

Pathways to Prevention or Delinquency?

The Protective Role of Schools

(A Tasmanian Study)

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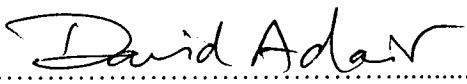
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David Adair

Dedicated to Bronny

and

**to the young people and teachers
in their struggle to communicate**

Abstract

This study examines the concept of schools as “protective” institutions as defined by developmental (“pathways”) criminology. Mainstream (consensus) developmental criminologies are critiqued, leading through re-formulations of labeling and resistance theories to restorative and peacemaking criminology. Existing research into school conflict and exclusion is reviewed, with an emphasis on Australian studies.

Themes from interviews of Tasmanian state schools teaching and support staff, Education Department support staff, NGO youth support workers, and private consultants in education and youth wellbeing, are discussed in the light of the theory and literature review. An appreciation is formed in the Tasmanian context of how schools can be “protective” of students involved in or apparently headed towards delinquency.

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My thanks go first of all to the people who consented to be interviewed for this study, and to all the informal contributors whose conversations have been supportive or informative.

Thanks Esmé for getting me out of a hole at that rather late point.

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Introduction

This study had its genesis in my recent (2006/7) support work with boys who were experiencing difficulties at home or school. One of the core functions of the program was *early intervention*, on the principle that working with young people from the late primary school age of 10 was anticipating a major transition period that was capable of producing strong divergences in the trajectories of young people's lives.

A majority of the young people referred to us had experienced parental separation, addiction, loss and/or poverty, and many had endured abuse and/or neglect. Few inhabited a social environment that valued or modelled academic achievement. Many had experienced a 'laissez faire' parenting style in which children and adults related to one another as 'equals', often using an everyday language that is commonly regarded as offensive in other social milieus. A necessity to look after their own and younger siblings' day to day needs from a comparatively early age was common, leading to an early independence and sense of self-actuation. These life experiences would lead to challenges to the behavioural expectations of the schools they attended. At about the same time that these young people were entering puberty and adolescence (characterised by physical and psycho-social upheaval, including rebellion and the testing of limits that are common expressions of a 'normal' developmental process), they were also experiencing the added double hazard of reduced

personal support and increased academic emphasis occasioned by the transition from primary to high school.

As a result (or not) of these and other factors, the majority of the program's clients were experiencing disciplinary conflict in their schools resulting in repeated suspension and/or self-exclusion. Conflict with authority was also extending outside of school, with many of the boys involved with court diversion processes and Juvenile Justice casework. A causal or interactive connection between family relations, school discipline and community delinquency was taken for granted by the program's workers.

The aims of the study

A developmental meaning was implied in the everyday language of HASS and other youth and school support workers, in that a connection was routinely made between experiences in the family of origin, trouble in school and trouble with 'the law'. In addition, the language of the 'risk factor' paradigm of developmental criminology was firmly embedded in Youth Justice and child and family services usage (both government and NGO). My first aim with this study was, therefore, to gain an understanding of "developmental and life-course criminology" (DLC – to adopt Farrington's, 2003, term) and how it might explain or describe the processes the HASS clients were undergoing. Thus Chapter 1 of this report begins with a necessarily brief examination of the origins and

tenets of DLC largely through a case study of David Farrington's theoretical development of it. A review of other theories related to schools and delinquency follows, and my theoretical perspective with respect to the research is described.

My second and central aim was to describe how schools are protective (or not) of young people, particularly in the years 7 to 10 in Tasmanian public education – the period of maximal school conflict and exclusion of students. In Chapter 2, a largely Australian body of research on school conflict and related issues is reviewed, closing with excerpts from phenomenological research of school students' perceptions as a complement to my own interview data. Methodology is discussed in Chapter 3 and in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, I present and discuss the results of qualitative interviews of a range of adult actors in and around Tasmanian schools.

I regard the views and the words of the respondents to be the most valuable part of this report, and I have reproduced as many of their original words as space and my study brief permits. Readers who wish to avoid the more 'academic' elements of this report might wish to read from Chapter 4. The Conclusion is mine – that is I have expanded on a theme that is meaningful to me. Another person will find different meanings. I have not overviewed the findings in general – the Chapters 4 to 6 have

brief summaries for this, with the added value of the reader being taken back to the originals, relatively free of the tyranny of interpretation.

Language

As a 'participatory observer' (see Methodology) in an critical interpretive research paradigm, I argue the impossibility of 'objective observation' while asserting the need for transparency in the observer's position. This saves me from the verbal gymnastics required to obliterate the personal pronoun from this report.

In any discussion of social change we find ourselves struggling with the language that binds us to past regimes of power or knowing. It is not possible in this process to at the same time 'clean up' one's language and remain completely understood. One device I frequently use is the placement of 'single inverted commas' around words that raise these questions.

On gendered pronouns: I correct myself on this but do not believe it my position to correct my respondents or writers I quote who may be writing in a pre-feminist era. Generally, the use of 'he' and 'his' in this work is due to the great preponderance of boys and men who are getting into trouble with 'authority'.

Chapter 1: Theories of school conflict and delinquency

This Chapter attempts to address the diversity of contemporary developmental criminology through a case study of one of its pioneers – David Farrington, currently Professor of Psychological Criminology at Cambridge – followed by a brief summary of other models of developmental theory. A discussion of Sampson and Laub's theory of 'cumulative disadvantage' is then offered as a departure from and critique of the 'technocratic'¹ stable of developmental criminologies. Theoretical approaches in the critical and interpretive traditions that are pertinent to school conflict or delinquency are then reviewed.

Developmental criminology

Farrington's (1996) paper "The Explanation and Prevention of Youth Offending" provides in its bibliography a 22 year history of developmental criminology, including 42 references to papers written by Farrington between 1972 and 1994. In the same paper reference is made to a seminal paper by Robins and Wish (1977), *"Childhood Deviance as a Developmental Process: A Study of 223 Urban Black Men from Birth to 18"*. In this paper the authors ask: "Can one view deviance as a developmental process in which one type of deviant act leads to another?" (p.448). They argue that the description of a developmental process in

¹ See Pavlich (2000) on the marginalisation of radical and critical criminologies.

childhood deviance would be theoretically important through integrating the study of deviant behaviour with the field of child development, and would contribute to the efforts of many social theorists (such as Cloward and Ohlin, Jessor et al. and Kaplan) "who have been struggling to develop a theoretical system that handles the interaction between opportunities and pressures to deviance provided by the social environment and the individual's perceptions of those opportunities and pressures, perceptions that must in part grow out of his own earlier behaviour" (Robins and Wish, 1977, p.449). On a practical level, "knowing the natural course of the development of deviance could suggest both the degree of urgency and best timing of intervention to prevent progression from less serious to more serious forms" (pp.449/450).

The paper goes on to describe in detail the statistical methodology and step by step reasoning applied to 13 interacting age-onset adjusted 'deviant behaviours'² (developmental 'risk factors' in current parlance), in an attempt to establish causal relationships between them. This was a retrospective longitudinal study drawing on school and police records and the recall of the men in their early thirties. From their findings, Robins and Wish suggest a developmental process described by both quantitative (amount of deviant behaviour) and qualitative (types of deviant

² These were: elementary school academic problems; elementary school behaviour problems (including absence); leaving before high school graduation (dropout); juvenile offense (police record); first use of alcohol before 15; first sexual intercourse before 15; use of cannabis before 18; use of barbiturates before 18; use of amphetamines before 18; use of opiates before 18; left home before 18; marriage before 18; developed alcohol problems before 18.

behaviours) relationships, the quantitative relationships being the stronger. Another key finding is that 'deviant behaviours' are interactional with each other and their age of onset in their production of further deviance. "Three relationships came close enough to being both necessary *and* sufficient [to the production of other behaviours] to "make them attractive candidates for efforts at intervention" (p.468): early alcohol use/left home, school absence/dropout, and school absence/left home.

In the introduction to his 1996 paper, Farrington composes a 'typical offender', using data from the (prospective longitudinal) Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development, and paints a determinist picture from birth to adulthood (and onto the next generation) of an individual left with an 'anti-social personality' by poor parenting in early childhood. The migration of the psychiatric category of *antisocial personality* (sociopathy) to criminology is attributed to Robins (1979, in Farrington, 1996) and is adopted by Farrington in the form of his key underlying theoretical construct of *antisocial tendency*. While suggesting a persistence over time of 'antisocial tendency', Farrington does point out "that about half of any sample of antisocial children persist to become antisocial teenagers, and that about half of any sample of antisocial teenagers persist to become antisocial adults" (p.79) showing that "a great deal of relative change is occurring" (p.80), with implications for research towards targeted intervention.

In his 2002 Sutherland Award Address, Farrington discusses his adoption of the term *developmental and life course criminology* (DLC), describing it as “a further elaboration of the criminal career paradigm that became very prominent in the 1980s... by adding in the study of risk factors and life events” and that to some extent “DLC theories were a reaction to what was perceived as a largely atheoretical criminal career paradigm” (Farrington, 2003, p.221/2). DLC paradigms became important in the 90s due to “the enormous volume and significance of longitudinal research on offending that was published during that decade” (p.222). DLC incorporates three related paradigms:

- The risk factor prevention paradigm – identifying key risk factors for offending and designing prevention programs to target those risk factors (for example Hawkins and Catalano, 1992).
- Developmental criminology – focuses on the *development* of offending, while also considering risk factors.
- Life-course criminology – focuses on life events and transitions, while also considering risk factors.

Farrington now offers the *Integrated Cognitive Antisocial Potential (ICAP) theory*, which is “designed to explain offending by lower-class males” and “integrates ideas from many other theories, including strain, control, learning, labelling and rational choice approaches” (Farrington, 2003, p. 231). In an advance on his earlier formulation, people's 'antisocial potential' (AP) can be ordered on a continuum from low to high, with relatively few people occupying the high (and criminogenic) end. Long-

term AP is negatively associated with attachment and socialisation in the family of origin. The main 'energizing factors' that can lead to high and long-term AP are desire for material goods, status, excitement and sexual satisfaction. These motivations will lead to high AP only if 'antisocial methods' of satisfying them are habitually chosen. "Antisocial methods tend to be chosen by people who find it difficult to satisfy their needs legitimately, such as people with low income, unemployed people, and those who fail at school" (p.233). "The commission of offenses and other antisocial acts depends on the interaction between the individual (with his immediate level of AP) and the social environment (especially criminal opportunities and victims)" (Farrington, 2003, p.233).

I have focused on Farrington's formulations because they represent 'classical' thinking in developmental criminology in the sense that they have a relatively early genesis, are relatively 'pure' in their positivist assumptions (adopting psychological and biological frameworks and assuming the eventual predictability of individual human behaviour) and because he has been an influential advocate of risk-based prevention and early intervention in the UK.³ Catalano and Hawkins (1996) have had a similar role across the Atlantic, and their *Social Development Model*

³ See for example Farrington (2007), the paper showcased on Tony Blair's website as an introduction to the Prime Minister's coming speech on social exclusion. Haw (2006) quotes Farrington that since the "choice of interventions is based on empirically established risk factors, the approach is research based but easily understandable and attractive to policy makers and practitioners" (Farrington, 2000, p.16, in Haw,2006). Haw adds that the answer to the paradigm's popularity "also lies in the dominance of technical-rationalist ideologies that support the procedures of governmentality" (p.346).

(drawing data from the prospective longitudinal Seattle Social Development Project study) also uses the concept of 'antisocial', meaning in this case (more narrowly than Farrington's), crime and illegal drug use. The key construct here, however, is *bonding*, to either prosocial or antisocial agents or institutions. Structural, constitutional and external restraint variables are 'fully mediated' by the core construct of social bonding. Other theorists in the DLC/positivist stable emphasise different factors within a broadly similar developmental and integrative model:

- Loeber (1996), in Hawkins (1996), focuses on classification of 'problem behaviours' and the relationships between them over time.
- Elliott and Menard (1996), in Hawkins (1996), argue for a predictive and causative role of peer association, in the development of delinquent behaviour.
- Moffitt (1993), in Farrington 2003, constructs two categories of 'antisocial' people: 'life-course-persistent' (LCP) and 'adolescent-limited' offenders. The key construct underlying LCP is 'neuropsychological deficit', interacting in the life course with labelling effects.
- LeBlanc (1997), in Farrington (2003), sees the development of offending as dependent upon four control mechanisms: social bonding (family, school, peers), personality development (particularly self-centredness versus empathy), modelling (pro-

or antisocial), and constraints (external or internal). Persistence of characteristics and offending is proposed.

- Thornberry (1996, 2005) proposes an *interactional theory* of delinquent behaviour, seen to develop dynamically over the life course. Interactional theory “does not anticipate only two major types of offenders or a strong correlation between onset and persistence” (Thornberry, 2005, p.161).

Thornberry stresses the reciprocity and complexity of causal relationships, and “the importance of linking social structural variables [including socio-economic] to causal links involving delinquency” (Thornberry, 1996. p. 216). By embracing complexity and diversity rather than seeking to reduce delinquency to manageable categories, Thornberry's interactional theory represents an evolutionary step in 'classical' developmental thinking, while remaining firmly bedded in positivist and consensus assumptions.

The ecology of human development

Central to an understanding of the positivist developmental criminologies is an appreciation of their foundation in developmental psychology, much of the research and theory of which Bronfenbrenner (1974) suggests is ecologically invalid.

What we find in practice ...is a marked asymmetry, a hypertrophy of theory and research focusing on the properties of the person and only the most rudimentary conception and characterization of the environment in which the person is found. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.16)

Bronfenbrenner describes a "deficit model of human function and growth" (1979, p.290) in which the cause of a problem is sought within the individual, or failing that within the family, or at the widest in the individual's community (local, racial and so on). Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development places the individual inside interacting layers of social and physical environment from 'micro' through 'meso' to 'macro', from family or classroom to community to societal (social structural). Thus labour market and workplace conditions can affect children's development through the conditions of their parents' employment (or lack thereof), whereas the 'risk factor' crime prevention paradigm reduces structural forces to individual 'risks', social problems are perceived as personal inadequacies, and interventions are aimed at individuals, families and occasionally communities, but no further (a point also made by Beck, 1992). So although there is a strong correlation between child neglect/abuse and juvenile delinquency, and between economic stress and child neglect/abuse (Weatherburn et al., 1997), the focus tends to be on the neglect/abuse. Which link in a sequence (or matrix) of cause and effect is to be designated the cause?⁴ Since a focus

⁴ For an illuminating discussion of behaviour and causality, see Dretske (1988) *Explaining behaviour: reasons in a world of causes*.

on poverty, particularly relative poverty⁵, would point to policies that would redistribute income away from the wealthy and privileged, the choice is likely to be ideological, and constrained by the existing power structure.

Sampson and Laub: 'cumulative disadvantage'

Sampson and Laub (1997, 2005) propose a life course theory of 'cumulative disadvantage' that can lead to persistent offending. Structural location, individual agency and labelling theory are centralised in a developmental (change over time) framework that challenges individualising, positivist and consensus assumptions. In contrast with the earlier theories, the incorporation of labelling theory is here paradigmatically congruent.⁶

In our life-course theory of crime, we seek to return development to where it probably should have been all along, conceived as the constant interaction between individuals and their environment, coupled with purposeful human agency and "random developmental noise" (Lewontin 2000, 35-36). According to Elder (1998), human agency is one of the key principles of the life-course perspective. The principle states that "individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances" (p. 4). The recognition of developmental noise

⁵ See Gilligan (2001), who identifies relative poverty as the prime target of violence prevention.

⁶ Hargreaves et al. (1975) point out that in the desire to integrate theories, "an important and often unrecognised obstacle ...is that different theories stem from different paradigms whose basic assumptions are often incompatible" (p.6), Farrington's 'integration' of labelling theory being a good case in point.

implies that "the organism is determined neither by its genes nor by its environment nor even by interaction between them, but bears a significant mark of random processes" (Lewontin 2000, 38, italics added). The challenge is that human agency and random processes are ever-present realities, making prediction once again problematic. It further follows that long-term patterns of offending among high-risk populations cannot be divined by individual differences (for example, low verbal IQ, temperament), childhood behavior (for example, early onset of misbehavior), or even adolescent characteristics (for example, chronic juvenile offending) (Sampson and Laub, 2005, p.15).

An over-reliance in social policy on the 'early risk factor' paradigm is seen as unbalanced, in that "human agency is an important element in constructing trajectories over the life course" (p.16) and in negotiating structural turning points. Equally importantly, structuralist approaches by themselves are inadequate in explaining crime, and "pure deprivation or materialist theories are not just antediluvian but wrong by offenders' own accounts" (Sampson and Laub, 2005, p.16).

Thus, neither agency nor structural location can by itself explain the life course of crime...Studying them simultaneously permits discovery of the emergent ways that turning points across the adult life course align with purposeful action and , yes, stable individual differences (Sampson and Laub, 2005, p.18).

Sampson and Laub (1997) point out that many longitudinal studies "simply investigate between-individual relationships using a static,

invariant conception of human development" (p.1). Using the borrowed tools of cross-sectional analysis, these longitudinal studies cannot inform how *individuals* progress through the life course. The correlation between past and future delinquency is, therefore, not causal but spurious, the result of population heterogeneity. Invoking a developmental conceptualisation of labeling theory (a natural synthesis), Sampson and Laub explain persistent 'antisocial' behaviour in the individual as due not to a time-stable trait, but to an interactive social process of 'cumulative disadvantage' over the life course. This process of cumulative disadvantage is played out through "four key institutions of social control – family, school, peers, and state sanctions" (Sampson and Laub, 1997, p. 13).

Oppression and resistance

Burgoyne (2003) carried out a qualitative study of eight young adults (age 25) drawn from the Seattle Social Development Project (SSDP) prospective longitudinal study. Though it is more likely that adolescents who fail in school and participate in criminal activity will be "unemployed, addicted, incarcerated, and victimized in adulthood ...not all individuals who had these problems in adolescence continue to experience significant life difficulties as adults" (p.1). Her study sought to differentiate the forces and conditions acting in the lives of her respondents, some of whom were thriving while others were struggling in their adult lives.

Burgoyne draws on "multicultural traditions"⁷ of scholarship to "expand, clarify, and illuminate the concepts and theories of prevention research" (p.2). Because prevention research is usually not concerned with "the structure of power, inequality and oppression" (p.2), Burgoyne adds critical and cultural perspectives to the developmental approach. Burgoyne abandons the labels 'prosocial' and 'antisocial' in favour of 'mainstream' and 'non-mainstream'. 'Risk factors' is expanded to '*risk and oppressive factors*' and 'protective factors' is expanded to '*protective and resistance factors*'. Positive ethnic and gender identity have been observed to be protective, while cultural difference between home and school can lead to conflict with school norms.

All of Burgoyne's 'thriving' respondents had 'protective partners', whose roles were either 'continual' (including a sibling and a step-father) or 'developmental' (addressing key issues), including a spouse, a commanding officer and a high school teacher. Protective relationships were also classified as 'primary' and 'reinforcing'. 'Primary protective partners' were a brother, a sister, a step-father, a commanding officer and a teacher – people who had a principal effect on the young people's lives.

Burgoyne's thesis mirrors Sampson and Laub's (2005) in their identification of relationships as crucial turning points in the lives of re-contacted Glueck study respondents. Also like Sampson and Laub,

⁷ Several of her subjects were African-American.

Burgoyne notes the strength of labelling/social interactionist effects, giving an example of a 'disruptive' student who is subject to a constant focus on order, compliance and containment, with punitive teacher responses and daily harassment, provoking rebellion and increasing levels of control. Another school may not have been similarly reactive to the original behaviour, thus avoiding escalation and 'secondary deviance'.

Knight Abowitz (2000) reinterprets resistance theories in the educational context in the light of Dewey's theories of inquiry and communication. Whereas an interactionalist approach will examine the causal relationships between independent entities, a transactionalist approach "will more holistically account for the symbiotic change in both or all parties involved in the experience" (p.879). Willis (1977), "mistaking simple opposition for resistance" (Knight Abowitz, 2000, p.889), observed that apparent instances of resistance had the effect of reproducing the dominant order. However, opposition can become resistance if interpreted as a communicative act⁸, modifying all parties involved and coordinating each group's social and educational aims. For Dewey, communities are "less distinguishable for their unchanging traditions or rules than for their communicative processes induced by change, conflict, and growth" (p. 884). Thus cooperative action necessarily involves conflict, which is central to democratic community. Knight Abowitz draws parallels between Dewey's transactionalism and postmodern and post-structural thinking on

⁸ Dewey saw communication as more than word-trading, rather as a social process that alters the involved parties.

resistance inquiry, where resistance can appear in “everyday struggles across multiple axes of domination and influence such as gender, technology, sexuality, race, class, ethnicity, and knowledge” (p.894). Individuals inhabit multiple cultural spaces, are members of various communities (family, school, gang). Power relations are not predetermined but have both hegemonic and transformative potential.

Central to this idea of community is the erasure of the binary opposition between individual and community. Resistance is the point where individual agency meets community norms ...conflict can be the first step in the inquiry required to formulate common political and moral aims in schooling (Knight Abowitz, 2000, p.902).

David Hargreaves: Schools and delinquency

Hargreaves (1981) offers a valuable analysis of school and delinquency theories, examining links between five theoretical positions:

- Cultural transmission theory: association with a criminal sub-culture (including family) produces deviance from mainstream culture.
- Control theory: attachments and commitments tie us to the social order (school for example) and inhibit deviance.
- Strain or status frustration theory: the negative evaluation in school of working-class boys according to middle-class standards leads to alienation from mainstream culture and the creation of

delinquent sub-cultures.

- Sub-culture theory: an active creation of status-frustrated youths – a collective solution to their problem.
- Labelling/social interaction theory: incorporating status frustration theory, since deviant labels arise when one group seeks to impose its culture upon another, and sub-culture theory, as labelled 'deviants' seek alleviation of their alienation in peer support.

Hargreaves then postulates two groupings of these theories:

- "Input theories": cultural transmission and control theories would assign the causative role in delinquency to the family and community rather than to later interactions with social institutions such as school and policing.
- "Process theories": status frustration, labelling and sub-cultural theories would assign the causative role to schools and other nodes of social interaction met during the life course.

These groupings reflect our earlier contrasting of Farrington's and Sampson and Laub's theories. Indeed Hargreaves quotes Farrington as arguing strongly against a process view of schooling and delinquency in his 1972 paper "Delinquency begins at home". Rutter et al. (1979) concluded:

It appears that children's observed behaviour in the school was strongly associated with school process variables. Of all the outcomes considered, this is the one for which the child's personal characteristics, his home background and the balance of the intake to the school were least important (p.175).

In the case of delinquency, however, the biggest difference was found in academic balance [intake] with school process having a much smaller though significant effect. Peer group influences were suggested to be having effect here. The authors stress that it was “*academic balance that was crucial rather than any mix in terms of socio-cultural backgrounds*” (p.176). Coleman (1988), on the basis of an overview of the research on the question, reckoned that school influences were about half as strong as family influences in the generation of delinquency, which is to say that schools exert a strong influence over that outcome. If, however, we treat both these zones of influence as *parts of the one process*, there will be no need for further argument, and support can be offered at any point in a person's life that it is needed. The nature and timing of turning points (helpful and unhelpful) in individual's lives cannot be reliably predicted (Sampson and Laub, 2005).

An in-depth study of school conflict from the perspective of labelling/social interaction theory is found in “Deviance in Classrooms” (Hargreaves et al., 1975). The basic proposition that deviance is a question of social definition seems very apt to school situations, where rules and their

application vary from school to school and from class to class (Reynolds, 1976; Rutter et al., 1979). Hargreaves et al. describe the deviance-provocative teacher who "believes that the pupils he defines as deviant do not want to work in school and will do anything to avoid it" (p.260), whereas the deviance-insulative teacher believes that all pupils really want to work, and if some do not, the conditions are assumed to be at fault. Hargreaves et al. do not dispute the validity of early-developmental explanations for behaviour, but assert that it is only a partial truth. Moreover, they point out that the language of psychological deficit has become part of teachers' explanatory vocabulary and believe that it "increases the teachers' sense of fatalism and powerlessness" (Hargreaves et al., 1975, p.264). They can do little to change home environments. Social interaction theory's elucidation of their own contribution to students' behaviour, however, is likely to be more useful.

A sociology of emotion?

Furlong (1991) discusses the lack of sociological attention at that time on student-school conflict, and attributes this to the "mid-1980s scramble to become 'policy-relevant'" as the deviance theories of the time (class cultural resistance – see Willis, 1977) came to be seen as "policy irrelevant" and "even dangerous to be associated with" (p.294). Education remained dominated by an individualised, psychologically oriented approach, while sociological research frequently adopted a

"highly simplified view of social structure, analysing complex issues such as social class or teachers' expectations in a one dimensional, 'categorical' manner" (p.295). Furthermore, sociology almost invariably saw young people as "rational and knowing individuals" (p.295), ignoring the importance of their *emotional* responses to the business of schooling, which is the business of *changing* people.⁹ Unlike law, which seeks to impose certain forms of behaviour, the educational power structure seeks to *construct* young people in particular ways. The experience of this will be variously positive or negative, but always strongly felt.

Furlong suggests that only by examining "the ways in which, through schooling, we use our power to change young people and to insist that they change themselves – that we can start to understand the roots of disaffection" (p.298). Schooling is conceived of as a highly demanding experience that gives rise to 'emotional injuries', which for some, overlay 'injuries' from the family. 'Disruptive behaviour' in school is seen as a 'venting' of repressed emotions around these 'injuries', and peer group subculture formation is seen as another way of coping, a "social solution to their psychological problem" (Furlong, 1991, p.306). We are invited, then, to look deeper than the behaviour in order to discern the motivating forces (emotions) that are driving it. Burgoyne (2003) uses the image of parallel and interactive 'outer' and 'inner' worlds of a person's experience.

⁹ Furlong, in calling for a "sociology of emotion" (p.296), appears to have missed Tom Scheff's work, see *Microsociology: discourse, emotion, and social structure* (Scheff, 1990) and his web page <http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/faculty/scheff/>. Space limitations prohibit the introduction of this important work into this analysis.

An observer's view of these might be termed *behavioural* when focused on the outer (visible) actions and *empathic*¹⁰ when focused on the inner thoughts, feelings or motivations. Important here are the relations that can be opened up through eschewing the behavioural and adopting the empathic view of the young people: a perceptual shift from a focus on disruptive or criminal behaviour, to a focus on opportunities for enhancing relationship.

Restorative justice and peacemaking criminology

Cooley (1999) approaches restorative theory with the concept of **conflict**. Society is comprised of individuals and groups with diverse interests. When divergent interests compete, conflict may result. However, conflict (as defined by Cooley) is more than disagreement: conflict occurs when the actions of one individual or group are defined by another as inappropriate and therefore meriting some form of corrective response. Conflict is an inevitable and necessary feature of society, enabling the social negotiation of 'acceptable' behaviour as it changes through time and circumstance, and is indispensable to individuals' social learning and moral development. These processes operate in all facets of private and public life, including families, schools, workplaces and the development and enforcement of common and statutory law. When a conflict is defined as a 'crime', some sort of harm is implied. The harm may be to a 'victim',

¹⁰ My earlier formulation for this was 'appreciative', after Flowers' (2001) usage in the peer education context, to be replaced by Pepinski's (2005) 'empathy'.

perpetrated by an 'offender', though the assignment of roles may be disputed; or the 'harmed' party may be the state (or school authorities), the 'harm' in essence being the challenge to its authority to control citizens' (or students') behaviour. Harm itself is also relativistic, with situational, subjective and perceptual elements defining its severity. The prevalence of one description of a conflict situation over another is not due to any moral quality inherent in the situation, but to the relative power of the individuals in relationship or of the competing groups in society (or school). In turn, ownership of the definition of the conflict helps to maintain the unequal power relationship. Language is the primary tool of this ownership, nowhere better exemplified than in legal (or school disciplinary) discourse.

'Conflict' is offered here as a more useful concept than 'crime' or 'wrong doing', because it leaves more space for dialogue, negotiation and repair of relationships than does the language of 'right and wrong', 'crime' or 'victim/perpetrator' (a process of moral 'othering'). Thus 'disruptive behaviour' becomes 'school conflict'. Conflict can then become an opportunity for communication rather than a cause of further separation (Knight Abowitz, 2000).

Pepinski (2005) offers a practice-based¹¹ theory of conflict and

¹¹ Apart from a Professorship of Criminology, Hal Pepinski practices victim/offender mediation and works extensively with survivors of sexual abuse. He also argues against a dichotomous discourse of theory and practice.

relationship that is centred on empathy and democratic relations. This may be summarised as **empathy/participation** versus **behaviourism/control**. A behaviourist response to a perceived conflict of interest is concerned with control of behaviour, but the behaviour is only an outer manifestation of inner disturbance. An empathic response would ask questions like "Why did she react so strongly to my request? What is happening in her life to make her so reactive?" and "How could I have done that differently? How can I stay more aware of the feelings of my students?"

I postulate that the essential distinction between interaction that alarms or distresses us, and that which reassures and validates and secures our lives, is in whether we remain goal directed, or allow our attitudes and objectives to be guided by what we learn of the clear, present, honest emotional responses we receive to what we do and what we stand for... To become truly informed is to allow one's personal and organizational agenda to become altered at a moment's notice of personal distress. (Pepinski, 2005, unpaginated)

The 'participation' part of the above equation refers to Pepinski's argument that "the prime dependent variable in criminology should be whether an interaction is becoming more participatory, more democratic".

Peacemaking entails taking turns in conversation about oneself and one's own feelings and interests, up and down the power structure like a child's see-saw or teeter-totter. Insofar as one offers empathy rather than a demand for obedience, one offers a gift rather than imposing an obligation. Whatever the response, it is responsible and

trustworthy only insofar as it is not commanded, or more implicitly, expected. What matters is whether concern for others' interests manifestly redirects the response. Empathy may be reciprocated and hence create safety; a command will never do so. The peacemaker's faith is that the co-generation of empathy will create responses which will accommodate everyone's needs more readily than any other response.

The popular criminal legal jargon these days around me is that since we know the system is out of hand and don't really favor punishment, we "give consequences" instead... Introducing consequences means that I assume responsibility and make decisions for others, taking away their room for exercise of responsibility. (Pepinski, 2005, unpaginated)

Summary

Positivist and consensus developmental criminologies provide inadequate, two-dimensional descriptions and explanations of school conflict and delinquency. Labelling and subculture theories, recent formulations of resistance theory, an emerging sociology of emotion, and peacemaking criminology form a composite picture of embodied, sensate young people in their cultural, economic and institutional contexts. Together, these theories have been found to reflect well the findings from the interviews, and to suggest participatory solutions to the social problems being enacted.

Chapter 2: School conflict and exclusion

*We don't need no education
We don't need no thought control
No dark sarcasm in the classroom
Teachers leave the kids alone
Hey! Teacher! Leave us kids alone
All in all you're just another brick in the wall¹²*

School conflict and delinquency

A dominant overall theme that emerged from my literature search is that student behaviour needs to be viewed ecologically – as a function of social context and personal history – and with awareness that some degree of authority-challenging behaviour is 'normal' in adolescence¹³.

'Misbehaviour' may for instance disguise learning difficulties or under-achievement and in effect be a coping mechanism for academic difficulties (NSWTF, 2002). The most important factor affecting student behaviour and learning is the teacher (MACER, 2005) and indeed "young people have identified good relationships with teachers as the most important factor in successful schooling" (SIU, 2003, p.6). A Victorian study found that the quality of their relationship with the teacher was the most salient factor in whether students seek help with study or personal problems.

Students also believed that teachers should initiate helping conversations

¹² Pink Floyd's "The Wall", expressing Sampson and Laub's "cumulative disadvantage".

¹³ See for example "Early intervention in conduct problems in children" (Sanders et al., 2000) for a discussion of family and school environmental factors in conduct problems; also "Improving school behaviour" (Watkins, 2000) and "Patterns and precursors of adolescent antisocial behaviour" (Smart et al., 2005).

if they suspect a student is experiencing difficulties. The development of counselling skills in teachers was recommended (Cahill et al., 2004).

Strength of attachment or connection to school has been identified as an important moderator of behaviour. South Australian school retention consultations identified factors that inhibit children and young people from making a strong connection to the school environment:

- The curriculum is not seen as relevant or responsive to young people's needs
- Many current teaching strategies result in school being boring
- Rigidity and restrictiveness in school policies and practices
- Poor relationships with teachers
- School operation or curriculum seen as culturally inappropriate
- Rules that disallow young people from expressing themselves as an adult and responsible community member
- School settings that appear isolated from the rest of the community and everyday experience
- Insufficient support or referral for young people experiencing personal or academic problems (SIU, 2003)

Research in the UK identified key school organisational factors in student alienation as:

- Hierarchical organisation
- Unequal personal relations between teachers and students and

between students

- Authoritarian rule systems, rituals and routines
- Strong academic orientation in curriculum (Edwards, 1998)

A Tasmanian study reported that:

- Negative experiences at school were the most common reasons given for truancy
- The increasing emphasis by the education system on academic achievement inherently emphasises failure
- Pressure on 'failing' students to achieve is likely to be met with resistance, such as power-assertive behaviour, truancy and further educational disengagement (Stranger, 2002)

School environments that contribute to abusive relationships are characterised by "high student numbers and overcrowding, poor design features that restrict monitoring of student behaviours, reduced capacity for avoiding confrontations, and student anger, resentment and rejection of rigidly imposed school rules and regulations" (Sanders et al., 2000).

A gap may exist between young people's expectations of their rights of expression and determination as experienced at home, and their rights as perceived by school staff, leading to disruptive behaviour as 'purposeful action' (Slee, 1986). The 'marginalisation' of these young people can then lead to their seeking status and recognition in 'deviant' forms of behaviour

and alternative subcultures (Polk, 1984, Hirschi, 1969, and Cohen, 1955, in Slee, 1986).

The 'developmental pathways' approach identifies 'risk factors' and 'protective factors' for the development of anti-social behaviour, operating in the developmental settings of communities, families, schools, peer groups, and within individuals. From this viewpoint, early and persistent 'problem behaviour', academic difficulty and low commitment to school are 'predictive' of later 'anti-social' behaviour, and punitive responses to problem behaviour increase, rather than decrease, that risk (Hemphill et al., 2005). Indeed some school practices "contribute unintentionally but systematically to troublesome behaviour both in and out of school" (Omaji, 1992).

Yet the tendency towards the individualisation of social problems persists:

The person-centred perspective tends to view the individual out of context, and focuses on his/her capacity to adjust to external pressures...this approach tends to lead to a person-blaming or more accurately, victim-blaming explanation of the problem... Therefore, not only does the problem reside within the individual, but the resolution must also be located within the individual (Semmens, 1980, in Slee (1986).

This leads to the adoption of 'behaviourist' management models, which

substitute control for discipline in the quest for order. "Subjected to such reductionism, discipline connotes an observation of hierarchical status and order" (Slee, 1986, p.97), rather than a process of developing self-control and pro-social attitudes". The main tool in this order (following the demise of corporal punishment) is suspension from school. Suspension may be 'prophetic':

There were practices which made suspension almost prophetic in determining which students would not be staying long in the school. Their ability to attract multiple suspensions must call into question the wisdom of dealing with the misbehaviour of struggling students by continually suspending them, excluding them from an education, whether they be willing scholars or not. Perhaps the school's approach to their reluctant education should have received greater attention...For example, in the school under study multiple suspensions almost invariably ended in the student leaving the school or failing to complete VCE at that school (Edwards, 1998, p.3)

It was the finding by McManus (1987) in the UK that school variables were the best predictors of the suspension rate which saw suspension presented as a predictor of school failure. He claimed that suspension fell by 50% in schools which changed their organisational procedures (p.4). The strength of school variables was also clear in the research of Rutter et al. (1979).

As discussed in Chapter 1, the labelling and marginalisation of students (through non-integrative disciplinary and cultural practices) encourages membership of 'deviant' subcultures, which may lead to criminal justice involvement. Rates of school suspension (and to a lesser extent, absence) provide a useful indicator of the success of schools in providing inclusive and supportive environments for their students. Hemphill et al. (2005):

It was found that the experience of school suspension did increase the risk of antisocial behaviour one year later....A similar effect was noted for arrests...These effects held across states... (p.4) These findings suggest that rather than deterring antisocial behaviour, school suspension may exacerbate antisocial behaviour....it is possible that suspending students from school may disconnect them from a positive social environment and increase their exposure to other risk factors (p.26). Finally, the results of this project suggest that punitive approaches to antisocial behaviour with youth may be counter-productive, emphasising the importance of keeping students connected to school and minimising early contact with law enforcement authorities (p.27).

Tasmanian data on cautionable juvenile offences showed that excluding a student from school was 4.5 times more likely to be followed by criminal behaviour than if a student had truanted for the same period of time (Stranger, 2002). A current study (Bouhours, 2006), analysing the records of 300 excluded students in one Queensland district over a 30-

year period, confirms a strong association between school exclusion (particularly when begun at primary school level) and subsequent offending. "Rather than a direct causal link, it is likely that exclusionary practices precipitate or accelerate a number of crime-promoting processes".¹⁴ At best, exclusionary responses to disruptive or anti-social behaviours are failing to prevent recurrences of the behaviours in either school or later criminal justice contexts. The problem is simply shifted elsewhere.

Comparisons have been made between common school disciplinary systems and the criminal justice system:

- Offences are considered more in terms of their challenge to the power of authority (as expressed in the codified rules of behaviour) than in terms of harm done to persons
- Problematic situations are conceptualised as the outcome of individual deficit
- In this process, persons may be defined in totalising ways and implicitly invited to form an identity around their offences
- Where the criminal justice system locks up offenders, the school disciplinary equivalent locks young persons out (Drewery and Winslade, 2003)

Other research in the UK found that:

¹⁴ Bouhours (2006), un-numbered page, draft thesis.

...nearly two thirds of the 250 prisoners interviewed were people with 'terribly low' self-esteem (Devlin 1996). Devlin, who has 25 years' experience teaching special needs students (including those expelled from mainstream schools), says that these inmates were school failures who did not get the support they needed. She says that either they gave up on school and became persistent truants, or school gave up on them (Stranger, 2002, p.20).

School exclusion in Tasmania

Tasmanian Education Department figures on suspension provide a useful, though limited, indicator of levels of school conflict and exclusion.

From the 2004 figures:¹⁵

- 6049 suspensions were issued to 2904 students (4% of the student population)
- 73% of suspended students were in years 7 to 10
- An average of 11.3% of students in years 7 to 10 were suspended at least once
- 76% of suspensions were applied to male students
- 6% of male and 10.3% of indigenous students were suspended at least once
- 44% of students who had been suspended were suspended more than once
- 15% of students who had been suspended were suspended more than three times
- 7% of students who had been suspended were suspended more

¹⁵ System-wide Disciplinary Sanctions and Exemptions Report 2004. See DoE (2005A).

than 5 times

- 46% of suspensions were for durations of 1 or 2 days, 27% were for 3 days and 6% were for 10 days
- 39% of suspensions were for physical abuse and harassment
- 18% of suspensions were for disobedience of instructions
- 18% of suspensions were for verbal infringements
- 8% of suspensions were substance/drug related
- 6% of suspensions were for disruption of learning environment
- 4% of suspensions were for refusal to participate in education program
- 4% of suspensions were for sex or weapon related and 'other behaviours'

Suspension therefore impacts upon a significant proportion of students, particularly male and indigenous students in years 7 to 10. The figures for 'absence yet to be explained' are also instructive, since they show a similar pattern to suspension figures – rising sharply after year 6 (from the first year of high school) from 1.7% in year 6 steadily to 5.6% in year 10.¹⁶ An unknown proportion of these could be described as self-exclusion.

The Report also shows a strong correlation (0.81 for high schools) between the rate of socio-economic disadvantage of schools' student

¹⁶ System-wide Student Absence Report 2004. See DoE (2005B).

populations (ENI)¹⁷ and rates of suspension. However, the rates of suspension for a given school ENI vary widely, by a factor of 2.5 at an ENI of 80 and a factor of 5.5 at an ENI of 40, for example (DoE, 2005A). The explanation for this could lie in a transactional relationship between school and intake community cultures.

Student perspectives

From an ecological standpoint, a study such as this would include perspectives of teachers and support workers, students and families and peer groups. This is impossible within the bounds of my study program and the 20,000-odd words of this report. Therefore in partial simulation of this ideal I am complementing the viewpoints of my adult respondents – presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 – with those of Australian (including Tasmanian) students, derived from phenomenological investigations of young people's experiences of school conflict and exclusion. Direct quotes from these will I hope present with something approaching the immediacy of my own respondents' words.

From Murphy (2005), speaking with Tasmanian students:

“There was a dark side to the commentaries of some young people however, like Sarah’s remark:

Some people try to get suspended ... they get into fights or destroy

¹⁷ As measured by the Educational Needs Index.

stuff.

With a strong sense that all is not as it should be, Ken said:

I think the teachers get it wrong – they pick on the ones who have records: that’s unfair... the ones who get fired up depending on the mood they’re in, the ones who don’t care about their education.

And Nellie: *"Some people think it’s cool [OSS].¹⁸ They’re the bad kids, doing drugs and stuff, who couldn’t care less."* Fiona added: *Some kids don’t care what happens to them.*

These are the young people with a history of academic and behavioural difficulties, who struggle with peer relationships, who have significant family problems, who frequently move schools - who need not just professional intervention but *all* of the support that schools can provide for them. There was some recognition of the mindsets of such young people in comments like those below:

It’s a bit like you may as well act like that ‘cos you’re being treated like that anyway. (Nellie)

If they don’t like ya then yer stuffed. (Jason)

Getting a suspension aggravated the precipitating situation:

Getting suspended makes you angry; you hate the principal and have grudges against teachers. You act up more if you’ve got a short temper. (Justin)

It makes it worse if it’s been a fight. (Naomi)

¹⁸ OSS = out of school suspension.

Even when they come back they use it [OSS] as an excuse to be more aggressive to people. They say "Oh, you got me suspended, I'm going to do this to you." (Fiona)

I didn't want to go back to school after I got suspended 'cos I felt it was unfair and 'cos I thought I'd just want to get her back, hurt her ... (Nicole)

They were clear that suspension for fighting, which all groups stated was the commonest cause of OSS, was counter-productive. It dealt with the *symptoms* of the problem, not with the underlying *cause*, and they argued strongly for more useful interventions: counselling, mediation, talking to someone who could help, "getting the parents in". Prevention, they thought, was better than cure.

Once out of the school on suspension, the possibilities for young people getting into deeper trouble are opened up, an outcome the students foresaw:

Ya get bored and get into more trouble. (Justin)

I caused more trouble when it happened to me. (Ben)

Again the literature supports this view, arguing strongly that OSS exacerbates such factors as poor academic performance, feelings of disconnection from school and stigmatisation by peers, while increasing the exposure of young people to a delinquent subculture."

From Trent and Slade (2001), speaking with South Australian students:

"To them, the logic is straightforward, i.e., good teachers and good teaching are demonstrably better for all, 'so why don't they just do it':

Because our teacher treated us well and everything, then everyone treated him well back. He didn't have to say be quiet all the time. Because he was so good to us we were just good back to him and we just shut up and did our work. He respected us. (Year 9)

We get them back and muck up with teachers that don't respect us. (Year 9)

Too often the spiral of disaffection is a process that they consider necessary:

You can't just sit there. You got to fight back, muck up, or somethin'. What else can you do? (Year 9)

From their point of view the power lies with the teachers to make the necessary adjustments, but they don't. For them, the outcome is that boys learn less because teachers teach badly:

You don't really learn that well if you can't concentrate because you're bored. (Year 9)

Teachers should do more things to make it interesting. They could do creative things instead of just sitting down filling in things on a work sheet kind of stuff. (Year 9)

It's the same for all lessons pretty much. (Year 9)"

Lastly, three short quotes from a recent autobiographical account written (from his diaries) by a young man shortly after leaving at year 11 what was regarded as a 'good' school (Travis, 2001). Jack Travis was one of that group of students described later in this report as "not engaged and not acting out"; one whose response to his school experience was directed inwardly – producing depression and suicidal planning:

The one place where I felt safe was in bed... In addition to feeling physically drained most of the time, bed was a warm place where I was away from the sadistic actions of school bullies, the disappointment of my parents, the often destructive authority of teachers... Inevitably I was regarded as lazy as a result of this. Problems remained in school, although my new-found apathy towards schoolwork at least meant this was not stressing me out. After all, I reasoned, death was near, at which point school would no longer own me (p.103).

The school year finally came to an end, and that concluded a major chapter of my life. Although I did not do year 12, I had stayed alive through the thirteen-year torture test... While the relief was wonderful, I was later to learn that the effects of school were far from over (p.127).

...speaking to Julian [ex-classmate] about his school experience, his main recollection was intense fear – fear of some teachers, fear of bad grades and fear of [bullies]. He said he had forgotten about that helpless feeling since he'd finished year 12 and entered the comparatively gentle adult world, but recalling memories of his

adolescence reminded him how lucky he was to have escaped that. He saw a lot of unpleasant things in his time, and was by no means protected from the deep ugliness of school (p.151).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Philosophy in the positivist vein and science in the scientific vein have set themselves up as arbiters of the rules in the game of knowledge. They have, like Descartes, checkmated error by allowing nothing upstream of themselves. (Doll, 1993, p.33)

Sampson and Laub's (2005) and Burgoyne's (2003) departures from 'positivist/technocratic' developmental theory, based on their in-depth studies of individuals' experiences and perceptions, demonstrate the importance of interpretive, qualitative work in the understanding of how people come into conflict with 'authority' and how they manage to get out of the social interactive spiral that often follows. This study seeks to describe the experiences and perceptions of a range of adults working with young people in and out of schools. The close limits imposed by research time, report length and ethics approval have prevented the inclusion of young people and their families in an ideal design which would reflect models such as ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and transactional inquiry (Dewey and Bentley, 1949/75). Yet one point in support of the adult 'bias' in this study is that a large number of student consultations and studies addressing the area of school conflict and delinquency already exist, including recent Tasmanian studies, whereas I have been unable to find any local or contemporary studies of teacher and support-worker perceptions of the problem.

Methods

Because I worked in home and school support of young people to March 2007, I am best described as a 'participant observer' in an ethnographic model.¹⁹ Indeed, three of my respondents (a teacher and two support workers) had collaborated with me in the support of individual students. My own observations and experiences are therefore brought into this report, and influenced early theoretical leanings and research design, including the 'starting questions' that were used in the unstructured and conversational interviews. However, in bringing my prior perceptions to the inquiry, *perceptions that were rooted in student advocacy*, I was to be shaken in my assumptions by the first teacher interviews. This led to a restructure of the theoretical part of the study, proposing a group of theories sharing a common paradigm, reflecting the greater complexity of my viewpoint as derived from the early data. This has been a reflexive process in which my first responsibility is to the accurate reporting and respectful treatment of my respondents' varied viewpoints. The second responsibility is to produce some sort of coherent response out of the differing viewpoints. My success in meeting these somewhat competing demands will be judged variably by my different respondents and other readers.

Because some of the issues to be raised are controversial in schools and

¹⁹ Conforming to Atkinson and Hammersley's (1998) "Features of ethnographic research" in Flick (2002), p.147.

the Education Department, private in-depth interviews and mechanisms to ensure confidentiality were important considerations in research design.²⁰ Respondents were recruited from my existing network of youth workers, social workers and consultants working in or around schools, and through the distribution of the Information Sheet and Interview Schedule to five Tasmanian high schools. These were schools which would occupy the harder end of a continuum of rates of school conflict or 'disadvantaged' demographic input (which, due to school social interactive factors, are not necessarily the same thing). Some of these were schools I had worked with, which proved useful in gaining respondents. My "purposive sampling" strategy (Babbie, 1998, p.195) was to include as full a range as research time allowed of the occupational groups of adult actors significantly involved with young people and schools. The small numbers prohibited representative sampling within groups.

Sound recordings of interviews were initially fully transcribed, particularly those of the 'main players' of the study – teachers and support staff in close contact with students. Later interviews were partially transcribed with additional notes referenced to location in the digital recording.

'Expert' interviews were more economically handled, by taking hand notes referenced to location in the recordings, for quick retrieval should more accurate recall be required. Transcripts and notes were thematically coded, and re-coded as different groupings were tried, only to return to

²⁰ Even the anonymous respondents' genders are obscured through using codes in the quotes rather than pseudonyms.

the first coding as better fitting both the interview responses and areas of concern found in the literature and as perceived from my own work experience – a process of negotiation (Flick, 2002).

In a 20,000 word dissertation, it is difficult to discuss the methodological issues in great depth or to do justice to all the data. Consequently I have had to constrain my theoretical argument in Chapter 1, omitting theories of gender and 'masculinities' and of class and subculture (excepting the latter's minimal treatment in the context of labelling theory). Thematic sections on gender and class/subculture were similarly omitted from the discussions of interview responses in Chapters 4 and 5. This painful decision was made on the basis that these themes are of less *pragmatic* importance to the social problem than the included themes.²¹ Another time and place might produce a different decision.

The respondents

Nineteen people were interviewed for this study, whom I have divided into three groups as follows:

- **'Teaching staff':** Five schools were approached, producing six respondents. One of these was a relief teacher who worked in a wider selection of schools, one was a principal, one was a deputy principal and the remaining three were teaching at various levels in

²¹ See Dewey (1916/66) on the 'pragmatic method of knowing': "Only that which has been organised into our disposition so as to enable us to adapt the environment to our needs and to adapt our aims and desires to the situation in which we live is really knowledge".

their schools. This group are identified in this report as **T1** to **T6**.

Those in leadership positions are not differentiated in order to help protect anonymity.

- **'Support workers'** (including school social workers, non-government student or youth support workers and Departmental support staff): six respondents. The Departmental support staff had been teachers themselves earlier in their careers. Student support workers are identified as **S1** to **S4**; Departmental support staff are identified as **DS1** and **DS2**.
- **Educational or support consultants**: Five respondents. All these people were willing to be identified, since readers of this report, in particular those working in schools, may wish to consult them.

These people are:

- John Lennox (**JL**): Former Police Officer with 30 years experience, latterly youth diversion (police conferencing), now a consultant (JLD Restorative Practices).
- Les Drelich (**LD**): Social worker of 30 years experience, latterly Manager of Community Youth Justice, now a consultant (JLD Restorative Practices).
- Rex Stoesigger (**RS**): Previously a teacher, now educational consultant specialising in boys' education.
- David Hunnerup (**DH**): Family therapy and mediation counselor and consultant, previously working for 10 years in Anglicare's "Hassles" family conflict resolution service and now

in private practice at the Blue Door.

- Debra Tatum (**DT**): Attachment therapist, visits Tasmania regularly and has worked with schools on support for attachment disordered children.
- **Researchers:** Two respondents. One of these is a researcher in an education faculty who has also had extensive teaching experience in Tasmania (here identified as R1). The other is a teacher and researcher, Rebecca Wilson (RW), who has shared through interview some valuable insights from a Tasmanian school-based research project (report not available at the time of my research for this report).

Chapter 4: Power and participation

The themes from the interviews that have been selected for discussion have been grouped into three Chapters according to discerned affinities, although there is thematic overlap between all the material, coming as it does from the respondents' holistic experience. The first theme in this Chapter focuses on power as a contested issue, while the second looks at how the balance of power in the form of teacher authority is wielded.

Axes of power and harm

Teachers, representing only 2% of the workforce in Tasmania, accounted for around 40% of workers' compensation claims for stress-related illness. This means that, when compared to the rest of the workforce, teachers were over-represented for stress related claims by a factor of 20 times or 2000%.²²

In a study focusing on schools as 'protective' institutions for young people 'at risk' of delinquency, one could forget that school conflict, as with any conflict, involves at least two parties, each with different vulnerabilities to harm. My respondent teacher/researcher, Rebecca Wilson, studied a peer-group of Tasmanian high school boys for three years:

²² McHugh, M. (1999) Independent report for Workplace Standards Tasmania, target areas: group 8, school teachers

RW: I had three lenses – identity, peer relationships, and power, and I [focused on] the idea of power and resistance, and how power [works] in the classroom and how the only way boys could have a voice is to resist, and yet they saw themselves as powerless. "The teachers have all the power; they can do what they want." Yet [the boys] had quite a lot of power because they resisted... and they'd talk about the strategies they used to resist. There was a contradiction in their understanding of power [as belonging to the teacher] yet really they had as much power in many ways as the teacher did...

DA: and the teacher sometimes feels that way too?

RW: Yes...They claim that power through the social connection and being together in the group...

Resistance comes in two forms: contained and active. Some kids actively resisted, others were contained.

DA: This is important isn't it, because its much easier putting responsibility for school problems on individuals when they are few, whereas the acting out kids are only the tip of an iceberg of disengaged kids?

RW: Yes. When you think about apathy, that's a strong form of resistance that's going to have probably long life-effects...

Hargreaves (1972) discusses leadership styles after the classic 1939 study by Lewin, Lippitt and White. 'Authoritarian' leadership styles tended to produce apathy in the group members, with a smaller number showing an aggressive response. In democratically led groups, however, relationships

were more cooperative and members happier, as well as showing a greater autonomous interest in their work.

*RW: There is in my transcripts the boys using the word resistance – now I didn't use the word resistance. But they would use "**we resist**" They know what they're doing – it's a conscious decision [RW's emphasis].*

Although some of my respondents and most of the literature reviewed for this study characterise the students overall as relatively powerless against an adult and institutional edifice, the conflictual harms experienced by the adults are notable:

T1: I know someone working in another school... They've had a change of management in their school that has watered down the behaviour management. She's gone from a really confident teacher who loved her job to hating it. She hates the kids and she can hardly wait to leave. That's what happens when you take away behavior management of those kids. She said "I used to feel sorry for these kids but now I just hate them"... because she hasn't got enough backup. That's what these kids can do to people if they're not managed properly. They can cause breakdowns too, they can ruin people's lives. I'm sure they don't think about that but it does happen...

There's nothing worse when you're a teacher [than having] a classroom out of control...it's horrific... it's hell... and the kids have no respect for you if that happens.

T2: I think if we can't suspend, you wouldn't get teachers to come here, because it is too harrowing dealing with the issues we deal with day in and day out... If we were told we couldn't suspend students anymore, we would all transfer...

S4 sees "many incidences where students are in control at school", where they are in control of the classroom. S4 sees schools as a "toothless tiger", not even using their legal power to enforce attendance.

S4: I'll give you an example of going into a maths class looking for a student: There were ten or eleven students in the class, all spread out... you have two or three girls sitting on tables in the corner talking on mobile phones, a couple of guys with MP3 players in their ears, and a couple who are absolutely running amok, physically... and you have this poor teacher aid in the middle of it all, just absolutely helpless...

T4 describes the circumscription of teachers' power in the face of a lack of effective sanctions to student behaviour, opposition of parents to school disciplinary actions and a keen perception of 'rights' in students. T4 finds that changes in these factors over the years have worked against the maintenance of effective control. At the same time, the balance of engaged to "challenging" students has shifted towards the latter.

T3 illustrates the vertical axis of power that is manifested in top-down policy decisions (which are perceived by some respondents as changing with each change of Minister, like seasons which come and go and which school staff must endure):

T3: Now they've taken away our student-free days... You hear all this rubbish on the radio, bashing teachers. They don't understand... teachers take a lot of stuff home and work long hours and the rest of it... You need time to get people together to work around different types of practices we can use to work better with students, and if we're not going to get that time...[searching gesture]... We have meeting times after school and I've got something ready to talk to staff about and I get half way through and think "I'm going to stop now", because these guys are exhausted...

The diversity of approaches that is found even in my small sample of teachers shows that alternatives to power-as-contest are being enacted:

*RW: One of the boys spoke about his art, how important it was to him and I saw that art class and the teacher had a completely different style. She did a lot of negotiation and there was a sense of equalness with the students and teacher. She didn't let them walk all over her and they respected her. He loved going to this art class and I asked "What is it about the art class?" and he said "**Because she gives the power to us**". (RW's emphasis)*

T5: The point is it's an emotional issue. I found a book called "Reading and Loving" which hit me like a sledgehammer. I'd known for a long time that learning and loving are inextricably linked, but the system we have is not about loving, it's about coercion, it's about force, small v but it's violence. Its like "you will learn this because I say you will", and "I've decided you've got to learn this whether you like it or not". It's not about loving or gentleness, it's a compulsive system.

T5 describes the difficulty experienced by a relief teacher committed to participatory democratic classroom relations working in an 'authoritarian' system. T5 sees the level of disharmony in classes as symptomatic of student dissatisfaction in the school cultural environments, and not being able to change that, feels compelled to adopt a degree of 'behaviourist' and controlling relating in order to 'survive'.

As valid as late-modern (multi-axis) power analyses are, we do need to acknowledge the deep structural disadvantages young people live under, with the legal- and knowledge-power of adults reified in the institution of schooling. JL gives a good example in the 're-entry meetings' following school suspension, describing them as "one-sided conversations" where the "ultimate power lies in the hands of the senior teachers sitting there... you either agree to this or... [gesture of powerlessness]... There's no fair process."²³ For JL, independent mediation is needed to ensure fair

²³ These perceptions of unfairness are supported by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission and the Australian Law Reform Commission, whose inquiry

process. One boy I worked with was so afraid of the re-entry meetings (which he found humiliating) that he refused to attend one despite it being a condition of re-entry to school, which he wanted to attend. It was only through the school staff bending their rules and engaging him in informal one-to-one conversations (as a substitute for the meeting) in the course of the day that he was able to resume schooling.

The practical value of a multi-axis analysis of power lies in its validation of teachers' experiences of powerlessness in the face of (often) group resistance to their authority. The realisation that all parties suffer from a contest of power might stimulate adult leadership towards new ways of relating in the classroom. Burgoyne (2003) points out that relationships built on dominance are not protective of the young person and that empathy was a consistent quality of 'protective partners' (including a teacher) in her 'thriving' respondents' lives. Pepinski (2005) observes that empathy is an essential ingredient of responsive action, that peace supplants violence when interaction becomes responsive, and that "responsiveness is how people act in a participatory democracy".

"revealed a lack of natural justice and procedural fairness in school exclusion processes...[which need]...greater impartiality, transparency and accountability..." (Sidoti (1998), p.4)

Control, agency and participation

T1: I use the school rules... I'll tell them what I expect and [that] there'll be consequences if it doesn't happen... and I'll be relentless in applying the consequences. I'll give them lots of warning... I won't suddenly jump on them, but I'll keep on applying consequences and following the school rules, until they realise that's how I run the class, [with] consistency – completely and utterly. It's hard too, its almost like breaking them. It' either me or them – that's how difficult it is... I have to be a person that I don't want to be to survive... You do have to be pretty authoritarian – in a nice way – I don't go in shouting and stuff, they'd shout back at me... You've got to be firm.

T4: When I was first teaching, if a child misbehaved you sent them out of the room and the Assistant Principal dealt with them... so you didn't have to spend all your time in your classroom being a policeman and only having this time left to teach.

The above responses to questions about authority need to be considered in the light of the “axes of power and harm” and in an ecological (Bronfenbrenner) light. Members of a system change or perpetuate the system at the same time as their attitudes are changed or perpetuated by it. To what degree is the 'survival' attitude involved in a recursive process of social transaction, to paraphrase Dewey? Some of the responses from my interviews, and studies showing school cultures to be a stronger determinant of conflict than demographic intake, would indicate a degree

of such an involvement. In the transaction between our inner world and the social and physical environment we find ourselves in, lies the possibility of multiple responses to problems we meet.

T3: Also, the kids learn differently so we have to be able to use a different pedagogy. We can't have kids lined up in rows of 10 in one room with a big cane, it hasn't worked that way for years. Kids are different... and I think now we are allowing them to express themselves a little better – and they want to, they want the right to do that, and to make choices... and I think that's a good thing. Society's freed up a bit and actually allowed us to do that.

RW: ...when I read Dewey I realized I have always been this way more than authoritarian. But as an educator, and working in counselling as well, with kids coming to me to sort out their problems with teachers, it's amazing how many teachers are still caught in the traditional style of teaching. I think you've still got to have some control, but the idea of democracy is really important. Really what we're talking about is basic respect between people.

Despite the obvious differences in approaches between the above two pairs of respondents, there are similarities to be found in fuller readings of the transcripts. All four are able to employ negotiation, feel empathy for their students, and value individuality and diversity. All four respondents show an awareness of the subtleties – that control and agency issues are

not black and white.²⁴ The difference seems to lie primarily in the consciously held theory or philosophy that describes their practices, with T3 and RW showing a consistent connection to an empathic and appreciative model throughout the transcripts – a 'north star' to guide their responses under frequently trying circumstances.

DS2 stressed the importance of language in guiding practice: if we describe the young people as 'troubled' rather than 'troubling', as 'acting out their distress' rather than 'misbehaving', we are acting empathically rather than behaviourally, thereby enhancing relationships, and practicing a peacemaking or restorative approach (Pepinski, 2005). DS2 describes a less than conscious practice:

DS2: [Referring to the Atelier Report]²⁵ What we were doing in relation to behaviour was in conflict with our values and purposes for schooling in that it was achieving different outcomes for some kids in disconnecting them from school and putting them [on a trajectory towards delinquency], and we were using different practices and understandings in relation to teaching and learning as we did with behaviour. [Punishment is not regarded as a tool for learning].

T5 gives a clue to how 'authoritarian leadership'²⁶ has persisted in educational circles into the 21st century (T5's central theme as a teacher is

²⁴ DH stated "There's an equality of respect, not an equality of power, when it comes to school needs and concerns. There is a clear hierarchy I have no trouble with".

²⁵ Report to the Education Department on special and additional needs (Atelier, 2004)

²⁶ See Hargreaves (1972)

empathy and support – from which cooperative behaviour *and* learning will flow more easily):

T5: Coercion works to some extent... more with kids from nurturing home backgrounds, but not with kids who are unhappy and alienated. It's mainly emotional. The more unhappy you are the more difficult it is to focus on things you don't like doing. Kids from a stable, loving home can put up with a lot from the outside world [such as an unsatisfactory learning environment], because they feel OK in themselves. The worse you feel inside, the more you rely on the outside world for your happiness or wellbeing. You need to be constantly gratified in order to feel good.

Most teachers don't acknowledge that 'misbehaviour' is an emotional problem, that behaviours are the tip of an emotional iceberg.

From a labelling (social interaction) perspective, deviance will be reduced if the number of rules is reduced. The enforcement of rules that are seen by pupils to be illegitimate provokes defiance, and “teachers should consider very carefully whether that rule is a necessary or important rule which is worth maintaining in spite of the deviance it provokes”.²⁷

²⁷ Hargreaves et al. (1975)

Summary

Students who are acting out or actively resisting teacher authority and pedagogy wield a power of their own, and in the resulting contest all parties are harmed. Despite this adults do possess the balance of power and the way this power is wielded can be placed on a continuum from participatory democratic to authoritarian. The position of school cultures on this continuum (and teachers' perceptions of disciplinary needs) is constructed by recursive, transactional²⁸ processes rather than due simply to local student profile as is often assumed. The choice of rules and how they are enforced, and student perceptions of their legitimacy, have a strong bearing on the levels of conflict experienced in a school, and these can be negotiated.

The actively resistant students, however, divert attention from the larger (though probably not criminological) problem of contained or passive resistance, characterised by apathy, which may be more damaging to future wellbeing than open rebellion.

²⁸ See Dewey and Bentley (1949/75) and Knight Abowitz (2000).

Chapter 5: Roles and relationships

The school has the function also of coordinating within the disposition of each individual the diverse influences of the various social environments into which he enters... As a person passes from one of the environments to another, he is subjected to antagonistic pulls, and is in danger of being split into a being having different standards of judgement and emotion for different occasions. This danger imposes on the school a steadying and integrating office (Dewey, 1916/66).

Education versus socialisation?

T1: We have some kids at XXX who really want to do well, and they've got a future... they can go on to university and they can go on to nursing, so I feel an obligation to them to provide them with enough [subject] background to do well at college or whatever... But at the same time and the same class I've got these other really needy kids who can't read, who can't write, they can't add two numbers together. They haven't really listened at primary school, and at primary school too their main job has been to socialise them. They haven't had books in their house... So I can try to teach them the basics... The only other thing I can do is to establish a good relationship with them and try to have some good effect on their lives, so I find the whole thing really difficult. If I just had to do that relationship stuff, or just the education, I'd be fine, but when you've got two [jobs] in the same class it's so stressful you wouldn't believe it...

DA: What is the core purpose of your work?

T2: I consider myself a teacher in the first place, where what I can do is pass on whatever I can to improve their life skills. That includes subject matter and more importantly social skills. I consider my teaching of subject matter is not a problem – I've got all the skills in that – but social skilling is a big challenge.

The above two teachers express a potent theme in this study and in many teachers' work²⁹: a tension between the roles of 'three Rs' and 'life skills' educator.

*T3: Thinking of some of the students who have come through... They're tough kids, they've coped with a lot before they come to school. Kids are switched on, they know that what happens at home they can't necessarily do at school – they understand that ...**if we teach it.** The really important thing is to teach the social skills and social understanding of the general expectations of society. You can't say to a student "You know better than that", because they don't! You've got to teach it... it's a real skill for teachers to learn that stuff... its coming from a different set of values and expectations...*

Burgoyne (2003) notes that schools can provide opportunities to learn the 'rules of power' and how to handle the differences between mainstream and home cultures. This has implications beyond school, to helping marginalised young people develop the tools to live successfully in a

²⁹ This theme is also prominent in the Australian Education Union's (Tasmanian) publications. See the website at <http://www.aeutas.org.au/index>

culture that frequently exhibits authoritarian power relations – in the workplace, for instance, and during interactions with the criminal justice system – and to avoid the downward spiral of Samson and Laub's 'cumulative disadvantage'.

All respondents affirmed the need to strengthen the support functions of schools:

DA: What do you think is disallowing them from engaging?

S1: On a personal basis, their hierarchy of needs – food and shelter and warmth and all that sort of stuff which needs to be catered for first. Some of these clients aren't getting that stuff so it's very difficult for them to front up to school on Monday morning. They may not have had anything to eat or a warm place to stay. They'd be some of the biggest barriers to getting to the classroom. We're trying to look at those needs first in order for them to be able to function in our middle class society.

A lot of kids are in survival mode and they do what they can to just survive and therefore the rules here don't apply. They're running houses, and we treat them like a kid, but they live in an adult world.

DA: I notice relations with adults in the homes are kind of equal...

S1: Yes... they have adult responsibilities... [Family events result in] them having to step up and look after the family. All that stuff makes it very difficult to come to school. It's not relevant any more, because their needs have gone past being able to read and write, it's about surviving, and what they've picked up – that's it – they don't need to know any more.

At the same time, an institutionalised 'curriculum focus' hinders full use of the supports that are available:

S2: I don't believe the teaching staff use me as well as they could, possibly because they are busy and forget about me and what I have to offer. I find it very teacher-centric, and an authoritarian, disciplinarian way of being with the kids.

I believe I have an important part to play in re-entry conferences of the students I work with, for example, but I'm often not involved in the conference.

The timetable doesn't accommodate the group programs I want to do. They are educational [about life matters, but are not part of the curriculum]...

Again, language needs to be looked at here. It is less helpful to talk about a conflict between 'support' or 'life skills' and 'curriculum' than it is to talk about expanding the curriculum (or shifting its emphasis) to include these essential learnings.

RS: I tell the high schools "If you spend all year 7 teaching boys social skills and didn't do anything 'academic' at all, you'd get better results in year 12. They don't believe me – nobody's taken me up on it!

LD: We challenge teachers by saying "If you've got a class which is out of control, and you spent a year sitting around in a circle

forming relationships, and didn't touch a book... you'd teach those kids a lot more than they learn in their whole life..."

There are structural obstacles to this, like curricular demands from above, even the structure of the classroom [full of desks]... You're able to work around anything as long as you believe in it...

Relationship and belonging

*DT: 'Relationship' is the word because it is the quality of relationship that an infant has [with primary carers] that lays the pattern for [functioning in future relationships] **but** those things can change. Even a child who has been through enormous trauma at ages 1 to 3, if at age 13 they meet an adult who is capable of providing validation, empathy, structure, opportunity... it's entirely possible for that to change. That's because the brain is always able to learn – **always** – and it learns best through human relationship. That's why schools are a perfect place... Not so much for the course of study they might be going into but for the adults who might be interacting with them...*

*If a child or teenager is demonstrating at-risk behaviour and an adult can get in there and make some real connection with that child, it changes the prospects of success for that child... **hugely**... [DT's emphasis]*

DA: So one type of student you would have trouble with would be the 'authority-resistant' student. How do you deal with that?

T2: I thought your work with XXXX was really good, when I did some work with you last year. It's all about relationships. The boy we worked with last year, I've got a good relationship with him. He won't do anything for anyone else in the school except me and one other person. If I ask him to come with me, generally he does, because I think he likes me. You're talking about a very violent, very aggressive, very antisocial boy at times, but he can be really nice. He'd make a fantastic student if he can get over that, and it's all about relationship. [This] school is all about having positive relationships with students, and if you don't, you have real trouble.

'Relationship' has been a constantly emerging theme from literature search and interviews. Quality of relationship recurs in various models as the most potent determinant of quality of life, not least the lives of the young people who are struggling with their place in school and community.

Burgoyne (2003) found that the most salient factor shared by her thriving respondents was a 'protective relationship' with another person. Qualities shared by all 'protective partners' were the ability to reliably affirm personal value, hold high expectations, provide opportunities, and (informally) teach skills. 'Protective partners' included spouses, siblings, a mother, a step-father, a commanding officer and a high school teacher. These latter two were among those classified as 'primary protective relationships', for the pivotal roles they played in the young people's lives.

T3: Class size is something the union has been trying to reduce for years, and if we're going to be fair about putting a lot of effort into increasing the number of students who are fully engaged then we have to have smaller classes. We have to have smaller groups teachers can actually identify with, because you can get to know the kids really well and you can truly say you are involved in personalised learning because you know that student there, you've had conversations about where they want to head, about things they're finding tough at the moment...

Most respondents stressed the importance of class size while some also favoured more teaching assistants. Having two adults in each class is a tantalising prospect from a relationship point of view, as well as a staff care point of view. DS2 pointed out that the young people would have a choice of who to relate to, and that many disciplinary errors occur due to teacher stress. DT promotes 'time in' rather than 'time out' when emotions get out of hand. Disturbed young people need intensive one to one attention at times like this. Having two adults in the class frees one to take the acting-out young person aside for focused support, communication, *relationship*.

JL: ...we say to teachers, "you know those risk factors out of the Pathways to Prevention report? You don't know what's happening in their lives between 3 o'clock in the afternoon and 9 o'clock in the morning, and until you get a relationship you never will... So when he's angry at 9:10, don't say "get rid of him", [ask]

"what's been happening for you?", because something's happened in the previous 8 or 9 hours that's causing that behaviour...

S3: Communication is one of the main things. At school, the teachers only see [small bits of the kids' lives]. If there are problems at home, it needs to be told to the school. If a kid's watching dad literally stand over mum, and a teacher stands over him, he's going to react. But if the teacher understands, and the kid understands that the teacher is not against him, that he understands his problems, and he's given the opportunity to say "I'm having a bad time", [then more appropriate school responses are likely].

Summary

The twin roles of teaching and support or socialisation are a source of considerable stress to many teachers, who are themselves under-supported in the latter role.

Support staff can feel hampered by what they see as an excessive curriculum focus that prevents them delivering social and personal programs. Solutions to this may lie in expanding or shifting curriculum to better accommodate 'life skills' education. Support staff are also hampered by under-staffing and a part-time presence – not being full-time at one school.

The quality of relationships is crucial to achieving any desired school

outcome. For disturbed young people particularly, the quality of relationships with adults that they form in school can make a crucial difference to life trajectories. Empathic relationships are favourably contrasted with behaviourist or instrumental relationships. Large class sizes and under-staffing make it difficult to form the quality of relationship that would be 'protective' of 'at risk' young people. Suggestions include smaller class sizes, more support staff and two adults per class.

Chapter 6: Inclusion and exclusion

There was no way that I could explain myself, I didn't know how. How could I explain nervous energy when I had never heard of it before? So what if a few windows were broken? Surely the logical step would have been to leave it broken and let me experience the consequences of it when the wind blew in on a winter's night... Eventually the club lost its true purpose as it barred guys like me from coming in when in fact we should have been the ones to be stopped from leaving at any cost... (Boyle, 1977/97, p.30)³⁰.

Responsiveness, curriculum and alternative education

T5: Teachers tend to blame the children for 'bad behaviour' rather than the system or themselves. Recently at a school I realised that what I did didn't work and that's why I had some girls who misbehaved... because they were bored... I realised later it was my fault because I didn't have the perception of their different needs...

T1:...and these kids, you can't blame them because I wouldn't like to sit in a classroom if I couldn't read or write or add two numbers together, I'd be trying to do anything I could to get out of it, so that's what they do...

Academic under-achievement is one of the strongest of correlates to delinquency. The possibility of diverting young people from delinquent behaviour or pathways through engagement in a flexible learning

³⁰ Jimmy Boyle, once labelled "one of the most dangerous prisoners in Scotland", is describing his youth club experience.

environment is a recurring theme of these interviews.

LD: We are driving kids to [delinquent pathways] often because of the traditional classroom. How often when I'm talking to young people they say "I hate school"... and often it's their associations, being bullied... but often it comes down to "I can't hack it in the classroom"... and they come [to Chance on Main for example] and they thrive, absolutely thrive...

DS1: Often I have kids say to me, whether it be through a pathway planning process or through this case management approach, "this is the first time in this school anyone's asked about me, and what I want and what my needs are", as an individual as opposed to part of a class or group of some sort. Again that's not the teacher's fault because that's the way the whole thing is structured. You've got 25 kids to take care of... But unsurprisingly, like all of us, kids think of themselves as individuals and are often frustrated not to be regarded as such in the school context.

One common thread that emerged from the interviews was that change is afoot (LD said there was a "quiet revolution" happening). I quote T3 at length as an example of the progress that has been made in one school:

T3: We've moved a long way in the last probably 5 years in the ability of the kids in the school to make bigger choices about what they want to be involved in. That has really freed up, and at our school grade 7 is a year they have a bit of a taste of everything because they have transited from year 6 [primary school] which is a

big transition that quite often means a bit of a dip in their literacy and numeracy. So that's a fairly emotional time for them as well. To help them stabilise, we have the grade 7 students in a core group, spending a lot of time together with the same teacher like in primary school. We say "Have a bit of a try of everything this year, see what you like, because it's different from primary school". From there on we pretty much open the options up for the kids.

[Trying to insist on a kid doing, say, music when he has no intention of playing a musical instrument] ...that's where you start to get those reactions ...[with negative reactions in turn from the school]... its really the kid saying "I don't want to do this, it's wasting my time". So that's where we start to personalise what we provide... normally in year 9 but we've backed it to yr 8 now... we're just creating problems otherwise.

It's been a really interesting discussion with the staff, and the community, because some people have shifted in their thinking. Others think we should [enforce a standard curriculum] because we're cutting their options otherwise, but we're not, because if a student chooses not to do music in yr 8, they can come back in yr 9 and do it.

[There will always be teachers] but they may become less of a focus for the students. We have kids negotiating with the teacher for different things and off they go and do it. They're not necessarily in a class.

The need for the introduction of trade and practical choices earlier into the curriculum – down to years 7 and 8 – was universally recognised by the respondents.

RW: One of the things that was interesting about the boys was that by the time they were in grade 10 they were all keen to get part time jobs – four of them had part-time jobs and some of them were working up to 20 hours per week. It was about having their own income which gave them power and autonomy – more freedom to do what they wanted. If they wanted to do motocross [or buy cool clothes, etc] they had the money and the parents couldn't say no... It gave them status. Kids [were] going to school all day and then – in grade 9 – working through to midnight. So that shows you – these kids were classified as lazy and unmotivated, yet if they are called in to work, they'll go.

I must say, while these kids were considered difficult, I did see them totally engaged in learning. It's not impossible. It happens if they feel some sense of belonging or relevance.

DS1 reminds us that a small number of 'acting out' students may mask a broader disaffection with curriculum:

DS1: If you ask the kids in that class [you were giving the example of] what they were getting out of it, what they all were feeling, even the ones she would describe as 'compliant', I bet that most of them would say they are bored, but because they are socialised in that way, they put up with it... You know, they're just handing out work sheet after work sheet – "look up in the atlas what's the biggest lake in Bangladesh" for weeks on end. They're the teaching strategies that are used. All kids are going to get bored but some tolerate it.

T5: It's such a blunt instrument, the whole education system. I know the numbers and class sizes and all that, but still, it's not an excuse. A country like us can do better, offer more choices, be more responsive to individual needs. It's like pouring water into a container – pour the information in – it's not starting from the inside and asking "what do you want to learn?" and we will facilitate it...

Pepinski (2005) defines *violence* as "going in a straight line (for too long)" and its opposite as *responsiveness*, where we are willing to alter our personal and organisational agenda according to the needs of the other.

Inclusion and exclusion

DA: From my observation and documentary research, suspension is not a good thing for the student being suspended. What solution would you propose for your classroom dilemma?

T1: We face that dilemma at school all the time. We can't afford to have kids feeling unsafe in our school. Now a lot of our kids come from homes where there are no rules or regulations and a lot of them come to school and they don't want to leave, because they're safe, they've got rules and regulations. If you have a punch-up fight and you hit back – 3 days suspension – it's an automatic consequence. Now maybe suspension is not the right thing, but there's nothing else. It's the other kids in the class rights to be safe, it's my right not to be abused every time I come to school, my right to be able to do my job properly. Now if there is another step we can take... If there was more money, we could have another

building somewhere staffed with professionals who are experts in anger management and whatever, who can actually help these kids...but we need to get them out of the school...or out of the classroom.

DA: Perhaps if they were still within the school structure they could go selectively to some classes...

T1: No, I don't think so because when they go selectively the kids see them abusing again... I'm talking about the really hard ones here... I think they have to go away from the school, because once they get to the screaming and kicking and punching in the wall stage, they've got to go away for a while. [What's important] is the safety of the class, and my credibility too! Someone threatens me in front of a whole class and nothing much happens to them, where's my credibility? The kids get the idea "We can do what we please, nothing's going to happen to me, so who cares?". And once again I have an obligation to the kids in my class who want to learn...

DA: So you are convinced that some kids really do need alternative education – separate in some form?

T1: Yes, very separate, in fact away from the others at lunch and recess. If not suspension [then sent] to a different place, where they can get anger management, treatment, counselling, whatever. They can come back to school in a while, but if they are going to abuse me again in front of the whole class, I think they have got to go. It's not my job to go to work to be abused and people who work in schools where abuse is allowed to happen burn out. Now ideally if someone [is disrupting] the whole lesson or being violent, you've got to get them out. Bill Rodgers said to get them

into counselling, behaviour therapy or whatever, and retrain them, but we don't have those resources. That's what it all boils down to.

T2: ...so they say "you can't suspend this kid because he's got a right to an education", but you've got to remember the other kids in the class who have a right, and we keep forgetting them, so by removing a couple of students you give the others the opportunity to learn. Now yes, fair enough, that student suffers, but then if they don't want to positively engage, there's not a lot you can do...

T1 and T2's words represent a considerable body of opinion among teaching staff, and accurately mirror the prevalent viewpoint in teachers' union publications.³¹ "Inclusion versus exclusion" (the phrase replete with shades of meaning and definition) is possibly the most controversial issue around the school system. It is also the issue most pertinent to the question of whether a school will protect or divert its young people from delinquency, or add to their 'cumulative disadvantage' through a process of labelling and delinquent peer group identification. T3 displayed an acute awareness of labelling processes, apparently without having formally met the theory. I quote T3 lengthily again for the clear exposition of a responsive-inclusive³² approach, and because the sometimes subtle differences between a responsive-inclusive and an exclusive approach need careful definition:

³¹ See AEU (Tas) website at <http://www.aeutas.org.au/index.php?id=30>

³² A common complaint against 'inclusive' policy was that it was often not responsive to individual's situations, to the point of doing harm. It is to avoid this trap that I suggest the term 'responsive-inclusive'.

T3: [With regard to labelling] I've seen it happen and it's really negative... We offer individual support but we also offer it across the board... In our [xxxx] program (which is just one program) every student in year 10 has a chat with the Pathways Planning Officer, and a teacher who spends a lot of time with the student also knows what's going on with that planning (students are asked if it's OK to share)... So no-one is different, they all go through the process... [In order to avoid labelling] we look at our gifted kids, and looking at kids who are struggling, and looking at kids in the middle who say "I'm interested in this for the future but I'm not really sure"... So we give them all options... [Individual needs are identified through a whole school process]...

So it's not seen in the school as "Johnny's going out to work with the local builder because he's been [abusing teachers] and we have to get rid of him for a while". We've moved past that, [we're not just trying to move kids out of the classroom]. We're now saying "Let's have a look at why this student is struggling. Some things we can't change... like huge issues at home... We can do a lot while a person's here with us, and so identify what's going to help that kid. So when we talk about students being in different places in the community, they're actually learning... They are not in the workplaces because we don't want them at school, they're actually learning...I don't know how to pull a car apart but this young lad is learning that. He's learning all the skills about measuring, numeracy, literacy. He's learning about workplace attitudes, what blokes say in the workplace, all those sorts of things. Those students see that as part of their program, so it's not seen as different. That was the biggest step we made as a school, because from then on people didn't see the kids as different. [T3 explains further that an academically minded kid might similarly be given an individual choice relevant to his university interests in the place of

wood or metal work. This is presented to the community in the same way as are the external workshop placements of his school mates].

Our timetable can be anything – it becomes incredibly flexible. We have one young bloke at the moment who is in school – as in our building – on Mondays. He runs the school canteen – he's absolutely brilliant – on Tuesdays, and Wednesdays he works [outside the school]. Thursday he's at school again, and every second Monday he's just started [attending a personalised college transition program]. So he's at school – as in our building – 2 days a week, and for the rest learning elsewhere, and for him that's the way he needs to learn... We don't see that as labelling him, we see that as his program. I think that's where it can fall down, if they're seen as labelled because "you can't do that". It's understanding the way kids learn, and if you understand that, you realise it's not just in the school building...

DA: Do you suspend at all?

T3: We do. We did exclude a kid last year for a very violent act – there will always be that safety net – [and] you want the best possible education for the students there. That's the reason I'm there every day.

The bottom line is asking "Do you think every student can learn?". That tells you a lot about that person's value system and where they're coming from...³³

When we see students who are very close to disengaging in yr 8,

³³ T3 portrays Hargreaves et al.'s (1975) description of the 'deviance insulative' teacher, who believes that all pupils (including those resisting) really want to learn, and that when they don't, the conditions are at fault and need to be changed.

and lucky to make it to yr 10 in what we see as our structure at the moment, we work on a really flexible notion for those kids...

T3 described an 'alternative' to suspension in which the young people are sent to the adjacent primary school to mentor children in the classrooms. This was described as a highly successful program beneficial to the children and young people alike and reminds me of a deeply disturbed and often violent boy whose most positive social experiences were observed when mentoring younger children at a weekend camp. We are social beings who will respond to a request to help others even while we refuse invitations to help ourselves.

DS1: There's a group of kids who are really difficult and act out, but don't have 'pathological' issues, and there's a much much smaller group who are 'pathological', no matter what you do or what environment you put them in... very damaged... But this other group, when there's acknowledgment that it's our responsibility as a school to provide some sort of learning that's going to engage these kids, that's when schools start to have some success, rather than thinking "we've got to get them out"... [As for the other ones], I don't think there's as many of those as some teachers make out. I'd say you're talking about 2 or 3 per high school, maximum, so that's 50 or 60 in the state...

*[With the very damaged kids] we don't deal well with those kids, and our relations with Youth Justice and Children and Family Services and other support agencies are not what they should be, **but** I have seen examples where kids who schools have had no*

hope for, when you give them something that engages them, something they can see the point to, they're just different. When schools think about this as a teaching, learning and curriculum issue as opposed to how are we going to deal with this aberrant behaviour, I think they succeed, more often than not.

DS1's thoughts about how many "very damaged kids" there are in the system raises a great difficulty found when comparing the attitudes and policies of teaching staff from different schools: when talking about the "really difficult kids", are we talking about the same thing? In all probability not, but it is impossible to know. We are dealing with the subjectivities of different individuals working in different systems (schools), culturally and otherwise. It is likely to be more fruitful to examine our language for attitudes and values than to attempt a quantification of "difficult". In any case an ecological or social interactionist view would see the question as meaningless. Hargreaves et al. (1975) describe 'deviance provocative' and 'deviance insulative' teachers and Rutter et al. (1979) describe the power of school-generated differences on student behaviour. In my own work I witnessed a boy's behaviour change from 'extremely disruptive' to 'normal' through changing schools. We are porous to our environment, particularly the social environment.

S3: In one school suspension's everywhere, another will do anything they can to keep a kid in school. I would like one kid to

change high schools because the environment at one school just isn't good for him, whereas the other one would be a positive environment for him. They cater for his problems better, understand it a bit better... I think the school that handles it better [including using fewer suspensions] actually has a tougher group of kids to deal with...

DA: It has been suggested that the most delinquent group of kids is not at school very much or at all. Is this your observation?

S3: There are some like that. I think they fall behind, and they're embarrassed in the class because they don't know the work. Up to say sixth grade they've slipped through the system, hit high school and haven't got a clue. There's one kid I know, he can't do any maths whatsoever. He writes like a six-year-old and he's in year seven. The teacher might as well be speaking Chinese, so he runs amok and gets kicked out... I don't know if he'll even go back next year...

A number of respondents expressed their concern at the suspension of students for minor infringements, particularly smoking:

S1: some of those things [smoking, swearing] become much bigger issues than they need to be. The number of kids who are suspended for smoking, for example, is out of proportion. There are things that are going to kill them long before cigarettes, these kids!

S4: Kids are suspended for smoking cigarettes and other little misdemeanors. I can certainly understand kids who are being disruptive or aggressive being suspended, but in times like these

when lots of young people smoke I think it's a waste. I see student records which show that they might have had five or six suspensions for the year, and four of them will be for smoking, often for three days or more [if associated with other infringements]. The [detection of the] smoking might lead to abuse of the teacher... [a comparison is made between this and the 'trifecta' of police charges – drunk and disorderly, leading to abusive language, leading to assault – an interactive, escalating process equally involving the police officer].

This is a classic labelling or social interactionist situation, recalling Reynolds' (1976) discussion of the harmony-producing effect of 'truces' between teachers and students in the application of rules.

A final major issue of inclusion/exclusion that was raised is that of the desirability of 'alternative' educational programs.

S3: But then does that label them? You could see it as: you put them in one of these alternative programs, is that the next step to Ashley and then... [We discuss putting all the 'naughty' boys together, separating them from more diverse association] Oh, they just learn off each other... plus it's fun...

*S2: [Referring to a particular 'alternative education' program] I didn't like the idea of them being withdrawn to a different site. Were they being included by being excluded? It's a tricky one. Things were going well for them there, but **socially** I have a problem in that they weren't being welcomed in the school [outside*

the alternative program hours]. I truly believe in diversity and alternative programs because I don't think the high school thing fits a lot of teenagers, [but I prefer them on-site].

I'm totally opposed to suspension, although I don't know what the alternative is in some cases.

R1: Before working here or in the Ed Dept in administration, I was [at a special school], which took the role in those days of taking from primary school all the kids that the primary schools couldn't cope with. Now the big issue was there was only a certain number of kids we could take and manage. Once the school was full of those kids, then they would never move back out again. I mean it was very difficult, once a child was removed from their school to get the schools to take ownership of the kid. Another issue for us was a huge disproportionate number of aboriginal kids compared to the general students, so there was a racist element. We could also see the issues related to poverty and so on which contributed to those kids being there. In the long run there were too few kids managed by the school well enough to be put back into a mainstream school, and it seemed a silly way of managing resources [to have the separate place]... So my preference is that kids be placed in mainstream schools and that they always maintain responsibility for them, even if they're not always in regular classes...

Many respondents felt deeply the conundrum of 'alternative education' in the context of responsive-inclusiveness. On the one hand we are providing some young people with opportunities to thrive that they are not finding in the mainstream system, on the other we are accepting the 'othering' implied in the separation. If (as some respondents believe) the

difference between the 'misbehaving' students and many of the 'behaving' students is merely that – behavioural – that student disengagement may be expressed in apathy or resistance – then 'alternative education' becomes less appealing than mainstream educational reform. But pending an ideal school system – a forever unfinished project in any case – the consensus is for multiple solutions that lean strongly towards inclusion while remaining responsive to individual needs.

S3: X is a good example of suspension just not working. I've talked to the school about it but they're not moving. If he swears at a teacher, it's suspension – simple as that. But why is it getting to the point that he's swearing at the teacher? [He lives with family abuse at home and this morning witnessed his mum being threatened] He comes into class and his mind is elsewhere... on stuff going on at home... He's witnessing some bad stuff... His mind's not on the job so he gets told off, but he hasn't done anything wrong, he's just thinking about home, hoping everything is OK, so when he's told off he reacts and swears at the teacher, and gets suspended again. Then he's stuck at home for a week with nothing to do. They want him to act like a mainstream student but they're treating him like an outcast. They didn't have a clue what was going on at home.

Since then we have made an arrangement that if something goes down at home his mum will ring the school and they can keep an eye on him or back off a bit from him.

Summary

Student disengagement is promoted by a 'one size fits all' approach to curriculum. The need for a flexible curriculum that is responsive to individual needs is widely acknowledged. Practical and trade opportunities in particular need to be offered from years 7 and 8.

Many teachers feel a dilemma between the rights of suspended students and the rights to an uninterrupted education of engaged students.

Suspension rates differ between schools, but may not be primarily due to local demographics. Many suspensions are for minor infringements.

School and teacher disciplinary styles contribute to the problem and are the likely source of a solution.

A blanket inclusion policy is regarded by some as dysfunctional. A language of 'responsive inclusion' is suggested, to help avoid harm to the few who cannot thrive in a large institutional setting. However, 'alternative education' for the few is eschewed by other respondents in favour of a flexible and responsive curriculum for all.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

About 90% of children or teenagers attend school, most of those for between 10 and 12 years, with an estimated contact time of up to 15,000 hours.³⁴ Respondent DS2 makes the point that:

School is the one place where we have access to kids, that has almost become an ersatz social work institution for kids... They have a responsibility... who else is going to notice [the troubled kids] and support them?

Schools are thus “perfect places” (to quote DT) for the detection and support of troubled young people. That this should be done *inclusively* has been soundly argued in the literature reviewed for this study and is well established in official policy. That this policy is undermined by inadequate staffing and infrastructure is regarded as a given by all my respondents – a constant background condition grudgingly accepted as ‘reality’. Yet within this undeniably important structural limitation exists a wide variation between schools in inclusive/exclusive practice – a variation that can be only partly explained by socio-economic variations in student populations. The reviewed literature and the interview responses point to the large role of school factors in the complex production of school disengagement and conflict. These are summarised in Chapter 2 and at the end of Chapters 4, 5 and 6 for easy reference. For my conclusion I will revisit and clarify what my participatory research tells me is the

³⁴ Rutter et al. (1979).

central factor of a 'protective' school or teacher, upon which the other factors depend.

The protective school

From the reviewed literature and respondents' perspectives, a meta-theme repeatedly emerges, which I propose as a primary descriptor of how schools are protective (or not) of the troubled young people in their care. This meta-theme is generally encapsulated in the word ***relationships***. Student consultations consistently place the quality of relationships with teachers as the most highly rated factor in student success and welfare. Sampson and Laub (2005) and Burgoyne (2003) found 'protective' relationships to be the crucial turning points in their 'thriving' respondents' lives, and in Burgoyne's study group, one of these 'protective partners' was a high school teacher. This theme is equally strong in my interview data. Several respondents directly stated "It's all about relationships", while others implied this. The importance of "relationships" lies in the fundamentally *social and cooperative* nature of human beings, something which is not always appreciated in a culture which elevates individualism over communalism.³⁵ By 'relationships' respondents mean *empathic* relationships – where emotions are shared³⁶ – as opposed to institutional or *instrumental* relationships. Although these

³⁵ And which retains a core belief in intrinsic 'evil' rather than intrinsic 'good', expressed in the cultural assumption that children need correction rather than the freedom to be themselves, make their own choices, and thus negotiate their place in community.

³⁶ Space has prohibited a discussion of affect theory, which sites empathy in the 'hard-wired' ability to 'feel *with*' the other person, primarily through the instinctive observation of facial and postural cues. See Webb (2003).

distinctions are rarely black and white, a tendency towards bureaucratic instrumentalism in educational institutions is frequently noted.³⁷ This is the difference between being valued for the whole person we are – an *appreciative* view – and being valued for our role as a 'good' or 'well behaved' student. Young people's acute awareness of this difference is expressed in the cooperative relationships a young person who is normally labelled 'defiant' can have with a school social worker, youth worker or a certain teacher. They have been able to form an empathic relationship in which the young person feels accepted and emotionally safe. Pepinski's (2005) thesis of empathy versus behaviourism expresses this most succinctly. We can place any school culture or individual style of relating somewhere on a continuum between the poles of empathy and behaviourism. According to Pepinski, empathy is an essential ingredient of responsiveness and responsiveness an essential ingredient of participatory democracy. My understanding of this is: 'responsiveness' refers to the recognition of a person's individuality in our dealing with them; 'participatory' acknowledges personal agency in the collaborative determination of group affairs. 'Responsiveness' and 'participatory' are actions, whereas 'empathy' is the social 'glue' that enables cooperative action and mutual respect. Conversely, 'behaviourism' is interested in how a person is behaving and is thus related to control. The emotional (but not social) 'glue' in this case is fear (uncertainty, insecurity, etc), and the social state is dominance (however subtly enacted) rather than

³⁷ For example, by Doll (1993), Carr and Kemmis (1986), and Apple (1995).

cooperation. Burgoyne (2003) noted that relationships based on dominance were not protective whereas empathy was a consistent quality of 'protective partners'.

To take this back to the world we are studying – the world of Jack Travis' "thirteen-year torture test" and S3's story of the boy who witnessed family abuse, only to receive multiple suspensions due to his inattention and emotional reactivity at school: Jack attended a 'high achievement' private school while S3's boy attended a 'high needs' state school. The common factor is that both schools were somewhere near the behaviourist end of the empathy-behaviourism continuum. What was noticed were test results, home work and 'abusive language'. The young people were not being asked "Are things OK for you at home?" or "Is your work load too high?" or "What would you *really* enjoy doing?" Travis (2001) also described how other boys acted their frustration outward into vandalism, particularly towards the school. One of 'my' boys did just this, and was captured on the security camera, adding to his 'cumulative disadvantage' despite the efforts of Police and Youth Justice to avoid just that. The school to criminal justice connection can be quite direct. But the message from this and earlier research is not that schools *cause* delinquency, but that there is much they can do to divert young people from it and to avoid accelerating their progress into it.

Suggestions for further research follow.

Further research

Conflict as communication

Knight Abowitz, using John Dewey's theories of inquiry and communication to interpret resistance theories in education, presents a "theoretical framework for a future inquiry into school opposition":

Progressive educators can cultivate conditions that are right for shared norms of inquiry, critique, and deliberation on current practices and ends. If these conditions are right in an educational institution, communication can foster more shared meanings and aims. Such conditions – a willingness to question, critique, investigate, and learn in the search for clarity and multiple perspectives – require both moral and intellectual habits not easily cultivated in today's assessment happy schools. The challenge of this work is considerable, especially when we consider that it compels educators to truly listen and respond to the needs of some of our schools' most marginalized students, students for whom quick solutions of "zero tolerance" discipline are increasingly popular. Communal practices around resistance, as suggested here, could limit or halt the objectification of resistant students who are, at present, more easily seen as "other" and shuttled off to special schools, programs, or the streets rather than affirmed and acknowledged (Knight Abowitz, 2000, p.902).

Educators in schools could, frequently, also be described as 'resistant' in the sense that they find themselves beleaguered by critics coming from both progressive and conservative standpoints, not to forget ambitious Ministers for Education who want to place their respective stamps on that old parchment of cultural transmission – public education. They are

therefore rightly suspicious of outsiders bearing yet another solution to school social problems. This is all fruitful ground to an action research inquirer into conflict and resistance, who would enter a school and community as an inquirer, and not a bearer of expertise (except for some 'equality of expertise' as a participant researcher/support worker, as 'professional' experience would be required for legal/ethical reasons). The starting thesis would be that conflict is an opportunity for communication and that resistance *is* communication if it is approached that way. The participant researcher would carry out conversations³⁸ with all actors – educators, students, peers, families, and so on – exploring relationships through questions and listening. For Dewey, communication changes the parties involved. Thus the researcher must expect also to be changed.

Reference: Kemmis and McTaggart (1988).

Active resistance and apathy

Researcher respondent Rebecca Wilson regarded disengaged students as resisting – either actively or 'contained'. 'Contained' resistance was characterised by 'apathy'. Research on this difference in the school setting as well as wider cultural and historic settings would be interesting and valuable. What sort of culture is being transmitted by a system that rewards apathy, in the sense that it is the actively resisting students who are more punished? Should the actively resistant students be applauded for their contribution to democracy? Would this remove the need for

³⁸ 'Action conversations' would be one useful tool. See Webb (2004) at http://www.cpe.uts.edu.au/pdfs/action_conversations.pdf.

some to withdraw into apathy?

A progressive society counts individual variations as precious, since it finds in them the means of its own growth (Dewey, 1916/66).

"...a classroom out of control... it's horrific... it's hell... and the kids have no respect for you if that happens"

The sentence raises a number of questions about the construction of meanings in a social environment. An exploratory transactionalist inquiry into this phenomenon could suggest directions in solving a social phenomenon that can lead to loss of educators or to strategies that are inimical to education as we would like to see it. This inquiry could use interviews, focus groups and whole class forums to explore the issues.

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[School of Sociology and Social Work Letterhead]

Information Sheet for Research Participants

"Pathways to Prevention or Delinquency? The Protective Role of Schools (a Tasmanian Study)"

This study is being undertaken under the supervision of Dr Max Travers, in completion of the course "Certificate to Masters in Criminology and Corrections".

Origins of the study

The idea of doing this study came from my employment during 2006 in The Salvation Army's Home and School Support (HASS) programme, working with 10 to 14 year old boys who were experiencing trouble at school, with the aim of helping them to remain engaged with school. School disciplinary practices were therefore an immediate concern, and prominent amongst these was the practice of suspension from school, generally as a last step in a disciplinary process. Education Department statistics show that a significant proportion of students receive suspensions, some repeatedly, and a large body of research literature links this outcome with later or continued delinquency and criminal justice involvement. This is frequently expressed not as school responses *causing* later criminal activity, but as *reinforcing* pre-existing tendencies or *failing to divert the young people* from the pathways they may already be on. Suspension, as an *exclusionary* practice, also appeared at odds with the *inclusive* policies or ethos of the Education Department, juvenile justice agencies and youth services. At the coal face of the classroom, however, suspension was presented to me by teaching staff as their last and necessary resort in the face of the disruptive behaviour of some students.

Purpose of the study

This study aims to explore the perceptions of teaching and support staff working with years 7 to 10, when the great majority of suspensions take place. It is hoped the information obtained will throw light on the nature of the problem and its contributory factors. In the big picture, this study is located within the wider debate on the role of high schools in the lives of young people; that is, whether schools should be seen primarily as crucial developmental institutions or primarily as places of education for later vocation, and how these roles can be consolidated.

The study will also be looking at the range of responses and supports available to young people who are experiencing conflict with staff and others at school.

What does participation in the study involve?

Individuals who work in teaching or support roles in schools will be asked to undergo an interview of negotiable length – up to one hour – at a time and place of your choice. You will be asked to sign a Consent Form and you will be provided with a copy to keep along with a copy of this Information Sheet. I will either sound-record the interview or take notes, in accord with your wishes. Questions asked are not rigidly set, but will change in the course of the interview and the larger investigation. The research method requires responsiveness to the participants' perceptions, and questions will vary with the issues that arise. However, a list of starting questions ("Interview Schedule") is attached.

Protection of confidentiality

Recordings of interviews and interview notes will be destroyed following transcription. Identifying material will not be transcribed (for example the school or suburb you work in) and a separately stored code will be used in the place of names on the transcripts, which will then be securely stored by the University of Tasmania for 5 years before being destroyed.

Withdrawal from participation

Participation is entirely voluntary at all times. You can terminate the interview at any time or decline response to any question.

Review of transcript

The participant is offered the opportunity to review and approve the transcript of their interview, and withdraw or change data that the participant does not want used as part of the research project.

Ethics approval

This research has received the approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee (Tasmania) Network. Should you have any concerns, questions or complaints with regard to the ethical conduct of this research, please contact the Executive Officer of the Human Research Ethics (Tasmania) Network, on 6226 7479 or human.ethics@utas.edu.au

For further information or if you have any questions, please contact

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CONSENT FORM

Title of research project:

"Pathways to Prevention or Delinquency? The Protective Role of Schools (a Tasmanian Study)"

-
- I have read and understood the 'Information Sheet' for this study.
 - The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me.
 - I understand that the study involves an interview of up to one hour, by arrangement between the interviewer and myself.
 - I understand that all research data will be securely stored on the University of Tasmania premises for at least five years, and then destroyed.
 - Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
 - I agree that research data gathered from me for the study may be published provided that I am not identified as a participant.
 - I understand that the researchers will maintain the confidentiality of my identity as a participant in this study and that any information I supply to the researchers will be used only for the purposes of the research.
 - I agree to participate in this investigation and understand that I may withdraw at any time without any repercussion. I also can have any data I have supplied withdrawn from the research project at any time prior to the submission of the Research Report.

Name of Participant:

Signature:

Date:

Interview Schedule

Preamble:

The purpose of this interview is to explore *your* perceptions of the issues introduced in the Information Sheet. Your perceptions are valuable. The list of questions below is only a guide or sample. Your responses will create different questions in accord with the direction of your thoughts and interests.

My questions are not intended to elicit personal or private issues. Please decline from answering any question that you feel invites this. I fully support your right to terminate the interview at any moment.

For the protection of your own and other's confidentiality, I ask all participants to avoid using the names of other staff members, workers, students or parents during these interviews.

Sample questions:

- What do you see as the core purpose of your work with/in support of students/young people? (This may differ from your formal job description, or how others view the core purpose of your position).
- What (factors, structures) *helps* or *impedes* you in this core purpose?
- How would you describe or define the problem of disruptive behaviour and conflict in the classroom? What might be the *origins* of these problems?
- What effects does this have on you and your work?
- In what directions would you look for solutions?
- What are the current solutions being employed in your school?
- What do you think are the effects of these solutions on [1] class or school and [2] the disruptive student and family?
- School student consultations and research, and my own conversations with students in my HASS capacity, generally show an ambivalent attitude of students towards authority, a common statement being "too many rules", while students who are getting in to trouble often say "I don't like being told what to do". What are your thoughts on this?
- If you were to really let your imagination go, what would you imagine for your class/school/community? What would you like to see?