools has been characterised as 'haphazard' (Yates et al., 2010, p. 11).

So education for these students is compromised, which has far-reaching consequences. It is known that low levels of educational achievement is linked to social exclusion (McLaughlin et al., 2013), and educational success is connected with employment and earnings (Thursfield et al., 2012), which are associated with quality and enjoyment of life. Because this group of students is now expected to live well into adulthood, they will be expected to be economically self-reliant, which means that educational success is as important for this group as it is for other students. As the recent World Health Organisation and World Bank (2011) report noted, 'Education contributes to human capital formation and is thus a key determinant of personal well-being and welfare' and not supporting students in education ultimately 'has high social and economic costs' (p. 205).

LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND POLICY ENVIRONMENT

In this section, legal frameworks informing policy that relates to this group of young people are considered. Firstly, social inclusion policy is examined followed by consideration of Australian Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and the 2005 amendment to the 1992 Act known as the Disability Standards for Education (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005). The key concept of 'reasonable adjustment' is raised to support discussion about vulnerabilities in the final section.

The multilayered challenges faced by the families of children and young people with serious illness, including those related to education, would be well served by social inclusion policy and services designed to assist with the management of complex needs. The families of children and young people with serious illness face considerable hardship. For example, in a major Australian educational study about these students:

> Parents … reported other challenges which emerged in tandem with the young person's ill health. For example, financial pressures as a result of parents (usually mothers) having to limit their hours of paid work in order to cater for the specific and unpredictable needs of their unwell son or daughter. (Yates et al., 2010, p. 54)

This should not be surprising as the connections between disability and poverty are well documented (Mclachlan, Gilifilan, & Gordon, 2013; Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2012; Gonski, 2011; World Health Organisation, 2011).

Australia's social inclusion policy was borrowed from the UK where the Blair government developed a model to simplify services through 'joined up government responses to multilayered social problems' (Cappo, 2002). However, the enthusiasm with which social inclusion policy was adopted at all levels of government in Australia has now diminished to the extent that the incumbent conservative Australian government, upon taking office in 2013, disbanded the Social Inclusion Unit, indicating that this was no longer Australian government policy.

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) (1992) applies to all educational institutions including schools. The DDA's definition of disability is consistent with those of the World Health Organisation and the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), and clearly includes those school aged young people with serious health conditions, even if this isn't apparent to teachers or school systems. Three concerns about the nature of the Australian disability legislative framework relate to this discussion.

Firstly, while it is unlawful to discriminate against anyone in education because of disability, the system is nevertheless complaint-based and requires no action until a complaint is lodged with the Human Rights Commission. As Innes (2000), the former Australian Commissioner for Human Rights, commented:

> It is my view that…the elimination of disability discrimination in the area of education in particular, using an individually based and essentially private complaint investigation and conciliation process, followed by hearings in a small minority of cases, has not, and will not, be successful. It takes too long, is very difficult for participants on both sides; only provides solutions (when they are provided) for individuals; and fails to address the systemic change that is necessary.

Secondly, the legislation requires local interpretation of the requirement for 'reasonable adjustment', which has proved difficult for young people with health conditions. Reasonable adjustment is defined as:

> a measure or action (or a group of measures or actions) taken by an education provider that has the effect of assisting a student with a disability … in relation to a course or program – to participate in the course or program … on the same basis as a student without a disability … or a service that the student requires because of his or her disability. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005, p. 10)

Knowledge about the legal rights and entitlements of these students, and those of their 'associates' (often parents) is limited. Schools and school systems do not have personnel acting in intermediary roles like the disability officers found in universities, who manage processes of reasonable adjustment. This concept of reasonable adjustment has also proved to be problematic for schools because judgement calls are required, together with consultation and negotiation with the individual students and their parents. However, little guidance is provided for schools that are expected to undertake these complex tasks without support.

The provision of brief fact sheets and 'guidance' notes on the Department of Education website does not adequately meet the recent review recommendations that guidance materials be developed that, "include practical examples to support consistent interpretation and application of the terms 'reasonable adjustment', 'unjustifiable hardship', 'consultation' and 'on the same basis" are developed" (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2012, p. 58). Education systems, by and large, continue to refer to the Disability Standards for

Education (2005) and provide information about resourcing and programs for those at the more extreme end of the disability continuum.

While the requirement for reasonable adjustment varies considerably for individual students with health conditions, it is worth noting here that this is not always dependent on allocation of additional resources, often requiring instead consideration and accommodation of individual circumstance and a sensible approach to the modification of tasks and timelines. The Disability Standards in Education (2005) are unequivocal about the obligations of education authorities and institutions in this regard, but the problem appears to lie in communication, interpretation and enactment at the school level, that is unsupported by government departments of education guidance or policy. Policy, or lack of it, is seen here in terms of text, discourse (Ball, 1993) and intention, and will be taken up in a later section of this chapter.

And thirdly, the disability legislation is problematic because most complaints are heard behind closed doors in formal dispute resolution processes. This means that case law examples are few and far between and those related to education tend to focus on issues of access (both physical and enrolment), ignoring issues of participation and success in education. Provision of access alone does not constitute educational inclusion (Mittler, 2012; Slee, 2011; Ainscow et al., 2011).

Australian legislation directs that individual 'disclosure' of disability is not mandatory in education or employment (DDA, 1992). Interestingly the Disability Standards for Education (2005) remains silent on this issue of disclosure. Nevertheless it remains an important issue for school level education. University disability services, as seen for example on The University of Sydney's (2014) website, provides guidance and clarity for students about the importance and implications of disclosure. For schools or other organisations to be able to assist with education through making reasonable adjustments, there needs to be disclosure by the individual students and awareness of legal obligation on the part of teachers, schools and education systems. This point also relates to a lack of knowledge about entitlements under disability legislation on the part of students, their parents and school personnel.

WHO IS VULNERABLE AND WHY?

While the term 'vulnerability' demands to be problematised, as it has been troubled by Radhika Gorur in this volume (See Chapter 1), I will not address it further here, beyond pointing to an ethical and methodological concern. In arguing about the vulnerability of these young people, I draw upon a comment made by eminent education policy researchers from the UK, who noted similar concerns in their own studies of young people:

> We wanted to avoid either portraying the young people as simply victims of their circumstance or pathologising – othering – them. (Ball, Maguire, & Macrae, 2000, p. 18; Maguire, 2010, p. 139)

Most scholarly attention paid to this group of young people provides perspectives from medical and psychosocial fields with little attention paid to educational concerns. While medical research has tended to group and categorise according to disease or condition, little research has reported on how these young people fare as a *collective* group of *school students* in education. This group tends instead to be viewed, if indeed their condition has been communicated within the school, as isolated individuals characterised by their medical conditions and absences.

Mothers of children with disabilities are more likely to be divorced, separated or never married and unemployed (Morad et al., 2004) and the stress levels of parents of unwell children have been well documented (Griffiths, 2009). Under Australian law, a parent is considered the 'associate' of the individual student with the disability and therefore is accorded rights and entitlements. However parents on the whole do not seem to be aware of these legal rights or those of their children and many parents have reported their lack of success in advocating for their children within schools (Yates et al., 2010; Donnan, 2011). Unlike the systematic approach in the UK (see Department of Education UK, 2013), Australian parents have no clear lines of communication available to them, particularly in regard to advocacy within schools. In Australia, parents are left to negotiate complicated education systems without supporting intermediaries. Teachers with expertise in supporting students with health conditions are not employed to assist students while they recuperate at home or are reintegrated into mainstream schooling. Instead they employed by government education departments remain in special schools in hospitals or associated services that do not prioritise this sort of assistance.

With the lack of formalised professional responsibility for these young people, parents are reliant on the goodwill of individual teachers and on being able to find someone in their child's school willing to listen, to take responsibility, to communicate with others in the school, to advocate and to follow through, even when the child is absent for long periods of time. In short, the system is mostly impenetrable and relies on the resilience and communication capacity of these parents. This burden makes parents vulnerable on many fronts, including socially, and in terms of their own health as well as longer-term economic wellbeing.

HOW ARE EDUCATION SYSTEMS AND EDUCATION SERVICES IN HOSPITALS VULNERABLE?

The Australian Education Department's (formerly called the Department for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations) commissioned report on inclusive education concluded that in Australia, 'All jurisdictions have well-developed policies that support inclusive practices' (ARACY, 2013, p. 20). However, as outlined in this chapter, government emphasis has been on referencing the Disability Standards for Education (2005), rather than interpreting and providing guidance about what these standards mean in terms of inclusive practice. In essence, inclusive education operates within a complaints-based legal system with national, state and territory education departments ensuring that perceptions related to disability comply with the letter of the law, rather than educational

inclusion *per se* (see Slee, 2011; Ainscow et al., 2011). Policy texts and discourses (Ball, 1993) are largely silent about young people with serious health conditions who consequently tend to remain unnoticed by education systems and schools.

By way of example, the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) has published notification of its coordinated service and resourcing for students with disabilities, where the individual students have been classified as having moderate to severe impairments. For example their *Home-Based Educational Support Program*, 'supports schools to provide students with severe disabilities and comorbid fragile health with an educational program when they are unable to attend their enrolled school, due to the nature and impact of their disability and health needs' (DEECD, 2014, p. 3). And some government special schools accommodate 'students from 5-18 years who have physical or multiple disabilities or highly complex health needs' (Glenroy Specialist Schools, 2014). However the group under discussion here does not reside at this extreme end of the disability continuum and consequently does not rate a mention.

A sizable number of children and young people exist in Australia who manage serious health conditions and who are enrolled in government schools but are unlikely to be offered accommodation or reasonable adjustment for their programs of study. A potentially significant problem for government education systems therefore exists, but is apparently being ignored. Therefore it is reasonable to argue that this policy oversight by Australian departments of education, together with the lack of guidance or systematic processes for schools, represents a policy of convenience. This large number of students is not acknowledged as an *educational group* warranting systemic attention, but is consistently treated as isolated individuals about whom education policy has nothing to say.

That governments accept little responsibility for these students is of concern and demonstrates how out of step with health advances education has become. Systematic educational support and monitoring processes during extensive and repeated periods of home-based recuperation have not been established. Nor are processes of systematic support provided for these young people when they return to school. Not only is this large group of Australian school students overlooked by their own schools, they are also not noticed by education systems. While biomedical science is saving and prolonging the lives of these young people, government education systems are neglecting their entitlement to educational accommodation, in all likelihood resulting in reduced success in education and low socio-economic status in adulthood.

Parents, usually mothers, have reported their attempts to advocate for their child and retain contact with schools, but they often do not succeed (Yates et al., 2010; Donnan, 2011). Individual teachers are not usually informed about the health conditions, hospitalisations or recuperation periods of individual students, particularly within secondary schools. Processes to follow up on these students do not tend to occur. To be fair to those in schools, however, it is usual for there to be few students from this group in each school, making it problematic to discern the need to develop specific programs or to allocate staff – or to learn from experience.

Nevertheless, it is a fact that government education systems fail to monitor or notice these students slipping through the cracks.

Together with the complaints-based legal framework focused on the individual, the policy intention of government departments of education policy for disability in Australia appears vague and unspecific. Therefore, guidance, direction and expectations about enactment of reasonable adjustment in education programs of study are lacking. Consequently, schools are left to their own devices, without adequate processes or accountability. And students with limiting physical impairments are more likely to be resourced and provided with attention in schools than students with challenging and serious health conditions because such impairments are more visible and knowledge about assistance requirements is less complex. This goes some way to explaining why individual students tend to be overlooked in Australian education. Unlike recent work on how schools enact policy in the United Kingdom (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012), in Australia teachers and schools can't locate or grasp any policy intention regarding this group of students. Therefore schools and teachers have little guidance and students remain unnoticed.

Government departments of education, nationally as well as in the states and territories, would be hard pressed to defend a charge of policy convenience because of their silence about these students, who are erroneously considered to be rare and individual *medical* aberrations, rather than collectively as a sizable group of school-aged *students* requiring specific accommodation. By making repeated reference to disability legislation and how this must be observed, the boxes are ticked and technically, legal compliance is achieved. However, families continue to report (Donnan, 2011; Yates et al., 2010) that little occurs on the ground that supports these young people, their families and their schools.

Section 4.3 of the Disability Standards for Education (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005, p. 16) clearly outline the measures for compliance with standards, that indicate what is required by teachers and schools:

> Measures that the education provider may implement to enable the student to participate in the course or program for which the student is enrolled and use the facilities and services provided by it on the same basis as a student without a disability, include measures ensuring that:
>
> a) the course or program activities are sufficiently flexible for the student to be able to participate in them; and
>
> b) course or program requirements are reviewed, in the light of information provided by the student, or an associate of the student, to include activities in which the student is able to participate; and
>
> c) appropriate programs necessary to enable participation by the student are negotiated, agreed and implemented; and
>
> d) additional support is provided to the student where necessary, to assist him or her to achieve intended learning outcomes; and

e) where a course or program necessarily includes an activity in which the student cannot participate, the student is offered an activity that constitutes a reasonable substitute within the context of the overall aims of the course or program.

By contrast, in the UK clear guidelines and processes for this group exist (Department of Education, 2013) where roles, processes and entitlements are detailed and responsibilities and key contacts outlined. This policy text replaced the earlier *Access to Education for Children and Young People with Medical Needs* (2001). Interestingly the summary begins, 'The Government's policy intention is that all children, regardless of circumstance or setting should receive a good education to enable them to shape their own futures … enable them to thrive and prosper in the education system' (p. 3).

As educational policy travels (Ball, 2008; Ozga, 2005) and Australia tends to borrow heavily from the UK (Lingard, 2010; White, 2010), questions need to be raised about the policy silence regarding students with health conditions. Australia routinely imports education policy from the UK, but by choosing *not* to borrow this one – a policy clearly intended to support these students and their families – Australian government departments of education have left themselves vulnerable. They are vulnerable to litigation for not accepting responsibility for these students and for not complying with the disability standards (see 4.3 excerpt above), and by failing to provide guidance or policy for enactment processes in schools, and for leaving these particular students to fend for themselves.

Australian government departments of education have also not met the more obvious educational needs of this group and have allowed philanthropic organisations instead to fund what are basic government obligations. Expert educational personnel are increasingly funded by philanthropy to work in hospitals to support young people with serious health conditions. Educational experts are also employed by philanthropy to support transition back to school, to provide teacher professional learning programs, to give lectures for university pre-service teachers and to provide psychological and education assessments as well as extensive national tuition support programs for students who have missed out on school because of illness (see Ronald McDonald Learning Program, 2014).

Government-funded education services in hospitals have developed their own priorities, including bedside teaching. They tend to offer educational activities only to those who stay at the hospital for periods that are longer than a week. However the average length of stay at paediatric hospitals is three nights (based on 2014 data from Royal Children's Hospital Health Information Services). Most children and young people instead spend lengthy periods of time at home recuperating – in no man's land – acknowledged by neither education nor health systems. Generally, hospital special schools and associated services do not accept responsibility for these students once they have left hospital. Nor do schools or education departments assume responsibility for these students in any systematic way. As Donnan (2011) observes: 'no direct teaching/lessons occur whilst the student is unwell at home but not yet able to return to school' (p. 16). An independent

evaluation of government funded educational services associated with paediatric hospitals would be likely to conclude that these services are outdated, lack relevance and do not provide value for money to government departments of education who ultimately have responsibility according to the legislative framework:

> The standards also give students with disabilities rights in relation to specialised services needed for them to participate in the educational activities for which they are enrolled. These services include specialist expertise, personal educational support or support for personal and medical care, without which some students with disabilities would not be able to access education and training. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005, p. 27)

While in hospital, students are likely not to be well enough to engage in educational tasks, especially those that bear little relation to work requirements from their actual schools. Those who are funded by government to take responsibility for the education of these students appear to have other priorities, while it is philanthropic organisations instead who have recognised the urgent need to step into this breach and provide appropriate services.

Philanthropic organisations have traditionally stepped into significant but unrecognised areas of need until governments accept responsibility for them. The time has come for Australian government departments of education to accept these students *as an educational group* and develop more appropriate policy discourses that go beyond legal checklists. These government departments of education should also review and redirect existing funding towards more relevant educational support services, rather than continue to fund traditional hospital-related special schools and services, so that the contemporary needs of this burgeoning group is met. Government departments of education should also monitor these students over time and move to ensure that legally mandated reasonable adjustments are routinely negotiated and enacted in schools. Policy reform is urgently required, as schools and teachers require information about the rights of these students as well as direction and expectations. If it is not the responsibility of these government departments of education to provide this guidance, then who should be asked to assume it? Government departments of education do appear to be in a precarious position, open to public criticism as well as increasing vulnerability to litigation.

A class action lawsuit where parents of young people with serious illness sued a department of education (national, state or territory) would serve to clearly establish how the DDA (1992) and the Disability Standards for Education (2005) should be interpreted by school systems and within schools. The reasonable adjustment required for individual students to participate, be included and to succeed in education, ought to become the focus for those in education, rather than medical conditions or absences. The establishment of case law in this area is required in Australia, to focus the attention of government departments of education and schools to accept responsibility for the education of these young people.

Hospital schools and government-funded education services associated with paediatric hospitals are particularly vulnerable because their practices would not bear close scrutiny, particularly in terms of the numbers of young people they serve or the nature of that service. Nor do these facilities provide adequate assistance that reflects the reality of medical success and the profound need for appropriate support for these young people, their parents and their teachers.

These students are legally entitled to an education that accommodates and adjusts learning programs for them. However, many students and parents are not aware of these entitlements, or are not making full use of them. There are complex reasons for this related to adolescence itself (Sawyer et al., 2007), because young people with significant health challenges desperately desire to fit in and to be seen to be an ordinary student (see Yates et al., 2010) and not be noticed as needing special attention because they are resilient and self reliant (see White, 2014). Nor do parents seem aware of the importance of disclosure requiring the association of their children with disability, in order to obtain legal entitlements within education.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on legal frameworks and the policy shortcomings for the education of young people who live with serious health challenges, who therefore reside at the intersection of health and education. The article has identified four groups who remain vulnerable through a lack of action and attention, despite considerable legal muscle in terms of the DDA (1992) and the (2005) Amendment to that Act, the Disability Standards for Education. The OECD (2007) identified *fairness* and *inclusion* as two dimensions that define equity in education. Ainscow (2012) takes up key points from that definition and comments that the OECD report argues that:

> a fair and inclusive education is desirable because of the human rights imperative for people to be able to develop their capacities and participate fully in society. It also reminds us of the long-term social cost of educational failure, since those without the skills to participate socially and economically generate higher costs for health, income support, child welfare and security. (p. 290)

In Australia the group of children and young people who are enrolled in school and who live with serious illness is conservatively estimated to number almost half a million. By and large, these students and their parents are not treated with fairness, nor are they included in Australian education, despite legislation purported to protect their rights, leaving both groups vulnerable to social exclusion. Policy silence has been identified as a major problem, particularly for government departments of education, who are left vulnerable to public criticism and litigation. Somewhat surprisingly, these government departments of education continue to fund special schools and other education services associated with paediatric hospitals that belong to a bygone era when prolonged stays in hospital were the norm. Medicine has made extraordinary advances over the past decade but these

educational institutions have not kept pace. They do not serve the interests of the majority of these young people, the schools to which these students belong nor the government education departments that fund them.

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PART 3

Practice Narratives

ANNE HAMPSHIRE AND GILLIAN CONSIDINE

8. BEYOND THE LENS OF FINANCIAL VULNERABILITY

Supporting Vulnerable Young People to Stay Engaged in Education

INTRODUCTION

The Smith Family is a national charity whose mission is to create opportunities for young Australians in need, by providing long-term support for their participation in education. Established in 1922, over the last 15 years it has completely shifted its focus from providing welfare support and emergency relief, to improving the educational outcomes of disadvantaged children and young people. This shift was prompted by the early intervention literature and its former 'welfare' clients indicating that their child's education was the area where they most wanted support from The Smith Family. In the 2013-14 financial year, The Smith Family supported over 107,000 children and young people and over 27,000 parents, carers and community professionals.

This chapter examines The Smith Family's flagship *Learning for Life* program, which supports over 34,000 children and young people a year. It draws on a range of quantitative and qualitative data to explore some potential flags of vulnerability for poor educational outcomes, which include, but go beyond, financial disadvantage. It will argue that efforts aimed at improving educational outcomes for vulnerable young people need to take account of a range of influences and factors, a number of which are 'outside the school gate'. It will also highlight the importance of sustained support across young people's development.

AN ECOLOGICAL APPROACH

The Smith Family's approach is underpinned by the work of Bronfenbrenner (1994) and others which identifies that there are multiple influences on the wellbeing of children and young people. These include:

- Personal attributes and characteristics such as intelligence, health, social skills, self esteem and attitudes.
- Their family, including the resources they have access to, parental aspirations and their engagement in their child's learning.
- Their peers, including their aspirations, attitudes to education and risk taking behaviours.

K. te Riele & R. Gorur (eds.), Interrogating Conceptions of 'Vulnerable Youth' in Theory, Policy and Practice, 113–131.

- The learning and care institutions that they attend, including school and early learning and care settings.
- The community in which they live, including the economic and infrastructure resources available, the level of social capital and cohesion, the presence of role models and the level of community safety.

These influences do not impact in the same way on all children and young people over their life course; nor do they act in isolation – challenges in one area can be offset by additional supports in another. These influences place a child on a pathway or trajectory which is not fixed, but can be influenced by the right support at the right time. The Smith Family works across these multiple areas of influence on a child's wellbeing, as this can maximise the likelihood of positive outcomes.

An ecological approach is reinforced by Hattie's (2003) research which identified factors which contribute to school achievement, noting that student factors account for about 50% of the variance in achievement.

> It is what students bring to the table that predicts achievement more than any other variable. (Hattie, 2003, p. 1)

THE *LEARNING FOR LIFE* SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Within the context of an ecological approach, The Smith Family's *Learning for Life* scholarship program is provided to disadvantaged families to help support their child's long-term engagement in education. Students can participate from the beginning of the first year of school right through secondary school and into tertiary education. *Learning for Life* has three components:

- Financial: a modest bi-annual financial contribution which is used for education related expenses, for example books, uniforms, school excursions, camps, extra-curricular activities or a computer.
- Relational: support from a *Learning for Life* Program Coordinator (a Smith Family staff member) who assists the student and family to address any issues relating to their educational participation. The student is also connected to a sponsor[1] who can provide ongoing encouragement for them to stay engaged in education.
- Programmatic: access to a range of programs which build skills and knowledge and influence attitudes and behaviours. It includes reading programs, after-school learning clubs, career mentoring initiatives and digital and financial literacy programs. These programs are targeted to the educational stage and need of the young person as outlined in Figure 1. The digital and financial literacy programs are particularly focused on supporting parents/carers.

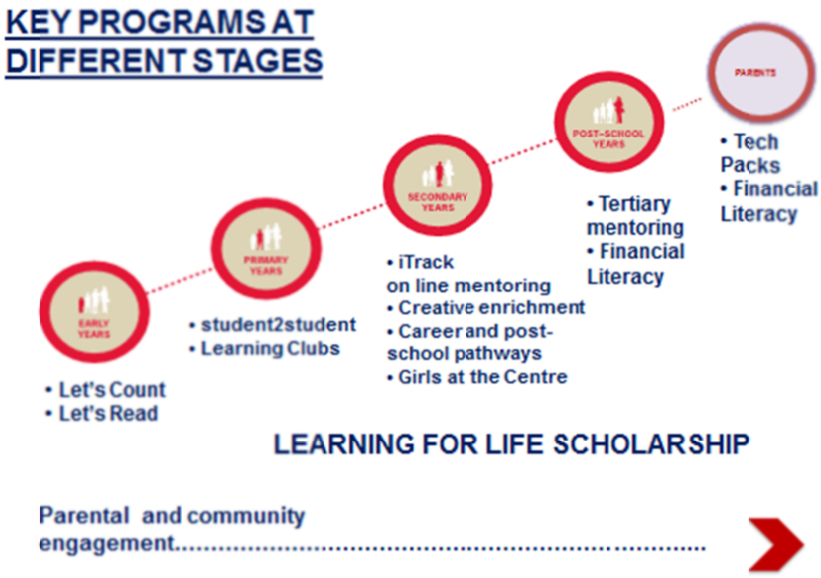

Figure 1. Key programs at different stages

Criteria for Learning for Life

The Smith Family uses a place-based approach, with families needing to initially live in one of the 96 disadvantaged communities in which the organisation works to be eligible for a *Learning for Life* scholarship. This maximises the likelihood of the young person being able to access the range of additional program supports that the scholarship provides, many of which are delivered through schools. In addition, the initial lens for selection includes a financial one – families must have a Health Care Card or be on a pension. Families must also enter into a partnership agreement with The Smith Family that commits both parties to working together to support the child's long-term education.

At its simplest, the criteria for selection are:

- Family residing in one of the disadvantaged communities in which The Smith Family works.
- Demonstrated financial need.
- Willingness to enter into a reciprocal agreement regarding their child's education.[2]

OTHER LENSES OF POTENTIAL VULNERABILITY

A range of research identifies potential vulnerabilities for children achieving poorer educational outcomes. After controlling for differences in school achievement, a number of individual and family characteristics are associated with differences in educational outcomes. On average, students who live in families where there is parental unemployment and low levels of parental education, or who come from an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background, have lower rates of school attendance, poorer academic achievement and lower Year 12 attainment rates than their peers (Lamb et al., 2004).

At the aggregate level, *Learning for Life* families (the 34,000 students are from over 18,000 families) exhibit a range of characteristics that flag potential vulnerabilities for their children succeeding in education. These go well beyond financial vulnerability alone and include:

- Household structure – over half are single-parent families.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background – 16% of students are from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background.
- Parent/carer employment – 58% are not in the labour force (NILF) and a further 10% are unemployed.
- Language other than English – a third of families speak a language other than English at home.[3]
- Family size – a third of families have six or more people in them.

The extent of residential and school mobility among many *Learning for Life* families and students are additional factors potentially influencing educational success. While students are initially selected into the program from one of more than 500 'partner' schools, scholarship support is continued when students move schools. School mobility is evidenced by the fact that there are *Learning for Life* students in over 4,000 Australian schools. Research suggests that frequent student mobility is associated with lower levels of school performance and achievement (Reynolds et al., 2009).

HOW DO *LEARNING FOR LIFE* STUDENTS COMPARE WITH OTHER DISADVANTAGED YOUNG PEOPLE?

Data made available through the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities highlights the extent of disadvantage experienced by *Learning for Life* families in that jurisdiction, even relative to their peers in disadvantaged schools. Table 1 includes school level data from 50 schools where there are 30 or more students on a *Learning for Life* scholarship and compares this with data from The Smith Family scholarship students in the same schools. All 50 schools have a low socio-economic status (SES) with a value on the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) ranging from 737 to 999.[4]

Table 1. Comparison of student demographics of The Smith Family students and their peers in low SES schools

Characteristic	*Total school population in 50 low SES schools* *%*	*The Smith Family students in these same 50 schools* *%*
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background	14.3	24.7
Parent/carer of non-English speaking background	16.4	24.5
Parent/carer Year 12 completion or post school education	80.3	39.4
Parent/carer university education	12.5	3.4
Parent/carer employed	79.0	18.4

Table 1 highlights that on key variables which are known to influence young people's educational outcomes, such as parental education and employment, The Smith Family's scholarship students are, as a group, more disadvantaged than their peers.

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT AND ASPIRATIONS

Research shows that high parental engagement has a positive impact on a range of student achievement and development indicators, including: higher grades and school graduation rates, a greater likelihood of commencing post-secondary education, more regular school attendance, better social skills, a greater sense of personal competence and efficacy for learning, and a stronger belief in the importance of education (Emerson et al., 2012). A review of the literature notes that:

> While involving parents in school activities may have an important community and social function, the key to facilitating positive change in a child's academic attainment is the engagement of parents in learning outcomes in the home. (Emerson et al., 2012, p. 8)

Some policy and research has directly or indirectly assumed that the educational aspirations of parents and children from low SES backgrounds are 'problematic' or less than those from more affluent backgrounds. However, recent research questions these assumptions. In a series of qualitative studies, Kintrea and his colleagues (e.g. 2011) suggest that poorer children and their families often have high aspirations and many want to go to university or get professional, managerial and skilled jobs. Similarly, in a large-scale survey of almost 14,000 families Hansen and Jones found that regardless of income level, the vast majority of mothers of seven year-olds (97%) want their child to achieve a university level

educational (2010, p. 139). The real difficulty for many is knowing how to fulfil their ambitions.

Aspirations of Learning for Life *families*

Fostering high aspirations and parental engagement in their child's learning is central to the *Learning for Life* program. The partnership agreement entered into by parents/carers and The Smith Family is a tangible example of this engagement. Qualitative research conducted in 2012 with The Smith Family's *Learning for life* parents and carers, indicates that their children's educational achievement is a major hope for them:

> *I hope my kids do better or at least go as far as what I did.*
>
> *I always told the children we want all of you to finish college because me and your mum we just only finished Year 8 that's it. And … our life it's not full it's not rich.*
>
> *I just want them to get the best education that they can and to get them to the career that they are happy to work in.*
>
> *At the very least Year 12. You want them to have more options in life and it's too late once you get out of school.*
>
> *With my son I would like him just to go to Year 12. He doesn't like school much so to get him to Year 12 would be a huge thing.*
>
> *Naturally I hope that they can enter university.*

As with the Kintrea's (2011) and Hansen and Jones' (2010) research, many *Learning for Life* parents and carers, despite having the highest of educational aspirations for their children, felt poorly equipped to support their children's learning. Reasons for this included a lack of knowledge of the contemporary Australian educational and employment systems, the multiple family needs they were managing, and for some, their own lower levels of educational attainment and poor history of engaging with schools.

THE IMPACT OF FINANCIAL VULNERABILITY

The 2012 research with *Learning for Life* parents and carers also highlighted their financial vulnerability and the direct impact this can have on children's access to a range of educational activities and resources:

> *There are always the financial burdens that we all have and just making sure they've got everything just like most of the other kids at school. You don't want them to look like they're missing out on anything.*
>
> *When my son started on the construction subject I had no idea I had to pay $200 just for that course for the year.*

The school asks us to take children to excursion…and we don't have enough money to support it to let them go and so we just say 'sorry'.

Every time I get the money it is gone to pay the bills, buy some food, petrol for the car. Sometimes it's hard for me to budget.

Most families in the study faced a range of issues that went well beyond their financial circumstances, with these issues potentially having a direct or indirect impact on the ability of their child to stay engaged in education. These included:

- Parental ill-health.
- Child with a learning difficulty, autism, disability and/or ill-health.
- Household unemployment.
- Low English language skills and limited literacy including literacy in first language.
- Large families and/or foster or kinship families.
- A lack of formal and informal support networks and limited accessing of services.
- Lack of knowledge of the Australian educational and employment system.

Some parents and carers also indicated they had experienced violence, trauma, family separation or other major life events, including the refugee experience.

Missing out and Adapting Preferences

The *Making a Difference* research (Skattebol et al., 2012), in which The Smith Family was a research partner, interviewed close to 100 young people aged between 11 and 17 years who were experiencing economic adversity. Thirteen parents and carers were also interviewed. A number of these young people and parents and carers were *Learning for Life* families. The research included a focus on the impact on young people's educational outcomes and school experience of living in economic adversity.

Many of these young people missed out on activities that were common place for their peers, such as school camps, sport and recreational activities and having friends over. A number consciously chose less expensive subjects at school, especially electives, in order to ease the pressure on their family's budget. These young people adapted their preferences and chose subjects they weren't interested in or that didn't match their skills and abilities, so as to limit the financial impost they put on their family's limited resources.

I think it's pretty easy [for my family to meet school costs] cos I don't pick very expensive subjects, plus I don't go on camps, because I don't like them, so that's saved my parents, like, $1000 (Annabel, 16 years). (Skattebol et al., 2012, p. 122)

> *At my school, some young people don't like asking their parents for the money so they will just come and they will just stay at school and do school sport instead of going away or whatever* (Sarah, 17 years). (Skattebol et al., 2012, p. 121)

They also chose schools which would minimise the overall costs of them attending, even if the choice was a poorer option for them, given their interests:

> *I was going to go to Southern Falls High. Mum wanted me to go to Southern Falls but we couldn't afford like the bus passes and all that so we went to White Ibis Plains* (Tahlia, 14 years). (Skattebol et al., 2012, p. 118)

These young people were not passive recipients of their families' economic circumstances. As the authors concluded when:

> the amount of money required was more than the household could afford, young people said they did not 'care' to participate and adapted their preferences to their situation. This process of adaption allowed young people to retain their own and their family's dignity and to pass as someone who was not adversely affected by economic shortfalls. (Skattebol et al., 2012, p. 120)

KEY MEASURES OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF *LEARNING FOR LIFE*

Against this context of multi-dimensional disadvantage, The Smith Family's five year strategic plan 2012-16, identifies three longer term measures that assess the effectiveness of its work supporting disadvantaged children and young people. These are informed by the key measures identified by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), which are in turn based on evidence regarding some of the outcomes which are important for young people's long-term wellbeing.

The goal of The Smith Family's *Learning for Life* scholarship is to:

- Increase the school attendance rates of students over time to 90% (Attendance Rate).
- Increase the proportion of Year 10 students who advance to Year 12 on scholarship (Advancement Rate).
- Increase the proportion of students in Years 10 to 12 who are engaged in employment, education or training, twelve months after they leave the program (Engagement Rate).

The Smith Family has been tracking the Attendance, Advancement and Engagement Rates of *Learning for Life* students since 2012, including analysing this data for different cohorts of students such as those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, from different household structures and by parental education and labour market or study status. This analysis is providing rich insights which are being used to refine and enhance the support The Smith Family is

providing to students and their families. It is also highlighting that the disadvantage being experienced by many *Learning for Life* families goes beyond financial constraints.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE RATES

School Attendance Rates for *Learning for Life* students vary according to a range of factors:

- Student year level – average attendance for students in Years 1 to 6 in 2012 was 90.4% and 84.6% for those in Years 7 to 10. Rates begin to decline slightly in the late primary years, with a steep decline occurring across the high school years, particularly in Years 8 and 9 (see Figure 2).
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background – average attendance rates are around 3 percentage points lower than their non-Aboriginal peers.
- Household type and size – households headed by single-parent mothers had the lowest average attendance rates, around 3 percentage points below that of two-parent natural families, who had the highest average attendance rates. Average attendance rates generally increased slightly with family size.
- Parent/carer's educational attainment – students whose parents had no formal education or only primary school level, had the highest average attendance rates, at just over 91%. For the remainder of the students, attendance rates increased with parental levels of education, ranging from 86.3% for those whose parents achieved Year 10 or below, up to 90% for those whose parents had a university degree or higher qualification.
- Parent/carer labour market or study status – the highest average attendance rates were for students whose parents were in full or part time study, at 90.8%. The lowest rates were for students whose parent/carer were unemployed or not in the labour force, at around 87%.

There was no difference in the average attendance rates by gender. The higher rates for students whose parent/carer had no formal education or only primary school level, while contrary to other research, is explained through analysing attendance rates by language spoken at home. Students from families where the main language spoken at home is an African one, for example, had an average attendance rate of 94.4%. Many of these families came to Australia as refugee or humanitarian migrants. These high attendance rates reflect the very strong value such families put on education, seeing it as offering a pathway out of disadvantage.

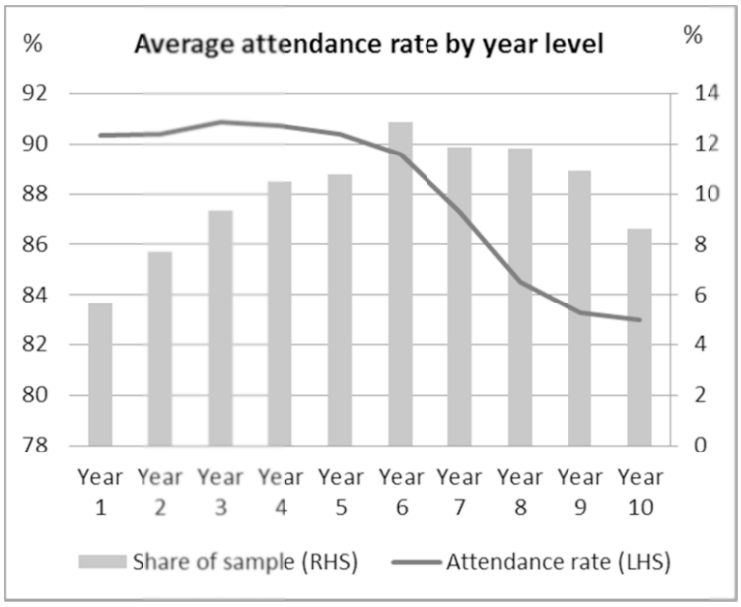

Figure 2. Average school attendance rates by year level

ADVANCEMENT RATES TO YEAR 12 OR EQUIVALENT

In a comprehensive review of research that examined the factors associated with the retention of students to Year 12, Lamb and his colleagues (2004) discuss a range of individual and family characteristics that have been consistently related to Year 12 completion. The gender gap in Year 12 completion, with boys less likely than girls to attain Year 12, has persisted for years (Lamb et al., 2014) and remains apparent today (ABS, 2014). Year 12 completion rates are also lower for young people with poorer academic achievement outcomes and this is closely related to lower and/or broken school attendance histories (Lamb et al., 2014).

Australian studies have also shown that after controlling for differences in school achievement, a range of other socio-economic background factors are associated with poorer school retention and Year 12 completion. These include:

- Families with parental unemployment (Ryan, 2011).
- Families from an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background (Ryan, 2011).
- Large families (Lamb et al., 2004).
- Single-parent or step-parent families (Lamb et al., 2004).
- Students whose parents have lower education levels (i.e. not completed Year 12) (ABS, 2009, Ryan, 2011).

- Students from English speaking backgrounds (Lamb et al., 2004; Ryan, 2011).

The Smith Family's Advancement Rate identifies the proportion of students who were on a *Learning for Life* scholarship in Year 10 who advanced to Year 12 or equivalent while still on the scholarship. Among the 2011 Year 10 students, 63% advanced to Year 12 in 2013.

Detailed analysis indicates that a number of student and family characteristics were associated with different rates of advancement to Year 12 or equivalent. Many of these findings reflect the results of national research into Year 12 completion rates. For the 2011 Year 10 scholarship students, lower Advancement Rates were observed among:

- Students from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, when compared to students not from these backgrounds (52% and 64% respectively).
- Male students when compared to female students (59% and 66% respectively).
- Students whose primary parent/carer was from an English speaking background, when compared to those from non-English speaking backgrounds (59% and 80% respectively).

Advancement Rates also varied considerably by family type, with 74% of young people from two parent natural families advancing to Year 12 or equivalent, compared to 60% for those from single-parent mother headed families, 54% for those from two-parent blended families and 47% for those from single-parent father headed families.

However, there were some relationships between student characteristics and their Advancement Rates that do not align with findings from national research. Among *Learning for Life* students, there was only a slight tendency for students to have higher Advancement Rates if their primary parent/carer was employed or studying (66%), relative to those whose primary parent/carer was unemployed or not in the labour force (61%).

Similarly, students from large families were no less likely to advance to Year 12 or equivalent than students from smaller families. In addition, although the 2011-13 Advancement Rate was relatively high among students whose primary parent/carer had an Advance Certificate (74%) or University Degree (75%) there was no clear relationship between student Advancement Rates and parental qualifications below this level.

The findings that do not concord with results from national studies may be due to a number of factors. It is likely that the low rates of parental employment and the relatively small proportion of scholarship parent/carers with high education levels are masking the positive effect that these characteristics have on student educational outcomes at a national level. All scholarship families, regardless of parental employment, are struggling financially. Therefore, scholarship parent/

carers who are in paid employment are likely to be in low-paid and low-skilled work. Employment in relatively high-skilled and/or high-paying work may be an important factor that supports positive educational outcomes for children, rather than just employment in any work.

POST SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT IN EMPLOYMENT AND FURTHER EDUCATION

In 2013 The Smith Family undertook its first Engagement Rate survey with former Year 10, 11 and 12 *Learning for Life* students who had left the program twelve months previously. The aim was to identify the level of engagement of these young people in employment, further education and training. A total of 2,337 former students were eligible to participate in the survey which was conducted through a phone interview. Almost two fifths of the households were not contactable, due to the fact that their last known phone number was no longer active. This highlights in part, the high level of mobility of *Learning for Life* families.

Interviews were conducted with 769 former students, of whom 12% either has a disability (56), is a parent (5), is a carer (10) or is both a parent and a carer (22). All of these young people were excluded from the Engagement Rate analysis but it reinforces some of the non-financial challenges that these young people are managing.

Of the remaining 676 former students who were interviewed:

- 62% were fully engaged (for approximately 35 hours per week), in part-time study and part-time work, full-time study or full-time work.
- 18% were partially engaged in either part-time work or part-time study.
- 20 percent were not engaged in work or study.

As with the Attendance and Advancement Rates, there were a range of characteristics which influenced engagement levels. Former students whose parents had completed a Certificate IV or higher educational qualification, were more likely to be fully engaged than their peers whose parents had not completed Year 12 or a Certificate II or III (70% and 58% respectively). Former students from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds were also slightly less likely to be fully engaged than their non-Aboriginal peers (56% and 62% respectively).

However, a number of characteristics that are associated with disadvantage were not related to the engagement outcomes of former *Learning for Life* students. Typical risk factors for engagement, such as coming from a single-parent household or from a jobless household (Pawagi, 2002), are not related to differences in engagement levels among former *Learning for Life* students. Only a slightly lower percentage of former students living in single-parent mother headed households were fully engaged (60%) compared with former students from two parent households (64%). Sixty three percent of former students living in households with one or more adults who were in paid work were fully engaged. This compares to 59% of those living in a household with no adults who are working.

Engagement by Highest Full Year of School Completed

Among former *Learning for Life* students, engagement outcomes are related to the highest school year level they completed as shown in Figure 3. Full engagement in work or education was more common among those who left school after completing the formal Year 12 Certificate, compared with early school leavers.

Interestingly, when examining the engagement outcomes of former students who did not complete Year 12, those who completed Year 10 had stronger outcomes than those who left school after Year 11. Former *Learning for Life* students who completed Year 10 and then left school were more likely to be fully engaged and they were also more likely to be studying (either full-time or part-time). These more positive outcomes may be attributed to a slightly higher take-up rate of apprenticeships (in which both employment and study are combined) among those who left school after Year 10.

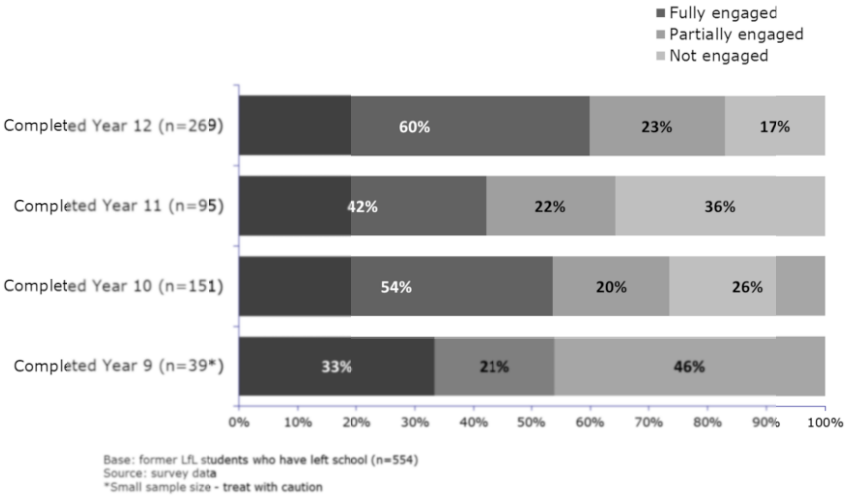

Figure 3. Engagement by highest full year of school completed

Reasons for Leaving School before Completing Year 12

As part of the Engagement Rate survey, former *Learning for Life* students who had left school prior to completing Year 12 (that is, they completed Year 9, 10 or 11) were asked about their reasons for leaving school early. Most early school leavers gave multiple reasons for leaving. This highlights the complexities that these young people face when considering decisions around schooling and the multiple influences on decisions about leaving school early.

Regardless of the year in which the student left school, the most frequently cited reason was related to a desire or need for financial independence – that is, they

wanted to earn their own money. The impact of students' financial circumstances is also reinforced by the fact that around two in five early school leavers (19%) indicated that the subjects that they would have really liked to study were too expensive. Other reasons for leaving early included, wanting to get a job, apprenticeship or traineeship, and disliking school. Each of these reasons was cited by more than half of each year group.

Other non-financial reasons which influenced young people's decision to leave school early reinforce the challenges a number of them faced: 23% indicated that they had health issues which made it hard for them to stay at school and 12% identified that they had to leave home and that made it hard to stay at school.

As shown in Table 2, outside of the three most common reasons for leaving, there is some variation depending on the year students left school. Students who left in Year 10 (that is, their highest level of completion is Year 9), were more likely than other early school leavers to have:

- Missed a lot of school or been absent a lot (59%)
- Not been doing well at school (51%)
- Problems with teachers (54%)
- Problems with other students (56%)
- Teachers who thought they should leave (36%).

Former *Learning for Life* students who left school after completing Year 11 were a little less likely than those who left after completing Year 10 to indicate they left because they wanted to earn their own money (71% compared to 83%) or because they had a job, apprenticeship or traineeship to go to (34% compared to 48%). The latter in particular supports the suggestion that the higher incidence of full engagement among those who completed Year 10 may be related to a higher incidence of apprenticeships and other more formalised post-school plans.

Happiness with Leaving School Early and Life Satisfaction

The Engagement Rate survey also asked early school leavers how they felt about leaving school before completing Year 12. At least a quarter of each of the three year groups was unhappy or very unhappy about their decision, with those who left during Year 10 (that is, having completed Year 9), most likely to be unhappy (44%) as shown in Figure 4.

All Engagement Rate survey respondents were asked about their overall life satisfaction, using the Cummins *Personal Wellbeing Index* (International Wellbeing Group, 2006), which has a scale from zero to 10, where 10 is completely satisfied and zero is completely dissatisfied. As shown in Figure 5, those who left in Year 9 were less likely than their older peers, to be highly satisfied with their life and more likely to score at five or below. One in three in

Table 2. Reasons for leaving school early by year of leaving

	Students left after completing … (%)		
Reason for leaving school	*Year 9*	*Year 10*	*Year 11*
Wanted to earn your own money	72	83	71
Wanted to get job, apprenticeship or traineeship	56	68	60
Didn't like school	59	63	54
Missed a lot of school or were absent from school a lot	59	42	33
Weren't doing well at school	51	40	35
Wanted to do study or training that wasn't available at your school	33	44	42
Didn't need Year 12 for the study or training you wanted to do	31	40	47
Didn't need Year 12 for the job you wanted to do	26	41	42
Had problems with teachers	54	34	19
Had a job, apprenticeship or traineeship to go to	23	48	34
Had problems with other students	56	32	15
Teachers thought you should leave	36	23	16
Had health issues that made it hard for you to stay at school	26	23	21
The subjects you would have really liked to do were too expensive	21	20	18
There were issues at home and that made it hard to stay at school	15	25	12
It was hard, financially, to stay at school	8	19	19
Had to leave home and that made it hard to stay at school	13	11	13
Caring for someone else[5]	5	5	4
Parent/guardian wanted you to leave	3	7	4
Other reasons	8	3	2
Left to care for your own baby[6]	5	2	5
Count	**39**	**151**	**95**

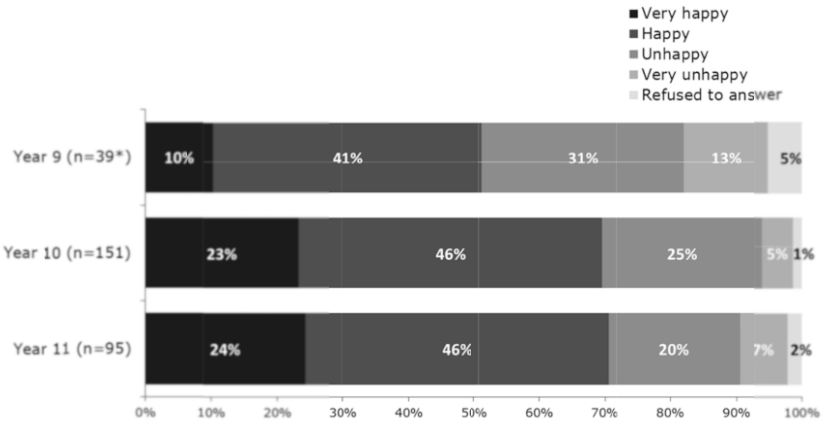

Figure 4. Former students' feelings about having left school before completing Year 12

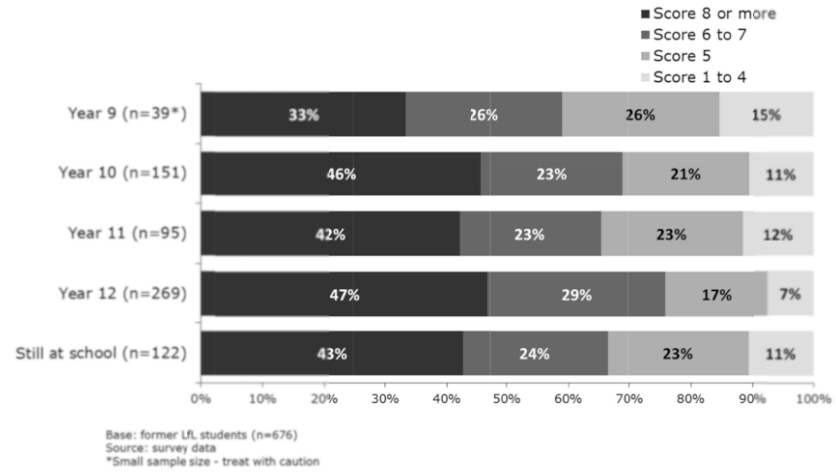

Figure 5. Satisfaction with life by highest level of school

this group, compared to close to half of the Year 12 group was very satisfied with their life. Two in five of the Year 9 group, compared with one in four of the Year 12 rated their life satisfaction at 5 or below.

INSIGHTS ACROSS THE ATTENDANCE, ADVANCEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT RATES

Examining the data across the Attendance, Advancement and Engagement Rates highlights some groups of students are more likely to struggle in one or more of these areas. *Learning for life* students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds are more likely to have poorer outcomes on the three measures than their non-Aboriginal peers, however the gap is relatively modest in the Attendance and Engagement Rates and largest in the Advancement Rate.

Parent/carers' education does not significantly impact on Attendance Rates, but does on Advancement and Engagement Rates. The influence of parent/carers' employment and study status is strongest with regards to the Engagement Rate and while there are slight differences by family type in the Attendance and Advancement Rates, the biggest difference is also seen in the Engagement Rate.

CHANGING PRACTICE

The development and implementation of The Smith Family's research and evaluation agenda regarding its *Learning for Life* program has highlighted particular groups of students who may need more support to attend school, achieve Year 12 and participate in post-school employment and training. It has also identified significant opportunities for more targeted intervention. As a result, signifycant enhancements in how the program is implemented have already been made, with findings from the research being used to inform and drive practice change.

Examples of this include a stronger focus on supporting school attendance across all years of school, particularly across the primary to secondary school transition period and through high school. This includes having more targeted strategies for conversations with families whose children are struggling to attend at 90% or above. The Advancement and Engagement Rate research has also resulted in a stronger focus on actively supporting older *Learning for Life* students to understand possible career and post-school opportunities. It has led to an enhanced focus on supporting young people to complete Year 12, or if they do leave school early, working with them to ensure they have a clear plan to pursue. The poorer engagement outcomes for students who leave in Year 11, relative to those who leave in Year 10, has been a key prompt for this new work. The reasons early school leavers gave in the Engagement Rate survey for not continuing at school have also provided some clear indicators of where early intervention efforts can be best targeted. Poor attendance, not doing well at school and difficulties with students and teachers are risks for early school leaving. If identified early, they provide opportunities for targeting additional support to keep young people engaged in education.

DISADVANTAGE BEYOND THE FINANCIAL

The quantitative and qualitative work undertaken to date by The Smith Family highlights that the challenges facing the young people and families that *Learning for Life* supports include, but are far from limited to, financial disadvantage. Financial challenges result in more limited exposure to the types of activities and resources that are assumed as 'normal' for young people in Australia today. Many of these activities and resources have a broad educational dimension. For example, at a national level only two thirds of children aged five to 14 years in Australia's most disadvantaged communities accessed the internet at home over a twelve month period, compared to just over 90% of children from the most advantaged communities (The Smith Family, 2013). The main reason children use the internet at home is for educational purposes, so more limited access to it can impact on disadvantaged children's learning outcomes. Financial disadvantage also impacts on the type of subjects and extracurricular activities in which young people can be involved. This can result in a loss of motivation and engagement with learning and can contribute to early school leaving.

In addition to financial disadvantage, many vulnerable young people do not have access to the networks of support and mentors who are particularly important in helping them navigate the senior years of school and post-school transitions to employment and further education. They may not know anyone who has completed Year 12, gone to university or had a career in Australia. Despite knowing that education is the key for their child's long-term future, many parents of these young people feel ill-equipped to help them traverse the increasingly complex education systems and labour markets of the twenty first century.

Financially disadvantaged young people are also more likely to be dealing with complex situations which include caring for others in their family, living with a parent or carer who has a physical or mental illness, and trying to balance multiple responsibilities, including part-time employment.

Efforts aimed at supporting improved educational outcomes for vulnerable young people therefore need to be long-term and adaptable to the changing requirements of young people as they develop. These efforts need to take account of the personal attributes of the young person, but also be inclusive of their family and community context. The longitudinal research which is continuing to be undertaken by The Smith Family, is informing how the *Learning for Life* program is implemented. This large-scale research program involving a unique group of young people has the potential to not only inform the support provided to *Learning for Life* scholarship students, but also public policy aimed at improving the educational outcomes of vulnerable young Australians.

NOTES

[1] The vast majority of *Learning for Life* students are supported by individual sponsors or donors. These sponsors are 'matched' with a student and there is communication between them at least twice yearly.

[2] There is a small variation in the criteria for tertiary scholarships.

[3] There is considerable missing data on this variable so it should be treated with caution.
[4] The ICSEA scale has a median value of 1000 and ranges from 500 to 1300.
[5] These figures do not include the former *Learning for Life* students who were full-time carers (n=10), parents (n=5) or combining parenting and caring roles (n=22).
[6] These figures do not include the former *Learning for Life* students who were full-time carers (n=10), parents (n=5) or combining parenting and caring roles (n=22).

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9. YOUNG PEOPLE ON OR OVER THE NEET CLIFF EDGE

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, policy makers and researchers have focused on young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). In 2011, approximately 1 in 10 young Australians aged 15-24 fell into this category (Muir, 2012). Whilst this figure was considerably lower than the 2011 OECD average of 16.4 per cent (OECD, 2012), the economic engagement trends of young Australians are concerning.

- The average duration of unemployment for a young person in Australia nearly doubled between 2008 and 2014, from 16 to 29 weeks (Brotherhood of St. Laurence, 2014);
- Since 2011, over one-quarter of young people aged 17-24 have not been fully engaged in work or study since leaving school (Jobs Australia, 2014); and
- By February 2014 more than 18 per cent of unemployed young people – 50,000 of those aged 15-24 – were long-term unemployed (52+ weeks) (Brotherhood of St. Laurence, 2014).

Lifetime costs of NEET are high, for the individual in lost earnings and opportunities, and for the state in lost tax revenue and higher expenditure on unemployment benefits (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2010). Being NEET is also associated with adverse non-economic indicators, including increased social isolation and homelessness, and decreased general satisfaction and wellbeing (Muir, 2012; Robinson & Lamb, 2012). NEETs are a cause for more concern than other young people because early social and economic marginalisation can have a cumulative effect across the life course (Belfield, 2012).

Because the costs are so high, it is important to better understand the patterns. How, why and under what circumstances young people do remain in or disengage from education and employment in Australia? This chapter draws from interviews with 70 Australians aged 12-20 across the spectrum of economically engaged, at risk of disengagement, or NEET. It examines commonalities and differences between these groups in how they perceive and experience education and employment. It examines factors which have helped or hindered their engagement

K. te Riele & R. Gorur (eds.), Interrogating Conceptions of 'Vulnerable Youth' in Theory, Policy and Practice, 133–149.

and the resources each group has drawn on to navigate their education and employment trajectories.

BACKGROUND

There is a large literature on young people who are not engaged in education, employment or training in Australia. Much focuses on the association between NEET and disadvantage: young people with a disability or health problem, who are Indigenous, from immigrant or low socio-economic backgrounds or who leave school early are all more likely to be NEET (Robinson & Lamb, 2012)(Circelli & Oliver, 2012). In 2012, the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) found that 30% of young people who left school in Year 9 or below were NEET, compared with 6.5% who completed Year 12. Both disadvantage and educational attainment mediate, not only the risk of being NEET, but also the duration of NEET status. Those from the poorest families, and those with lower educational attainment, are most likely to remain NEET long-term (Robinson & Lamb, 2012).

Factors contributing to a young person being NEET operate on many levels. The international literature indicates that health issues, particularly mental health, are associated with higher likelihood of disengagement (Benjet et al., 2012; Bynner & Parsons, 2002; Spielhofer et al., 2009). UK research suggests NEET young people may have more negative attitudes and lower expectations – though not necessarily lower aspirations – regarding education or employment (Finlay, Sheridan, McKay, & Nudzor, 2010; Simmons, Russell, & Thompson, 2013; Spielhofer et al., 2009). NEET young people are also more likely to engage in risky behaviour (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Britton, gregg, Macmillan, & Mitchell, 2011).

A second set of factors relate to family/household characteristics. For instance, shouldering childcare responsibilities is associated with less engagement by young people in the UK (Yates, Harris, Sabates, & Staff, 2011). Further, young people with informal caring responsibilities for other people, usually family members with chronic illness, disability, or the frail aged (Cass, Smyth, Hill, Blaxland, & Hamilton, 2009) – have higher unemployment than non-carers, and are also more disadvantaged in education and training (Cass et al., 2009). Other relevant familial/household issues include transience and housing instability, and relationships between schools and families (Britton et al., 2011; Skattebol, Saunders, Redmond, Bedford, & Cass, 2012)

A third theme in the NEET literature is the link between disengagement and negative schooling experiences. Spielhofer and colleagues noted that negative schooling experiences can manifest across a number of domains: problems with the social dynamics in the school space, particularly bullying; poor relationships with teachers; negative views of schooling and the academic curriculum (particularly its 'relevance'); and feeling 'looked down on' because they come from low-income families (Lammas, 2013; Skattebol et al., 2012; Spielhofer et al., 2009; Taylor & Allan, 2013). Behaviour (e.g. truancy) and poor academic performance also influence disengagement from school (Spielhofer et al., 2009).

Finally, the NEET literature details structural labour market changes over the last thirty years, and an associated decline in stable low-skill, entry-level employment. Skills and post-school qualifications are needed to successfully navigate modern labour markets (Cuervo & Wyn, 2011; Riele, 2012). Accordingly, youth unemployment is skewed towards the younger age group and those with lower educational attainment (Robinson & Lamb, 2012). In the UK NEET tends to be geographically concentrated and mediated by local job markets and youth services. Recent research in Australia reveals similar patterns, with the Brotherhood of St. Laurence identifying 'hotspots' of youth unemployment around the country (Brotherhood of St. Laurence, 2014).

In sum, NEET status is influenced by a complex and fluid mix of individual factors, household/familial circumstances, experiences of schooling, and the nature of (local) labour markets (Thompson, Russell, & Simmons, 2013).

To date, most literature has focused the experiences and needs of young people *within* the NEET category. Given the multitude of contributing factors, however, it is necessary to expand research to include comparison of the NEET group with other young people, such as the fully engaged or those at risk of disengagement. This chapter addresses this gap within the Australian context. It examines how Australians aged 12-20 years with different levels of economic engagement (in education and/or employment, engaged but at risk of dropping out, and NEET) experience and perceive their participation, and what supports and resources they draw on. It unpacks similarities and differences in how young people describe and explain their experiences. It asks what we can learn from these groups that may inform policies and supports to keep young people economically engaged?

METHODOLOGY

The Study

This chapter uses data collected as part of an Australian Research Council Linkage Project (LP120100406), *'We can't afford not to: Supporting young people in their families and communities from adolescence to young adulthood'*. The study investigates how young people navigate economic and social engagement from early adolescence to early adulthood (ages 12-20). It aims to identify supports and resources at the home, community and policy levels that assist young people remain socially and economically engaged.

The research includes longitudinal interviews with young people living in urban, regional and rural areas across three states in Australia. This chapter reports on interviews with 70 young people in the first wave of data collection, conducted between October 2012 and January 2013. Interviews were face-to-face, semi-structured and lasted approximately one hour. Young people were asked about their experiences and perceptions of education, employment and community; their relationships with family, friends and trusted adults; and related topics like resources, health and wellbeing, risky behaviours, aspirations, and service use. They also completed a short demographic survey.

The interviews were fully transcribed and coded using QSR-NVivo 10. The coding framework was developed to answer the research questions of the project, to be consistent with theories drawn upon and to capture key themes, including social and economic (education and employment) engagement, health, wellbeing and identity (e.g. in/dependence, agency, self-esteem and confidence).

Sample profile

The group of 70 young people interviewed was 47.1% (n=33) female and 52.9% (n=37) male. The age range was 12-20 with the mean 16.4 years. Cultural and linguistic diversity was achieved, with 17.1% (n=12) from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, 17.1% (n=12) born in a country other than Australia and18.6% (n=13) who spoke a language other than English at home. The study oversampled young people who were either NEET, or at risk of becoming so, by recruiting through re-engagement programs and other youth groups and services known to include those who were having difficulties engaging in education or employment.

Young people were coded as economically engaged if they were enrolled in education or training or if they were in paid work. Those 'at risk of dropping out' were identified as follows. Three researchers read the full transcript of each interview and coded protective and risk factors. Risk factors were categorised as direct (directly influencing whether a young person stays engaged), partial (young person links the risk factor with education/employment but it may be insufficient alone to result in dropping out), and indirect (a risk factor that, with other factors, may place the young person at risk of dropping out). Table 1 provides examples of the indicators by category. One researcher checked a fifth of the transcripts analysed to ensure coding consistency and accuracy. There was a high consistency between researchers; minor differences were reviewed with the lead researcher.

Young people were categorised as 'at risk' if they had:

- One or more direct measures;
- At least one partial measure AND indirect measure(s) (e.g. number of measures in each category, relationship between measures, whether or not the measure was temporary in nature); the type and number of protective measures recorded; and the extent to which protective factors mitigated partial or indirect measures
- Had finished school but were not yet engaged in work/further education because of the time of year interviews were conducted (over summer holidays) AND had no plans for further education or work, and/or met the criteria above.

Young people had to have at least one direct or partial measure to be classified as 'at risk'; indirect measures alone were insufficient.

Table 1. Examples of direct, partial, indirect and protective measures

Direct	*Partial*	*Indirect*	*Protective*
Plans to drop out of school/ work History of high absenteeism at school/work	History of suspension(s) and/or expulsion(s) Failing or struggling Misbehaviour / history of being reprimanded Young person has no/low educational aspirations Experiences of bullying or negative social dynamics & negative attitudes Young person's friends have dropped out & this is encouraged/seen as a positive solution	Mental health issue High family mobility Homelessness Low parental engagement in young person's education Pregnancy/early parenthood Alcohol/substance abuse	Interest in subjects Strong aspirations Supportive networks Feelings/reports of competences Feeling valued Receiving help from a trusted adult

Table 2. Selected characteristics of the sample, by engagement status

	Engaged, not at risk	*Engaged, at risk*	*NEET*	*Total*
Sex				
Male	17	11	9	37
Female	14	12	7	33
Geographic area				
Rural	10	4	1	15
Regional	9	8	10	27
Urban	12	11	5	28
Age				
12-14	8	4	0	12
15-17	12	15	10	37
18-20	11	4	6	21
Speaks a language other than English at home				
Yes	8	2	3	13
No	23	21	13	57
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander				
Yes	4	5	3	12
No	27	18	13	58
Total	**31**	**23**	**16**	**70**

Of the 70 young people interviewed, 54 were in education and/or employment and 23 of this group were deemed as 'at risk'. In total, 44.3% (*n*=31) were engaged in education and/or employment, 22.9% (*n*=16) were NEET and 32.9% (*n*=23) were engaged but at risk of dropping out. Table 2 presents some demographics of the engaged, at risk, and NEET young people interviewed.

Engagement status was similar by gender and by whether or not the young person identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. At risk and NEET young people were more likely to be from regional and urban areas, and concentrated within ages15-17 (although the number of young people from regional areas was over-represented). Given the small sample and the research question, this chapter analyses young people's experiences by economic status rather than other demographic factors.

Most engaged young people were in education (*n*=50, 71.4%). Of these, 42 were enrolled full-time and 8 were enrolled part-time. Of the 50 in education, 22 (44%) were at risk of dropping out. Only 11 young people (15.7%) were employed (2 full-time, 9 part-time). Two of the 11 were categorised as at risk of dropping out. An additional 23 young people had previous employment experience. Employment was mostly low-skill, entry level and casual.

FINDINGS

Experiences and Perceptions of Education and Employment

Engaged young people commonly used positive language when talking about their education, including comments about school being 'good' (17F, regional) or 'great' (12F, rural). Whilst some at-risk young people had positive attitudes to school – 'It's good. I enjoy going there' (15M, urban) – in general this group lacked the enthusiasm of their engaged peers. Most who had disengaged from school were negative and used words like 'hate', 'didn't like' and 'boring' to describe how they had felt about school (19M, urban); (16F, regional); (18F, urban).

Attitudes to employment were much more consistent, with most able to identify numerous positive factors. Often the best part of working was the financial reward (e.g. 17F, regional, engaged; 12F, rural, engaged; 18F, regional, at risk; 19M, regional, engaged; 16M, rural, engaged). Many engaged young people also described enjoying the social aspect: 'we all got along [at work]' (17F, regional, engaged).

People Who Influence Economic Engagement

People consistently came up as highly influential in how young people perceived and experienced education and employment.

Teachers were most often central to why young people liked/disliked or were engaged in/disengaged from school. Many engaged young people were positive about their relationships with teachers, describing them as 'friendly', 'pretty cool'

and 'pretty awesome' (Engaged, 16M, regional; 15M, rural). The engaged were also able to describe positive teaching styles: teachers who were 'relatable' (19F, urban), helpful (16M, rural), and who paid attention to students individually (18F, regional). In contrast, a number of at-risk young people talked negatively about teachers. For example: 'they're all boring, they don't do anything fun. It's always serious, do this, do that, there's no fun activities, nothing' (14F, urban). However, teachers sometimes played a protective role for young people at risk, helping to motivate them to keep attending, as the following quote demonstrates:

> Every day they [teachers] encourage you to come back and they say you're doing good and that … I went to another behaviour school before I went to this one but I never used to go. But now I have high attendance. (15M, urban)

A number of young people who had disengaged from education discussed their dislike of teachers.

> [I] Hated the teachers, I wanted to get out. (19M, urban)

> I didn't really get along with teachers … I was a bit of a smart arse … I just had like this crazy attitude towards the teachers. (18F, urban)

In some cases teachers played a protective role beyond education. One engaged young person described how a teacher had helped them find employment: 'When I finished Year 12, I asked one of my teachers about getting a job and she picked up the phone and called a friend … I got a job through her' (20M, urban). This demonstrates not only the importance of the teacher, but also their networks in facilitating young people's employment.

Trusted Adults

A number of young people discussed how a trusted adult who was not a family member or teacher, such as service providers, youth workers and coaches, influenced their education and/or employment. Trusted adults were identified by approximately two-thirds of interviewees and are characterised by providing emotional and/or practical support.[1]

A number of young people at risk of dropping out identified a paid professional (not in a teaching role) who had an impact on their educational engagement. One young person had a Guidance Counsellor and a not-for-profit support worker assist her return to school after she dropped out and by helping her with school assignments (15F, regional). An Indigenous support group was pivotal in assisting two interviewees in a regional area to remain in school and successfully complete their High School Certificate.

Some disengaged young people spoke about trusted adults that they relied on for practical support. However, only one NEET young person directly spoke about trusted adults helping them with their economic participation, providing him with information about employment opportunities, and pathways back to education (e.g. distance education) (15M, regional).

Two other young people, who had previously been NEET, recounted how trusted adults had indirectly led them back into education. A PCYC officer was able to convince a young man to re-enrol in school (16, urban, at risk), and a young woman's aunt pushed her to re-engage in education (15, rural, at risk).

People within formal job-provider services were often key facilitators to accessing employment opportunities for NEET and at risk young people:

> They [youth workers] just write a form for me and take me there to interview … they are a lot of help. (14M, urban, at risk)

> Yeah, my case manager [name] helped me in preparing my resume. (18M, urban, at risk)

Family

Family members and family dynamics played a key role in a number of the young people's economic participation. Some engaged young people mentioned their parents' 'willing[ness] to help out if we needed it and backed us 100 per cent on what we wanted to do' (19F, urban). Others noted that they worked hard because of strict parents: 'Oh my dad at home, he's very strict, so that's why I had to do all my work' (19M, urban).

In contrast, at-risk young people were more likely to describe their families as the *single* reason that they attended school. For example, one spoke about being unable to attend her alternative schooling program without the support of her sister and brother-in-law (16F, regional), and a 16-year-old female only attended school to avoid 'disappointing' their mother (rural).

Generally, NEET young people did not describe their families as helping them remain in education or employment. Indeed, they often spoke about family dynamics *hindering* their engagement. Issues were multiple. Consistent with the literature, for some young people caring responsibilities and familial resources hindered engagement. A 17-year-old male with many siblings spoke about dropping out of school to look for a job because 'I wanted to look after the kids [financially]' (urban). An 18-year-old female, with a large family including members with multiple health and disability issues, said 'I want to stay and help my family as much as I can … as long as they're struggling, I can't sort of focus on anything else' (18F, regional).

Family members were also important for young people's motivations, participation and access. One engaged young person, for example, spoke about his parents encouraging him to find a better job because 'the boss wasn't paying enough' (19M, regional), and a young person at risk spoke about being prompted to enter the workforce after a motivating speech from an older brother (16F, regional). The greatest significance of family networks, however, was in assisting young people to secure work.

> I actually got that [job] through my family because my aunty and my mother had both worked there at one point. (15F, regional, NEET)

> I was looking for a job and then mum knows the manager there so I kind of got it through the manager. (17F, regional, engaged)

Peers

Peers were mostly mentioned in relation to participation in education rather than employment. For many, friends were one of the important and enjoyable parts of attending school. Such sentiments were expressed across risk categories:

> At [X School] the only reason I was there was really my friends. (18M, regional, engaged)

> My friends, and they are the only reason I ever went to school – to see my friends. (16M, regional, at risk).

While friends played a positive role for many, peers were a major reason other young people dropped out of school early:

> I was bullied a lot at school. … And I've just like hated school ever since … (16F, regional)

> Really the only thing that really stopped me from school was the whole student aspect. The bullying, the social sort of stuff. (15F, regional)

It is important to note that some at-risk and disengaged young people reported disliking both other students and teachers, and thus had no support networks or relationships that bound them to school:

> You have no friends there, you don't know the teachers, you don't know how they are teaching you. It's hard. (18M, urban, at risk)

> I didn't get along with people. I didn't like the teachers and the students (15M, urban, NEET)

A dislike of all peers was rare among fully engaged young people, but still evident: 'Not everyone is friendly at school, there are a lot of people that are mean' (15M, rural).

Friends were only mentioned by two young people in relation to finding employment. Two engaged young people described how their friends had assisted: 'my friend called me up and said, 'this pharmacy needs someone to do pamphlets'' (15M, rural), 'my friend was working there so he told me that they needed workers' (17M, urban).

Employers

Employers and supervisors had an obvious influence on young people's experiences and perceptions of work. Having a manager who negotiated working hours to fit in with education was of significant benefit to one young person balance the competing demands of school and work: 'If I needed time off to do like

exams and something, my manager would give it to me like off so I could study' (17F, regional, engaged). Conversely, some bosses hindered economic engagement. One young man from an urban centre reported being fired after asking his boss, who was paying him in 'breakfast and lunch', for money instead (20, at risk). Another young woman, working in food service, had stopped being paid by her employer completely and eventually had to quit the job (16, regional, engaged).

Resources That Influence Economic Engagement

The influence of people was central, but other resources also emerged as important for economic participation.

These included transport. For example, one young person from a rural community was prevented from getting a job by the fact that, 'Mum would have to drive me into work every day' (16M, rural).

Young people also described computers and the internet as key resources facilitating engagement. For the engaged, access to electronic resources was mainly framed in terms of schoolwork: "I like the library … lots of computers so you can research." (17M, rural). At-risk and NEET young people spoke about relying on computer and internet access at youth or community services, like the PCYC. These young people tended to use computers to help their job searches and doing "resume[s]" (14M, urban, at risk).

Pathways to employment were critical for young people. Navigating labour market entry was identified as a significant challenge by many young people, but especially for those disengaged or at risk. Many seemed caught in Catch-22 situations where they couldn't secure work because they had no previous employment experience. As one NEET young person observed, 'a lot of places, now, they want experienced people, so it's kind of hard because I don't have any experience whatsoever' (18F, urban).

Generally, young people across all three groups identified a lack of entry-level jobs in the communities where they lived. While engaged young people touched on this (e.g. 'there's not a great deal of places to work', 16M, rural), this theme was overwhelmingly dominated by at-risk and NEET young people. These two groups discussed multiple issues: high competition for jobs ('it's hard because you are competing against 20 different people', 14M, urban, at risk); few available jobs ('there is not much', 18F, urban, NEET); and underemployment (''you might have an hour a week? That's pretty shit', 16M, regional, at risk).

Within this context, some young people undertook unpaid work to facilitate future employment. One young man from an urban area was currently in an unpaid 'on-the-job trial', which he thought would lead to a paid position as a waiter (20M, urban, engaged). Another from a rural area was doing unpaid work in shearing sheds (16F, at risk). The lack of payment was not problematised by these young people gaining experience.

Unsuitable Learning Environment

A number of young people disengaged or at risk reflected on a mismatch between their school learning environment and their needs or preferences:

> I like to be more hands on than just sit and learn and write. (18F, urban, NEET)

> I prefer small classes. I just feel more comfortable and I kind of like relax more and concentrate more. (20M, urban, at risk)

Learning style was generally not mentioned as a problem for engaged young people. Rather, it was other young people disrupting their learning that the engaged were most likely to report hindering their education. These examples reflect a long list of similar quotes from other young people:

> People who don't really want to learn, they just want to kind of hold everyone up, people who shouldn't really be at school. (17M, rural)

> Definitely in my English class, there's usually 5 mins of work and the rest is yelling at the kids … (15M, rural)

Personal Factors

Personal factors including mental health, learning disabilities and home life were influential in how young people perceived and experienced education and employment.

Across all three groups, young people spoke about the negative effects of mental health issues on their experiences and perceptions of education. Although still engaged in school due to numerous protective factors (e.g. strong parental support and encouragement and counselling), a 15-year-old male from a rural area explained 'my pretty bad anxiety … stops me from going to school'.

Another young person at risk of dropping out explained how her anxiety and depression made it hard for her to not only go to school, but to also feel engaged once she was there:

> It's the smallest things – just getting out of bed and going to school, the smallest things …, that's something basic that I normally always do, but I lost all motivation (15F, rural, at risk)

Having appropriate support while experiencing mental health problems, however, could help young people re-engage. A 15-year-old female who 'was diagnosed with anxiety and mild depression' was supported by a mental health program at her school, and reported that 'they helped me out getting back into the schooling again and they helped me develop new coping mechanisms and it was really good' (regional, NEET).

Learning disabilities were volunteered as another reason for dropping out of or struggling to stay at school. One young person was desperately hoping that he had

passed Year 10, intending to drop out of school if that was the case: 'I have always been bad at school, I think I have some learning disability. I hope I'm not going back [to school] next year. I hope I've definitely passed Year 10' (16M, regional, at risk).

Another young person with a learning disability had dropped out in Year 10 after being encouraged to leave by his teachers, who were worried about his ability to undertake more complex academic work:

> It's not like I hated school … It was mainly because I chatted with the head teacher of the seniors and they said they were concerned with how I'd go in Year 11 and 12 because I get special needs until Year 10. They were kind of concerned whether they would set me up to fail. (17M, regional, NEET)

Consistent with the NEET literature, unstable home lives made attending school difficult. At 16 one young man struggled to remain in the same high school, despite experiencing secondary homelessness:

> Last year my mum kicked me out of home and then I wasn't in a stable home 'til about this year June, so I just kept moving and moving and it wasn't … I didn't really want to go into a new school every two weeks or five weeks so … (17M, regional, at risk)

Another left school and post-school education because she wanted to help ease the family's financial and housing stress and to provide a caring support role:

> My youngest sister who's just recently turned two was diagnosed with cerebral palsy and my mother has back problems … So I moved back home to help her out … (18F, regional, NEET)

Providing support to family was a higher priority than pursuing her own education and she could not see how to undertake both roles. Similarly, two other at-risk young people wanted work to contribute financially to their households. An 18-year-old woman, the second-oldest of seven siblings, worked as a motel cleaner before and after school because 'I needed to help mum out with money and stuff so she could actually afford to do things' (18F, regional). A teenage mother, living with her mother and young child in a regional town, was also looking for work to help financially (15F, regional, at risk).

Young people who were engaged, and not at risk, were also sometimes motivated to take the financial burden off parents, but this was framed more as decreasing reliance and increasing independence than a necessity (17F, regional; 12F, rural). Only one young person expressed regret there was not more understanding of the complex situations young people might be facing at home:

> Maybe the way teachers teach – they should understand more about the students. For example understanding when a kid is having trouble at home like abuse or something, then they come to school and have trouble, the teachers should be patient to understand their situation. (20M, urban, engaged)

Personal Characteristics, Attitudes and Behaviours

Attitudes and behaviours were frequently noted as why young people were at risk or had already dropped out of school:

> I think maybe my reactions to the way people treated me. (15F, regional, NEET)

> It's just me. I have to listen more to the teacher. But sometimes I don't listen that's why I fail. (14M, urban, at risk)

Most of these self-reflections showed young people had insight into their own attitudes and behaviours, but they also implied that some did not know how to address these problems or to change.

Engaged young people, in contrast, articulated personal traits that helped them either survive or thrive in education. Even if there were other challenges, these young people described themselves as confident, optimistic, leaders and/or friendly. For example:

> I feel confident (12M, rural)

> I always think my future is bright, I have no doubt of that. (20M, urban)

They also reported skills that helped them at school. The ability to work hard and be productive, in particular, was viewed as important:

> Hard-working is important. At school, I have to work hard … (12M, rural)

> I don't want to get lazy, I know how teens my age they just love to be lazy, I don't want to be like that. (14F, urban)

Being or feeling intelligent was also useful: "I know it sounds like I'm bragging, I always had a bit of above average vocabulary" (18F, regional).

Whilst some young people at risk also mentioned the importance of particular skills, like being hard working (17M, urban; 16F, rural), overall positive comments about personal traits and behaviours in relation to education and/or employment were rare. They were almost absent among young people who had already dropped out. Generally, however, young people attempting to re-engage were a little more positive. One young person who had disengaged from education, but who was trying to attend some literacy and employment support programs through an NGO, commented:

> My youth worker, [name] at the refuge, she reckons that I'm pretty strong because of all the stuff I've been through I haven't just given up. (16F, regional)

Another young person who was currently disengaged, but who had left school early to go to TAFE, reflected:

> I think it's all helped me develop as a person. It's definitely matured me more … (15F, regional)

These comments, however, were exceptions. Most young people who were disengaged described feeling only regret:

> It's just I miss school. Like, yeah. Just miss going to school. Better than staying home. (17M, urban)

> I regret leaving high school. I reckon I would have finished Year 12 this year so I reckon I would have been better off staying in school – I missed out big time. (18F, urban)

In contrast, engaged young people's regrets were primarily about wanting to have achieved higher grades or better outcomes:

> I'm probably a little bit too into my games. I always put all my assignments off until the last minute. Probably if I put more time into that [school], I'd probably do a lot better or a bit better. (14M, rural, engaged)

> [If I could go back I would] do my work a lot more, I started to do that this year only. (16M, regional, at risk).

Unlike NEET young people, those engaged and at risk usually expressed regrets about possible alternatives, not being left without a future pathway.

DISCUSSION

Much previous literature has focused on exploring and comparing the experiences of young people who are NEET. This chapter has gone further, comparing the experiences and perceptions of young people who are NEET with those who are engaged in education or work, or engaged but at risk of dropping out. While there is a complexity of factors within each group, and this research is limited by the sample size, some clear trends emerged in relation to who and what influenced young people's engagement.

Unsurprisingly, young people who were engaged in education reported more positive experiences than those who were not engaged or at risk. There were fewer differences in the way employment was perceived and discussed, perhaps because the number of young people employed in the study was small.

Across young people's engagement status, the people they were exposed to were central in shaping their perceptions, decisions and behaviours. Different people play different roles in protecting, facilitating and hindering young people's economic participation. Teachers were often a positive influence on engaged young people. They constituted a risk and/or a protective factor for young people at risk of dropping out. Peers played a mediating role for young people at risk – friends could keep them in education – and a hindering role when young people experienced bullying and/or social isolation. Young people who had dropped out of education often described having neither peers nor teachers that bound them to school. A number of young people from all engagement groups discussed the role family played in relation to economic participation, perceptions and experiences. Engaged young people were more likely to talk about family facilitating their

participation, while disengaged young people were most likely to discuss how their family situation directly or indirectly hindered participation.

Though less central than people, personal situations and characteristics were often mentioned as facilitators or barriers to engagement. Mental health issues and learning disabilities were mentioned mostly by those at risk or disengaged. Unstable family lives were also particularly common among young people in these groups. Additionally, financial and personal stress within the home, homelessness and caring responsibilities affected young people's engagement. This usually entailed young people making decisions that prioritised short term family needs over their own trajectories.

Young people also described how their own attitudes and character traits affected their education and employment. Poor attitudes or behaviours were frequently cited as why young people dropped out of education. Conversely, engaged young people commonly spoke about positive traits. There were few exceptions to this dichotomy, but some young people at risk and disengaged pointed out positive characteristics. Most young people who had disengaged described regret at having dropped out. Regret was also felt among some engaged and at-risk young people, but usually in relation to increasing their current efforts or improving their current situation.

Although also far less frequently mentioned than the influence of people, resources like the internet and transportation were raised as barriers/facilitators, especially among those disengaged or at risk of dropping out. The learning environment was also brought up as a factor by disengaged and at-risk young people (often for its unsuitability for them) and by engaged young people (mostly as either positive or in relation to other young people being disruptive). Finally, having access to job opportunities was mentioned as important by young people across engagement groups.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown there is considerable complexity in the NEET experience. It confirms the impact of personal challenges on young people's engagement, but adds the comparison of young people at risk of dropping out and those still engaged. From a policy perspective the findings suggest while young people's attitudes and behaviours and their education and employment environments are important, the people, resources and supports around young people can be critical.

Overwhelmingly, it is people who influence young people's participation. Teachers and other professionals (within and outside of the education system) were arguably most important in shaping how young people experienced education. Having positive, sound relationships with a professional adult was especially important for young people at risk of disengagement (e.g. they could have a mediating effect against other risk factors) and those who had already dropped out (e.g. in supporting them to consider, develop and action plans for reengagement). This study also shows the importance of systems within educational environments to support learning preferences (and overcome disabilities) and to recognise and

provide support for young people struggling with personal challenges (mental health problems, disabilities, caring responsibilities, unstable family lives, homelessness and financial stress). Places where young people can access not only the technology, but also support from a service provider to facilitate educational and employment opportunities, were essential for a number of young people. Engaged young people often received this support within the home, while at-risk and disengaged young people tended to seek it externally. Importantly, in no situation was disengagement described as a positive choice by young people. For some who had previously dropped out there was a desire to work hard towards a more secure future. Others who were still disengaged expressed heavy regret at what was lost.

The findings of this study clearly suggest positive outcomes are possible with good supports. They offer some answers to the question that policy makers, service providers and trusted adults need continually to ask: how do we effectively support young people to stay in and re-engage in education or work without further reinforcing their vulnerabilities?

NOTE

[1] 17/23 at risk young people, 20/31 engaged young people and 11/16 NEET young people mentioned having a trusted adult in their life when asked.

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LIZA HOPKINS AND TONY BARNETT

10. LEARNING AT THE HEALTH AND EDUCATION INTERFACE

Personalised Learning at the Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne

INTRODUCTION

> There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children. (Nelson Mandela)

Nelson Mandela's words at the Launch of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund in Mahlamba Ndlopfu Pretoria South Africa back in 1995 continue to resonate with theorists, politicians, policy makers and practitioners across jurisdictions and through many years. While fundamental enactments of policy around ensuring the needs of children and young people have addressed universal needs such as free, compulsory and secular education, secure housing and primary health care access, policy discourses in western democracies over recent times have tended to focus on the most marginalised, at risk, socially excluded or vulnerable in society. The language changes over time but the conception of a socially just polity making provision for those with the least access to resources remains the same.

In the Australian context, the Victoria state government has explicitly identified addressing the needs of vulnerable children and young people through the development of the Best Interests Framework for Vulnerable Children and Youth, which commits the community and the government to ensuring that:

- Parents and families are enabled to care effectively for their child and supported to act in their best interests.
- Communities recognise and respect children, value their diversity and culture, and build their connectedness and resilience.
- There is the right mix of places, professionals and high quality programs to meet the changing needs of children and families, to provide opportunities, promote positive outcomes, intervene early and prevent harm. (DHS, 2007)

Designing policy to address the needs of the most vulnerable groups in society requires attention to sometimes wicked problems of interrelated issues which interact and compound for people at the intersections of multiple issues of disadvantage. This chapter looks at three deeply interconnected areas of potential vulnerability: youth, chronic illness and education, and the way one particular

K. te Riele & R. Gorur (eds.), Interrogating Conceptions of 'Vulnerable Youth' in Theory, Policy and Practice, 151–164.

service works to meet the policy imperative identified in the third dot point above. We look firstly at the ways in which these three areas interrelate and overlap, and the effect of having a chronic health condition on young people's educational and developmental trajectories. We then look at some specific examples of programs conducted with inpatients at The Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne to ensure continued engagement in education for students made vulnerable through their health status.

EDUCATIONAL VULNERABILITY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH HEALTH CONDITIONS

Advances in medical science over the past few decades have meant that many more children and young people with once-fatal illnesses and injuries are now living longer, healthier lives. In addition, rising rates of auto-immune conditions such as asthma, diabetes and severe allergies across the globe, along with increasing diagnoses of developmental disabilities such as Autism Spectrum Disorders are creating a significant cohort of children and young people living with life-long chronic health conditions. Ascertaining exact figures for the numbers of school-aged children and young people with chronic health conditions is difficult, due to the significant variations between the ways in which different health conditions are diagnosed, treated, managed and reported in different jurisdictions around the globe. Best recent estimates of the prevalence of chronic health conditions indicate that up to 30% of children and young people in Western countries may be living with one or more chronic health conditions (O'Halloran et al., 2004). While the vast majority of these conditions cause minimal interference with day to day functioning (depending on the definitions being used [van der Lee et al., 2007]), 6.5% of children and young people may be living with a chronic illness severe enough to interfere with participation in normal activities such as school (Newacheck & Halfon, 1998).

Research has shown that students with chronic health conditions are at higher risk of experiencing prolonged school absence, disengagement from education and learning and academic underachievement compared to their healthy peers (Conley & Bennet, 2000; Martinez & Ercikan, 2009; Needham, Crosnoe, & Muller, 2004; Venning et al., 2008).). The critical role of education in predicting future life course outcomes has also been repeatedly demonstrated in the research literature (Bennett et al., 2013; Dugdale & Clark, 2008; OECD, 2002; Sisco et al., 2013), highlighting the critical importance of ensuring that young people with health conditions remain engaged in education, despite the barriers, in order to reduce future inequities in social, economic and civic opportunities and outcomes.

Despite good evidence of health conditions as a risk factor for poorer educational and consequent life outcomes, causal pathways for these sequelae are not well understood. While a chronic health condition is a risk factor for higher than average school absence, absence from school for a legitimate reason such as health care is not as high a risk for poor school outcomes as absence for

illegitimate reasons (Hancock et al., 2013; Daraganova, 2013). Other complicating factors which may be at play, besides absence from the regular classroom, include:

- Physical effects of the health condition including fatigue, nausea, inability to concentrate, pain, loss of sleep
- Psychological effects including anxiety, fear, depression, school refusal
- Side-effects of treatment, both physical and psychological
- Social disconnection from friends and peers leading to disengagement from learning
- Inability of the school to meet the student's health care needs
- Lack of knowledge or understanding of appropriate modifications to school routines or school work to meet the individual needs of each student.

There are also critical transition points in the education journey when students are at higher than usual risk of disengaging from education. Such transition points occur when changes to school setting are being made (kindergarten into primary school, primary school into secondary school) and also when changes within school happen, such as the move from compulsory education to post-compulsory education, and even from year level to the next, when friendships and existing relationships with teachers and other support workers may be disrupted and have to be re-established. Moreover, for many students with chronic illness, the disruptions of unavoidable absence occur at repeated time points and at different locations, as students move through hospitalisation, care at home, return to school and return to hospital on a cyclical basis, often throughout the student's whole life. Such health conditions include cystic fibrosis, metabolic disorders, organ failure, childhood cancers and other genetic and congenital conditions.

EDUCATION AT THE ROYAL CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL EDUCATION INSTITUTE

The Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) in Melbourne treats approximately 44,000 inpatients annually, with an additional 220,000+ outpatient occasions of service, 7,500+ children undergoing surgery from the waiting list, and over 77,000 children presenting to their emergency department each year (RCH, 2013). The majority of these children are of pre-school and school age (3-18 years), and hospitalisation can represent significant amounts of time missed from education for these patients. In addition, The Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre (PeterMac) admits adolescents and young adults with cancer, which interrupts their participation in schooling, university or training. Absence from school is a known risk factor for educational underachievement, and the greater the length of absence, the greater the risk of underachievement or premature disengagement (Daraganova, 2013).

The Victorian Government recognises the potential educational vulnerability for students with health conditions, especially those with multiple conditions and/ or chronic conditions which require intensive, long term or highly specialised medical care. To support these students educationally during periods of school absence, the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD)

supports the delivery of education support services to students associated with the two hospitals through the RCH Education Institute.

In accordance with the agreement between the DEECD and the RCH Education Institute, the key strategic priorities of the RCH Education Institute are to:

1. Continually improve student engagement and learning outcomes for children and young people with a health condition;
2. Generate and translate knowledge at the education / health interface to inform policy and practice; and
3. Mobilise community and stakeholder support to ensure growth and sustainability of the organisation.

The RCH Education Institute works with young people, their families and schools as well as education and health professionals to ensure that students remain engaged in learning while managing their health condition (RCH Education Institute, 2013). The RCH Education Institute education support team is made up of 16 staff, including teachers, education consultants, a Head of Teaching and Learning and a Head of Arts Education. In addition, 13 non-teaching staff (including corporate, communications, research and administrative teams) support the work of the education support team. Teaching staff create vibrant learning opportunities in a health care environment to provide personalised learning for students on wards, in outpatient clinics, public spaces and other locations across the RCH and PeterMac. Education support staff also provide advice about educational issues to young people and their families in specialist areas such as the Victorian Paediatric Rehabilitation Service and the Paediatric Integrated Cancer Service long-term follow-up clinic (RCH Education Institute, 2013).

While not every student who spends time at the RCH is educationally vulnerable, the Education Institute has referral processes in place to make sure that priority patients are identified on admission to the hospital and assigned a teacher to work with them as their health permits. Students are considered to be priorities for education support if they meet one or more of a number of criteria, including:

- Chronic health condition
- Anticipated length of stay in hospital of more than five days
- More than 15 outpatients appointments in one year
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student
- Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) or Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) student (senior years)
- School absenteeism and/or school refusal
- Homelessness

Engaging these students in education whilst absent from school is a vital strategy to mitigate educational risk factors for this cohort of students.

PROGRAM LOGIC FOR EDUCATION IN HOSPITAL

Students learning in hospital range in age from pre-school (3-4 years of age), through primary and secondary school to post-compulsory learning including university, Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and also those learning in alternative learning settings. Students come from metropolitan and rural areas all over the state of Victoria, as well as from interstate, including remote areas of the Northern Territory and internationally from neighbouring countries such as East Timor and Papua New Guinea. They attend government, Catholic and independent schools, are home-schooled and some are school non-attenders. The majority have chronic health conditions involving either long hospital stays or frequent short or long admissions. Many experience lifelong complications either from their condition itself, or as a result of invasive treatment regimes, which can impact on the student's ability to attend school, to concentrate whilst at school, to participate without fatigue and to remain socially connected to peers, classmates and friends.
Addressing this range of issues to ensure hospitalised students remain engaged as learners requires a multi-faceted approach. However, for this cohort of students, continuity in the delivery of education support can be complicated due to:

- the transience of students, who move in and out of hospital care, often with little notice for teaching staff, as their health status alters, and
- the difficulties in assessing learning outcomes for transient students

To help address these complications, the RCH Education Institute recently developed a Program Logic Model, to clarify and make explicit the four elements of the Institute's Theory of Change. These elements include:

1. identifying areas of need expressed as program goals, using an ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) which places the child in the centre of their social and educational world;
2. delineating the activities to be undertaken in order to reach these goals;
3. defining the short and medium term outcomes which indicate that goals have been achieved; and
4. designing a database that captures measureable information on inputs (activities) and outcomes to provide an evidence base for future work

The four program goals operate at the level of the child, the family, the school and the hospital, wrapping services around a child centred framework which recognises the importance of proximal and distal factors on child outcomes, above and beyond what the child undertakes on his or her own. It goes on to identify key activities at each level, where educators can not only enhance the child's own learning, but also influence factors within the family, such as attitudes to school and understanding of the importance of education, factors within the school such as how to manage students with chronic health conditions and the importance of communication, and factors within the health care setting, such the incorporation of the child's educational needs within their therapeutic and health care plans.

A set of outcomes from these activities is matched back against the program goals, to ensure that students are achieving their goals, and data is collected and regularly analysed to ensure that the educational program continues to reflect intended improvement. The next section of this chapter outlines some of the pedagogic strategies employed to alleviate educational vulnerability for this cohort of students who miss school due to hospitalisation. Key elements include the use of Individual Learning Plans, an Arts based approach, use of ICT to facilitate learning anywhere anytime and information sharing.

STRATEGIES TO AMELIORATE VULNERABILITY

Personalised Learning

Teaching and learning in hospital requires a differentiated, flexible and individualised learning approach, taking account of each individual student's educational background, learning needs and interests, as well as their fluctuating health status and competing schedule for medical appointments and care. For these reasons education at the RCH Education Institute is built around a model of personalised learning, centred on the development and implementation of an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) for each student. This ILP is developed by teachers in consultation with students, parents and teachers at the students' home school, in order to ensure continuity of learning as well as facilitate transition back to school after discharge from hospital. The ILP forms part of the students' personal medical record and is shared as appropriate with other members of the multidisciplinary care team, including physicians, nurses, social workers, psychologists and allied health staff, incorporating the students' educational progress into a holistic, child-centred model of care. The initial design, development, implementation and use of the ILP form was evaluated by the RCH Education Institute research team, allowing the education support team to create an evidence informed policy on the use of an ILP within the hospital setting.

Flexibility is incorporated into the ILP through the division of the plan into "learning needs" (identified by the student, regular school teacher and/or parent as areas needing more work or concepts being covered at school during the student's hospitalisation – often relating to core areas of literacy and numeracy) and "learning wants" (areas of student interest, or passion, often an area of student strength). Regular opportunities to undertake project based learning in areas of student interest help to create engagement in learning and build the student's confidence and self-perception as a successful learner. Project based learning has been shown to be more effective than a thematic approach, at maintaining students' positive outlook toward and engagement in learning (Bryson, 1994). Project based learning opportunities include film-making, cooking and gardening, book creation and a range of arts-based learning opportunities.

These projects utilise a Design Thinking process to open up student ways of thinking and their approach to learning. The Design Thinking process is generally regarded as comprising three main phases and five sub-stages that aim to engage

students in problem finding and problem solving about real world issues or topics. Students work through a process of discovery and immersion in an issue or problem before moving to creating and delivering real world solutions or products. The five sub-stages include: discovery and immersion in the problem or situation; interpretation and synthesis of current knowledge; brainstorming information for new ideas; prototyping; and testing and feedback on findings. The flexibility and personalisation available through such an approach to learning aims to meet a student's learning needs irrespective of prior learning experiences. It aims to teach learning strategies in the time available to students whose learning is interrupted by health care needs, rather than focussing on the curriculum content which must be achieved in standard classroom settings. Students can then take these strategies and processes with them back to their regular classroom or learning setting.

Teaching through the Arts

Creative arts practice is increasingly being incorporated into educational environments for its intrinsic socio-cultural values, its contribution to improving broader academic outcomes and its ability to engage students in self-directed learning (Belfiore, 2002; Brice Heath & Roach, 1999; Catteral et al., 1999). The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) defines the Arts as:

> unique, expressive, creative and communicative forms that engage students in critical and creative thinking and help them understand themselves and the world. In every society the Arts play a pivotal role socially, economically and culturally. The Arts encourage the development of skills and the exploration of technologies, forms and processes through single and multimodal forms. They fuel the exploration of ideas that cross the gamut of human emotions and moods through holistic learning using cognitive, emotional, sensory, aesthetic, kinaesthetic and physical fields. (VCAA, 2012)

Thus, the Arts are integral, not just to academic learning, but to all aspects of the human experience and contribute to student well being. In many hospital settings, the use of creative arts practice to engage students in learning, as well as to provide therapeutic opportunities for self-expression and creativity, is increasingly common. The RCH Education Institute has a strong focus on learning through the arts, using opportunities for writing, visual arts, music and craft to stimulate the students' desire to engage and participate. Creative arts practice is also a highly practical teaching and learning strategy in an out-of-school learning setting, where students come from a wide variety of educational backgrounds and bring a diversity of knowledge, skills and abilities to their learning. Creative arts practice is easily adaptable to meet the individual learning needs of the student, and teachers are able to use any aspect of arts practice to catch the student at their point of need, and build on what the student already knows. The practical, tangible nature of such learning is also appealing to many children and young people, and the pleasure and sense of achievement brought about by successful art practice can

be highly motivating for students who are not otherwise enthusiastic about participating in learning due to their health status.

Use of the creative arts in teaching and learning at the RCH is predicated on the Reggio Emilia approach to holistic education, which utilises the 100 languages of children to recognise that students are able to express themselves in multiple ways, using multiple modes and means. This approach is implemented in two distinct ways. The first might be called Arts for Arts' Sake. This approach celebrates arts learning as a discrete domain in education, just as any other curriculum area, and focuses on excellence in arts learning. Educators at the hospital are able to build on partnerships with major cultural institutions from across Melbourne, to enhance arts-based learning. Visiting educators from state museums, orchestras, ballet companies, film institutes and art galleries bring hands on learning to students in hospital across a range of arts disciplines, while volunteers with a passion for the arts also contribute hundreds of hours of education support working alongside Education Institute teachers to uncover students' passions and strengths and build a learning environment rich in creative thinking and problem solving.

In addition, and closely tied to the implementation of each student's ILP is an arts integration approach, which makes deep use of the arts to make content learning across other curriculum areas more accessible. This approach encourages students to develop design thinking strategies to problem solve real-world learning opportunities. Teachers who work directly with students are able to call on specialist art teacher support to identify and respond to the arts needs of project-based learning in the hospital. This builds on Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983; 1993; 2000), engaging students' passions and equipping generalist teachers with the skills to assist their students in learning across the curriculum. The key here is using the arts to engage, rather than simply to entertain.

Anywhere, Anytime Learning

In 2011 The Royal Children's Hospital moved from its 1960s-built premises into a brand new facility incorporating state-of-the art design for a paediatric hospital. Located in Melbourne's Royal Park the hospital features an abundance of natural light, beautiful artwork, a two-storey aquarium, meerkat enclosure, science-installations and outdoor play and garden settings. While remaining first and foremost a tertiary healthcare setting providing world best hospital care to the sickest and most severely injured infants, children and adolescents, the new building also lends itself to innovative, flexible and responsive teaching and learning. In the absence of a set classroom or physical school building, teachers provide educational opportunities for students across a range of hospital spaces, making use of the buildings' features to incorporate relevant, locally situated and meaningful learning for students anywhere, anytime.

Hospital teaching and learning takes place at the students' bedsides, in activity spaces, outdoors and in shared, public learning areas. For adolescents, in particular, the shared activity space on the adolescent ward provides a regular space for the

students who are able to get out of bed to meet together for group learning as they would if they were in their regular school. The activity space includes a wet area for arts and crafts, a library of senior texts and recreational reading, as well as a television, pool table and Xbox gaming console for recreation and socialisation.

Staying Connected with Technology

For most hospitalised students it is essential that they maintain their connection with school staff (e.g. teachers, administrative and support staff) and their peers. For a student with a chronic illness or disability, a sense of isolation and disconnection are significant risk factors associated with disengagement from school, education and learning (Robinson, 2014). As schools and education providers increasingly move into the digital realm, using technology to connect students becomes increasingly important. In the hospital's shared learning space interactive whiteboards and wireless connectivity allow students to connect face to face and online with peers and classmates. Education Institute-owned sets of iPads are heavily used by students of all ages, while increasingly students are also bringing their own devices to connect to school portals, access online curriculum, submit assessment tasks and maintain social connections. In addition, secure online learning spaces such as Edmodo allow students to connect in virtual space with teachers and classmates at any time and from anywhere.

Yet despite recent advances in technology allowing physically absent students to remain virtually connected to school and classes, institutional limitations of effective technology use have hampered the development of such connections. Workshops conducted recently with stakeholders from hospital settings, schools, families and researchers into the acceptability of using technology to connect hospitalised students found three main issues which needed to be addressed:

- Privacy and the transmission of private and health-related information;
- Distraction for classmates and peers in the student's regular school classroom; and
- Control over information, technology use and unmediated communication. (Wadley et al., 2014)

While successful projects have been established in some overseas hospitals using technology such as Skype™ (Ziezon, 2014; Weiss et al., 2001), hospital schools and education support services in Australia have struggled with issues such as Education Departments' firewalls, privacy and consent for transmission of children's images and voices, lack of bandwidth and competing demands on teachers' time. Technology in schools remains some way behind the latest commercially available products which students may be using to connect in their own time.

Information Sharing/Teacher Liaison

In a recent study (Barnett et al., 2014) in which parents/caregivers of hospitalised students were interviewed approximately one month after discharge about the education and learning needs of their child, the majority of parents/caregivers reported that they wanted better communication and more information about resources available to support their child's education journey and transition back to school. The RCH Education Institute provides two teacher liaison services that aim to meet this need: one based at The Royal Children's Hospital catering to inpatients and outpatients of school age and one based at PeterMac, providing support to adolescents and young adults with a cancer diagnosis.

Generalist teachers at The Royal Children's Hospital also play a significant role in liaising between the student and their family, the hospital and their regular school setting. Teachers who are associated with particular clinics within the hospital, especially in the area of rehabilitation, work directly with students and families as part of the multidisciplinary team, ensuring that the student's return to school is effected successfully. This role involves having a thorough understanding of the individual student's health condition, its likely impacts on his/her physical, cognitive and psychological status and abilities, potential barriers to successful school re-entry and the range of support services available to students to ease this transition.

Teachers in this role work with vulnerable students at the point of transition between hospital or home-based health care and return to school on either a full-time or part-time basis. These students have often suffered traumatic brain injuries or serious illnesses such as cancer which results in the student returning to school in an altered state from before. This may take the form of physical differences, including hair loss, significant weight loss or weight gain or loss of mobility or motor skills. Such changes are particularly significant for adolescent and young adult students who are simultaneously managing the changes associated with puberty and the desire to 'fit in' with peers and classmates. Cognitive changes may mean that students are no longer able to participate in the same way that they have done before and may even mean loss of previously acquired skills. If students are unable to return to their previous school then a further loss is introduced in the form of having to make a new set of social connections during a critical phase of individual development. School offers a normalising environment for students with health conditions, but managing difference is an ongoing task.

Educating teachers, peers and classmates is an important aspect of this task, as misinformation and misunderstanding can undermine students' ability to successfully negotiate return to school. Addressing concerns from classmates such as being able to 'catch' cancer from another student is critical in ensuring that students are welcomed back to mainstream educational settings. Negotiating support from various agencies is also a task which parents are often left to manage on their own. Teacher support through clinics and at outpatient appointments can

ensure that vulnerable students are linked in to appropriate support services both within their school setting and from community and other agencies.

In addition, the Education Institute employs an Education and Vocation Support (EVS) teacher as part of the state-wide ONTrac program for 15-25 year olds diagnosed with cancer. The role of the EVS Teacher is predicated on a developmental understanding of the task of adolescents and young adults in preparing themselves for independent lives as adults, identifying future pathways, developing career aspirations and pursuing educational goals. A diagnosis of cancer can put significant barriers in the way of achieving these developmental tasks, particularly when educational services and even health care professionals may be pressuring the young person to take time out from education to focus on their health. Research has shown that one of the most important things for young people with health conditions is to be seen and treated as 'normal' (Hopkins et al., 2014; Yates, 2014). The EVS teacher's role is to ensure that these opportunities to continue to grow and develop as 'normal' remain open to young people, despite their health condition.

The EVS Teacher therefore works with patients, their families and their education providers to ensure that the educational needs of young people with cancer are not forgotten or ignored in the rush to manage a potentially life-threatening illness. The teacher will liaise with students from their initial diagnosis until 12 months post-treatment, providing long term support, advice and information. The teacher contacts schools, universities, TAFEs and other educational services which have enrolled a student with cancer, to ensure that the school or service understands its statutory requirements to support their student despite illness and potentially lengthy absences. The EVS teacher's main task, however, is to ensure that these very vulnerable students remain engaged in education throughout their cancer journey, particularly in the face of educational services finding it too hard or too confronting to deal with the student's individual circumstances.

CONCLUSION: VULNERABILITY CAN BE OVERCOME WITH THE RIGHT STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES

In developmental terms the task of adolescence is a continuing trajectory from the dependence of childhood into an independent and interdependent adulthood, through the acquisition of skills, knowledge, emotional maturity and the ability to claim a full place in the adult world. The concept of interdependence is particularly relevant in discourses of vulnerability and the responsibilities of the individual and society. It refers to the relational characteristics of citizenship (responsibilities between the individual and society), and the ethic of care (relationship between the carer and the cared for in society). An inability to achieve this relative independence and these developmental milestones during youth and adolescence places enormous burdens on individuals, their families and the wider society. Recognising and responding to the needs of young people who

face vulnerabilities in navigating this period is critical for all those concerned with issues of justice and improving outcomes for young people. There is good evidence to indicate that living with a chronic health condition is a major risk factor for many (though of course, not all) young people as they negotiate an appropriate educational pathway which allows them to achieve their full potential. Young people with a chronic illness are at increased risk of isolation and disconnection from school and premature disengagement from education and learning. The Royal Children's Hospital Education Institute works at the nexus of young people, health conditions and education, to ameliorate the interrelated vulnerabilities which face young people navigating the transition to adulthood while simultaneously managing ongoing health conditions and remaining engaged in education.

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11. 'VULNERABLE', 'AT-RISK', 'DISENGAGED'

Regional Young People

INTRODUCTION

As part of social policy regimes, terms such as 'disengaged', 'disadvantaged', and 'at-risk' are used to identify and delineate different populations of young people according to their personal characteristics, relationship to social institutions, and possible educational and labour market futures. These terms are primarily targeted at those who, for whatever reason, do not move along the biographical pathways expected of contemporary youth, and are therefore the subjects of educational and welfare interventions designed to encourage a movement back towards normative educational and employment pathways. These terms are also powerful ways in which the material inequalities and cultural differences which structure the youth period are made meaningful and come to influence young people's lives. Distinctions between those who are disengaged and at-risk, and those who are not, therefore participate in the construction of youth subjectivities: they enact social differences and normative distinctions between different populations of young people, and contribute to the social construction of youth as such.

Social policy regimes defining different populations of young people must be understood as part of the governance of inequality in the context of neoliberal capitalism, which mandates the construction of reflexive, self-governing, aspirational young subjectivities (Kelly, 2006), constructing normative distinctions and hierarchies of moral worth between those who succeed and those who fail at the project of self-governance (Skeggs, 2005). Distinctions between those who are 'at-risk' and those who are not reflect material inequalities which structure the biographical pathways taken by differently positioned youth (Wyn & White, 1997), and have consequences for young people that vary according to the positions they are able to achieve within these hierarchies of worth (Smyth & Wrigley, 2013). With this in mind, this chapter draws on research conducted with young people in regional Australia to explore the consequences of these discourses and their relationship with young people's identities. The chapter focuses on a small alternative or flexible learning program run for young people in a regional city in Victoria as a case study for understanding the subjectivities and social relationships imagined by contemporary approaches to 'disengagement' (for a fuller explication of these programs see Smyth & McInerney, 2012), and contrasts these with the narratives that different young people are able to tell about themselves and their lives. The chapter explores the intersections and disjunctions between the

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assumptions made by social policy regimes and differently positioned young people to show how these distinctions contribute to the construction of youth subjectivities in regional Australia.

The chapter begins by discussing the project and research site in the context of the inequalities shaping the lives of young people in regional Australia. The chapter then analyses contemporary discourses which address educational inequalities in terms of disadvantage, disengagement and risk, highlighting the political priorities and normative assumptions which contribute to the meaning of these terms. The chapter then discusses how these terms are used by the teacher of a flexible learning program in order to interrogate the consequences of these discourses for how young people are imagined. In the second half of the chapter, young people's narratives about themselves and their lives are analysed in relation to the cultural hierarchies at work in discourses of disadvantage, disengagement and risk. Encompassing both students of the flexible learning program, as well as students sampled from a 'mainstream' local school, the chapter shows how young people's identities are constructed in the context of a neoliberal emphasis on individual aspiration and self-governance which, in the absence of resources, can foreclose young people's imagined futures (Smyth & McInerney, 2014a). Imagined futures are constructed in a complex intersection of material inequalities, familial resources, and institutional pressures, processes which escape narrow constructions of disengagement and risk promoted by contemporary educational policies.

THE PROJECT: INEQUALITY AND 'DISADVANTAGE' IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

In recent decades, the position of rural and regional places within the political and cultural dynamics of Australian society has changed, creating new inequalities which influence young people's lives in profound ways. Until relatively recently, the notion of 'the rural' played a significant role in Australian nationalism, with romanticised images of 'salt of the earth' farmers acting as powerful symbols of Australian values (Brett, 2007). These images coexisted with a protectionist policy agenda directed at supporting the viability of the agricultural and manufacturing sectors that were the basis for the regional economy, at the time understood as the cornerstone of Australian society. While regional young people have always been placed at a disadvantage in their engagement with education, economic and social policy changes have created new geographical inequalities between the city and the country that have reshaped the youth period (Farrugia, 2014).

Chief among these has been a neoliberal policy environment in a context of economic globalisation. In an age of 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000), capital is increasingly unbound from nation state boundaries, able to be moved at will to wherever is most favourable for doing business. This era has seen the increasing economic significance of transnational networks of 'global cities' (Sassen, 2012), in which educational and work opportunities are increasingly concentrated. Simultaneously, government support has focused on the flourishing of urban service economies (such as urban infrastructures, communication and transport facilities intended for urban use (Peck & Tickell, 2002) whilst rural communities

have been left to compete, succeed or fail, exposed to the global agricultural market (Bourke & Lockie, 2001). Meanwhile, the role of rural and regional places in Australian nationalism has declined in significance: as neoliberal policy agendas allow rural places to be evacuated of many basic services and amenities, rural places are increasingly associated with simplistic, homogeneous visions of 'disadvantage' in relation to an urban norm (Cuervo & Wyn, 2012). The naturalisation of markets in neoliberalism constructs these geographical inequalities as inevitable consequences of social change.

The consequences of this for regional places have varied. While some regional places have rebranded themselves as service and tourism economies, others have suffered economic decline along with the industries that sustained them. Geographical inequalities have always placed rural young people at a disadvantage in relation to their engagement with education, and the significance of this has come into sharp focus when understood alongside the changing place of regionality in a neoliberal policy and cultural terrain. The regional centre we focus on here is representative of these changes. Economically dependent upon local industries now in decline, the city is an example of new forms of geographical inequality produced by deindustrialisation, rating high on government indexes of 'socioeconomic disadvantage'. The school which this project was conducted in has a disproportionate number of relatively disadvantaged students, and also includes a flexible learning program for students who have 'disengaged' or been excluded from mainstream education.

In this context, this project explored young subjectivities in regional Australia, focusing on the relationship between place, inequality, and young people's imagined futures. The results of this project have been published elsewhere (see, for example, Farrugia, Smyth, & Harrison, 2014a, 2014b), and show the importance of geographical inequalities and local family histories for influencing the resources available to young people in constructing identities. However, as emphasised in Farrugia et al. (2014a), young people in this project are also under pressure to construct individualised, entrepreneurial subjectivities as a means by which to navigate an uncertain future. In this context, here we focus in particular on the relationship between notions of 'disadvantage' and 'disengagement', and the broader terrain of youth subjectivities we explored in the project. The next section of this chapter analyses the meaning of disadvantage, disengagement and 'risk' in the context of the structural and discursive shifts that have reshaped geographical inequalities in regional Australia.

GOVERNING DISADVANTAGE, DISENGAGEMENT AND RISK

One element of the policy discourses currently at work in governing young people's engagement with education is the identification of a group of young people who are 'vulnerable' to disengaging from education, or who have already stopped attending school. These young people are the target of flexible learning programs, aimed ultimately at getting young people engaged with education. These policy regimes draw on a sometimes uneasy mixture of discourses, with terms such

as vulnerability, disadvantage, and 'at-risk' coexisting to define different populations of young people who may be targeted by such programs (Smyth & Robinson, 2014). As demonstrated below, the meanings of these terms reflect the governmental imperatives of contemporary education, particularly the need to produce economically productive, healthy, self-reliant citizens capable of successfully negotiating the economic and cultural demands of neoliberal societies. The successful, self-governing, entrepreneurial subject who moves unproblematically through education into the workforce operates as a normative centre for these policy regimes, which are aimed at identifying and governing populations that deviate from this pathway. These populations of young people are constituted as problems both for themselves, and for the social world as a whole, described especially as an economic burden. A report outlining flexible learning programs written by a consultancy firm commissioned by the Victorian Government Department of Education and Early Childhood Development states that:

> Those children and young people who fail to complete school tend to be significantly more disadvantaged in later life with: an increased likelihood of experiencing unemployment; worse outcomes in health, accommodation, and social status; greater risk of offending behaviour; greater susceptibility to the influences of drug and alcohol misuse, homelessness, and anti-social behaviour; and lowered lifelong income. This also has associated social and economic costs to both the Victorian and Australian governments, in terms of increased demand for welfare support and government subsidised services. (KPMG, 2009, p. 11)

According to the DEECD, disadvantage is defined as:

> … underlining family circumstances that shape the experience of both disengagement and vulnerability of children and young people. In an educational context disengagement is used to describe the detachment of children and young people from core opportunity mechanisms in society, that is, school and further education. (DEECD, 2010, p. 9)

In these discourses, the terms disadvantage and disengagement are used to define a population of young people who are destined to become problems for society and the state due to their own detachment from education. In the process, education is described as an unproblematic mechanism for the creation of opportunity and the construction of productive subjectivities. In this sense, the definition of disadvantaged populations, and the creation of flexible learning programs, defines the majority of young people as engaging equally and unproblematically with a similarly unproblematic education system (cf. te Riele, 2006, 2007) and labour market. Creating the disadvantaged subject thereby acts to erase the inequalities which structure the rest of the education system, replacing these with distinctions between those who are disadvantaged and 'everybody else' and ignoring an increasingly uncertain post-education future for all young people, especially those designated as disadvantaged (Smyth, McInerney, & Fish, 2013a). Those young

people who, for a wide and disparate range of reasons, do not fit into the system in the expected way become exceptional deviations from an unexamined norm and are defined as 'at-risk' of disengagement. These risks are diverse, including cognitive abilities, family issues, personal traumas, absences of goals and aspirations for the future, as well as more systemic issues such as relationship to curriculum and availability of student support.

Government policies then construct a kind of triage system of risk (te Riele, 2014), in which young people are positioned along a four-stage continuum according to how "at-risk" they are of disengagement. Each tier of this risk continuum offers different combinations of individualised and flexible learning plans which aim to 'wrap around' students and facilitate their engagement with mainstream education. Those who are most at-risk are described as having multiple and compounding issues such as contact with the criminal justice system, homelessness, cognitive or behavioural difficulties, or an ongoing history of disengagement. If a young person has all of these issues they fall into the fourth tier, which contains those young people most 'at-risk' of disengaging from education, thereby missing out on the opportunities that the system promises and becoming 'problems' for themselves and others. The fourth tier is reserved for those for whom no other programs have worked. Comprising flexible learning options in a community setting, it is the education system's last resort.

At all levels, programs are designed

> to promote self-confidence and self esteem, develop life and problem solving skills, practice social skills, link the child or young person into appropriate community services, and ultimately facilitate the young person's engagement in education. (KPMG, 2009, p. 24)

Programs are also designed to be flexible, and particularly at the fourth tier include "Greater timetabling flexibility and a wider range of programs (e.g. literacy and numeracy; pastoral care; life skills; individualised, student centred education and behaviour programs; and applied learning approaches)" (KPMG, 2009, p. 25). These discourses coexist with a stated emphasis on meeting students where they are, mobilising their own interests, aspirations and plans towards a future in the mainstream education system and the labour market.

In this sense, flexible learning programs exemplify the normative and political consequences of neoliberal policy regimes, which focus on governing inequality through the subjectivities of those who experience material deprivation (Burchell, 1991; Dean, 1998; Rose, 1991). Structural inequalities are governed as personal or family characteristics. Disadvantage is relocated from a property of societies to an attribute of individuals through the language of risk, which operationalises structural processes as personal characteristics and dispositions towards risky behaviour (France, 2008). These risk factors operate to define 'deviant' subjects against an unexamined, homogeneous norm, and the institutional response is to facilitate young people to move back towards this norm, wrapping around young people to provide individualised solutions to problems understood in individualised ways. The emphasis on socialisation in the form of life skills classes and the

management of behavioural problems is the strongest example of this process, particularly concentrated as it is in the final two tiers of the risk continuum, where the riskiest and most problematic young people are said to be found. In the governance of disadvantage, disengagement and risk, normative distinctions between self-governing, successful young people and unruly, failed subjects are instated as part of the cultural landscape of contemporary poverty and privilege (Smyth & Wrigley, 2013).

CONSTRUCTING YOUTH AT-RISK

The next part of this chapter explores the consequences of this framing of inequality by exploring how the leader of a flexible learning program discussed her students. Our analysis here shows the way in which the discourses discussed above are also cited as this teacher discusses her educational priorities in relation to the needs of her students:

> The students are aged between thirteen and twenty-one. They are students at risk or youth at risk … What we are trying to do with the program is to give these youth some sort of sense of identity, develop their personal skills and their social skills to maybe possibly give them some work related skills so that they might be able to either go back into mainstream or get work. A lot of them wont, because a lot of them are generational Centrelink recipients and also their backgrounds are generational poverty so you've got those issues. A lot of them come from Drugs and Alcohol backgrounds …

What is particularly significant here is the way that this program leader emphasises the identity dimension of her work. When asked about this, she connects educational engagement, personal development, identity, and compliance:

> … the word is re-engagement I suppose and that's a fairly loose term but the idea is to have these youth who are maybe on the street, maybe have no sense of identity or purpose which is the majority, to come into a program like this one … [we] develop with them … a hands on learning style program where they will develop a sense of their own identity … we establish with them a personal development, they develop confidence, they develop a sense of self, a real sense of self and purpose. They may end up with a job, they may not but they might and I do have some that do. I also have a lot of kids … through the disability services because they have mental health issues and that's quite a lot of them so you know just make them into maybe more compliant citizens as well, because some of these boys in particular are not very compliant at all you know they would rather bash and wreck and kill and do all that and trying to sort of say hey you know how else can you deal with this.

This, it seems, is what she considers to be her main task:

> I find that and I've often said you know I wish they didn't have to do that VCAL[1] bit because that's irrelevant to them. What they need to do if we've got to assess them is to assess them on their progress on how they have developed as an individual, how they can work in a team, how you know we can overcome conflict resolution … their work ethic and I don't mean just going out but you know get out there and do things, that's what we assess them on.
>
> … I think youth are very important because they are our future and we have got so many kids that are going to create so much havoc in our society because of their backgrounds, where they come from – it's their mindset – you know we may not ever change that mind set and we can't impose our views on them because they are different, but if you can give them opportunities you know to make something of themselves and to incorporate other people in a nice, compliant way rather than you know that's the aim and youth are our future they really are – we've got to give them the opportunities.

In this narrative the teacher neatly describes the social, political and normative consequences of the educational discourses which frame the purpose of flexible learning programs. These are most clearly evident through a focus on the use of the terms 'identity' and 'mindset' in the way that this teacher constructs her students, which create a contradiction that is basic to the way in which these discourses construct the subjectivities of their students. This program leader maintains the view that education cannot impose values and aspirations on students, a view which reflects policy assertions of the importance of mobilising learning around students' interests and aspirations. However, this coincides with an emphasis on identity building that views young people as coming to these programs without a sense of self to appeal to, suggesting that that the purpose of these programs is the provision of such an identity. The success of the program is defined in terms of personal development, work ethics, and compliance, as well as engagement with a 'hands on learning program' (and secondarily with VCAL). These are the qualities that are said to constitute a meaningful identity in the terms of these discourses. The perceived absence of these becomes read as a lack of identity as such due to 'disadvantage', or family circumstances that do not provide these young people with what, within these discourses, is recognised as an educationally meaningful subjectivity.

It is important to note that descriptions of the educational mission of alternative education programs vary (McGregor & Mills, 2012; te Riele, 2007), and we do not wish to disparage the efforts of this program leader to deliver education in the context of profound disadvantage and under-resourcing. What is significant here is the way in which these young people are positioned within these discourses, as both within and outside of the normative and political demands that neoliberal education frameworks place on them. They are within them in the sense that they are seen as governable through the use of policies that act on what are conceived as already existing subjectivities. However, they are also outside of them in the sense

that their identities are not recognised as intelligible within the terms of these same discourses, and become signifiers for social disorder and notions of 'disadvantage.' These discourses enact distinctions between productive, governable subjectivities and those which are ungovernable, unruly, and destructive, aligning 'vulnerable' young people with social disorder and stigmatising disadvantaged places (cf. Smyth & McInerney, 2014b in relation to place). These distinctions are fundamental to the operation of the notion of vulnerability and being 'at-risk' as it is defined by contemporary approaches to disadvantage and student disengagement. However, whilst these are powerful discursive boundaries, they are far from impermeable and are continually in the process of being blurred (Smyth, McInerney, & Fish, 2013b), and the subjectivities produced within this context are assembled as the widespread pressure to construct entrepreneurial subjectivities interacts with local inequalities and young people's histories, producing a diverse terrain of youth identities. It is to these identities that this chapter now turns.

YOUNG SUBJECTIVITIES

More than merely a theme within neoliberal discourses of school disengagement, the imperative to construct productive, reflexive, self-reliant young subjectivities influences all young people in different ways. Contemporary young people are under increasing pressure to navigate their lives as individual projects and construct identities as choosing individuals. This pressure comes from both the uncertainty of the contemporary youth period (Andres & Wyn, 2010), and the contemporary cultural emphasis placed on aspirational and entrepreneurial subjectivities as a means by which to accumulate cultural esteem (Skeggs, 2011). In late modernity, the operation of economic and cultural resources is increasingly seen in the narratives that young people articulate as they respond to this pressure to reflexively navigate their lives, and young people's identities are sites at which resources are mobilised and inequalities are navigated. In this project, conversations with young people were aimed at uncovering the different ways in which regional youth are responding to this pressure. This section describes narratives from young people enrolled in both the disengaged program, and in mainstream education at the school this program was attached to, in order to understand the terrain of subjectivities produced within the neoliberal emphasis on individualised self-reliance in this disadvantaged regional town.

In previous work our project has emphasised the importance of place, local family history, and community connections as resources around which young people build identities and imagined futures (Farrugia, Smyth, & Harrison, 2014a, 2014b). The first two narratives come from young people enrolled in the disengaged program who lack these locally emplaced resources. Both had been excluded from mainstream schooling, and their families were marginal to the local labour market. The first young person, 'Vanessa',[2] spends much of the interview discussing her alienation from her local community, which she hates. However, she also says that she cannot imagine living anywhere else. Vanessa feels socially

disconnected and stigmatised in this place, and views the space around her in negative terms:

> Ninety percent of the people in this town are on average arseholes … it's like half the people in this town are druggies and like we live right out the front of a skate park – there's a skate park in town and we live right out the front of it and we just hear swearing and that kind of stuff and like Mum's being trying to get it moved for like years and the Council won't help Mum.
>
> Like old people that I know, I've heard stories from them that they know people and stuff and they know stories and they've lived all their life [here] and I have and like something their parents and their grandparents have and apparently it is like the way it has always been … it's the way have been around here the majority of people.

Vanessa was excluded from school after what she describes as temper issues, as well as experiences of being persistently bullied. She prefers attending this program to mainstream school, in part because of the practical farm work that she is learning how to do:

> So you work on the farm? What kind of work do you do on the farm?
> *Gardening and stuff.*
> Do you enjoy that?
> *Yeah I can't go to regular school … I can't go there because I've got temper issues …*

Vanessa is unclear on what the future holds for her, and does not consider herself capable of continuing education:

> So after you have been through the program Central Connect have you thought about what you are going to do after?
> *I haven't really thought about it.*
> Do you ever talk to say your parents about it?
> *Yeah.*
> Yeah what do they reckon?
> *I've already made a decision I'm not going to go to Uni or TAFE -because Mum said I've got mental problems and its going to be really hard for me to learn in a big group and I can't expect people to teach me in a different way to other kids so.*
> Ok so you are just going to see what comes up?
> *Yeah.*

For Vanessa, this program has been a space where she can avoid the bullying that she has experienced both at school and in her day to day life in this community. However, both she and her family have accepted her position as an outsider to the possibilities promised by the education system, and construct her exclusion as a personal pathology in relation to a mainstream of 'other kids'. Lacking other resources or community connections, Vanessa is unable to plan her escape from a

local existence that she is deeply unhappy with, or articulate a future for herself in terms of work or education. She lacks the family resources and local social connections around which other young people articulate their identities and imagined futures, and hence does not have access to examples of possible imagined futures. Her sense of self as articulated here is foreclosed by a combination of local marginalisation and stigmatisation in the context of profound rural inequality.

An interesting contrast to Vanessa's narrative is provided by Jack, another student interviewed at the alternative education program. Jack lives with his father, step-mother, and 18 month old brother. His father and step-mother are not working at the moment, although his father has worked in the past in precarious jobs such as in abattoirs. Jack came to the research site from Melbourne due to some problems with violence that affected him and his family, and has experienced a lot of mobility in his life:

> Well me and Dad we decided to get out of Melbourne for a bit because it was getting too hectic for us and we just got enough of it so we moved up here and we moved from like we moved all around Melbourne like St Kilda and all that and we decided to move to Lake Eildon and then moved from Lake Eildon to Geelong and then here – or [a nearby town] and then here.

Jack has had contact with the juvenile justice system, and his attendance at this program is a probationary requirement. Jack says that is unable to attend mainstream schooling because of his involvement in violence, drugs, and alcohol, factors he raises when discussing his engagement with the program:

> Can you tell me a little bit about how you got involved in here?
>
> Well I was in [a nearby town] and I used to go and see [an employment support agency] a lot and so I went down there and they asked me about it and I turned around and said yeah take me down I'll have a look blah blah blah … and then I came here and I stuffed up when I got here when one of the kids here brought alcohol so I decided to drink it all and then I had a problem with alcohol and drugs and yeah so then I come and went back up to [a nearby town]. The school up here won't take me, Marian won't take me because I have too many suspensions from my other schools – fights and everything, then I moved up here and got into here and ever since I've gotten along really well and haven't been locked up.

Throughout the interview, Jack credits the program with allowing him to avoid jail – one of its main positive points. He also points towards other widely discussed positives about the flexible approach to learning:

> So you like it here? Can you tell me why?
>
> Because it's not like any ordinary school, you are doing active things, you are not sitting in a classroom for three hours a day doing nothing and reading and writing and you don't have a teacher that's yelling at you telling you to do your work 24/7 you just – you are doing it but you can do whatever you want.

Like many marginalised young people, for Jack education has been a place where feels he has been disparaged and unrecognised by teachers offering forms of education he is unable to relate to (Smyth & Hattam, 2004). Jack can engage with this program comfortably, and his continued engagement is keeping him from ongoing contact with the criminal justice system. However, when he discusses his aspirations for the future, his involvement in the program is absent from the narrative. Instead, Jack's story is similar to those collected within the wider program of research that this data is a part of, emphasising the importance of immediate family relationships and practical experiences that he has had:

> I wanted to be a Shearer … because my Dad's worked at the Abattoirs … he was on the kill floor and I used to work with him on the kill floor so that's where I got it from … I don't like killing animals but what are you going to do when you need something to eat.
>
> What gave you the idea of shearing?
>
> I don't know because it's not killing the animals – it's just like I'm not one of those hippy type people but I'm not killing the animal it's just helping them out through the hot weather but its I don't know …

Jack's narrative illustrates the disconnection between the concept of flexible learning or re-engagement, and the biographies, social relationships, and imagined futures of young people (cf. Smyth, McInerney, & Fish, 2013a). While Jack has had a difficult past, he describes a strong relationship with his father at a number of points in the interview, a relationship which also becomes a factor in his future plans. While Jack sees the program as a friendly and relaxed place which has kept him out of trouble, nevertheless his aspirations come from his immediate social relationships and experiences, themselves structured by his position within wider material inequalities. Through a narrow focus on individual capacities, notions of 'disadvantage' fail to capture the social resources which Jack mobilises here. While his family relationships are unlikely to provide him with opportunities within the labour market, they facilitate the construction of a meaningful imagined future that is not recognised by the assertion that Jack is merely disengaged from the opportunities provided by the education system.

Our final example is Steven, a student in 'mainstream' education attending the school to which the flexible learning program is attached whose father is a skilled worker and supervisor for the largest local manufacturing employer. In Steven's narrative, personal interests and competencies are supported by familial resources, and mobilised to navigate an educational and work trajectory that is aspirational and supported by the school. Interviewed in year eleven, Steven describes the cultivation of an interest and enjoyment in sport and other physical activities, especially long distance cross country running. This interest was supported by his family, who organise running groups and take him to races across the state:

> Well I did athletics, I don't know I sort of excelled a bit in long distances but then I started off in the like young groups of cross country and we had a little

> club but then I found that it was a bit easy and I was just always winning, so Dad started up about two years before, doing a cross country group with [the local town] and [a nearby town]. It's like money, its racing every weekend so I wanted to do that and I started to do that and then now I just do that every single week, I've got a race every week and then I go off and do other competition runs like in Melbourne and Halls Gap …

Steven discusses a desire to study either physical education or sports science at university, and is working towards the educational milestones required to gain access to this course:

> Well something in line with Sport, teaching – sports teaching, sports science or physio for a sports club – something like that … I'm in Year 11 yeah so I know I have to get a fairly high score with Maths and English and yeah just work out what I need to get into the courses, Bachelor in P.E. and that.

He is able to align his interest and ability in sports and long distance running with an intellectual and educational interest in the science of sports performance:

> I like to continue the sport thing but I thought it's good to be able to teach be able to because you are like discussing the stuff things that I like all the time and you are teaching people the same thing so like … I like to talk about the muscles and stuff like how they work and why we use different energy systems and stuff and all that kind of thing.

Interviewed again towards the end of year twelve, Steven had decided to take a year off in order to save money and pursue other interests in motorsports. However, he had maintained his involvement in long distance running, and said that this remained the focus of his increasingly concrete educational and work aspirations:

> Probably move to [a regional centre] and go to [university] and study – at the moment it's PE teaching I think I'll do, probably. Either that or physio or something like that … Yeah, so I'm slowly starting to narrow down what I wanted to do, didn't really change that much.

Steven's narrative demonstrates the material resources required to construct the kind of entrepreneurial subjectivity mandated by discourses of disengagement and risk. Steven's engagement with education, and the relationship between what he is learning at school and his own imagined future, is structured around interests that are supported by familial resources and recognised as meaningful personal competencies within the school. He is able to draw on the subjects he is learning at school to provide an educational and intellectual foundation for his interests, mobilised into an educational and work trajectory that is described as the reflexive fulfilment of Steven's desires. It is this alignment between material resources, developing personal competencies and educational experiences that allows Steven to construct an positive educational identity and imagine a future that aligns with the structural possibilities actually available to him. Steven's active response to the

pressure to entrepreneurially navigate his own life is made possible by this alignment, the complexity of which is entirely unrecognised by discourses of disengagement and risk.

CONCLUSION

The language of disadvantage, disengagement and risk is part of a complex assemblage of social policy discourses, welfare interventions, and lived subjectivities. These terms enact normative distinctions between productive, entrepreneurial subjectivities and unruly subjects that pose a threat to the social and economic world imagined within neoliberal governmental regimes. Within this neoliberal imaginary, young people are expected to navigate individual pathways through normative transitions across educational milestones and into the workforce, whilst those who lack the resources to construct these biographies appear as pathological failures who lack meaningful subjectivities. The educational program which formed part of the case study in this chapter contributes to these normative distinctions even as it provides a refuge from the exclusion and stigmatisation that characterised their involvement in 'mainstream' education. The subjectivities constructed by students both within and outside of this program demonstrate how material and educational resources are mobilised to respond to the widespread pressure on young people to construct subjectivities that are entrepreneurial and 'aspirational'. These narratives show that the dynamic relationship between material inequalities, educational biographies, and lived identities escapes simplistic distinctions between the 'mainstream' and the 'disengaged', gesturing towards a complex landscape of inequalities that is elided by neoliberal approaches to disadvantaged youth.

NOTES

[1] A vocational learning program.
[2] All names used here are pseudonyms.

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12. EDUCATING THE RISKY CITIZEN

Young People, Vulnerability and Schooling

INTRODUCTION

It has been suggested that "[t]here is an indelible, axiomatic connecting line drawn between youth/young people and the future" (Foster & Spencer, 2011, p 128). This connection is ubiquitous within both the policy and practice of schooling, which commonly constructs youth as a state that is, above all, one of *becoming* various things: as Kelly puts it, "becoming an adult, becoming a citizen, becoming independent, becoming autonomous, becoming mature and becoming responsible" (2011b, p 48).

On the one hand, this link between youth and futurity associates youth with hope: the work of schools is frequently framed as an investment in a hopeful and better future, both for the young people who are the subjects of the schooling process and for the society in which they are being schooled to participate, both as citizens and as workers. Since the 1990s, it has become a commonplace for advanced democracies such as Australia to promote the neoliberal idea that young people should be educated to be citizens who can reflexively navigate the risks that characterise contemporary life, citizens who are purported to meet an almost impossible prescription as "intelligent, wise, happy, virtuous, healthy, productive, docile, enterprising, fulfilled, self-esteeming, [and] empowered" (Rose, 1998, p. 12).

On the other hand, this link between youth and futurity positions young people in a permanent state of transition. It also evokes the more dystopian interpretation of the future that has become part of the social and political zeitgeist and that associates it with apprehension and risk. Under the influence of that zeitgeist, as Lupton explains, "human responsibility is now attached to risk" (2006, p. 12). This attachment takes two forms: the contemporary individual is understood both to be the source or cause of risk and to be the agent responsible for risk minimisation.

This same concern with risk also permeates modern policymaking. As France and his colleagues have explained (2010), contemporary public policy is predicated on a risk-factor approach that analyses the current behaviours and circumstances of individuals and groups in order to predict and prevent future social and economic problems: as a result, early intervention and prevention have become central features of policy, including education policy. Young people are a common target of this risk-factor analysis. Indeed, youth has become "a site for anxiety", one that

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expresses itself through concerns about the kind of adults – and the kind of citizens – that young people will become (Woodman & Wyn, 2011, p. 7).

This anxiety takes two different but often simultaneous forms. Young people are positioned as the subjects of future risk, giving rise to a pervasive policy discourse of '*youth at risk'*. They are also positioned as the sources or causes of risk, fuelling an equally pervasive discourse of *'youth as risk*'. These discourses of youth, or "truth[s] of youth" (Kelly, 2000, p. 307), are applied with particular frequency to those groups of young people, often within the context of low socioeconomic communities, who are suspected of being unwilling, incapable or unprepared to reflexively navigate and negotiate the fluid and flexible labour markets that prevail in countries such as Australia, "the globalised, risky labour markets of the liberal democracies" (Kelly, 2011a, p. 7). In the context of education, they are applied to those young people who may fail to achieve the transitions that have come to be equated with the realisation of a preferred or normative adult future and which include educational attainment, full employment and home ownership (Wyn, 2009).

Such young people are positioned as being vulnerable to various forms of failure: failure to become the citizens that education policy describes: "active and informed" citizens who "participate in Australia's civic life" and who "work for the common good" (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 9); failure to achieve the "standard biography" that has come to be equated with contemporary reflexive citizenship (Beck, 1992, p. 134); and failure to become the full social, economic, political, cultural and even 'industrial' (Marshall, 1992) citizens that the neoliberal era requires, citizens who are responsible for their own life success, including their own employment (Fejes, 2010). More than any of this, they are positioned as being vulnerable to a much deeper failure: the "failure of the self" (Bansel, 2007, p. 286). This risk of failure is not free-floating but is linked to local geographies. While education policy typically constructs active citizenship as something that is constituted regionally, nationally and globally, it also promotes the local community as a primary site both for the development of young people's active citizenship values and capacities (Birdwell, Scott, & Horley, 2013). In the United Kingdom, for example, the Crick Report constructs schooling as a means of ensuring young people's "community participation; political literacy; and social and moral responsibility" (Jerome, 2012, p. 61). In Australia, the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, which represents the current blueprint for Australian schooling, describes the imperative for schools to prepare young people to be both "global and *local* citizens" (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 9, our emphasis). At the same time, the local community can also be the site of risk and vulnerability for young people and their capacity to experience and enact the citizenship that policy prescribes.

This chapter compares and contrasts various approaches to developing young people's active citizenship in social and economic spheres of life. In it, we consider the degree to which the policy promise of citizenship and membership is being realised for young people whose experience may include markers of marginalisation and exclusion, including precarious participation in the labour

market. We consider how this policy promise relates to the persistent discourses of youth risk and vulnerability that continue to motivate the work of educators in low socioeconomic school communities. We also consider what meanings may apply to young people's citizenship – or even to the notion of citizenship itself - in local geographic settings where structural forces influence the social and economic opportunities and mobilities available to them.

We start by examining governmental strategies seeking to 'manage' young people at risk of becoming marginalised from work. We describe the fluid and insecure context of the contemporary workforce, as well as current policy responses in relation to youth unemployment. These responses are characterised by internal contradictions and tensions – particularly in the treatment of young people living in certain geographic contexts – and represent a neoliberal response to managing 'risk' and 'vulnerability'. Aside from these key responses to unemployment, another key strategy for managing this risk and vulnerability is through schooling, which continues to be seen as a key point of intervention in managing the risk of young people's disengagement from workforce participation post-school. Following this, our discussion moves from the macro level of Federal Government policy to case study research in two Australian secondary schools that have sought to develop a richer notion of active youth citizenship, with mixed results.

UNCERTAIN FUTURES: ECONOMIC CITIZENSHIP AND THE PRECARIAT

We begin this discussion in the future. The link between youth and futurity that we describe earlier in this chapter associates youth with the hope that they will become fully participating economic citizens. Young people who experience workforce insecurity and unemployment are seen to be vulnerable to the risk of not meeting that future. Young people's post-school futures are broadly characterised by uncertainty, insecurity and fluidity in relation to working life (ACTU, 2012). This is supported by data from the last three decades, which show long-term changes to worlds of work as well as the impact of more recent phenomena such as the Global Financial Crisis (GFC).

Standing (2011) has coined the term 'the precariat' to describe the emerging class of people, including young people, who are increasingly vulnerable to these changes. While it can be argued that young people in Australia face far less degrees of precarity experienced elsewhere in the world, key indicators suggest that the experience of precarity by young Australians has been intensifying over the last three decades. In the longer term, the labour market has changed in at least six significant ways.

Firstly, the number of full-time job opportunities for teenagers has been steadily declining since the 1980s (Robinson & Lamb, 2009; Robinson, Lamb, & Walstab, 2010). Secondly, there has been an increase in the uptake of casual and part time work by young people aged 15-24. One fifth of all casual workers are aged 15-19. From 2001 to 2011 the prevalence of casual work increased significantly for this age group and to some extent for 20-24 year olds for the period, but far less for

older age groups (ACTU, 2012). Many want to work more but are unable to do so. Underemployment, defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as part-time workers who are available to do more work, rose significantly following the GFC, a trend that has not abated since (Stanwick et al., 2013).

Working life in general is also increasingly competitive and "fluid". The rate of casualisation across the Australian workforce increased from 18.9% in 1988 to around 25% in 2012 (Stanwick et al., 2013). Levels of "non permanent" work and the extent of casualisation are hotly contested, with many claiming casual work is valued by young people. It is to some extent erroneously argued, for example, that "casuals do not want to lose their flexibility or their casual loading", or that casual work is preferred "as it allows [casual workers] to take part in the workforce and balance family responsibilities or study commitments" (Willox, 2012). While some young people prefer casual and part-time work because of the benefits that flexibility offers, the overarching context of labour market change has challenged the ability of young people to plan their lives and maintain close social relationships (Woodman, 2012). While employment conditions generally improve after the age of 25 (Stanwick et al., 2013), it would appear that for many, the options for young people to secure full-time work are increasingly out of reach.

Thirdly, globalisation is creating challenges for young people seeking work in Australia. As Birrell and Healy (2013) suggest, young working holiday makers from overseas are intensifying competition for jobs with young local workers. Particularly vulnerable are those "without post-school education, who are seeking less skilled, entry-level jobs." Fourthly, a growing share of local workers aged 55 and over is staying in the workforce (Birrell & Healy, 2013). Between May 2003 and May 2013, the share of those aged 60-64 in the workforce increased from 39% to 54%. This increasing competition for work particularly affects young people who are qualified but lack experience.

A fifth trend arises from a perceived global mismatch between skills and jobs. As we discuss in greater detail below, a number of business surveys confirm the perception that young people are underprepared for working life and lack foundational skills in literacy and numeracy as well as soft skills such as communication and problem-solving (Mission Australia, 2013; Chamber of Commerce & Industry Queensland, 2011).

Finally, there is a disproportionately high level of youth unemployment. Figures from 2014 suggest that youth unemployment represents just under 40% of all unemployment in Australia. More than one in three unemployed Australians is aged between 15 and 24 (Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2014).

Following the election of the Liberal-National Party coalition government in 2013, a language of austerity was adopted in a response to a perceived crisis in the form of a budget deficit. Echoing the language of the Cameron government in Great Britain that "Conservatives are for strivers not skivers", Treasurer Joe Hockey evoked the idea that "we are a nation of lifters, not leaners". Explicitly suggesting that work can build "a sense of self", the government proposed an extreme set of neoliberal measures to reduce the social safety net and render individuals, including young people, responsible for managing their own risk by

seeking work. In a speech to community organisations, Hockey asserted the view that "If we don't start living within our means the people who are the most vulnerable in the community will suffer the most" (Browne, 2014).

A few of these proposed measures are worth noting. The “learn or earn” rules announced in the 2014 budget included an effective reduction in dole payments. Unemployed people under the age of 25 would no longer qualify for the Newstart allowance of $510 a fortnight, which has previously been available to young people after they turn 22. People under 25 would have to apply for the lower Youth Allowance, worth $414 a fortnight at the full rate. In addition, jobseekers under the age of 30 would have to wait six months before receiving unemployment benefits, depending on their work history. It was also proposed that unemployed young people would be expected to submit 40 job applications per month to qualify for benefits, alongside participation in a Work for the Dole scheme.

Alongside this, funding was withdrawn for the organisations including Youth Connections and the Local Learning and Employment Networks (in Victoria) that provide transitions support such as career counselling. When coupled with proposals to deregulate higher education and the replacement of Tools For Your Trade financial assistance to apprentices with the Trade Support Loans Programme, these measures reflect a governmental strategy for managing vulnerability and risk that shifts responsibility onto young people (and presumably their families) as a means of saving funding.

Amongst the many implications of these proposals, the location of young people at risk is particularly salient to this approach. Year on year, those young people who are most vulnerable to risk of marginalisation from earning or learning live in regional and remote areas (Robinson, Long, & Lamb, 2011). Geographic location is also an important predictor of vulnerability to marginalisation from opportunities to undertake work or further study. Current policy seeks to address this by compelling young people through the punitive measures outlined above to relocate to areas where employment is available (Cox, 2014).

This policy is not without contradictions. Rural areas experiencing an exodus of young people, such as the Murray-Darling Basin, from which young people are leaving at higher rates than elsewhere in Australia, could be deeply affected. Under current policy proposals, young people would be forced to leave family and support networks to search for scarce jobs in unfamiliar places on a minimum or no allowance. Furthermore, this policy measure runs counter intuitively to The National Stronger Regions Fund, which seeks to boost employment in regional areas.

This suggests that a deeper set of techniques related to managing risk and vulnerability are at play. These techniques draw from a double taxonomy of responsibilisation and control in relation to the management of risk (Rose, 1999). As Kelly has pointed out (2001), the individualisation and responsibilisation of young people has become a standard feature of the risk environments of contemporary policy, one that constructs them as responsible for all aspects of their lives, including those aspects that are institutionally structured or shaped by national and global forces beyond their control.

On one hand, this responsibilisation takes the form of compelling 'leaners' to become 'lifters'. On another, the conditions attached reflect an expression of governmentality that seeks to control and engineer forms of transition and risk-management. For example, the Minister for Social Services expressed interest in supporting the incorporation of income management into a suite of support services available to job seekers by determining how welfare payments are spent by recipients to prevent young people from misspending them on non-necessities, such as alcohol (News.com.au, 2014). The current government espouses personal responsibility on hand while seeking to maintain central control over individual life-choices, on the other.

Two possible impacts of this policy are worth noting. The first is that compelling young people under the age of 30 to wait six months until they can access Newstart or Youth Allowance effectively positions young people in an extended, seemingly never-ending, state of transition.

The second is that in transferring responsibility for risk to young people, proposed policy measures may exacerbate the 'failure of the self' to which we allude earlier. Evidence from previous Work for the Dole schemes in Australia and the US, for example, suggests that being compelled to work may reduce the job-searching activities of young people (who feel fully occupied) or stigmatise them in the eyes of some employers (Borland & Tseng, 2003). This risk of failure is heightened for those living in regional and remote areas of Australia, where work is less available.

These policy developments also reflect a deeper shift in conceptions of youth, citizenship, risk and vulnerability. The current political discourse is departing from a previous discourse of vulnerability that sought to build pathways and support services for young people, to one in which individuals are treated as inherently capable of lifting themselves out of conditions leading to their marginalisation. Within this emergent discourse, risk is reformulated as a motivator through the punitive policy measures outlined above. In a very real sense, forms of economic citizenship that depend on social structures and government funded safety nets are hollowed out and replaced by one in which the young person is responsible for his or her mobility. Wyn and Cuervo (2014) observe that "members of Generation Y have largely accepted that it is up to the individual young person (and their family) to invest in education and learn how to navigate increasingly insecure labour markets".

EDUCATING FOR ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

While the Liberal-National Party coalition government has flagged that it will curb school funding increases from 2018 (Hurst, 2014), schooling continues to be the key site at which the risks of post-school disengagement from earning and learning are mitigated. The evidence suggests that completing the final year of school confers economic and social benefits to young people across the life course (Robinson & Lamb, 2009), and it is for this reason that government policy has sought to increase the level of school completions.

Policy such as the Australian Curriculum has sought to be responsive to the labour force conditions outlined above. The Australian Curriculum: Work Studies, Years 9-10, for example, was written in response to a view that "Australian industries and enterprises face unprecedented global competition and pressure for increased productivity. This, in turn, contributes to an unpredictable work future for young people, where routine job opportunities are limited, and outsourcing, contract work and flexible work arrangements are the norm. School leavers can no longer anticipate a single job or career for a lifetime and will be encountering jobs which currently do not exist" (ACARA, 2010).

Consultation for the development of this curriculum was framed in terms of a concern that "the gap between education and the work readiness of young people is widening. Early and intense educational intervention is needed to help young people develop work readiness, career development and work knowledge" (ACARA, 2010). Echoing the surveys of business outlined above, this approach promotes the development of skills and capabilities to prosper in new knowledge-economies that "differ from those of the past. Young people will need a set of personal and interpersonal capacities, wide-ranging global awareness and the flexibility to manage rapid change and transition" (ACARA, 2010). These general capabilities and non-technical work readiness skills and knowledge reflect a wider interest in education systems in developing soft skills to enable young people to be adaptable to changing global labour markets.

These 'soft skills' – also referred to as literacies, 'generic and basic skills' (Roberts & Wignall, 2010) – include social intelligence, emotional resilience, enterprise and discipline (Roberts, 2009). Sometimes promoted as a response to the frustration of employers about the work-readiness of young people, they are seen not only to be essential for workplace readiness, but also for the development of active citizens and cohesive communities (Kahn et al., 2012).

In addition, information, ecological and cultural literacies are promoted as essential to navigating various domains of virtual and face-to-face life (Hannon, Patton, & Temperley, 2011). While many of these are already evident in programs such as VET In Schools and curriculum such as the International Baccalaureate, it is argued that these need to be more widely and explicitly adopted across schooling in general.

In light of the neoliberal discourse of policy described above, the need to develop soft skills in schools could be seen as essential to preparing young people for a responsibilised future post-school. That said, it can equally be argued that the development of these skills is fundamentally bound up with neoliberal policy. The need to better develop these skills – though valuable – reflects a wider need to prepare young people for a world of insecure work. Serving as a kind of adversity capital that enables young people to be more adaptive, flexible and resilient, they also reflect the need to prepare young people for more uncertain, fluid working lives in which the conventional notion of a career is obsolete. The danger is that fostering soft skills in schools may lead to a reflexive adoption of the idea that education and life in general is reduced to economic need, and one that is highly individualised. What are the implications for community, family and broader social

cohesion, particularly those characterised by socioeconomic and geographic immobility? Some insight can be gained by looking closely at the responses of individual schools.

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN RISKY PLACES

The rhetoric of active citizenship is imbued with the neoliberal promise that even the most structurally marginalised young people can experience full political, social and economic membership if they engage in their local communities, yet internationally, vast numbers of young people are being forced to leave their communities in search of economic opportunities while other young people remain "chained to place" (Bauman, 1998, p. 45), condemned to geographic and socioeconomic immobility. These include the 'lost young people' described by scholars such as Dillabough and Kennelly (2010), for whom life on the edges of Canadian cities means an inability to access the opportunities for mobility that are promoted by those globalised cities. They also include the large numbers of young people who are living on the margins – literally and metaphorically – of Australian cities.

The following part of our discussion is informed by data from case study research in two Australian secondary schools. Each is a small to medium-sized government school that draws its enrolments from peri-urban or rural fringe communities located on the edges of the state's capital city and characterised by socioeconomic exclusion. For the educators at these schools, the everyday geographies of schooling include families with high needs, limited resources to meet those needs, and a struggle to meet systemic benchmarks of educational achievement and school completion. For the young people who attend these schools, these everyday geographies also include an increasingly casualised youth labour market and high youth employment, poor public transport services, and a frequent association with vandalism and petty crime within their respective communities.

Both schools have introduced active citizenship curricula that encourage students to design and implement social action projects within the local community. These include youth-focused projects such as campaigns for better youth recreation facilities and projects to raise local community awareness of issues facing young people such as drink-driving, bullying and drug use. They also include projects with a wider community focus such as campaigns for better local public transport and projects to develop the local rail trail, encourage local reforestation and create productive community gardens.

Both curricula target students in Years Eight and Nine, or aged between 14 and 15. These are commonly understood to be the years during which young people are most likely to disengage from school: in both cases, an active citizenship curriculum has been introduced as part of a conscious attempt to boost student engagement. They are also promoted for other purposes: as a means of endowing them with the skills and capabilities for community change, even for community leadership; and as a means of preparing them for post-school labour market

participation. As one school principal explains, "now that students are more confident in themselves, more engaged, we then start talking career and future steps". This equation between present community engagement and a productive economic future is echoed by the teachers who conduct the curriculum: "they will be leaders, they will be more well-rounded and more confident in groups, and they can take those skills on to … their further education". It is also echoed within the narratives of the young people themselves. As one student explains, "it's better if you have a leadership role so you can take on board lots of job opportunities".

The fact that educators should construct the curriculum as a facilitator of a desirable youth future is in itself fairly unremarkable. Contemporary secondary schools, in particular, are almost inescapably oriented towards the future and centrally concerned with the preparation of young people for that future. What is important is how their future is understood by young people in low socioeconomic circumstances and what is done in the name of securing that future.

The hopeful statements that we have touched on above reflect the individualised rhetoric of choice and self-determination that is so much a part of the contemporary educational zeitgeist, but there are other discursive threads or themes that colour the implementation of active citizenship curricula in these schools. There is a keen concern amongst the educators at both schools that their students are vulnerable not only to the precarity of employment that already characterises their communities but to more grim forms of social exclusion and constraint. The following observations by the same principal portray the school as a place beset by risky circumstances, and the students themselves as vulnerable subjects whose futures are at risk:

> One of the main things that we're trying to do here is actually get them to be able to interact nicely with each other, and not do stupid things before they think, and in the end become well informed citizens who've got a job that they're happy with. […] They don't have to be rocket scientists. They can be whatever they want, so long as it's a job they enjoy. […] So long as they're not out on the streets doing some of things that some of their parents might have done, which you don't want to know.

The educators at both of these schools are deeply concerned with protecting their students from the loss and abandonment that they associate with those students' youth, with their socioeconomic status, and with their current experience and status as young people living in economically marginalised locations. This concern is combined with a hope that their own pedagogical efforts will reduce the future risks that they believe await their students.

This concern has unsettling effects, however. For one thing, it highlights the fracture between the skills and notions of active citizenship as they are promoted within education policy and what Wood has called the "multiple and varied experiences of *being* a citizen" in low socioeconomic communities (2013, p. 51, original emphasis). In sharp contrast to the agentic and self-directed discourse of active citizenship, it sets up a discourse of risk and vulnerability that reduces these young people's experience of active citizenship to little more than an educational

safety net. This sits uncomfortably, to say the least, with the removal of social and economic safety nets for young people that we have described earlier in this chapter. It also suggests that when it comes to the key indicators of young people's current and future citizenship, such as education and employment, policy responses are increasingly fractured.

CONCLUSION

The policy and school strategies to promote active citizenship that we have described in this chapter represent an attempt to provide the means for young people to navigate the fluidity and precarity of contemporary working life. Given the insecure nature of working life, this raises a number of questions.

The first question arises as to whether these strategies fulfil the conventional role of citizenship in enabling young people to experience membership and belonging in an economic sense. Or is the development of soft skills to prepare young people to be responsive (even subjugated) to global capital at the expense of other needs, capacities and abilities, such as the ability to plan, engage in their local communities, or the expression of identity in relation to something other than the economy?

Conceptualising vulnerability in terms of young people's "unsuccessful transitions" from school to work, training and further study, is also problematic. The notion of transition has been contested for some time now, and with changes to traditional markers of transition moving to later in life, such as getting full-time work, buying a house and starting a family, its meaning has become porous if not irrelevant. A flow on effect of insecure work appears to be a distortion in young people's ability to plan these kinds of events. And when viewed as something exclusively in service of fluid labour markets, the notion of transition becomes all the more problematic in relation to broader definitions of citizenship that seek something beyond employability.

An observation by Stein, Stauber and Walther in the European context is salient here: "many policies that are intended to 'lead' towards gainful employment, adult status and social integration, are in fact 'misleading' in terms of: reducing social integration to labour market integration, thus neglecting young adults' subjective perspectives and leading to a "waste" of motivation; not considering the change of labour societies and reducing the "mismatch" between supply and demand to an individualised "pedagogisation" of labour market problems (2003, p. 4). They also rightly observe that young people find themselves caught in an interstitial zone of being both adults and young people simultaneously. They evoke "the metaphor of 'yo-yo' transitions to refer to the ups and downs, 'either-ors' and 'neither-nors' of young people living adult and young lives simultaneously" (Stein, Stauber, & Walther, 2003, p. 4). This 'yo-yo-isation of transitions' between youth and adulthood (Walther et al., 2001) is exacerbated by current neoliberal policy that seeks to change eligibility for the social safety net to the age of 30 while responsibilising young people to navigate globalised labour markets alongside older citizens with life-experience, qualifications and other potential assistance,

such as home ownership and spousal support. Ironically, many of the proposed 'earning or learning' measures currently on the policy table in Australia are more lax for older age groups. For example, where physically able job seekers aged under 30 will have to sign up for 25 hours of work for the dole for at least half of each year, those aged between 30 and 50 will be expected to do 15 hours of work for the dole every six months (Barlow, 2014).

This policy is predicated on the idea that those who want and are able to work can do so. A second question arises as to whether secure work awaits those ending their post-school study and training. In May of 2014, it was reported that a total of 146,100 job vacancies were available in Australia (ABS, 2014), while a total of 740,000 Australians were unemployed (Martin, 2014). Those in part-time work seeking more secure employment are not necessarily in a better position to gain full-time employment. Teenagers in part-time jobs are statistically only slightly more likely to move into full-time employment than those who are unemployed (Robinson, Long & Lamb, 2011). Since the latter half of the 1980s, the age at which young people enter full-time work has increased. Increasing levels of education amongst young people overall mean that those with poor education outcomes are likely to struggle in the labour market, but insecurity is not confined to those without sufficient qualifications (Stanwick et al., 2013).

The third question arises in relation to the places in which young people being educated for citizenship, and in which they are expected to act and contribute as social and economic citizens. For growing numbers of young people, the local community is the site of increasingly complex and contradictory discourses and experiences of citizenship. It is constructed as a place in which they can express their citizenship in transformative ways, both for the community and for themselves, but it is also the site of youth experiences and discourses that position them as both subjects and sources of uncertainty and risk.

These unanswered questions, the trends that we have described in young people's workforce participation, and the changes that are rapidly emerging within Australian social policy in relation to young people, suggest that at the very least, social and education policy are at risk of overlooking the everyday experience of citizenship for young people in low socioeconomic communities that are located at the sharp end of policy change and economic precarity. More than this, the recent move away from notions of youth vulnerability within policy, and their substitution with harsher, more individualised and more punitive notions and practices, suggest that the citizenship experience of such young people is itself becoming more vulnerable, more risky and more precarious in ways that are likely to have lasting and detrimental effects. As Wyn and Cuervo (2014) put it in response to the 2014 federal budget: "The harms that are done cannot be retracted. Young lives cannot be relived".

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PART 4

Young People's Voice

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13. RE-PRESENTING OR REPRESENTING YOUNG LIVES?

Negotiating Knowledge Construction of and with 'Vulnerable' Young people

INTRODUCTION

Representations in and out of Research Practice

The concept of 'vulnerability' informs research practice with young people from research design through to dissemination. Young people, specifically those under the age of 18, are categorized as an inherently vulnerable population in many national and institutional ethical guidelines. As Carter (2009, p. 863) notes, this approach automatically identifies researching *with* youth as a risky endeavor:

> […] forcing researchers into a defensive position and framing children as vulnerable even when the risks may be negligible and the risks of not doing the research are higher for children.

In the context of research governance, young people are generally perceived to become less vulnerable with age, with older young people (16-18) in some cases being able to consent to research without their parent or guardian's permission. There are, of course, other indicators of 'vulnerability' used in research that intersect with the category of 'youth'. Young people can be positioned as 'doubly' or even 'multiply' vulnerable if, as well as being young, they are also experiencing disadvantages such as poverty or disability. The term 'vulnerable youth' has, as Valentine and colleagues (2001) point out, often come to represent young people 'at risk' of social exclusion for one or more reasons.

Researchers engaged in systematic and reflective inquiry continually make decisions about design and data collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting (Rossman & Rallis, 2010, p. 384). Yet these common research activities become "more complex and more significant when the research involves work with a 'vulnerable' group of children or youth" (Valentine et al., 2001 p. 119). This has traditionally meant that young people from backgrounds identified as vulnerable (e.g. young people from low socio-economic or minority group background), 'hard to reach' (e.g. young people living in out of home care or excluded from school) or 'difficult' (e.g. young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties) have had fewer opportunities to be involved in participatory research. It can be difficult to

K. te Riele & R. Gorur (eds.), Interrogating Conceptions of 'Vulnerable Youth' in Theory, Policy and Practice, 197–211.

balance the protection and participation of 'vulnerable' young people across different points of a research project. For example, reflecting on her research with girls and their experiences of violence, Tisdall (2005, p. 100) highlights the irony she felt as a researcher committed to promoting young people's involvement in both individual and public decision making while also acting as a "protective gatekeeper" when the media sought contact with young people to discuss the topic area.

Many researchers working with youth favour participatory research approaches where the co-construction of knowledge between those involved (as researchers and/or participants) is relatively explicit and can be formalized (Cammarota & Fine, 2010). While participatory research practices differ in their degree and approach, they usually involve researching *with* and not *on* youth, seeing young people as social actors capable of sharing their experiences and contributing to knowledge production. They often seek to privilege the 'voices' of young participants, in order to present 'authentic' accounts of their everyday lives, and to 'empower' youth to identify solutions to problems in their own lives and the lives of others. This type of research is complex, and there is an important body of critically reflective writing about the challenges and contradictions involved in this process (see for example Holland et al., 2010). In particular, it is widely acknowledged that the process of 'doing' participatory research surfaces a number of challenges related to power and representation, requiring careful negotiation (Kessi, 2011; Porter et al., 2012). Thus as researchers we need to engage in practice to identify not only how our social locations, academic training, and research agendas filter, shape, and present participants' lives in particular ways (Fine et al., 2000; Sime, 2008; Watkins & Shulman, 2008), but also pay close attention to the ways young people are characterized in the media, policy, and institutions that serve them.

In this chapter, we focus on research practices *with* 'vulnerable' young people, asking: What kinds of practices create representations that best respect and reflect their realities? And, ultimately what kinds of representations of 'vulnerable' youth are constructed in and out of these practices?

Dominant Cultural Narratives and Counter-stories

Multiple representations, 'stories' or 'narratives' about 'vulnerable youth' co-exist, but not all have equal power. Rappaport (2000) offers the following distinction between *community (setting) narratives* and *dominant cultural narratives*; a community narrative is a shared story that is "common among a group of people" people" people" and "may be shared through social interaction, texts, pictures, performances, and rituals" (p. 4), whereas dominant cultural narratives are those stories in the media, social and cultural institutions, that are known by most people in a given culture. The latter are often 'shorthand' stories such as stereotypes (student, welfare recipient, recently arrived migrant) that are "well practiced images and stories" (p. 5). It is through the symbols of stories such as text and

images that we often 'cue' people to access particular narratives about groups in society, including young people.

Our research practices shape the stories we are able to tell about 'vulnerable' young people. Our epistemologies frame the questions we ask and the stories they elicit from young people. Research can offer routes for young people to produce 'counter-stories,' which "challenge social and racial [and other] injustices by listening to and learning from experiences of racism and resistance, despair and hope at the margins of society" (Yosso, 2006, p. 171, as cited in Rolón-Dow, 2011). The goal of counter-storytelling is to "foster spaces in classrooms [and we argue beyond] where young people can engage as social critics, develop a historical understanding and strong critique of racism and other forms of oppression" (Bell, 2010, p. 65) so that they may "act effectively on their own behalf and against institutional and systemic patterns and practices that marginalize them" (Solorzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001, p. 319).

In order for counter-stories to be told, researchers must create conditions in the research process that constitute forms of 'counter-practice'. 'Counter-practices' are practices that shift discussions which focus solely on the person 'suffused with problems' to those which develop questions and a language that 'map' external roots of issues (White and colleagues as cited in Watkins and Shulman, 2008). Watkins and Shulman (2008) provide an example of how re-shaping interview questions may influence such stories to be told by young people differently;

> For instance, when a young adult is asked when she has managed not to be overwhelmed by hopeless feelings, a particular incident may emerge. A short story of courage and resistance may come forward that sharply contrasts with her and her family's previous narrative of her as passive in the face of "her" depression. Such new stories about unique outcomes fan feelings of competence and resourcefulness vis-à-vis one's life, rather than feelings of demoralization and futility. (p. 203)

The notion of 'counter-practice' provides a productive lens for thinking about how 'vulnerable youth' are represented in and out of research practice. Researchers engaging in 'counter-practice' consciously search for the cracks and fissures in dominant conceptualizations of young people, that is those presented in the media and policy, where young people are often represented in deficit terms. For 'vulnerable' youth commonly used terms like 'at-risk' or 'disengaged' can bring about particular images and stories of youth as troubled, troubling, and passive. For us, this approach involves mobilizing frameworks, theories, methods and creative tools that recognise young people's strengths and agency, and illuminate, as presented in the work of Fine (2014) "circuits and consequences of dispossession" in the lives of young people:

> A circuits analysis deliberately torques our critical gaze away from asking "what's wrong with these victims?" toward analyzing instead how structures, histories, and dynamics of injustice travel into communities and bodies. More specifically, a circuits analysis investigates the social psychological transit of inequality across scale (structure, policy, institutions, relationships, psychological and embodied Selves), across place (nation, zip code, communities of privilege, and disadvantage), and across sectors (education, labor, criminal justice, health and psychological well-being). (p. 228)

As researchers adopting a critical lens, part of our work is to understand the implications of these representations, and to consider how to disrupt those that are narrow and oppressive. It is in this way that community (localized and contextualised) narratives can be produced that better represent young people and their lives, contributing to 'alternative' or 'counter' stories through research practices and products.

INTERROGATING OUR RESEARCH PRACTICE WITH 'VULNERABLE YOUTH'

Here we draw on our experience of constructing knowledge of and with 'vulnerable' young people across three research projects. The projects are diverse spanning two countries (El Salvador and Australia), with differing research foci (civic participation, graffiti and community arts, and flexible learning programs), and differing tools of data collection (photovoice, surveys, focus groups and interviews). What they have in common is the involvement of youth deemed to be vulnerable and the exploration of issues related to vulnerability (living in poverty, educational exclusion, illegal/legal activities). As researchers we are located in different disciplines and identify with different bodies of literature (community and liberation psychologies, children's geographies, and the sociology of childhood and youth). We have, however, a shared commitment to socially just research practices and representations. We unpack selected moments in the process of data collection, analysis and dissemination, examining the different ways we represent and re-present 'vulnerable' young people through three sections: indicators and images ; talk and text; and bodies and embodiment. In doing so, we aim to show how differing dimensions and contexts of vulnerability are being constructed in relation *to* and *by* young people through research practice. Framing this interrogation are the notions of 'dominant narratives' and 'counter stories'.

Indicators and Images: Understanding Poverty through the Eyes of Young Salvadorans

Participatory visual and creative methods, such as photovoice, are gaining popularity in youth research in part because of their potential to be empowering for young people (Wilson et al., 2007). Photovoice works to shift the dynamics that are often at play in research, positioning the young people as active participants in the meaning-making and knowledge creation process. These methods are not simply

about young people taking photographs and talking about them, they are also opportunities to share the knowledge production process and a space for young people to represent themselves and their communities.

Here I (Alison) reflect on a photovoice component of a larger mixed-methods research project, which explored links between community context and civic and political development among young people in El Salvador (for more information on the research see Baker & Brookins, 2014). The purpose of the photovoice project was for young people to explore their local community, a coastal village in El Salvador which had been gaining popularity as a tourist destination. Through the photovoice process, the goal of the research was to show up different elements of young people's sociopolitical development and use it as a basis for action. In this research example young people's representations create a space for their identification of the contextual markers of poverty in their community and add another dimension to existing standardised measures.

Large organizations, such as the World Bank or UNESCO, consider the percentage of people living on less than $1 to $2 U.S. per day to be in extreme poverty. In El Salvador a number of indicators are used in the national census to measure socioeconomic status and deprivation, including: the percentage of homes without electricity; without plumbing; without a toilet; and with the earth as the floor. While these indicators provide important comparative information about people's living conditions, they are limited in what they reveal about young people's lived experiences and what poverty looks like to them. As a result young people can "find themselves as participants in a calculus based in normative predictions and causal claims that link individuals, poverty, social problems and delinquency" (Bottrell, 2007, p. 600) in ways that diminish local understandings and young people's capacity for action.

As part of the photovoice research project in El Salvador, a group of 15-19 year olds chose to explore the issue of poverty in their community. They took a number of images that represented visual 'indicators' of poverty in their community. For example, markers of poverty in their images included children not wearing shoes, children playing with tires by rolling them in the street, having a wood stove, homes made from scrap sheet metal or mud bricks and a portrait of a family in which both the mother and daughter had infant children. Figure 1, a photo taken by one of the female participants, portrays a young boy engaged in making something. The image by itself could be interpreted a number of different ways. Some may think he is simply playing; he is however working, making tortillas to sell to local restaurants and other families in the community. The cliché 'a picture is worth a thousand words' implies layers of complexity or 'stories' embedded in a single photograph but, when taken out of context, an image can also be a powerful misrepresentation. In listening to the young person who took the photo explain the image and the young people's discussion; it is clear that their representations make visible not only the everydayness of poverty, but also the ways in which young people in particular are affected. The young people discussed the contradictions involved in responding to poverty – on the one hand they identified the need to work to provide money for basic needs, and on the other hand the importance of

attending school because an education was crucial to breaking the cycle of poverty in the long term.

Figure 1. Image taken by research participant on the photo theme of 'poverty in the community'

All of the young people participating in the research project were engaged in work, whether for a local small business or for their family and trying to keep up with attending school. Several young people in the project reported having to drop out of school to work more in order to help their family. While this image and many of the other photographs can be quite confronting for those living in contexts where young people working is not the norm, they are representations of young people's lives and communities that represent vulnerabilities through their eyes. They are the issues and dilemmas that youth in their region face all the time.

Yet, the story doesn't end there. During the discussions, when asked what they saw as solutions to the problem of poverty in their community, young people came up with a number of strategies, many of which involved themselves as social and political actors. For example, one young person said that for the younger children in the community they could throw a party or run some fun sports activities, opportunities they may not participate in otherwise. Young people said the community could pitch in and help to fix up some of the dilapidated housing and ensure the homes got the repairs needed to be safe. Similarly, they said it was important the government worked to help people who needed it, for example by providing school uniforms free of charge and subsidies for single mothers.

This research example highlights the importance of understanding vulnerability in context and as a relative concept. Despite many young people's families in the project being in precarious economic situations, they identified ways of helping

others and the importance of the community in providing a safety net for the most vulnerable. The stories young people told in response to the images about working illuminated the barriers they faced, caught in between the present and their potential futures. They perceived education as a circuit breaker of poverty for themselves and others, particularly for young women. While these young people and their communities are positioned as vulnerable due to their economic conditions, through their images and discussions their representations show the complexity of vulnerability as it is overlaid with resilience and community resource sharing. The ways in which the young people represented poverty and subsequent social action in their own community can challenge notions of what being 'poor' or vulnerable can be. It also pointed to the importance of the broader structures (local and federal government and schools) as mechanisms that perpetuate poverty, but also have the power and potential to positively change such conditions. This collaborative research highlights the ethical imperative to present young people's experiences and ideas in ways that incorporate their lived experience and recognizes their agency, as well as their vulnerability.

Talk and Text: Situating the 'Voices' of Students at Flexible Learning Programs in Research Reports

As researchers we work with talk and text in multiple ways. Writing is often the end product of the research process. Our research reports can impact on the young people who not only participate in our studies, but on related groups as they may be used to support or withdraw funding for programs and to change practice in health, education and social services. There is, as we know, a political and ethical aspect to representing others, especially those already marginalised or facing discrimination within society. Alderson and Morrow (2011) use the examples of teenage parents and young asylum seekers to illustrate that the positive aspects of their lives are often under-reported in the media in comparison to the problems they are seen to cause or to face. They suggest that:

> Researchers who hope to publicise such positive examples widely, and inform public opinion, face double and treble prejudices when their findings are about young people, about disadvantaged groups, and about ethnic and religious minorities (p. 135)

How, then, might researchers seek to represent 'vulnerable' young people in nuanced and holistic ways? Ways that acknowledge the difficulties they face, but also illuminate the positive. In this example, we reflect on tensions in representing what 'vulnerable' young people say and how it is subsequently used in research reports for policy and practice.

As part of a team researching 'promising' Flexible Learning Programs (FLPs) around Australia, I (Vicky) interviewed students (as well as staff and community members) about their experiences of these programs. In particular we were interested in understanding what these different groups perceived to be the outcomes of the program and the practices underpinning them. FLPs were defined

in the research as those programs aimed at re-engaging marginalized young people with a secondary school education. The majority of the young people attending had disengaged or been excluded from 'mainstream' schooling. In addition, and often related to, their educational marginalization, a number of young people were also experiencing health issues and housing uncertainty. The research team published a case study report for each program based on interviews, observations and document analysis. The case studies, final report, and dissemination activities were designed to maximize the impact of the research findings on policy and practice, and importantly for the young people who access these programs (for more information on the project see Te Riele, 2014).

Aside from the rare publications co-authored with young people (e.g. Cahill et al., 2008; Anderson-Newton et al., 2014), young people are often represented in research reports through the use of quotations from interviews with them. A challenge in including young people's 'voice' in this way is that in turning talk from an interview into text quoted in a report, it can become disconnected from the rhythms and nuances of the conversation, and decontextualized from the person's life and the social interaction of the interview. In our project, we spent time hanging out at the FLPs, getting to know the young people and those who worked with them. We knew more about their lives, relationships and character, than the one-on-one recorded interviews, and particularly a quotation can convey. We have had a relationship with the people we are writing about, and a need to represent them in ways that are true to what we know about them. In a sense, the young people are an 'imagined partner' as we write. For us this reflection resonates with, Watkins and Shulman's (2008) practice of "slow and careful listening and self inquiry" in our research practices with participants which "brings us into relationship with that person, in part by ensuring that the sound of her voice enters our psyche" (p. 27).

Tensions remain in listening to and representing carefully what young people say, when their talk feeds off and into deficit and troubling narratives about 'vulnerable' youth. For example, in our project some young participants made reference to past behaviors, in terms of "causing trouble" or taking part in illegal behaviours such as stealing or drug use or spoke of parents that did not care enough. Students also spoke about the FLP as the only place that would accept them and as not 'fitting in' in their previous school. One young person described the FLP as for those who have "weird life things" or "have drifted away from the mainstream life". While there is a positive story about belonging in these narratives these discourses are also concerning. Te Riele (2014, p. 31) notes that:

> [W]arning bells ring when programs refer to young people as 'troubled adolescents' or as students who cannot fit into mainstream schooling. Such perspectives 'can (unwittingly) sabotage' a constructive approach to providing flexible learning programs

Warning bells also ring when the young people appear to have internalized the deficit, pathologising and problem focused discourses that surround them, referring to themselves and other students through this lens. As Blum-Ross (2013, p. 62)

notes in her research using participating filmmaking, many young people "chose to replicate rather than resist mainstream representations". She points out that this poses an ethical dilemma for the aims of participatory research. Is it more ethical to not intervene and 'allow' the young people to decide on their own representations, or should the researcher encourage young people to be more critical of how they are representing youth and interrogate their decisions? A similar tension exists when including young people's 'voices' in research reports. The style of most research reports means there are not the same affordances of a journal article, where an in-depth reflective discussion of methodological and theoretical issues can be undertaken. In reports researchers tend to write about what people have said as 'fact', rather than offering a critical deconstruction of the participant's views.

How do we speak for but not over young people in our research reports? Weis and Fine (2000, p. xii) argue it is important to engage with youth in ways in which 'deficit models are left at the door', that we recognize their strengths and attempt to speak back to dominant disempowering discourses. For us, this is about both recognizing 'vulnerable' young people's agency and the constraints they are acting within. In writing the case study reports, attempts to address these challenges included carefully selecting quotations that highlight structural constraints as much as young people's own self-determination. At times this meant drawing attention to possible constraints even if the young person does not. It also meant providing contextual data to situate the young people's 'voices' within. As Nind et al. (2012) contend, in their research with girls with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, this means accepting the relational nature of young people's own stories and "accepting their voices as situated within complex dynamics" (p. 653), which include the exclusionary processes of their previous educational experiences. The young people in our project were, as one staff member noted, having "to constantly repeat your [their] story", a story about leaving mainstream school and coming here, of the issues they were facing in their life. As Aitken and Plows (2010, p. 330) suggest:

> […] when working with young people it is important to attend to the ways they imagine alternative, perhaps hopeful, futures; futures that are sometimes missed with conventional methodologies.

While our methods in the FLP project were conventional, we purposefully framed our interview questions around possibilities rather than problems, building on knowledge garnered through simply hanging around at the program. Subsequently much of what the young people talked about in their interviews emphasized their talents and capabilities including their own and others' achievements and aspirations for the future. We were then able to use this data as 'counter stories' to the tales of being troubled or troubling.

Bodies and Embodiment: With or without You? Launching a Report of a Legal Graffiti Program

In an attempt to 'go beyond' the textual representation of young people's experiences, researchers have sought to support young people to disseminate research findings in a number of modes (i.e., presentations, workshops, performances). It can be powerful when young people contribute to dissemination activities, reaching audiences, and doing so in ways, that adults cannot (Tisdall, 2009). Like any youth participation, there are different degrees of young people's involvement in dissemination, ranging from tokenistic to empowering (Hart, 1992). The desire to involve them has an ethical imperative – this is research about them and their experiences, can they not tell it better than the researcher? But there are also ethical challenges – there is potential for negative or damaging reactions without the protection of anonymity. As with most methodological decisions this is a consideration that involves weighing up the potential benefits against the potential harms, and a balance to be sought between the protection and participation rights of the young people. As noted by Valentine (1999) it is imperative that strategies for involving young people in the dissemination activities of research are something they will be comfortable with. In research involving a 'sensitive' topic, where participants are deemed 'vulnerable' or when "the topic is invariably framed by stubborn negative stereotypes and subject to media frenzies" (Tisdall, 2005, p. 98), such as those linked to young graffiti writers, our awareness of these issues is heightened. It is also clear that this is about the risk and benefits not only for the individuals taking part but the wider group of young people their bodies and actions are seen to represent.

For close to one year I (Alison) had been 'going along' to a legal graffiti program, with the aim of better understanding community arts spaces as sites for citizenship development for 'disengaged' young people (for more information on the research see Baker, 2013). The program was a council initiative and part-funded through a grant supplied by the Department of Justice. This grant had provided the funds for young people in the program to create six murals in areas that were identified as graffiti 'hot spots' within the local authority. The participants in the program were involved in a collaborative research project, which involved documenting their lives and their experience of the program. The young men, ranging in age from 14 to 19, participated in photography and video methods to highlight particular aspects of their lives such as their love for graffiti art and hobbies such as skateboarding. They participated in interviews or focus groups to discuss their images and the program more generally. Further, many of the young men in this program would be characterized as highly 'vulnerable' due to their age, experiences in and out of school, and contact with the justice system.

Two launches were held for work related to the program; an 'official' launch of a mural produced by the young people and then months later the launch of the evaluation report. Although they were invited and encouraged to attend the events by project staff the young graffiti artists did not come to either launch. The launches, while celebrating the artwork and achievement of the young people in the

program, were not likely to be seen as an inviting space for them. The young graffiti writers were wary of adults and in particular 'official' personnel because they have had negative experiences at the hands of police, public transport authorities or those in the justice system more generally. In political and social discourses espoused by the media and politicians, young graffiti writers are portrayed as criminals, misfits, and even violent. Furthermore, participants were constantly worried about being identified because of their previous (or ongoing) participation in illegal graffiti. Their non-attendance challenges the presumption that young people should 'be there' and raises questions as to the purpose of involving them in these public events aimed at disseminating research findings. For young graffiti artists, attending the launches would have likely placed them in the centre of the 'wars on graffiti' surrounded by politicians and other adults who voice and voiced their disgust for 'tags' but approval for 'art'. For many young graffiti writers in particular, recognition and legitimization doesn't come from attending celebratory events that cheer them on for 'playing by the rules' through a legal program. Recognition comes in a number of other ways, including having completed collaborative 'pieces' across the community, each one embodying their skills, talent identities and imagination – essentially this artwork serves as representations of themselves (Hanauer, 2004). The fact that their murals were seen everyday by passersby and the general public was a way of *being seen* without *being there*.

The tensions involved in this research story pushed us to reflect upon the appropriateness of the events as safe spaces for young people and think about involving them in other ways in the future. Quite often these types of events can become "situations where young people are merely "on show", uncomfortable in a context that they are unfamiliar with and expected to speak to a formidable audience" (Van Blerk & Ansell, 2007, p. 321). For this particular research project it means thinking about the body (noun) beyond a corporeal object, 'a mere skeleton wrapped in muscles and stuffed with organs' (Moore, 1997, p. 3) and considering the embodied (verb), in which we represent what bodies have actively created and expressed (i.e., ideas, thoughts or behaviors) through their artwork. Hanauer (2004) contends that graffiti writing is a form of psychological embodiment, reaffirming presence of self in a physical space in addition to being a physical representation of internal voice. Similarly, young writers in this project had created murals, videos, and photographs, which all serve as representations of their creativity, collaboration and sense of self. With these understandings of bodies and embodiment in relation to graffiti arts practice, this final research example reminds us that it is important to realize that many contexts, events, and academic (or policy) rituals are not necessarily spaces that will empower young people if they are physically present. It then becomes the job of researchers (and others) to think of appropriate ways to incorporate the 'presence' of groups of young people who are at the centre of debates about vulnerability, and in this case criminality and creativity, in public discussions about them.

In this project, an alternative to having the bodies of young people present at the launch came in the form of showcasing their artistic expression through alternative

means. For example, their photographs and artwork were a central component of the evaluation report and the use of a video clip to document their artwork and perspectives on participating in the program brought their voices into the event. In addition, having a professional graffiti mentor present to speak about the program also provided insight about the young people without putting them on the spot. It is important to carefully plan with young people the ways in which they feel comfortable participating in dissemination activities, if at all. While their presence at events, especially involving funders, could be a powerful emotive force, it is not always in the best interest or desire of young people themselves to be there.

REFLECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS ACROSS CONTEXTS

In this chapter we have focused on research practices with 'vulnerable' young people, asking: What kinds of practices create representations that best respect and reflect their realities? And, ultimately what kinds of representations of 'vulnerable' youth are constructed in and out of these practices and our research artifacts? We chose to reflect on examples from our work that we felt had implications for the possible 'counter-stories' we aim to construct as researchers, about, and sometimes with, 'vulnerable youth'. Our examples illustrate the ongoing complexities and concerns involved in researching and representing young people deemed to be 'vulnerable'. We hoped to work in ways that resist negative dominant cultural narratives and attempt to honour commitments to listen and facilitate "new stories [that] resist the objectification of persons, and open psychic and social spaces for the re-authorship of oneself and one's family or group life" (Watkins & Shulman, 2008, p. 202).

Permeating our examples is a tension between acknowledging young people's capacities and agency, without diminishing the vulnerabilities and constraints in their lives. Moves towards more nuanced ways of understanding individuals in their broader contexts are, we believe, the next steps towards what we envision as research aligned with social transformation. This involves understanding the ways in which differing representations act as tales of 'terror' or tales of 'joy' about the young people with which we work (Rappaport, 2000). Another common thread is the decisions and dilemmas involved in striking a balance between participants' accounts and researcher interpretations during the research process and in the production of research outputs. Further compounding these challenges is our awareness of the stakeholders who consume and influence this knowledge, making decisions that will ultimately affect the lives of these young people. Together the examples illustrate some of the complexities of 'authentically' representing and respectfully interacting with young people. These examples also call for researchers' to be aware of their complicity in conceptualizing 'vulnerable' youth in imperfect, but powerful ways.

We would like to end by returning to the 'dominant cultural narratives' and 'counter stories' at work across our different research practices and settings. The three different contexts of our research have in common the existence of their own 'official' terminology used to describe the young people, particularly use in policy,

funders and the media. Descriptors such as 'homeless', 'rural poor' and 'disengaged' serve as cues in 'short-hand' stories, and contribute to dominant cultural narratives about 'vulnerable' young people in different communities (Rappaport 2000). These cues do serve a useful purpose in identifying need, advocating for resources, and in supporting young people's access to appropriate services. There is, however, a tendency in these descriptors to focus on vulnerabilities rather than capacities, and to emphasise deficiencies in young lives, often evoking images of passive victims. The kinds of descriptors that dominate 'official' representations of young people across our different settings are shown in the left-hand column of Table 1. The right-hand column offers examples of the kinds of counter representations we repeatedly heard from the young people and those who work with them from our time in the settings. These alternative everyday descriptors, such as 'problem solvers', 'caring', and 'creative' recognise the agency of the young people; privileging their strengths, talents and capabilities rather than their problems. They are important community narratives about who the young people are and their relationship to those around them.

Table 1. Dominant cultural narratives and counter-stories in our research settings

	Dominant cultural narratives	*Counter-stories*
El Salvadoran community	• Developing nation • Rural poor • Deprivation • Gangs and violence	• Collective efficacy • Political awareness • Participation • Problem solvers
Flexible learning programs	• Disadvantaged • Homeless • Substance abuse • Young parent	• Resilient • Caring • Responsible • Community member
Legal graffiti program	• Vandals • Criminals • Risk-taking • Disengaged	• Artists • Talented • Creative • Engaged citizens

In bringing together these 'cues' for both the dominant cultural narratives and counter-stories we are not intending to identify static binaries but to underscore a fluid and multi-dimensional conceptualization of 'vulnerable youth', enabling us to think more critically about our research practice. Such understandings highlight young people's intersecting and changing capabilities, rather than focusing on pre-

determined and relatively fixed notions of vulnerability. They act as a salient reminder of the contextualized nature of vulnerability, and remind us that vulnerability is something young people experience; it is not something that determines who they are.

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14. YOUNG PEOPLE SPEAK

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

As outlined in the introduction to this book, its genesis was a workshop funded through the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia in August 2013, to explore the concept of 'vulnerable young people'. The focus of both the workshop and this book is the way this concept plays out in policy, practice and research. It made sense to ensure young people themselves were part of the workshop as well. We invited four young people to form a panel on Day 2 of the workshop (in alphabetical order):

Geskevalola (25): university student and working for multicultural arts programs Western Edge Youth Arts,[1] and the Barkly Arts Centre.[2]

Jesse (20): student at and public speaker for St Kilda Youth Service[3] and aspiring youth worker.

Billy (23): qualified plasterer, running a business with a friend, participated in Hands On Learning[4] while at school.

James (20): living with Osteogenesis Imperfecta, professional gamer, and volunteering for ChIPS: Chronic Illness Peer Support.[5]

The panel was facilitated by Reynato Reodica (then at the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition) and Leonie Kite (from the Office for Youth in the then federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations). The panel was organised to resemble a talk show, with Rey and Leonie acting as the hosts. Based on the transcript of the audio file from the panel, this chapter is an edited version of the answers the young people gave to four key questions (provided as subheadings below). Reflecting that the chapter consists of their insights, we gained permission from Geskevalola, Jesse, Billy and James to recognise them as the authors.

The youth panel turned out to be a highlight of the workshop. The four young people had been invited as experts for the workshop, because their experiences matched one or more common indicators of 'vulnerability', for example in relation to health, education or welfare. In just a one hour session, they demonstrated how one-dimensional such indicators are, compared to their rich and diverse lives. They told us about difficulties they had experienced, reflected on relevant policies and practices, and shared their interests and dreams. For this book, it is fitting to give them the last word.

K. te Riele & R. Gorur (eds.), Interrogating Conceptions of 'Vulnerable Youth' in Theory, Policy and Practice, 213–222.

CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOURSELF?

Billy

I'm a qualified plasterer, I've been out of school for about seven years now. I run a plastering business with my best mate and we've been established for three years. I went to Trade School for it, I did four years study.

I was always a real naughty kid at school. In Grade 1 I stole my mum's cigarettes and thought it would be an idea to smoke them in the toilets with the rest of the school kids. The way I got punished was to sit down in a hallway for two days and just write down on paper, "no smoking, no smoking". So it wasn't the right sort of punishment being in Grade 1. I got labelled the naughty kid. I felt like I was a naughty kid, and I wasn't good at reading or writing, so I felt like I was stupid. I didn't get the right attention to be taught to read or write properly. In Year 7 I wasn't any good at Math or anything like that so I would play up and I would just get sent to the Principal's office. My main thing at school was that I didn't have the right attention with learning, no one was putting the time into me. I felt like I was stupid therefore I didn't want to do stuff.

Then I found a course called "Hands On Learning" and they kept me in school for an extra two years. It was probably getting acknowledged for doing something that I was actually good at doing, like building a fence or deck, or concreting paths, or building walls. Hands On was one day a week. That was on a Friday so it gave me something to look forward to. It was at the end of the week and it mixed it up. I find now that owning the plastering business that's something that I'm good at doing. I use my hands in different aspects and that's what I never got in the classroom. I never got acknowledged in class by the teachers to be able to learn.

Q: Do you think the teachers' attitude changed once you started doing the Hands On Learning program?

Definitely. I think they saw that. And it gave me a little bit more of life at school and made me want to pay attention a little bit more. I wanted to be there as well because I wanted to do my Friday at Hands On.

James

I have a medical condition called Osteogenesis Imperfecta, which is brittle bones. All through primary school I had my wheelchair so as you can imagine a bit of bullying, just from people who didn't understand. I only ever got in trouble once for bullying back, which I thought, "Well, come on guys, I'm giving it back".

For my condition, the teenage years with the body growing, you get weak points, lots of fractures, everything goes out of whack. So in primary school I was quite a good kid and then in high school it all sort of changed. Missing a lot of school because of injuries and that changed the teachers' perception. A lot of teachers didn't understand. I don't blame them, they've got 30 other kids in the

classroom and unfortunately there's not enough time in the class to get to everyone.

Then in about Year 9 I actually broke my femur which is the bone between your knee and your hip. I had four of those halo rings down the leg for four and a half months so my schooling was severely affected. It was partly because I was grossed out by this thing and I was fearful of going out, seeing people at school. So during that extended period out of school I was a long, long way behind. The teachers did try and I give them full marks for their attempts but my mind was totally in a different space, being un-social for that amount of time. Then I moved out Northwest and that was a big change, now I lived on a country train line. That doesn't sound like much but when you're in a wheelchair it's a very different situation.

Fortunately around this time I found the ChIPS Program, which is a program run by the Royal Children's Hospital but it's definitely youth participation based. So if we want something to be done we get our 'tick' [3] and then we organise a plan, get the budget and do it. I've run a camp myself for 30, 40, 50 young people all with very different chronic conditions. It gave me a lot of life skills. This program really changed my life. At the time we had a coordinator who was also a psychologist so that really helped because I was very antisocial, very depressed, all those kind of things, so having that extra help on the mental side of things was really good. Then I left school in early Year 10 but fortunately I got back, I motivated myself to finish Year 10 the next year.

I worked at the Tax Office and that was a real eye opener for me. Unfortunately with this condition I can't really do plastering, even though that would be kind of cool because I could fix myself up if I break something. I got a real understanding of a desk job and I've got to say I didn't really like it. Now I'm a professional gamer, I fly around the country and compete at events with money. Also I do event management, I run events here in Melbourne for gaming. I'm still a part of the ChIPS program but very much up in the peer leader role, bringing in new Chippers – that's what we call our young people. I get opportunities like this to come out and talk to you guys and share a little bit of my story and the ChIPS story.

Q: Where would you see yourself if you weren't still involved in ChIPS?

I would certainly miss it. It's tricky, I think I would really have to seriously consider what I want to do in the future and that scares the hell out of me. You know, the fear of committing to something for two or three years at a TAFE or a Uni or something and then actually at the end of that be like, "I still want to do this". The ChIPS program buys me time to avoid making that step but unfortunately I know that time is running out because I'm 21 in October so you've got to really do something.

Jesse

I study at SKYS, St Kilda Youth Services in Port Melbourne. I've been there off and on for about five to seven years. My first high school was Buckley Park in Essendon, and then from there I got transferred in the first couple of months of Year 7 to Kamaruka in Richmond. I was there for two years doing a Year 5 equivalent, got Grade 5. From there they sent me to another school just because I wasn't getting anywhere or whatever. I went to another school for a couple of weeks or months, I couldn't even tell you, and then from there got sent to Spirit West, it's in Footscray. I was there for two years. It was a smaller class, smaller room, everything like that. Spirit West is a more just like a really quick way to get your VCAL, they give you assistance but they're not going to help you 100% or whatever. So yeah, I had to drop out of there after trying it twice. Because I was homeless and it was hard, just moving houses, couch surfing. From there I went to SKYS at Port Melbourne.

Q: You've come back to SKYS a couple of times, what has been good about that experience?

Probably the care that the teachers give you. I've said it a thousand times, like I've had injuries, I've had wounds, I've had infections and stuff, and I could go to school and it's pretty much my home. I never really had a house to go to, to wash my wounds or do anything. The staff there take the time out to talk to you, whatever you want, pretty much everything. They are teacher, social worker, mate, everything.

Q: Did you ever have those sorts of relationships in any of your other schools?

There are the one or two teachers that are just amazing that do go to the extreme to help a young kid, but not every single teacher. At smaller schools [like Spirit West and SKYS] they don't have to learn about 30 people's life they only have to learn a couple, which is a lot easier. So they're all pretty quick to know what to say and what not to say, and how to treat you.

At the end of this year I'll finish the first lot, I think it's Year 10, and then next year I'll do 11. But at the same time I want to do like a social worker course. I want to start working with youth, like helping homeless kids and drug affected kids. The four years that I was out of SKYS, I did my carpentry apprenticeship and then I went back to SKYS because I got injured again.

Geskevalola

I am studying Public Health and Health Promotion. I also work as a contractor and a paid employee of two organisations: Western Edge Youth Arts, and the Barkly Arts Centre which is a division of the Western Region Health Centre in Footscray.

My experience of being vulnerable didn't occur so much in primary school and high school but it happened while I was at Uni in my second year. Basically I was doing fine in my studies but I felt disconnected to the environment and the culture of the university, and I felt isolated and that stopped me from going to Uni. I would hop on a train, get half way and then I would turn back and go home just because I didn't want to go to Uni, I thought, "Well there's no point of going to Uni because why should I go to a place like that when I'm kind of not acknowledged by the tutors, lecturers". The culture didn't feel inviting. So, I started failing and I got excluded for a minimum of a year but I didn't go back until this year so it was a gap of a year and a half or two years.

Throughout that time I've had the help of the artistic directors [at Western Edge Youth Arts] being mentors to me in regards to getting skills of confidence and using the right language to portray my feelings to the university when I wanted to readmit myself into university. It was really helpful because the artistic directors as mentors allowed me to understand the perspective of the university but then they also showed me how to show my perspective to the Uni as well, and that was really helpful and I've been readmitted obviously.

Q: What were the barriers for you?

The environment that I grew up with in the Western suburbs was a very inclusive environment. We had programs and projects in place in the school that I went to, and the community that I was part of. It was always inspirational or motivational and it always made me aspire to seek opportunities and do my work. But when I went to Uni that culture wasn't there for me, and I felt really disconnected and unmotivated to be part of that culture. It made me feel depressed.

I was able to communicate that to my Uni and they didn't realise that I felt isolated and then they apologised on behalf of the university for the fact that I felt that way, and they tried to help me in regards to suggesting ways in which I could face those kinds of barriers. But I think I'm motivating myself to go to Uni because I actually want to do something with the degree. I don't think it's the university that's assisting me completing my degree, I feel that it's myself. I'm just going to do this on my own and seek the support from other people who do give me the support, which are the organisations that I've been a part of.

WHAT MAKES PUBLIC SPACES THREATENING OR SAFE FOR YOU?

James

With my condition I'm always noticing the environment around me because if I fall or trip it's disastrous. Out where I live we don't even have footpaths on our side streets, so that would be nice. At the shopping centre that we have the footpaths are really uneven. We have one street light in our entire street so that's another safety or a comfort thing. People have lived in that area for over 20 years, 50,000 people live there and one street light, no footpaths. I think it's pretty

ridiculous these days but I guess that's a part of living a little bit out of town as well. So that kind of safety is my concern.

Billy

I've been stabbed before, at TAFE actually. I went to the pub for a meal and some bloke started a fight, beating up one of my mates, and he stabbed a few of us. So I guess that's something that floats in the back of your mind as well, but at the same time just don't walk the streets late at night. I feel pretty safe, it's just those little bits of insecurities that pop up in your head when you are walking down the street at night time. I do go out Thursday, Friday and Saturdays, not all in the same week, I wish I had that stamina but I don't unfortunately. You would walk around the streets and drunk blokes – if you're walking the street with your girlfriend, they give you the wolf whistle or they try and chat up your missus or something like that. You don't tell them to go and stick it or something, you know, you just keep walking and try and just put your head down and hope for the best.

But what would make it feel a bit safer. I guess they're doing a pretty good job with the policemen at the station. Out in King Street, if you're going out there they've got it down pretty good. But I guess it would be nice to see a bit more security in the city because there's a lot of that sort of stuff happening, people drunk, people walking around trying to start fights.

Jesse

Well my biggest fear ever, because I've slept in parks and everything before, is just because of alcohol really. I don't reckon that everyone should just be able to buy an unlimited amount of alcohol because I've seen kids in the park and they've got two boxes of slabs and it's all gone between eight of them. I haven't drunk for two years, it causes trouble. I reckon like a six pack per person. I just don't understand that even an 18 year old can go into a bottle-o and get 20 slabs and take it to the park and share it with 16 year old mates that could run in front of a car, could go bash someone. That's just one of my main experiences. That's why I don't touch it anymore.

Geskevalola

I understood the question a little bit differently. I feel safer in the suburb that I've grown up in, that I work in now, which is Footscray, because I've grown up to understand the culture, the people within the suburb. It's an area where there are programs and projects that are inclusive of young people, old people and people from all cultural and diverse backgrounds. There is a lot of stigma around the suburb that I grew up in, Footscray, because there is drug use there, there's violence and gambling. But for someone who has grown up there you kind of blank that all out. No one involves you in their business, it's just the way that I've grown

up is, "You go your own path and the other people go their own path" and we just get by like that. So I've always felt safe in my area.

I sometimes disagree in regards to the police. I kind of feel that the police make situations like that worse and I think there needs to be training in regards to approaching people of different cultural backgrounds. I think some of them don't know how to approach people from an ethnic background and I think that escalates violence sometimes.

In regards to school, the reasons why I felt unsafe there is because you get thrown into an environment where you have to trust people even though you don't know them at all. There is not that kind of growth where you can learn to trust people. You're thrown in there at the age of five and you're just around so many different people where you don't know what they're about and sometimes that can be something that puts kids off.

IMAGINE YOU WERE THE PRIME MINISTER: WHAT WOULD YOU WANT TO DO FOR THE FUTURE OF THIS COUNTRY, AND FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?

Billy

I would definitely change the way things are in schools. People talk about, "Oh, you've got to help the young kids out by making sure they're getting their work done" but it doesn't actually happen from my experience of school. You get given homework to do and you don't do it so you get given more homework to do. But how are you supposed to do your homework when you don't know how to do it?

There should be more attention on the kids that aren't as smart in school, rather than the ones that know what they're doing. You can sort of point out the naughty kids and they're the ones that really need the attention. They need that acknowledgement to just say, "Hey, you aren't that bad of a kid that you got called three years ago. You're a good person, let's put pen to paper and I'll show you how to do things", instead of just not worrying about them.

I guess what I experienced would be fantastic. I would get Hands On Learning put in every school. One day a week you go and build stuff around your school, you go and help out other people, and that's what kept me in school. That's what I would be preaching, I would be putting a few million into that. I would be going, "Look here's 100 mil, share that out between all the schools that need it". Not the private schools that have money, the poorer schools. The kids in those schools don't get the things that they need, they're the ones that get sent up the back of the class.

Geskevalola

I agree on education, in regards to alternative education. For the work that I do with Barkly Arts Centre and Western Edge we go into primary schools and high schools. We work with kids after school and during school time, and in theatre and drama and also in music. So with the music we promote awareness around race-

based discrimination and in theatre and drama we just provide them transferrable skills and knowledge, that they can use within their classrooms. So we focused on Macbeth and things like that, that you would normally do in your English class. That's really helped them with their English and their learning skills. When I was in high school I was a participant of these organisations as well and I found that really helpful, it got me through high school.

Also what I found valuable, in primary school I had the same teacher for three years and in high school I had the same teacher for three years as well. That really helped me because I was able to trust the teacher and the teacher was able to understand the needs of the students that they had. I enjoyed that because there was a connection between the teacher and the students that you would never get if you kept swapping teachers every year.

Jesse

A long time ago there were Tech schools, like Williamstown Tech, St Kilda Tech. If I was the Prime Minister I would bring that back from Year 7. Everyone's got different experiences but if there were a lot of kids that were in Year 7 that weren't getting along, they were just going off the rails, just see how the Tech school goes for them. And if they learn something over the next couple of years at the Tech school they could go back to their mainstream school.

I'm 20 and I still go to school and I love it. They say that you learn a lot better when you're a kid, but for some reason, I swear I learn better now that I'm a bit older and can concentrate.

This one is far-fetched, but I dream about it every day. I just think 18 is when you're just getting your bearings, you can't even get a loan out. But at the age of 18, DHS [Department of Human Services] turn their back on you. I would make it at least stretch out to 25 so they can stay with you and just give you the right tools. My girlfriend just got out of the DHS and she's seventeen and a half. She doesn't have anything, she doesn't have family. So she's got to try to do it herself which is hard. From what I heard DHS just turns their back and says, "You're old enough, off you go". I don't know what she's going to do, what we're going to do. But I'm sure that we're smart enough. We've been through harder than where we're at now, so I'm sure we can survive.

James

In terms of schooling, we touched on it a bit, but having earlier detection. You do so many government tests and tests all through school, but they don't look for the signs of how you learn. In mainstream schooling you sit there, you look at the board, you write from the board, do the answers on the board, you talk about it. I'm a hands on kind of guy, I like to be outside the box, but there was none of that early detection.

The end of Grade 6, that's a big leap to Year 7, that's a whole new school for a lot of people. If there is a test or something where "You can draw or write how you

would answer this", for example. I reckon there would be a lot of young people that would draw their answer. It just shows they're outside the box, like "Oh, I can be artistic here". Or someone could be quite a good speaker, or someone could be quite a good drama student. Like those early detections aren't there to see the type of person they may become. Those early signs to notice, "Oh, he seems like he could be a good kid for drama, I'll let him know we do drama courses in Year 7".

I was very lucky at my high school we had fantastic Arts, drama, woodwork. I know a lot of schools don't have that but they don't really look out for it either. It's up to the kids to make their mind up, which is good but look out for it a bit more, that's what I'm saying. I don't know how you would implement that but I think that would be something that I would want to be looked at if I was up there.

Like every school has a social worker or a careers counsellor. In high school they're like, "Oh go to the careers counsellor in Year 10, but you probably might even need that a little bit earlier because in Year 10 you're set in your ways. Earlier intervention at least so you meet the social worker and they say, "What do you like doing?", "I like Math, writing". Just like five minutes, once every six months: "How are you going, you said you like Math here. How is that going for you?".

WHAT KIND OF THINGS MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO RE-ENGAGE WITH EDUCATION, WHETHER IT WAS IN A SCHOOL OR AT UNIVERSITY?

James

For me it was a motivation thing. I realised I have to get at least the Year 10 qualification, that is something that people recognise. Even though if I went for a random job and there was a Year 11 person that applies with the same qualifications, but they're a Year 11 then they get ahead of me. But for a majority [of employers] they at least look at an application if you have a Year 10 certificate. Anything below that, it is extremely difficult.

Geskevalola

Actually when I left Uni I wanted to go back so badly because I am a person who likes to stay busy. If I'm doing nothing then I feel useless and that's kind of depressing to me. So when I left Uni I had less work to do, I was at home a lot, and I was just like, "Oh is this all that I'm doing?" and it's just really bad. When I had the chance to have a meeting with the academic disciplinary panel from Uni I felt anxious because I knew that that was the point where I could get back into my studies and be a lot more active, or I could just go back to how I was.

Billy

Even at Trade School you've still got to do a fair bit of bookwork. Thankfully I'm not an electrician or a plumber, I've seen some of their bookwork and I'm just like, "I wouldn't have lasted that". But plastering is a lot of prac work.

I would have got the Apprentice of the Year at Trade School so my teachers tell me, but I didn't do my paperwork. I told them, "I left school because of that exact reason, I don't like doing bookwork". I'm dyslexic. I said to my teacher, "You put anything in front of me, you tell me to build something, do whatever, and I'll do it and you know I will, you know I'm capable of that, but I'm not doing that paperwork".

Q: Did anybody tell you that you were dyslexic at school?

When I was younger I just got told I was stupid. I think as you grow up as a kid, you know, the first time you get in trouble and your mum goes, "Alright the bogey man will get you". All of a sudden shadows look different, you put on a pair of glasses and every time you see a shadow you're like, "Oh, it's the bogey man".

Then you get to prep and you know, you're not allowed to do this and that. And you get to your teens and some girl comes up to you and goes, "Gee, you've got pimples", or "You're fat", or "You've got a red T-shirt". So you put all these lenses on and by the time you're 21 or 22 you're not looking at life the way it is, you're looking at life through all these things that people have said to you.

So, one of those big things for me was "Hey, I'm stupid". Give me paperwork and straight away I just go into my shell, "Oh, I don't know what to do". I never had a person go, "Look, let's go through this. Okay, so you're not the best, let's practise your reading". So I just felt when I went back into school it was a little bit intimidating, just doing paperwork.

Q: Who does it for your business? Do you do it now?

Yes, I do it with my business, it's completely different. I'm good at it. I do plans and stuff like that, I don't need to go to a job to measure it up, I can measure it off the plans, and that's how I get all my work done.

NOTES

1 http://www.westernedge.org.au
2 https://www.youtube.com/user/barklyartscentre/about
3 http://www.skys.org.au/skys2013/education.html
4 http://handsonlearning.org.au
5 http://www.rch.org.au/chips/

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