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Experience of School Transitions

Policies, Practice and Participants

Springer

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Preface

This book describes and discusses how policies and practices supporting post-school transitions are formulated by and enacted in education systems and schools. It outlines how students, parents, and others in the community engage with these policies. It does this by drawing upon accounts from a range of countries with advanced industrial economies where the expectations for successful transitions are increasingly being aligned to individual, community, and national economic well-being. In countries such as Britain, Australia, Germany, Switzerland, Canada, and the United States, social and economic changes are heightening the importance of young peoples' transitions from secondary schooling to post-school life in contemporary times. Such transitions now involve negotiations of diverse and sometimes complex educational and work-related pathways (Barabasch & Lakes, 2005; Evans, 2002; te Reile, 2004) to a range of possible destinations including employment, further or higher education, or even disengagement from both work and education (McMillan & Marks, 2003). Well-organized pathways that connect initial education with work and further study have been identified as a key ingredient for systems that secure successful transitions (Raffe, 2008). Indeed, identifying and establishing such pathways has become the principal educational concern for many governments (Billett et al., 2010). Yet, for most young people, the degree of ease in negotiating these pathways is also likely to be premised on their performance in high school, the support they secure from within families and communities, and the clarity and achievability of the post-school goals they (or their families or others) have established for themselves (Ball, 2003; Lehmann, 2007). Indeed, for young people aiming toward further education, depending on the particular circumstance of schooling or performance at school, the pathways on offer can lead either to participation in their preferred choice of university or tertiary education courses or, conversely, frustration at not being able to access their preferred or proposed options for study. For other young people opting to enter the workforce directly after leaving school, their pathways might lead to further training such as apprenticeships or directly to paid employment that requires no further education. However, in current times, pathways leading directly from school to such forms of employment are becoming potentially more perilous. As the educational requirements for entry into

well-paid and esteemed employment increases, so does the competition to secure these kinds of work. Consequently, for others, poor school performance or even non-completion of schooling leaves them prone to being restricted to engagement in contingent and low paid employment. Issues then arise about engagement in non-preferred educational or work activities or neither, which can complicate the transition process. Complications in the transition process can cause moratoriums on career aspiration or even engagement in study and employment, leading to new pathways being sought or to circuitous pathways of achieving preferred or modified outcomes over a longer term. In these ways, the experience of schooling can reinforce, rather than reduce, inequity (Lehmann, 2007), and confront expectations and senses of entitlements.

Yet, in all of this, it would be wrong to just view young people and their prospects for post-school life as being wholly shaped by what pathways their schools and family afford them. Instead, there is other evidence suggesting students' decision-making, efforts, and agency also play a key role in how they are able to negotiate these transitions (Evans, 2002). Moreover, the failure to negotiate what others see as being a successful transition does not necessarily lead to outcomes that are always restricting or failing to meet individuals' plans, aspirations, and/or expectations. So, although the kinds of institutional structures (i.e., in schools, tertiary education, workplaces) that shape these transitions and their intended pathways are of profound significance, alone they do not provide an adequate explanation of what constitutes productive or effective transitions for these young people. Individuals ultimately make judgments about what constitutes productive processes and success for themselves. Moreover, a consideration of these students in this way positions them as being something more than subjects to be acted upon and places them as active and engaged contributors to their transitions. Indeed, Walther, Du Bois, Reymond, and Biggart (2006) propose that rather than viewing young people as a problem and their transitions from school as something to be closely managed as a corrective process, instead they should be seen as a resource with whom to engage and to mobilize.

So, beyond policies that identify and establish pathways, there is a need to understand how transitions along these pathways are enacted by all kinds of students. It follows that an important educational goal for schooling is to assist all students, including those at risk of unsatisfactory or unproductive pathways and outcomes, to secure post-school transitions. To ensure that these are productive transitions, schools will need to put in place processes enabling students to identify and realize post-school destinations that they can reasonably aspire to and are suited to their interests and capacities (i.e., productive transitions), and then receive appropriate guidance and engage in learning experiences that will assist them to reach those destinations (Brooks, 2009). There is a need therefore to identify how best students can be guided toward and along these pathways. Indeed, the OECD (2009) notes the importance of designing and developing transitions in a lifelong learning perspective, with effective connections to post-school destinations. Importantly, the experiences of schooling that lead to post-school transitions need to be invitational

for all students, regardless of capacities, social origins, or access to particular kinds of cultural, economic, and social capital.

Consequently, this book seeks to identify and elaborate on the ways in which such pathways are enacted by schools and their communities and engaged with by students across a range of countries, through initiatives that are policy-formulated. Thus, it discusses how policies formulating transition processes are conceived and enacted, how they are negotiated by students, and how they might best be organized to meet the needs of the range of students leaving schooling. In these discussions, it is necessary to account for both what educational institutions afford these students and how they might take up what is afforded them through the educational experience, and as well, the relations between them. It is not sufficient therefore to consider only the arrangements made by schools, as the ways through which individuals are prompted, supported, and sustained in engaging with these arrangements are also important. That is, it is the relations between what is afforded by schools and schooling systems and how students engage in them that is central to understanding how these transitions are enacted and engaged with by young people. Therefore, it is necessary to illuminate both the experience of schooling by students and how these experiences are shaped by both the practices of institutions and participants.

It is these considerations that are taken forward across the sections of this edited volume. The first section—*School Transitions: Overview, Policy Orientations and Theorizations*—comprises three contributions, the first being the overall premises and ways of understanding and conceptualizing what constitutes productive transitions. This chapter is followed by two others that orient the project of transitions from schools in particular ways. First, Evans summarizes findings from a series of European studies into effective transitions from schools, emphasizing the boundaries that shape opportunities for students and how they come to exercise their agency while still constrained by these boundaries. Then, DeLuca and colleagues discuss how similar processes unfold in North America, identifying the need to view issues of transition on the bases of the person-in-context, thereby emphasizing both affordances of institutional arrangements and also the need to consider students as individuals engaging with these arrangements in particular circumstances and with diverse sets of cultural capital, capacities, and readiness to progress. The second section—*Imperatives for and Practices of Transitions: International Perspectives*—comprises five chapters and brings together contributions that describe and appraise imperatives which are driving transition policies in the United States, Germany, Canada, Switzerland, and Australia. Lakes and Barabasch compare approaches adopted in the United States and Germany and critique policy borrowing as failing to take into account the fit required between identifying needs and the adequacy of policy responses. Similarly, Walther highlights the need for refinements and even transformations for policy and practice, as well-tried responses fail to meet emerging issues for effective transitions for sections of German youth. Competing agendas and imperatives are seen by Lehmann to shape outcomes and processes for Canadian school students with concerns that institutional and structural

barriers are inhibiting these processes and achievement of some of the desired outcomes. Following these themes, the chapter by Stalder notes how the key educational mechanism for ordering transitions in Switzerland appears to be failing students with low educational achievement and/or those who are otherwise socially disadvantaged. In their chapter, Thomas and Hay analyze Australian State and Territory policies on transition to show how these policies are informed by the governing rationality of social investment, with a heavy emphasis on economic productivity and a mitigating focus on social inclusion. This rationality constrains the practices available to young people and stresses the importance of linear progressions from school to post-school life. Together, the chapters illuminate the range of educational practices that have been enacted in these countries and, in different ways, exercise the cultural–historical context of schooling and transitions to life beyond school as being a product of diverse institutional facts.

The third section—*Experiences of Schooling: Practices and Prospects*—comprises six chapters that draw on the approach to and findings from a 3-year Australian study which explored the notion of "productive transitions" in three high school communities. The first chapter led by Ryan sets out the conceptual and empirical context of the study and outlines the study's overall design. The following three chapters comprise case studies of the three schools and their communities that are informed by focus group interviews with students, parents, and staff at each of the schools. These data provide rich accounts of how productive post-school transitions are constituted in each school community. For instance, Hay and Sim note that the range of school-to-employment pathway options catered for by Southside College was influenced by its position within the local educational market and particularly by the school's strong academic reputation. Yet, the traditional academic pathways had consequences for a number of non-tertiary-bound students attending the school who reported difficulties engaging with their preferred post-school pathways. Then, at Sunny Beach College, Thomas and Ryan describe how a key element of a transition policy was used as a catalyst for changing the senior secondary school program. They show how successful transitions at Sunny Beach College were understood as a linear process through multiple pathways, facilitated by the school, but ultimately the responsibility of individual students. Their findings demonstrate the pervasiveness of discourses on linear transition and on individualism in both education policies and in the everyday lives of students and teachers as they enact transition policy.

With its emphasis on transitions to work and tertiary education, rather than higher education, Johnson and Billett identify how at St Jude's parents' lack of participation in the school-based transitions program is problematic for the school. The work of assisting at-risk students to transition is labor-intensive and staff continue to take up the shortfall. At the same time, the leadership team acknowledges that families have many valid reasons for their under-representation and engagement with schools. Next, the chapter Belterman leads draws on interviews with recent school-leavers who have experienced problematic post-school transitions to yield further insights into what productive transitions means for at-risk students, and, in these instances, that sit outside of school communities. The final chapter, led by Sim, presents a

critical overview of the findings of this Australian study and outlines considerations of how such transitions might be accommodated in its schooling systems.

Through the perspectives and accounts provided across these contributions, nuanced and empirically driven accounts that how transitions might be viewed, enacted, and experienced by school students are explicated.

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Contents

Part I
School Transitions: Overview, Policy Orientations and Theorisations

Chapter 1
Experiences of School Transitions: Policies, Practice and Participants

Stephen Billett and Greer Johnson

Productive Transitions from Schooling

In countries with advanced industrial economies, the completion of schooling marks an important transition point for most young people (Walther, du Bois-Reymond, & Biggart, 2006). It constitutes a clear step from childhood into adulthood and, with it, expectations that young people will be more independent, self-directed and responsible for their activities, trajectories and progress in roles assigned to adults in work, family and community life. Moreover, it suggests a point at which, regardless of whether they are engaging in further education, paid work or other activities, these activities will be undertaken with increased personal responsibility. There is also a range of expectations that centre on the effectiveness of these transitions. Most likely, national governments will view effective transitions as positioning students to contribute directly to the nation in the form of engagement in education or employment that can assist securing social and economic goals and also resist a continued call upon the state's social provision. As key sponsors of compulsory education, nation states look to their schooling systems to secure such outcomes which avoid ineffective transitions that might lead to dependency on the state and to young people engaging in activities that are deleterious to their community, family and themselves (Stokes & Wyn, 2007). It is worth noting that beyond educating young people for their personal development, mass compulsory education is also associated with securing economic and societal continuity within the nation state.

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Although this goal is perhaps made most explicitly in occupationally focussed education programs and provisions, it is also implicit in state-sponsored schooling and post-compulsory forms of education (Quicke, 1999). Furthermore, others concerned with meeting these social and economic goals (i.e. industry organisation, professional bodies, trade associations) may make judgements about the worth of the educational provisions on bases of how such provisions meet their needs in pre-paring students for employment or further education (Lehmann, 2007). Communities, families and perhaps local employers may similarly be looking for students to have educational experiences and transitions that reflect their very specific expectations and needs. Finally, how individual students are themselves able to negotiate transitions to meet their needs and fully realise their capacities is likely to be the basis for whether they conclude that the outcome is productive or not. For most young people, ease in negotiating these transitions is probably largely premised on their high school performance and the clarity and achievability of the post-school goals they (or their families) have established for themselves (Teese, 2000; Walther et al., 2006).

Certainly, for young people aiming towards further education, depending on their particular schooling context or performance at school, the pathways they are able to realise may lead either to participation in their preferred choices of university or tertiary education courses, or frustration in not being able to access their preferred option (Lehmann, 2007). For other young people opting to enter the workforce directly after leaving school, pathways might lead to further training such as appren-ticeships or directly to paid employment that requires no further education. However, pathways leading directly to employment are becoming less frequent and are now seen to be more perilous as the educational requirements for entry into well-paid and esteemed employment increases, and opportunities for work requiring little or no post-school preparation recede (McMillan & Marks, 2003). Yet, for school leavers without high levels of school achievement or for those who leave early and/or without clear goals, pathways may be more restricted and the consequences of progressing along them potentially more uncertain, limiting, and even perilous (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2009). So, not only do successful or productive transitions depend on the viewpoints of particular interest groups, but the processes that schools adopt to achieve particular kinds of outcomes are also shaped by particular intentions, expectations and judge-ments about what constitutes productive transitions as they are enacted in particular schools and their communities.

Given these national, workforce and other imperatives, it is perhaps not surprising then that key policy focuses for senior schooling are now centred on educational activities and outcomes directly associated with securing productive transitions (Billett et al., 2010). That is, policies seek to secure outcomes in which young people move into either further education (i.e. university, technical education), or employment which includes occupational preparation (e.g. apprenticeship, cadetship), or employment per se that meets their needs and capacities. Such outcomes are likely to ensure young people contribute to the society in which they live and which has supported them so far. It follows that an important goal for the process of schooling in a range of countries, particularly those with advanced industrial economies, is to

prepare students for productive post-school transitions through the provision of experiences that will enable them to identify the range of options they should aspire for and are suited to their interests and capacities, and then receive appropriate guidance to reach those destinations (Brooks, 2009). In these ways, transitions need to be seen as both processes in which individuals engage, regardless of whether they comprise the kinds of pathways set down for them by others, and as an outcome upon which the individual and others will make judgements about its productiveness for the person or their particular imperatives. Here, it is proposed as others have already shown (Cho & Apple, 1998) that what schools afford and emphasise as pathways to transitions are often supported by the communities in which they engage, thereby accentuating advantage and disadvantage alike. Consequently, efforts associated with schooling policy and practice may need to be re-doubled.

Conceptualising School Transitions as Affordances and Engagement

From what has been discussed above, bases to understand what constitutes school transitions, their effectiveness and productiveness can be seen as comprising a duality between sets of social and personal factors. That is, on the one hand, there are the course provisions, advice, expertise and guidance that schools provide, the contributions of parents and family (i.e. economic social and cultural capital) (Bourdieu, 1977), the experiences of working life any workplaces provide, and, of course, peer advice and modelling. Yet, on the other hand, the interests, capacities and intentions of students are also central to their decision-making about and engagement in the transition process. Consequently, when seeking to understand the goals for, processes of and bases for appraising the process and outcomes of transitions, there is a need to account for both institutional facts (Searle, 1995) that comprise the institutions involved, and the personal facts associated with how students engage with what is arranged, supported and projected by social institutions (Shanahan & Hood, 2000). These institutional facts include what the society asks of schooling and transitions from it, the presence and exercise of cultural capital in institutions such as schools: their goals, purposes and privileging; families: their concerns and needs and expectations; and workplaces: their goals, processes and purposes. These facts play out in very tangible ways for school students in terms of the opportunities that are provided for them, how they are guided through those opportunities, and also the ways in which they are supported in achieving the goals that they or others have decided for them (Staff & Mortimer, 2003). These invitational qualities can be encouraging or dismissive (i.e. inviting or inhibiting engagement). The pathway to prestigious occupations through hard-to-enter university programs might well be invitational to academically able students whose family circumstances support engagement, but are uninviting to students with low levels of achievement and whose family circumstances do not provide the kinds of support and guidance necessary to secure entry to such programs.

Yet, there is also a need to account for the personal facts which constitute individuals' interests, subjectivities, capacities and intentionalities, which shape how they engage with such institutional facts. For instance, some students may take up a different pathway to that expected by their parents, teachers and/or their peers. Equally, some students might act to find ways of overcoming disadvantages and secure a pathway that is outside their parents' experience, teachers' expectations and maybe even how they have been positioned during their schooling (Evans, 2002). These two sets of factors can be understood in terms of affordances and engagement (Billett, 2001). Affordances comprise what constitutes the invitational qualities of social institutions (i.e. how they invite, support and engage students). As noted, invitations can sometimes be unwelcoming. For instance, it is often claimed that the senior years of schooling are largely directed towards tertiary or higher education entrance. These affordances may fail to meet the needs of students who are not bound for such post-school destinations, and position them in inferior ways within the school. In this way, affordances can range between highly inviting and highly uninviting of individuals' participation. The transition pathway for students from family backgrounds whose cultural capital is well aligned with that required to make informed decisions associated with productive transitions is likely to be quite different from those students whose personal and family background is not so well-aligned with considered decision-making. Outside of these factors, issues of wealth, class, private or public education, gender and ethnicity also play roles here. Consequently, the concept of affordances is useful to identify and evaluate the worth of contributions to students' transitions provided by their family, school, community and workplaces.

However, beyond institutional facts are those of the individuals (i.e. students) themselves and, in particular, the bases by which they engage with what is afforded by them (Staff & Mortimer, 2003). Individuals can make the most of rich and supportive affordances or reject their invitation, or alternatively compensate for lower levels of supportive affordances. For instance, a student from a comfortable, well informed family who attends a prestigious private school may well elect to ignore the advice of family, teachers, counsellors and make decisions which are directed by their own or other interests. This decision-making may or may not imperil them. As noted, they may well pursue options other than what their parents and teachers propose as being those to which they should aspire. Or, they might simply ignore or reject advice because of its source; accepting peer advice whilst rejecting that of parents and teachers. Yet, as foreshadowed, there are also individuals whose agency and capacities work to overcome the disadvantages of only having access to low levels of affordances (Evans, 2002). That is, they may engage effortfully and strategically with the opportunities available to them, seek actively to develop the kind of capacities that allow them to maximise opportunities and build upon what is afforded them. Analogous examples for the range of engagements can be found elsewhere. For instance, workers have been identified as engaging actively and with high levels of intentionality to learn particular kinds of capacities because these were central to them achieving their workplace goals. The exercise of their agency went so far as to confront and contest some of the boundaries which seem to be searched to inhibit

their learning. That is, these individuals engage effortfully and intentionally (i.e. agentically) to learn more about the practice, because it was important to them. On the other hand, there are instances where individuals have elected to ignore or reject or rebuff workplace affordances because they either did not meet their needs, or they were adjudged to be irrelevant (Billett, Smith, & Barker, 2005).

So, in considering transitions and appraising the decision-making and engagement in school, community and workplace activities that comprise what they afford students, it is necessary to also account for how individuals elect to participate in the processes and practices that constitute the transition from school to post-school life.

Bases of Affordances and Engagement

Across the contributions in this monograph, diverse accounts of such affordances and engagement are given that enable the identification of bases for understanding, appraising and even realising productive transitions. In her Chap. 2, 'Reconciling the System World with the Life Worlds of Young Adults: Where Next for Youth Transition Policies?' Evans sets out conceptual schema to assist a rethinking of 'social structures' in relation to human aspiration and capacities for change in learning, work and social responsibility. She views transitions in terms of reconciliations between students' life worlds and the systems in which they engage. From this Habermasian standpoint, she proposes an analysis of the scope that young people have for fulfilling their aspirations, and the ways in which they strive to achieve these outcomes through work and learning. This standpoint focuses attention on connections between the bounds of human agency and the individual, mutual and social responsibilities enacted in the social world. It proposes that popular beliefs in meritocracy and the openness of opportunities to all could evaporate very quickly in new generations of young adults when it becomes apparent to them that the qualifications chase is one in which the most advantaged have an unassailable head start. Assessing claims that the neoliberal trends are approaching a stalling point in many societies, Evans argues that the culture of contentment is now being disturbed by growing inequalities. She suggests it will reach a point when even the middle classes may come to recognise that what is being created is profoundly stacked against them. In such a context of insecurity, they will realise that inequality, in the end, is bad for everyone. Greater social responsibility exercised throughout society means replacing individual responsibility with mutual responsibility as the core construct. The mutuality of social responsibility requires reconnection and a voice for the ordinary citizen, exercised through work and the workplace as well as in the wider social world. So, here, the key affordances put in place by current transition policies are seen as privileging particular cohorts and thus working to disable, disadvantage or simply divert elsewhere the interests of those who are not so socially and economically advantaged. Through emphasising affordances as being structures that are determinant, these concepts emphasise how social factors shape students' transitions from schooling.

In some ways, the contribution by DeLuca and his colleagues, Chap. 3 'Bridging School and Work: A Person-in-Context Model for Enabling Resilience in At-Risk Youth', seeks to respond to the circumstance Evans outlines. It does this through appraising the process and outcomes of providing students with work-based educational affordances that can be used to engage educationally and socially disadvantaged students. Through that engagement, such affordances aim to mitigate disadvantage through the promotion of personal resilience. Of course, this approach which features a person-in-context model is from a continent that has distinct institutions and different societal sentiments and workplace traditions than the countries that Evans identifies. But it also plays to a concept that Evans has discussed earlier and here—the concept of bounded agency: that is, the way individuals are able to exercise within particular societal boundaries. The person-in-context model comprises three dimensions: (1) individual, (2) social-cultural, and (3) economic-political. 'At-risk' students are those who perform below-expected achievement standards, and are often disengaged from schooling, experience school as a context of adversity, and demonstrate poor attendance. The concern here is to afford these students' work-based education experiences that can assist them secure productive transitions to working life beyond school. Part of the rationale for such affordances is that even seemingly invitational schooling arrangements and targeted teaching strategies enacted by competent teachers are unable to effectively engage these students. So, the affordances are being extended to experiences beyond schooling, albeit shaped by the requirements and practices of a different kind of social setting (e.g. workplaces). These experiences are intended to both secure and empower students' capacities through the development of resilience. Moreover, this model extends the consideration of these students' capacities beyond those that are held to count in schools and schooling. In this way, these provisions aim to be openly invitational for those whose capacities and successes are constrained by what they encountered in school programs. Consequently, what is afforded by the schools aims to be invitational in particular ways, including extending students' capacities to be advocates for themselves. Yet, at the same time, it is acknowledged that these at-risk students may not be well-equipped or prepared to enact such advocacy. Hence, as an explicit affordance of the schooling experience, the approach here aims to enhance these students' capacities to engage and be resilient. In this way, promoting engagement and resilience for that engagement is an explicit goal of the model. Such engagement redresses the kinds of limits that Evans identifies through affording students' particular kinds of experiences, and, perhaps, redressing an overemphasis on societal determinism, through an approach that advocates and provides experiences that are of a different kind from those encountered in schools.

Similar discussions feature across the second section comprising chapters that offer accounts of students' transitions in the USA, Europe, Scandinavia, Canada and Australia. First, Lakes and Barabasch advance their concerns about the nature and appropriateness of policy borrowing by considering the fit between policies and practices elsewhere, and the issues being addressed within the US education system. Their Chap. 4, 'The American Shortcut to VET: Global Policy Borrowing for the Post-16 Educational Arena', discusses issues of transitions through comparing

approaches adopted in the USA and in the EU to make judgements about their educational merit. They note that the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce advocated a benchmarked performance-based educational system, whereby secondary students undertake a scaled capstone tests to fast-track their post-16 college and career pathways. In a country, like many others, that is historically wedded to an age-graded secondary school system consisting of 12 lockstep years, this suggestion is quite radical. The reform model highlighted practices that might assist VET-bound students who passed the board tests on core subjects (e.g. reading, mathematics, and science) to then transition quickly into technical and community colleges. Perhaps bored and uninspired with their existing schooling options, this group of capable young people would move on at a quicker pace. More academically oriented students might continue for 1 or 2 years of upper-secondary schooling prior to entering selective colleges and universities. Hence, this proposal sought to offer students distinct pathways that take them to either tertiary or higher education. In particular, in this chapter, 'early college' policy initiatives that resonate with workforce development imperatives to advance students bound for vocational and education and training (VET) for quicker entry into the labour force are discussed. The development of this model, largely on the basis of qualifications in a number of high-performing countries such as Austria, Norway and Sweden that have some noteworthy and contrasting qualities to those from the USA, is also explained. In keeping with other policy-related contributions, Lakes and Barabasch also analyse the idea of global policy borrowing used to internationalise assessments for the post-16 educational arena in the USA. Here, there is an attempt to expand the range of affordances offered to at-risk students and align them more closely to their needs and aspirations.

In almost complete contrast to the approach adopted in the USA, Walther's Chap. 5, 'Access, Coping and Relevance of Education in Youth Transitions: The German Transition System Between Labour Society and Knowledge Society', adopts a life course perspective. Walther discusses school-to-work transitions in Germany, which for a long time have been characterised by the dual system of standardised vocational training which combined company-based apprenticeship training with school-based vocational education. He proposes that this model was attractive for school leavers because it afforded them secure nonacademic career options. It was also welcomed by employers for whom it promised a reliably skilled labour force. Thus, over time, the dual system, whose affordances and bases for engagement were held to be well-premised, contributed to low rates of youth unemployment in Germany. However, both these affordances and bases of engagement have changed, and in ways that are imperilling the system. That is, in the past two decades, this model has faced considerable challenges as the supply of apprenticeship places has declined significantly, thereby weakening what can be afforded learners. At the same time, young people's preferences have changed away from the occupations that have been serviced by apprenticeships (i.e. there are reduced bases for engagement). In this situation, another specificity of the German transition system comes into play: the selective differentiation of secondary education which allocates students into different educational tracks after 4 years of primary school according to

achievement and performance. In some ways, this reflects what has been proposed to be afforded in the USA as discussed by Lakes and Barabasch. As a consequence, more and more young people have remained without post-compulsory qualifications. Transition policies undertaken in this recent period are characterised by repairing rather than reforming the existing system with the result that the split between included and excluded trajectories is widening. Focusing on the distinct kinds of experiences and capacities of young people in Germany, and how the long-standing and highly esteemed occupational-specific approach to school transitions are struggling to meet the contemporary educational requirement of German youth, Walther demonstrates not only the salience but also the dynamic qualities of both these affordances and bases for engagement, and that even long-standing and proven approaches may not be sufficient in contemporary times.

In his Chap. 6, 'Making the Transition to Post-School Life: The Canadian Situation', Lehmann holds that regardless of overall economic conditions, the circumstances for productive transitions in Canada are limited by the institutional facts that are often beyond the control of students: the youth employment level has been consistently above that of the adult population. As elsewhere, this trend is especially pronounced during times of economic crisis and particularly so for young people with low levels of education (i.e. at-risk students). In response, federal and provincial governments have introduced schemes that aim to assist young people to secure productive post-school transitions. Yet, many of these schemes are founded on the premise that Canada is transforming into a knowledge economy and at-risk students, in particular, may require extra support to develop the capacities required to secure employment in a knowledge-intensive labour market. Yet, Canada is also experiencing shortages, crucially, in skilled trades work and also, to a lesser degree, in highly skilled, professional occupations (e.g. in engineering, rural medicine), which likely represent unachievable options for such students. In ways similar to the streaming and pathways proposed for the USA and long practised in Germany, Canadian provincial governments have tried to increase the number of young people entering training and careers in the skilled trades. Moreover, Canadian transition programs have also sought to address the limited affordances of higher educational provisions by redressing issues of equity and fairness in access to tertiary and higher education programs. Schemes and bursaries have been introduced to attract, for instance, more working-class and Aboriginal students into these programs. Yet, whilst these affordances are commendable, Lehmann holds that most of these transition schemes and programs are directly concerned with and focused on the development of human capital, and tend to neglect the creation of employment opportunities and the removal of barriers that restrict access to training, education, and employment. Moreover, he proposes that Canada's federal structure and largely decentralised policy environment has led to a lack of coherence in the development and delivery of these programs, which limits the achievement of their stated goals. In these ways, the affordances may seem piecemeal and partial and not systemic, and as such may not promote the kinds of engagement that are required by students.

As noted in Walther's chapter, some countries have well-established pathways that seek to secure productive transitions to lives beyond school. These pathways are often underpinned by societal sentiments that greatly value the outcomes to

which they are directed and enjoy significant institutional support across a number of levels (e.g. workplaces, educational institutions and in the home). Most noticeable are those countries with strong apprenticeship systems that are participated in by the majority of school students. There, school-to-work transitions are often shaped by two distinct stages: the transition from lower secondary school into basic vocational education and training (VET) (e.g. at age 15 or 16 years), and the transition from basic VET into full employment (e.g. at age 19–21 years). Whilst comparative VET research has praised the apprenticeship system for providing young people with smooth school-to-work transitions, a considerable part of youth, such as low achievers and socially disadvantaged young people (i.e. at-risk students), still face major problems at both stages of these transitions. It is the relations between what is afforded by these systems and how they are engaged with by such learners that are emphasised in Stalder's Chap. 7, 'School-to-Work Transitions in Apprenticeship-Based VET Systems: The Example of Switzerland'. Stalder commences by elaborating the affordances and bases of engagement in the Swiss apprenticeship system. She discusses how at-risk students manage their participation in basic VET, on the one hand, and VET-to-labour-market transition, on the other. This discussion includes an exploration of affordances comprising factors and circumstances protecting, promoting or reinforcing successful school-to-work-transitions. This includes taking into account individual and family background factors, as well as provisions involving training companies and vocational schools. She proposes that whilst all of these affordances collectively enhance successful school-to-work transition, those comprising supportive education and training conditions are the most important for students. This claim is advanced using data from the Swiss longitudinal youth panel study commencing with cohort data gathered in the year 2000. The initial sample of over 6,000 young people is representative of an entire Swiss grade 9 school leavers' cohort, whose school-to-work transition has been followed up until 2010. The findings suggest that VET-transition policies that aim to support at-risk youth in their school-to-work transition need to be reformed constantly to sustain their relevance as do the VET policies, programs and practices which support them. So, as with the German system and Canadian initiatives, structural changes and initiatives alone are insufficient without educational interventions and support to assist these learners engage in and be successful with what is being afforded them.

The centrality and positioning of such affordances and expectations of engagement are often captured explicitly in policy statements. In their Chap. 8, 'Governing Schooling, People and Practices: Australian Policies on Transitions', Thomas and Hay examine a selection of current Australian state and territory policy documents informing the provision of secondary education for young people (aged 15–17 years) in the transition from school to post-school work or study. Not having clear pathways, or the social means and personal capacities to make a productive transition from schooling can inhibit young people's participation in social and economic life thereafter. The particular focus of this chapter is an analysis of how these policy documents address the needs of students who are most at risk of not securing productive transitions. The review identifies that many of the goals emphasised the autonomy of students in taking control of their own transitions. However, as with

the policies discussed above, such individualistic views downplay the mediating role that access to cultural, social and economic capital is likely to play in the negotiations involved in making a productive transition. Thus, the needs of at-risk students who may have limited access to the forms of capital offering the best support for these negotiations are not well acknowledged in the policies.

The practices and experiences manifested by these policies are the focus of the contributions of the third section that reports and discusses the findings from a study of transitions in Australia. The previous chapter reviewed the policy context in which young people in Australia currently make the transition from senior schooling to post-school destinations. The project reported here was conceived in this context and sought to investigate: (a) what constituted 'productive transitions' from a range of perspectives in a number of communities and (b) how different curriculum practices in these communities helped young people in making productive transitions. This section draws on focus group and interview data gathered in the project that examines how the transition experience plays out in different communities and thus what can be learnt about creating opportunities for productive transitions for all young Australians. To introduce this study, Ryan, Johnson and Billett's Chap. 9 'Researching Transition Experiences in Australian Senior Schooling' outlines the approach and method adopted in the project. It details its overall aim and research questions, and for each of the case studies, the selection of schools and participants and curriculum emphasis within each school. The procedures adopted at schools and in interviews conducted with recent school-leavers are also described here.

The following three chapters report and discuss the three case studies. First, a case study of school-to-employment transition arrangements as revealed through interviews with teachers, parents and students in a coeducational private school in Queensland. The Chap. 10 entitled 'Excluded from the Game: A Case Study of Transitions for Non-tertiary-bound Students in a Queensland Private School' commences by locating the case study in the context of policy concerns about transitions for young people in Queensland. Hay and Sim then turn to an analysis of transition arrangements at the school, including those school-based policies and programs aimed at supporting transitions. Drawing on student and parent interview data, the case is made that structures to support transitions in some cases did not function effectively to facilitate transitions for students. Instead, they were limited by a number of practical implementation issues and the engagement of students themselves. This is a theme that emerges across this section. Despite access to abundant physical, social and cultural resources relative to other local schools, universal assumptions concerning appropriate transition pathways for students may, in fact, work against the goal of achieving secure transitions for certain kinds of students attending the school. For these students, school-to-employment transitions can be regarded as something other than an informed process of considerations supported by pertinent support and guidance.

Current national and international policies on transitions from school to post-school life stress the importance of providing diverse pathways. This emphasis is reflected in research literature that sees the transition process as involving the negotiation of diverse, complex pathways. This Chap. 11 by Thomas and Ryan entitled 'Pathways

and Choice: Transitions at Sunny Beach College' reports and discusses the provision of diverse pathways at Sunny Beach College: a secondary school in a regional coastal community in Australia. The chapter provides a brief description of Sunny Beach College, placing it in its regional context before outlining the school's approach to assisting students to make productive transitions from school to post-school life. In so doing, it details the affordances that this school provides for its students in supporting their diverse transition pathways. Students' accounts of their experiences, that is, their engagement with these affordances, are then examined to understand the relationship between the dualism of affordances and engagement. Data analysis identifies tensions between the school discourses on the transition experience constructed by teachers and parents and evidence in school documents and those constructed by the students as they moved through the senior phase of secondary schooling. School discourses were characterised by concerns about guidance, skill development and education, and reflected a commitment both to the dissemination of knowledge and to the provision of diverse pathways. On the other hand, student discourses, whilst acknowledging the importance of the school affordances, included concerns about the pressure that arose when making decisions about these pathways. It would appear that the provision of diverse pathways has negative, as well as positive, consequences for students' experiences of transition. Again, provisions of support that are open and responsive to a range of transition pathways are promoted here.

In the Chap. 12 entitled 'A Critical Focus on Family-School-Community Partnerships: St Jude's Secondary College Transition Program for "At-Risk" Students', Johnson and Billett outline a case study where a school, its families and to a lesser extent the immediate geographical community are focused on providing a supportive environment for ensuring productive transitions for their at-risk school-leaver cohort. For the most part, at the completion of their senior schooling, the young people profiled in this case opt to enter the workforce directly after leaving school. This post-Year 12 pathway mostly leads to further training, such as apprenticeships, or directly into paid employment requiring no further education in the foreseeable future. Through examining interview and focus group accounts by Year 10 and 11 students, their teachers, some parents and some employers, using a narrative-based methodology, a tension was identified between school and community affordances for ensuring productive transitions and opportunities for student agency. The chapter concludes with suggestions for securing a balance between what the school and community has to offer at-risk students (i.e. affordances) and what students can do to make effective transitions out of school (i.e. their bases and practices of engagement).

It was also important to identify the experiences of those who had withdrawn or had been excluded from the schooling system, because their perspectives are not represented in the school-based case studies. In Chap. 13, 'Making the Transition from an Interrupted Schooling Experience: Accounts from Recent School Leavers', Belterman, Ryan and Billett argue that a more thorough understanding of the factors which play a role in young people's experience of the school-to-work transition needs to take into account individual characteristics which affect how they cope

with their particular circumstances. Drawing on interviews with nine recent school-leavers whose circumstances might be considered to put them at risk of not making a successful transition from school to work, factors which they identify as influencing their decision to disengage from schooling before completing Year 12 and their experience of the post-school transition process are delineated and described. The findings show how individual factors can often enable young people to cope with, at times difficult, circumstances. This account emphasises how distinct kinds of negotiations young people enact between what is afforded them by schools, families and youth agencies, and how they elect to engage with them. This includes the decisions these young people make to opt out and then back into educational programs and practices.

Then, the final Chap. 14, 'The translation of transitions policies into school enactment', presents a synthesis of the themes and issues that have emerged from the transitions to post-school life for young people across the school sites. Sim and colleagues propose that although time and financial constraints limited the scope of the Australian project, the groups of young people whose perspectives and experiences we have documented, when juxtaposed with the views from parent and staff representatives at the schools which they attended, capture a diversity of takes on the transition process. Whilst much of this diversity is evident in comparative readings of the preceding chapters, common themes and issues are also evident. The process of teasing out these commonalities and developing ways of understanding them theoretically, arose through a consideration of differing purposes and affordances in this chapter. A synthesis of the case studies identifies not only a set of common themes, but also different purposes and affordances in each school setting. These accounts assist in realising key bases for progressing policies, enacted practices and means by which students are most likely to engage.

To provide some elaborations of the data about these affordances and bases of student engagement across the three cases, the following section focuses on the students' perceptions of what their schools and communities afforded and how they described their engagement in the transition process.

Students' Perceptions of School and Community Affordances and Personal Efforts in Transitions

It is often accepted that the most important curriculum concept is 'experienced curriculum'—what students experience and learn from what is planned and enacted by schools (Smith & Lovatt, 1990). Consequently, accounts from students about what experiences they are afforded through schooling, the kinds of community engagement they have and also accounts of their own actions stand as being important premises upon which to make judgements about how the provision of schooling shapes their learning (Shanahan & Hood, 2000; Stokes & Wyn, 2007). Of course, accounts taken in interview will always be only that—accounts rather than statements of objectified reality. However, by gathering, gauging and considering

accounts of students' experiences, it is possible to go beyond the accounts that teachers might provide for instance, about what they enacted (i.e. the enacted curriculum) and also the aims and goals of the school and its curriculum (i.e. the intended curriculum), as presented in documents and their websites. As noted, students were interviewed across the three school sites. The first set of informants comprised groups of students interviewed towards the end of Year 10. By this time, the students had made decisions about subject selection for Years 11 and 12 (their senior years of schooling). The second set comprised students in Year 11. In other words, all were potentially within 1 or 2 years of leaving school and needing to secure a productive transition to post-school life. Their responses were categorised under headings related to what was provided by the school, community (including parents and friends) and what they did in making informed decisions about and plans for their post-school transitions.

Affordances, as has been noted, are the kinds of experiences reported as being provided by the school and its nearby community. The engagement with the community includes engagement with friends as well as opportunities for part-time employment and work experience either paid or voluntary. It also includes the advice which comes from these sources about schooling and transitions to life beyond school. Finally, the actions that students take themselves in preparing to make the transition to life beyond school are considered. These include the personal agency which students exercise in seeking information and making decisions for the transition. From the students' perspectives, there are quite different educational intents being enacted across the three schools. The educational intents and enacted experiences of St Jude's College, for instance, do not focus on university entrance, unlike many of the educational purposes and efforts of the other two schools. Of these two, Sunny Beach College appears to afford students more choice and options, supported in different but balanced ways. Southside College seems to be directing its students to higher education entry and this purpose is privileged in what is afforded by the school, and also in what it de-emphasises (i.e. vocational education pathways). These affordances and the distinctions amongst them are now elaborated further.

School Affordances

At Sunny Beach College, students report bridges to post-school life being organised through the kinds of subjects that are available to them, the provision of guidance and support in making decisions about subject selection and pathways in the senior years and, where appropriate, the provision of experiences beyond the school. Students claimed that they can undertake subjects that clearly had intents associated with general learning outcomes likely to assist university entrance, and subjects that had a specific occupational emphasis that, in some instances, may also contribute to university entrance, but also provided preparation for more specific occupational courses or for direct employment. The students seemed to recognise and acknowledge these differences. They referred to a form of streaming which divided them into

provisions associated with university entrance and those that did not. The affordances provided at this school also included the provision of advice about pathways and, in some cases, the organising of experiences that assist students move directly into the workforce (i.e. school-based apprenticeships). Included here is the role of the careers teacher, the job guide and making accessible engagement in specific vocational education courses (e.g. veterinary nursing). Also at this school, comparisons were enacted between students' level of schooling performance (i.e. existing grades) and the specific entrance requirements for students' preferred university courses or tertiary education program. The students also referred to a specific subject 'Workplace' that aimed to prepare them to understand the world of work. So, the bridges provided here included an array of subjects that have distinct intents, and support and guidance and planning for post-school pathways.

The students reported favourably about these kinds of affordances at this school, yet claimed that they could be improved. They suggested that there should be tighter alignment between subjects and post-school outcomes. Also, they requested being actually able to experience the particular occupations about which they have become interested and were to invest significant effort and cost in trying to enter. Moreover, despite having a subject focusing on work, they wanted more discussion about life after school, including more information on different kinds of careers. All informants welcomed the support and planning for post-school experiences; some students commented that in both the subject selection and the state-wide planning process to aid and manage their transition (i.e. SET planning), they were being locked into particular options that they would not be able to change. So, the bridges to post-school life afforded by the school were clear and well signposted, with two distinct kinds of transitions that appear to be equally supported by the schools programs, yet they were quite fixed.

At Southside College, the student informants reported having access to both subjects with general and specific focuses. However, here they reported less of a balance between these two different pathways with a greater emphasis on university entrance. The subject selection was strongly in favour of this pathway. Hence, the bridges provided by the school were strongly directed towards that outcome. The provision of career support was well regarded by some students, but not others. They refer to the one-on-one support provided by the 'careers lady'. Yet, the engagement in a state-based process to map out their futures, including a consideration of vocational education options seemed to have been fairly perfunctory, as few students could recall the experience of engaging in this process. The students here, like those at Sunny Beach College, wanted to access and trial different kinds of work before making decisions that would lead to a particular occupation. They also requested having access to a broader range of views about the post-school world, than presumably those provided by their teachers. There was clearly uncertainty about the consequences of selecting particular subjects and the degree this would lead to particular outcomes, which they might not be able to be renegotiate later. Students also wanted projections about where their current level of schooling performance would leave them in terms of their university entrance scores. Capturing all of these concerns was the suggestion by some students that they needed the opportunity to

reflect on their progress and to be informed about the range of particular post-school pathways to which they might reasonably aspire. In this way, the affordances provided by the school appeared to be focused largely on university entrance and the process of engaging students in the decision-making and be informed about the range of options available to them, less emphasised, than say at Sunny Beach College. There appeared to be a concern that students were being herded towards one preferred pathway, and they wanted time to consider, reflect and contemplate the range of potential pathways before them.

At St Jude's College, the small cohort of students reported liking their school experience and the range of subjects and other experiences that were afforded them. All the students are enrolled in the same subjects together and many of them had specific occupational focuses and led to experiences and certification that were lined with particular kinds of occupations. There were subjects that provided a more general kind of preparation for the world of work beyond school (e.g. work education course), and the school's week was also organised so that one day was set aside for students to either engage in work experience or go to a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institution to take a specialised course. Moreover, the school itself offered vocational certificates in hospitality and retail. In contrast to Southside College, the students here reported that the school did much to provide an effective pathway between the school experiences and the world of work beyond school. This support extended to organising traineeships, job placements and paid part-time work. Here, the achievement of more general educational outcomes was directed towards the provision of a life skills course (i.e. personal management) and the school's engagement in the Young Achievement Australia program. The same state-based process of planning for post-school pathways, which was downplayed at Southside, had clearly engaged the students at St Jude's as the students reported participating in triads (i.e. teachers, parents, students) when engaging in this process. Yet, again, here, students also reported that they were concerned about being locked into the decisions they made during this process. So, it seems that the three schools afforded experiences and emphasised quite different post-school pathways. Whereas Sunny Beach College afforded a range of options, both Southside and St Jude's were more focussed. It seems that whereas St Jude's was explicit in its emphasis on vocational education and work-based pathways, Southside was also explicit in emphasising higher education pathways, and each school's affordances were aligned to these outcomes.

It is also noteworthy how these emphases were supported in the communities with which each of the three set of students engaged.

Community Engagement

The students at Sunny Beach College reported that the community in which they engaged outside of school provided quite specific forms of support for their post-school pathways. These experiences included opportunities to experience a range of forms of work and engage with individuals who could provide specific, informed

and authoritative career advice. Examples were provided about the benefits of engaging in authentic work experiences as students involved in veterinary nursing and coaching activities reported here. In both cases, these were experiences that were aligned with possible career options for these students. Other students were engaged in paid part-time work which they also viewed as having an educative dimension as well as providing remuneration. Some, but not all, claimed that this work helped develop skills for work in the future, albeit not the kind of work in which they were employed whilst still at school. One of the dimensions was that they learned the kinds of work that they did not want to be doing post-schooling. Advice from friends and parents was seen to be valued, and also from informed members of the community. Interestingly, much of the advice from outside of schooling was to emphasise the importance of staying on at school. So in this way, it seems that the community in which the students engaged provided opportunities that helped them make informed choices about their preferred occupations, the requirements to enter those occupations and also understand more about the world beyond school.

In a similar way, some students at Southside College also found contacts and advice from within the community outside of the school as being helpful in informing choices about the kinds of careers they might want to pursue beyond school. As for the other students, some of these were also advised by members of the community, including their own families, of the importance of staying on at school and securing good school results. Only one student reported engaging in work experience to sample a form of work that they were considering as an occupation beyond school. Some students also, like their counterparts at Sunny Beach, referred to the development of skills and capacities arising through that paid part-time/casual work. There was also an instance here of a process of discussion within the family referred to as a half-day conference which occurred in or around the time of subject selections. Others referred to assistance and advice coming from their families in terms of commitment to support the students in their preferred career choice. Yet, not all students had consulted with their parents about career choice at this time. Perhaps this is because many were more concerned about securing high school grades. Yet, here, there was also a parallel with the bridging provided by the school that was of a more general kind associated with university entrance, and less emphasis on particular university courses. A source of actual experiences was found in conversations with siblings and older friends and the kinds of outcomes they had realised post-schooling.

Students from St Jude's referred to the support provided by people in workplaces and how they had assisted them, even when they had made mistakes in their work experience or paid employment. They spoke about workplaces as being engaging and supportive. They referred to advice about post-school options provided by friends and acquaintances and also from those of their family. The emphasis on support was sustained in consideration of that provided by their families, the provision of support for considering particular employment options and understanding about them. In this way, the kinds of pathways provided by the community with which the students had engaged were seen as facilitating their decisions about particular post-school options, and, in particular, entry into the workforce. Again, this is quite

consistent with the aims of the school, and the kinds of programs that it enacted. So, in some ways, what was afforded by the schools and their communities was highly consonant, albeit in particular and distinct ways.

It follows that from a consideration of affordances and engagement, it is necessary to take account of how students elected to engage with what their schools and the communities in which they lived afforded them.

Personal Action and Agency

There appears to be a clear pattern in the responses from students at Sunny Beach College emphasising their responsibility to be informed about and participate in the processes and decision-making leading to their transition to life beyond school. For instance, some referred to the disposition of keeping an open mind about or trialling post-school options. A number of the students referred to engaging in an active process of researching various options and attempting to make informed decisions. They referred to accessing the Job Guide book and engaging actively in coming to understand the kinds of work that they might ultimately select as career choices, including the requirements to gain entry into that occupation. As noted, they also referred to concerns about being locked into particular choices arising from subject selection or the state-organised processes to assist them plan their post-school pathways. There was also acknowledgement of the importance of securing an apprenticeship, not as a second choice but as something which required effort and persistence. In using this language, the students seem to emphasise the importance of their role in identifying and securing pathways between schooling and post-school lives.

The most detached and disengaged set of responses across these interviews were those from Southside College, as the students almost to a person appeared under-informed and disengaged in making decisions about life after school. Moreover, they struggled to identify processes in which they had been actively engaged in considering specific outcomes (e.g. occupation or courses). The responses to questions indicate that these students' considerations of options beyond school seem to be narrow, potentially underdeveloped and unreflective, which seem surprising given that they had participated in similar processes of subject selection and the post-school planning as those at Sunny Beach College. Indeed, their recollections of these processes seemed commonly quite vague, seemingly reflecting the lack of emphasis on this process at that school. Moreover, their responses about post-school pathways were of quite a general order and rarely referred to specific occupations. Some, however, who had engaged in paid part-time work were able to refer to particular forms of work, most of which held little in the way of interest for them. Yet, despite this apparent disengagement and consistently more detached approach to decision-making, the students referred to the importance of being effective in their studies, questioning in their approach and reflective on that process and the importance of being independent to the degree that they are following their own interests, and not those of others who would have them follow theirs.

Reflecting the high level of care and support that the students from St Jude's received from both within the school and the community, they reported little in the way of being proactive in making their own bridges to life beyond school. Instead, the level of support they received seems to obviate the need for this kind of engagement. That is, they reported being well accommodated by institutions and the community, although one informant referred to reflecting upon the kinds of experiences they have had during a TAFE course. So, across these case students, the affordances of the community outside of the school and their impact upon the students were manifested in distinct ways, as elaborated in the next section.

Interrelationship Amongst School Affordances, Community Engagement and Student Action

The data synthesised from the student interviews indicates that there are relations amongst the contributions to assisting students make productive transitions beyond schooling from the school itself, the community in which students engage and the actions of the students themselves. That is, although these factors are seen as being in some way separate and shaped by their own imperatives, there is evidence of relationships here which provide different kinds of experiences. It seems that both Sunny Beach and St Jude's have extended the educational reach of their programs into workplaces and, in the case of St Jude's, to a local TAFE college, and that there are productive relationships operating between these two schools and the world into which their students will progress. Yet, even here there are differences. At Sunny Beach, it seems that students are being provided with a range of options, and they are being expected to take a role in engaging in learning from experiences, in ways quite different than is occurring at St Jude's. There are likely clear reasons for these differences pertaining to the educational purposes of the school and, perhaps, the capacities of the students. Southside College appears more focused in its educational intents upon providing pathways to higher education, and this focus appears to permeate the kind of relations that are built (or not built) with institutions beyond the school. Even the relatively unreflective attitudes of students at this college to their paid part-time work experiences, for instance, reflect examples of this privileging.

In all, it can be seen through these studies that institutional facts at the societal, community and school level shape the ordering, form and range of post-school pathways that are afforded high school students. It is these facts that provided particular kinds of affordances that were directed to distinct kinds of educational purposes across these schools. These facts also shape the bases for and premises by which the students came to engage with what was afforded them in the school and community in which the school is located. So, deliberate attempts at specific kinds of engagements, intents about particular pathways and distinct kinds of engagements with these often shape the scope of options available to students. It seems as though immersion in community and schooling circumstances may be a powerful combination of factors that shape the social experience of the student. It seems particular kinds

of immersion leads to particular outcomes, which may only work to serve both advantage and disadvantage more strongly. The data from those who left early, however, tell a slightly different story: one of selective engagement on the bases of personally premised decision-making, including opting out. All of this speaks directly to the kinds of deliberate educational interventions that have been discussed earlier to mediate and possibly ameliorate for such social shaping.

In conclusion, schooling policy and practice at the local level (i.e. school and community) may need to be re-doubled to secure productive outcomes for all students, especially in circumstances where low affordances exist, and narrow and limited pathways are evident. This is not to position students as wholly disempowered, and without discretion and agency, but that the social support required for effective transitions to post-school life likely needs to be stronger in some settings than in others. Without this support there may be deleterious impacts for students in those circumstances.

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Chapter 2
Reconciling the System World with the Life Worlds of Young Adults: Where Next for Youth Transition Policies?

Karen Evans

This chapter uses the evolving concept of bounded agency to assist a rethinking of 'social structures' in relation to human aspiration and capacities for change. Empirical encounters with groups of 18–25-year-olds in Britain and internationally[1] have formed the basis for extended dialogues between ideas and evidence in the search for new ways of conceptualising youth transitions. These explorations have taken place in contrasting societal contexts over several decades. A life course framework is increasingly being used to explain youth transitions. The life course approach understands the life-course as an interrelationship between individuals and society. It evolves 'as a time-dependent, dynamic linkage between social structure, institutions and individual action from birth to death' (Heinz, Huinink, Swader, & Weymann, 2009, p. 15). From this standpoint, the chapter develops an analysis of the scope young adults have for fulfilling their aspirations, and how they strive for these aspirations through their work and learning. Asking how system worlds can be better reconciled with the life worlds of young people provides a starting point for debate on how bounds on human strivings and aspirations can be loosened to release creative potential and realise broader and fairer forms of meritocracy.

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Reconciling Life and Personal Worlds

My earlier attempts to capture the features of youth transitions using metaphors of pathways, trajectories and navigations (Evans & Furlong, 1997) have given way to more contextual metaphors that recognise the complex dynamics of young people moving in changing social landscapes as 'bounded agents' (Evans, 2002, 2009). My focus on social landscapes is consistent with the Habermasian view of the life world as the world of the personal in which people live, move, communicate and have their being. How do people's life worlds develop? How do 'ordinary people' learn what they know, both tacitly and explicitly, and does this play out in their day to day lives? How do these life worlds relate to the system worlds dominated by political and economic institutions? Habermasian views see life worlds as 'colonised' by system worlds that draw people into frameworks of thinking and acting that are consistent with the dominant discourses of the time, and thereby the interests of the political and economic institutions that generate them. People are not directly impelled to subscribe to these accounts of the world or to legitimise themselves in their terms. However, advantages and penalties accrue from subscription or non-subscription in ways that people come to recognise. This subscription applies as much within the particular organisations that people work in as it does within the wider societal framework. The extent to which these processes become visible or not depends on the points of reference and comparison that people have available to them as they move in social landscapes. Different rationalities co-exist in the social world. The agency of young people is expressed in and through the social practices of everyday life, from peer group to the workplace. Their modes of participation reflect, in their quality and intensity, the life world and the system world in interaction.

Over several decades of research into life and work transitions, I have been privileged to hear and have access to the personal accounts of their lives offered by adults of all ages—young, mature and older adults. These accounts, have shown, in often dramatically contrasting life situations, how past habits and routines are brought into the present, and how future possibilities are envisaged, all within the contingencies of the present moment as events unfold day by day in people's lives (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Personal accounts show how people's priorities, preoccupations and beliefs play out in the shifting social landscapes of real life. While these accounts represent diversity, it is also possible to discern marked 'social regularities', the recurrent patterns that become apparent in life experiences and social outcomes within and between social groups.

Social regularities in the patterns of engagement in work and learning that are systematically revealed by large-scale survey research become much more difficult to interpret when they are connected to the voices and purposeful activities of people moving in their various, highly differentiated social landscapes. This is because survey or observatory research at national and trans-national levels rarely offers convincing accounts of localised social and cultural variations. They also do not recognise how changes in the social landscape trends can be linked to the contextualised exercise of human agency. The analysis of empirical encounters with research

participants as actors in a range of settings can, however, generate extended dialogue between ideas and evidence of different kinds. This approach draws on Ragin's (1991) comparative sociological method in ways that can shed new light on questions about human agency, the beliefs people have about their abilities to control their lives and the extent of individualisation taking place in different societies. The process of extended dialogue has led to an elaboration of the concept of bounded agency, complementary to the notions of 'structured individualisation' (Roberts, 1994) as a way of understanding the experiences of people in changing social landscapes. How does what people believe is possible for them (i.e. their personal horizons developed within cultural and structural influences) shape their behaviours and what they perceive to be 'choices'? Proponents of theories of 'reflexive modernisation' refer to a condition in which the growth of knowledge 'forces decisions and opens up contexts for action' (Beck, 1999, p. 110). As individuals are released from structures, they must 're-define their context for action under conditions of constructed insecurity' (Beck, 1998, p. 85). Counter arguments put forward by, for example, writers such as Furlong have pointed to the ways in which individualisation processes have deep structural foundations in gender, social class and ethnicity. Socially positioned lives reflect the power relations that exist in the wider society (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). These accounts, however, by focusing on factors that reflect and reproduce the underlying structural features and regularities of the social world, tend to downplay the everyday dynamics of the social landscapes in which people move. In these landscapes, spaces open up at the 'meso' level for variation and incremental change over time through the exercise of human agency (Doray, Bélanger, Biron, Cloutier, & Meyer, 2010; Evans, 2009; Evans, Behrens, & Kaluza, 2000). Some aspects of young adults' experiences of education and work, particularly those least powerfully placed in the social landscape, transcend national and cultural differences despite substantial variations in regulation and custom. Yet, agency in adult life also operates by engagements in and through the social world, the environments and institutional practices of everyday life in changing social landscapes. These negotiations between the life world and the system world shape what constitutes transitions and how they are enacted.

The second part of this chapter argues that bounded agency can be elaborated as a lens through which the life world dynamics of work, learning and social participation can be viewed in relation to the system world as a means of explaining transitions. Human agency is bounded in different ways. Some empirical encounters with young adults certainly show patterns of belief, behaviour and action in the social world that lend support to Goldthorpe's (1998) thesis that a subjective process of weighing up situations leading to 'rational action' is taking place. For young adults, whether unemployed, employed or in further or higher education, the labour markets and other features of the social landscapes display different pathways and openings which offer apparently rational options. But, these options are differently framed and perceived according to the position and orientation of the viewer. Options visible to some are invisible to others. Decision-making is also subject to all of the complex contingencies of the present moment that occur in the lives of young people. These, from time to time, can have critical and life-changing effects, particularly in the

lives of those in the most precarious and vulnerable positions, who are the least cushioned from negative consequences as our research into individual personal histories showed (Evans et al., 2000). In this respect, Bourdieu's accounts of how horizons are shaped are powerful in understanding how structures are represented and reproduced in the socially positioned lives that people lead (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). What these accounts miss, however, is an analysis of the dynamics of how horizons change over time.

A perspective on agency, which includes but is not defined by rational action and which views people as social actors engaging in multiple social practices while moving in social landscapes, suggests that the effect of cultures operating in the different institutional settings of education, employment and unemployment schemes may offer further explanations of the social regularities that are apparent in patterns of participation and labour market outcomes.

Transition Behaviours and Employment Outcomes

The extent to which young people succeed in developing longer-term occupational goals depends not only on their past socialisation in family and school, but also to a large degree on the way their identity formation has been linked to challenge and rewarding experience in the passage to employment itself (Evans & Heinz, 1994). If young people embark on risky voyages in a clearly defined progression of qualifications, based on their decisions, this tends to bring stability to the unfolding life course. If a diffuse, short-term sequence of activities is embarked on in a way which is reactive to immediate job demands and upheavals, the risks are far greater. Self-confidence in youth seems to arise out of success in completion of tasks, from occupational choice to labour market entry (Evans & Heinz, 1994; Schoon & Silbereisen, 2009). The timing of transition is dependent on the available jobs and the cultural norms about transitions, which influence the decisions of young people. For example, in England, parents and young adults have often viewed early transitions to an independent employment status commensurate with the level of education achieved, as most desirable. When quick accession to paid work becomes difficult, at times of high youth and graduate unemployment, various forms of training schemes and internships provide work substitutes. At the upper end, internships for those who can afford to work with little or no remuneration while forgoing rights to unemployment benefits are disproportionately available to those with social connections and family support (Lawton & Potter, 2010). At the lower end, youth training schemes have increasingly been made a condition for welfare support. Many young people, especially from working-class backgrounds, meet the requirement to participate in schemes which are in lieu of work with reluctance or distrust, as young people 'churn between welfare and the ever more slippery bottom step of the labour market' (Worth, 2005, p. 403). Furthermore, young people turn to other sources of identity stabilisation—that may be decoupled from the transition to employment—when they do not find the desired level of entry to work. This stabilisation may be provided, for instance, by peer groups or early parenthood.

My early analyses of youth transitions, carried out in the context of comparative studies, generated theoretical constructions illuminating the relations between transition behaviours—important elements of the young people's personal histories—and career outcomes. 'Transition behaviours' referred to the patterns of activity people adopt in attempting to realise their personal interests and occupational goals within social requirements and structural opportunities. They were 'a more or less adequate set of solutions to problems that started with educational achievement, occupational choice, looking for a training place, applying for jobs and qualifying for promotion' (Evans & Heinz, 1994, p. 211). Transition behaviours may change when there is failure to achieve the intended result at any stage of the process, and can be linked with career trajectories. Four broad transitional life trajectories of young people can be identified internationally: (a) the academic mainstream leading towards higher education; (b) training and education leading to skilled employment[2]; (c) other forms of education and training leading typically to semi-skilled employment; and (d) early labour market experience of low-skilled jobs, unemployment and 'remedial' training schemes. Four transition behaviours: (a) strategic, (b) step-by-step, (c) taking chances and (d) wait-and-see behaviours are activity patterns that young people tended to adopt when moving along trajectories into the labour markets.

Moving step-by-step is a common transition behaviour for young people in many national contexts (see Evans & Niemeyer, 2004). In England, step-by-step is encouraged by the fluid nature of the opportunities available. In countries with more institutionalised frameworks for youth transitions, such as Germany, step-by-step movement is encouraged by the highly structured system which offers alternatives in a longer time-frame for decision-making. Relatively few young people have crystallised their occupational goals by the age of 19. Where they have, proactive career strategies are encouraged by arrangements which set out clear and regulated pathways and criteria for achieving them. For those with well-defined occupational goals in less regulated societies, such as England, the ways of achieving them are often less transparent, and step-by-step behaviour is often, but not always, the response. Risk-taking can also be encouraged in different ways. Experimentation is more possible within institutionally supported transitions which provide safety nets. Taking chances with career and occupational choices in buoyant labour markets is less risky in the longer term than it is in an economically depressed area. In both cases, recovery would be possible, by virtue of institutional support in regulated systems and the operation of strong local labour markets in market-led, less regulated systems. The risks, therefore, can be calculated and are therefore less likely to be fatal if things go wrong.

I have shown previously how the interplay of the person's initial trajectory (through education and into the labour market) with the behaviours adopted during transition produces differentiated career patterns (Evans & Heinz, 1994; Evans et al., 2000). These behaviours can be progressive, stagnant or interrupted. They may involve upward drift in which the young person is in the right place, at the right

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[2] Dual system in Germany; work-based training and apprenticeships or further education college learning to vocational qualification in Britain.

time, to derive career benefits from their work context without any strategic planning or goal setting on their part; or, they may experience downward drift in the labour market, as setbacks are encountered which reduce the utility of their experience and qualifications. Career outcomes depend not only on the transition behaviours of young people but also on the institutional and labour market settings and social support available. Transition behaviours are influenced by labour market conditions, institutional structures and the operation of social networks. These behaviours differ substantially both within societies, according to geographical region and localised cultures, as well as between societies (Evans & Heinz, 1994; Green, 2002; Silbereisen & Tomasik, 2010).

Youth transitions in societies that are themselves undergoing fundamental transformations, for example from command economies to market economies as experienced under the political changes in Eastern Europe, pose the question: 'To what extent do more open conditions created by social and economic transformations encourage greater personal agency?' Those in 'transitional' positions (i.e. which could lead upwards or downwards) in societies that are themselves undergoing transition are more likely to improve their position through active transition behaviours, particularly where backed by family support or personal connections. The combination of step-by-step or wait-and-see behaviour with the taking of chances occurred frequently among young adults in these positions (Evans et al., 2000) as the person weighed up the unfamiliar situation before taking the chance, or proceeded cautiously and step-by-step having made the first, more risky leap into a more promising position. Conditions after these types of political change in parts of eastern and central Europe appeared to encourage various forms of personal agency among young people whose intended career paths had been diverted or terminated. Some young people were quick to pick up the 'signals' from the system and market, that active transition behaviours and 'going for it' were the best ways to maximise opportunity and reduce risks for young people who were already in precarious positions. This was particularly the case where access to family support and resources meant that mistakes were unlikely to be irrevocable. However, the 'open' labour market conditions were often not as open as might be expected. The young people who had experienced broken transitions into the labour market (often through closing down of opportunities in their chosen occupational pathway) often remained cautious about their future prospects, even where they had gained entry to the labour market, reflecting the unstable features of the secondary sector jobs that were most readily available to them. As Roberts (2003) also finds, the 'expected links between origins, routes and destinations have persisted throughout the transformation of the former communist countries' (p. 484). Social and familial resources continue to structure young people's chances and, tellingly,

> it remains, possible to observe how young adults learn from their own youth life stage transition experiences and, where applicable, use the assets that they acquire or retain, to advantage their own children thereby structuring the opportunities that confront all members of subsequent cohorts of young people (Roberts, 2003, p. 484).

Labour market conditions and socialisation affect the assessment young adults make as to what extent structural or individual factors influence life opportunities.

The belief in how open opportunities are for everybody plays an important role for the young adults' assessment for opportunities and control of their lives. Young people can increasingly find themselves in a double bind: a hostile labour market which effectively excludes unqualified young people but which can no longer sustain the training routes and social support previously provided for the large majority. The striving for work identities does not diminish, and there is evidence that frustration mounts for marginalised and excluded youth, as they churn between schemes and welfare with negative economic and social consequences (see, e.g. Behrens & Evans, 2002; Schoon & Silbereisen, 2009; Worth, 2005). There is, at the same time, a growth in casualised work opportunities available for unqualified adults. Ways into the labour market diversify and become more dependent on young people displaying the behavioural and attitudinal characteristics employers say they want, as well as qualifications. Active transition behaviours are important in overcoming setbacks for those already in precarious situations. The active transition behaviours most likely to overcome setbacks are those associated with taking chances in fluid and changing labour market conditions. Structural factors, however, remain highly significant in the shaping of life chances, and the outcomes of taking chances are just as likely to be downward movements from already precarious situations. Young people may be more likely to take calculated risks, but under very different individual pressures and circumstances. Decision-making is relative to their personal horizons and the subjectively perceived range of education and employment options available to them. While these decisions are not determined by social class or by the dynamics of the labour market, they have structural foundations which are manifested in life experiences and destinations in primary and secondary labour markets. Policies which promote active transition behaviours—urging people actively to search out opportunities beyond those that immediately present themselves—have to recognise the 'risk' side of the equation, and ensure adequate support if young people are not to be further disadvantaged by accepting the message that their own shortcomings are to blame for predicaments which are beyond their individual control. Many young people who respond quickly to systemic and market changes may start to take more chances, in individualised ways. Those without middle class, familial safety nets to support them or access to the privileges of unpaid internships obtained through social and family networks, need to have non-stigmatising forms of material support readily available, to ensure that they are not stretched beyond their capacities to deal with difficult life situations unaided.

Pathways to work have become more socially segmented in many societies and the risks of underemployment and joblessness have increased and widened in scope, to touch the lives of vocationally and academically qualified young people and adults (Côté, 2002; Heinz, 1999). Only at the extreme ends of the spectrum of advantage and disadvantage are pathways and destinations relatively unaffected by the social changes of the time. For many, social and gender inequalities restrict the possibilities to take advantage of career options, even where these are apparently available. More differentiated accounts of individualisation are needed, which do not fall into the trap of assuming unilinear modernisation in the developed world and uncritical application of Beck's (1992, 1998) version of reflexive modernisation

in other societies. The process of elaborating the different dimensions of agency and control in human lives through a range of empirical encounters sheds further light on the realities of youth transitions in contrasting social contexts.

Agency and Feelings of Control in Human Lives

At the outset of this chapter, I pointed to the ways in which social regularities revealed by survey research become much more difficult to interpret when they are connected to the voices and purposeful activities of social actors moving in highly differentiated social landscapes. Agency is often understood rather simplistically as input from individuals to various social processes, emphasising those aspects of social engagement which are predominantly individual, creative and proactive and which involve resisting external pressures. The expanded concept of agency as 'a temporally embedded process of social engagement' (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 964) in which past habits and routines are contextualised and future possibilities envisaged within the contingencies of the present moment, leads to a socially situated understanding of human agency. Agency is influenced, but not determined by, structures; it involves internalised understandings and ways of interpreting the world as well as external actions. These understandings are developed in and through social practices in multiple environments and social settings as people move in social landscapes. The dynamics of social landscapes thus both generate and encapsulate the limits and the possibilities of human agency.

The concept of control is closely related to conceptualisations of human agency. Control beliefs can be understood as subjective representations of the person's capabilities to exercise control (Flammer, 1997). This is distinct from the actual exercise of control, which can be considered as the regulation of process. According to Flammer, control beliefs can be conceptualised as a composite of contingency and competence beliefs. Contingency beliefs are beliefs in the probability that certain actions will affect outcomes in particular ways. Competence beliefs are the beliefs people have about their capabilities to act in ways which will produce the probable outcomes. In youth transitions, personal beliefs in competence as well as beliefs about the extent to which 'your own weaknesses matter' fundamentally affect choices that are made at key decision points, particularly when a high degree of uncertainty is involved (Evans, Behrens, Rudd, & Woolley, 2004; Evans et al., 2000).

In Beck's (1992, 1998) outline of an emergent 'risk society', the emphasis was placed on the increased uncertainty and unpredictability of the individual's life course. The person learns to 'conceive of him or herself as the centre of action, as the planning office with respect to his/her own biography' (Beck, 1992, p. 135) trying to minimise risk and maximise personal opportunities. Beck believed that individualisation heralded the dissolution of factors traditionally seen as determining many aspects of life in industrialised societies—class culture and consciousness, gender and family roles. In England, this work was paralleled by Giddens' more critical accounts of reflexive modernisation (Giddens, 1991, 1998). Indeed, Furlong and

Cartmel (1997) and Engel and Strasser (1998) have both contested these accounts of individualisation as misleading and reflective of an epistemological fallacy; the social world has only come to be regarded as unpredictable and filled with risks that can only be negotiated on an individual level, while, in fact, structural forces operate as powerfully as ever and the chains of human interdependence remain intact.

A conceptual scheme for further investigation of the individualisation thesis uses the three dimensions of (a) structure-agency, (b) internal-external control and (c) social reproduction-conversion to shed light on these phenomena (Evans, 2002, 2009). The next section considers these dimensions of agency and structure in relation to youth transition processes.

The Shaping of Youth Transitions: Three Dimensions

The first dimension of the structure-agency relations is reflected, at its extremes, in social determinism versus individualisation and reflexivity in social biographies. The starting point for the individualisation thesis is usually attributed to Beck's outline of the risk society (Beck, 1992, 1998) and its manifestation in the uncertain life situations of people. Baethge (1989) took this thesis further by applying it to the situation of youth in industrialised societies and the structural disintegration of social classes or strata into 'individualised' sub-groups, accompanied by the formation of individualistic identities at the expense of collective identity. As proponents of the idea that people are agents actively and individually engaged in the construction of their own biographies, Beck and Baethge (1989) privilege agency over structure within this dimension, while Ziehe's (1996) concept of 'makeability'—reflected in how young people 'stage' themselves for the outer world—places much greater emphasis on internal control struggling with social forces that have structural foundations. The latter view also predominates in the work of Wyn and Dwyer (1999) who propose that many young people are increasingly proactive in the face of uncertainty, finding ways to maintain their aspirations despite the structural influences upon them.

The second dimension for investigating the individualisation thesis emphasises internal versus external control processes. Bandura (1995); Elder (1995); Flammer (1997); Rothbaum, Weisz, and Snyder (1982); Heckhausen and Schulz (1995); and other efficacy researchers have emphasised internal processes of the 'acting individual' in relation to the external environment. There are limitations to personal control in all domains of life. Some aspects of environment and personal circumstances are extremely difficult to change. Others can be overcome by the exercise of initiative and learning. Social psychologists and sociologists who emphasise adaptive processes in human development explore the intersection of agency and the internal processes that underpin individual action (e.g. Côté, 2002; Elder, 1995). Those who place greater emphasis on the external limits on internal processes explore the relationships between social structures and the social processes involved in individual adaptation. Researchers who attempt to hold all of these processes in view within a life course approach to youth transitions include Schoon and Silbereisen (2009), and Jones (2009).

The third and final dimension places the focus on social reproduction-conversion, exploring the degree to which social mobility and transformation can be attributed to individual and collective scope for action. Rational choice theorists such as Goldthorpe (1998), who emphasise the overriding importance of analysing the conditions under which actors come to act, are positioned far along the social reproduction dimension while acknowledging the subjectivities inherent in feelings of control and agency-structure and the interplay of internal and external factors. Goldthorpe's position overlaps to some extent with economists' perspectives that focus on the need to achieve a better understanding of the operation of incentives. Social reproduction is also a dominant theme in Furlong and Cartmel's (1997) epistemological fallacy thesis which shares some precepts with Bourdieu's (1993) emphasis on social reproduction. The latter also attaches high importance to structural influences but gives more attention to exploring the feelings of control and subjectivities of the acting individual. All of these accounts explore relationships between the 'life world' and the 'system world' in different ways and from different angles. In so doing, they illuminate the ways in which agency is exercised through the structures of the system, recognising that selective social processes 'sift and sort people' (Settersten & Gannon, 2009) in ways which may close down or open up the horizons which shape action and the life chances that lie beyond them.

Bounded Agency: Focusing on How Individual Agency Can Be Supported Without Losing Sight of the Structuring Effects of Contexts

The exploration of individualisation and risk requires a better understanding of social regularities and individual differences in the agency of individuals, their decisions and actions and the consequences of these. All social transitions entail risk of losing personal control, with effects dependent on biography and on material (i.e. economic) and social situations (Elder, 1995). The empirically grounded concept of bounded agency sees the social actors as having a past and imagined future possibilities, which guide and shape actions in the present. Bounded agency is agency that is influenced, but not determined by structures, that is motivated by internalised understandings and frameworks as well as external factors. Bounded agency operates in differentiated and complex ways in relation to the individual's subjectively perceived frames for action and decision, recognising that these change over time. These frames have boundaries and limits that not only have structural foundations in the socially positioned lives people lead, according to gender, ethnicity and social inheritance/class but also in characteristics developed through education and wider experience. Subjective perceptions of the structures they have to negotiate, the social landscapes in which they move, fundamentally affect how people act. As bounded agency emphasises internalised frames of reference as well as external actions, the focus it provides in examining the effects of risk and uncertainty in the life course

moves from structured individualisation onto individuals as actors, without losing the perspective of structuration.

As actors move in social landscapes, spaces open up for actions which are not wholly reducible to the effects of social reproduction or underlying structural features. There are some constraints in a social landscape that will be very difficult to move or remove, but others might be reduced through social and educational policies. Societies need to ensure that the greatest demands to 'take control of their lives' do not fall on those who are the least powerfully placed in the social landscape they inhabit. Bounded agency places the spotlight on the experiences people have of exercising control and agency in life and work settings and how this links with the ways in which they are socially positioned as employees (actual or potential), learners and citizens. By focusing our attention on how people with agentic beliefs about work and their social environment encounter frustrations in acting upon them, the social processes involved in bounded agency can potentially be elaborated in ways that inform research, practice and policy.

Rich empirical encounters with young adults experiencing transitions involving further or higher education, employment and, in many cases, periods of under-employment or unemployment have involved survey, in-depth individual interviews and recorded group discussions. Data from these encounters have been analysed using a range of qualitative and quantitative techniques, as part of the long-term research programme supported by UK Research Council Major Awards, Anglo-German Foundation and Anglo-Canadian research, EU funded projects and related research at national and international level (1989–2010). This programme of research has focused on variations in transitional experiences and life chances of young people and adults. The structural foundations of transitional experiences are consistently revealed in the analysis of personal accounts over time, particularly when evidence sources are combined. For example, many people, particularly young men, believe the effects of gender in life chances are outweighed by the effects of educational qualifications, effort and performance. More generally, awareness of gender influences runs through personal narratives that in other respects emphasise individual responsibility for success and failure in the labour market, with a sense of acceptance by both young women and adults that a reality of working life is the need to prove oneself more as a female. Findings from the research studies carried out in the 1990s with young people making transitions in education and employment consistently highlighted gendered experiences (see, e.g. Wallace's, 1994 analysis). A later study (Evans, 2006) showed the survival of women in male-dominated occupations was often attributed to their ability to rise to this challenge of proving themselves, with exceptional resilience often required in the face of gendered practices and assumptions. This resilience was also required, in different ways, by males entering female-dominated fields such as childcare. While powerful discourses around gender have emerged in many of the empirical encounters, there were differences in emphasis in the perceptions of scope and limits for choice and equality of treatment between individuals. Many more women than men give priority to child-rearing possibilities as something they want from work in all areas (Woolley, 2005);

there is little evidence in this research of the emergence of the 'new man' who pays close attention to family considerations when talking about career options.

Social class awareness has also been shown to be mixed in with family and gender dimensions in complex ways, with much reference to the importance of 'social connections' and the invisible social factors, beyond qualification and competence, which affect success. Important questions to ask are: How and why do young people change their job expectations, in different societal contexts? How independent are they of their parents? Young people in the United Kingdom do not generally discuss their life experiences directly within a social class perspective, but most are aware of the influences, of their parents' occupational background on their own prospects and preferences (Evans, 2009). The effects of 'framing' in limiting what might be seen as possible from any particular social position (Bloomer, 1999) also comes through strongly in analysis of empirical encounters. But, equally there were many indicators that forms of social capital are seen as being convertible and expandable through qualifications, making new connections and taking chances. This circumstance was highlighted in the views, expectations and experiences expressed in a wide range of interviews and group discussions. However, limits were also recognised, differentially according to social group, with much scepticism about the idea that 'talent always rises to the top' coupled with awareness of the social influences involved.

The evidence discussed so far suggests that reflexive processes operate in differentiated and complex ways in relation to the individual's subjectively perceived frame for action and decision. Thus, a person's frame has boundaries and limits which change over time, but which have structural foundations in ascribed characteristics such as gender and social or educational inheritance, and in acquired characteristics of education and qualification and the segments of the labour market into which these lead. Also, adults in market economies, particularly those with broken or 'downward drift' occupational biographies, are unlikely to be able to identify with any stable group that can provide a voice or platform for action (Roberts, 1994). In this and other respects, the hypothesis that a structured individualisation process is apparent in the experience, values and behaviour of young people is supported. Previous metaphors (Evans & Furlong, 1997)[3] underplayed the importance of the different domains of life, of horizons and group affiliations. The conceptualisation of people as social actors moving in social landscapes calls for metaphors which can capture internalisation of horizons and that possibilities matter as much as external action, and change over time. As social actors in changing social landscapes, people perceive the horizons not only from where they initially stand in the landscape but also according to where their journey takes them. Where they go depends on the pathways they perceive, choose, stumble across or clear for themselves, the terrain and elements they encounter. Their progress depends on how well they are equipped, the resources and help they can call on and those with whom they associate themselves.

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[3] This portrayal and analysis also apparently resonated beyond the English speaking world, given the reproduction of an edited version in the French language journal *Lien Social et Politique*.

Contradictions arising from interfusion of agency and structural influences are sometimes apparent in the people's views and beliefs. Dualistic treatments of structure and agency quickly become problematic, as agency is exercised through structures rather than within them.

'Life Chances' and Beliefs About Opportunity

In empirical encounters, while some disbelief is expressed about the workings of so-called meritocracy, most young people—whether employed, unemployed or still in education—tend to attach importance to individual effort. They express the belief that if people worked hard and achieved suitable qualifications, then they should be able to follow their own independent pathway in adult life. The significance of social connections, forging them and 'making them work for you' as well as the importance of image and self-presentation are much emphasised, often on the basis of observations of what makes others successful in their careers. Young people, irrespective of their location, are certainly not blind to the influences of economic and social structures, but the least advantaged emphasised that they have to be realistic in their individual aspirations and goals. We found little sense of fatalism expressed in our analysis of thousands of interpersonal interactions recorded in the course of the group interviews with 18–25-year-old research participants in English and German cities, as part of the Anglo-German series of studies (see Behrens & Evans, 2002; Evans, 2009; Evans, Behrens, Rudd, & Woolley, 2001; Evans et al., 2004). Frustrated agency and struggle characterise the day-to-day experiences of many of the young people who are in disadvantaged situations. In explaining the individual attributions of success and failure within socially structured environments and the almost universal recognition of the importance of qualifications, the lens of bounded agency sheds light on the socially situated processes that lie behind these attributions, shaped by the experiences of the past, the chances present in the current moment and the perceptions of possible futures.

The concept of structured individualisation accounts for the variety of experiences and incidences of interrupted or broken transitions in all social groups as well as for the class-based and gender-based linkages in planning orientations and horizons. It shifts the attention back onto the operation of structures rather than focusing attention on how the dynamics of agency and the agency-structure interfusion work together in the social world. The expanded notion of bounded agency recognises that the acting individual or group is socially situated, but not socially determined. Agency understood in this bounded way expresses itself in the social landscape through the dynamics of multiple, interlocking socio-biographical journeys in a social terrain. This understanding makes a conceptual advance in ways of linking social change and individual lives. This advance also goes beyond previous assumptions of life course paradigms which have asserted 'that developmental processes and outcomes are shaped by the life trajectories people follow, whether reflective of good or bad times' (Elder, 1995, p. 49). Examining the convergences of multiple influences in the social

terrain, suggests that these are mutually reinforcing and reciprocal. For example, ambitious goals and endeavours are likely to appeal to people who have strong control beliefs and not to those lacking self-confidence. In turn, the progress in working towards goals of this kind tends to further enhance a sense of personal agency.

Social relationships also structure experience and interlock with personal constraints in complex ways, while external influences and constraints can turn into modes of agency through a process of internalisation, in ways that reflect the complex intertwining of life worlds and system worlds (Habermas, 1996). This applies particularly in the domain of research into work, where the human agency of employees is sometimes acknowledged, but rarely explored or well understood. An understanding of how human agency is exercised in the working lives of young adults requires insights into the realities of work: how employees understand and make sense of their work; how they respond to the structures imposed on them; how they use their skills, knowledge and emotions; how they respond to pressure, routine and monotony (Noon & Blyton, 2002).

Experiencing Working Life and Learning at Work

The engagement of young people with work often starts with part-time work while at school and continues through the search for employment opportunities into the actual work positions of early adult life. The significance of the social practices in which young people engage during these work episodes is often neglected in the study of youth transitions.

These practices involve fundamental learning processes, as people, young and mature, experienced and inexperienced, increase their capacities by contributing to evolving work practices. They strive, become, and perform while personalising and remaking work activities day by day. Interdependence at work between members of work groups and teams rests, at least in part, on the worth of the work engaged in, to individuals. This worth is often not well reflected in indicators such as hierarchies and rewards (Billett, 2006, p. 263). Young people's sense of self-worth and their own goals are most likely to be key drivers for their engagement in work, with social and family support being important enabling factors (Woolley, 2005). People find meaning and purpose and exercise their agency within forms of work of all kinds, including those which are not highly regarded in terms of their social standing. Different rationalities operate within work and workplaces: many people find spaces and means for self-fulfilment within jobs that would be experienced by others as demeaning. For many young people, just getting a foothold in the labour market gives feelings of personal control which are rarely experienced within full-time education. Opportunities for individuals to engage in work and ways of working which suit their purposes are relational depending upon the individual's circumstances, age, skills, capacities and social circumstances. Yet social regularities do have to be critically examined, to reveal how security of tenure, types of skill that are recognised and attract high pay are distributed by age, ethnicity and social class background.

Inequalities according to social positioning are very evident in workplace participatory practices (Billett 2002). The distribution of invitations, opportunities and support for participation in various workplace practices often reveals insider and excluded groups; the dark side of the ways in which relations between the individual and social play out in particular organisational contexts has also to be kept in view in considering the role of work in youth transitions.

The improvement of performance is a key driver in most contemporary work organisations. This is part of a distinctive organisational rationality which tends to ignore the significance of employees' experience, and has a narrow view of what constitutes the appropriate exercise of human agency (or 'initiative' at work). Furthermore, this experience is often at odds with the rationalities operating in their day-to-day work activities. Young people identify pressure to perform, 'knowing you can be easily replaced' is a shared feature of early employment experience (Evans et al., 2004). Attempts to foreground individuals' agency and intentionality more can humanise, lead to richer learning and lessen the counterproductive effects that stem from imposition of the dominant rationality of top-down performance management. Intentionality, experience and human agency are all present in the work of employees and need to be taken into account by planners and policy makers if they want to optimise engagement of young employees in effective work practices. As Edwards and Boreham (2003) have argued, localised experiences and subjectively defined purposes, individual and collective, lie behind motivation and directed efforts in all the domains of life, including the workplace.

The studies drawn upon in this chapter have not set out to study the rationality, objective or subjective, of young people's decision-making. Instead, they have revealed the apparent rationality of perceptions and actions of individuals in relation to features of labour markets and their positions in the social landscape. The changing but bounded aspirations and expressions of agency that vary according to position in the social landscape are also influenced by collective experiences in peer groups and in work settings. There are some important indicators of 'collectivities' in perceptions of the social landscape and common experiences which are well articulated by young people (and may therefore be surmised to be well internalised). Roles and social relations may be continuously redefined as part of the strategy to take control of their lives, and these redefinitions may have collective and cultural features. Furthermore, social and cultural inheritance may be converted into action in new but socially differentiated and bounded ways.

Policy Implications

The more insecure and flexible systems of advanced liberalism (as exemplified by the English labour markets) necessitate greater proactivity and the maintenance of the positive approach to 'opportunities'. This arises out of individual attributions of success and failure, which are themselves linked with beliefs that 'opportunities are open to all'. But as actors move in these social landscapes, spaces open up for action

that are not wholly reducible to the effects of social reproduction or underlying structural features. The concept of bounded agency provides a focus for further consideration of policy issues. Young adults manifest agentic beliefs in relation to work and their social environment, but many encounter frustrations in expressing or acting upon them (Evans et al., 2001). There are obviously constraints that affect the young particularly as they try to find and construct their place in the changing social landscape. There are other constraints that make it very difficult for young adults who have broken career histories and have spent significant amounts of time out of the labour market to re-establish themselves in occupations and gain just recognition for what they have to offer. Many of these constraints are embedded in the underlying structures and will be very difficult to influence or remove, but others might be reduced through actions of key players at a local level. Policy initiatives can give legitimacy to different ways of thinking about the predicament of those who are most vulnerable in society. For example, policies designed to ensure that the greatest demands to take control of their lives do not fall on those who are the least powerfully placed in the landscape would require agencies working both with young adults and mature adults to emphasise brokerage and advocacy on behalf of young people as a primary aim and function. Policies that can respond adequately to socio-economic changes could adopt a broader and longer term view in ways that are informed by empirical evidence on the multiple influences on life course patterns and their dynamic interaction over time, while keeping in view the social returns to different forms of learning at different life stages. This includes keeping in view the ways in which particular educational experiences provide platforms for later development and can contribute to stability or instability in the life course. While for some people staying on in higher education is associated with personal development, for others the attainment of early financial independence is a primary goal and driver. There is also evidence to suggest that increasingly young people with good academic competences, including those from privileged and less privileged backgrounds, are becoming disengaged from school, and are not motivated to pursue an academic career (Schoon, 2008). Not all young people are able or willing to prolong their childhood dependence until their mid or late twenties, and there is need for flexible measures acknowledging differences in pacing and timing of education participation. Some young people with high ability and high expectations are leaving school early in order to make a living, although they might return to education at a later stage in their lives (Schoon, Ross, & Martin, 2009). Hence, identifying effective policies will include (a) an integrated policy approach, instead of a concentration of efforts on selected problems; (b) consideration for the interaction between labour market changes and other aspects of the transitions of adulthood, such as living arrangements and family formation; (c) consideration of 'outsiders' and minority groups and approaches that facilitate participation; (d) support for second and third chances, enabling recovery and repair after a problematic start or unforeseen setbacks; and (e) opportunities for lifelong learning that expand human capacities and facilitate the upgrading of knowledge as well as reskilling.

The responsibilities exercised by people in and through the transitions of early adult life—in work, housing, social participation—entail mutual responsibilities

and interdependencies of purpose expressed through social practices in overlapping domains of life—from peer group to the workplace (Evans, 2009). These engagements reflect, in their quality and intensity, the life world and the system world in interaction. Life worlds have been colonised by the system world, but very imperfectly. Although the workings of modern capitalism have become increasingly difficult to read (indeed, Sennett, 1998 refers to their 'illegibility'), there is high level of awareness of these pressures and contradictions among young people. What happens when the system world starts to become too far removed from the aspirations of ordinary people is shown in many parts of the world. Policies continue to espouse the importance of individual agency through individual responsibility—but loosening the bounds on agency also means bringing the system world closer to the life worlds of ordinary people.

Summary and Conclusions

Transitions can be explored in relation to the thesis of individualisation, or hypotheses about the extent to which a process of de-standardisation of the life course can be said to be taking place. Longitudinal patterns—reflecting the social regularities discussed earlier—can increasingly be identified through birth cohort studies that are now able not only to track people through most of the life course but also to compare patterns and life course trajectories in different generations. This enriches the possibilities for extended dialogue between ideas and evidence, to come to a view about the scope people have for fulfilling their aspirations, and the ways in which they strive for this through work and learning. As youth shades into adult life, confidence continues to stem from cumulative experiences of success in roles, from feelings of control in personal decision-making about jobs and experiences in job changes as employment structures and work contexts change. The converse is also true as people encounter setbacks in the labour market, which cumulatively undermine confidence as people are positioned as deficient in relation to labour market or system demands. Some aspects of adults' experiences, particularly those least powerfully placed in the social landscape, transcend national and cultural differences despite substantial variations in regulation and custom. Yet agency, the desire to change things for the better through action in the social world, also operates through the connections people forge with each other in the social world, the environments and institutional practices of everyday life in changing social landscapes. While human capacities for action are bounded and constrained in the extent to which they can affect people's lives for the better, they are also potent forces in a changing social world.

A pluralist framework for understanding the processes and consequences of learning through the life course has to acknowledge, first, that development takes time and that it reflects cumulative experiences (e.g. the accumulation of individual resources such as educational credentials or capabilities). Second, the social contexts within which human development is embedded range from interactions with

significant others to macro-social circumstances. Third, life course transitions, such as from school to work or work to retirement, are not only shaped by institutional and labour market structures but also involve developmental tasks that challenge the individual actors as well as regulatory frameworks. Fourth, individual decision-making is both constrained and enabled by social institutions and wider macro-social conditions (Evans, Schoon, & Weale, 2010).

The lens of the risk society offers a vision of human beings who are condemned to processes of individualisation to survive in the modern world. A life world lens offers a richer vision in which the bounds on human strivings and aspirations are loosened to release creative potential and realise broader and fairer forms of meritocracy. This situation requires fundamental rethinking of the dynamics of work, learning, achievement and responsibility in society. Theorising about society and the social relations of learning and work has shown how the aspirations and strivings of ordinary people can make a difference and that turning or tipping points are always within reach, at some level. Herein lies the significance of social movements in the modern world. Furthermore, when assumptions that underpin public policy set the system worlds against the life worlds of large numbers of ordinary people, and when these ordinary people increasingly include large sections of the middle classes as well as those less powerfully placed, governments put their electability at risk and rediscover the need to bring politics closer to the people. Evidence, ideas and the polity can mobilise political thinking in new directions, can engage and persuade as policy makers search for the new 'big idea'. In the modern world, asking how system worlds can be better reconciled with the life worlds of young people provides a starting point for public debate on how transitions can better be supported through public policy.

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Chapter 3
Bridging School and Work: A Person-in-Context Model for Enabling Resilience in At-Risk Youth

Christopher DeLuca, Nancy L. Hutchinson, Joan Versnel, Jennifer Dods, and Peter Chin

Youth, Education, and Employment

This chapter proposes a person-in-context model that addresses how work-based education (WBE) can promote a context of resilience for at-risk youth. The model comprises three overlapping domains: (1) individual, (2) social-cultural, and (3) economic-political. In the context of school, at-risk students typically perform significantly below expected achievement standards, are disengaged from school, experience school as a context of adversity, and often demonstrate poor attendance (O'Connor, 2003). WBE is held to offer a protective context that enables these young people to effectively navigate and negotiate influential factors within each of the domains as they transition from school to work. Our practical goal in proposing this model is to address the vexing question: Which WBE programs are most likely to lead at-risk students to successful transitions into meaningful work? Underpinning this question is an assumption that the match between WBE programming and young people's individual needs is a critical feature for successful transitions. We define successful transitions as those in which at-risk students experience resilient contexts that address students' adversity and that lead to labor market attachment.

The youth employment problems of the past decade have been intensified by the recent financial crisis of 2009 with young people now more than three times as likely as adults to be unemployed across many countries (Scarpetta, Sonnett, & Manfredi, 2010). The Organization for Economic and Cultural Development (OECD) reported

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in 2010 that "the global economic crisis has hit youth very hard," especially at-risk young people, including unskilled school-leavers and school dropouts (Scarpetta et al., 2010). Large-scale studies estimate that these at-risk young people currently make up about 25% of youth in the United States and Canada (Burstein, 2005; Saunders, 2008; Scarpetta et al., 2010). Recent employment outcome data from the United States suggest that only about 40% of at-risk youth are employed as they become young adults (Pungello et al., 2010). These trends are paralleled in other parts of the world (International Labor Organization, 2006; OECD, 2010).

Both developed and developing economies have been challenged to create decent and sustainable jobs for large numbers of young people entering the labor market each year (Ekundayo-Thompson, 2009; Kahn, 2011). Even countries like Canada, whose economies are recovering quickly from the events of 2009, have youth unemployment rates that are twice the rates for adults (Scarpetta et al., 2010). Investigations have pointed to two main issues contributing to youth unemployment. The first issue relates to the disengagement of young people from education through a deficit model that holds them responsible for their disengagement. The second issue is a changing labor market that can no longer absorb young workers with minimal qualifications, especially those who disengage and leave high school before graduating (e.g., Kahn, 2011; McGinty & Brader, 2005). This issue is usually viewed as focusing on the broader social, political, and economic contexts and factors that shape transition.

Research has been conducted on each of these two issues in relative isolation, although studies on each issue often acknowledge the importance of the other. Researchers in education, social work, and psychology focus on outcomes for individuals and study the disengagement of young people. Their findings have identified many risk factors that contribute to individuals dropping out of school, including low academic achievement, discouragement in school, poor physical and mental health, disabilities, and poverty (Bowers, 2010; Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989; Serbin et al., 2010). Research within sociology and economics that focuses on contextual and systemic features points to weak linkages between education and the labor market (e.g., Raffe, 2008; Smyth, Gangl, Raffe, Hannan, & McCoy, 2001) with factors of globalization and the growth of the knowledge economy cited as influential in making more difficult the transition process (Ashton & Green, 1996; Te Riele, 2011).

The current situation worldwide points to the need for transition systems that bridge the contexts of school and work. While there have been practical efforts to implement transition systems for at-risk students in many developed countries (e.g., Connexion in Great Britain; Rodger & Cowen, 2005) and in developing countries (e.g., peace project; Ekundayo-Thompson, 2009), there has been notably little theoretical research on the mechanisms and structures that facilitate successful transitions from school to work for vulnerable young people. Furthermore, researchers who have addressed the conceptual basis of school-to-work transition have done so either through a macrocosmic (i.e., macro) perspective or through a microcosmic (i.e., micro) perspective. Macro frameworks

emphasize systemic structures as key influences in young people's transition to work whereas micro frameworks emphasize individual and person factors as influential to their engagement in the labor market (cf. Giddens, 1976; Goldspink & Kay, 2004). While each perspective is important in understanding school-to-work transition, neither provides a comprehensive approach that enables researchers and practitioners to understand both person and context facets in school-to-work transition simultaneously.

Therefore, perhaps unsurprisingly, prominent social scientists including Pintrich (1994) and Ford and Smith (2007) have urged researchers to develop integrative conceptual models that connect important constructs usually studied in isolation. This approach has been variously described as *a living systems model* (McCombs, 1991) and a *person-in-context* model (Ford & Smith, 2007). Person-in-context perspectives attempt to explain how environments and individuals act on each other and can only be understood together (Magnusson & Stattin, 1998). Accordingly, our purpose here is to develop a person-in-context model for understanding WBE as a context of resilience for at-risk students in transition from school to work. Our aim in developing this model is to address the current theoretical gap in the literature on transition systems by considering both individual and contextual issues in tandem and to present a more comprehensive framework for understanding at-risk young people's transition into the labor market.

Researchers focusing on individual and contextual issues appear to concur on two matters. First, data from many countries show that failure to attach to school or work is experienced as an adverse context where individuals experience social exclusion and poor mental and physical health (e.g., Bynner & Parsons, 2002; Gallie, 2004) and societies report marginalization of unemployed youth and social unrest (e.g., Hammer, 2003). Second, WBE is one of the most frequently recommended solutions, suggested by researchers examining data for individual outcomes (e.g., Schoon & Bynner, 2003) and data at the societal level (e.g., Quintini, Martin, & Martin, 2007). We bring together these two points of concurrence as a starting point for our model: that WBE is frequently recommended as a solution for at-risk young people who experience school and work transition as contexts of adversity. WBE refers to educational and other interventions (based in schools, colleges, and agencies) for high school students and young adults that facilitate learning by placing young people in supervised practica in workplace contexts for all or part of their educational program (Bailey, Hughes, & Moore, 2004). These learning experiences include workplace mentoring, paid work experience, instruction in workplace competencies, and cooperative education (Smith & Betts, 2000).

In research on young people who are at-risk for a range of negative life outcomes, resilience is considered a critical construct for curtailing adversity and enabling reengagement. Resilience has been described as positive adaptation of a system during or following exposure to adversities or risks (Masten, 2007; Schoon & Bynner, 2003). Ungar (2005b) demonstrated that resilience in youth is enabled by the responsiveness of services (e.g., counseling), structures (e.g., sociopolitical

means of ensuring safety, access), and relationships that allow the young people to be seen in a positive light. Thus, resilience is a function of both personal agency and social, cultural, and political assets in the youth's context. Four decades of research on resilience have brought researchers to this *fourth wave* of understanding. This wave encompasses the correlates, processes, and interventions already associated with resilience while shifting attention to *multilevel dynamics* including social interactions among individuals in relationships and social networks (Masten, 2007), that is persons in contexts.

Education systems have been highlighted as adaptive systems in which effective teachers and programs can promote competence and resilience in at-risk young people (Masten, 2009; Masten, Herbers, Cutuli, & Lafavor, 2008). At-risk students not only disengage from school but experience difficulty attaching to the labor market following school (Pungello et al., 2010). Resilience has been suggested as a focal construct for intervention programs aimed at the reengagement of at-risk young people (Versnel et al., 2011). Specifically, Wiesner and his colleagues (Wiesner, Vondracek, Capaldi, & Porfeli, 2003) advocated that the field of education must develop preventive programs that focus on promoting positive contexts for disengaged young people and that fine-grained studies are required for understanding the multiple facets that promote resilience in these contexts. Similarly, Schoon and Bynner (2003) proposed that researchers must address resilience as a critical construct in the education and training of at-risk youth as resilience, and the conditions that promote resilience, serve to address adversity and risk factors whilst promoting transition to more healthy and positive lifestyles.

We hold that to address the needs of young people disengaged from school and failing to gain labor market attachment, that these individuals should be enabled to access systems of resilience so that they can respond to adversity in ways that promote their success. Accordingly, we propose that WBE interventions that are well matched to individual student needs are likely to serve as a protective context that contributes to accomplishing this goal. However, there has been no concerted effort to understand the conceptual underpinnings of what constitutes successful WBE programs that enable resilience for this vulnerable population (McGinty & Brader, 2005). Instead, a plethora of WBE programs has emerged with no practical means or conceptual model for guiding the matching of WBE programs to the wide-ranging needs and strengths of at-risk youth. Given that without a concerted effort at both the conceptual and practical levels at-risk youth will continue on paths to social exclusion (Hammer, 2003), we advance a theoretical model that can be used to inform such matches and that can be studied empirically for its practical and conceptual merit.

School-to-Work Transition

Although specific transition programs and structures differ across and within countries, previous research has identified four general characteristics of those that underpin successful transition from school to work. First, transition systems can be

characterized by the strength and nature of the linkage between educational structures and work opportunities (Hannan, Raffe, & Smyth, 1996). Iannelli and Raffe (2007) claim that in systems with strong linkages, vocational education follows an employment logic (e.g., Germany) while in systems with weak linkages, vocational education follows an education logic (e.g., Canada). When a country has a strong linkage, trade unions usually have a larger role in the design and delivery of vocational programs, labor market needs are addressed through educational programs, and strong institutional and recruiting networks support transitions from school to work. For at-risk youth, the linkage between school and work is often tenuous or nonexistent. This is especially true in systems that adopt an education logic and that value academic educational programming over WBE or apprenticeship programs. Research has also demonstrated that without a strong and direct link between school and work contexts, provisions and accommodations made for students in education settings are often neglected in workplace contexts (e.g., Hutchinson, Versnel, Chin, & Munby, 2008) and that students who are at-risk at school often face prejudices when applying for work (Cousée, Roets, & De Bie, 2009; Støren, 2011).

A second characteristic of transition systems is their emphasis on student stratification within a standards-based educational system (Allmendinger, 1989; Kerckhoff, 2000). Standards-based education refers to the uniformity of expectations and the requirements for secondary school completion. Evidence suggests that transitions from school to work are smoother in standardized systems because employers can rely on standardized minimum competencies for program graduates (i.e., graduation certificates always mean the same thing) (Smyth et al., 2001). Within this standards-based context, educational stratification refers to the extent and form of tracking at the secondary level and to the opportunities for differentiated outcomes and education pathways to school completion (Smyth et al., 2001). Blossfeld, Klijzing, Mills, and Kurz (2005) described the nature of different vocational pathways, classifying them as work-based, school-based, dual (i.e., work/school-based), or apprenticeship. The availability and extent of these pathways differ significantly across educational systems and the number of vocational programs remains small with continued valuing of academic programs over vocational education tracks in most developed countries (Taylor, 2006).

A third characteristic of transition systems is the nature and quality of WBE programs. Consistently, international research reports that youth who experience WBE and other forms of work experience during school make more successful transitions into the workforce (e.g., Alon, Donohoe, & Tienda, 2001; Bailey et al., 2004; Müller, 2005; Perreira, Mullen Harris, & Lee, 2007). WBE is one form of transition programming for youth as they leave school to enter the labor market and specifically refers to educational and other interventions (based in schools, colleges, and agencies) that facilitate learning in workplace contexts. Several factors have been identified as contributing to successful WBE experiences. Research findings suggest that the match between student career interests and work-placement is critical. Case study research has shown that young people placed in workplaces unrelated to their interests and aspirations often make little effort to learn, participate, or contribute and especially show little initiative (Chin, Steiner Bell, Munby, &

Hutchinson, 2004; Zanibbi, Munby, Hutchinson, Versnel, & Chin, 2006). Also, providing scaffolded learning opportunities and incrementally increasing student initiative and responsibility within the workplace have proven beneficial to student engagement in work placements (Hutchinson et al., 2008). Finally, aspects of workplace experiences that have positively influenced young people, especially at-risk youth, have included the provision of a mentor who can guide them (e.g., DeLuca et al., 2010), the use of routines to enable the youth to understand how the context is predictable (e.g., Munby, Versnel, Hutchinson, Chin, & Berg, 2003), and the timing of the WBE in the at-risk youth's high school career (Hutchinson et al., 2010). While WBE has been suggested as one of the most promising solutions to the challenge of youth unemployment (Bailey et al., 2004), currently in North America, these programs are too few in number and do not yet fully address the diverse interests of students or a diversity of workplace contexts (Sonnet & Vandenberghe, 2008).

The final characteristic of transition programs is recognition that both individual capacities and interests (i.e., agency, self-determination, self-efficacy, and self-advocacy skills) and sociocultural factors (i.e., family, peer, schools, and community associations) significantly impact a student's transition from school to work. This impact is particularly true of at-risk students who often have negative self-perceptions and little self-determination and who have negative peer associations or an adverse home life (Ungar, 2005a). In the past decade, both US and UK researchers have shown in large-scale quantitative studies that individual and contextual factors contribute to labor market attachment of youth including a prolonged career exploration period within these countries (Arnett, 2000). For example, in a US sample, Wiesner et al. (2003) found in a longitudinal study that four career pathway groups of at-risk males could be distinguished based on educational attainment, arrests, and mental health problems. Two of the four groups were disengaged from school and work (i.e., the long-term unemployed group and the short-term unemployed group). Similarly, Bynner and Parsons (2002) found in a longitudinal UK-based study that poor educational achievement was a major factor in disengagement from education, but that inner-city living for boys and lack of parental interest in their daughter's education were also negative factors in promoting school-to-work transitions. Unquestionably, sociocultural factors such as cultural perceptions of work, peer associations, and parental and community supports as well as individual factors are critical contributors to the transitions of at-risk youth into contexts of resilience and meaningful work associations (Gallie, 2004). In the following section, the characteristics of at-risk youth and the need to foster resilience through transition systems that bridge school and work are elaborated.

At-Risk Youth and Resilience

Our primary interest in this chapter is to address the multiple facets that impact young people's transition into the labor market with a specific focus on at-risk youth. At-risk young people are a particularly vulnerable population in the transition from

school to work given their previous experiences at school and work, propensity for negative peer associations, adverse personal contexts, social prejudices that influence work opportunities, and lack of knowledge, skills, and workplace readiness (Scarpetta et al., 2010). Educators use the term "at-risk" to refer to students who are at-risk of dropping out of school, those who have not learned the necessary skills to succeed in attaining meaningful work after graduation, and those whose current level of educational mastery makes their future school career problematic (Cho, Hallfors, & Sánchez, 2005). The employment sector uses the term "at-risk" to refer to individuals who do not have the necessary skills to obtain competitive employment and succeed at their jobs (Ziguras, 2006). We use these two meanings of at-risk in this chapter. In addition, we follow Statistics Canada and OECD definitions in defining youth as people between 15 and 25 years of age.

Youth who are at-risk often contend with dominant negative social sentiments and factors, or a confluence of factors, leading to distress and negative developmental outcomes in a variety of life situations (Gerard & Buehler, 2004). Risk occurs when students face adverse contexts; hence, the terms risk and adversity are used interchangeably in much of the literature (Ungar, 2005a). For some at-risk youth, the structure and nature of schooling represents one of the dominant factors contributing to a context of adversity (DeLuca et al., 2010; Hutchinson et al., 2010). For others, socio-personal, economic, and health factors may contribute to students being at-risk. In addressing the needs of at-risk young people in educational and workplace contexts, there is a need to provide them with a protective context where they can experience resilience in response to adversity and risk.

Resilience describes positive adaptation in the face of adversity (Schoon & Bynner, 2003). Ungar (2005a, 2005b) argues that social and cultural contexts play a deciding role in determining the positive and negative factors and outcomes for at-risk youth, making risk and resilience constructs that are contextually based. Resilience has been suggested as a focal construct for intervention programs aimed at the reengagement of at-risk young people with calls for fine-grained and conceptual studies on resilience in at-risk youth (Schoon & Bynner, 2003; Wiesner et al., 2003). Transition programs (e.g., WBE) can be conceived as a protective context where at-risk young people can move from adverse contexts to contexts of resilience. Accordingly, we hold that WBE can be leveraged as a context of resilience for addressing the challenge of youth disengagement from the labor market. Hence, here we construct a model that situates WBE as context to facilitate youth transition toward meaningful work engagement.

Constructing the Model

Our model was developed through a systematic and interdisciplinary review that examined empirical, conceptual, policy-based, and practice-based literature on at-risk young people's transition from school to work. Over a 2-year period, documents were identified through searches of databases including PsycINFO, ERIC, CINAHL,

and Sociological Abstracts, as well as through searches of international and national policy and research organizations (e.g., OECD, International Labor Organization), government and ministry websites, and specific WBE program sites. Documents were retrieved from multiple disciplines including education, health care, sociology, psychology, policy studies, and economics. To contribute to the development of a robust person-in-context model, articles were analyzed to identify both individual and contextual factors that influence transition and for data that support WBE as an enabling context for youth. Our review also examined existing models of transition and other systems for addressing the needs of at-risk young people as a basis for constructing our model.

Current models on the transition from school to work generally are derived from one of two perspectives. Models either use a macro context approach that considers systemic structures in the transition from school to work, or a micro approach that considers individual facets within local settings. Few models have bridged macro and micro perspectives, thus limiting the utility of the model for use across sectors and levels. From the field of sociology, Raffe's (2008) model of transition systems represents a hierarchical approach by drawing on a systems theory perspective to understanding factors influencing school-to-work transition. Raffe (2008) devised a four-level model of transition systems to describe features of a country's institutional arrangements that shape young people's transition to work. In contrast, the Total Clinical Outcomes Management (TCOM) model represents an example of a micro approach that gives credence to the experiences and perspectives of individuals. TCOM was initially developed in the foster care system to assess the needs and strengths of at-risk children and youth and to make decisions about the correct level of care for individuals (Lyons & Weiner, 2009). While this model does not directly relate to the integration of young people into the workforce, it does present one of the few approaches focusing on local factors and structures that aim to support and engage at-risk children and youth. The TCOM model reminds us of the importance of addressing the specific needs of at-risk youth when considering transition placements and programs. Moreover, this model highlights the value of a standardized assessment method for determining student need, which could prove useful in transition planning.

TCOM addresses some of the critical factors facing at-risk youth at a micro level whereas Raffe's (2008) model points toward the systemic macro structures that need consideration in transition planning. While the micro and macro approaches offer useful suggestions for the development of a more comprehensive transition model, there are a number of criticisms against these approaches. For instance, Raffe (2008) raises a number of these limitations. For example, many of the features and factors described in each model are multidimensional and some can be interpreted in a number of ways due to heterogeneity within systemic levels and specific programs. Further, for macro models, supporting evidence tends to be based on aggregated large-scale data sets, which does not necessarily represent the experiences of any specific person. Macro frameworks tend to overlook the quality of individuals' experiences within local school and work programs. However, micro frameworks also have limitations and are few in number due to difficulties in researching at-risk young people's lived experiences (Ferguson et al., 2005). As a result, most of the

related work on transition models or systems has overlooked or downplayed the experience of individuals, leaving few models at the appropriate unit of analysis for enacting such a framework. The person-in-context approach represents an initial attempt at representing both micro and macro level factors within a comprehensive model.

In advancing this approach, the literature on WBE provides guidance because it presents a practical context that aims to negotiate micro and macro level factors in the transition of school-to-work for at-risk youth. Further, WBE has been suggested as the most promising approach to redressing the gap in young people's employment across the globe (Canadian Career Consortium, 2007; Quintini et al., 2007). In Canada, many provinces have developed educational initiatives that pair education and work sectors to respond to this critical situation (e.g., Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2007; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Supporting these WBE programs are educational theories focusing on the individual learning in context (Kincheloe, 2007), situated cognitivist reframing of workplace learning that takes account of social, cultural, and political dimensions (Munby, Hutchinson, & Chin, 2007), and theoretical work on the appropriation of workplace knowledge (Hung, 1999; Wenger, 1998) and on the intentionality of workplace learners (Billett, 2006; Nicol, Tsai, & Gaskell, 2004). However, despite WBE being one of the most widely used initiatives to address youth transition, there have been few attempts to advance a comprehensive theoretical model to guide WBE programming. Of those that have aimed to tackle this gap in literature, the majority has tended to look for common, best-practice features rather than focusing on the diversity of local programs (e.g., Stone, Kowske, & Alfeld, 2004). Zanibbi and his colleagues (2006) argued that there is a critical need to describe the person-context fit while examining the features of workplace experience in a systematic manner. Drawing on these current transition models, we address this need by constructing a person-in-context model.

Person-in-Context Model

In constructing a model to serve our purpose, we considered transition at many levels and focused on both the context and the person. This led us to organize the model around three critical domains that have been identified in the research as influential for school-to-work transition: the individual domain, the sociocultural domain, and the economic-political domain. Within each of these domains, multiple facets that shape youth transition need to be accounted for. In contrast to previous models, we deliberately use the word *facets*, instead of factors or components, to indicate the multidimensional and interconnected nature of structures and influences within each domain. The individual domain includes facets related to individual characteristics and propensity for resilience. These facets include young people's sense of agency, self-determination, and self-advocacy skills. The sociocultural domain involves facets that influence a youth's navigation and negotiation of social norms and cultural values. These facets include family support and structure, peer
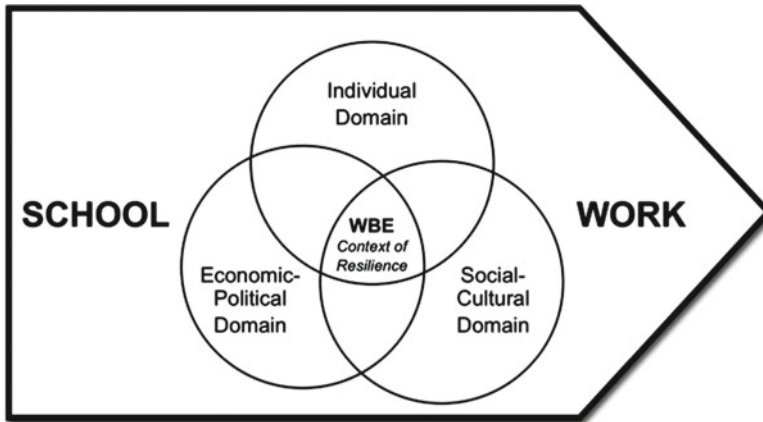
Individual
Domain

SCHOOL   **WORK**

WBE
*Context of
Resilience*

Economic-
Political
Domain

Social-
Cultural
Domain

Fig. 3.1 Person-in-context model for enabling resilience in at-risk youth who are in transition from school to work

associations, school social and behavior expectations, and community-based cultural and social services. Finally, the economic-political domain considers the fiscal affordances and governance structures and policies that shape educational and employment sectors within the youth's context of transition from school to work. Figure 3.1 shows the linkages between these critical domains, emphasizing that much of the transition process is dependent upon these linkages.

Rather than presenting a hierarchical model that prioritizes systemic factors over personal factors, we construct the model as an integrated, nonhierarchical conceptualization of domains that contribute to the school-to-work transition experienced by at-risk young people. Each domain is understood to operate in relation to the other domains. For example, the political-economic domain impacts the availability and nature of sociocultural programs and resources. Similarly, sociocultural contexts influence personal perceptions of school and work. We believe that these intersections are critically important to constructing transition programs that support at-risk young people in engaging the complex context of work. We further assert that transition interventions, such as WBE, should aim to align initiatives across and between the three domains and suggest WBE as a potentially effective structure to facilitate this alignment and to enable youth to negotiate influential facets within the domains by providing a protective context that fosters resilience. Accordingly, we position WBE at the center of the model, positioning it as an educational context that can promote resilience for at-risk youth who face adversity. In the subsequent sections, we describe some of the central facets within each domain, and followed by an elaboration on the intersections between the domains. The central facets within these domains describe aspects of the lived experience of at-risk youth that enable us to consider the matching of WBE programs that are most likely to meet the needs of at-risk youth leading to a context of resilience and meaningful engagement in work.

Individual Domain

The individual domain focuses on psychological attributes that contribute to a young person's propensity for resilience. In addition to basic individual human needs (i.e., food, shelter, health resources), research has pointed toward the importance of individual agency, self-determination, and self-advocacy skills as critical facets for at-risk youth to experience resilience in the face of adversity (Rojewski & Yang, 1997). These three facets are elaborated below and then used to consider how WBE provides a structure that addresses these facets.

The concept of an individual with agency is critical to a person-in-context model that aims to understand how to create contexts of resilience for at-risk youth and is necessary if such a model is to inform the matching of WBE programs to the strengths and needs of individuals. It captures the roles of individuals' competencies and their lived experiences in the transition from school to work. This concept has been introduced in previous models; for example, Heinz (2001) wrote of human agency referring to individuals' active shaping of their biographies and making choices within their linked lives and social networks. Raffe (2008) made the case that transition-system research has paid little attention to skills and competences except as these are represented by educational qualifications. We concur that there has been limited emphasis on the lived experience, psychological effects, and individual agency associated with transition into the workplace. By the mid 1980s, researchers were aware of the social and psychological consequences (e.g., higher distress and lower self-esteem) for individual workers who had experienced unsuccessful transitions in working life, including unemployment, especially for young workers (Warr, Banks, & Ullah, 1985). Two means of increasing young people's propensity for resilience are to create contexts that enable self-determination and self-advocacy.

Self-determination as a construct is complex and multifaceted, reflecting both psychological characteristics and behavioral skills, and generally refers to individuals' taking charge of their own lives. One of the most researched frameworks for understanding self-determination, developed by Ryan and Deci (2000), distinguishes three basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. According to self-determination theory, fulfillment of these needs—for feeling competent, experiencing positive relations, and engagement with others, and experiencing oneself as the source of action—is essential to experiencing well-being and to function optimally. Recent studies suggest that support for autonomy contributes to urban youth developing a sense of work hope (i.e., belief that their academic efforts can pay off in their future careers) (e.g., Kenny, Walsh-Blair, Blustein, Bempechat, & Seltzer, 2010). And, it appears that career development and school engagement may serve as reciprocal positive influences for changing the perspectives of at-risk youth on their future prospects (e.g., Kenny, Blustein, Haase, Jackson, & Perry, 2006). This is because exposure to career pathways and options in conjunction with developing an individual's self-determination abilities enables effective goal setting and career planning based on youths' interests and abilities.

One way that young people exercise personal agency is by advocating for themselves. Self-advocacy involves knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication, and leadership (Test, Fowler, Brewer, & Wood, 2005a). Studies of youth with disabilities have demonstrated that interventions throughout the high school years are effective for increasing self-advocacy for youth with a range of disabilities (e.g., Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, 2005b), especially interventions that use explicit instruction (Wood, Kelley, Test, & Fowler, 2010). However, there is much less research on fostering resilience in at-risk youth through the development of self-advocacy than there is on students with disabilities. Demereth, Lynch, and Davidson (2008) reported in a 4-year ethnographic study that lower-achieving students and minority youth were less effective and less comfortable with self-advocacy than their higher-achieving and majority peers. These students reported that they needed more self-confidence and they expressed bewilderment about their lack of success in obtaining the information they needed from teachers and counselors. Recently, comprehensive high school counseling programs have begun to focus on self-advocacy for all students, including those who are at-risk (e.g., Hatch, Shelton, & Monk, 2009), which may help to change at-risk students' experience of high school from a context of adversity to a context of resilience.

There are several facets within the individual domain to consider when matching young people and WBE programs. Aspects of capability including the emotional, social, personal, and financial resources one brings to a transition contribute to agency. Additionally, aspects of self-perception include an individual's goals, aspirations, sense of personal worth, and self-efficacy (Fouad & Bynner, 2008). Finally, resources that youth bring to the transition including talents, skills, interests, and course credits are also important when matching WBE programs to their strengths and needs (e.g., Hutchinson et al., 2010). Hence, while material resources are influential, a young person's motivation and desire to achieve are strong influences on taking advantage of affordances that enhance resilience to overcome a disadvantaging background (e.g., Bandura, Barbaranelli, Vittorio Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Rojewski & Yang, 1997; Schoon & Parsons, 2002)—the exercise of personal agency makes a difference even in the face of challenging lived experiences.

WBE has been shown to provide a context for at-risk youth to develop and enhance their individual agency, self-determination, and self-advocacy skills. In their analysis of at-risk youth engaged in WBE, DeLuca et al. (2010) described multiple WBE experiences that allowed students to develop these skills in preparation for future employment. In one case, students in a school district attend a WBE fair that allows them to inquire into and select from a variety of WBE programs based on their individual learning and career interests. DeLuca et al. (2010) further described a process through which one WBE teacher made a deliberate effort to align WBE programming to a student's expressed needs, thereby facilitating pathways for self-determination. This intervention ultimately led the student to act agentically and secure work in his desired field. As evident across qualitative studies of the lived experiences of young people in WBE, individual facets that impact school-to-work transition including agency, self-determination skills, and self-advocacy skills can be developed through WBE and transferred into workplace contexts for effective transitions from school to work.

Social-Cultural Domain

Social-cultural facets stand as a central domain in shaping youth transition from school to work. This is perhaps hardly surprising given that research in the areas of sociology, education, criminology, and psychology has consistently identified strong links between social-cultural groups and propensity for at-risk status in youth (Cauce, Cruz, Corona, & Conger, 2011). Specifically, this body of research has shown that facets of family, peer groups, school social and behavioral expectations, and community services shape a young person's understanding of social norms and cultural values influencing youth attachment to school and work, including their enrollment in and completion of WBE (e.g., Fouad & Bynner, 2008). Accordingly, in this section, we explore each of these facets in the transition from school to work for at-risk youth.

The psychological aspects and lived experiences of youth transitions are often influenced by family members, family values, and family resources. Fouad and Bynner (2008) hold that the range of emotional, educational, and social resources that parents are able to provide set the foundation for youth identity capital. Case study research on at-risk young people in WBE has shown instances of siblings providing transportation to work sites, parents accompanying youth to difficult appointments at school (DeLuca et al., 2010), and parents locating sites for their children to participate in WBE (Hutchinson et al., 2010). In addition, individuals can be constrained or supported by a family's socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and the geographic locations in which they live. Rural environments may provide fewer sites for WBE placements and present transportation challenges, while urban environments may require commuting long distances to WBE sites far from their homes. Aspects of growing up in a family can also contribute to language acquisition, preparedness for school, literacy, numeracy, expectations of work, and all the individual skills and attributes that contribute to one assuming an agentic stance, as described in the individual domain (Bandura, 1997).

Negative peer affiliation in school and community has also been identified as one of the most significant facets influencing the behavior of at-risk youth, with the potential to lead to social exclusion and greater risk of disease, mental illness, substance abuse, and criminal activity (Haynie, Silver, & Teasdale, 2006). As children move to adulthood, reliance on peers increases as family influence decreases (Kipke, Unger, O'Connor, Palmer, & LaFrance, 1997). Based on their study of 1,614 secondary school students, Pokhrel, Sussman, Black, and Sun (2010) found that students who identified with high-risk peers tended to report higher relational and physical aggression than students who identified with "regular" peers. In conclusion, they argued that peer association contributes to youth behavior, with significantly negative consequences for youth affiliated with high-risk peer groups. In addition, research has shown that peer association is linked to young people's self-efficacy and individual facets including self-determination and personal agency (Kipke et al., 1997; Kiuru, Nurmi, Aunola, & Salmela-Aro, 2009).

In response to the link between peer affiliation and at-risk youth status, social mentoring programs have increased significantly as a means to encourage positive

behavior and affiliation in at-risk youth. Social mentoring involves educational programming on issues of social responsibility and action and may involve the pairing of at-risk young people with positive peer or adult mentors. When in place, these school- and community-based programs have proven beneficial to reducing negative behavior and reengaging at-risk youth (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008; Rhodes & Lowe, 2008; Wilson et al., 2007). Social mentoring, whether by positive peer role models, teachers, or workplace supervisors, has also been shown to be an effective component of WBE. Specifically, in their WBE case study, DeLuca et al. (2010) recognized that the social interactions with and mentorship from the lead WBE teacher had a positive effect on shifting the focal young person's perception toward work and his self-efficacy and self-determination related to future career goals.

Individuals' transition experiences are also mediated and shaped by community services. Communities may share characteristics such as religion, language, or socioeconomic status (Raffe, 2008) and reinforce social values, expectations, and attitudes toward work and school. Communities can create norms that run counter to those expected by society and may pressure youth to conform by dropping out of school, participating in gang activity, or applying for social assistance. In such communities, where large numbers of individuals experience poor transitions that lead to unemployment and social exclusion, the social costs to communities can be extremely high with greater dependency on social services and increased violence, crime, and drug activity within the community (Fouad & Bynner, 2008). In contrast, some communities afford opportunities for participating in stimulating and motivating activities (e.g., sports, clubs, and social organizations) that help youth to recognize their strengths, aspirations, and unique abilities. Other communities offer prevention and intervention programs to support the transition of at-risk youth by providing them with employment-related skills and positive community affiliations. Increasingly, these social programs draw on a variety of support workers including paraprofessionals, social workers, health care professionals, and educators to promote a multidimensional approach to addressing the varied issues (i.e., psychological, social, and educational) facing at-risk youth (e.g., Graham, Jones, & Shier, 2010; Matsuba, Elder, Petrucci, & Marleau, 2008). Social capital (i.e., who you know; Putnam, 2001), cultural capital (i.e., knowing how to behave; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), and identity capital (i.e., how you define yourself and are defined by others; Côté & Levine, 2002) can all be affected by communities.

WBE programs provide supportive environments that enable at-risk young people to learn about employment skills, obtain educational credits, and gain support from qualified and caring adults as they transition into the labor market. In addition, WBE students typically have access to additional student support services from social workers to community employment sites, which can be utilized depending upon the individual strengths and needs of students. In a recent paper, Versnel, DeLuca, Hill, Hutchinson, and Chin (2011) concluded that WBE programs provide an effective structure for the collaboration among services that support resilience for at-risk youth. Specifically, Versnel and her colleagues argued that WBE can minimize the number of individuals an at-risk youth must interact with to provide a "one-stop shopping" approach to helping effective transition to the workforce.

Such an approach has been suggested elsewhere as a means of promoting resilience for at-risk youth accessing services in the health care system, which can involve multiple paraprofessionals and health care programs (Ungar, 2005b). At-risk youth in contexts with multiple supports and contacts may find the task of learning about and negotiating the various supports and contact daunting and difficult without guidance. Bringing supports and services together appears to facilitate the negotiation process and promote greater access to resources and services.

Economic-Political Domain

Youth transition to the labor market is shaped by global and national priorities related to economics and politics as well as by globalization. Within the economic-political domain, we focus on two facets experienced by young people in the contexts that create the political and economic circumstances that influence their ability to transition from school to work. These facets are youth as a member of a nation and youth as a member of the global context.

In considering the impact of national priorities on youth in transition, some authors have contrasted nations like Germany with dual systems reputed to move young people smoothly from school to work with countries like the United States (Mortimer & Kruger, 2006), Canada (Heinz & Taylor, 2005), and Great Britain (DiPrete & McManus, 1996). Other researchers have compared a large number of European and North American countries to develop five clusters of nations, called welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Mills & Blossfeld, 2005). The nations studied by Mills and Blossfeld clustered into five regimes: liberal regimes (Canada, Great Britain, United States); conservative regimes (Germany, Netherlands, France); social-democratic regimes (Norway, Sweden); family-oriented regimes (Spain, Mexico, Ireland); and post-socialistic regimes (Estonia, Hungary). We add to these a sixth type of regime, chaotic regimes, which includes countries whose welfare regimes are decimated by war, chaos, and out-of-control inflation like Sierra Leone, the Republic of Congo, and Tunisia (e.g., Ekundayo-Thompson, 2009).

In addition to considering national influences to youth transition, increased globalization over the past few decades has been proposed as creating a unique context within which youth make the transition from school to work (e.g., Ashton & Green, 1996). Cross-national studies describe national transition patterns through unemployment rates and occupation distributions (e.g., DeBell, 2006; Smyth et al., 2001; Teichner, 2007). Mills and Blossfeld (2005) make the case that over the centuries there have been fundamental changes in the ways economies operate and in the entire experience of this transition. Klijzing (2005) demonstrated large increases in employment of males and females in the service sector from 1950 to 2000, and showed the general upward trend in the use of fixed-term contract employment from 1983 to 1999 as a result of global movement. Increased flexibility, unpredictability, and insecurity are documented in large cross-national data sets (e.g., Mills & Blossfeld, 2005), while Fouad and Bynner (2008) described the

social upheavals that have defined the past few decades. In the past two decades, manufacturing and services have moved locations internationally as companies try to reduce costs at the expense of their traditional employee base (Ashton & Green, 1996; Blossfeld, Buchholz, & Hofacker, 2006). Individuals may not have the choice to move with their company, and their company or their country may not have effective policies to support individuals who lose their positions. The unpredictability and protracted nature of school-to-work transitions have led to the conceptualization of a new stage of life—emerging adulthood, which extends through the 20s (Arnett, 2004). During this period, youth may not acknowledge being adults, experience well-being, or feel they have achieved (Gaudet, 2007; Sen, 1992).

Understanding the economic and political context of work is challenging, especially for young people who are at-risk and who have had unsuccessful school experiences. WBE provides a protective and scaffolded structure where these youth can learn to experience the economic and political aspects of workplaces. In their case study of Daniel, an at-risk youth enrolled in a WBE program, Hutchinson and colleagues (2010) found that through his WBE program, Daniel was not only introduced to job-related skills but also to the prospects of employment and the changing context of working in his desired field of auto mechanics. Through his WBE experience, Daniel also recognized the limited opportunities for employment in auto mechanics and with the support of his WBE teacher and his workplace supervisors, Daniel considered more realistic occupations and found permanent work in a related field that required less stringent qualifications. Based on this research, it is evident that educational structures are necessary to help at-risk young people understand and negotiate the changes in the local and larger labor market conditions due to political and economic forces in society.

Intersections of Domains

Research suggests that facets in each domain of the model influence school-to-work transitions for at-risk youth and research supports WBE as an intervention to promote resilience. However, it may be even more critical to focus on the alignment and intersections of these domains to ensure successful transitions for at-risk young people into the labor market. Specifically, WBE is a transition structure with the potential to combine facets from each domain so youth navigate and negotiate toward engagement in meaningful work. What is required is a context of resilience in which the WBE program is intentionally designed to fit the needs of individual at-risk youth. The three domains and their linkages point to the key ingredients that ensure this fit.

The links between the individual and the social-cultural domains involve assisting young people in understanding how to enact their personal agency and self-determination within the social and cultural conditions of their communities. For engaging in work, developing this understanding requires them to consider the alignment between their personal aspirations, interests, and abilities and the

expectations of them held by influential social and cultural groups including families, peers, educators in their schools, and adult mentors. For example, Anisef and Axelrod (2001) followed a cohort of students in the manufacturing province of Ontario, Canada to provide an account of the interactive role of individual agency and social structure supported through school in shaping the life course of individuals. They developed examples of individual narratives to show that schooling can diminish the importance of an individual's class and region. Their portraits of at-risk youth demonstrated how individuals who articulate a clear vision of their dreams can "take creative advantage of the enabling aspects of social structures," (p. 486) while those who drift without purpose are constrained by social structures. Likewise, WBE, as an intermediary educational structure, can provide opportunities for at-risk young people to examine their roles and responsibilities within communities while addressing their interests and aspirations for work and further education. For example, DeLuca et al.'s (2010) case study of at-risk youth engaged in WBE portrayed the development of a young person's identity from a negative self-perception to a more positive, agentic perception of an individual who could contribute meaningfully to a workplace that met his interests. This transition was mediated and supported by a close teacher-mentor and by the opportunity to work in a social, protective, school-based workplace that enabled the youth to build on his strengths.

The linkage between the sociocultural domain and political-economic domain focuses on the policies, resources, and funds directed by governments to support the development of stable communities. For example, in liberal and socialistic governments, there is typically a strong link between government priorities and the development of local communities (Kennett & Forrest, 2006). These governments tend to support and emphasize social programs for youth and communities at risk and to contribute resources to educational interventions aimed at disadvantaged groups. Inversely, local communities and cultures can promote the development of policies and the generation of resources and funds through grassroots initiatives that impact broader economies and governance structures. WBE positions youth at the nexus of sociocultural and political-economic domains by providing them with the opportunity to learn within community-based businesses. Hutchinson et al.'s (2010) work that traced Daniel, an 18-year-old at-risk youth who found work in a neighborhood garage, demonstrated the linkages among community, school, and the economic realities of work. In this case study, the workplace supervisor described WBE as a "win-win" situation, in which the student, a member of the local community, received a "second chance" after being unsuccessful in traditional schooling and learned in an authentic work setting. At the same time, the small garage maintained productivity in a slow economy that did not allow the hiring of a full-time employee. WBE presented a solution that supported the economic viability of a community business while serving the educational and transition needs of an at-risk youth from the neighborhood.

The linkage between the political-economic domain and the personal domain involves young people negotiating the practicalities of waning employment opportunities within the current economic context. This linkage also highlights the importance of youth developing an understanding of how their career may be sustained within

a rapidly changing labor market that is responding to the effects of globalization. One of the cases reported by DeLuca et al. (2010) demonstrated how a young woman, who had dropped out of school and returned to a WBE program to complete high school, then moved onto a community college to study business. She reported having learned in WBE how complex it was to run a small business, and because this was what she aspired to do, she enrolled in a 2-year business program. Authentic work in WBE had taught her about the political and economic shoals she would have to navigate if she were to meet her career goals.

Like Sirin and his colleagues (2004), across these linkages and within each domain of the model, it is important to focus on the lived experience of individuals while acknowledging complex contexts in modern societies. We also acknowledge that further research, based on this person-in-context model, is required on WBE programs that explicitly situate youth at the intersection of these domains to study a range of configurations of WBE programs for at-risk young people.

Utility of the Model

Our purpose in this chapter was to advance a model that addressed how WBE can promote a context of resilience for at-risk young people who are in transition from school to work. Specifically, we held that WBE provides a protective context that enables youth to navigate and negotiate influential facets within individual, social-cultural, and economic-political domains. Research on WBE provides a practical application of contemporary resilience theory to support at-risk youth in transition to work. In alignment with the work of Masten (2007) and Ungar (2005a), WBE facilitates a multilevel dynamic process that educates young people about the multiple facets that shape transition while providing a system of affordances that fit young people's individual needs within the present social-cultural and economic-political context. Hence, WBE facilitates an educative process that accounts for influential facets at both person and context levels for at-risk youth seeking labor market attachment.

Previous theoretical conceptualizations of school-to-work transition and interventions for at-risk youth have tended to operate from either a macro perspective or micro perspective. The current model aims to situate the person within context to understand the complex interplay between learning needs of vulnerable youth and WBE programs. A key feature of effective WBE appears to be the intentional matching between students' learning needs and programs that teach students about the larger social, political, and economic facets that shape their transition into work. We believe that this model provides a useful basis for responding to the practical question: Which WBE programs are most likely to lead at-risk youth, with specific characteristics, to successful transitions into meaningful work?

As foreshadowed, research suggests WBE as one of the most promising solutions to curtail the youth unemployment crisis and reengage young people in successful school-to-work transitions. However, in our population of over 20 case studies of

at-risk youth, young people with disabilities, and mainstream youth engaged in WBE, the emerging pattern points to the centrality of matching WBE programs to the young person's specific learning needs (e.g., DeLuca et al., 2010; Hutchinson et al., 2008; Hutchinson et al., 2010; Versnel et al., 2011). This matching involves responding to individual facets that contribute to school as an adverse context for the young person as well as structuring a program that addresses their aspirations and interests. Our research has also identified that the most successful WBE programs work within current social-cultural and economic-political contexts to position youth on a career path that not only responds to their individual needs but that is also responsive to current labor market conditions. In addition, through successful WBE programming, youth learn to understand and negotiate these contextual facets for themselves, reinforcing their self-determination and self-advocacy abilities. In this person-in-context model, we have aimed to integrate these multiple facets to promote more effective matching between the needs of individual at-risk youth and WBE programs by using a comprehensive theoretical model.

This chapter presents a preliminary articulation of this person-in-context model. Based on this model, we see several potentially useful lines of research contributing to a research agenda that addresses the youth unemployment crisis through WBE. First, we see value in validating our model with empirical data. While the model was based on international research including theoretical and empirical studies, there is a need to apply this model to WBE experiences of at-risk youth from diverse contexts and to conduct cross-case analyses to establish validity evidence for the model (Eisenhardt, 2002; Stake, 2000). Through such validation efforts, the model can be refined to more accurately represent diverse WBE contexts from around the world. Second, the model may be used to inform current research on WBE and school-to-work transition by providing a conceptual framework for analysis of transition facets and structures that promote contexts of resilience for at-risk youth. Finally, there is a need to respond to our practical question and to engage stakeholders from the school and work sectors in utilizing the model to develop, design, and inform specific WBE programs for at-risk youth. Our particular interest in this avenue of research is to examine structures that enable effective matching of at-risk youth and WBE program components that respond to the contextual features within social-cultural and economic-political domains.

Central to this program of research is elaborating WBE, conceptually and practically, as an educative context that promotes resilience for at-risk youth with the aim of facilitating successful school-to-work transitions. Without a concerted effort at both the conceptual and practical levels, we will continue to face the challenge of disengaged youth on paths to social exclusion at a rate that was not apparent even two decades ago when a more flexible labor market could absorb almost all young workers, no matter their qualifications. Economic and globalization factors continue to create difficulties for at-risk youth who seek employment, and there has never been a more pressing time to address this challenge. Accordingly, a coherent research initiative is required that maintains a strong theoretical basis and that serves the practical end of reengaging at-risk youth in meaningful and sustained work.

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Part II
Imperatives for and Practices of Transitions: International Perspectives

Chapter 4
The American Shortcut to VET: Global Policy Borrowing for the Post-16 Educational Arena

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Introduction: College-for-All?

Educational policymakers view with alarm the college and career readiness of young people through the lens of international performance benchmarks like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) that point out serious deficiencies in the American system of schooling. Many of the OECD countries reported PISA scores in 2006 significantly higher than US youth in science (21st of 30) and in math (25th of 30). The 2009 rankings indicated slight improvements in those league table indicators, but still triggered President Obama's administration to step up the pace of school reform nationwide. What has resulted is a federal initiative to implement common-core curricular standards in math and science for all the states. This idea was derived from global policy borrowing whereby governmental leaders studying the successful practices of high-performing nations cull-out lessons that might drive domestic school and curricular reform. For instance, in 2010, Obama's Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, commissioned the OECD to write a report on how the highest-performing nations on PISA 2009 incorporated rigorous academic standards into an instructional system aligned to quality teaching (OECD, 2010a).

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The report is positioned to inform the American public that "comparative international assessments can extend and enrich the national picture by providing a larger context within which to interpret national performance" (OECD, p. 18). By profiling high-performing countries like Canada, China, Finland, Japan, and Singapore, the OECD report's authors argued, "the yardstick for judging public policy in education is no longer improvement against national educational standards, but also improvement against the most successful education systems worldwide" (OECD, p. 18).

The American states are ratcheting-up diploma requirements and consolidating curricular track assignments, measuring secondary-level student competencies for work in a knowledge economy. Difficult gateway exit exams in the USA require mastery of an academic core of 3–4 years of English, math, science, and social studies, emphasizing the course credits needed to gain acceptance into colleges without the need for further remediation once there. Yet there is a rising concern in some quarters that current valorization of the college-going norm ignores the realities of secondary school failure and underestimates the crisis of at-risk youth who drop out of the system altogether (Orfield, 2004). According to Rosenbaum (2001, p. 57), students are misperceived by the 4-year college-going rhetoric that "can inadvertently encourage a deception that hurts many youths" because students are set up with vague offers of college success without really knowing the requirements for degree completion. "The college-for-all norm is highly misleading and does great harm to youths," he noted, since "it offers big promises to students without warning that few low-achieving students will get a college degree" (Rosenbaum, p. 82).

An influential report by the Pathways to Prosperity Project out of Harvard University (Symonds, Schwartz, & Ferguson, 2011, p. 6) took issue with "the college-for-all rhetoric that has been so much a part of the current education reform movement" by employing the technique of policy borrowing to revive vocational education in America. That is, the report writers' spoke of a "post high-school credential for all" modeled along the lines of high-performing OECD nations that provide students with incentives for entering VET, planning careers, and developing job qualifications through work-based learning. They explained at length:

> The lessons from Europe strongly suggest that well-developed, high-quality vocational education programs provide excellent pathways for many young people to enter the adult work force. But these programs also advance a broader pedagogical hypothesis: that from late adolescence onward, most young people learn best in structured programs that combine work and learning, and where learning is contextual and applied. Ironically, this pedagogical approach has been widely applied in the training of our highest status professionals in the USA where clinical practice (a form of apprenticeship) is an essential component in the preparation of doctors, architects, and (increasingly) teachers. When it comes to teenagers, however, we Americans seem to think they will learn best by sitting all day in classrooms (p. 38).

Some researchers suggested that all students—not just those enrolled in vocational education—should participate in real-life communities of practice, "an authentic activity system in which actions and knowledge use have real consequences," where problem-solving processes have "greater intensity and scope" through work experiences than in the classroom alone (Bailey, Hughes, & Moore, 2004, p. 166). Others claimed VET can enrich secondary-level academics, even facilitating the transfer

function to postsecondary institutions (see Castellano, Stone, Stringfield, Farley, & Wayman, 2004). In addition, school-leaving numbers might be lowered if secondary-level students took more vocational credits in their high school years (Plank, DeLuca, & Estacion, 2005, p. 26). Vocationally bound students require up-skilling with sub-baccalaureate credentials. Yet "the challenge is to build an integrated system of pathways," as Carnevale and Desrochers (2002, p. 27) cautioned "with different points of access and exits controlled by posted education skill standards. Individuals should not be allowed to enter or exit a particular path without certification of qualifying skills and applied competencies."

The next section offers a brief discussion of the career pathways approach, highlighting a few of the programs that help transition students more quickly into the 2-year community colleges and postsecondary technical institutions. In a number of American states, this has become enacted as legislative policy, resulting in formal school-to-school transitions because it allows eligible upper secondary students to take college courses under a dual enrollment program that will satisfy their high school graduation requirement, but not leave the secondary schools altogether. As they provide dual enrollments, these programs can speed up the rate upon which students graduate. They comprise a shortcut that simultaneously allows up to 2 years of advanced college credit or an associate degree in 4–5 years while earning a high school diploma. Technical college courses actually take the place of high school classes and upper-level students are enabled "to advance where they are strongest, while gaining confidence and skills in areas of challenge" (Hoffman, 2004, p. 216). Still, the public is very concerned about a flood of 16-year-olds entering tertiary institutions, such as the community and technical colleges where the average student population is in the upper 20s to early 30s.

Career Pathways

A variety of career pathway programs should enable students to graduate high schools on time and transition to further education (Kazis, Vargas, & Hoffman, 2004). Career academies, cooperative education, internships, and work-based learning provide students with incentives for planning and developing promising postgraduate careers.

Programs adopting a career pathways approach integrate rigorous academic and vocational courses at the secondary level while facilitating access to postsecondary credentials through course credit and enrollment articulations. Community colleges and technical institutes in the USA generally attract nontraditional, working-class students earning 2-year associate degrees or 1-year occupational certificates, who typically juggle part-time schooling with minimum-wage jobs just to raise families and make ends meet. Allen, Goldberger, and Steinberg (2004, p. 225) endorsed an integrated model of VET because "lower-performing students have too often been locked out of college-level technical courses, and high-end technical high school programs usually have very selective entry requirements." These "early college"

programs are designed to award advanced academic or technical credit to high school students and help position them for success in further education—and to reduce the amount of remediation required upon entry in college. Remediation is costly and time consuming. Instructional support for underprepared enrollees amounts to a staggering $3.7 billion, for instance; monies that are being used to divert faculty and staff from real college teaching, lost time spent on matriculation delays, and taxpayer waste to the tune of $1 billion a year to cover this redress (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006). A policy study on persistence in California's community colleges showed that about 60% of students dropped out or changed their plans to transfer to a 4-year college shortly after the first semester of academic study (Driscoll, 2007). Early college programs "do not foreclose options; rather, they open doors to higher-paying careers while keeping open the possibility of higher education" (Allen et al., 2004, p. 228). That is, lower-income students unable to attend traditional 4-year colleges are provided an alternative route to postsecondary education with technical certificates, a high school diploma, and work-based learning as they progress toward a career. Advantages of the early college high schools are multifold and bridge the divide between secondary and postsecondary levels.

In a few cases, targeted career pathways start as early as the middle grades (ages 12–14) in order to develop a pipeline of students interested in pursuing technical careers at 4-year colleges, specifically in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). STEM education has been recognized as critical to economic competitiveness, and national recognition of a shortage of trained teachers in the field has been a presidential cause célèbre both for George W. Bush and his successor Barack H. Obama. However, vocationally bound students at the secondary level are directed into programs of study based upon an organized set of curriculum within families of occupations. Each family cluster might have anywhere from two to seven career pathways leading to career specialties, identifiable academic standards, and measures of performance or skills competencies. For example, the cluster named *Arts, Audio/Video Technology and Communication*s leads to specialties in Audio and Video Technology and Film, Printing Technology, Visual Arts, Performing Arts, Journalism and Broadcasting, and Telecommunications. Another in *Health Science* offers Therapeutic Services, Diagnostic Services, Support Services, Biotechnology Research and Development, and Health Informatics (States' Career Clusters Initiative, 2008). Additionally, the clustering model allows greater curricular alignment with the area community colleges and technical institutes so that students have a foundation for advanced study leading to an occupational certificate or 2-year associate degree. This approach provides closer planning, guidance, and counseling of students, while building a coordinated system of national skill standards and enhanced academics. Creating linkages between high schools and colleges helps students previously ill-served by the traditional route to further education. The 1990s policy changes in the federal vocational education act (the Carl D. Perkins Act) mandated integration of academics into the secondary-level VET curriculum, work-based learning, and seamless transitions from high schools to colleges using a model for articulation known as

tech prep (Castellano, Stringfield, & Stone III, 2003). In fact, tech prep was one of the earliest reforms at the time that advanced the notion of sequential high school curriculum following a logical pathway to community college (Bragg, 2000). Newer federal policy requires that programs of study based upon occupational clusters are identified statewide with articulation agreements between secondary and postsecondary institutions.

Last, the career academy and the vocational charter school facilitate VET transitions. The career academy is an established educational reform initiative that features the integration of academics with technical studies, a small learning community within a larger comprehensive high school, and strong business support for work-based placements (Mittelsteadt & Reeves, 2003). The vocational charter school concept is a "partnership with employers who are directly involved in the school's design, governance and delivery of learning to students" (US Department of Education, 1998, p. 1). Both career academies and vocational charters generally enroll students in classes for time-blocked periods within a school day, half-day daily class periods scheduled in the mornings or afternoons, with additional academic coursetaking requirements toward earning the high school diploma. The schools' programs feature work-based learning with career internships, youth apprenticeships, mentoring, job shadowing, and the like. The academies function as schools-within-a-school that is a popular option in almost one-fourth of US high schools, particularly with cluster-based learning in information technology, health care, finance, and hospitality and tourism, among others. The academies hold anywhere between 50 and 75 students per grade level and "foster a sense of community, personal attention from teachers, and constructive collaboration with peers" (Lerman, 2007, p. 53). In both career academies and charter schools, the students can earn college credits that apply toward rapid completion of their high school programs. Career academies have been shown empirically to curtail dropout-prone youth from leaving school, and these programs build knowledge and skills (as reflected in grade point averages), which in turn increase the likelihood of graduating. There is a rich research base on evaluations of these programs (Kemple, 1997, 2004; Kemple & Snipes, 2000; Maxwell & Rubin, 2000; Stern, Dayton, & Raby, 2000). Both models of career academies and the vocational charters support the idea that students should begin college-level studies in their high school-going years. Beyond offering multiple pathways to advancement, the models try to stop "the leakage in the education pipeline" among those most at-risk of academic failure, and offer possible "traction for policies" that are based on solid research on what works (Steinberg & Almeida, 2007, p. 173). Still, the career pathways mentioned above have different funding schemes and uneven accountability structures, and none provide for a national system of performance standards capturing measures of advancement. That is, the pathway approach is a jumbled mix of program offerings that provide the public limited information for cross-comparison purposes. There is no standard of measurement or benchmarks that explain whether these students actually are ready for college-level work. The next section explores the board exam model proposed by the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE).

The Board Exam Model

The New Commission on Skills of the American Workforce published a report about 5 years ago advocating a benchmarked performance-based education system, whereby secondary students sit for exit exams (also termed board exams) to fast-track their post-16 college and career pathways (National Center on Education and the Economy [NCEE], 2007). This is a controversial idea in a country historically wedded to an age-graded secondary school system consisting of 12 lockstep years. That report was written by a blue-ribbon panel of 25 education, labor, and economic experts who sought a broad overhaul of public schooling, primarily advocating the implementation of a series of state board qualifying examinations. The first board exams would allow youth about age 16 and in the tenth grade who score a pass to proceed into further education such as community colleges and technical institutes and postsecondary vocational schools. Otherwise, they remain in upper secondary schools for demanding rigorous studies in vocational or academic specialties, readying them for a second stage of benchmark exams and then entry into selective colleges or job training programs. However, the first proposed US gateway exam would be given at the end of a student's lower-division secondary schooling, and modeled along the lines of the British General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), which administers subject-based qualification tests that confirm compulsory schooling has ended at age 16 or older. At present, the US system does a disservice to adolescents who bide their time in high school awaiting completion of formal education in the twelfth grade, about age 18 (NCEE). The idea that all students should be college and career ready in tenth grade is derived from the cross-national understandings that, in order to ensure economic competitiveness in the technologically driven global workplace, young people must have the necessary skill sets for employability. The commission's projected board qualifying examination would serve as an early college entrance exam: passing these tests would enable transition the next year directly into open access community colleges and technical institutes or other postsecondary VET. Unlike the disproportionate state-level multiple-choice assessments administered in the nation's public school system, curriculum-driven board exams would be aligned to an instruction and exam structure. Wagner (2008, p. 95) noted the US reliance upon "inexpensive, 'objective' multiple-choice tests," and that other countries require "more complex and extensive open-ended tests that demand real thinking and a deeper understanding of concepts." School reforms in his view prepared young adults for learning, work, and citizenship in the twenty-first century, and teaching should be guided by these seven themes: critical thinking and problem solving; collaboration across networks and leading by influence; agility and adaptability; initiative and entrepreneurialism; effective oral and written communication; accessing and analyzing information; and curiosity and imagination.

Recently, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (founded by Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates) funded $1.5 million dollars to jump-start the reform model in 12 of the American states (and an additional $3.2 million dollars over 2 years to

support research and evaluation), the major feature of which is a board-qualifying curriculum and benchmarking examination process for students at the end of their tenth grade year or around age 16. One example of this NCEE-derived model is the proposed Grand Canyon Diploma in the state of Arizona, targeted to begin in the 2012–2013 school year pending approval (Move on When Ready, 2011). The idea is to offer career-bound students a rigorous academic curriculum in the lower-division high school (first 2 years) that prepares them for transition to tertiary colleges without the need for remediation, or move on to upper secondary schools for further advancement. All students will be able to view their state-level performance standards in comparison with one another, based upon alignment with international benchmark standards, as in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) or the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (Phillips, 2010). A board examination system—complete with syllabi, curriculum, tests, and teacher training modules—will be matched to a complement of high school subjects in history/social studies, English, math, science, and the arts for these students. The board exams for lower-division high school students intending to transition to community colleges and postsecondary technical schools would be available from three vendors: ACT QualityCore®, the University of Cambridge, and Edexcel/Pearson. (Those in the upper-division high schools could prepare for the International Baccalaureate Diploma program, Advanced Placement courses, and a variety of advanced international assessment programs for selective college or university admissions from the same vendors just mentioned.) Arizona students who passed their board exams at the end of the tenth grade would be granted the Grand Canyon Diploma, allowing them to advance directly into community colleges or postsecondary vocational training programs. Students who did not pass the board at that state would remain in school to retool for next year's exams or pursue a traditional academic course of study. Perhaps the most controversial aspect of this entire model is the unknown as to whether students who pass the lower-division exams and receive the diploma could end formal schooling at that point with parental permission.

Educational reformers look overseas for practices in which to inform domestic policymaking. When describing the model above, NCEE president Tucker (2004, p. 52) said: "I would like to offer a modest proposal for an American adaptation of this international system," though "we should not copy the system of any other nation and probably could not, even if we wanted to." Darling-Hammond (2010a) studied the national assessment systems of two Scandinavian countries and four English-speaking nations as well, that provided insights into how high-performing nations use board exams in conjunction with improvements linked to their systems of teaching and learning. She found that unlike the US obsession with standardized test-taking, other countries "teach fewer topics more deeply each year, focus on applications of knowledge, rather than recall of facts, and have a more thoughtful sequence of expectations based on developmental learning progressions within and across domains" (p. 1). A number of international policy forums offer cross-cultural comparisons through league tables that inform redesigns in the secondary and tertiary educational sectors valued by school reformers. Henry, Lingard, Rizvi and Taylor

(2001, p. 56) explained that "the OECD in its role as an international think-tank operates, and exerts influence, essentially as a comparative forum, accommodating both a sense of national autonomy as well as a sense of commonality among the like-minded." For example, while reviewing the OECD (2010b) report *Off to a good start? Jobs for youth* about the widespread problem of non-completers in the upper secondary level, Hoffman (2011, p. 8) noted widespread governmental support structures for unemployed young adults that exhibited "important differences in the way the US tackles the dropout challenge and what occurs in other OECD nations." There are policies to be borrowed from abroad, she continued: "Perhaps, in learning more about how other nations address the issue the United States can discover ideas that would also work here." "While no system from afar can be transported wholesale into another context, there is much to learn from the experiences of those who have addressed problems we encounter," claimed Darling-Hammond (2010b, p. 164). And Symonds et al. (2011, p. 18) recognized the need for policy borrowing when declaring:

> It is no longer defensible for the USA to behave as if it has nothing to learn from other countries. We believe that if the USA is serious about increasing the proportion of young people who arrive in their mid-twenties with a post-secondary credential with currency in the labor market, it is imperative that we closely examine the experiences of several other OECD countries, especially those with the best developed vocational education systems.

We next turn to the findings in a newly published OECD (2010c) report titled *Learning for jobs* indicating future directions for the VET sector, but first explain the reasoning behind why one might adapt policy recommendations from abroad—known in the literature as policy borrowing or policy transfer.

The OECD and Policy Borrowing

The general intention of policy borrowing or policy transfer is to find out if any specific practice, for example, in the VET sector in another nation, can either be transported into another country or taken as an example for the development of a new regime of policy. It refers to the utilization of the knowledge and experience of others who have comprised strategies, guidelines, rules and regulations, action plans, and goals and objectives for VET transitions. Prior to actual adoption, however, the policy needs to be examined in regard to its innovative character and its efficacy (Allan & Clark, 1981). One assumes that those desiring to adopt a policy would go to great length to examine the genesis of the respective policies, socioeconomic and cultural circumstances; yet, political agendas of the leading parties make informed decisions about the use of this knowledge and the implementation of policies in other contexts (Bennett, 1997). This includes study of the governance of VET systems, technological developments, economical and political conditions, history and the national character of a country (Phillips & Ochs, 2003). Cowen (2006, p. 561) defined policy transfer as "the movement of educational ideas, policies, and practices from one place to another, normally across a national boundary."

According to Phillips (2005), policy transfer can occur at different policy levels: policy ideologies or philosophies, policy goals, implementation strategies, enabling structures, educational processes, and educational techniques. A transfer can thus be very small in that it affects only a certain teaching technique or it can have a great impact on the entire nation-state education system, for example, as when moving from a behaviorist approach of learning and teaching to a constructivist approach. Phillips and Ochs classified policy transfer activities according to the question: What can be transferred and under which conditions? The borrowing/lending process impels policymakers to ask whether there is a need to raise awareness about alternative educational practice in other countries, or maybe to bask in the success of one's own country in comparison with others, or simply to justify best practices in one's own educational system; or to scandalize educational practice at home (Halpin & Troyna, 1995; Ochs, 2006; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). A policy transfer can be considered to be successful when both sides (exporter and importer) have concordantly agreed to a transfer. The actors should know about the political interests and implications of such transfers, cultural principles and practices, and motifs for the adoption of certain policies (Tanaka, 2005). It is essential that the receiving country has taken the initiative for the transfer and holds ownership over the intended or implemented changes (Coburn, 2003; Samoff, 1999).

Dale (1999, p. 4) claimed that international policy agendas emanating from the OECD and World Bank all had a common ideology of responding to "the problems posed to rich countries by changing global economic circumstances." That is, the member states have one allied agenda: they must rise to the challenges of attracting global business through human capital development. Nations that disseminate regular report cards or league tables publicizing academic achievements for comparative purposes are broadcasting their abilities to promise a pool of skilled workers for the global economy. This economic imperative is based upon policy knowledge and transfer over how to rectify the skills mismatch between what employers' want and what the schools traditionally teach. Yet, policy borrowing alone does not lead necessarily to a convergence of educational policies around the world (Meyer & Ramirez, 2000); and maybe there is simultaneously a localization of policies that are based on very different motivations at the national and local levels (Schriewer, 1990; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Ochs (2006) reasoned that foreign policy texts act as motifs for shaping one's own national policy future. They might serve as a source for inspiration for enacting new reforms, or to align reforms with international educational trends. Dale (p. 2) remarked: "There is an increasing recognition that national differences remain despite the spread of globalization, and accompanying doubts about tendencies toward convergence." Such was the case in Australia after OECD conferences, projects, and reports on work-based training in the late 1980s and 1990s led to the restructuring of the VET sector, a national training reform agenda that "drew upon a series of local documents that collectively framed a distinctively Australian policy framework for vocational education and training" (Taylor & Henry, p. 496). Still, the member states have been drawn into (or led by) policy conversations in OECD's selected thematic topics related to human capital development and globalization, as well as analysis of international indicators of performance.

"The key issue here is the strengthening of the OECD's normative role in policymaking and, more broadly, of the significance of the policy stances of international organizations in the framing of national policies" (Taylor & Henry, 2000, p. 501).

Learning for Jobs

In 2009, the 17-country OECD (2009) study on the VET sector, titled *Learning for jobs*, published an initial report for its members, and offered five broad policy recommendations: (1) provide the right mix of skills for the labor market; (2) reform career guidance to deliver well-formed career advice for all; (3) ensure teachers and trainers combine good workplace experience with pedagogical and other preparation; (4) make full use of workplace learning; and (5) support the VET sector with tools to engage stakeholders and information to promote transparency. The final report appeared the following year (OECD, 2010c), asserting that a number of problems remained in the field. VET continues to have an image problem as "low status," overshadowed by public policy discussions on general academic education and college-going for all (p. 9). It fails to adapt rapidly with newer industry production practices, emerging technologies, equipment, and the like. In addition, the global economic recession means that newer cohorts likely will find employers reluctant to offer work-based training opportunities and placements or jobs. This, in turn, may compel more students to remain in further education for longer periods of time. Public institutions already subject to state budget cuts will be unable to accommodate the rising demand for their educational services as well. Finally, VET systems in the OECD member states offer very limited data on sector assessments, qualification frameworks, and school-to-work outcomes, which makes for difficulties when engaged in comparative policy analysis.

What follows is a discussion of the features of successful transition models derived from the OECD reports on Norway, Sweden, and Austria. All three countries briefly profiled offer different transition systems, but little stigma is attached to VET in comparison to the USA, and there is relatively strong support by the government for work-based training in employment settings.

Norway. The Norwegian system is characterized by relative inclusiveness in regard to academic and vocational pathways (Kuczera, Brunello, Field, & Hoffman, 2008). This might be because most upper secondary education is free of charge. Approximately half the students of one cohort group enters one of three general academic programs, the other half continues after secondary school with one of nine vocational programs. Most public upper secondary schools offer both general education and VET—the latter consists of a $2+2$ model of 2 years in school followed by 2 years of apprenticeships. Approximately one-third of the students who have finished the 2-year in-school VET programs and could not find an apprenticeship attend a third year of practical training in school. Upper secondary VET students wanting to enter the university need to take a supplementary year after completing their vocational studies. Students with VET qualifications can transfer

directly to vocational technical colleges. The first year in upper secondary VET combines general education and introductory knowledge of the vocational area. In the second year, VET students specialize and attend more trade-specific courses. The 2-year apprenticeship takes place with an employer (or employers) and follows a national curriculum. The advantage of the Norwegian approach lies in the alignment of the 2 + 2 system to labor market needs. Within this model, students are able to choose other forms of learning and training provision, for example, alternate apprenticeship with courses at school from the beginning of their upper secondary program. Early specialization can nevertheless also be problematic if students do not have a sound orientation as to what they would like to pursue in the future. The relatively high dropout rate (20%) might be an indicator for that and calls for better career orientation services.

Sweden. The VET system in Sweden is based upon a strong compulsory school performance by international standards at age 15 (Kuczera, Field, Hoffman, & Wolter, 2008). The country has lower dropout rates compared with its neighbors and many students labeled as such return to schooling through various lifelong learning options. Nevertheless, youth unemployment in Sweden is relatively high, which can partly be explained by strong employment protection legislation and the minimum wages determined by collective bargaining. In comparison to Norway and Austria, Sweden offers more school-based VET, which is less aligned with changing workplace requirements. Since 1992, upper secondary VET programs were extended by 1–3 years in total, having now the same lengths as a general upper secondary education. They entail more general education content and core subjects are compulsory in all programs. Almost all students enter upper secondary schools after compulsory schooling (98%) and most complete their upper secondary education in 3 years. Upper secondary education offers 14 vocationally oriented and four academic national programs. A bit more than 50% of all students enroll in vocational programs, which entail broad general education and basic eligibility to continue studies at the postsecondary level. The upper secondary programs include eight core subjects (which occupy around one-third of total teaching time in both vocational and academic education), optional courses, subjects which are specific to each program, and a special project. On average, students attend 15 weeks of workplace training over the 3-year period. Workplace training is organized by the schools that also have to verify its quality. In comparison with other European countries, Sweden has little formal framework for cooperation between VET providers and social partners.

Austria. Austria has an equally recognized and strong full-time VET system and a dual system characterized by well-structured apprenticeships that integrate learning in schools and workplace training (Hoeckel, 2010). In comparison with Sweden, youth unemployment rates are low and the transition from education to first employment is smooth. As in Norway, social partnership involvement is strong at all governance levels. Students can pursue different transitional routes at various levels. The many options prevent dead-ends and link VET to general tertiary education through a professional baccalaureate. Austria has one of the highest proportions of upper secondary students in vocational education and training among all OECD countries.

Around 80% of each cohort enters a VET pathway after finishing compulsory education, 40% take up an apprenticeship, 15% attend school-based VET, and another 27% enroll in a VET college. Apprenticeships take between 2 and 4 years, of which approximately 75% of the time is spent in a training firm and 25% in a part-time VET school (this can vary across trades). The professional baccalaureate (established in 1997) offers students access to both vocational and general tertiary education. The Austrian double apprenticeships lead to two separate occupational qualifications (taken together lasting no more than 4 years). Typical for the VET system (in particular its dual part) is a relatively early specialization in occupationally targeted training and a rather limited investment in additional academic learning, including numeracy and literacy.

Overall, the OECD reports offer a macro-level view of nation-state VET practices. The authors did not study regional or local variations in course offering and programming, or describe institutional factors that lead to quality instruction. All three countries have developed transition models where students at grade 9 or 10 have pathways into VET. While the exit and/or entrance exams needed (board exams) vary across states or provinces and between the three nations, all three systems have been successful in preparing young adults for the labor market without requesting 12 years of general compulsory education. The reports briefly profiled indicate that upper secondary VET students have transparent career pathways leading to further education and employment; quality programs that feature cooperation between VET schools with social partners (e.g., industry and trade unions); governments that support workplace training; VET certifications that are recognized in the industry; and academic and vocational education is combined. In comparison with their European peers in the respective countries mentioned here, US students have little or no workplace experiences while their counterparts had already almost a year (on average 50% of their apprenticeship). The final OECD report on VET in the USA (examining the states of South Carolina and Texas) confirmed that too few high school students have opportunities for work-based learning, many upper secondary graduates lacking basic skills required further remediation when enrolled in technical colleges, and lower secondary students lacked adequate planning information on initial VET starting at grade 10 or beyond into postsecondary career pathways (OECD, 2011a, b). One of the most consistent messages throughout the country profiles is that the upper secondary schools in Northern and Central Europe appear to operate more like the American postsecondary technical and community colleges in the granting of occupational credentials and a variety of VET specialization.

Concluding Remarks

The high-performing OECD nations are to be admired for they have VET systems that are high status, on par with college training for the professions. According to Hoffman (2011, p. 10):

> These countries have expanded VET from its earlier guild handicraft, and blue-collar focus to include white-collar occupations and those requiring sophisticated technical skills. The

VET sector also prepares young people for citizenship and lifelong learning. Completion of a VET program certifies that the young person has the nationally standardized qualifications for their chosen occupation.

The 17-country OECD review offered "advice to countries on how to make their initial VET systems more responsive to labour market needs" (2010c, p. 39). The reports certainly raised awareness about laudable school-based practices with more equitable outcomes. Such awareness can assist processes of educational reform in the USA. We know that educational reforms can be traced historically from country-to-country. The foundations of American public education resulted from initial visits by educational leaders to the Prussian schools under Pestalozzi in the early nineteenth century. Education reformers borrow system designs that at times are enacted into federal legislation, as when the German apprenticeship model of work-based learning was incorporated into the now expired School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 (Bailey et al., 2004). "Ideas have been passed on," Halpin and Troyna (1995, p. 307) explained about policy transfer in general, "but we do not know which ones in particular or in what form or how and in what ways, they influenced the judgements of particular education policy makers subsequently." Gonon (2009, p. 68) related that prior to the formation of the European Union (EU) "a sense of Swiss exceptionalism had prevailed for a long time, observable as a feeling along the lines of 'there's nobody like us.'" With the EU concern over the dizzying array of VET diplomas crossing member states, however, the Swiss were forced to consider transparency in their own vocational qualifications. Maybe "a readiness for reforms had to be developed and an awareness of possible deficiencies had to be shown" (Gonon, p. 68). On the other hand, policy transfer may be viewed by leaders as a short-term fix to a political crisis, resulting in the failure of cross-national attraction to gain traction in a host country. Phillips and Schweisfurth (2007, p. 98) clarified: "Many are the politicians who pay a quick visit to another country and return with notions of borrowing this or that policy perceived to be effective in quite a different context."

A look at the composite model by Phillips and Ochs (2003) suggests that American policymakers are at the very beginning of a four-stage process in VET policy borrowing. First, there is cross-national attraction stage (Stage I); then the decision-making (Stage II), implementation (Stage III), and evaluation (Stage IV) phases. This initial stage is indicated through the actions of studying a comprehensive collection of OECD reports around the world. The individual countries' reports moreover provide a glimpse into differing approaches taken in VET sectors, and serve as policy lessons about the variety of pathways leading into tertiary education. Rose (1993, p. 12) noted that, while a starting point for global policy borrowing, lesson-drawing "is driven by a desire to find a program that will deal with a pressing political problem." And "if there is a positive consensus among experts about how a program will operate," he clarified, "this will reassure a policymaker who approves its goals" (1993, p. 15). One of the most intractable educational challenges is the secondary school dropout problem previously mentioned that has led US policymakers to adopt international benchmarks with the hopes of raising literacy rates. Another pressing problem is that the timeline for reauthorization of the VET sector

is rapidly approaching, and policy borrowing discourses likely will penetrate the congressional debates over continued federal funding in the future. Since a wider group of policy experts are studying OECD educational systems, we would surmise that more legislators will desire to overthrow traditional college-for-all norms, and ask others to join them in envisioning a fluid educational system balancing college *and* career readiness "based on the best international evidence and experience" (Schwartz, Levin, & Gamoran, 2011, p. 35).

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Chapter 5
Access, Coping and Relevance of Education in Youth Transitions: The German Transition System Between Labour Society and Knowledge Society

Andreas Walther

Introduction

> In the German education system, the transition from the primary to one of the lower secondary school types constitutes an area where marked social disparities are evident. Few people only make amendments to a decision for transition by transferring to another school type later in their lives… Diverse measures of the transition systems have been designed for those school leavers from general education schools who cannot immediately begin a fully qualifying vocational training, but their effectiveness is questionable as far as existing data allow for analysis. (Authoring Group Educational Reporting, 2008, p. 27)

This quote from a national report in 2008 captures in a nutshell that the regulation of young people's transition from school to work in Germany currently has arrived at a decisive historical crossroad. For a long time, international research literature on youth transitions has referred to Germany as a prototype of what comparative labour market research refers to as 'occupational labour markets' (Shavit & Müller, 1998). The 'dual system' of vocational training was held to secure stable trajectories through its combination of practical training and theoretical education standardised within a national legal framework (cf. Allmendinger, 1989). This model has, for a long time, been attractive for school leavers by providing them access to qualified non-academic careers, for employers—especially in manufacturing—as a means of recruitment of a reliably skilled labour force and for the welfare state as rates of youth unemployment were low (Heinz, 2000). However, in the past two decades, this model has been confronting considerable challenges during which the supply of apprenticeship places has declined significantly while also young people's preferences have changed. In this situation, another specificity of the German transition system comes into play: the selective differentiation of secondary education that allocates students into

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different educational tracks after 4 years of primary school according to achievement and performance. As a consequence, more and more young people remain without post-compulsory qualifications. Current transition policies can be characterised as repairing rather than reforming the system of school-to-work transitions with the result that the division between included and excluded trajectories is widening. This chapter aims to appraise the challenges of the German system of youth transitions from a life course perspective. The life course stands for a societal order based on the institutionalisation of individual life trajectories around gainful employment. It is complemented by a biographical perspective concerned with how individuals reconstruct their life course in terms of a meaningful life history. This means that the life course perspective implies an understanding of social integration as an interplay between structure and agency. A life course perspective towards education may be operationalised in terms of (a) access to and accessibility of education which reflects social inequality of life courses reproduced by education, (b) coping in terms of the resources individuals mobilise and the strategies they adopt to meet the educational demands they are confronted with and finally (c) relevance in terms of the meaning, value and recognition of education by societal actors and the learners themselves. Applying such a perspective, the potential of the German system of youth transitions for social integration seems to be questionable: access to education remains restricted, coping with transitions is being individualised and the relevance of education is 'lost in translation' between traditional vocationalism and transnational (OECD-led) discourses on competencies in knowledge societies (Parreira do Amaral et al., 2011; Walther, 2006, 2009).[1]

The chapter commences by describing the fundamental institutional structures and historical development of the German transition system. Second, key problem areas are outlined distinguishing systemic risks acknowledged by the institutional actors from subjective risks that are relevant for the individual young men and women themselves. Third, respective policy trends and discourses are documented. This analysis is framed by a comparative perspective. The fourth section analyses the German situation in the framework of a comparative model of transition regimes which has been developed in the context of EU-funded transition research. This model reveals that the current situation is characterised by a tension between a transition model of the Fordist and the Post-Fordist constellation, or the industrial labour society and the post-industrial knowledge society. The final section refers to some pedagogical dilemmas emerging from this situation and draws some conclusions in this respect.

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[1] This theoretical perspective is currently being applied in an EU-funded research "Governance of educational trajectories in Europe. Access, coping and relevance of education of young people in European knowledge societies in a comparative perspective" (GOETE) (www.goete.eu).

Standing on the Shoulders of Giants? The Heritage of Luther and Bismarck in Contemporary German Youth Transitions

The development of the regulation of school-to-work transitions in Germany can be roughly reconstructed as starting in the sixteenth century with the protestant reformation when Luther challenged the hierarchy of the Catholic Church by endowing—and thereby valorising—work with a religious value in terms of individual *vocation* ('Beruf': Weber, 1920). In the following centuries, this normative concept of work underwent both processes of secularisation and industrialisation. The establishment of the welfare state and of public education at the end of the nineteenth century contributed to a standardised and stratified model of life course politics (Leisering & Leibfried, 1999) addressing the demands of modern industrial work and mitigating the social question on the basis of an occupational order. This occupational order at the same time laid the basis for a comprehensive implementation of Fordism in the twentieth century starting in the Weimar Republic, continuing through Nazism and reaching its peak in the 1960s and 1970s. The model of 'Rhineland capitalism' (Titmuss, 1974) in Western Germany was characterised by a corporatist consensus between employers, trade unions and the state while the Eastern part applied a state socialist approach. The success of a highly productive and competitive manufacturing industrial sector, which is still the backbone of the German economy officially referred to as 'world champion in exports', has at the same time slowed down the development of the service and the knowledge economy. As a consequence, the labour market has been lacking a dynamic counter balance against the job losses of a constantly rationalised production in manufacturing.

This problem is especially reflected by a rate of female employment which has been constantly below or just at EU average. Apart from the specific production regime, this problem is also due to a gendered standard life course and family ideology which has tended to reward single-earner families and child upbringing through mothers staying at home. Public childcare provision is still below EU average except for Eastern Germany where, however, compared to state socialism, both public childcare and female employment have been in sharp decline (Pfau-Effinger, 2000). Another line of segmentation in the labour market relates to ethnicity and migration. In the 1960s, the West German 'economic miracle' required additional labour and 'guest workers' were hired from Southern European countries (especially Italy and Turkey). Instead of returning to their home countries, more and more of these immigrants were followed by their families and opted for staying in Germany. At present, the life conditions of the 'third generation' immigrants—born in Germany, holding German citizenship status and therefore referred to as 'youth with migration background'—are still characterised by discrimination and disadvantage as regards access to education, training and the labour market (Authoring Group Educational Reporting, 2008; cf. Mørch, 2008; NESSE, 2008).

Complementary to this historical process, similar developments can also be traced back through educational policies in post-war Germany. While Eastern

Germany had a comprehensive school system followed by school-based vocational training, in West Germany school was differentiated from lower secondary education onwards followed by the dual system of vocational training. The only similarity was that in both parts of Germany, entrance to higher education was restricted to a minority. German reunification in 1990 marked both the end of the East German system and the transfer of the West German training and employment system even though it did not correspond to the needs and structures of a collapsed ex-socialist labour market. The selectivity inherent to the German school system with an above-average relation between social origin and competence achievement while overall performance of students has been under the OECD average, only recently has been evidenced by the PISA study (OECD, 2010). As a consequence, education has become subject of a conflictual societal discourse and a series of policy reforms.

These historical processes have led to a diversified institutional structure and an ambiguous situation regarding the transition of young people into the labour market which itself is marked by transition (in a historical sense) from a Fordist towards a Post-Fordist model, from a labour society based on manufacturing towards a post-industrial knowledge society based on services and from state governance towards pluralist governance. To contextualise the current change, in the following, the institutional structure of education and training that has prevailed until recently shall be briefly outlined (cf. Authoring Group Educational Reporting, 2008; Evans & Heinz, 1994; Parreira do Amaral et al., 2011; Shavit & Müller, 1998):

Schooling is structured in a differentiated way: after 4 years of primary education, students are distributed to different tracks of secondary education on the basis of prior performance. Some of these tracks end with the certificate of compulsory education and are intended to lead school-leavers into vocational education or training. Only one-third of students in secondary education attend a Grammar School ('Gymnasium'), which is the primary route into higher education. The school population of the different tracks reflects social divisions with youth from lower social classes and immigrants being over-represented in the lowest track ('Hauptschule'). Especially, in Hauptschule in the past decades, school social work ('Schulsozialarbeit') has been established in order to address social problems undermining education and learning.[2] It is worth noting that education is the responsibility of federal states. Thus, Germany has 16 different education systems which differ in the degree of differentiation and selectivity.

Vocational education and *training* is dominated by the so-called dual system which used to absorb two-thirds of a cohort until the 1980s (in the Western parts of Germany). School leavers apply for an apprenticeship training contract with a company (currently 350 training professions are officially recognised) lasting three and half years and securing them an apprenticeship wage. At this time, they alternate between practical work and theoretical instruction which is documented by a standardised

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[2] Apart from this, Germany holds the biggest and most differentiated special school sector in Europe with 5% of students attending special schools, most of which address learning disabilities (European Commission, 2011).

certification. In contrast to countries such as Austria or the Netherlands where dual apprenticeship systems are balanced by significant school-based vocational education routes, in Germany the supply of regular training depends heavily on the willingness of companies to invest in training. In Germany, school-based training caters exclusively for social, health and administrative professions. While in the dual system males are over-represented, in the school-based system females predominate. Traditionally, school-to-work transitions have been characterised by two thresholds—from school to training and from training to work.

Between school and training, the *careers service* of the national employment service plays a key role by mediating between school leavers and companies, thereby contributing to the persistence of the standardised vocational system. The career service claims to reach all school leavers. However, qualitative studies indicate that young people feel manipulated towards available training professions or remedial schemes (cf. Walther, du Bois-Reymond, & Biggart, 2006). The careers service is not only involved in two out of three apprenticeship contracts, it also plays a role in the trajectories of those young people who fail in entering dual or school-based regular training.

These young people are channelled into a system of remedial measures consisting primarily of *pre-vocational education and training*. Those leaving school under age 18 without entering regular vocational education or training are obliged to attend a 1 year school-based pre-vocational education course. If young people still do not manage to enter regular training after this, they are directed into further pre-vocational schemes funded by the employment service and run by private service providers or non-profit welfare organisations. The so-called 'vocational youth assistance' ('Jugendberufshilfe') normally combines practical experience (either in special workshops or in placements within private companies) with social pedagogical assistance in terms of vocational orientation, life planning and training for job interviews. Due to the fact that pre-vocational education and training neither provides additional qualifications nor increases the chances for entering regular training, it is largely seen as a mere waiting loop.

The social pedagogical schemes of pre-vocational education and training are based on a concept of *disadvantaged youth* which ascribes a lack of competitiveness in the struggle for scarce apprenticeship posts to individual deficits rather than to structural problems such as contracted labour or training markets. While it is acknowledged that such deficits may result from underprivileged socialisation processes—whereby support through the welfare system is being legitimised—it is the individuals who have to compensate for them by attending schemes before having a chance of re-entering regular vocational education and training. This system is still informed by an assumption of full employment in which unemployment reflects either individual disability or temporary economic conjunctures.

After following a corporatist occupational and vocational model for many decades, *labour market policies* since the late 1990s have been restructured in the direction of 'activation' and 'workfare' which means that welfare entitlements are being reduced and more self-responsibility is demanded from job seekers and welfare recipients (cf. Harsløf, 2005; van Berkel & Hornemann Møller, 2002).

Traditional labour market policies were oriented towards preserving both the existing occupational order and the living standards of former employees. Nowadays, job seekers can no longer expect to wait for a job corresponding to their qualification because the level of unemployment benefits is being reduced to a residual social assistance after 12 months. Unemployed young people find themselves increasingly channelled into atypical and precarious employment which means unskilled, fixed-term and low-wage (while there is no legally defined minimum wage).

In sum, the traditional transition system relies on the assumptions of a standard life course: school provides *access* to different training and study routes according to a meritocratic principle, the *relevance* of education in turn is secured by connecting school to a vocational education and training system involving employers as key actors, while making sure that children and young people *cope* with education is the natural task and right of parents. Only in cases where parents fail in laying the foundations for education and subsequent training will the welfare state (represented by local youth welfare services) intervene with compensatory measures such as school social work and vocational youth assistance.

Key Problem Areas: Unemployed Youth and Lack of Qualified Labour

Demographic change, individualised biographical orientations and the flexibilisation of the labour market confront the German transition system with the challenge of how to secure its inclusiveness in the future. At present, the system appears not sufficiently prepared to address individualised, flexible and diversified trajectories beyond smooth transitions to employment (e.g. upward, alternative, repaired, stagnant or downward trajectories) (Evans, 2002; Walther & Plug, 2006; cf. Blossfeld, Klijzing, Mills, & Kurz, 2005). Obviously, the strong orientation towards an occupational status order inhibits institutional and market actors from assessing these trajectories other than as deviant or disadvantaged and therefore requiring assistance or, increasingly, pressure. This accounts primarily for the school leavers from Hauptschule, the lowest track through compulsory education, which still represents approximately 30% of all school leavers. The German transition system, therefore, does not only protect young people insufficiently against risks of exclusion and precariousness, it also implies mechanisms of 'cooling' individual aspirations 'out' (cf. Walther, 2009). Figure 5.1 reveals that especially the early tracking after 4 years of primary school offers limited options for leavers from Hauptschule which are reflected by the guidance principles of the careers service, the gendered segmentation of the dual training system, and the limited compensatory potential of pre-vocational education and training: all representing risks inbuilt in the institutional mechanisms. The risks young people are confronted with in their school to work transitions can be distinguished with regard to their recognition by institutional actors (systemic risks) and their subjective relevance for the young people themselves (subjective risks) (Walther et al., 2002).

Higher education	Labour market		
Transition VET – labour market			
Risk: *status monopoly of dual system compared to other trajectories*			

	Vocational youth assistance		*Upper secondary education*
	Risk:		*Vocational education and training*
Dual system of VET	*Revolving doors effect*	School-based VET	*Transition system*
Risk:	Pre-vocational education (BVJ)	**Risk:**	*(Age 15-18)*
segmentation, competition, dependency on employers	**Risk:**	*Doing-Gender*	
	Unproductive waiting pattern		

Comprehensive schools

Grammar School (Gymnasium)

Career service

Risk: *guiding principle – placement in 'any' training or scheme*

Transition lower secondary – upper secondary education / VET

Risk: *restricted options of standardised routes after early selection*

Comprehensive school	Realschule	Mittelschule	Hauptschule	Special schools	*Lower secondary (Age 10-15/16)*

Transition primary – lower secondary education

Risk: *early selection through differentiated lower secondary education*

Primary school		Special schools	*Primary (Age 6-10)*

Kindergarden	*Elementary (Age 3-6)*

Fig. 5.1 Inbuilt risks of exclusion in the German transition system

On the side of *systemic risks*, an obvious risk results from a loss of 200,000 apprenticeship places in the dual system between 1990 and 2010 while the school-based vocational route has only marginally been extended. Companies justify their withdrawal by pointing to the costs of training, and to the difficulties in forecasting future needs regarding labour and skills. The share of school leavers entering the dual system has dropped from more than 60% per cohort in 1990 to around 40% in 2010, while participation in school-based training has only increased from 10% to 15% and in higher education from 35% to 40% (cf. Authoring Group Educational Reporting, 2010). Especially, leavers from Hauptschule have increasingly been excluded from regular training. The persistence of the differentiated three-tiered school system and the low success rate of pre-vocational education and training in terms of subsequent regular training or employment (20–30% with a few exceptions of schemes with 50% of participants making it into an apprenticeship of job) result in a stable rate of early school leaving. Fifteen percent of 18–24-year-olds—primarily leavers from Hauptschule—do not hold more than an ISCED 2 qualification and are not in education or training. Inasmuch as the differentiated school system restricts the choices of those in the lower tracks of secondary education in continuing with school, this rate is declining only at a slow pace (Pohl & Walther, 2007). Together with the breakdown of the East German labour market after German unification, these developments have contributed to a rise of youth unemployment, which had traditionally been rather low compared to European neighbour states, up to 15% from the late 1990s until the mid 2000s. Problems of schooling, however, do not only apply to early school leaving but also to low levels of reading literacy as evidenced by PISA (cf. OECD, 2010). In fact, at present there is the paradoxical situation of an increasing demand for qualified labour due to demographic change and economic recovery since 2010 while employers are still reluctant to take leavers from Hauptschule as apprentices. They ascribe to such students a lack of 'trainability' in terms of problematic social behaviour and the lack of basic skills in reading and writing.

Young people with a migration background are being identified as a particularly disadvantaged group. These young people are over-represented in the lower educational tracks, among early school leavers, low achievers with bad reading literacy in PISA and the unemployed. This circumstance no longer accounts only for girls assumed to be under parental control motivated by traditional religious gender stereotypes. More and more, it also accounts for boys whose low levels of school performance, especially where they are combined with subcultural acts of rebellion, has put them on top of the policy agenda in terms of prevention and intervention in education and the labour market. However, not only when intersecting with ethnicity and migration but also more generally, gender divisions are currently undergoing substantial changes. For a long time, the higher school qualifications of females were contradicted by the persisting gendered segmentation of the labour market. Higher rates of young women entering higher education and lower youth unemployment rates suggest that education starts paying off for young women also with regard to labour market entry while boys from lower social backgrounds and/or with a migration background are seen as more vulnerable (German Shell, 2010).

The gap emerging from the figures documented above has been covered by the increase of pre-vocational education and training—referred to as the 'transition system' (Authoring Group Educational Reporting, 2010). In 2008, 40% of school leavers intending to undergo regular vocational education or training (25% of all school leavers) entered pre-vocational measures instead of the dual system or school-based VET. The 'transition system' represents a complex and uncoordinated diversity of programs, measures and actors which is hardly overseen, even by experts. Various programs have been implemented to coordinate the system at the local or regional level, thus themselves requiring a 'coordination of coordination'.

From a systemic perspective, problems of access tend to be addressed in quantitative terms of supply and demand (of training places), problems of coping are ascribed to individual deficits, while the relevance of education and life course options are primarily interpreted with regard to the vocational order of the employment system. Apart from this, there is a range of *subjective risks* young people are confronted with which are not formally acknowledged and which emerge primarily from qualitative research on biographical experiences in transitions to work. In the context of the German transition system, subjective risks arise especially a lack of choice for those with low qualifications. The challenge for such young people is identifying and motivating themselves for a three and half year training and vocational socialisation process in a second or third choice—in their words, for jobs that are 'no fun' but, at the same time, conflict with demands emerging from different life areas in the context of de-standardised transitions to adulthood (all quotes from Walther et al., 2006, pp. 134–137; cf. Walther, 2009):

> You really get pressure in lower secondary school: you must, you must—training, training, without training you will not make it—and no alternatives … So many only start any training only because of pressure or anxiety. (female, 21)

Another subjective risk is the effect of stigmatisation experienced by being categorised as disadvantaged through the employment services:

> It is an administration after all—just staring into your file, going bah, bah, they treat you like a cow. (male, 21)

The same applies for the experience of the limited potential of remedial schemes which are perhaps more effective in terms of a process of 'cooling-out' (cf. Goffman, 1962) whereby vocational aspirations are reduced rather than career perspectives improved:

> Some from this [pre-vocational] project made it into an apprenticeship—if you were lucky enough, I simply wasn't. (male, 20)

From this perspective, the German transition system (re)produces disadvantage by the combination of a selective school system and a rigidly standardised system of vocational education and training. In fact, positioning a third of school leavers as 'not trainable' contributes to undermining young people's motivation and self-consciousness. While school-to-work transitions undergo significant change, the institutional structures and their normative assumptions of professional choice requiring highly subjective commitment still persist. In other words, not all options

which appear accessible to young people are also subjectively relevant for them while they have to cope individually with the biographical dilemmas emerging from this discrepancy (Parreira do Amaral et al., 2011; Pohl & Walther, 2007).

Repairing or Reforming? Policy Trends and Discourses

The array of factors described above has turned youth transitions into a highly conflictual societal discourse arena in which existing power relationships and long-standing assumptions of normality are being challenged. School, vocational training as well as the 'transition system' are subject to ongoing debates, and reforms in terms of *access*, *coping* and *relevance* of education are being redefined. The most important reforms are briefly presented.

School, especially the differentiated access to lower secondary education and the early age at which pupils are divided into different tracks, is being addressed by several reforms at federal state level.[3] This development has been primarily triggered by the OECD's PISA study in which Germany performed below average and which revealed a higher social reproduction through education than all other European countries (OECD, 2010). Some federal states are currently merging the two lower tracks of lower secondary education into a single 'middle school'. However, as these schools in most cases remain differentiated internally—in terms of providing qualifications of different levels—and the elite status of grammar schools remains unquestioned, the hierarchical structure of secondary education persists. However, the imperative behind these initiatives is economic competitiveness of the knowledge society rather than concerns for social justice and social cohesion (see also European Commission, 2006). In the ongoing shift from input to outcome in defining what education is relevant, competence standards are replacing standardised curricula. These standards are monitored, or rather measured, by randomised educational research while a 'national education panel study' has also commenced to enable a constant assessment of individual competencies 'from cradle to grave' (Blossfeld, Schneider, & Doll, 2009; cf. European Commission, 2001). At the same time, increasing social problems in secondary school are being addressed by an expansion of school social work ('Schulsozialarbeit') aimed at supporting students in coping with education and compensating for social disadvantage through counselling, contact with parents, conflict mediation, social skills training and increasingly individualised support teaching. The fact that school social work is organised by youth welfare services at municipality level reflects an inbuilt mechanism in the German education system: responsibility for social aspects (and problems) of learning and education are 'outsourced' to the families or the welfare state (Parreira do Amaral et al., 2011). In fact, compared to the traditional responsibility

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[3] In Germany, general and higher education are responsibilities of the federal states (Länder) which means that in Germany, formally, 16 education systems coexist.

of the federal states, new educational governance is characterised by an increase of actors on the local, national and transnational level (cf. Amos, 2010).

The externalisation of responsibilities of support applies also to *vocational education and training,* although traditionally the coordination of state and market has been constitutive for the dual system. Since employers began withdrawing from their commitment within the consensus characterising the Rhineland capitalism throughout the era of Fordism, public actors have been concerned with maintaining the provision of training supply to maintain options of access for school leavers without academic qualifications. However, 'soft' means of persuasion prevail while 'hard' means of incentive or control like the introduction of a training tax for companies refraining from the dual system fail due to a lack of the necessary political will and the fear that companies might leave the country for less regulated labour markets. The cultural weight of vocationalism (and the public expense implied) has inhibited the expansion of the school-based training route. An exception has been the expansion of non-company-based apprenticeship training organised by public and private training providers which, especially in Eastern Germany, has helped to compensate for the lack of training offered by companies (cf. BMBF, 2010). However, here the question of relevance comes into play. While the dual principle secures not only labour market relevance of skills and qualifications but also a demand for trained labour force, the provision of additional apprenticeship places in market terms produces an oversupply of labour. As well, the introduction of new occupations in the service and knowledge economy has proved difficult. On the one hand, these new occupations are not built on the same cultural (vocational) foundations as other professions organised in the dual system; on the other hand, dual training in the IT sector has particularly attracted young men with grammar school qualifications, rather than the traditional target group of the dual system. This means that in the dual system, the objectives of securing subjective and systemic relevance of training and increasing access tend to contradict each other (Bosch, 2010). This is particularly reflected by employers justifying their withdrawal from the dual system by referring to the lack of 'trainability' (Ausbildungsreife) of school leavers. This concept is new to the discourse agenda, introduced by employers and taken up by most other actors, including the National Employment Service and the Federal Institute of Vocational Training. Standards of trainability as well as procedures of assessment have been developed. In this constellation, the responsibility of employers for providing training opportunities and securing young people's vocational training processes are being individualised. It is up to young people to cope with the demands of the economy and to the welfare state, welfare agencies and social pedagogical assistance to support them in this respect (Eberhard, 2006). The discourse on 'trainability' is reflected by redefining the sector of labour market policies for young people, which consist primarily of segregated and compensatory social pedagogical measures aimed at re-integration into regular training and employment, as the 'transition system'. The term reflects traditional assumptions of standard and full employment that do not foresee uncertain transitions. According to these assumptions of normality, transitions imply problematic, deviant and riskful careers and require special treatment.

In recent years, the low success rates of pre-vocational education and training in placing young people in regular training—which reflects the structural paradox of curing structural problems with individualised pedagogical measures—has paved the way for an increase of preventative programs. As a consequence, labour market policies have been shifting towards school and anticipating transition related compensatory action in the life course. Labour market entry is regulated by an activation, or rather the workfare approach, while support for coping with transitions is translated into support for coping with education. In the following, this trend shall be illustrated by two examples of recent policy programs:

1. In 2004, the Federal Office of Auditing ('Bundesrechnungshof') criticised the national employment service for its low success rate in placing jobseekers in the labour market and demanded more effective measures. The government, run by a coalition between Social Democrats and the Green Party, installed a commission of experts that produced a report resulting in a reform of the Social Assistance Act and Employment Act referred to as the 'Hartz Acts' (recalling the name of the chair of the commission). The Act on Basic Social Security ('Hartz IV') implied a paradigmatic change in labour market policies towards an activation approach: restricting social insurance–based unemployment benefits to 12 months, followed by a job seekers' allowance at the level of social assistance combined with the pressure of accepting any job. This included the so-called '1-Euro-jobs' (1 Euro per hour on top of the job seekers' allowance) which have replaced a grown social economy of employment opportunities for the long-term unemployed. 'Hartz IV' is being applied also to young people under 25 who (or whose parents) fall into the category of long-term unemployment. They are allocated a 'case manager' who imposes and monitors an 'individual action plan' regarding job search or remedial schemes. While it is unclear to what extent recent positive effects on the German labour market can be partly ascribed to this reform or to economic and demographic change, it is obvious that activation has increased poverty, especially among young people, and contributed to a de-professionalisation of the German labour force. Young people under 'Hartz IV' are no longer channelled into training but into '1-Euro-jobs' whereby the traditional vocationalism is step-by-step being replaced by a precarious work regime. A side effect, especially in Eastern Germany, is young people who justify early school leaving by anticipating 'I will be on Hartz IV anyway' (cf. German Shell, 2010, p. 247). In some regions, also an increase of young people neither in employment, education or training nor registered unemployed (NEET) is being reported, that is, young people withdrawing from the transition system altogether (cf. Pohl & Walther, 2007).

2. In 2009, the Federal Ministry of Employment launched a pilot program aimed at providing the weakest students in lower secondary education (Hauptschule) and in special schools individualised and continuous support through personal advisors 'accompanying' them into training and employment for a period of 2–4 years ('Berufseinstiegsbegleiter'). For the pilot, 1,000 schools have been selected with ten students per school identified as needing support most urgently (e.g. in terms

of low schooling achievement and disadvantaged background). The personal advisors, similar to school social workers, are employed by external providers who in turn receive funding from the Federal Employment Service. The program starts when young people are 2 years from the end of lower secondary education (which means in grade 8 or 9 depending on the federal state) and focuses on learning-oriented support, vocational orientation including placements with companies and writing applications for apprenticeship places. If young people manage to enter training, the accompaniment stops after 6 months (covering the trial period of the apprenticeship contract), otherwise they are supported for a maximum of 2 years. The program responds to the critique of various actors of vocational youth assistance, according to whom the failure of most pre-vocational measures results from discontinuous funding inhibiting sustainable support but leading to a 'revolving doors' effect. While an interim evaluation report reveals that most actors appreciate the objective of the program, difficulties with realising the principle of continuity also emerge. These findings indicate inappropriate practices in the ways in which the program is administrated by the Employment Service. First, providers have been selected primarily according to financial criteria, implying low salaries for the staff, with the consequence of either low professional quality or high fluctuation. Second, young people in many cases have been dismissed from the program if they miss appointments with their personal advisors or if they start a pre-vocational scheme (i.e. instead of regular training) that includes social pedagogical assistance. In fact, only a minority of participating young people have had the opportunity to develop continuous relationships with their personal advisors (cf. IAW, 2010).

Both programs represent significant innovations within the framework of German labour market policies and the 'transition system' contradicting the traditional principles and procedures of access, coping and relevance of education with regard to youth transitions; both are characterised at least by ambivalent effects; and both, at least partly, are cases of 'policy borrowing' from EU neighbour countries. Therefore, the following section contextualises the German transition system within a comparative typology of transition regimes in Europe.

Youth Transitions in Germany in Comparison: The Model of Transition Regimes

A key requirement of a cross-country comparison of transition systems is the functional equivalence—and thereby comparability—of the institutions or practice involved in regulating youth transitions in different contexts under analysis. One way of securing functional equivalence is contextualisation which means relating single phenomena in their wider societal context through which they are endowed with specific functions and meaning. The concept of transition regimes refers to different (national) configurations of the regulation of transitions in the life course.

It has been developed in the context of European comparative research on young people's transitions from education to work. The notion of 'regime' implies that regulation of life course trajectories expands beyond public institutions towards the interaction of socio-economic, institutional and cultural factors including individual agency. In sum, transition regimes refer to different configurations of power and normality in organising social inclusion and exclusion.

One reference point of this model has been Esping-Andersen's (1990) work on welfare regimes. From there it has evolved over a series of studies on youth transitions involving the analysis of institutional arrangements, document analysis of policy programmes, statistical analysis, expert interviews, case studies of projects for disadvantaged youth, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with young people across different educational levels as well as with parents (Biggart & Kovacheva, 2006; McNeish & Loncle, 2003; Pohl & Walther, 2007; Walther, 2006; Walther & Pohl, 2005; Walther et al., 2006). Key analytical dimensions are young people's access to welfare (Gallie & Paugam, 2000), structures of education and training, especially in terms of standardisation and stratification (Allmendinger, 1989), structures of labour markets and labour market entry between 'open' organisational and 'closed' occupational models (Shavit & Müller, 1998), mechanisms of doing gender in terms of female employment and gendered segmentation of labour markets (Sainsbury, 1999), policies against youth unemployment with regard to their main goals and concepts of disadvantage (referring to individual deficits or to structural problems) including different interpretations of the concept of activation (Harsløf, 2005; McNeish & Loncle; Pohl & Walther; Walther et al., 2002), and, finally, the dominant institutional representations of youth reflecting the demands and expectations addressed towards young people (IARD, 2001; Walther, 2006, 2009).

A regime typology should not be misunderstood as descriptive. It clusters different groups of national transition systems in their underlying rationale of regulating youth transitions. This implies that structural and institutional details may diverge considerably. For the time being, four regime types have been modelled (see Table 5.1).

- The liberal transition regime in the Anglo-Saxon countries like the UK is best characterised by the notion of individual responsibility in which young job seekers face major pressure to enter the workforce. Youth is regarded as a basically transitory life phase which should be turned into economic independence as soon as possible. The labour market is structured by a high degree of flexibility. While this provides multiple entry options, it also implies a high level of insecurity. Although female employment is high, it tends to be of a part-time nature and in low-skilled or unskilled service occupations. In the context of fair work policies, young people face considerable risks of social exclusion.
- The universalistic transition regime of the Nordic countries like Finland is based on comprehensive education systems in which general and vocational education is largely integrated and individualised. Youth is first of all associated with individual personal development providing young people a status of 'citizens in

Table 5.1 Transition regimes across Europe

Regime / Dimension	Country	School	Training	Social security	Employment Regime	Female Employment	Concept of Youth	Concept of Disadvantage	Focus of Transition Policies	Expenditure* Educ/F&C/ALMP	Policy trend
Universalistic	Finland	Not selective	Flexible standards (mixed)	State	Open Low risks	High	Personal development Citizenship	Individualized and structure-related	Education Activation	FI: 5,9 / 2,9 / 0,7	Liberal (more labour market orientation)
Employment-centred	Germany France Netherlands	Selective	Standardized (dual)	State / family	Closed Risks at the margins	Medium	Adaptation to Social positions	Individualized	(Pre-) vocational training	D: 4,5 / 2,8 / 0,5 F: 5,6 / 2,5 / 0,7 NL: 5,3 / 1,6 / 0,7	Liberal (more activation)
Liberal	UK	Principally not selective	Flexible, low standards (mixed)	State / family	Open High risks	High	Early economic independence	Individualized	Employability	UK: 5,4 / 1,5 / 0,1	Liberal (more education)
Sub-protective	Italy	Not Selective	Low standards and coverage (mainly school)	Family	Closed High risks (Informal work)	Low	Without distinct status	Structure-related	'Some' status (work, education, training)	IT: 4,3 / 1,2 / 0,4	Liberal (deregulation) and employment-centred (training)
Post-socialist countries											
	Poland Slovenia	Principally not selective	Standards in process of transformation (mixed)	Family state	Closed High risks	Low (except Slovenia)	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	PL: 4,9 / 0,8 / 0,1 SI: 5,2 / 1,8 / 0,1	PL: Liberal/ employment-centred SI: Universal

aEurostat data on expenditures (% of GDP) for education/families & children/active labour market policies in 2007 (Eurostat)

education'. This is reflected by an education allowance for all who are over 18 and still in education which contributes to partial independence from their families. Activating labour market policies imply individual choice in order to secure individual motivation. Gendered career opportunities are highly balanced due to the integration of general and vocational education, a broad public employment sector and the availability of childcare.

- In the Mediterranean countries like Italy, the transition regime is under-institutionalised in a double sense. Due to a lack of reliable training pathways into the labour market, transitions often involve a waiting phase until the mid-thirties, with unequal outcomes. As they are not entitled to any kind of social benefits, young men and women depend to a large extent on their families who are referred to as a buffer against the socio-political vacuum. As a result, youth does not have a formal status and place in society. Higher education is one option providing a recognised status while informal work helps to gain limited economic independence. Young women's career opportunities are clearly restricted and they anticipate responsibility for later family obligations.
- Germany belongs to the *employment-centred regime* of continental countries (like France or the Netherlands) characterised by a differentiated and selective school system connected to a rigidly standardised and gendered system of vocational training. In secondary education, students follow different routes according to prior performance. The dominant expectation for youth is to socialise for a set occupational and social position through training. This explanation is reflected through the provision of a two-tiered division of social security, favouring those who have already been in regular training or employment, while others are entitled to stigmatised social assistance; 'disadvantage' implies a deficit-oriented perspective.

It is obvious that this picture is limited inasmuch as it represents the so-called Western world. Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries have been analysed according to the dimensions of the model. However, the pace of transformation and the diverse mixtures between an apparently uniform past and increasing heterogeneity do not allow for subsuming CEE countries under the existing model or creating one post-socialist regime type. Apart from this, the model does not replace further comparative analysis, especially as differences *within* regime types as well as consequences of social change tend to be neglected. It primarily serves for organising contextual information to interpret comparative findings.

With regard to the current situation of the German transition system, the model may help to explain the difficulties in changing track: the combination of differentiated and selective schooling with a rigidly standardised system of vocational training reflects a corporatist structure of the employment-centred transition regime in which young people often do not have individual social rights until they reach the age of 27 years. This transition system has been celebrated as stable and inclusive in the Fordist period, due to the low level of youth unemployment and the high qualification and productivity of German labour force; it has been referred to as stagnating in the 1990s when it seemed to neglect the turn towards the service economy reflected by

increasing youth unemployment; however, it has performed better than other systems in the economic crisis in 2008 and 2009 (cf. European Commission, 2011).

Arguably, the effects of this constellation of factors have shaped recent policy reforms even if they resulted from attempts of 'policy borrowing'. The reform of labour market policies ('Hartz IV') has been mainly inspired by the British 'welfare to work' strategy and the New Deal for Young People. However, key contextual factors such as young people's individual entitlements for social benefits representing an incentive for making contact with authorities as well as the possibility to continue with education due to a flexible and permeable education system are missing in Germany (cf. Kohlrausch, 2009). The 'accompaniment' program ('Berufseinstiegsbegleiter') can be interpreted as transferring ideas from both Danish counselling programs for school leavers and the British Connexions program. Both programs aim at increasing attendance in post-compulsory education by individualised support. Main actors are municipalities (Denmark) or local partnerships (UK) allowing for a contextualised implementation. In contrast, the German program is administrated by the Federal Employment Service, used to running large-scale standardised programs, and in fact failing the main intention of the program of facilitating continuous support (Pohl & Walther, 2007).

A fundamental difference between Germany on the one side and Denmark and the UK on the other is the different stage in the shift from the labour to the knowledge society or from Fordism to Post-Fordism. While the German corporatism combining differentiated school and standardised vocational training has been highly functional for a hierarchical industrial labour society centred around a strong manufacturing sector, the service and the knowledge economy rely on flexible institutions and individualised trajectories which are prevalent in Denmark and the UK, yet in different ways. Using terms introduced by Dolowitz and Marsh (2000), the examples can be characterised as cases of 'uninformed' and 'incomplete policy transfer'. They take a middle range position between repairing and reforming traditional structures. They show, on the one hand, that mechanisms of path dependency are at work in transition policies (Pfau-Effinger & Geissler, 2005) which restrict the possibilities of changing from one policy regime type to another. On the other hand, they reveal that policy reforms, especially if framed by international comparison and learning from 'best practice' as encouraged by the European Union, require differentiated and reflexive approaches of de-contextualisation and re-contextualisation in order to take institutional inter-dependencies as well as cultural factors into account (Casey & Gold, 2004; Walther & Pohl, 2005).

Conclusions: Pedagogical and Political Dilemmas

In this chapter, the way in which transitions in young people's life courses are being structured in Germany—in terms of regulating access to education and training, of providing support for coping with education and labour market entry and of negotiating relevance of education and vocational training—has been reconstructed from

early modern labour society to late modern knowledge society. Starting from an understanding of the life course as an interplay between societal structures and individual agency, it has been shown how institutional actors and young people react differently to the restructuring of school-to-work transitions. This has lead to an increasing discrepancy between systemic regulations and the lived realities of young people in transition to work. While policies address systemic risks by providing prevocational schemes, these measures are not necessarily relevant to the life plans of the young people and thereby do not reduce the subjective risk of alienation and demotivation. The challenge for the German transition system, and this includes the paradigms of educational and transition research, lies in making pathways more flexible for individualised trajectories without putting the whole responsibility of successful versus failing transitions on young people's shoulders. This is especially the case if taking the reproduction of social inequality through the differentiated school system into account. At present, options of access both within general education and from general education to vocational education and training remain restricted; support for coping is being outsourced to the welfare system and made conditional upon prior categorisation (and stigmatisation) as 'disadvantaged' or 'untrainable'; while the relevance of education and training is no longer only determined by linkages with the occupational system, but also by global models of competence achievement. Comparative analysis in general and the model of transition regimes in particular sheds light on the historical origins of this pathway and the limitations for policy borrowing from other contexts in which the whole configuration of welfare, education and training, and the labour market, as well as the assumptions of normal life conduct are less alien to individualised life course trajectories than German corporatism. The effect of comparative analysis rather than policy borrowing lies in a higher reflexivity of policy, practice and research in conceptualising youth transitions and regulating access, coping and relevance of education in a way that takes account of both systemic and subjective perspectives.

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Chapter 6
Making the Transition to Post-school Life: The Canadian Situation

Wolfgang Lehmann

Introduction

Canada assumes a somewhat unique position amongst other industrial and post-industrial nations. It shares with these nations a substantial prolongation of the transition from school to work and a shift towards a knowledge-intensive service economy. Yet, it also rests its economic fortunes on the exploitation of natural resources. Together, these factors create a set of distinctive challenges for young people choosing educational pathways and transitioning to post-school life. A pervasive public discourse links economic and life course success to increasingly high levels of formal education, preferably at university. At the same time, Canada currently struggles with a serious shortage of skilled workers necessary in the extraction and processing of Canada's natural resources, especially in the oil and gas sector. A growing number of young people and their families are responding to the first challenge. University enrolment has steadily increased over the past decades. Yet, few young people enter apprenticeships or other forms of training in the skilled trades and a substantial number of high-school leavers still enter the labour market without any further education. It is the latter group that faces precarious employment prospects and is exceptionally vulnerable to unemployment, contingent employment and a host of other problems.

Consequently, school-work transitions programs and policies in Canada can best be described as a hodge-podge of approaches that aim to address the needs of a rather diverse group of stakeholders. In terms of university access, for instance, policies are increasingly aimed at widening participation for traditionally under-represented groups, such as children of working-class families or members of Canada's Aboriginal communities. Obviously, these policies differ greatly from

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those aimed at attracting young people into careers in the skilled trades or keeping at-risk students at school or moving them into some form of post-secondary education or training. Development of policy strategies is further complicated by Canada's federal structure. Education, for instance, is a provincial mandate, with little to no federal coordination. In addition, school-work transition issues vary greatly between provinces. Oil and gas-rich Alberta, for instance, has been very engaged in the development of a skilled trades workforce, whereas a province like Ontario, which has lost a great number of manufacturing jobs, appears more concerned with university access for a greater number of young people hitherto excluded from higher education.

In this chapter, I will describe some of the context variables affecting transitions to post-school life in Canada. I will further outline some of the key challenges encountered by young people in their transition to employment and introduce a few policy programs aimed at addressing these challenges.

Labour Market and Education Contexts

Despite persistent concerns about high levels of youth unemployment, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] (2008) rates the performance of Canada's youth labour market as comparatively good. Sustained economic growth had led to steady declines in youth unemployment in the pre-recession decade. Furthermore, more than three-quarters of first jobs of school leavers with at least an upper secondary diploma were full time and permanent during this period. The OECD also reports a long-term incidence of youth unemployment in 2006 that was well below the OECD average (OECD, 2008, p. 2). Despite these positive findings, however, the unemployment rates for youth[1] in Canada stubbornly remain double that of adults and the school drop-out rate is relatively high, as is the percentage of young people not attending any form of post-secondary education (Statistics Canada, 2008). In 2009, 25% of Canada's population above the age of 25 held a university degree, 24% were educated at the college level, 12% completed apprenticeships or other skilled trades training and 38% had no post-secondary credentials (Canadian Education Statistics Council, 2010). In comparison, the post-secondary pathways of recent high-school graduates show a clear academic bias. Although data on immediate post-high school destinations are difficult to obtain, in 2005, 40% of Canadians between the ages of 24 and 26 had attended or were currently attending university, followed by 26% in colleges, and 13% in some other form of post-secondary education. This also means that 21% had not yet continued to any form of post-secondary education (Shaienks & Gluszynski, 2007, p. 28).

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[1] Statistics Canada defines "youth" as young people between the ages of 15 and 24.

The insignificance of workplace-based post-secondary education and training is an important aspect of Canada's school-work-transitions (SWT) system. Countries with extensive and highly developed dual systems of vocational education provide a viable alternative to young people who prefer hands-on, applied forms of learning, or struggle with the demands and culture of school-based learning. Young Canadians who fit this description are the most likely to find themselves in the labour market as unskilled workers, which in turn has a plethora of negative consequences, such as higher levels of unemployment, low salaries, vulnerability to bust-and-boom cycles and contingent employment, or restricted access to important benefits associated with good jobs (such as extended healthcare or private pension plans). Not surprisingly then, at-risk youth and those with low levels of formal education have long been a target group for SWT policies and interventions, which take various forms such as stay-at-school programs for those at risk of not finishing high school or employment support programs for those with low levels of skills or other labour market attachment problems. High-school-based youth apprenticeship programs are another policy initiative aimed at attracting those not interested in school-based learning to a more experiential form of post-secondary education and into the skilled trades, an area experiencing worker shortages.

At the other end of the educational achievement spectrum, we find programs aimed at increasing the number of individuals with high levels of formal education, especially individuals from groups traditionally underrepresented in higher education. Widening participation in higher education, removing access barriers, and improving retention and graduation rates are seen partly as social justice issues, but also reflect policy concerns associated with securing Canada's transformation into a knowledge economy (Lehmann, 2011). School-work transition policies in Canada have also been shaped by current and projected demands for workers in specific labour market segments. The ongoing transformation of Canada into a knowledge economy is associated with an increasing demand for highly educated knowledge workers. According to both historical labour market data and projections of future demand (Lapointe, Dunn, Tremblay-Côté, Bergeron, & Ignaczak, 2006), it has been argued that the number of newly created jobs requiring formal post-secondary education (PSE) continues to rise, with a corresponding decline of employment opportunities for those without post-secondary education. In a report on the status of post-secondary education in Canada, the Canadian Council on Learning argues that given the current combination of employment growth and rate of university completion, Canada will be faced with a shortage of highly skilled workers (Canadian Council on Learning, 2006, p. 26).

Parallel to the knowledge-economy/university education discourse, concerns have, in recent years, also been focused on current and future shortages of skilled workers in the trades. This concern has taken on a special urgency because of Canada's ambition to become an oil and gas superpower. High oil prices throughout the pre-recession 2000s coupled with technological changes in extraction and refining have made it possible to exploit, on a massive scale, a rich reservoir of oil sands in Northern Alberta. The oil sands in Northern Alberta are vast, but their development requires a process that is very resource intensive in terms of energy

requirements, equipment, technology and human resources. The need for skilled workers is manifest in a number of ways beyond those required in the actual oil industry: workers are required to build the necessary support infrastructure in the oil sands area, but also in the nearby larger cities. Similarly, offshore oil development in Newfoundland has created skilled employment opportunities in Eastern Canada. The shortage of workers is further exacerbated by the aforementioned aging of Canada's workforce. However, this problem is perceived as more pressing in construction and other areas of skilled trades labour, as the physical demands on workers in these industries mean earlier retirements than in other sectors (Construction Sector Council, 2004).

Following this brief overview of the context in which transitions to post-school life take place in Canada, a few key initiatives are described occurring both at federal and provincial levels. Given that education is a provincial mandate and that Canada, like other English-speaking nations in the liberal welfare state tradition favours deregulation, it is not possible here to do justice to the vast range of programs and initiatives in existence in Canada. Instead, I hope to provide the reader with a sense of the variety of programs aimed at different stakeholders.

School-Work Transition Policy Programs in Canada

In the following discussion of policy programs, which will be necessarily brief and abstract, the focus is on programs aimed at helping at-risk students, addressing skilled labour shortages and widening access to university.

At-Risk Students: Staying at School

At the federal level, the Government of Canada offers a range of different programs under the *Youth Employment Strategy* (YES)[2] umbrella. One of these programs, *Skills Link*, is aimed at helping young people who, for various reasons, face barriers to employment. The program is based on what the government calls a client-centred approach, which means that there is no overarching program structure to *Skills Link*. Instead, the government funds organisations and businesses who become involved in helping young people at risk. The stated intention of *Skills Link* is to fund tailored interventions that give young people employment experiences and the opportunity to develop important employability skills. In turn, these interventions are meant to make these individuals increasingly self-sufficient in their efforts to find and keep

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[2] Information regarding all programs in the Youth Employment Strategy can be found at the following website: http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/epb/yi/yep/newprog/yesprograms.shtml

employment. Employers may receive wage subsidies to employ at-risk youth, community organisations may receive funding to involve young people in community service who are otherwise considered unready for employment or funding can be made available to groups that engage in employment readiness and basic skills training for underprivileged and disadvantaged young people. Unfortunately, these programs are very limited in scope and usually of a relatively short duration. For instance, 91,000 young people considered at risk participated in *Skills Link* between 2003 and 2007. Although a review of *Skills Link* found a net income benefit to participants and was able to report a return to schooling for a third of participants (HRSDC, 2009), the long-term benefits are unclear and the number of participants is too small to realise substantial change.

Although the intended beneficiaries of these interventions are ultimately young people with labour market attachment problems, the funding does require active involvement from businesses, non-profit, community and government organisations. As proposed later, however, these types of organisations have a relatively dismal track record of involvement in the education and training of young Canadians. More commonly, therefore, youth at risk (who have not yet left school) will encounter interventions at the high school level. High-school-based programs are premised on a recognition that not all students excel in traditional schooling. Also, the ethnic diversity of most Canadian communities creates challenges for minority groups who do not see their cultural values and modes of learning reflected in the largely Eurocentric nature of Canadian schools and curriculum. Although many immigrant groups to Canada have exceptionally high levels of educational achievement (e.g. students from Chinese or Southeast Asian backgrounds), others have long struggled with high dropout rates. As a response, alternative schools are increasingly being created within the public school system. For instance, the Province of Alberta has experimented with Charter schools, some of which target Aboriginal students. Similarly, the City of Toronto recently opened its first Africentric school, which is premised on the idea that African-Canadian students will perform better in schools that respect and reflect African traditions and pride. Finally, an increasing number of First Nation groups are assuming control over the education of their children and reforming schools to better reflect their indigenous cultures and traditions.

More commonly, schools have introduced greater variety in their school programs to attract and retain students who do not respond well to the academic-abstract demands of schooling. As the comprehensive Canadian school system traditionally lacks the kind of vocational pathways offered to, for instance, young Germans via the dual system, many Canadian provinces have introduced programs that integrate more applied, hands-on or vocational forms of learning into their high-school curriculum. These programs are aimed at re-engaging young people at school, which in turn leads them to graduation, potentially with credits that allow them to continue their education in an apprenticeship, college or university. In the Province of Ontario, for instance, a *Specialist High Skills Major* (SHSM) allows students to focus their high-school education on a specific occupational or economic sector. By doing so, students can structure their high-school education around courses and cooperative placements (or other forms of experiential learning) in their chosen

area. Students who complete such a major successfully can gain credit towards their high-school diploma, while at the same time gaining documented skills and, potentially, certification in their chosen sector. Currently, students are able to choose from a range of programs that cover occupations in sectors that range from agriculture, construction and mining to business, arts/culture and health and wellbeing.[3]

Youth Apprenticeships: Helping Young People and Addressing Pressing Labour Shortages

Youth apprenticeships fulfil a dual function in the realm of SWT programs: they are aimed at students who respond better to applied, hands-on learning, but are also more directly associated with concerns about pressing labour shortages in the skilled trades.

Apprenticeship training has always been a relatively marginal SWT pathway in Canada (Skof, 2006). In 2007, less than 2% of the total labour force were registered in an apprenticeship (Ménard, Menezes, Chan, & Walker, 2008). Furthermore, the majority of apprentices in Canada become registered after having worked for a number of years, rather than immediately following high school. In 2007, for instance, the average age of apprentices was 30 (Ménard et al., 2008). Although direct or reliable numbers do not exist, it can be estimated that less than 1% of a high-school graduating cohort enrol in an apprenticeship immediately after graduating from high school.

Yet, rapid aging of the workforce, especially in construction, and an increased demand for skilled workers in Canada's thriving oil industry, have recently pushed apprenticeship training to the forefront of SWT debates. Canadian provinces have, in the past two decades, introduced programs aimed at attracting high-school students into apprenticeship training programs, in order to expose them to alternative career paths earlier and to increase the profile of occupations in the skilled trades as a career possibility (see e.g., Lehmann, 2005; Taylor, 2007). This approach is seen to lead to a win-win situation: apprenticeship training offers an alternative pathway into fulfilling and rewarding employment for young people who are considered at risk of not completing secondary education or who are generally more interested in applied, rather than academic learning, while at the same time addressing labour shortages in key industries. Alberta's Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) is perhaps the most successful of these programs in Canada and also the one that is most formally established. I will therefore focus my description of high-school apprenticeships on RAP.

RAP was introduced in the early 1990s as an alternative form of vocational education aimed at students in the final 2 years of high school (Grades 11 and 12, when the student is 15 or 16 years old) who have an interest in a career in the trades.

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[3] Information regarding the Specialist High Skills Major can be found at the following website: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/morestudentsuccess/SHSM.asp

Hours spent in the workplace count towards participants' high school completion, as well as their apprenticeship requirements, should they choose to continue their apprenticeship once they graduated from high school. Depending on the flexibility of school and workplace, students alternate between work and school during the day (e.g. they attend school in the morning and work in the afternoon), or per term (e.g. they spent the fall term at work and the winter term at school). In Alberta, students who participate in RAP are also fully registered apprentices, which is not necessarily the case in high-school apprenticeships in other provinces. There is some tension regarding the target population for programs like RAP. Although RAP does have a clearly stated mandate to reengage students and keep them in school, employers and schools also hope to attract relatively high achieving students into the program. Research has shown that schools and employers are indeed more interested in targeting the latter group (Taylor & Lehmann, 2002), which may be explained by the fact that schools need to rely on continued employer participation to make the program viable. This imperative, in turn, means that students who are not quite workplace-ready are less likely to be selected for participation in this program.[4]

The program has seen significant growth in enrolment since the first five students started RAP in 1991. By 2009, enrolment had grown to 1,700. Yet, these numbers still comprise less than 1% of all high-school students and about 2.5% of all apprentices registered in the province of Alberta. The number of RAP high-school students who continue their apprenticeships and eventually become certified is even smaller. For instance, by 2009, approximately 13,000 high-school students had participated in RAP; only 2,081 of them had gone on to become certified in their trade and 3,300 were continuing their training (Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board, 2010, pp. 53–54). These numbers contribute little to filling the looming labour market shortages or improving the SWT pathways of a large portion of young people. Generally, apprenticeship training in Canada is characterised by very high non-completion rates, not just for youth apprentices (Sharpe, 2003). A report entitled *Accessing and Completing Apprenticeship Training in Canada: Perceptions of Barriers* (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2004) identifies the overall negative image of careers in the trades, a lack of information about apprenticeship training, unwelcoming workplaces, the relatively high cost of apprenticeships (to both employers and apprentices) and the lack of resources and regulations for apprenticeship training as reasons for low enrolment and completion in youth apprenticeships.

Widening Participation in Higher Education

Given the centrality of ever higher levels of participation in formal education within the knowledge economy discourse and the long-term advantages associated with high educational attainment, SWT policies have seen a shift from a near-exclusive

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[4] For a more detailed description of RAP, see Lehmann (2007a).

concern with at-risk students to programs aimed at increasing university access and retention. This policy has also focussed on improving the employment prospects of university and college graduates. Although young people enrol in university and community college at a rate that places Canada at or near the top of PSE participation compared to other OECD countries (OECD, 2010), we continue to see barriers to participation that affect certain social groups more so than others.

For instance, Finnie, Childs, and Wismer (2010) found that most young people and their families engage in educational decisions that put them on a pathway towards or away from university long before the children even enter high school. In Canada, the most 'reliable predictor' of educational attainment for young people is still the educational attainment level of their parents (see, e.g. Anisef, Axelrod, Baichman-Anisef, James, & Turrittin, 2000). Other measures of social class, such as income, have been shown to have similar effects. For instance, Junor and Usher (2002) document that university attendance of young people increases with family income. These findings can be partially explained by the rising cost of a university education. Tuition in Canada has more than doubled since the early 1990s (with some provincial exceptions). Furthermore, as tuition increases have outpaced inflation, the earnings of low-income Canadians have not. This creates a cost-benefit scenario that clearly disadvantages young people from low-income families. Financial considerations aside, we also have a growing body of evidence that young people from working-class families encounter cultural barriers in education that can limit their educational aspirations (Lehmann, 2007a). As high-status professional occupations are outside their frame of reference and as universities are seen as essentially middle-class and alienating institutions, young people and their working-class families are likely to seek alternative educational pathways they consider to be more in line with their social experiences and knowledge (Lehmann, 2007b). Furthermore, Usher (2005) found that low-income families tend to over-estimate the cost and underestimate the long-term value of a university education.

Most universities in Canada have therefore pledged to increase access for and retention of non-traditional students, including those from low-income and working-class families. This is seen as an issue of social justice as much as the exclusion of non-traditional students is considered a waste of potential talent that cannot be afforded in a knowledge economy. It is less clear, however, how universities hope to accomplish this goal of widening participation. Efforts to increase enrolment range from outreach programs at high schools and in communities, special bursaries for first-generation students[5] and mentoring programs for those low-income students who arrive at university.

In addition to access and retention programs for non-traditional students, universities and governments (both provincial and federal) have also developed programs

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[5] In Canada, the term "first-generation" is preferred over "working-class" or "low-income" student, presumably because it avoids a form of labelling that might be considered negative. First-generation student refers to students who are the first in their family to attend university. Most first-generation students do come from working-class or low-income backgrounds.

in recent years aimed at assisting the growing number of university graduates to gain post-university employment. There has been a proliferation of co-operative and experiential or service-learning programs at Canadian universities in the past decade. They also offer on-campus employment services to their students. These services range from resume-writing workshops to recruitment events with employers. The aforementioned federal *Youth Employment Strategy* (YES) also includes programs for students in post-secondary education. For instance, the *Canada Summer Jobs* program provides funding for not-for-profit organisations, public sector employers and small businesses to create summer job opportunities for students at all levels (i.e. both secondary and post-secondary). These initiatives support organisations and businesses that might not otherwise be in a position to hire young people. In doing so, they create additional employment opportunities for students, giving them access to the development of employability skills, and, potentially, attracting them to careers in the public or non-profit sectors. *Career Focus* is a more targeted YES program that is restricted to graduates from a post-secondary program. The stated goal of *Career Focus* is to enhance the employability skills of PSE graduates by providing organisations with financial assistance to offer PSE graduates career-related work experience. As with other federal YES programs described above, these organisations can be businesses, non-profit organisations, labour groups, educational institutions, Aboriginal organisations or municipal, provincial or federal government departments.

These descriptions merely scratch the surface of the hundreds if not thousands of SWT programs offered by all levels of government, universities, high schools and the private and non-profit sector. Yet, we know relatively little about the effectiveness of these various efforts. The sheer number of programs and their diversity make any kind of comprehensive review impossible. Nonetheless, the next section raises a few problems and concerns likely to affect the majority of these programs.

Why Is the Transition to Post-school Life So Persistently Problematic?

Although the employment situation of young people in Canada appears better than in many other OECD nations (OECD, 2008), the effectiveness of SWT programs to improve that situation continues to be rather limited. For instance, over the past decades, the youth unemployment rate has remained double that of adults, regardless of economic conditions. The school dropout rate continues to be relatively high, as is the number of Canadians who enter the labour market without PSE credentials. Finally, university access has remained relatively restricted for individuals from groups without a tradition of participation in higher education, such as members of Canada's First Nations or young people from low socio-economic backgrounds.

In a review of different SWT programs, Bell and O'Reilly (2008) identified a number of persistent problems associated with school-work transitions in Canada. These include the decentralised (i.e. province-based) approach favoured in Canada.

The problem with decentralisation and deregulation is a lack of any kind of framework that guides SWT initiatives across the country or even within a province. Without such a framework, programs and policies tend to be reactive rather than proactive. Furthermore, this approach has led to a hodge-podge of programs, often based on relatively little supportive empirical evidence and without well-established linkages into the labour market and little coordination (OECD, 2008). In addition, most SWT programs require public funding and support. Unfortunately, in recent years, all levels of government have been under pressure to slash deficits and balance their spending between the needs of young people who struggle with the demands of a knowledge economy, and that of a rapidly aging population, which requires additional resources in health care and pension payments.

In the remainder of this section, a few other important reasons are advanced to explain the persistent disadvantages experienced by young workers in Canada.

Flexibility Versus Transparency in School-Work Transitions

Hamilton and Hurrelmann (1994, p. 331) define transparency as 'how well young people can see through the system to plot a course from where they are in the present to a distant future goal'. They argue that transparency is linked to the vocational specificity of a labour market, the standardisation of knowledge and credentials and the overall level of stratification in a social structure. Germany is generally seen as having a highly transparent SWT regime. The labour market is organised around the principle of *Beruf* (occupation), which means that for most occupations, a specific educational pathway is mandatory, often via the country's dual system. With this high level of vocational specificity also comes a high level of standardisation of vocational knowledge, as expressed in the fairly detailed training guidelines in apprenticeships. Finally, the highly streamed secondary school system creates a level of stratification that is problematic from a perspective of social justice, but sends clear signals about educational and occupational pathways (Lehmann, 2007a).

The situation in Canada is rather the reverse that of Germany's. Low levels of vocational specificity, a lack of clearly defined PSE alternatives and comprehensive secondary schooling all lead to a relatively low level of transparency, but a high level of flexibility. Although flexibility is a desirable feature of school-work transitions, too much flexibility may actually be problematic. In Canada, there are relatively few occupations that prescribe a specific occupational pathway or certification. High-status professional occupations are exceptions, as are some occupations in the skilled trades. The lack of vocational PSE alternatives further disadvantages young people less inclined towards academic achievement. The rather extensive range and diversity of SWT programs are additional proof of a SWT system that can be difficult to comprehend and navigate, not only for the young people making the transitions, but also the adults who are there to help them. For instance, very high levels of flexibility limit the effectiveness of career and educational counselling in schools and elsewhere. I have shown elsewhere (Lehmann, 2007a), for example, that young Canadians who

participated in high-school apprenticeship were largely unaware of the requirements of their apprenticeships beyond their high-school participation and had little information about the occupations or industrial sectors in which they are apprenticed. Although participation in a high-school apprenticeship may potentially reengage disenfranchised young people in learning at the high-school level, their value as SWT programs remain limited if the participants do not fully understand the conditions and long-term potential or consequences of their participation.

Lack of Employer Involvement

The lack of active employer involvement in SWT programs and policies is perhaps one of the most profound impediments to improving post-school transitions for young people. With the exception of programs within the federal *Youth Employment Strategy* (YES), which provide funding to employers of young people, SWT policies rely on the voluntary participation of employers or, alternatively, need to sell these programs as win-win propositions to a largely reluctant employment sector. Youth apprenticeships in high school, co-op and service learning programs in post-secondary education or programs like Ontario's *Specialist High Skills Major* (SHSM) initiative all depend on employers' willingness to take on young people. Moreover, they depend on employers' willingness to provide young people with valuable skill-development experiences, rather than using them for menial, cheap labour.

Unfortunately, Canadian data show that employer involvement is limited at best. Cooke, Zeytinoglu, and Chowhan (2009) reviewed studies documenting Canadian employers' low investment in training in both absolute terms, and relative to other industrial nations. Their analysis further shows that the most vulnerable workers are the least likely to receive training at work. Saunders (2009, p. 2) confirms the low rate of workplace learning support, suggesting that less than 30% of adult workers in Canada participate in job-related education and training. Saunders cites a lack of funding or tax incentives for employers, fear of poaching and a lack of infrastructure and credential/skill recognition mechanisms as key reasons why employers do not engage more in the training of their workforce. Peters (2004) offers further evidence that the few Canadian workers who receive training are a relatively select group. Most importantly, she shows that the likelihood of receiving training increases with a worker's formal level of education. Thus, a university-educated worker is nearly three times more likely to receive workplace training than somebody who entered work without post-secondary education (Peters, p. 9). Similarly, workers in managerial or professional positions are substantially more likely than lower-level white collar or blue collar workers to receive training (p. 15).

Although these studies do not isolate employer participation in SWT-related workplace training, we do know that these patterns are the same. Furthermore, there are concerns that participants in SWT programs are sometimes misused because they are seen as cheap labour, rather than young people with learning support needs (Lehmann, 2005).

Lack of PSE Alternatives

The reluctance of employers to participate in the training and education of young people—and hence in SWT programs more generally—aside, the credibility and potential of many non-academic SWT programs are compromised by the fact that university education is increasingly seen as the preferred form of post-secondary education and the panacea to most economic and individual transition problems. Furthermore, programs like youth apprenticeships or Ontario's *Specialist High Skills Major* (SHSM) aim to attract young people into career pathways that are undoubtedly important, challenging and fulfilling, but exist very much at the fringes of Canadian post-secondary education. Despite significant enrolment growth in youth apprenticeships, participation in most provinces has remained well below 5% of a high-school cohort. Teachers, counsellors, parents and young people themselves are often unaware of these programs, or have very limited information about them. Furthermore, the vast majority of parents wish for their children to attend university (Davies, 2005). The income and employment potential offered in the trades, especially given current and future labour shortages, does not seem to provide enough incentive to families and young people to reconsider their educational preferences. This relatively common and widespread rejection of vocational education pathways is part of a larger and pervasive public discourse regarding the value of university in a knowledge economy and a labour market bias towards white-collar service work. It also reflects a culture that has traditionally placed little emphasis on the development of 'homegrown' manual, skilled workers. Historically, Canada has relied on immigration to fulfil its need for skilled workers in the trades and craft sector. Yet, social mobility in Canada, especially for immigrant families, is increasingly defined around achieving high levels of formal education.

Furthermore, many of these programs are characterised by conflicting messages about the kinds of young people best suited to them. On the one hand, policy statements suggest that youth apprenticeships and other applied skills programs are ideal for young men and women who might have problems with the academic demands and culture of high school or college and university. As such, they are aimed at young people considered at risk of dropping out of high school. On the other hand, schools and employers are interested in attracting relatively high-achieving students to these programs. Partly, this is considered important to boost the profile of these programs. More importantly, however, getting 'high-quality' students to participate in these programs is seen as necessary to attract and retain employers willing to hire these young people. Herein lies a Catch 22: students whose SWT challenges make them ideal candidates for such programs are often denied access, due to academic performance problems at high school; yet, students who might be considered attractive by schools and employers tend to have little interest in participating or, if they do, tend not to continue in the programs (Lehmann & Taylor, 2003).

Underemployment and the Opportunity Trap

Finally, as SWT policies and programs have increasingly shifted attention towards widening participation in and assisting those graduating from higher education, dissenting voices about the labour market value of higher education are beginning to emerge. Although there is no shortage of evidence that, at least in Canada, high levels of education lead to a pay-off in the labour market, there is no guarantee that university graduates will work in jobs for which this type of education is necessary. Livingstone (2004) has conducted extensive research on underemployment in Canada. Underemployment means that job incumbents do not require the level of education they possess in order to perform their job. Livingstone argues that underemployment has been on the rise steadily in the past two decades. Similarly, Statistics Canada, which uses the term overqualification to describe the same phenomenon, has documented clear evidence of a rise of the number of workers educated beyond the demands of the jobs they hold (Li, Gervais, & Duval, 2006). This indeed challenges the assumption that widening participation at university is always the most constructive effort to improve young people's transitions to post-school life.

Brown, Lauder, and Ashton (2011) note that knowledge jobs, which were meant to be the salvation of post-industrial economies that could no longer compete as manufacturing nations in a low-labour-cost global economy, are experiencing the same fate as industrial employment. As developing nations like China and India are vastly expanding their educational systems, they have quickly caught up with the engineering and scientific knowledge that were considered to remain in the domain of Western countries for much longer. Rather than being restricted to the cheap production of products, China and India now have the skills and knowledge base to take on the design and development responsibilities themselves, at a fraction of the cost. Given the relentless push towards rationalisation in large multinational firms, it is precisely the value-added, high-skills jobs that were to save us that are being outsourced to low-cost, but high-skill nations like India and China. This means that many of the careers for which young people attend university will depart countries like Canada. It also means that there will be increased cost pressures on workers at home to accept lower wages and generally declining working conditions to keep jobs in Canada. Perhaps not surprisingly, the regions that have seen the highest net gain in new employment in recent years are Alberta and Newfoundland; in both cases, it is the exploration and exploitation of natural resources (oil and gas) that is driving employment growth, not jobs in the new economy.

Conclusion

School-work transition policies, programs and activities essentially can be divided into two groups: (1) human capital programs, that is, programs aimed at keeping young people at school or facilitating access to post-secondary education or training;

and (2) active labour market interventions, that is, programs aimed at creating employment opportunities for young people. Obviously, all SWT programs aim at a combination of both. Human capital programs improve the employability of individuals, which in turn makes participating individuals more competitive in the labour market. Active labour market programs, in turn, help participants develop on-the-job employability skills, which improve their human capital and their long-term employability. Yet, specific aspects of Canada's education system, labour market structures and occupational cultures limit the long-term potential of many of these programs. Program effectiveness is difficult to assess, as many SWT programs in Canada are new or constantly changing. Yet, we do know that school dropout rates remain relatively high, a large percentage of school leavers do not take up any post-secondary education, and the unemployment rate of young Canadians remains twice that of adults. Furthermore, despite efforts to widen participation in higher education, non-traditional groups, such as members of Canada's First Nations communities and individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds, remain significantly underrepresented. Although individuals may have benefited greatly from these programs, the persistence of the problems outlined above suggests that their overall effectiveness is rather limited.

In all cases, better coordination between programs, program providers and levels of government has been suggested to increase the transparency of SWT programs and pathways. The findings reported in this chapter that PSE decisions are made very early in a young person's schooling, even in a comprehensive system like that in Canada, further suggest that early interventions are required. This could mean career exploration in earlier grades in primary and secondary school. More importantly, especially in Canada, this also means an expansion of early childhood education programs. There are currently no government-funded, universally accessible early childhood education provisions in Canada (with the exception of Quebec and newly established programs in Ontario). Yet, interventions at this stage have been shown to be especially important for children who may not otherwise have access to learning resources in childhood (Palacio-Quintin, 2000). It is important, therefore, to recognise that SWT programs may need to target individuals long before they embark on their actual transition to working life.

Finally, Canada requires more active employment-creation policies to match efforts in human capital development. Whether one believes in the pessimistic scenario put forward by Brown et al. (2011) or the more optimistic outlook of a knowledge economy with endless potential to reinvent itself, few SWT programs and policies in Canada consider the creation of employment opportunities. By and large, the responsibility is that of young people, who are expected to make themselves more marketable by identifying career pathways and getting the proper training and education required for success on that pathway. The growing evidence of underemployment and overqualification and the continued high levels of youth unemployment suggest, however, that this individualistic view of SWT is not sufficient. While the focus on individual development of human capital is obviously important for the employability potential of young Canadians, it can by itself not create new jobs, or at least only to a rather limited extent. Although federal programs under the *Youth*

Employment Strategy (YES) umbrella provide funding to organisations willing to employ young people, these programs are very limited in scope and usually of a relatively short duration.

What is necessary, therefore, is a reconsideration of funding principles and avenues of employment creation. Currently, employment creation is expected by lowering of corporate taxes. Yet, global competition and pressures create a tendency for large multinational firms, who are the likely beneficiaries of such tax cuts, to move jobs to countries in which these jobs can be performed at a lesser cost. More promising for the purposes of school-work transitions and employment creation would be a mechanism that redistributes money through tax breaks for companies that train and create employment and levies for those that do not. Furthermore, a greater emphasis on small- and medium-sized innovative businesses might more effectively support local and sustainable job creation and training. Perhaps an even more promising route might be support to non-traditional business models such as community or cooperative organisations, all of which can place training, education and community concerns before a single-minded profit motive. Regardless of which types of businesses or industries are seen to provide the greatest benefit, support for job creation needs to complement human capital strategies more strongly to increase the effectiveness of SWT programs in Canada.

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Chapter 7
School-to-Work Transitions in Apprenticeship-Based VET Systems: The Swiss Approach

Barbara E. Stalder

While school-to-work transitions generally have become more individualised and discontinuous (Heinz, 2009; Walther & Plug, 2006), comparative research on vocational education and training (VET) has repeatedly praised the apprenticeship system for providing young people with relatively smooth and linear school-to-work transitions (Raffe, 2008; Ryan, 2001). In contrast, more recent educational research on apprenticeships in Switzerland and other German-speaking regions has illustrated increasing transition risks for a considerable component of the youth population (Beicht & Ulrich, 2008; Bergman, Hupka-Brunner, Keller, Meyer, & Stalder, 2011; Hupka-Brunner, Gaupp, Geier, Lex, & Stalder, 2011; Stolz & Gonon, 2008; Uhly & Granato, 2006). These include, for example, the risk of not securing an apprenticeship place, the risk of dropping out from and not completing an apprenticeship or the risk of not finding an adequate job upon completion. Moreover, political concern grows for those young people who seem to lack the academic skills or the social and financial resources to secure direct entry into an apprenticeship programme, to remain in such a programme until graduation and to find gainful employment afterwards (Descy, 2002; SKBF, 2010). For a long time, the Swiss apprenticeship system has been seen as the orthodox and most appropriate means to provide school-leavers with smooth school-to-work transitions and to integrate all young people in the labour market. However, this system does not guarantee successful and linear school-to-work pathways for everybody.

Amongst those who suffer more often from risky transitions and discontinuous school-to-work pathways, are low-achieving students, socially disadvantaged youth and young people with migrant background. Given that apprenticeships constitute

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the main upper secondary pathway of young people in Switzerland, the dual vocational education and training (VET) system has to be evaluated for its specific capability to include low-achievers and those with less favourable family backgrounds.

This chapter frames school-to-work transitions within an apprenticeship-based VET system. First, the chapter gives an introduction to the Swiss apprenticeship system and investigates its main principles of organising school-to-work pathways. It then focuses on low-achieving students, elaborating how training and education conditions in companies and vocational schools influence pathways throughout and after initial VET. The discussion is supported by analyses from data collected in the school-to-work transition study TRansition from Education to Employment (TREE), which has followed educational pathways of more than 5,000 students in Switzerland (Bergman et al., 2011).

Main Characteristics of the Swiss Apprenticeship System

The Swiss educational system is highly differentiated and selective. In most of the 26 Swiss cantons, lower secondary school channels students into different tracks with so-called 'basic' or 'extended' curricula (ISCED 2, years 7–9; ages 13/14–15/16). Compulsory schooling ends after lower secondary education. Upper secondary students' pathways are divided into vocational education or general education strands (ISCED 3A, 3B, 3C, years 10–12/13; ages 16–18 plus). Two thirds of the school-leavers in Switzerland enrol in VET programmes (OPET, 2011). VET is mainly organised in the form of so-called dual apprenticeships, which combine school-based education and work-based learning. Only a quarter of the adolescents enter a general education programme (mainly academic matura schools which lead to university). Full-time school-based programmes—whether general or vocational—are aimed at higher-achieving students from lower secondary schools with extended curricula (Stalder & Nägele, 2011). For medium- and lower-achieving students, apprenticeships are the main upper secondary programmes on offer.

Apprenticeship programmes last from 2 to 4 years. They train apprentices for a large number of specific occupations and vary widely in terms of their level of academic/intellectual requirements. Three- to four-year apprenticeships, which lead to a Federal VET Diploma, are for medium- and higher-achieving school-leavers, while 2-year apprenticeships are for lower-achieving youth and awarded a Federal VET Certificate. In 2011, over 200 ordinances for Federal Diploma-VET programmes and more than 30 Federal Certificate-VET programmes in industry, trades, commerce, domestic service, agriculture and the health sector were in force (OPET, 2011). VET diploma and certificates enable their holders to commence skilled work in their occupation and to enter higher vocational training in the professional, non-academic branch of tertiary education later on (ISCED 5B). The pathway to academic higher education (ISCED 5A) is again limited to higher-achieving apprentices. They can opt for a vocational matura certificate, which complements the VET diploma and permits entrance to the universities of applied science and to special programmes, which allow access to universities.

The present form of the Swiss apprenticeship system, which is classified as 'dual-corporate model of VET' (Greinert, 2004), is elaborate and its management is complex. VET tasks are shared amongst public (i.e. Swiss Confederation, cantons) and private partners (i.e. professional organisations, such as trade organisations and social partners). The Swiss Confederation is responsible for the strategic management and development of the overall VET system, for revisions of the federal law and the ordinance of vocational education and training. The cantons implement the federal law and ordinances, coordinate the VET activities of all VET partners at the cantonal level and run the vocational schools. Professional organisations are responsible for defining aims and contents of apprenticeships in new occupations as well as for the revision of existing VET ordinances. According to the understanding of 'plural governance' in the Swiss VET system, major reforms in vocational education and training are undertaken after consultation and in cooperation with all VET partners.

One of the major characteristics of the Swiss apprenticeship system is the three sites of education and training: the companies, the vocational schools and the cross-company training courses. In its main form, apprenticeships combine 3–4 days a week of training and work in a private or public company with 1–2 days a week of education at the vocational school and also additional cross-company training courses of some weeks during the apprenticeship. It is this provision that makes the Swiss system distinct from those elsewhere in the German-speaking world. The companies—18% of the companies in Switzerland participate in VET programmes—are responsible for the practical training and should ensure that the apprentice acquires the essential skills and competences for the specific occupational career pursued. Vocational schools expand the work-based practical training by providing theoretical knowledge in the occupational field and in general subjects. Cross-company introductory training courses, which are often given in a regional centre of a professional organisation, focus on practical, work-related learning and instruction, which complement both practical and theoretical VET elements.

The new federal law of vocational education, which is in force since the beginning of 2004, stresses three main purposes of the VET system. First, it should support young people's vocational and personal development and their integration into society and the labour market. Second, VET should serve the economic competitiveness of the companies. Third, it should enhance equal educational opportunities, particularly with regard to gender and disabilities. One of the recent policy papers of the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (OPET) goes even further and puts it as an undisputable fact: 'Vocational education and training enables young people to enter the labour market and ensures that there are enough specialists and managers in the future' (OPET, 2011, p. 3).

The above-mentioned educational purposes are not specific to apprenticeship systems, instead being common for most VET systems. What is noteworthy in apprenticeships is the organisation of VET through specific curriculum goals and means.

Curriculum goals for apprenticeship focus on occupation-specific skills training and the development of broader employability skills (e.g. flexibility, social competences, motivation for lifelong learning). The latter is again not specific for apprenticeships,

but applies to a variety of VET structures. What remains as the core difference and 'trademark' of the apprenticeship system is the strong emphasis on 'occupationality' (*Beruflichkeit*) (Deissinger & Frommberger, 2010), which shapes both the labour market and apprenticeship market and results in specific curriculum means.

The main curriculum means are outlined in the highly structured framework, which places apprenticeships between education/training and employment by combining typical characteristics of both of these provisions. Employment-specific features include the recruitment and selection procedure of apprentices, which is purely decided by employers, and the apprenticeship contract signed between apprentice and employer. Other employment-specific features are that apprentices participate in everyday production processes of their company, thus contributing to the company's productivity through their work, and that they earn a monthly salary. The employment perspective is also important for apprentices themselves, who identify themselves rather as 'working' than as 'studying' (Nägele & Hasler, 2010). Education and training-specific features of apprenticeships become most manifest in that apprentices attend vocational school. Furthermore, practical training aims are an essential part of the apprenticeship contract and regulated in the ordinances and educational plans of the training occupations. In the company, apprentices should work, learn and practise vocational skills under the supervision of the apprenticeship trainer or an experienced worker colleague. All in all, the approach of being both worker and learner should enable apprentices to progress from a novice to an expert worker.

Risks, At-Risk Groups and the Role of Employers and Vocational Schools

The positioning of VET within both education/training and employment is considered to be a strength and major advantage of the European apprenticeship approach over other more school-based VET systems. The close link to the labour market is seen as a key success factor of apprenticeship systems. This same factor, however, brings forward specific transition risks, which culminate at three stages of the school-to-work pathway: First, at the transition from lower secondary school into initial vocational education and training at the age of 16; second, in the course of the apprenticeship; and third, at the transition from apprenticeship to qualified employment.

Transition *risks at the intersection of lower and upper secondary education* emerge as problems of not securing access to an apprenticeship place (i.e. being employed as an apprentice) and the product of social inequalities due to regional, structural, institutional and personal factors (Heinz, 2009; Seibert, Hupka-Brunner, & Imdorf, 2009). Transition to upper secondary programmes is based on schooling results in lower secondary, on individual aspirations and choices as well as on opportunities and restrictions in the educational (apprenticeship) market. Although, currently, the number of places offered and the number of apprentices in training is at a high level, the apprenticeship market is still at disequilibrium (Dubs, 2006;

LINK Institut, 2011). On the one hand, there is still a relative shortage of apprenticeship places in overall numbers and competition for available training places in attractive occupations and companies remains very high. On the other hand, there is a qualitative mismatch between the training occupations sought and the type of places offered. While the number of available apprenticeship places in the building construction and technical sectors exceeds demand, there is a substantial shortage of training places in the service sector (LINK Institut). Furthermore, because of technological change, academic requirements in many apprenticeships have risen and employers often complain that school-leavers' school achievement and personal competences are not sufficient to start an apprenticeship (Moser, 2004; Schneeberger & Petanovitsch, 2004). Moreover, research findings have consistently shown that chances to enter VET programmes are unequally distributed amongst different groups of school-leavers. Amongst those whose choice is most limited are young people from lower secondary schools with basic demands (i.e. lower level school type) (Meyer, 2003; Reissig, Gaupp, & Lex, 2008), and school leavers with migrant and/or low education family background (Hupka-Brunner, Sacchi, & Stalder, 2010; Imdorf, 2010; Uhly & Granato, 2006). As companies are free to decide who they employ as apprentices, governmental measures geared to fight social discrimination in the recruitment and selection procedures for apprenticeships are very limited. Instead, the cantonal governments have created an extensive range of intermediate solutions (e.g. 1-year schooling programmes), which are offered to young people without an apprenticeship place and aim to increase their chances on the apprenticeship market. Today, up to one third of all compulsory school-leavers enter such a short educational programme before starting apprenticeship training (SKBF, 2010).

Transition *risks during the apprenticeship*—initially unplanned transitions, like changing the occupation or the company or dropping out from apprenticeship—are at least partly linked to the restricted access to apprenticeship training. To avoid being left without vocational education, young people might take 'just any kind of apprenticeship', accepting an apprenticeship offer, which does not fit with their interests and skills (Stalder & Schmid, 2006). Also, employers might focus on company (e.g. productivity) needs, while neglecting or undervaluing occupation-specific academic requirements of vocational schools. In both cases, apprenticeship contracts might be signed between insufficiently matched partners, which can result in a poor fit between the apprentice and the occupation, the employer or the educational conditions in the company and the vocational school. Once into apprenticeship training, it is the companies and vocational schools that shape the apprentices' pathways. Despite standardised VET regulations, educational plans and qualification procedures, training conditions vary considerably between companies. Larger size enterprises often have many apprentices, who are trained in training centres and by specialist trainers. Small enterprises—60% of all apprentices are in companies with less than ten employees—mostly train only one apprentice and often, training takes place informally in the course of the production process. However, little research is available about the kinds of institutional factors that most effectively support linear pathways throughout apprenticeship leading to successful graduation.

Studies on apprenticeship dropout and change, however, suggest that nonlinear pathways result from a mismatch between the apprentice and his or her educational and training context (Bohlinger, 2002; Deuer, 2006; Stalder & Schmid, 2006). Apprenticeship dropout and change are often explained by a lack of preentry knowledge, a wrong occupational or organisational choice, insufficient skills and school attainment but also by poor educational and training conditions and by conflicts between the apprentices, their trainer and co-workers. Individual and institutional factors are held to contribute to decreasing job satisfaction, interest and commitment and increasing turnover intentions (Allen, Bryant, & Vardaman, 2010). If fit cannot be (re)established, a correction of the educational pathway is requested. Apprentices or employers may cancel the apprenticeship contract before its standard completion point and then apprentices have to search for an alternative. It is estimated that about 20% of all apprenticeship contracts are cancelled prematurely, with rates up to 30% for migrants and apprentices trained in occupations with low academic requirements (Stalder & Schmid). Early contract cancellations do not necessarily mean that the young people drop out from education for good. More than three quarters of the apprentices re-enter training after the cancellation of the arrangement and most of them also manage to secure an upper secondary diploma or certificate (Schmid, 2010). However, such transitions might be difficult, as contracts can be cancelled at any time during the apprenticeship, are not able to be planned for in advance and institutionally are not well supported. They are seemingly likely to get more difficult in the future. Employers are reluctant to train former dropouts (Stalder, 2000) and the occupation-specific curricula do not allow for easy occupational changes. In any case, discontinuities in pathways throughout apprenticeships prolong the duration of education and increase the risk that young people remain without vocational qualifications (Schmid).

Transition *risks from apprenticeship to qualified employment* have long been underexplored both in the political debate and in the scientific discourse. Compared to other European countries, the total youth (15–24) unemployment rate in Switzerland is low (Scarpetta, Sonnet, & Manfredi, 2010). However, it is nearly twice as high as the unemployment rate of the total population, and substantial in its increase. Youth unemployment *after* apprenticeship has risen from 0.3% in the year 2001 to 4.9% in 2008 with seasonal peaks up to more than 10% (Sacchi & Salvisberg, 2011). Unemployment amongst apprenticeship leavers can be explained only partly by changing economic conditions (boom and recession years). Sacchi and Salvisberg find a more plausible explanation in the growing skill demands in the labour market, which underline work experience and additional qualifications as necessary preconditions to enter the first qualified employment. In contrast, post-apprenticeship unemployment could not be explained by other factors. According to Sacchi and Salvisberg, unemployment seems not to be caused by an increasing mismatch between occupational qualifications sought by the labour market versus those held by apprentices, a decreasing rate of apprentices staying in the company upon completion nor a 'first-in-first-out' policy of companies, who would discharge more often those who had been employed only recently (Sacchi & Salvisberg). The demand

for qualification above an initial VET qualification is more disadvantageous for at-risk groups, who lack the academic skills or the financial means to acquire higher educational credentials. At-risk groups face precarious transitions in a double sense: not only is their unemployment risk higher than those of non-risk groups (Descy, 2002) but their resources to cope with unemployment are also more limited.

In sum, looking at all three transitions and related transition risks, the important role of employers becomes evident. First, they act as gatekeepers to apprenticeship by offering VET training and by recruiting and selecting apprentices. Second, they shape learning and working conditions during the apprenticeship through favourable job characteristics (e.g. interesting work, possibilities to develop vocational skills, adequate workload) and a supportive organisational context (e.g. competent and fair superiors, supportive colleagues) (Böhm, Lindhuber, & Grössenberger, 2008). Third, companies decide about offering jobs to VET graduates. In contrast, vocational schools seem to play a less important role. Currently, apprentices spend only limited time at school and vocational schools cannot decide about the establishment or the cancellation of apprenticeship contracts. Also, educational conditions at vocational school have been shown to influence apprentices' satisfaction to a lesser extent than those of the workplace (Stalder, 2003).

The role of companies and vocational schools shall be further analysed in the following section, which focuses on lower-achieving youth, and on the evaluation of transition risks before, during and after apprenticeships. Detailed analyses that study the impact of educational conditions, both at the workplace and at vocational school, on nonlinear pathways during apprenticeship and on the situation to be NEET (not in education, employment or training) will then be presented.

Transition and Transition Risks of Lower-Achieving Youth: An Empirical Test

Previous research on school-to-work transitions in Switzerland has focused on single stages of the pathways, analysing either transition risks between lower and upper secondary education, during apprenticeship or between the end of apprenticeship and qualified work. The Swiss youth survey TREE allows researchers to look at the pathway from lower secondary school to post-apprenticeship employment in a longitudinal perspective (Stalder, Meyer, & Hupka-Brunner, 2011; see also www.tree.unibas.ch). TREE is based on the Swiss PISA sample tested in the year 2000. School-to-work transitions have been followed up annually until 2007 and with an additional survey in 2010. The initial sample counted over 5,000 young people representative of an entire Swiss grade 9 school-leavers' cohort. Each year, the young people described their current educational situation, reported significant events in their educational pathway and specified their occupation, school or company. This approach allowed reconstructing the pathways of more than 2,500 apprentices, including the timing of transitions to, during and after the apprenticeship.

Method

Three transition risk situations were analysed in order to assess school-to-work transition risks in the framework of apprenticeships. The first risk situation concerns the access to upper secondary education and specifies whether students had started such a programme directly after compulsory schooling or not. The second risk situation refers to linear versus nonlinear pathways during apprenticeship. Linear pathways were defined as those without (initially unplanned) changes or interruptions until successful graduation, whereas nonlinear pathways included events such as changing the occupation or company, class repetitions, failed final exams or dropout without immediate continuation of vocational training. The third risk situation is the pathways after the completion of apprenticeships, and more specifically the risk to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) 2 years after the apprenticeship.

Reading literacy was used to distinguish lower from higher-achieving school leavers. Reading literacy was assessed by PISA before students left lower secondary schooling (OECD, 2001). It comprises measures of understanding and identifying key statements in a text, but also being able to interpret and give a critical assessment of its content or form. For the present analyses, school-leavers were sorted into lower skilled (literacy level 0–2) and higher skilled (literacy levels 3–5) groups of students.

Socio-demographic variables included *gender*, *migration background* (father or mother born abroad) and *level of father's education* (low level, if without upper secondary qualification).

For the purpose of this study, educational conditions were analysed twice: First, in terms of their impact on nonlinear pathways during apprenticeships (subscript 'nonlin'), and second, in terms of their effect on being NEET 2 years after apprenticeship (subscript 'neet'). To assess the impact on nonlinear pathways during apprenticeships, educational conditions a year before the change or dropout was considered, while for those with linear pathways, a year (out of 2–4 years in apprenticeship) was selected at random. To gauge the effect of educational conditions on being NEET after apprenticeship, the last year in apprenticeship was taken as reference.

Opportunities for learning were measured by a scale with three items (workplace) and two items (vocational school), which were adapted from the variability scale of the Short Questionnaire for Job Analysis (Kurzfragebogen zur Arbeitsanalyse, KFZA) (Prümper, Hartmannsgruber, & Frese, 1995). An item example is 'At work (at school), I can learn a lot of new things'. A 5-point scale was used, from 1: nearly never to 5: nearly always (Cronbach's alpha: workplace $\alpha_{nonlin} = .86$, $\alpha_{neet} = .83$; vocational school $\alpha_{nonlin} = .47$, $\alpha_{neet} = .57$).

Workload was measured by a scale with five items each for workplace and vocational schools adapted from Prümper's KFZA (Prümper et al., 1995). The scales assessed complexity and difficulty (e.g. 'I have to accomplish difficult tasks which I have not yet learned') as well as time pressure (e.g. 'I have too much to do') on a 5-point scale (1: nearly never to 5: nearly always) (Cronbach's alpha: workplace $\alpha_{nonlin} = .64$, $\alpha_{neet} = .62$; vocational school $\alpha_{nonlin} = .80$, $\alpha_{neet} = .78$).

Pedagogical competences of apprenticeship trainers in the companies and vocational school teachers included a scale of five items each, which assed the educators' didactic and social skills [e.g. 'My apprenticeship trainer/main teacher is good at explaining things'] on a 4-point scale (1: not true at all to 4: totally true) (TREE, 2010) (Cronbach's alpha: workplace $\alpha_{nonlin} = .88$, $\alpha_{neet} = .88$; vocational school $\alpha_{nonlin} = .86$, $\alpha_{neet} = .91$).

Low achievement in vocational school was measured by the insufficient marks in the school report of the apprentices ('How many insufficient marks did you have in your last school report?'). Responses were grouped into 'none' vs. 'one or more' (TREE, 2010).

Educational satisfaction was assessed with three items adapted from Oegerli (1984) including a Kunin faces (smileys) scale (sample item 'all in all how satisfied are you with your education (apprenticeship, school?)', response from 1: 'extremely unsatisfied to 7: extremely satisfied') (Cronbach's alpha: $\alpha_{nonlin} = .84$, $\alpha_{neet} = .75$).

Results

Results will first show the distribution of transition risks before, during and after apprenticeships. Second, for the group of lower-achieving apprentices, statistical models will be presented, which test the impact of socio-demographic and educational characteristics on nonlinear pathways during apprenticeship and on the situation to be NEET 2 years after the apprenticeship.

A comparison of school-leavers with lower and higher reading literacy skills, as measured by PISA, shows the expected risk of lower achievers to experience difficult school-to-work transitions (Table 7.1). Lower-achieving youth enter upper secondary education more often delayed or not at all (36%) than higher-achieving youth (17%). If they begin with an apprenticeship (i.e. directly or delayed), they more often experience nonlinear pathways (40%) and fail to reach an upper secondary diploma more frequently (18%) than their higher-achieving colleagues. Two years after the last year in apprenticeship—not considering if apprentices had finished with a diploma or not—however there is no difference in whether they are more often not in education, employment or training (NEET).

As expected, transition risks tend to be higher if lower-achieving youth have a parent not born in Switzerland or a father without upper secondary education qualifications. Four out of ten lower-achieving students with migrant background or a less-educated father did not enter directly into upper secondary education. Nonlinear pathways (i.e. with initially unplanned changes or dropout) are far more frequent for apprentices, whose father has a low level of education, but not so for migrants. In contrast, the risk to remain without a VET diploma increases both for apprentices with migrant background and for those whose fathers are without upper secondary education. By tendency, the same is true as regards the risk to be NEET 2 years after apprenticeship.

Table 7.1 Distribution of transition risks for low-achieving young people

| | Reading literacy | | | Low reading literacy | | | | | |
| | | | | Migration background | | | Father without upper secondary education | | |
	High	Low	p	No	Yes	p	No	Yes	p
% Delayed or no entry into upper secondary education	17%	36%	***	31%	42%	***	31%	42%	***
If in apprenticeship:									
% Nonlinear pathway in apprenticeship	15%	40%	***	42%	38%	ns	34%	45%	**
% Did not reach upper secondary diploma 7 years after compulsory school	3%	18%	***	12%	25%	***	15%	22%	*
% Neither in employment nor education 2 years after last year in apprenticeship	8%	11%	ns	8%	13%	t	8%	13%	t

Weighted analyses to account for sample attrition

ns not significant

t $p < .10$; *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$

To analyse predictors of nonlinear pathways of lower achieving apprentices during apprenticeship, hierarchical logistical regression analysis was used, with socio-demographic risk factors and information about direct versus delayed access to apprenticeship included in the first model, educational conditions included in the second model and vocational school achievement and educational satisfaction included in the third model (Table 7.2). Nagelkerkes R^2 was low in the first model, but increased markedly in the second and third model. On their own, socio-demographic variables and direct/delayed access do not predict sufficiently nonlinear pathways of lower-achieving apprentices. Adding educational condition variables and indicators of school achievement and satisfaction considerably improved the prediction.

It was found that socio-demographic risk factors predict nonlinear pathways when controlling for perceived educational conditions, achievement and satisfaction. Male apprentices are at lower risk of following nonlinear pathways than females. Apprentices whose father has no upper secondary qualification incur higher risk. Contrary to expectation, migration background does not increase the risk for dropout or unplanned changes, but lowers the risk, if educational conditions, achievement and satisfaction are controlled for (Model 3). No significant effect can be found with regard to direct or delayed entry into apprenticeship.

Looking at educational conditions, opportunities for learning in the company and workload at vocational school emerge as significant predictors in Model 2. The higher apprentices rate their learning possibilities at the workplace the lower is

Table 7.2 Predictors of nonlinear pathways during apprenticeships

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Exp(B) p		Exp(B) p		Exp(B) p	
Male [female]	.58	**	.60	*	.55	*
Migrant [non-migrant]	1.02	ns	.84	ns	.55	*
Father with low level of education [high level]	1.55	*	1.66	*	1.75	*
Direct entry into apprenticeship [delayed]	1.23	ns	1.31	ns	1.41	ns
Opportunities for learning in company			.61	**	.81	ns
Workload in company			1.17	ns	1.21	ns
Pedagogical competences of trainer in company			.79	ns	.76	ns
Opportunities for learning in vocational school			1.39	t	1.89	**
Workload in vocational school			1.66	***	1.39	*
Pedagogical competences of vocational school teacher			.91	ns	.79	ns
Low achievement in vocational school					3.26	***
Educational satisfaction					.67	**
Constant	.43	**	.40	ns	1.50	ns
Nagelkerke R^2	.04		.16		.24	

Exp(B) > 1: Risk for nonlinear pathway increases by factor X in comparison to reference group
Exp(B) < 1: Risk for nonlinear pathway decreases by factor 1/X in comparison to reference group
ns not significant; N (number of lower-achieving apprentices included in the analysis) = 390
t $p < .10$; *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$

their risk for a nonlinear pathway. In contrast, a higher workload at vocational school is a clear risk factor for nonlinear pathways. Workload in the company did not affect pathways.

When introducing low achievement in vocational school and educational satisfaction (Model 3), significant effects of both predictors can be shown. As expected, an increase in educational satisfaction lowers the risk for dropout and unplanned changes, whereas low achievement, that is insufficient marks, increases the risk. Opportunities for learning at the company are no longer significant in the third model. As learning opportunities have been shown to be one of the most influential factors of educational satisfaction, their effect on risks for nonlinear pathways might be mediated by satisfaction. The same might be true for workload at the vocational school (lower effect in Model 3), which is closely linked to insufficient marks at vocational school. Against expectation and of concern, opportunities for learning at the vocational school do not have a positive effect on pathways, but rather seem to increase the risk for nonlinear pathways. Effects of pedagogical competences of teachers and trainer point to positive influences of trainers and teachers on linear pathways; however, the results are statistically not significant.

Table 7.3 Predictors of being NEET 2 years after apprenticeship

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Exp(B) p		Exp(B) p		Exp(B) p	
Male [female]	2.41	*	2.95	*	2.81	*
Migrant [non-migrant]	1.85	ns	2.44	t	2.60	t
Father with low level of education [high level]	1.78	ns	2.52	t	2.31	t
Previous pathway [direct and linear]						
Delayed or nonlinear, but reached diploma	1.18	ns	1.01	ns	1.04	ns
Nonlinear without diploma	4.49	**	6.53	**	6.65	**
Opportunities for learning in company			.43	**	.46	**
Workload in company			.47	t	.49	t
Pedagogical competences of trainer in company			.58	t	.63	ns
Opportunities for learning in vocational school			1.06	ns	1.13	ns
Workload in vocational school			.73	ns	.74	ns
Pedagogical competences of vocational school teacher			.72	ns	.71	ns
Educational satisfaction					.86	ns
Constant	.02	***	38.89	*	37.42	*
Nagelkerke R^2	.10		.28		.28	

ns not significant; N (number of lower-achieving apprentices included in the analysis)=340
t $p<.10$; *$p<.05$; **$p<.01$; ***$p<.001$

Hierarchical logistical regression analysis was used again to analyse predictors of NEET situations 2 years after apprenticeship (Table 7.3). In addition to socio-demographic risk factors, educational conditions and satisfaction, information about previous pathways was included. Pathways of lower achieving apprentices were differentiated into three groups: (1) those with direct access to apprenticeship and a linear pattern until successful graduation; (2) those with either delayed access or a nonlinear pattern, but ending with diploma at a later time; and (3) those with direct or delayed access, a nonlinear pattern and ending without diploma.

Socio-demographic variables and information about previous pathways explained to a moderate extent, whether apprentices were NEET after their apprenticeship (Model 1). Adding information about educational conditions improved the overall prediction considerably (Model 2), whereas the inclusion of educational satisfaction (Model 3) did not.

In all three models, the absence of a VET diploma goes along with an increased risk to be NEET 2 years after apprenticeship. Apprentices, who left training without a diploma, face a more than six times higher risk to be NEET than apprentices who had entered apprenticeship directly and had a linear pathway (Models 2 and 3). However, no difference could be found between apprentices with nonlinear pathways, who reached a VET diploma at a later stage, and apprentices with direct and linear pathways.

Male apprentices have higher risks to be NEET than females. By trend, the risk is also higher for migrants or for apprentices whose father has a low-level education (Models 2 and 3).

Educational conditions at the end of apprenticeship predicted NEET only with regard to the workplace. Ample learing opportunities and, by trend, higher work-load in the company reduce the risk of being NEET. Detailed analyses show that, on the average, work load is on a medium level. It thus seems that the more apprentices percieve their work as demanding with regard to learning and task fullfillment, the lower is their risk to be NEET. Educational satisfaction has no influence on being NEET 2 years after apprenticeship.

Discussion and Conclusion

Apprenticeship systems have often been credited with providing young people with smooth and linear school-to-work transitions because pathways are institutionally well-structured and closely linked to the labour market (Raffe, 2008). This assumption has been supported by the relatively low unemployment rates in Switzerland as compared to other countries (Scarpetta et al., 2010) and by empirical research focusing on transitions from the last year in apprenticeships to the first years in a job (e.g. Elfering, Semmer, Tschan, Kälin, & Bucher, 2007; Scherer, 2001). In this chapter, a broader perspective on school-to-work transitions is adopted, which includes transitions from compulsory school to apprenticeships and to skilled employment, because this is a pathway experienced by the majority of young people in Switzerland. It was argued that apprenticeship systems may have their advantages, but also bear their own and specific transition risks, which appear to be growing.

Based on empirical data, the findings suggest that for many young people pathways are far from smooth and easy. In the group of lower-achieving youth, more than a third did not succeed in entering upper secondary education directly. Once in apprenticeship, more than a third experienced a nonlinear pathway, and one out of six remained without a VET qualification. Transitions proved even more difficult for low achievers from disadvantaged backgrounds, and especially so for apprentices from less-educated families. Results corroborate previous research, which found evidence for persistent social inequality in education (Imdorf, 2010; Seibert et al., 2009; Uhly & Granato, 2006).

The findings both reveal and illuminate that transitions seem to be more critical at the beginning of the pathway than towards the end. However, delayed entries and nonlinear pathways did not in any case lead to permanent educational dropout. Some apprentices coped successfully with the contract cancellation, found another apprenticeship and/or employer and finished their training with a VET diploma. The diploma is then one of the strongest predictors for productive transitions to post-apprenticeship life. In all, it seems important to support apprentices in the situation of an early contract cancellation towards re-entering training. There seems to be little time to do so, as re-entry chances are highest directly after the cancellation,

but decrease rapidly after 3 months (Schmid, 2010). In any case, dropping out from an apprenticeship or changing the occupation or company during it is usually not envisaged as part of a 'normal' apprenticeship career. Such events are in many cases unplanned and enforced and do not correspond to the normal life plans of young people (Walther & Plug, 2006).

It has been argued that apprenticeships encourage step-by-step transition actions that allow for wider time horizons in decision making (Heinz, 2009). This might be true because of the double status of apprentices, which allows for a period as 'junior skilled worker in preparation' (Heinz, p. 395) before apprentices enter 'real' employment. On the other hand, it may be questioned, if apprenticeships are helpful for testing occupational routes, while at the same time limiting occupational changes in the course of the pathway. As apprenticeships and VET diplomas are strongly occupation-specific, changing pathways are societally and personally costly and might be risky, once a training occupation is chosen and an apprenticeship started.

The impact of educational conditions on transitions during and after apprenticeships appears to be different for the two learning sites analysed. Opportunities for learning at the workplace foster not only linear pathways during apprenticeship through their effect on educational satisfaction, but also seem to directly promote transition into employment or additional education. This finding supports previous research, which showed that core job characteristics such as job variety increases motivation and job satisfaction and affects job effectiveness and subsequent job behaviour (e.g. job mobility, turnover) (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Learning opportunities at school had the opposite effect. Learning at school might be stressful, if too many different subjects have to be learned in 1 day a week and in a condensed way. Also, school is not of primary interest to many apprentices, and especially for lower-achieving apprentices, who prefer practical work over more abstract learning. Consistent with previous research (Bohlinger, 2002), insufficient achievement in vocational schools remains a distinct risk factor for nonlinear apprenticeship pathways. Achievement-related problems might have existed before the apprentices had begun their training, which would point to an insufficient fit between apprentices' academic competences and the requirements of the apprenticeship. School problems might also be a consequence of a poor fit between the occupational interest of the apprentices and the learning context, which negatively influences apprentices' motivation to study. In any case, it seems important to improve both the recruitment and selection procedures into apprenticeship and the supportive measures at vocational schools (Deuer, 2006; Stalder & Schmid, 2006).

Being aware of increasing transition risks in the Swiss apprenticeship system, public and private partners decided to address the problem by increasing the overall upper secondary completion rate from today's 90–95%, by introducing strategies to avoid loss of time due to waiting periods, changes or drop outs and by identifying and supporting possible risk groups at an early stage (Galliker, 2011). Recently, the government has launched the programme 'Case Management Vocational Education and Training' to support 13–25 year olds in multiple risk situations, whose school-to-work-transition is bound to be severely hampered (Kraus, 2010). Case managers act as coordinators and networkers between educational, social and health institutions and initiate individual support measures for the young people—if needed over

a prolonged time period. Educational policy expectations with regard to these case management measures are high. However, programme evaluation has yet to show whether they can be met. Another means to promote successful pathways of low achievers is the introduction of 2-year apprenticeships, which were established with the new federal law of vocational education in 2004. Two-year apprenticeships should enable lower-achieving school-leavers to start training without delay, to pursue the apprenticeship without any disruptions and to find gainful employment or access to longer (3–4-year) apprenticeships afterwards. The early findings from the evaluations are encouraging (Kammermann, 2010), but further research is needed to study the occupational pathways of these apprentices in the longer run.

In order to better integrate at-risk groups, such as the socially disadvantaged, low-achieving or disengaged young people, many western countries currently develop educational programmes focusing more on workplace learning (OECD, 2005). It is also in this context that apprenticeship training draws new interest (Rauner & Smith, 2010; Scarpetta et al., 2010). Learning from the Swiss case, it seems that achieving successful pathways through apprenticeship depends on many individual, institutional, political and economic factors, which cannot be disentangled easily. The long tradition of Swiss apprenticeship training might be one important factor. The institutionalisation of pathways, the active involvement of public and private partners and the will for constant reforms might be others. The favourable general preconditions of the Swiss labour market still offer employment opportunities for most people, which include lower skilled people. Although the apprenticeship system is sometimes criticised for being outdated, reforms still do not question the existence of the VET system per se, but try to optimise its present state (Gonon, 2004).

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Chapter 8
Governing Schooling, People and Practices: Australian Policies on Transitions

Sue Thomas and Stephen Hay

The previous five chapters described imperatives that are driving transition policies in the USA, Germany, the UK, Canada and Switzerland. Together, the chapters illuminated the range of educational practices for transition that have been enacted in these countries. This chapter shifts the focus to the Australian policy context by examining a selection of current Australian state and territory policy documents informing the provision of secondary education for young people in the transition from school to post-school work or study. It investigates how transition is understood in these policies that focus on senior secondary schooling and vocational education. Understandings of transition policies are important because the ways in which policy problems are framed within policy texts 'will affect what can be thought about and how this affects possibilities for action' (Bacchi, 2000, p. 50).

In Australia, the last decade has seen a plethora of policies concerned with the beginning of the senior phase of schooling, which is seen as a 'critical transition point' in a young person's life (Department of Education Science and Training, 2005). Each state and territory[1] has established different policies to reform the senior years of secondary schooling. All these policies are concerned with ensuring the production of a highly skilled workforce, and hence economic prosperity, by requiring all students to secure successful transitions from school either to employment or further education. This chapter examines the diverse understandings of transition in policy documents across Australia in order to show how these understandings inform particular school to work transition initiatives and practices.

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[1] The Commonwealth of Australia is made up of six states and two territories; under the Australian constitution, each of the state and territory governments has responsibility for the provision of school education in that jurisdiction. For this reason, the analysis of policies for transition will focus on state and territory policies.

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The chapter begins with a discussion of how it conceptualises education policy. Next, it outlines the processes employed to investigate Australian policies on transition. This section identifies the Australian policy documents that were the subject of analysis and explains and justifies their selection. It then outlines the two-step approach adopted for the analysis of the documents: first, an automated content analysis using Leximancer software to identify key themes and, second, a fine-grained critical discourse analysis of selected extracts from the documents. The remainder of the chapter details the findings from this analysis, identifying the discourses on transition traced in the policies and relating these discourses to the wider social context. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how Australian policies understand transition and the implications of these understandings for the governance of schooling, students and practices around transitions.

The analysis in this chapter extends that detailed in an earlier publication (Billett et al., 2010). That analysis identified the key themes and emphases underpinning the stated purposes, goals and mean of senior schooling that were outlined in many of the same documents. The purposes, goals and means were examined in order to capture particular constructions of productive transitions across the policy documents. These constructions were discussed in terms of how they address the needs of students who are most at risk of not securing such transitions. The following analysis furthers the understandings of transitions outlined in that analysis by moving from a thematic analysis, to a fine-grained linguistic analysis of the documents, then back to a consideration of the social context and the implications of these understandings for the governance of schooling, students and practices around transitions.

Understanding Education Policy

Education policies are public policies. A public policy is more than the production of a specific document or text. Rather, such policies 'are made on behalf of the state by its various instrumentalities to order the conduct of individuals, such as teachers or students, or organization such as schools or universities' (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997, pp. 1–2). That is, policies on education seek to steer the direction of schooling in particular ways. They are evidence of governmental activity that is positive and directional. Luke and Hogan (2006) describe this activity as prescriptive regulation, which steers changes in behaviour and practices and allocates resources in the process of seeking solutions to particular problems. Importantly, how policies label a problem also constrains the solution and advances certain interests and values (cf. Codd, 1988; Placier, Walker, & Foster, 2002; Taylor, 1997). That is, the representation of the problem is implicit in the policy (Bacchi, 2009).

Also implicit in the policy is a commitment to a particular set of values as policy activity involves the authoritative allocation of values (Codd, 1988). Education policy, therefore, is understood as the documentation of decisions about action, decisions that are underpinned by particular values. However, at times, policy is also

evidenced by non-decision-making, which results in the suppression of, or silence on, issues (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). It follows, then, that an analysis of education policies offers insights into what Miller and Rose (Miller & Rose, 1990, 2008; Rose, 1992) have termed governing rationalities, that is, the ways that authorities seek to define the objects of government, including who and what should be governed, and the problems and goals to which government should be directed.

Further, education policy is seen to be more than a document or text. That is, it is considered not as an object, a product or an outcome, but as a process, something that is interactional and unstable (Ball, 2008). Two implications arise from such an understanding of policy. First, the policy process is a complex, shifting meld of values, contingency and context (Maguire, Ball, & Braun, 2010). Consequently, education policy, even when centrally mandated, is translated, adjusted and worked on differently by diverse sets of policy actors in processes of interpretation and recontextualisation as it is enacted in particular contexts (Braun, Maguire, & Ball, 2010). Second, policy texts are polysemic (Thomas, 2006) or heteroglossic (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). That is, they attempt to accommodate competing interests and values through the incorporation of multiple meanings. A fuller picture of these meanings is best gained through the use of multiple lenses of analysis. As Freebody (2003) notes when talking about case studies, the acknowledgement of multiple perspectives facilitates the exploration of patterns in the findings. In this chapter, two different lenses are applied to policy documents in order to trace patterns in the ways that these policies understand and frame the transition from school to work.

Investigating Australian Policies on Transitions

A search of contemporary Australian policy documents was conducted in 2008 in order to identify current state policies that focused specifically on senior secondary school, vocational education and training or the transition from school to post-school life. An additional search was made in 2009 to ensure that the most recent and most relevant policies were found. As noted earlier, state and territory policies were the focus of these searches as constitutional responsibility for education and training rests with this level of government. The scans identified documents released by each of the eight Australian state and territory governments. The documents are listed in Table 8.1.

Policy documents are often large texts, so a means for entering the data needs to be found. One such means is by performing an initial content analysis of the document. Content analysis involves 'establishing categories, and systematic linkages between them, and then counting the number of instances when those categories are used in a particular item of text' (Silverman, 2006, p. 400). It offers the convenience of simplifying and reducing large amounts of data into organised segments by using pre-designed categories prior to data analysis. Leximancer software provides the means by which an automated content analysis of texts can be performed. It can be 'thought of as a form of text mining' (Smith & Humphreys, 2006, p. 262) that identifies themes for further analysis. The Leximancer program was used to mine

Table 8.1 Australian policy documents on transition

Document	State/territory	Year
The Kirby report	Victoria	2000
Education and training reforms for the future: A white paper (ETRF)	Queensland	2002
Our 15–19 year olds – Opportunities and choices: An education and training strategy for 15–19 year olds in NSW 2006–2009	New South Wales	2006
School to work transition strategic plan	Northern Territory	2006
Success for all: Report to the Minister for Education and Children's Services on the review of the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE)	South Australia	2006
Strategic plan 2007–2009	Western Australia	2007
Shaping a thinking future: Qualifications and skills for Tasmania tomorrow	Tasmania	2007
Pathways to the future	Australian Capital Territory	2008

the eight Australian policy texts on senior secondary schooling in order to identify the concepts and key themes that underpinned understandings of young people's transition to post-school life.

The Leximancer program runs documents through an automatic process that first generates a 'collection of concept seeds that reflect what was important to the authors of the texts based on their word usage' (Leximancer Manual (Version 3), 2008, p. 91). The process results in the extraction of thesaurus-based concepts, understood in the program as 'collections of words that generally travel together throughout the text' (Leximancer Manual (Version 3), 2008, p. 28), from the data. The next stage of extraction establishes the implicit, indirect relationships between previously extracted concepts. The result of this stage of extraction is asymmetric concept co-occurrence information that is used to generate a concept map. The concept map illustrat[es] the main features (i.e. concepts) and how they relate (Leximancer Manual (Version 3), 2008`) The concepts identified through the Leximancer process are grouped in clusters on the map. The emergent concept groups or clusters are referred to as themes. Highly connected concepts are identified as a parent of a thematic cluster and are used to characterise that cluster. That is, the Leximancer program not only identifies concepts but also, through the analysis of the relationships between these concepts, key themes in the documents. In the following analysis, the first step uses Leximancer to provide a macro-level snapshot of the major themes across all the policies. The second step in this analysis, critical discourse analysis (CDA), interrogates these themes identified in the initial analysis at the micro-level.

Specific extracts from the policy texts were selected for further fine-grained analysis using critical discourse. The Leximancer analysis enabled the researchers to identify extracts in the policy that referred to the themes generated through the concept map. One hundred and eighty-five extracts were identified. These extracts were collated, then subjected to further examination using the linguistic features of collocation (or co-occurrence) of words and repetition. A focus was placed on these

Table 8.2 Extracts for CDA analysis

Policy/state/territory	Extract/s from document
The Kirby report/Victoria	Pathways and the post-compulsory phase, p. 77
Education and training reforms for the future: A white paper/Queensland	Foreword and executive summary, pp. 5–6
Our 15–19 year olds – Opportunities and choices: An education and training strategy for 15–19 year olds in NSW 2006–2009/New South Wales	A profile of the 15–19 Cohort, p. 2
	NSW government investments in our 15–19 year olds, pp. 3–4
	2.0 Supporting strongly, pp. 9–10
School to work transition strategic plan/ Northern Territory	Introduction, p. 3
	Priority four: Pathways, pp. 7–8
Success for all: Report to the Minister for Education and Children's Services on the review of the South Australian Certificate of Education/South Australia	Principles for reforming the SACE, pp. 84–89
Strategic plan 2007–2009/Western Australia	Strategic plan, n.p.
Shaping a thinking future. Qualifications and skills for Tasmania tomorrow/Tasmania	Our education and training investment, p. 2
	Section One: QUALIFICATIONS and SKILLS, p. 3, 4 and 6
Pathways to the future/Australian Capital Territory	Message from the Minister, p. iv
	Is it important to stay on at school? pp. 6–7

features because both features indicate a preoccupation with some aspect of reality that serves to set up a common sense understanding of the way things are (Fairclough, 2001b). For this reason, particular emphasis was given to extracts where the relevant concepts co-occurred with other concepts. In some cases, these extracts were supplemented with the text surrounding the extract in the document. One extract from each state policy was selected for fine-grained critical discourse analysis. The selected extracts are listed in Table 8.2.

Using Leximancer to Identify Key Themes

The application of the Leximancer software to the Australian policy documents used concept co-occurrence to generate a concept map that displays both the concepts identified and the relationships between them. The concept map is shown in Fig. 8.1.

All concepts identified through the analysis appear as small dots on the map. As noted earlier, the concepts settle in groups or clusters if there are relationships between them. Leximancer imposes coloured circles, known as theme circles, over these groupings. Five theme circles of highly connected concepts are displayed. That is, the Leximancer program identified five significant themes that underpinned understandings of young people's transition to post-school life across all the selected documents. The themes, in order of significance, were *students*, *people*, *school*, *assessment* and *skills*. The theme people included the initial concepts of young and

Fig. 8.1 Concepts and themes about policies in transition

people, which were merged into one concept because they referred to one group mentioned in these policies, that is, *young people*. Future reference therefore, will be to young people when referring to this theme.

The identification of the five themes resulted from the program's facility to change the number of themes visible in the concept map at any one time. The map displays 50% of visible themes. The decision to display 50% of visible themes was based on a particular feature of a Leximancer analysis, the brightness of the themes. The brightness of a theme is related to its frequency. That is, the brighter the theme, the more frequently it appears in the documents under analysis. Consequently, the five themes identified above are both the brightest and most frequent. It is significant to this analysis, that while *transition, pathway* and *retention*, all significant elements in school to post-school transitions, appeared as concepts on the map, they were not identified as themes. Another significant element, *work*, appeared as a concept only. This result indicates that Australian state policies about transitions from school to post-school life place most emphasis on describing (and so directing or managing) students, young people, schools, assessment and skills rather than on retention in senior secondary school, the transition process, or the pathways available to young people or work.

The five significant themes identified through the Leximancer analysis are not of equal significance. Rather they are listed in a nested hierarchy according to their connectivity and relevance scores. The hierarchy is apparent in the thematic summary contained in Table 8.3.

Table 8.3 Thematic summary

Theme	Connectivity (%)	Relevance
Students	100	
[Young] people	65	
School	51	
Assessment	25	
Skills	16	

The connectivity score reflects the theme's salience and ranks the themes relative to the most connected theme, in this instance, students. The most frequent themes, all of which obtained a connectivity score of above 50%, were students, young people and school. The themes of assessment and skills had significantly lower connectivity scores. This result is significant as the connectivity score 'represents the degree to which constituent concepts in each theme are connected with others on the map' (Leximancer Manual (Version 3), 2008, p. 67). Thus, an examination of the thematic summary indicates that the policies placed particular emphasis on students, young people and schools.

Further, the location of the five thematic circles on the map is significant. The thematic circles appear to be grouped in two layers, indicating links between the themes in each layer. One layer includes the three themes of students, schools and assessment, indicating that this layer is concerned with the schooling context. The second layer includes the themes of young people and skills. This layer is concerned with contexts outside schooling and includes concepts such as work, community and training. That is, the theme of young people incorporates work, training, community and opportunities, and these concepts lie completely outside the schooling domain. The location of these themes in the outside school context is significant because it locates work, training and young people within communities.

An analysis of the school to post-school life transition is concerned with the connections between these two layers or contexts. Such connections are revealed in an examination of the knowledge pathways constructed between concepts. Knowledge pathways are a feature of the Leximancer program that allows the analyst to identify the relationships between concepts. The knowledge pathways identified in the Leximancer analysis are shown as lines in Fig. 8.1. The concept of school is the central point on a pathway that runs from the concept of standards to that of skills, indicating that school is the link between the schooling and outside schooling contexts. While the location of school as a bridge between the two contexts is to be expected, further examination of the knowledge pathways reveals more details about the connections between the two contexts in relation to the links both between students and work and between students and young people.
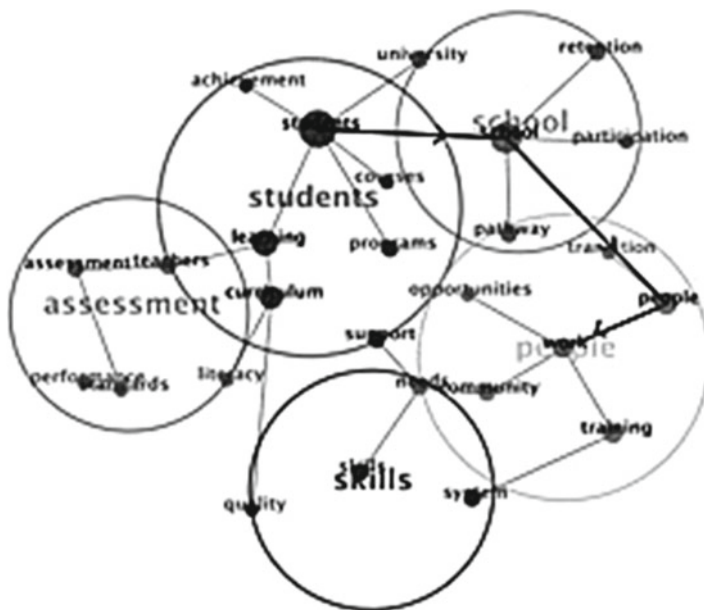
Fig. 8.2 Knowledge pathway between school and work

One knowledge pathway of particular interest for understanding transitions is that constructed between the concepts of students and work. The knowledge pathway that connects students to work is shown in bold in Fig. 8.2. The pathway forms a linear connection between the concepts of students, schools, young people and work. Significantly, the concepts of transition and pathway are not on the school-to-work knowledge pathway. Rather, both these concepts are endpoints on pathways that link to one other concept only. Pathway is linked to schools and transition is linked to young people with neither concept linked to the other. It would appear that in Australian state policy documents, schools are seen to be the providers of pathways but that young people effect their transitions in specific out-of-school localities. Once again, pathways and transitions, despite being significant elements in the transition process, are not given emphasis, nor are the links between them emphasised, in the policies. The knowledge pathway connects the concepts of students and young people, which as noted earlier, are located in different social contexts. Once again, school is the bridge between the contexts. Given that both concepts refer to persons, questions arise here about the distinctions that are made between the two concepts. It would appear from Fig. 8.2 that the policies identify persons in schools as students, who then become people after moving into contexts outside school.

The mapping of the policies using Leximancer revealed that the Australian state policies focused on the themes of students, young people, schools, assessment and skills. A significant finding was that less attention was given to transition and

pathways and limited emphasis to retention and work, despite these concepts being key elements of the transition from school to post-school life. The policies distinguished between students and young people, locating them within the school and non-school contexts, respectively. The location of young people outside the school sector and their identification with work, training, community and opportunities was significant. However, the significance of these findings cannot be derived from the maps alone, but can be explored further by using a fine-grained critical discourse analysis of the text extracts that Leximancer has identified as being central to the themes. Such an analysis is the focus of the following section.

A Fine-Grained Analysis of Students in Transition

Policy texts, like all texts, not only describe the world but also create and recreate it (Saarinen, 2005). Policy language is crucial to such representation, as it constructs and transmits meanings through the labelling of categories (Yanow, 1996). Analysing the language of policy provides a way of seeing how policies work to privilege certain understandings of the problem that are the focus of that policy. That is, it shows how policy texts construct discourses that 'organise their own specific rationalities, making particular sets of ideas, obvious, common sense and "true"' (Ball, 2008, p. 5). CDA is a valuable tool for such a policy analysis (Bacchi, 2000; Taylor, 2004; Thomas, 2005).

However, CDA is more than a linguistic method of analysis (Thomas, 2005). It is a complex tool that draws on an ensemble of social science techniques to trace social practices within power relations (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). Fairclough (2004) notes that policy texts create imaginaries that move towards changed realities. Policy discourses, therefore, work to construct imaginary spaces for governance as they 'construct/imagine "frameworks for action", procedures which network social practices (activities) in particular ways' (Fairclough, 2005, p. 59). Thus, a critical discourse analysis of policy documents can trace the construction both of imaginary spaces for governance and of the social practices within a particular set of social relations. The following critical discourse analysis traces the policy discourses constructed in Australian policies on transition and senior secondary schooling in order to describe the imagined space of changed secondary schools as they construct frameworks for action on transitions from school to post-school life.

In addition, CDA recognises the dialectical relationship between texts and their social context and can be employed therefore to trace discourses at both macro- and micro-levels. Such recognition leads to the rejection of rigid barriers between micro- and macro-methods of analysis (Fairclough, 1995). The analysis that follows focused on the micro-level as it analyses the linguistic features in the extracts to trace the ways that language works to construct official discourses in the policy documents. The linguistic features of modality, deictic categories and evaluation (Fairclough, 2003) are traced in the extracts in order to gain an understanding of the discourses that are constructed in policy documents on transition and senior secondary schooling.

Defining Transitions

Policy discourses construct a particular reality that defines the problem that is the focus of policy in particular ways. The findings of the Leximancer analysis highlighted the importance of analysing how the policies define pathways and transitions. They signalled also the need to investigate the definitions of students and young people. Of particular interest is the linking of young people to work, training, community and opportunities. These definitions are traced through an analysis of the use of modality. Specifically, modality is investigated in terms of what the authors of the policy commit themselves to when they make statements of fact. Such statements are declarative in that the subject of the sentence precedes the verb. Fairclough (2001a) notes that declarative statements work to position the authors as givers, and readers as receivers, of information. This exchange of knowledge involves what Fairclough (2003) calls epistemic modality. Epistemic modality refers to the authors' commitment to the 'truth' of the situation. Assertions or statements of fact realise strong commitments to the truth as it is understood by the author(s) of the policy.

Making statements of fact is a key feature of the policy extracts. The selected extracts reflect this feature as, with one exception, they are comprised entirely of declarative statements. The exception is a question found in the South Australian policy (Government of South Australia, 2006, p. 86). Declarative statements work to establish the authors of the documents as the authoritative voice on transitions to define young people, students, transitions and pathways in particular ways. An analysis of declarative statements in the policy extracts reveals a strong commitment to the way young people, students, pathways and transitions are defined in the policy extracts.

The policy extracts define pathways in various ways. Most policies incorporate a discussion of transition within this definition. The most detailed discussion of pathways and transition is found in the Victorian policy extract (Kirby, 2000). Here, pathways are defined as 'a series of learning platforms' (p. 77). This definition attempts to capture the concept of lifelong learning where young people move through 'transition journeys' that are 'diverse, dynamic and uncertain' (p. 77). The policy distinguishes this definition of pathways from those definitions that see the pathways as options in education, training or employment or as planned routes through education and training to careers, both of which assume a linear progression through processes of meritocratic selection and choice.

It is these latter definitions that dominate the other policy documents, as is evident in the Tasmanian policy's identification of the need for 'relevant, accessible and attractive pathways to training and employment' (Government of Tasmania, 2007, p. 4) or the emphasis on learning or earning (Government of South Australia, 2006; The State of Queensland, 2002), which is designed to give 'a range of options to help them [our young people] achieve the academic or vocational educational qualifications they need to compete in the world of work' (The State of Queensland, p. 6).

Young People, Students and Communities

An analysis of the way that young people and students are defined in the policy extracts reveals that *young people* is the dominant term used in most extracts, although the term *young adults* (NSW Department of Education & Training, 2006) is also used. In many instances, young people is used interchangeably with *students*, and often is used alternatively, as in the following extract, 'the decision to stay on at school or leave is one that some *young people* confront daily and most, if not all, *students* face from time to time' [emphasis added] (Government of South Australia, 2006, p. 88). As this extract indicates, the primary focus of most policies is on young people and students are referred to in relation to young people. The one exception is the South Australian policy (Government of South Australia), which refers frequently to students, especially when talking about proposed changes to senior secondary school. For example, the first principle for proposed changes in the policy is informed by a concern that 'schools are able to develop and adapt curriculum to meet students' learning needs and aspirations' (Government of South Australia, p. 84). The South Australian policy was the largest document analysed, and its emphasis on students may account for the dominance of that concept in the Leximancer analysis. That is, the distinction between students and young people suggested by the Leximancer analysis may well be the result of the way the concepts students and young people travel in the documents.

A further analysis of the declarative statements about young people reveals that most extracts describe young people as being aged between 15 and 19 years. Two policies, those from Queensland and the Northern Territory, are the exception, referring to young people as being 'those aged 15, 16 and 17 years' (The State of Queensland, 2002, p. 6). Common to all policies is the assumption that young people are involved in the post-compulsory phase of schooling and all policies include a focus on those young people 'still not engaged in work or study' (NSW Department of Education & Training, 2006, p. 2).

The policies also define students and young people in terms of their level of engagement with school or study. For example, the Queensland, ACT and Tasmanian policies all focus on the problems of disengagement and reengagement of students. The Tasmanian policy (Government of Tasmania, 2007) notes that 'education can help us to overcome the challenges of youth disengagement, skills shortages, and low productivity' (p. 3), and Queensland's ETRF policy (The State of Queensland, 2002) aims to help young people to 'reengage in learning to gain the skills and qualifications needed to survive and prosper in today's society' (p. 6). While the South Australian SACE policy (Government of South Australia, 2006) is also concerned with 'student engagement and satisfaction with their secondary education' (p. 84), it identifies responsiveness as a higher principle and gives prominence to senior secondary education being 'responsive to the needs of young people' (p. 84).

A closer examination of the declarative statements shows that most statements describe young people as passive participants in the transition process. Governments,

through their policies, are identified as the active participants. Government agency is evident in the emphasis, found in all policies, on supporting, helping, preparing and developing young people. That is, young people are depicted as lacking in skills or as not yet being full members of society as the following extract shows:

> Building Character
>
> As 15–19 year olds move through the later years [of schooling], the focus is increasingly on academic and vocational outcomes including the Higher School Certificate. However, they are also preparing for adulthood and participation as a full member of our democratic society. We are, therefore, committed to developing responsible, well-rounded, young adults. (NSW Department of Education & Training, 2006, p. 10)

Some policies, such as those from Western Australian, Victoria and the Northern Territory, do recognise the importance of youth agency, evidenced in the acknowledgement that young people actively experience or make transitions. In this regard, the definitions of young people reflect the findings of the Leximancer analysis, which noted the link between the concepts of young people and transition.

The dominant definition of young people in all policies is that of a group whose lack of engagement and achievement poses a problem to government. All policies focus on the ways that government can solve this problem, and all propose the same solution: improved participation in senior secondary schooling as evidenced in school retention and completion rates. It is important to note that all policies identify government as being the provider of the solution to the problem of young people. The following sentiment is found in all policies, albeit in slightly different terms:

> Our Government is committed to supporting young Queenslanders and helping them to achieve. We are demonstrating that commitment by changing the education and training system to ensure that young Queenslanders lead the way, and are not left behind, in a world of rapid and constant change. (The State of Queensland, 2002, p. 5)

In all policies, young people's needs as seen by the government are outlined as is the means that governments will adopt to support, and so improve, young people in order to achieve increased rates of retention to Year 12 and completion of schooling.

Several policies, specifically policies from Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory, see the involvement of groups outside the school context as part of the solution to the problem of young people. For example, the Northern Territory calls for the 'active engagement and involvement of all client stakeholder groups' (Department of Employment Education and Training, 2006, p. 8). Similarly, the South Australian policy identifies the principle of a connected curriculum, in which 'students' learning in the senior years is connected to and supported by the wider community' (Government of South Australia, 2006, p. 87). Both this policy and Queensland's ETRF (The State of Queensland, 2002) place heavy emphasis on promoting and building of 'rich community partnerships between school communities, employers, unions, further education and training providers, and other communities external to the school' (Government of South Australia, p. 87).

It was noted earlier that the policy extracts are characterised by declarative statements of fact initiated by the authors of the policies. Readers of the document are positioned to agree with these statements. This positioning is reinforced by the

use of deictic categories. Deictic categories are the means of referring to outside and inside of the text by the use of pronouns such as *our*, *we* and *you*. They work to construct a particular sense of the self (Allan, 1998; Clark & Holquist, 1984), groups and/or community (Fairclough, 2003). Five out of the eight policy extracts analysed contained statements that used deictic categories to refer to one or more of young people, vision, actions or government, such as the above extract from the Queensland policy. Many extracts referred to our young people as in the following statements in the NSW policy extract:

> *We* recognise that this generation of 15–19 year olds has grown up in a rapidly changing society and world, with evolving technologies and patterns of work….
>
> The NSW government has made a significant investment in its education and training system to make it more relevant to the 21st century and to prepare *our* young people to face the challenges and opportunities of the future from a position of strength. [emphasis added] (NSW Department of Education & Training, 2006, pp. 2, 3)

In the above statement, *we* refer to the NSW government who, like the governments in all other policies, has agency to manage *our* students, who are positioned as being owned by everyone, perhaps even by the state. By using the deictic category *our* to include everyone, the policy extracts construct a particular reality that collectivises participants and devolves responsibility for transition to the wider community (Hay, 2009). That is, the state governments position themselves as managing the context so that students, young people and the community can manage themselves in appropriate ways. The positioning of young people in this way echoes their location in the non-school context evident in the Leximancer analysis.

Desirable Transitions

It was noted earlier that policies not only define the problem that is the focus of government action but also privilege these definitions in ways that advance particular interests and values. Such privileging is traced through the use of evaluation. Evaluation refers to the ways in which authors commit themselves to values and is concerned with tracing the authors' commitment to desirability and importance (Fairclough, 2003). Of particular interest to this analysis are evaluative statements about desirability and undesirability, about what is good and what is bad. Explicit modality markers signal such commitments to desirability and so to the values privileged in the policies. Statements about desirable transitions and young people can be traced in all policy extracts and refer to the desirability of economic prosperity and investment; of providing support for young people, including a recognition of diverse student populations and of the disengaged; and of education and training.

The focus of all policy extracts is on economic prosperity and investment. For example, the introduction of the Northern Territory (NT) policy states

> It is important that the NT has a skilled and educated workforce who can adapt to our rapidly changing and increasingly knowledge-based, globalised economy. To achieve this, a systematic approach to identifying existing and new labour market opportunities is

required. Young people need support to identify and take up these employment opportunities. They also need education and training that will allow them to acquire the skills required by industry and business both now and in the future. (Department of Employment Education and Training, 2006, p. 3)

The modal markers *required* and *need* signal the desirability of the situation described in this statement, which links economic prosperity both to young people and to education and training. The link is stated strongly in the NT vision that 'all students make a successful transition from school to work so they can actively participate in the economic and social development of the NT and Australia' (p. 3). Both the above statement and the vision encompass all three desirable factors noted above. Similar links are to be found in all policies. Education and training are valued as the means to 'develop skilled workers at all levels in both traditional and emerging industries' (Government of Western Australia, 2007, n.p.) in order to prevent disengagement from schooling. The Tasmanian policy extract (Government of Tasmania, 2007) notes

it's crucial that our education and training system supports them in ways that meets their needs and which encourage them to keep on learning. Young people need guidance in making choices about their career. They need relevant, accessible and attractive pathways to training and employment. (p. 4)

Once again, modal markers, such as *crucial* and *need*, signify the desirability of student engagement. The above statement also identifies the need for guidance and support, and for relevant pathways.

Similarly, the South Australian policy recognises the importance of the valuing of all study pathways. This policy explicitly states that 'the SACE must be socially inclusive' (Government of South Australia, 2006, p. 86). It is in this section on social inclusivity that a question is found. It was noted earlier that the South Australian policy extract was different because it included one question among the declarative statements of facts. The use of a question is significant as asking questions indicates a knowledge exchange where the (authoritative) author elicits the reader's commitment to a particular truth (Fairclough, 2003). In the section on social inclusion, the policy poses the question, 'can this situation [differential access to curriculum choice and learning opportunities, resources and services experienced by different groups of students] be allowed to continue in both human terms and in the building of a new economy?' (Government of South Australia, p. 86). The identification of the question raised in the SACE policy, therefore, highlights a feature (the principle of social inclusion) that is evaluated as desirable or undesirable by authoritative voices on education, a feature to which the reader's commitment is sought. That is, the South Australian policy gives explicit emphasis to the desirability of social inclusion. It states that

in order to develop a socially inclusive curriculum, it must be *accessible* to all and ensure that all students, despite their individual differences, are equipped with the *skills for participation and engagement* in the curriculum. This principle also demands a curriculum that is appropriate to all students, not one that is shaped to meet the needs of students from particular groups and that is incompatible with the backgrounds and experiences of students from other groups. It should promote *unity in difference* rather than disunity through sameness. [emphasis in original] (Government of South Australia, 2006, p. 86)

Here, the modal markers *must* and *should* establish the explicit valuing of social inclusion in the South Australian context. This valuing also underpins many of the other principles listed in the SACE policy, including the principle of responsiveness noted earlier. The policy repeatedly stresses the importance of a curriculum for *all students*.

However, there is less emphasis on social inclusion in other policy extracts. While statements such as 'our vision for the Smart State is to create a state of prosperity and social justice with a commitment to equality of opportunity' (The State of Queensland, 2002. p. 5) are present, the main focus of the policies is on economic prosperity. That is, the policies privilege educational outcomes, in economic, rather than human, terms. Detailed discussion of social inclusion is mainly absent, and where it is present, there is no indication that the policies seek to redistribute resources to intervene against disadvantage. Such a restricted version of equity is found in all policies, suggesting that equity is valued as a by-product of increased retention rates in senior secondary schools. As such, the above analysis reflects the findings by Smyth (2010) that Australian policies for social inclusion are based on a deficit and punitive view of young people. That is, young people are the problem, which is to be fixed by technical means.

Discourses on Transition

The above analysis shows that Australian state and territory policies on transition construct preferred discourses that define transitions as being a linear progression from school to further study or work through processes of meritocratic selection and choice. The discourse constructs young people as both a resource and a problem. They are a resource because they are needed to build the skilled workforce required for future economic prosperity. They are a problem because too many young people do not participate in, and disengage from, schooling. Education and training are valued as solutions to this problem, and the policies focus on the introduction of mandated participation in, and engagement with, schooling through earning or learning initiatives aimed at increasing school retention and completion rates. Such initiatives place an increased emphasis on expanding pathways within senior secondary schooling, on vocational education and training, on systematic planning for senior secondary schooling and on community partnerships. These initiatives are presented as government investment in young people in order to meet their needs, but their needs as defined by government.

Further, the analysis of Australian state and territory transition policies has shown that the policies on transition seek to regulate young people and schooling through policy discourses that steer changes in the practices of senior secondary schooling and allocate resources to facilitate these changes. That is, the policy discourses realise imaginary spaces for the governance of schooling and young people as they construct frameworks for actions aimed at increasing school retention and

completion rates in order to build a skilled workforce to ensure economic prosperity. That such actions should result in increased social inclusion is a desirable, but not explicit, goal of the policies. The discourses traced through the policy documents organise specific governing rationalities of economic prosperity and, to a lesser extent, social inclusion.

It is possible to trace alternative discourses in some policy documents, particularly the Victorian (Kirby, 2000) and South Australian (Government of South Australia, 2006) policies. These discourses construct transitions not as linear options but as processes of lifelong learning. They place emphasis on schools being responsive to young people through a flexible, socially inclusive curriculum that addresses the needs of all students. While such discourses recognise the relationship between young people, social inclusion and economic prosperity, explicit emphasis is given also to human values, rather than economic imperatives alone. In this way, these discourses, while retaining the emphasis on economic imperatives, reflect a slight shift towards the middle of the continuum between social inclusion and economic prosperity as policy objectives.

It was noted earlier that CDA rejects the notion of rigid barriers between micro- and macro-methods of analysis. The above micro-level analysis of extracts from policy texts identified the imaginary spaces for governance and frameworks for action constructed in the Australian policies. An analysis at the macro-level situates the policies within relations of power and links the discourses traced in the policy extracts to the wider policy field. The following macro-analysis shows how the discourses traced in the Australian policies on transition reflected commitment to the governing rationality of social investment, encompassing both economic prosperity and social inclusion as key policy outcomes. It describes how the rationality of social inclusion informed the Australian state and territory policy discourses on transitions. The analysis shows how social inclusion is a part of a neoliberal globalised education policy discourse that relies heavily on policy borrowing from transnational players in a global knowledge economy, such as the OECD, and other nations, especially the UK.

The emphasis in the policy documents on economic productivity, social inclusion, student engagement and the management of young people's transitions at the level of communities points to the influence of strategies of social investment. Social investment strategies are located within a neoliberal frame in that they share with market neoliberalism a focus on economic productivity and growth as their principal policy objective. However, where market neoliberalism signals a distancing of the state from social policy and welfare, social investment regards social policy as a key component of economic policy. Capturing the balance between social and economic objectives, Giddens (1998) has argued that social investment denotes the development of a 'new mixed economy [that] looks … for a synergy between public and private sectors, utilising the dynamism of markets but with the public interest in mind' (pp. 99–100).

While social investment, to some degree, attempts to pursue the social objectives of the welfare state, it has been sensitive to criticisms that universal policies of social protection created a culture of dependency on the state as a provider of

welfare. For this reason, social investment takes a positive approach to public spending on social policies, targeting programs that encourage and enable people to take responsibility for managing their own welfare within specific local sites. Communities, configured around schools therefore, are both key government assemblages and crucial sites for managing transition for young people. Moreover, within communities, responsibility of all stakeholders is emphasised through the encouragement of an active (entrepreneurial) citizenship (Giddens, 1998; Rose, 1999, 2000).

The governing rationality of social inclusion is a part of a neoliberal globalised education policy discourse that emphasises the role of education in supporting economic productivity growth through the development of human capital formation. This global discourse relies heavily on policy borrowing from other nations and from transnational players in a global knowledge economy, such as the OECD (Exley, Braun, & Ball, 2011; Lingard, 2010). The OECD plays a significant role in identifying common policy problems in education and highlighting preferred solutions (Henry, Lingard, Rizvi, & Taylor, 2001; Peters, 2001). Adopting orthodox assumptions concerning the links between educational attainment (measured by school completion) and economic productivity, recent reports (e.g. OECD, 2009) have made specific claims in support of measures to improve retention rates beyond the compulsory years and qualification levels of school leavers. Such claims assume a direct and causal relationship between education and economic productivity and educational attainment. In this context, rates of Year 12 completion have become a surrogate measure of potential economic competitiveness in the global economy. Accordingly, all state and territory education policy documents analysed in this chapter problematised student retention and school completion rates as a potential threat to economic competitiveness.

Further, the take up of the global education policy discourse is mediated by local histories, politics and cultures (Lingard, 2010). In the Australian context, policy borrowing relating to transitions has been influenced by the status of federal and state politics at the time the policy documents were formulated and subsequently released. It is significant that all documents selected for this analysis were developed under labour governments, which dominated state politics in Australia during the first decade of the twenty-first century. This situation was in contrast to the federal political context in which a Liberal National Coalition government was in power from 1996 to 2007. At the federal level, the coalition government, following models established by the Thatcher administration in the UK and Regan administration in the USA, aggressively pursued market-based neoliberal policies particularly in the areas of health, education and industrial relations. However, as noted earlier, the state governments in Australia retain the constitutional responsibility for public schooling. State education policies, therefore, were often proposed as a counterpoint to the privatisation and marketisation of education at the federal level (Hay, 2009; Hay & Kapitzke, 2009). To this end, Australian state and territory labour governments adopted social investment approaches to education following policy trajectories in the UK implemented under New Labour's Third Way political agenda (Hay, 2009).

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed Australian state and territory policies on the transition from school to post-school life. It used two lenses to give multiple understandings of transition. The first lens, a content analysis of the policies using Leximancer software, identified five themes that were significant across all state policies. These themes were students, school, young people, assessment and skills. This analysis showed that the school was depicted in these documents as a bridge between students and young people. The analysis found also that limited emphasis was given to transition and pathways, despite these concepts being key elements of the transition from school to post-school life. The significance of these results was explored further by using the second lens, a fine-grained critical discourse analysis of text extracts that the Leximancer program identified as being central to the themes.

The policy discourses traced through this fine-grained analysis defined transitions in terms of the problem of economic productivity, which in turn was defined by school retention and completion rates. Increased economic prosperity was to be gained through policies that mandated participation in, and engagement with, schooling, indicating a view of young people as a problem requiring government intervention. The policies sought to regulate young people and schooling through policy discourses that steered changes in the practices of senior secondary schooling. That is, the policy discourses realised spaces for the governance of schooling and young people as they constructed frameworks for actions aimed at increasing school retention and completion rates in order to build a skilled workforce to ensure economic prosperity. An analysis of these discourses at the macro-level demonstrated their connectedness to policy strategies borrowed particularly from the UK and the OECD. Further, it identified discourses of social inclusion that underpinned state and territory education policies and their connectedness to economic prosperity within the social investment strategy.

It can be seen, therefore, that the governing rationality of social investment, with its heavy emphasis on economic productivity and mitigating focus on social inclusion, informed the Australian state and territory policy discourses on transitions. This rationality constrained the practices available to young people, placing a heavy emphasis on linear progressions from school to post-school life. However, the presence of alternative discourses, such as those discourses noted earlier that discussed social inclusion in human terms, attests to the inherently unstable nature of the policy process. In such an unstable process, there are spaces for challenges to, and contestation of, policy discourses as they are enacted in local sites. The chapters in the following section show how transition policies, even when centrally mandated, are translated, adjusted and worked on differently when enacted by diverse sets of policy actors in diverse local contexts.

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Part III
Experiences of Schooling: Contemporary Practices and Experiences

Chapter 9
Researching Transition Experiences in Australian Senior Schooling

Jill Ryan, Greer Johnson, and Stephen Billett

The analysis of recent Australian state and territory educational policy documents in Chap. 8—'Governing Schooling, People and Practices: Australian Policies on Transitions'—showed how the policies acted to constrain provisions through which school students currently are guided and supported in making the transition from senior schooling to post-school destinations. The research project that informs the final Part III of this book, 'Experiences of Schooling: Contemporary Practices and Experiences', was conceived in this policy context and sought to investigate (a) what constituted 'productive transitions' from a range of perspectives in a number of school communities and (b) how different curriculum practices in these communities helped young people to make such transitions. In addressing these issues, this section of the book draws primarily on focus group and interview data generated in the same project to investigate and evaluate how the transition experiences were enacted and engaged within three different school communities as presented across the following three chapters (Chaps. 10, 11 and 12). As well as the case studies of each of these school communities, a further element of the investigation involved capturing the transition experiences of nine recent school leavers whose secondary school careers had been interrupted or were cut short before they had completed senior secondary schooling (Chap. 13). It was necessary to access these perspectives from recent school leavers independently from the school data collection procedures. Consequently, separate processes were used to secure these participants, and they provided a distinct set of data. Chapter 14 seeks to draw deductions from these four investigations to synthesise what constitutes productive transitions from schooling in the described context.

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As a means of introducing Part III, this chapter provides an additional and specific description of the context in which the study was enacted and the methods and procedures selected for gathering and analysing data within this inquiry. In all, it presents an overview of the kinds of procedures that were used to understand the intended transition experiences and how they were enacted in the three participating schools and, as well, the experiences of some young people who were at that time positioned outside of the school system. In this way, this chapter provides an overview of the investigation's aims and research questions and outlines the selection of case study schools and participants and artefacts within each school. Common approaches to collecting data at the school sites and the additional sites where recent school leavers were interviewed are also described.

The Scope of the Project

The broad intent of the project was to explore how young Australians experience post-school transitions and how these are being organised through schools and schooling.[1] As the analysis of documents in Chap. 8 indicates, productive transitions may be seen as those which enable students leaving school to participate fully in economic and social life, by moving directly into worthwhile employment, vocational or higher education or a combination of these. Thus, the project was particularly focused on the processes that different school communities adopted, initially to assist their students to identify post-school destinations that they could aspire to and which were suited to their interests and capacities, and then to provide them with the appropriate guidance to reach those destinations, i.e. the processes that would enable students to make productive transitions. To understand the factors that contribute to such transitions, we sought the views of a range of participants in the transition process: young people—some approaching their final years of secondary schooling, some who had already left school behind as well as representative groups of parents, senior school staff and employers of young people in the communities in which the schools were located.

The first stage of the project—the analysis of current transition policies across Australian states and territories that was discussed in the previous chapter—was an essential initial component of our study. As Thomas (2005) has observed, the words that label and thus constrain a policy issue advance particular interests and values. The understandings of transition which emerged from the policy analysis therefore helped to inform the approach adopted in the remainder of the study and, in particular, the empirical work that followed the review. As the starting point for the practical inquiry phase, the policy analysis could afford to be wide ranging.

The ubiquity of the Internet, and the enthusiasm with which most levels and sectors of the state and territory governments who have responsibility for schooling in Australia have adopted its use to inform and persuade the general public, meant that accessing government policies about post-school transitions over the last decade was a relatively straightforward process.

In contrast, the fieldwork component of the project was necessarily of more limited scope. Research resources are often limited, and judgements have to be made about the most time- and cost-effective ways of gathering data. Some of these decisions we take as given—with the research group located in Queensland, it was perhaps inevitable that this state would provide the location for the study and, thus, that the investigation would be designed against the backdrop of Queensland's Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF) (2002) which was discussed in the policy analysis in the previous chapter. Other decisions though were the product of more calculated deliberations about how the research team might go about understanding how the young Queenslanders in our study perceived the transition from school to the range of post-school destinations available to them. In this chapter, decisions about how to proceed and how the choices made about processes undertaken within the study are illustrated. In so doing, the attempt here is to capture some of the fluidity of the research process—something which was unavoidable when embarking on an inquiry which requires multiple levels of ethical clearance and data gathering in sites where participants are already busy going about their everyday tasks.

Before embarking on this task, it is necessary to provide an account that contextualises the schooling system in which the investigation was conducted. The next section—The Queensland Context—elaborates the policy context that has shaped the environment in which young people in the 15–17 years age group in this state attend schooling and seek to secure effective post-school transitions. These contexts are presented by providing a level of detail required to introduce the system, including some of the educational arrangements that have been adopted for young people in this age group as a result of recent reforms to senior schooling.

The Queensland Context

The ETRF (Queensland Government, 2002) initiated changes across early, middle and senior years of schooling. However, a key goal was to increase the 'participation, retention and attainment of young people aged 15–17 years in schools and TAFEs' (p. 10). It proposed that the development of a more inclusive senior phase of schooling would result in better prospects for young people and for the state as a whole. In the first instance, these improvements occurred through assisting and enabling all students to make a successful transition from school to work and/or continuing education. A successful transition would then assure young people's ongoing participation in economic and social activities and ultimately assist in creating 'a state of prosperity and social justice with a commitment to equality of opportunity' (p. 3) would be achieved.

The means of achieving these policy goals comprised making changes to both legislation and curriculum. First, in 2003, legislation was enacted to increase the compulsory school leaving age in Queensland: young people were required to stay at school until they had completed Year 10 or turned 16 (previously it had been 15), whichever came first. Then, in 2006, a more flexible senior curriculum leading to a new senior schooling qualification, the Queensland Certificate of Schooling (QCE), was introduced across the state. At the same time, further legislation mandated a period of compulsory participation that required all young Queenslanders to be 'learning or earning'. That is, unless young people were in full-time employment, they would be required to participate in some form of education or vocational training:

- for two years after they completed compulsory schooling or
- until they turned 17 years of age or
- until they completed the QCE or a Certificate III vocational qualification. (Queensland Department of Education and Training, 2008)

It can be seen here that there was a clear intent to prepare students more adequately at school and to ensure that their preparation to engage in an economic and socially post-school life was extended to all students. Changes to senior schooling which were introduced to enable more young people to participate successfully in the compulsory participation phase included:

- broadening the range of learning options for students in a variety of settings so that senior school subjects, vocational education and training courses, workplace and community learning and university subjects undertaken while still at school could all count towards a QCE
- providing opportunities to plan for their education and future career through Senior Education and Training (SET) plans based on their abilities, interests and goals
- registering students with the Queensland Studies Authority and thereby opening a 'learning account' for them to record details of their studies and enable them to monitor their progress towards a QCE (Queensland Studies Authority, 2011a)

The new approach to senior schooling, as outlined above, enabled schools to work more closely with students, families and communities to ensure that provisions for transitions from school were more contextually relevant than might have been the case in the past.

The research study reported in the following chapters commenced in 2008, just as schools were completing the first iteration of the reformed senior phase. That is, students commencing Year 10 in 2006 were the first cohort to be awarded QCEs as they completed Year 12 in 2008. The students participating in the research would, therefore, complete Year 12 in the third and fourth years under the new curriculum arrangements. Of the changes outlined above, the introduction of SET planning and broadening the senior school curriculum to include Vocational Education and Training (VET) pathways were of particular relevance to the three case study schools.

SET Planning

SET planning is a formal process by which students develop a plan to guide them through their senior phase of learning. In Queensland government schools, SET plans are initially formulated in Year 10 when students, together with their school and their parents or caregivers, identify career goals and explore how these might be achieved. In non-government schools, similar planning activities are undertaken with Year 10 students, though these may not always be referred to as SET plans. In the first instance, such planning is designed to help students make informed subject choices for Years 11 and 12. Students' choices will determine whether the learning pathway they pursue in the expanded senior school curriculum will be that of a more traditional academic pathway, a vocationally oriented pathway or a combination of the two. SET plans may be periodically revisited and updated as students refine their goals and aspirations (Queensland Department of Education and Training, 2008). In many ways, the SET plans and the planning processes were seen to be key means for achieving the kind of goals which government sought to realise for senior schooling. Yet, given the different emphases taken by schools in the pathways they offer students and the consequential student learning outcomes, SET planning can indicate the particular emphases within the schools and their school specific initiatives (e.g. towards tertiary entrance or other outcomes).

Provision of Vocational Pathways

As a response to the ETRF's call for a more inclusive senior schooling phase, many Queensland schools provide flexible programs that lead towards a QCE but offer both pathways to further study and pathways to employment. Typically, students opting for tertiary entrance follow a traditional academic pathway. That is, they complete a minimum number of semester units of academically oriented subjects based on syllabuses approved and issued by the Queensland Studies Authority ('Authority' subjects) to count towards an Overall Position (OP) on a Tertiary Entrance Statement at the end of Year 12. The OP is used to rank these students for entrance to courses at all universities, technical and further education (TAFE) institutes, and other tertiary institutions in Queensland (Queensland Studies Authority, 2011b). Accordingly, OPs stand not only as key indicators for students' achievement but also as a measure of the success of a school in achieving the kind of outcomes that it seeks to secure.

Alternative vocationally oriented pathways can take a number of forms. School-based apprenticeships and traineeships (SATs) enable students to complete secondary school and gain a QCE at the same time as they work for an employer and train towards a recognised qualification. VET certificate courses leading to Certificates I, II (basic vocational skills and knowledge) and III (more advanced skills and knowledge in particular industries) may also be offered as part of senior schooling.

Schools that meet industry standards in facilities and have staff with industry experience can themselves become registered training organisations (RTOs) and issue VET certificates while other schools may work with external providers, such as TAFE colleges or private RTOs, to enable students to take certificate courses. Thus, it can be seen that schools intent upon developing effective vocationally oriented pathways need to direct considerable resources and planning towards such goals. This is likely to include engaging with partners in the local community, such as employers and agencies, to provide placements for apprentices and work experience programs.

Research Design

In essence, the investigation sought to understand how the reforms of senior schooling outlined in the ETRF had been implemented in a variety of Queensland schools. The focus and design of the investigation was directed by three key research questions:

1. What constitutes productive transitions from school to post-school life?
2. How should productive transitions best be organised?
3. What processes and practices are most effective in securing productive transitions?

Research that investigates curriculum initiatives should accommodate many variables (Sim, 2001). Therefore, in this project, it was important to include schools characterised by varying student cohorts and diverse communities. While the sample selection was not seeking to be representative, it does incorporate something of the diversity of the schooling situations that comprise the system that these policy initiatives are being enacted within. The issue of diversity in sample selection is particularly relevant in the present era of marketisation in education whereby schools are driven to differentiate themselves from one another to secure a market niche for themselves. So, even though legislation and policies may be endorsed at a state level, the educational practices that are enacted as a result will largely be shaped locally, as individual schools organise curricula to meet the particular needs of their students and requirements of their surrounding communities, and the kinds of institutional goals. Consequently, a case study approach was identified as one that would provide not just rich descriptions of curriculum initiatives in practice in a diverse range of sites but also a foundation from which to articulate a framework for the analysis and theorisation of the fundamental features of productive post-school transitions.

Selecting the Case Study Schools

South East Queensland, stretching from the beach areas of Noosa in the north to the Queensland-New South Wales border in the south and from the coast west to Toowoomba, is Australia's fastest growing metropolitan region (Queensland Government, 2007–2010). The region contains diverse communities, so the decision

to restrict the selection of schools to this region to facilitate ongoing working relationships with schools was not impeded by the limited location. There is a broad range of lower, middle and higher socio-economic communities, served by both government and non-government schools, and located in rural and urban settings from which to select research sites. While funding restricted our case studies to three schools, the pool of schools from which we could draw was further limited one factor beyond our control. This factor was a decision made at a central level in the state government department responsible for education to deny the project access to all government schools and their communities—a decision that was made despite the support from a number of government schools that had already indicated that they would welcome involvement in the study.

This decision did however enable us to focus our research on the non-government school sector comprising Catholic and independent schools. This is a sector which has grown rapidly over the last two decades, not just in South East Queensland but also across Australia as a whole (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010). In South East Queensland, around 42% of secondary school students attend non-government schools (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007). Two Catholic schools, St. Jude's College[2] and Sunny Beach College, and one independent school, Southside College, agreed to participate in the study.

The sample schools[3] had a number of features in common. All had been established in the mid-1980s in locations which, at the time, were experiencing population growth due to new housing developments in their locales. Thus, they were well placed to take advantage of the growing market for education which emerged in Australia in the 1990s. The schools' websites provide representations of how each school 'sells itself' in response to these changed circumstances. That is positioning themselves in an education market that is increasingly characterised by growth in private schooling sectors and concerns by public schools to respond to this market challenge. For example, all schools see themselves as catering for more than a geographically proximate community: two schools mention the nearness to public transport and major roads; the third specifically notes that its student intake in Year 8 extends across the city beyond local 'feeder' primary schools. In addition, the websites highlight the schools' pride in the physical environments they have developed: images and descriptions of landscaped grounds and/or bushland settings, and modern buildings with general and specialist facilities portray a pleasant environment in which to learn. Aligning with the intent to involve schools from a range of communities in the research, there were differences in the socio-economic make up of the communities which the three schools serve. The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) figures[4] which are provided on the My School

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[2] In naming the sites, pseudonyms have been used consistently throughout Chaps. 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13.

[3] While the three participating schools were named colleges, we continue to refer to them under the generic label 'schools'.

[4] ICSEA values are derived from information about a school's student population background. The information, shown in quarters on the *My School* website, shows the proportion of educationally disadvantaged or advantaged students in the school compared with the spread of students across Australia.

Table 9.1 Comparison of students' backgrounds at case study schools

School	Bottom half (%)	Top half (%)
Southside College	18	81
St. Jude's College	56	44
Sunny Beach College	45	56
Australian distribution	50	50

Adapted from ICSEA values in school profiles on *My School* website

website (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2011) succinctly capture and project these differences. The schools' profiles presented in Table 9.1 show that Southside College provides for students from a predominantly advantaged background, while the student populations at St. Jude's College and Sunny Beach College were more representative of the Australian 'average', though with St. Jude's College skewed slightly towards the lower end and Sunny Beach College towards the higher.

What differentiated the three schools, and motivated our interest in them as case studies, were the different approaches to the senior school curriculum that each had adopted. While more will be said of these approaches in the chapters which follow, briefly:

- At Southside College, both academic and vocational pathways were available to students in Years 11 and 12. However, students aiming to gain tertiary entrance through the completion of OP-eligible subjects were predominant with less than 10% of students incorporating school-based traineeships or apprenticeships or VET certificate courses into their senior studies.
- In contrast, St. Jude's College catered particularly for students who did not wish to pursue an OP pathway. Instead, senior schooling had a strong vocational emphasis with all students undertaking vocationally oriented subjects throughout Years 11 and 12 either through the school or the local TAFE. As well, students were expected to participate in vocational experiences such as structured work placements or traineeships/apprenticeships as part of their senior schooling.
- Sunny Beach College's approach to senior schooling might be seen as falling somewhere between St. Jude's and Southside's approaches. A wide range of both academic and vocational subjects were offered at the school enabling students to follow academic pathways making them eligible for university, vocational pathways for those aiming to enter employment after completing school or pathways with a combination of academic and vocational subjects.

Identifying the Participants

At each school in the study, a number of participant groups were proposed by the schools as ones that could contribute to our understanding of the transition process. As well as those experiencing the process first hand (i.e. current students), teachers

and school leaders, parents and caregivers, and local employers who had taken on school-based trainees or apprentices were also identified as being likely valuable informants. Young people who had recently left school were also seen as being able to provide other retrospective accounts of transition. These students had to be identified and recruited by staff within these three schools as privacy policies forbid schools providing details of past students in ways that would permit initial approaches by the research team.

Current and Former Students

The investigation was guided by the belief that experiences of post-school transitions can be best understood through a consideration of the participatory practices that are afforded to and engaged with by students: (1) in classrooms, (2) outside of classrooms within the school and (3) outside the school in community and workplace settings. Thus, in each school, the investigation aimed to engage with past and present students to obtain their perspectives on what motivates their participation in school and community activities that are ultimately directed towards their post-school lives.

While preparations for a life beyond school may begin in some schools—and in some families—at an earlier stage, the SET planning initiated in Queensland schools in the second half of Year 10 provides an institutional marker for the end of the middle phase of schooling and the beginning of the senior phase. In each school, the aim was to engage groups of Year 10 students who had just completed their SET planning, but had yet to embark on senior school subjects, in focus group discussions. Additionally, the investigation aimed to undertake focus group discussions with Year 11 students who would be in the process of engaging with the senior school curriculum and with former students who could look back to reflect on how they engaged with the experiences afforded them during their schooling and in their immediate post-school years.

An experienced member of the senior school staff who was closely involved in the SET planning process, as well as other aspects of senior schooling, became our ongoing point of contact in each of the participating schools. These staff members selected groups of students from Years 10 and 11 to participate in the focus group discussions. Ideally, we had hoped that the school would also be able to introduce us to some of their former students to participate in additional focus group discussions. However, as noted, ethical constraints meant that our contact person would have to make the initial invitation to participate in the study before we could make any approach to these ex-students. Yet, negotiating access to groups of Year 10 and Year 11 students for focus group discussions during school time was easily organised, contacting former students proved to be a more onerous task. At only one school were former students' names able to be supplied to the researchers. Of the five young people whom we hoped to interview from that particular school, none followed up on our invitations to participate in the study.

An alternative strategy for gauging the perspectives on transitions of young people who had already left school involved a deliberate shift in focus for the project. It became evident from our discussions with the current students that most had made steady progress through their first 10 or 11 years of schooling. While there were some who may have at times struggled, they had maintained a stable positive relationship with the school. We recognised that other young people who, for one reason or another, had less stable relationships with school were not represented in our school-based groups. The change of focus led to our approaching a number of youth service providers and community organisations in the broad area of South East Queensland. We requested staff in these organisations to identify recent school leavers who could be characterised in this way and invite them to participate in the study. Of the nine young people who participated in this component of the research, five had left school before completing Year 12. The other four had completed Year 12 but had experienced periods of interruption to their schooling on the way.

Other Participants

The project worked on the underlying assumption that young people are not the only ones involved in the post-school transition process. Teachers, counsellors and administrative staff in schools; the young peoples' parents or caregivers; and local employers who take on young workers in school-organised work placements, school-based apprenticeships and traineeships (SATs) or as casual employees, all play a role in post-school transitions. At each of the three schools involved in the study, staff and parent representatives were invited to participate in focus group discussions or individual interviews to provide their views about ways that students could make the most of the opportunities afforded them in schools and their broader communities. Focus group discussions with school staff who worked with students in the senior phase of schooling occurred at around the same time as our initial focus group discussions with students at each school. These groups included a range of people who worked with senior students, including teaching and non-teaching staff and school leaders.

The researchers were advised by each of the schools about the best way to involve parents and/or caregivers in their community. At two schools, focus groups were arranged to precede school events that parents were already attending. At the first school, this was an information evening for Year 10 students selecting their senior subjects and their parents, so the topic of post-school transitions was of particular relevance. However, at the second school, the participants were members of the school board. So, as well as not being a very representative parent group, not all had children for whom the topic of post-school transitions was immediately relevant. At the third school, parents were described as too 'time poor' to be able to commit to a focus group discussion at the school. The alternative method proposed by the school was individual phone interviews. Two parents were interviewed in this way.

In a similar way to which the schools acted as brokers in contacting former students and parents, we also asked them to provide introductions to local employers who had developed ties with their school through work placements or SATs. Again, this process proceeded successfully at only one of the three schools, namely St. Jude's. Their views about transition form part of the data set which contributes to the St. Jude's case study in Chap. 12.

Generating the Data

Focus group discussions were the primary means by which data were generated at each school. They provided individual perspectives and collective reflections about the range of experiences that young people encounter both within and outside of school, the purposes for engaging with these experiences and the potential and actual consequences for their transitions into post-school lives. A key assumption underlying the research was that to get a fully developed sense of how transitions were experienced, we would ask different groups involved in the transition process for their perspectives. Thus, the past and present students' discussions and interviews aimed to understand their experiences of 'what is' and their preferences for 'what should be'. The complementary discussions and interviews with other groups—parents, school staff and employers—focused on their perspectives on the ways in which schools and communities provide opportunities for young people to assist them make productive transitions. For each group of participants, a set of open-ended questions acted as prompts to elicit stories about school transitions. Consistency across schools and across participant groups was achieved through structuring the interview/discussion schedules around three elements identifying as assisting students to make productive post-school transitions:

1. School strategies (i.e. how teachers and schools help young people make transitions: what more schools and teachers might do to assist)
2. Engagement with the wider community (i.e. how families and friends, local businesses and government agencies help young people make transitions)
3. Students' personal actions and agency (i.e. what actions young people themselves need to take to make effective transitions)

The common focus on school strategies, community engagement and student agency with each group of participants at each of the study's sites provided a coherent and unifying thread through the school case studies and recent school leavers' accounts which are presented in the next four chapters. Table 9.2 indicates the number and range of informants in each of the three schools.

Two types of additional data were collected for each school site to supplement the interview and discussion data: (1) the publicly available information on the school websites which details the schools' curriculum offerings for current and potential students and their families and (2) documents provided by our primary contact in each school. These included examples of SET planning documents together with

Table 9.2 Summary of informants at case study schools (2008–2009)

Participants	Instrument	Number of participants at each school (time of data collection)		
		Southside College	St. Jude's College	Sunny Beach College
Year 10 students	Semi-structured focus group interviews	20 Students in 4 focus groups (Nov 2008)	11 Students in 2 focus groups (Nov 2009)	12 Students in 2 focus groups (Nov 2009)
Year 11 students	Semi-structured focus group interviews	17 Students in 2 focus groups (Nov 2009)	9 Students in 1 focus group (Apr 2009)	12 Students in 2 focus groups (May 2009)
Staff	Semi-structured focus group interviews/individual interviews	5 Staff (Nov 2008)	3 Staff (Aug 2009) Principal (Nov 2009)	5 Staff (May 2009)
Parents	Semi-structured focus group interviews/individual interviews	8 Parents in 2 focus groups (Aug and Sept 2009)	2 Parents: individual phone interviews (Aug 2009)	6 Parents in 1 focus group (May 2009)
Employers	Individual interviews		3 Employers: individual phone interviews (Dec 2009)	

other documents that they judged as exemplary material related to their schools' approach to post-school transitions. Overall, the website information and the school-selected documents provided a means of contextualising further the perspectives reported in the focus groups and interviews.

In the next three chapters, we draw on this corpus of data to describe and analyse how the specific curriculum initiatives developed by the three school communities were perceived by students, teachers and/or parents within these communities as contributing to productive post-school transitions. Together with Chap. 13, which seeks to understand the views of recent school leavers for whom the move to post-school life had been more challenging, the case studies contribute to a critical understanding of the transition process in the Queensland context.

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Chapter 10
Excluded from the Game: A Case Study of Transitions for non-Tertiary-Bound Students in a Queensland Private School

Stephen Hay and Cheryl Sim

Introduction

In the context whereby educational success increasingly determines post-school employment opportunities for young people, school selection is regarded by many parents as a key strategy for securing positional advantage for children in the competitive market for desirable post-school education and training opportunities and employment (Ball, 1993, 2003; Lamb, 2007; Lynch & Moran, 2006; Thrupp, 2007). In Australia, encouragement to regard private education, and particularly selective private schooling, as a form of investment in children's futures has received significant impetus since the 1980s as successive federal governments implemented policies to expand this education sector. While this expansion has been promoted by governments largely through discourses around 'parental choice' in educational provision (Marginson, 1997), policies urging parents to take on the role of informed consumers within educational markets has meant that, for the Australian middle class, private schooling has all but become synonymous with the ideals of good, responsible parenting. For private schools—particularly independent private schools servicing the growing aspirational middle class in Queensland—the problem has been one of striking a balance between maintaining or growing potential market share of student enrolments and maintaining exclusivity by enrolling academically meritorious or otherwise gifted students.

The means by which many private schools have managed the trade-off between exclusivity and protection of market share has been to highlight their commitment, through marketing, to realising the potential of all students irrespective of academic ability, cultivating students' specific interests or talents or facilitating students' desired post-school destinations. In practice, this has meant catering—at least to

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some degree—for students whose post-school career pathway does not include entry to tertiary education either because of exclusion resulting from poor academic achievement or because of a personal preference to enter the workforce directly following Year 12.

This chapter reports on research on school transitions conducted at Southside College, a coeducational private school located in Brisbane, Queensland, as revealed through interviews with administrators, teachers, parents and students. The research focused on the school's implementation of the Queensland State Government's Senior Education and Training (SET) plans—written plans negotiated between parents, students and schools specifying students' pathways through the senior phase of schooling. It reports on how strategies adopted by the school were experienced by different groups of students. Southside's student population is drawn mainly from middle-class professional families from a large catchment area across Brisbane. Historically, the post-school destination for the majority of students attending the school has been university.

This chapter is presented in three parts. Part one places the case study in the context of policy concerns about transitions for young people in Queensland leading to the mandating of SET plans by the Queensland Government in 2002. Other case studies reported in this volume focus on explicit policy strategies formulated in schools for facilitating young people's transitions from schooling to employment in light of this policy (e.g. organisational processes and structures around SET plans). Alternatively the focus of this chapter is on how transition policies and practices at the school were influenced by its role in mediating struggles by middle-class families to achieve competitive advantage in schooling. Part two of this chapter draws on the work of Teese (2000, 2007) and Teese and Polesel (2003) which theorises the relationship between the curriculum hierarchy and private schooling in Australia. In light of this theorisation, documentary and interview data is used to overview the socio-demographic context of the school and to examine the school's relative position within competitive educational markets in Brisbane.

Part three analyses transition arrangements developed and implemented by the school. It draws on interview data from teachers, parents and students to examine how transitions were conceptualised and managed at the school and how these arrangements were experienced by students themselves. This chapter shows how the range of transition options available to students was influenced by the views of key administrators about what constituted 'appropriate' transition pathways for young people attending the school. Further, it uses membership categorisation analysis (MCA) (see Freebody, 2003; Hester & Eglin, 1997; I. Jayyusi, 1984; L. Jayyusi, 1991) to demonstrate how these administrators articulated the preference for traditional academic pathways over vocational education and training (VET) as part of the moral order of the school by associating those pathways with different categories of students undertaking them. This chapter concludes by noting that the focus on academic pathways worked to support successful transitions for the majority of students. However, it argues that this strategy worked as a constraint to some non-tertiary-bound students attempting to engage their preferred transition pathway.

The Policy Context of Transitions in Queensland

The context of this case study was transformations in Queensland's education system beginning in the late 1990s undertaken in response to perceived threats to Queensland's economy and society caused by its integration within the global economy. The policy framework that guided these changes through the first decade of the twenty-first century was *Queensland State Education – 2010* (*QSE-2010*) (Education Queensland, 2000).

Following orthodox assumptions concerning the relationship between levels of educational attainment and economic productivity (Wolf, 2004), *QSE-2010* proposed a target of 88% of students completing Year 12 by 2010. According to the document, this target would ensure that the proportion of the 18–25 years population in Queensland having completed Year 12—a measure identified by the OECD as a key indicator of economic performance—would be equal to that of the highest performing nations in the OECD (Cullen, Cosier, Greco, & Payne, 1999). In order to achieve this objective, Queensland authorities, through the strategic document, *Education and Training Reforms for the Future* (*ETRF*), announced legislation, effective from 2006, that raised the requirements for leaving school by requiring young people to:

- Stay at school until they finish Year 10 or have turned 16, whichever comes first
- Then participate in education and training for a further 2 years or until they have:
    - Gained a Senior Certificate
    - Gained a Certificate III vocational Qualification
    - Turned 17 (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2002, p. 9)

Students who were able to negotiate entry into full-time employment following Year 10 would be exempt from these requirements. However, the purpose of the legislation was to ensure that the majority of students competing their senior education met the requirements of the new Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) issued to eligible students exiting Year 12 from 2008 (Queensland Studies Authority, 2005). Further, *ETRF* signalled the introduction of Senior Education and Training (SET) plans required for all Year 10 students (Queensland Studies Authority, 2010a).

Transitions Policy and the Context of Private Schooling in Australia

It is significant for the case study reported here that transition policies articulated in *QSE-2010* and *ETRF* were mainly aimed at improving outcomes for disadvantaged young people who were most likely to experience disrupted transitions from school to employment (Ministerial Council on Education Early Childhood

Development and Youth Affairs, 2008; OECD, 2004). That the social exclusion of disadvantaged groups was regarded by Queensland authorities as a key problem for education in Queensland was evident in the policy discourse of *QSE-2010* which acknowledged that:

> With new patterns of employment and underemployment, greater mobility and new concentrations of poverty, families are shifting in configuration from nuclear families. … The nurturing family of recent decades, based on consensus that the Australian dream surrounded every child, has melted away. Teachers see the signs of family disruption in students—anxiety, depression, lack of discipline, aggression, inadequate literacy outcomes and a greater need for adult role models, particularly male role models. (Education Queensland, 2000, p. 4)

The social issues identified in this statement are typically associated with the conditions of children's upbringing in working-class families rather than middle-class ones. Indeed, these statements revealed concerns on the part of Queensland education authorities about deficits of social capital within working-class families which, they asserted, impacted on children's ability to achieve at school. Moreover, these statements serve as a reminder that risks associated with disengagement from schooling and disrupted transitions are unequally distributed across the State's regions and across its schooling systems. Research on educational disadvantage has long established that risk is disproportionately experienced by indigenous students (Bradley, Draca, Green, & Leeves, 2007), students in rural and remote communities (Vickers, Lamb, & Hinkley, 2003), students living in socioeconomically disadvantaged urban areas (Lamb, 2007; Swan, 2005; Thomson, 2002) and students attending government schools (Marginson, 2002; Teese, 2000).

Contemporary research on educational inequality not only acknowledges, however, that relative advantage or disadvantage results from individuals' membership of particular socioeconomic groupings but recognises that the curriculum itself is an important site of class struggles (Teese, 2000, 2007). Furthermore, this research has examined the role of selective schooling as a means by which some families are able to secure competitive advantage in the curriculum as a strategy for maintaining social class position (Teese, 2000, 2007). It is this research examining the role of selective private schooling in political struggles over the curriculum that is key for explaining the way transitions were conceptualised at Southside, the range of strategies implemented and the consequences for different groups of students undergoing their transitions at the school.

A key feature of selective private schools—underpinning their market appeal amongst middle-class parents—is their ability to mobilise considerable human and physical resources to cater for relatively homogeneous student populations whose aspirations are generally focused on tertiary entry (Teese, 2000; Teese & Polesel, 2003). As such, the primary focus of these schools is on securing success for their students in the most selective subjects in the curriculum, success which provides access to the most desirable post-school pathways. Accordingly, the implementation of school-based initiatives can be regarded, in part, as an outcome of how individual schools are relatively placed in terms of their ability to secure success for students in the academic curriculum. This chapter now turns to examine in more detail research that theorises the relationship between the curriculum hierarchy and selective schooling.

The Case Study in Context: Curriculum Hierarchy and Selective Schooling in Australia

Teese (2007, p. 42) argues that educational risk is unevenly distributed across social class groups in Australia because of unequal access to two 'hierarchies of educational opportunity'. The first is the hierarchical organisation of the school curriculum itself. The second is the hierarchically differentiated schooling system. According to Teese, it is the school curriculum that gives expression to the cultural and social backgrounds of students because schooling success is more a matter of social selection than student learning. Thus Teese (2000, p. 3) argues that

> … it is through the curriculum that the financial reserves of educated families are converted into scholastic power – the ability to differentiate one group of children from others on a socially legitimate and authoritative scale of general worth.

Teese proposes that the curriculum is arranged hierarchically with intellectually demanding and selective subjects dominating its upper levels. These subjects—typically drawn from the disciplines of science, mathematics and humanities—are 'those that give the greatest play to the economic power, cultural outlook and lifestyles of the most educated populations'. At the lower end of the hierarchy are those subjects that are newer additions to the curriculum that cater for increasing numbers of students with diverse academic abilities retained in schools. These subjects include some newer humanities and vocational subjects which are alleged to be more motivating to working-class students who may perceive them as less demanding or more immediately relevant to the world of work. These 'newer' additions to the curriculum, however, generally lack prestige and tradable value in terms of university entrance or selection for employment.

According to Teese, subjects that are located at the top of the curriculum hierarchy codify the performance characteristics of the 'good' student. To succeed in these subjects, individuals must increasingly draw on higher order intellectual abilities demonstrated through their capacity for abstraction, logic and reasoning abilities, sophisticated language and communication skills, creativity, imagination and the rest. However, these capacities, in turn, are formed out of even more fundamental abilities that 'are closely linked to the informal training given by families rather than explicit and methodical instruction in schools' (Teese, 2000, p. 5). These include such personal capacities as 'language facility, attentiveness, achievement motivation, self-confidence in learning, personal organisation, self-direction and the capacity to learn for intrinsic rather than extrinsic interest…' (Teese, 2000, p. 5). Thus, according to Teese (2000, 2007), the patterns of success in the curriculum come to closely mirror that of the social structure itself.

For middle-class students, scholastic advantage is multiplied and risk minimised because they are able to distinguish themselves academically in the most demanding subjects in the curriculum hierarchy. However, for most working-class students

who choose to stay on at school, the curriculum offers a cultural barrier to success in the most desirable subjects. Teese (2000, p. 196) argues:

> [f]rom this results the paradox that a curriculum defended *in the name of the individual* as maximising fairness and unpredictability also delivers great inequality and *predictability of social outcomes*'

For socially disadvantaged students—with the exception of the most academically able—there is nowhere in the curriculum where distinction can be achieved as 'there is no subject in the curriculum where economic and cultural resources do not play a discriminating role' (Teese, 2000, p. 202).

Paralleling the unequal access to the curriculum is Teese's second hierarchy of educational opportunity: differential access to specific school systems and sites. In Australia, the most privileged sites are the selective private schools. Here, barriers to entry such as tuition fees and practices of elite selection—including entry examinations—have the effect of homogenising the student population within these schools (Teese & Polesel, 2003). Further more fee income, supplemented by government funding, enables selective schools to recruit and retain quality teaching staff, develop high-quality teaching resources, provide specialist support to augment student learning and maintain smaller class sizes.

Because private schools are able to select their population based on social standing or demonstrated intellectual capacity, they are able to focus resource usage and teaching time to activities geared to success within the most prestigious subjects in the curriculum (Teese, 2007, p. 48). Thus, students gaining entry to these schools are able to multiply the advantages already afforded by family background. Through this process, selective schools play a crucial role in reproducing class structures in Australian society because of their ability to dominate university entrance and pathways to elite professions (Marks, 2004; Teese, 2007).

The selective dimensions of private schooling described by Teese were axiomatic in the context of Southside. Notably, entry to Southside College included payment of a non-refundable fee to join a waiting list for a place at the school. While the school did not use entry examinations for selective entry, 'gatekeeping' criteria are employed. For example, the school's enrolment procedures noted that when determining whether or not to enrol a student, information on the applicant's educational needs was gathered from parents and other relevant persons or professionals and reviewed by the college's enrolment committee. Other criteria and evidence were also considered such as support of the college ethos, whether other siblings are enrolled at the college and scholarship offers.

Information gathered through this process enabled the school's administration to determine an applicant's suitability based on direct indicators of past academic ability and social indicators of likely future academic success. The annual fee for a secondary student enrolled at the college was over $10,000 at the time of writing. While this level of fees would be considered moderate compared to those charged by some private schools in Queensland, it clearly presents a barrier to entry for students from lower income families.

The following section of this chapter profiles Southside College, identifying how the school is relatively positioned in terms of securing academic distinction for its student population in the Queensland curriculum.

Profile of Southside College

Southside College's mission statement emphasises that its learning environment is based on Christian values and an educational focus that strives to develop students intellectually as well as emotionally and spiritually. The school offers a diverse academic curriculum with many additional curricular programs such as Music Performance, Leadership Development, Gifted and Talented and Information and Communications and Technology. In addition to a range of cultural and sporting opportunities, Southside's co-curricular offerings strongly align with its academic curriculum, building on students' language and conceptual capabilities though such activities as debating, school advisory committees, academic competitions and music performance.

The college's website emphasises the accessibility of the campus by car, rail, ferry and bus services, suggesting that the student population is drawn from beyond the immediate surrounding suburbs. The ability of the school to draw its student population from suburbs beyond the local area is a significant indicator of the school's status, as parents are willing to bypass local state schools and less desirable private schools to attend Southside. The school's large catchment area was confirmed by the Head of Curriculum who commented: 'we have students travelling… So it's quite a large drawing field you know'.

Student Achievement and Post-school Destinations

Patterns of student achievement suggest that the school caters for students mainly pursuing academic studies leading to higher education. In 2009, around 9 in 10 students received a tertiary entrance score (Queensland Studies Authority, 2010b). Moreover, at Southside, the distribution of tertiary entrance scores was in the higher achievement bands. According to the school's website, in total, 97% of Queensland Tertiary Admission applicants received an offer. In addition, around 30% of students were awarded one or more vocational education and training (VET) qualifications. However, of those students who completed a VET qualification while at school, around two thirds either entered university or VET Cert IV or higher (Department of Education and Training, 2010).

Reflecting Southside's strong academic achievement, students' post-school destinations as reported in Queensland's Next Step report (Department of Education and Training, 2010) were heavily weighted towards tertiary entry. Over half (51.5%) of students entered university, a significantly higher proportion than the Queensland State average. Another 20% of students undertook VET of which around 13% entered programs at Certificate IV level or higher. A very low percentage of students experienced 'risky' transitions, that is, either seeking work (3.0%) or neither studying nor in the labour force (1.5%). Around 12.5% of students entered full-time work following school (Department of Education and Training, 2010).

Southside's capacity to select academically capable students is reflected in the curriculum offered by the school. According to Southside's website, in 2009, the school offered 24 Authority subjects (academic subjects approved by the Queensland Studies Authority that count towards tertiary entrance). Significantly, only a limited number of non-Authority subjects were offered including English Communication, Prevocational Mathematics, Manufacturing Skills and Business Studies. Only two VET Certificate II courses were offered. It is significant to note that Southside's information to parents and students states that it actively promotes school-based traineeships in its efforts to provide individual education programs to meet the needs of all students.

Notably, despite Southside's apparent endorsement of VET pathways, in 2009, only five students of the Year 12 cohort were completing or had completed a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship (SAT) (Queensland Studies Authority, 2010b), indicating a low uptake of VET pathways by students. This data illustrates Southside's strong reputation for academic achievement. Its curriculum profile—heavily weighted towards the academic curriculum—and limited involvement of students in VET pathways suggest that its selective ability is high relative to other schools. The following section draws on interview and documentary data to overview structures and procedures developed by the school for facilitating student transitions through the SET planning process.

Managing Transitions: The School Perspective

Structures and procedures the school had in place for supporting student transitions were reported by the Head of Curriculum, the Careers Counsellor and Curriculum Heads of Department responsible for administering senior curriculum areas. Processes were organised mainly around students' selection of senior subjects that occurred near the end of Year 10. There were three main processes that were identified by informants: (1) career guidance, (2) informing about subject selection and (3) SET planning. Career guidance activities leading up to subject selection began earlier in Year 10, with students using a web-based career guidance program, *Voyager*. This program prompted them, through various activities, to examine their interests, values and aptitudes and to consider various career options it generated based on that information. The *Voyager* program was used in conjunction with the *Job Guide*, a guide to employment choices published annually by the federal government and made available to all students in Year 10. A key event was a subject selection day which provided students with information about the requirements of the QCE, the range of pathway options, tertiary entrance and procedures for developing SET plans. Students were also provided with information about subject options and their importance in terms of future careers from various Heads of Department. At this event, students were issued with a booklet explaining subject choices and their implications for obtaining the QCE and university entrance. One Head of Department noted that the booklet served as a basis for discussions between students and their parents regarding subject choices.

This event was followed by a subject selection evening attended by students and their parents. Here, parents were provided with background information relating to the QCE and subject choices. This was followed by a showcase where parents and students could attend different presentations delivered by Heads of Department covering specific information relevant to their subject areas including tertiary entry and career pathways. Following this event, students completed their personal SET plans from rough drafts begun earlier in the year during weekly Personal Development classes. Following this, students completed a 10-minute interview with the Careers Counsellor to discuss their SET plan. The plan was then sent home to parents/carers to sign, indicating their agreement with the negotiated pathway. Following this, students submitted their Subject Selection Form to the school. Throughout Years 11 and 12, the school conducted an exit preparation program which, according to one Head of Department, was based around career advice and further subject selection advice if required. Further, each student participated in a follow-up interview with the Careers Counsellor in Years 11 and 12 for the purpose of monitoring and, if necessary, revising their SET plan.

The above sections overviewed school performance data indicating Southside's position within the competitive hierarchy of schools in Brisbane and administrative arrangements put in place by the school for managing student transitions. The remainder of this chapter draws on interview data to examine how administrators and teachers conceptualised transition options for students and how students experienced them.

Membership Categorisation and the Ordering of Post-school Pathways

This chapter regards responses by participants during interviews as instances of discourse. The concept of discourse overturns the notion that language functions as a neutral vehicle for representing the world but rather acknowledges that it is a crucial site in the exercise of power where meanings are actively constituted (Rogers, 2004; Taylor, 2001). This includes the constitution of objects, social realities and identities of social actors to which a discourse refers (Thomas, 2005). Language by this account produces epistemological effects, that is, it produces particular kinds of knowledge about people and objects constituting a particular version of reality in the sense invoked by Foucault's concept of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1977).

Moreover, the idea of discourse recognises that language is always a situated activity (Taylor, 2001). This is particularly significant with respect to this case study as data collected consisted of interviews with school administrator, teachers, parents and students, all of whom were positioned in particular ways in relation to the school. Freebody (2003, p. 155) notes that in the context of interviews, participants are prompted to provide explanations or accounts relating to social phenomenon and to substantiate and justify them. To achieve this, participants may deploy reasoning practices including the use of categories and attributions that constitute reality in particular social contexts for speakers (Freebody, 2003, p. 155). In educational

contexts, such categories may include 'student', 'young person', 'teacher' and 'parent'. Moreover, categories may be further defined by associating them with category-bound activities or attributes such as dispositions, behaviour, patterns of association, rights and obligations and so on (Freebody, 2003, p. 157).

Together, categories and attributes constitute the 'facts' of social contexts as described by interviewees. However, categories and attributes are not neutral or disinterested descriptions of external reality, but provide powerful resources through which speakers constitute moral orders (Freebody, 2003; Hester & Eglin, 1997; I. Jayyusi, 1984; L. Jayyusi, 1991). In this way, power is inscribed in language in the way categories of persons are positioned, valued or devalued explicitly or implicitly through such binaries as good/bad, worthy/unworthy and enterprising/unambitious. The task of MCA, accordingly, is to elucidate the explanations of the social order by documenting the categories used by speakers and the various attributes linked to them (Freebody, 2003, p. 157).

As noted above, Southside's public information professed to value diverse student pathways including school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. However, interview data provided clear evidence that curriculum leaders at the school ascribed differential status to academic and vocational pathways. The following section uses membership categorisation analysis (MCA) to show how key administrators responsible for managing post-school transitions at the school articulated academic pathways as part of the moral order of the school associating academic and vocational pathways with particular categories of students undertaking them. This analysis is then extended demonstrating how the differential valuing of pathways impacted on transition experiences for students, particularly those whose transitions required the negotiation of VET training options linking to employment.

Defining 'Appropriate' Pathways

Evidence that differential value was accorded different school-to-employment pathways at the school was provided during one interview with the school's Head of Curriculum (HOC) and Careers Counsellor (CC), two key staff members responsible for the administration of transition arrangements at the school. Early in the interview, the Head of Curriculum (HOC) drew a distinction between academic and vocational pathways, referring to the latter as 'alternative' pathways. Consider the following exchange:

HOC: … all of our year 10s gather for a day where they're given some information about QCE and possible pathways that include I guess standard sort of academic curriculum pathways and also alternatives based on school based traineeships, TAFE options and all of those sorts of things.

Interviewer: Do you actually use the term academic and alternative? Or how would you describe that to the students?

HOC: No, they're not words I would actually use with the students. I guess we talk about the QSA and we talk about Board Subjects, OP subjects, Board Registered Subjects, you know SASs, those sorts of terminology. We don't use the words academic pathway or alternative pathway in that form, no.

When asked to clarify the use of these terms, HOC quickly reverted to the school's official discourse which spoke of the equal valuing of all transition pathways:

Interviewer: … I asked the question because last week… the word "academic" came up… and the students didn't know the term at all so I was looking for clarification.

HOC: Yes, no, I guess I use the word just so that, you'd pick it. No, I mean we're about I guess, and one of the things about the school is about finding best pathways for kids and so one pathway isn't any better than the other. It's about finding what's particularly best for particular individuals so that's certainly the way we tackle it.

Despite this reassurance, further in the interview the distinction between academic and vocational pathways was made explicit by both the Head of Curriculum and the Careers Counsellor. Both interviewees associated the choice of a vocational pathway with personal capacities and dispositions of certain kinds of students. In the following exchange, the Careers Counsellor categorised some students pursuing VET training pathways with respect to what she perceived as lack of aspiration. This personal attribute was associated with a further categorisation of particular Southside families which she viewed as lacking appropriate kinds of social capital:

Interviewer: Do those 25 [vocational] students face particular challenges or are there constraints on what they do?

CC: They're a mix of students. We've got a couple of students that fall into those groups with learning difficulties kind of thing, but no, other than that no particular challenges I wouldn't think. Some of them, this is anecdotal stuff but some of them, it seems to me, are students whose parents have not done any tertiary study so that makes it obviously a lot more difficult for them to aspire to, sometimes, it makes it very difficult for them to aspire to a university type pathway.

Here, the Careers Counsellor not only implied that academic pathways were the most appropriate and desirable choice but suggested that students who did not to pursue them lacked motivation due to certain deficiencies in their conditions of upbringing. She took this assumption further implying that students choosing VET pathways lacked personal commitment required to undertake academic pathways stating: '[s]ome students actually see you know, a pathway or a traineeship, and that's the thing, they see that as an easy option'.

For the Head of Curriculum, some students selecting vocational pathways were characterised by other personal shortcomings such as poor organisational skills:

HOC: And I guess one of the other interesting things is that often the kids who are going down that Voc Ed or TAFE course or traineeship are the ones who have issues with being able to get themselves organised and all of that sort of stuff….

The interview data above indicates that these administrators' characterisation of certain VET students in terms of personal shortcomings constitutes what is labelled here as the category of the 'deficient' VET students. The characterisation of VET students in this way was underscored by way of a contradiction—pointed out by the

interviewer—relating to their assumptions regarding the self-discipline and motivation of certain VET students. As noted above, while the HOC suggested that VET students often lacked personal organisation, he nevertheless pointed out that VET pathways were often the most difficult for students to negotiate at the school because of organisational issues around school timetabling and off-campus work placement:

HOC: I guess one of the things that we have is they drop a line of a subject but they're here at times when there will be gaps in their timetable and they're trying to keep up to date so they have to catch up on the stuff that they missed… We try to double them up if we can on maths or English depending on which one they need the greatest support with. Some students will just be in neither of those that are doing okay and so they'll be just allocated to a classroom where they go every week to work on whatever they need to work on catching up.

CC: The reality is it isn't an easy option really. There's a lot more organisation and as [HOC] mentioned, and you know time management necessary and commitment in order for them to really succeed.

Interviewer: And yet ironically you're saying that often it's the students who don't have those qualities.… Are they counselled about the position? They know that?

CC: Oh absolutely.

HOC: Very, very and I guess that you know, in the book there's a whole process if you're going to do a school based traineeship that you know, there's a whole lot of signing off and making very much aware of the expectations… But I guess no matter how much information you still get this mentality that yes, I understand all that and it'll be fine and yeah, it creates challenges for sure.

Despite the HOC's acknowledgement of the organisational demands placed on students pursuing VET programs, the association of VET students with a particular 'mentality' indicated that his categorisation of these students was firmly established and stable. However, the qualities of self-discipline, organisation and self-motivation required of students pursuing a VET were evident in students' own descriptions of how they managed various competing demands of their studies. The situation described below was typical for a number of students interviewed. These students were committed to four days school attendance to complete the school curriculum and one day off-campus to attend work placements:

Interviewer: Yeah. And how many hours will you work in the salon in terms of the apprenticeship and staying at school?

Student 1: I have to work a certain amount of hours. I don't know what it is. But it's not enough to just do one day a week at school. So I have to do like either Saturdays, like a few hours on Saturdays, like every week. Or go in like a lot of my time in the holidays.

Interviewer: Right, to make up the hours?

Student 1: Yeah, but I need the holidays to go to TAFE. So Saturdays are like…

Student 2: Is it the same as 200 hours or something?

Student 1: Something closer, yeah.

The constitution and categorisation of the 'deficient' VET students by the HOC and Careers Counsellor was underscored later in the interview through the belated realisation of an alternative type of VET student. This alternative membership category is labelled here as the 'ambitious' VET student. In the data presented below, administrators constituted this figure inferring desirable personal attributes typically associated with the 'ideal' academic student (Teese, 2000) such as clarity of purpose, perseverance, dedication and motivation to succeed. The HOC identified 'ambitious' VET students in the following way:

> HOC: those who do really grasp it, I mean they have their pathways set. You know, they're finishing certificate II or certificate III and they know exactly where they're going and there's a couple of students you know in Year 12 this year who.
> CC: Excelled.
> HOC: Because they've done, they have excelled and they've really struggled with the standard curriculum side of it but they know exactly where they're going. They've got a job for next year, their pathway is set and they've said they're very passionate about it from the start and they're very happy with where they're now going.

Researchers have noted that, historically, the youth have been constituted negatively through psychology-inflected discourses that pathologise personal characteristics, dispositions, motivations and behaviours (Smith, 1989; Swadener, 1995). Accordingly, as noted above, the school's Head of Curriculum and Careers Counsellor constructed the identity of the 'deficient' VETs student by linking it with personal characteristics such as poor motivation and aspiration, limited self-initiative and poor organisational skills. In contrast, however, the successful outcomes achieved by 'ambitious' VET students were attributed by these administrators, not to the personal initiative and industry of students themselves, but rather to programs conducted by the school:

> CC: And that's not to say by any means that the last two years here for those particular students has been a waste of time. This is about actually being involved in the school has provided all that additional pastoral care that they couldn't possibly have been able to access if they'd been given full time traineeships and not at school. So whilst they maybe haven't achieved all that much here in terms of their actual school work, their actual participation has been extremely important to that success I believe.
> HOC: Yep, the value isn't just their academic results and that's certainly one of the things that the school would push. It's about much more than that. That's all important. That's just part of what you want kids to…

The tendency to provide differing explanations for the achievements of 'ambitious' VET students as opposed to those of 'deficient' VET students was emphatically underscored at the conclusion of the interview by the Careers Counsellor:

> Interviewer: Okay. Are there any final comments either of you would like to make as we finish up?
> CC: Obviously, if I can just add one thing. One of the things for the students who struggle with that transition I think you know, you could relate that back to the level of responsibility if you like that parents particularly take for their student's education. I'm sorry, but that's the truth.

Administrators' association of some VET students with particular social deficits was further highlighted by how administrators and teachers used the idea of 'readiness' differently to explain students' ability to commit to a particular post-school pathway. As noted, above, the HOC and Careers Councillor explained the uncertainty and equivocation of particular students regarding their post-school pathways primarily through a social discourse alluding to the role of social and cultural capital within families and its alleged impact on the personal dispositions of students:

> CC: Those who present basically in the middle of Year 10 and say look, I don't know what I want to do and you have to really tease that out with them, those are the students who are less likely to do well and it could be because you're essentially trying to find a pathway that they haven't seen for themselves. They need to see it for themselves and they need to see that you know, that the effort's worth it if you know what I mean.

However, teachers interviewed for the study explained students' readiness—or lack of readiness—to commit to a pathway through an alternative categorisation of 'students'. This categorisation drew on popular psychologically based discourses around adolescent social development, articulating the category of student as a 'stage of life'. Notably, this categorisation did not differentiate between students on either a vocational and academic pathway but encompassed all students.

For example, subject HODs interviewed described students' self-motivation to work towards structuring their own transition pathways in the following way:

> Interviewer: What do you think the students are doing well? What could they do better? What could they do more of?
> HOD 1:   They're kids.
> HOD 2:   I think kids are kids and they will always look for an easier option. So particularly in the organisation of work experience where they're asked to contact an employer themselves they'll generally try and go through family or friends rather than seeking out you know, an opportunity necessarily based on their career I suppose. So that's probably it.
> HOD 1:   Yeah, generally that's what kids are like.….
> HOD 3:   And that is the nature of kids.

The above has illustrated how administrators at the school privileged traditional academic pathways in a manner consistent with the school's status as an academically selective school. It demonstrated how administrators constituted the moral order of Southside, in part, by associating different categorisation of students with academic and vocational pathways. While there is no suggestion that the views expressed by the administrators represented the reality of transition arrangements in a transparent and correspondent manner, interview evidence nevertheless illustrated how discourses work to constitute particular versions of social reality as appropriate and desirable, supporting and enabling certain practices while constraining others. The following section shows how the privileging of academic pathways mediated the range of transition pathways available to students at Southside. It reports on students' experiences of transition arrangements at the school, particularly those student undertaking VET pathways.

Opportunities for Students in Transition

The normative assumptions of key administrators regarding desirable transitions for mainstream students at the school were indeed reflected in the perfunctory and superficial way that transitions were managed. For example, at the time the final interviews for this study were conducted, the school had cancelled work experience for Year 11 students apparently without explanation to parents or students. In addition, it was noted in the parent and student interview data that the SET-planning interviews to finalise students' subject selections were not going to occur for some students until *after* subject selection forms were due at the school, rendering the interview process redundant. Further, the career talks offered by the school were not mandatory, leading one parent to lament that students who could potentially benefit would choose not to attend. Indeed, according to some students interviewed, these talks had been cancelled due to poor attendance.

Moreover, where activities were conducted to inform students about potential transition pathways, most were targeted at students undertaking 'mainstream' academic pathways. In discussing the school's attempt to attract various speakers to the school, the Careers Counsellor explicitly linked desirable transition pathways with the occupations of a particular socio-demographic segment of parents. Here, the preferred transition pathways of students—and thus their information requirements—were universalised by associating them with elite professions located and practised in Brisbane's CBD:

Interviewer: So the parents that you're talking about that would provide opportunities for the students would come from that large area?

CC: A range of areas including the city obviously. Quite a lot of them are business people. Accountants, architects, that kind of thing you know and have worked for some of the larger, lawyers, some of the larger firms in the city. So those are the opportunities that we try to access for the students in terms of work experience and other you know, industry visits and that sort of thing.

Unlike the approaches taken at other schools in this study, the normative understandings of school administrators at Southside regarding appropriate and desirable student pathways signalled a generic, universal—as opposed to individualised—strategy for managing students' post-school transitions. There was a sense in the interview data that because of the school's dominant emphases on the academic curriculum, risk associated with post-school transitions was of little concern. Accordingly, indecision on the part of students choosing an academic pathway was not considered to constitute significant risk. This approach was reflected in the kind of transition advice provided to students which tended to focus on strategic subject selection aimed at leaving options open for entry into a range of university courses based broadly on students' aptitudes and interests. Here, students commented on the generalised advice received from the Careers Counsellor during SET plan meetings:

Student 2: Her with me, she didn't really help me that much.
Student 5: Yeah, me too.

Student 2: She just goes oh okay, so that's what you want to do, here's what you can but that's really it. Like she didn't try to say you could try this, it's the same sort of thing.

Student 3: I had the same thing. Like I didn't find that she could help me much because I kind of said this is what I like so she couldn't really… yeah she didn't really go oh there's other things that you could look at, it was more that's great that sounds good and stopped there. But I guess you can't really expect it.

Moreover, this generalised approach to managing transitions was further observed in students' perceptions of the limited role played by teachers at the school with respect to transition advice. Students perceived the role of teaching staff at the school strictly in terms of subject delivery, which, in their view, was unrelated to processes of determining future transition pathways:

Interviewer: Okay. And… are the teachers helpful? Do the teachers… say this content is going to be good for doing things beyond school?

Student 3: No not really.

Student 2: They indicate whether the stuff that we're learning is good for…

Student 3: Tests.

Student 2: Yeah or like Year 11 or 12 subjects but they don't really say how it would help your individual careers.

A similar distinction was made by Year 11 students:

Interviewer: Do you think [teachers] could do more?

Student 1: No, I don't know.

Student 2: It's not their job.

Student 1: It's not their, yeah, they're there to teach us, not tell us where we should go. We got to figure that out.

Student 3: Yeah. But I suppose they could give you like more, like a direction.

This general view of the teachers' role is reinforced by one student from another student group interview:

Student   … Teachers don't really do anything. Teachers just teach us stuff, like their class. That's all they do. [Careers Counsellor] probably like the best, the only person who's taught me anything or helped me with like anything to do with like my apprenticeship or anything.

Destination data for the school suggests that for the majority of students aiming to enter university, a generalised strategy aimed at achieving a tertiary entrance score was effective. Here, transition risk could be largely avoided by judicious subject selection based on the broad entry requirements for university courses. However, the school's tendency to privilege support for these pathways appeared to be acting as a constraint for students who had opted for transitions involving workplace training in school-based apprenticeships and traineeships.

Students undertaking these pathways cited issues with the inflexibility of the school timetable resulting in problems managing competing demands of off-campus attendance at workplaces and TAFE courses and progress in the school curriculum. Here, one student referred to issues relating to timetabling and *ad hoc* procedures

put in place for catching up work in the academic curriculum caused by absence from the school to attend work placement for 1 day during the week:

Interviewer: So the fact that you are away from school one day a week …
Student: Yeah.…
Interviewer: …do you have to do anything extra?
Student: …like that's when you're meant to do assignments and stuff, and like catch up on all the work that you missed out on.
Interviewer: Do you, can you go and talk to teachers in that time or…?
Student: If they have a spare, then yes. But not really. It's meant to be like before school, like if you have a spare then you're meant to find out, like the stuff you do, like the previous day or whatever, or that you missed, so then you'd have it all ready for if you have a spare that day. But, you kind of get lazy and if you're late to school it doesn't really work.
Interviewer: So is there anything that you've ever sort of completely not known about and, has that ever occurred or you were able to…?
P: Yeah. A few times.… Oh well, you get that. That's life.

For several students pursuing a non-OP VET pathway, lack of flexibility in managing individualised pathways was seen less as a constraint and more as a barrier to their post-school aspirations. Contrary to the assumptions made by the school's Careers Counsellor that VET students lacked motivation and initiative, they were, in fact, able to clearly articulate their preferred post-school pathways and possessed a detailed knowledge of the requirements to engage with them. However, for these students, the only option they saw available for engaging their post-school destination was to leave the school:

Interviewer: … So you're looking at doing mainly Certificate II was it?
Student: Three.…
Interviewer: And that's available in Year 11 too?
Student: Yeah, except you have to do two days and we're only allowed one at this school. So I don't know how I'm going to cope.
Interviewer: Okay. So one day out of the week goes off to do that at TAFE is it?
Student: Two.…
Interviewer: But you know the school's saying only one off?
Student: Yeah, so we can't like if you don't do it, then wait. But then again I want to have it by the end of school. So I might have to either leave [Southside] or go to TAFE.

In the following example, a student in a similar situation who wanted to pursue an apprenticeship attempted to arrange his own work placement. However, he found that employers he approached did not accept students in school-based apprenticeships for workplace training on only 1 day per week:

Interviewer: Are you … doing anything to sort of keep that possibility?
Student: I try to find a few more people but they just don't take school based. They're like more a full time first year. They're just not into the whole school based thing.
Student: You have to wait until after school if you want an apprenticeship now.
Interviewer: So you stand a better chance actually if you can …

Student: Yeah. They just don't like the idea of me coming out one day cause they
                don't like learning things just for that one day. They'd rather full time. Just
                like a waste of money pretty much.
Interviewer: So that was your idea of say leaving …
Student: Yeah.
Interviewer: … leaving school, going and doing TAFE …
Student: Yeah.
Interviewer: … and can TAFE join up with the [QCE] …?
Student: Yeah. I'd have to go to TAFE to do it.

This student saw his desire to leave school and pursue alternative study options as a rational choice given his academic credentials and his perception of relative competition within the curriculum hierarchy. In what seemed a frank and sophisticated analysis of his own context, he reasoned that further investment in the academic curriculum would be largely wasted as it would not add to his competitive advantage in achieving a post-school destination:

Student: Well I'm not really the brightest person out there. So like an OP's not
                really, like I think that I'm heading towards because they don't reckon that
                I could get a very good run in the OP.
Interviewer: Is that your decision or people advised you, as we were saying, you know,
                often it's a back-up plan that you might have it. But you're choosing sub-
                jects that aren't giving you that choice at least not in the immediate school
                leaver choice.…
Student: Well like it's just the fact that like, not so much that I'm leaving, but like I
                don't like school. So I'm not really going want to do something that I don't
                like. So I'm not going to sit down like every afternoon and do homework
                for legal or something that I don't really want to do anyway.

For some students, engaging in a preferred pathway was seen as a challenge. Although they had aspirations to engage in a post-school pathway while completing their certificate, they found that this was not possible because of converging expectations of parents, teachers and school administrators. Here, parental aspirations for them to complete their studies at the school, accorded with the schools aspiration for students to complete their schooling via a traditional academic pathway. Given this, an alternative pathway that involved leaving school was one that could not be realised.

Conclusion

This chapter has documented a case study on school-to-employment transition in a selective private school in Brisbane. It began by locating the school within the socioeconomic context of selective private schooling in Australia.

A key argument put forward in this chapter is that in the context of selective schooling, decisions relating to the management of school-to-employment transitions of students are ultimately related to decisions about the curriculum. For

selective schools, such decisions in turn relate to the school's reputation in the educational market and parent's expectations for the school to provide positional advantage in the academic curriculum. In the case of Southside, the alignment between the aspirations of middle-class parents and the school's orientation towards academic achievement meant that pathways via the traditional academic curriculum leading to university were valued over 'alternative' pathways involving vocational education and training. This differential valuing of pathways was indicated in the views expressed by key administrators at the school who associated academic pathways with characteristics of ideal, academically oriented students. This was contrasted with their views of vocational pathways which they mainly associated with characteristics of poorly performing students. For the Careers Guidance counsellor, the origins of these attributes of 'typical' VET students were to be found in the deficiencies in social capital of students' families.

This analysis showed that differential valuing of academic and vocational pathways by administrative staff was indeed reflected in the processes implemented at the school for managing pathways. Here, the favoured strategy was a generalised one focused mainly on subject selection to facilitate traditional pathways via the academic curriculum. This approach sought to minimise risk and maximise opportunities for the majority of students by enabling them to enter the higher education course of their choice or to defer their options as long as possible.

While this strategy was successful for managing transitions for most students attending the school, the focus on traditional academic pathways worked as a constraint for a small minority of students attempting to engage with their chosen vocational pathway through school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. For some of these students, limited flexibility around the school's academic timetable and limited support for students attending off-campus workplace training were a significant constraint to gaining a VET qualification while at school. Here, to achieve a VET qualification, students were required to make a significant investment of additional time outside of school hours and to invest considerable personal resources in order to manage the demands of VET and to keep up in the academic curriculum.

For several students interviewed for this study, despite having identified a clear transition strategy, the only option they saw available to them for engaging their chosen transition pathway was to leave the school. However, due to the powerful social expectation for these students to complete their QCE at the school—an objective that served the mutual interest of both parents and the school—leaving school was simply not an option.

The case study's focus on non-tertiary-bound students undertaking their transitions within a selective private school revealed an interesting paradox. It was argued above that parents seek out selective schooling in part to minimise their children's exposure to competition in the academic curriculum and reduce risk associated with their transition to post-school life and work. However, for some VET students interviewed for this study, their experience of transition was one of being 'stuck in school' but experiencing few of the advantages private schooling is generally thought to afford.

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Chapter 11
Pathways and Choice: Transitions at Sunny Beach College

Sue Thomas and Jill Ryan

This chapter reports on a case study of one particular secondary school as it responds to, and enacts, current policies on students' transition from school to post-school life. It does so in a context where current national and international policies stress the importance of providing clear and diverse pathways to facilitate students' successful transitions. In a time when youth transitions have lengthened (Taylor, 2010), policymakers have focused on policies and programs for young adults who do not have upper secondary education completions and who are not currently participating in education. These young people have been identified as facing difficult transitions from education to work and, therefore, as being most at risk of marginalisation in post-school lives.

The policies are informed often by the belief that 'the chances of solid transition outcomes are higher where young people have available learning pathways and qualifications frameworks that are clearly defined, well organised and open, designed and developed in a lifelong learning perspective, with effective connections to post-school destinations, whether work or further study' (OECD, 2009, pp. 36–37). Consequently, the policies stress the need to improve the existence, diversity, relevance and transparency of different pathways. In this way, they are strongly influenced by assumptions of linearity and pathways (Savelsberg, 2010) in the belief that successful transitions require a linear pathway, one that proceeds directly from full-time education to full-time work. Fundamental to this assumption is the belief that individual young adults can choose their own pathway (te Reile, 2004).

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However, the research literature notes that transitions are often protracted and problematic (Savelsberg, 2010). Decisions about careers are often unstable or transitory in nature and not predictable (Ball, Maguire, & Macrae, 2000), and many young people experience their transitions as 'complex and interconnected, as involving false starts and redefined possibilities' (Looker & Dwyer, 1998, p. 17). Rather than following a linear pathway, the transition process involves the negotiation of diverse, complex pathways.

Despite these findings highlighting the complexity of many young people's transitions, linearity seems to be an educational goal preferred in Australian policy. This preference is exemplified in the Queensland policy document on transitions, a white paper entitled *Queensland the Smart State – Education and Training Reforms for the Future* (ETRF) (The State of Queensland, 2002), that influenced the practices of the case study school. This policy proposes that, 'to compete in today's world, young Queenslanders need exciting and flexible pathways from school to work, training or further education' (The State of Queensland, 2002, p. 3). The above statement indicates that the policy views transitions as a linear pathway through school and into university, further studies or work. The policy flagged the introduction of new laws that:

- make it compulsory for young people to stay at school until they finish Year 10[1] or have turned 16, whichever comes first
- require young people to then participate in education and training for:

  - a further 2 years; or
  - until they have gained a Senior Certificate; or
  - until they have gained a Certificate III vocational qualification; or
  - until they have turned 17

- provide exemptions for young people who enter full-time work after they have either completed Year 10 or turned 16 (The State of Queensland, 2002, p. 7)

Also evident in the policy is the assumption that young people can choose their own pathway. Such an assumption underpins the introduction of Senior Education and Training (SET) plans, which are to be completed by all students in Year 10. While the policy requires schools to develop these individual student plans for the senior phase of learning, later government documents note that 'a young person's Senior Education and Training (SET) plan maps out a personalised learning path for his or her senior phase of learning. SET plans help *young people establish* the necessary path to achieve their goals' [emphasis added] (Department of Education and Training, 2003). In other words, young people are expected to have ownership of, and the main responsibility for, their SET plan. The ETRF policy reflects an 'earning or learning approach' that expects young people, except in extraordinary circum-

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[1] In Queensland, secondary schooling includes Years 8 to 12, with Years 11 and 12 constituting the Senior Phase of Learning. Year 10 is identified as "a foundation year for the Senior Phase of Learning to consolidate the knowledge, skills and capabilities that are necessary for successful learning in Years 11 and 12" (Department of Education and Training, 2010).

stances, to be participating in full-time work or full-time education or training during the compulsory participation phase. That is, the policy is strongly oriented towards providing young people with linear pathways from school to vocational education, jobs or higher education (Savelsberg, 2010). Conceptualising transitions in this way affects 'the structures and practices available to young people (e.g. through imposed reforms and funding), thus enabling some forms of transition and hindering others' (te Reile, 2004, p. 247).

Transition policies such as the one identified above have resulted in schools introducing measures to provide a variety of pathways for their students. This chapter describes how one secondary school, Sunny Beach College,[2] a secondary school in a regional coastal city in Australia, enacted the ETRF policy through the provision of multiple pathways for students. The study draws on data from a larger study that seeks to capture the experiences of students as they negotiated their transition from school to post-school life. Data was collected from (1) selected pages from the schools' (publicly available) websites; (2) teacher and parent focus group discussions; (3) focus group interviews with students in Years 10 and 11, that is, with students entering the senior phase of their secondary schooling; and (4) school documents associated with the senior phase of schooling. The chapter first gives a brief description of Sunny Beach College, placing it in its regional context. Next, it outlines the school's approach to assisting students to make productive transitions from school to post-school life. In so doing, the chapter details the multiplicity of pathways that this school provides. Students' accounts of their engagement with, and responses to, these pathways are then examined. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the interplay between the pathways offered by the school and students' choices about transition. It shows how both teachers and students at Sunny Beach College saw successful transitions as a linear process from school to post-school life.

Introducing Sunny Beach College

Sunny Beach College is a coeducational Catholic secondary school located in a regional coastal city in Queensland. The tourism, retail and construction industries are major employers in the city, and casual and part-time work in tourist-related industries and in retail play an important role in the transition process for many senior students at the school. The school draws a diverse student population with a range of academic abilities, from a wide catchment area. This diversity is evidenced by the school's ranking on the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ISCEA), a scale created to numerically represent the magnitude of the influence or level of educational advantage in schools (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority, 2011).[3] Sunny Beach College is ranked slightly above the national average,

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[2] Sunny Beach College is a pseudonym for the school.

[3] See Chap. 9 for a fuller discussion of ISCEA.

with students spread evenly across the top, bottom and two middle quartiles. At the time of the study, the school had revised its school program in the light of this student diversity and of the school vision.

As a Catholic school, Sunny Beach College had a particular vision on secondary schooling. This vision emphasised community, describing the school as a community that is supported by the faith experiences offered to students as part of the Catholic ethos of the school; by the broad range of learning experiences both in the classroom and in co-curricula activities which are offered to students to equip them for lifelong learning; in the attractive and well-maintained physical environment, including both grounds and buildings; and particularly by ongoing pastoral support which is based on the individuality and worth of each student. The school worked to establish a reputation as a community to which it is worth belonging, and which is inclusive and welcoming to all.

In keeping with this vision, the school promoted itself as one that catered for students with a range of academic inclinations by offering academically and vocationally oriented subjects across all year levels. In the spirit of inclusivity, Sunny Beach College responded to policy initiatives on transition by initiating specific measures to address the issue of student retention in the senior years of schooling. Key to these measures was the implementation of a more varied senior school curriculum, which added a strong vocational education component to the existing academic subjects.

To facilitate the strong vocational emphasis, the school appointed a Student Pathways Coordinator. The Student Pathways Coordinator was a senior member of the school, working closely with the Assistant Principal and the School Counsellor. Her role included being Head of Vocational Education, together with administering the development of SET plans and the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE). Together with an administrative assistant, she also coordinated and monitored time in the workplace for those students undertaking structured work placements as part of vocational education and training (VET) certificate qualifications[4] or school-based traineeships or apprenticeships.

The school viewed the changed emphasis on vocational education subjects in the senior school curriculum as a success. The Student Pathways Coordinator observed that, previously, 25% of students went straight from school to university (personal communication). She noted that in 2008,[5] the number of students moving from school to education and training, including university and TAFE,[6] had risen to 65%. These claims are substantiated in government data found in the *Next Steps* report (Department of Education and Training, 2009), which noted that only 1.9% of students

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[4] As an accredited Registered Training Organisation (RTO), Sunny Beach College was able to issue VET Certificates I, II and III in a number of industries. Students were also able to take VET Certificate courses through external providers.

[5] Statistics for 2008 are included here as these statistics give a picture of the schools' results that were current when the conversations took place in 2009.

[6] TAFE refers to technical and further education.

who completed senior secondary schooling at Sunny Beach College in 2008 were neither studying nor working. The Student Pathways Coordinator attributed this rise to the active encouragement of students to consider a program of study that would give them a range of options, including university, TAFE and work. In addition to the provision of a number of options (pathways), efforts were made to delay student decision-making about future options until the end of Year 10.

Pathways at Sunny Beach College

Sunny Beach College provided a program for students that offered both an academic pathway and a number of vocational pathways. Students following an academic pathway completed a minimum number of semester units of Authority subjects to count towards an Overall Position (OP) on a Tertiary Entrance Statement at the end of Year 12. At Sunny Beach College, increasing numbers of students were encouraged to opt for alternative pathways that comprised either a mix of both academic and vocational subjects or a complete suite of vocationally oriented subjects. Even though students who studied a combination of academic and vocational subjects did not receive an OP, they were still be able to consider tertiary study through the *selection rank* that they would be awarded. The college's emphasis on informing students about the selection rank pathway to tertiary entrance was couched in terms of enabling students to keep their options open. It was accompanied by the expansion of vocational education subjects in the college—a situation that benefitted students who were still undecided about their post-school destination as well as those who did not intend to undertake any further study. As the Pathways Coordinator noted,

> when I first got here I don't think there was enough [subjects] for them… there wouldn't have been enough of them to actually do a full non-OP course but they've now been slotted into exactly what they want to do where we've put more work experience in, more emphasis on the workplace.

In 2009, the college offered a variety of vocational education programs for students, including structured work placements, school-based apprenticeships and traineeships (SATs), and VET certificate qualifications in which the college acted as a registered training provider. Many of these programs reflected a growing awareness of alternative pathways for students. For example, structured work placements in VET certificate qualifications

> require realistic industry training and … those students have to do it on the job … [but] getting work placements to understand and to negotiate and work with us can be difficult. (Teacher, Vocational subjects)

Around 33 students at Sunny Beach College were completing SATs in 2009. School-based apprenticeships and traineeships enabled students to study senior school subjects at the same time as they receive training as part of their apprenticeship or traineeship. As the Department of Education and Training website notes,

SATs provide students with:

- qualifications or skills that are recognised Australia-wide, and that can count towards the Queensland Certificate of Education
- hands-on experience in a workplace
- paid work
- the chance to also work towards an Overall Position (OP) score
- confidence and contacts to move from school to work or further study

(Department of Education and Training, 2010)

The college also introduced a Certificate III qualification in Early Childhood and a Certificate II qualification in Tourism as additional vocational options. The teacher responsible for these subjects noted,

> the school has to be registered separately than the rest [as a Registered Training Organisation], … so we have to provide evidence that we have teachers that have industry experience to work in those areas and we're registered similarly to some business colleges so that we have to abide by their rules, so we're actually on the national guidelines, whereas the rest of the subjects are on the State guidelines. (Teacher, Vocational subjects)

As these subjects were taught both in the classroom and in an 'industry realistic environment', they required the college to work with employers in local industry sectors. However, placing students in such an environment could be difficult, especially in times of financial difficulty, such as the global financial crisis, which was impacting heavily in the city at the time of these interviews. Consequently,

> It's been very difficult [to get students out of the classroom] … it's a societal problem because we've got this, you know, [global financial] crisis going on at the moment. A lot of these employers are having to put off their own staff, and [they] say "for us to put off our paid staff and then bring on somebody who's free … it's not looking good." (Teacher, Vocational subjects)

In addition, time and resources needed to be spent ensuring all involved, employers, students and parents,

> understand what the expectations are. I have now also developed our parent agreement form and the student agreement form, for the parents and the students both to sign before they go out to work placement, to say this is a school day. It's not a day to make appointments for doctors and to go and see your friends off at the airport and do everything else. This is a school day and these are the requirements … it's because we are bound, legally and duty of care wise, to know where these students are that we've sort of had to, I guess, impose those kind of legal structures on it. (Teacher, Vocational subjects)

Some students taking vocational pathways undertook volunteer work. This experience provided opportunities for them to work with, talk to and develop relationships with adults other than their parents and teachers. The college told students to expect two outcomes arising from their volunteer work:

> One, you actually feel really good about yourself at the end of the day when you've done something that's helped somebody else out. Secondly it looks absolutely fantastic on your resume, that you're willing to do something for free. (Student Pathways Coordinator)

Volunteer work was emphasised in Year 11 particularly. For example, English Communication students volunteered one afternoon each week at a St. Vincent de

Paul centre. Despite many students finding it unpleasant work, the students built a respect for the nature of volunteer work. Some of them returned to do more work of their own accord. Their volunteering experience also carried over into another aspect of the English Communication course when they organised a gala to raise funds for the centre. This was an activity where the students:

> had to put on an event, it was sort of like an events management, and they had to design entertainment, seating, tickets, invitations, requesting donations of prizes, food, they had to interact with fellow staff members and negotiate permission to use various facilities at the school. …. So like the start from the volunteer work brought the idea of doing the gala for the fundraiser, which ended up presenting a cheque at the end of the year for more than … $1,600.00 odd to the charity and then some of them went down after that again to see how the money was used. So it was a real sense of achievement for the volunteer basis. … They seem to get a sense of accomplishment out of it. (Teacher, English Communication, Senior School)

In addition to providing a variety of vocational programs within the school, the school encouraged students to look at a variety of post-school options, including programs offered jointly through universities and TAFE colleges. As the Pathways Coordinator noted, she spent:

> a lot of time working with students getting them to look at the TAFE option because TAFE is now running a lot of courses in conjunction with … universities where they do the first 12 to 18 months at TAFE and then that will give them credit towards their full degree. I think last year we had probably about 15 or 20 students take up that option for various reasons. One of them was a student who was possibly quite capable of doing well in year 11 and 12 but was not as confident as he could have been and so pulled out of all the university options and then at the end of year 12 went "Oh actually I really do want to be an engineer". So he's gone the TAFE pathway and so he'll do his two years there and then move on. That's becoming a big option, and I think it'll be even bigger this year because as I said the jobs won't be there when the students leave at the end of this year, and so I'm spending a lot more time emphasising to kids that they need a plan B. (Student Pathways Co-ordinator)

The college particularly valued its partnerships with the local university because there is 'a real openness about [it], quite a seamless transition really that I think the university has gone a long way towards creating' (College Principal).

An integral component of the school program was the provision of information for students, parents and industry. The Pathways Coordinator, in particular, spent time:

> teaching the parents about selection ranks, so you don't have to do all OP subjects, you can do a bit of both, and spending a lot of time with students and parents introducing them to the concept of work, TAFE and university as a variety of pathways, and that can be done at all different times of their life as well. (Student Pathways Co-ordinator)

All students studied two career education subjects. One subject focused on providing information to students on learning and careers. The other, a Year 11 subject, focused on students developing both life skills and study skills, such as:

> how to unpack your assignments, how to manage your time, how to read academically, and all the students in the school do that whether they're heading for university or a job, because as I explain to them you need to read and time manage and all these things in the workforce as well. You don't just get to go to the workforce and never read or write again, that's an unrealistic expectation. (Student Pathways Coordinator)

The subjects were combined with one-on-one interviews with students. The Pathways Coordinator also made additional contact with individual students on topics of interest during the SET planning process. Since parents were integral to the SET planning process, additional information about subject selections and career options was provided through information evenings and the regular college newsletter.

The college also recognised the importance of students' self- or family-initiated part-time work. While not a pathway offered by the college, part-time work was seen to benefit the students by helping them to develop contacts in the wider community and in offering valuable learning about work and work life. Part-time work was seen to help students learn broadly applicable work skills, a strong work ethic and an appreciation of the economics behind employment. As the Assistant Principal of the college explained,

> there aren't too many kids [in Sunny Beach College] that don't have part time jobs. You know, part time jobs are just so easy to get [in this city] and sometimes that gives students a false impression of what it's going to be like when they leave year 12 and that's where I find the kids. They think "Well hang on, I got a job. It's easy". But, you know, to explain to them, "well no you're cheap. When you're 18, they're not going to want you …"

The Student Pathways Coordinator agreed with this statement, adding

> it is because of our great huge hospitality and tourism industry, and that's what I try and explain to the students. The jobs you are getting now are often based on the fact that we have our general retail and everything, but at certain times of the year that blows up because we've got all tourists coming in and so that means that we have more restaurants and things than other places. And trying to get them to understand the economic reasons why there's lots of part time jobs but they may not transfer into full time jobs later.

Despite the caution about the possible lack of full-time work in the future, the teachers saw part-time work in a positive light, as 'something that could turn into a career path'. For example, '… we've had a couple of girls … who've actually taken the job and the next step and actually been trained up as departmental managers'. (Student Pathways Coordinator)

As the strategies outlined above show, the college used the introduction of SET plans as a catalyst for change in the senior years and to assist students, who were not likely to get a tertiary offer, to identify alternative pathways to traditional academic options. Being a Catholic school, and therefore not part of the government (state) schooling sector, the college held that it was not required to implement the SET plan initiative, but as the Student Pathways Coordinator noted below, the development of SET plans was used as a change agent in the school:

> By strict rules, we don't actually have to do them [SET plans]. But we've chosen to make them compulsory here, like … the State system does. And I'm finding that one on one meeting, say this is compulsory, you must attend. That's probably been the biggest change agent in the school … when I arrived here, probably 90% of students were doing all six OP subjects, university was the only direction to go and many of those students weren't getting the OPs required to get in there. [now] we give them SET plans and more information to students on pathways. We have about 50% of our students doing OP pathways, about 30% doing the selection rank, so they've got a foot in both camps, and then probably 20% doing a pure pathways program into the workforce. (Student Pathways Coordinator)

The next section discusses how a selection of students at Sunny Beach College responded to the expanded senior secondary curriculum prompted by the introduction of the SET planning process.

Student Engagement with Pathways to Transition

The following discussion of how students at Sunny Beach College engaged with the variety of senior school pathways available at the college, including SET planning, is drawn from a series of focus group interviews with students in Years 10 and 11. As noted previously, Year 10 is the transition year for Queensland students, a year where they go through the SET planning process to make decisions on future careers and select the subjects for senior secondary schooling that will help them move towards these goals. At the time of interviews, the Year 10 students interviewed were nearing the completion of the SET planning process. Of the 24 students interviewed, most had definite ideas about their future direction, and all but one planned to proceed to study, either at university or TAFE, upon leaving school. Having undergone this process the year before, the Year 11 students had started their chosen subjects and were in a position to reflect on their decisions and on the SET planning process itself.

The teachers noted that, at an institutional level, the SET planning process was seen as a key element in an overall strategy to ensure that senior schooling at Sunny Beach College provided an inclusive and a productive experience for students. Students also identified their participation in the process, though rarely as a complete process or by name, as a significant experience. In general, they recognised the importance of the senior phase of secondary schooling, with many repeating the mantra 'Don't leave school'. They valued what the school offered, 'Well it's like helping us get the education we need to actually do what we want to do', and readily identified the information-giving role played by the school:

> Well school, it generally helps like it gives you a view into certain subjects that you may need for certain career paths and it allows you to experience certain things through the subjects, such as English is a great help for a career path such as journalism whereas Maths would be good for something like Architecture and just etcetera. (Year 11 student)

Giving and Receiving Information

It was noted above that the school saw that the giving of information was an important part of its role in assisting students make productive transitions to post-school life. The students also saw the giving and the receiving of information as an important part of the transition into senior secondary schooling and beyond. They identified a number of sources of information, including two specific subjects, career planning talks offered by the school and the SET planning interview with the Student

Pathways Coordinator. The students had a mixed reaction to the two specific subjects focusing on careers. Several Year 10 students acknowledged the relevance of some content as the following extract from a group interview shows:

Student 19[7]: Just learning about the workforce and…
Student 20:   What's going to happen if you leave at the end of this year and stuff like that…
Student 21:   They help us to do resume and all that…
Student 22:   We're doing a big book about resumes now

However, for many students, particularly Year 11 students, the courses were 'a joke' and 'so boring'. As one Year 11 student remarked,

> In that [study skills] class they could do more in that because it's like with QCS [Queensland Core Skills test] it's getting through the QCS but they don't really talk about life after school. Like they could do – do more like careers and stuff like that.

Similarly, several Year 11 students recalled an event at the end of Year 10 when

Student 5: we got heaps of stuff…
Student 1: It was about everything…
Student 3: Yeah it was about university…
Student 2: Yeah, it was a three-day thing.

However, the students did not see this event as helpful because

Student 2: they pumped so much information into you in like 50 minute periods and you can't remember it all … Like I walked out of there and I was like, "What did they just say?" …
Student 3: Yeah. They force a lot of information …
Student 2: Like you screw up now and you screw up forever …
Student 3: Yeah, that's exactly, they give you that kind of image. I am pretty sure that's not exactly not what they mean. But at times like they give – like that kind of image is perceived because like, if you don't choose the subjects and you don't do well at the end of Year 12, you won't be able to get into the career that you might want. So at times, that's what causes a negative attitude and it's not like that it's more like just giving you advice and just keep your mind and like on your goal and just make sure you are focused.
Student 6: It's kind of like the harsh reality.

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[7] Student participants are numbered consecutively according to the focus group participation:

Year 11 Focus group 1: Students 1–6
Year 11 Focus group 2: Students 7–12
Year 12 Focus group 1: Students 13–18
Year 12 Focus group 2: Students 19–24

The students identified the Pathways Coordinator as a great source of information as the following comments from two Year 11 students show:

Student 11: [she was] pretty good. Like being able to see her … she leads you in the right direction …

Student 12: She helps out a lot, yeah

The Pathways Coordinator was the main implementer of the SET planning process. As such, she organised the information-giving sessions and conducted a SET plan interview, where Year 11 and 12 subjects were finalised. As one Year 11 student observed, the Pathways Coordinator

> advises on our subjects I guess. Like what we should do if we tell her what we want to do like after we finish school. She can advise us on what subjects to do and then try and guess – like say if we want to do an apprenticeship after we finish school, try and get us a school based apprenticeship or something like that to start off where we're going. … Basically just tries to point you into the right direction. … Or start you off with your career.

The Year 11 students recognised these interviews as crucial, and most found this, and subsequent, follow-up contact with the Pathways Coordinator helpful:

Student 1: You can make an interview with her …

Student 2: Then you can talk to her and then she will follow that up by going…

Student 1: Researching …

Student 2: yeah researching what you have talked to her about and then she'll come back to you with like a list of phone numbers to ring if you are interested…

Student 4: Like if you are interested in like a traineeship or an out of school job… She can set you up … or something like that, she can help you set that up.

The interviews were the means whereby the Pathways Coordinator both informed and guided the students. As the Year 11 students explained, [they]

Student 8:   had like a meeting with her and she'd go through like – she'd have a look at our – our reports and all that stuff. …

Student 10: Yeah, just suggested. …

Student 8:   What we wanted to do. Like – so…

Student 10: you've got the ideas, but then she had to you know…. She'll – what's the word negotiate with you. Like you know what's the smart thing to do …

Student 7:   See if it's very realistic. …

Student 8:   setting realistic goals …

Student 10: You know if you wanted to be a lawyer and have the crappiest grades, then you know it's not really going to work out. So it kind of – yeah, points you in the right path.

Some students found that 'when you have your interview … everyone went in with different stuff that they wanted to do and [the Pathways Coordinator] just

changed everything'. Consequently, as they described the SET planning interview, it becomes clear that for these students, the interview was 'a life-changing session'. One student described it as 'the fifteen minutes that changed my life'.

Many students felt pressured by the process. They did not like either feeling pressured or the compulsory nature of the process. As one Year 10 student stated,

> I don't like it … I don't think you should have to choose the rest of your life when you're 14. … I don't know. I just don't think you should … Yeah. Well, because they're like, "Write down what you want to do for a career." It's like, "I don't know what I want to do." They're like, "Well, write something down." It's like, "I don't know." … I know what I want to do when I leave high school but I don't know what I want to do as a career … I want to have some fun before I commit to something. I know that sounds stupid … That's why I don't want to commit because if you change your mind, like, I've changed my mind 50 times. I think it depends though with every different person. (Student 17)

For another Year 10 student, the pressure was welcome:

> I actually think it's good … But I think it's good because it actually keeps you on track. If you have a goal set it keeps you on track, you keep thinking back to it, like, it sits in your book and you open up your book and it falls out … You look at it and you think, "What am I doing mucking around in class?" It makes you think and keep on track. (Student 14)

It was apparent that the students interviewed recognised and valued the information provided both through specific career subjects and through the SET planning process. However, it was also clear that they had mixed reactions to these experiences and to the need to make decisions about their future. For many students, such decisions involved feelings of being pressured and scared.

Experiencing Work

As a key element of the expanded program facilitating the transition from school to post-school life, the school offered a number of vocational education pathways designed to provide opportunities for students to experience work. These pathways included work placements, SATs and a number of Certificate subjects. The Year 11 students who selected these options had mixed views about the potential contribution these experiences would make to their life beyond school. At the time of the focus group interviews, the certificate students had yet to undertake structured work placements on which they could reflect. For these students, and for the Year 10 students who were going into the same courses in the next year, the main benefit of Certificate subjects was seen in terms of the provision of an alternative pathway to post-school study through gaining a selection rank. That is, for students who were considering going to university at the end of Year 12, completion of a Certificate III subject guaranteed them a minimum Overall Position score that they could use for university entrance. As one Year 10 student noted,

> I'll be finished [the Certificate in Early Childhood] by Year 12, yeah. And once I finish Year 12 I go to TAFE and I think it's six months' or a year's course there and from there I go to uni. There's like a pathway [the Pathways Co-ordinator] told about … I didn't know about going to TAFE, I thought I had to do all my OP to get straight into uni but she helped me a

lot… It made me feel more relaxed because I knew my path to go. When I didn't know anything about it I was stressing about what subjects and stuff like that. (Student 18)

A Year 11 student saw the combination of academic subjects and VET certificate qualifications as 'a backup' and a way of keeping all his options open:

Also with tourism that's always a good back up as a Certificate II in Tourism so you can go further in TAFE and if your uni or something doesn't go right or you lose interest or you get more interested in what tourism and you can always expand on that getting a diploma of tourism, whatever. (Student 7)

Students who were not expecting to continue studying but who were aiming for employment after completing school saw the VET certificate as giving them a head start. For example, a Year 10 student said:

I'm going to walk out of school with two certificates and you can go straight into work. So I think it's a good idea.

Two Year 11 students were completing their first year of a school-based traineeship for veterinary nursing. For both, the traineeship was 'a really good experience', but it represented a continuation of their exploration of options rather than as a firm commitment to a career:

Student 6:   I have got no idea what I want to do after I leave school, but this is just giving me hands on experience and I if I wanted to become a vet nurse once I leave, this is like a Cert II in nursing, hey.

Student 5:   I took a totally different turn. Like at the start of this year and late last year I was really set, got my set heart on being a vet. And then this experience has kind of shown me what it's really like and I don't know, I don't want to do [it].

In addition to the vocational pathways offered by the school, the students gained experience of work through part-time employment. All but one of the Year 11 students and most of the Year 10 students had already entered the paid workforce as casual or part-time workers. As such, the students substantiated the claims of Abhayaratna, Andrews, Nuch, and Podbury (2008), who note that participation in part-time or casual employment while still attending school has become a common, indeed almost universal, occurrence for young Australians. The students placed great importance on their paid work, which dominated talk in one interview with Year 10 students. Most students worked in the fast-food industry, but others worked in retail and other service positions.

However, only one student saw his current casual employment as being at all related to his future career. Oddly enough, this employment had come about through the school: the student, who was interested in filmmaking, had been introduced by one of his teachers to a local film production company. He now worked at this company on a regular basis. While fellow students and the Pathways Coordinator held up this young man's experience as an exemplar of school-to-work transitions, the students appeared to recognise his case as being atypical. As one of the fast-food workers observed to him, 'you make ours [casual jobs] sound like shit'. For most students, part-time was a place for making friends and earning money as they were

certain that their future careers would be different from their current casual work. Importantly, both teachers and students acknowledged the important opportunities that part-time work provided for learning about the world of work and for the development of broad employability skills, such as self-management and teamwork.

Looking to the Future

For most students, engaging with the multiple pathways offered by the school resulted in a consideration of, and a commitment to, a future that entailed study, either at TAFE or at university. However, there were exceptions. For example, the Year 10 student who had resisted the SET planning process said:

> I want to take a gap year and go travelling. And I've got a European passport so I can live overseas and work but I also want to do some kind of a course, either something to do with legal or with journalism, and she's [the Pathways Co-ordinator] let me know about the courses I can do online overseas and a few other of those ones. And that really helped me because I didn't think I'd be able to. (Student 17)

As the above extract shows, even this student accepted the need for further study and was contemplating study overseas. Her thinking was prompted by information provided by the Pathways Coordinator.

Students at Sunny Beach College did not appear to be unaware of the relevance of school nor were they sceptical about the claims made about the school to work transition (Savelsberg, 2010). Indeed, all the students accepted that they needed to prepare themselves for post-school life and saw senior secondary schooling as the place to do that. Students accepted that school was the place to

> prepare yourself, do work experience or something. So getting out there and see what the job is like so you don't go to the job… So go and do work experience with someone. (Year 10 student)

The students believed that they needed to 'see if you're going to like it before you get involved in something because there's no use in studying for something that you're not going to absolutely want to do'. It was 'just a waste of time and you've still got a career behind you' and they may find that they 'don't actually like it'.

However, despite this acceptance, some students also felt pressured, 'Don't muck-up when you have the opportunity so don't screw it up', and scared. One student joked that life after school was 'scary, when you think about it. … I just want to stay really young forever … I'll live with my parents till I'm like 40'. Such pressure stemmed from a fear of insufficient preparation or from choosing something in which they were no longer interested as the following comments by Year 11 students show:

Student 4: I am worried that I am going to get to uni and I have finally decided what I want to do and then they are going to say, "Well you haven't done these subjects in high school," and then you have to do bridging courses I think they are called.

Student 2: If you get there and find out that it sucks and you don't want to do it. … What have you got to fall back on? … Yeah my dad started a course and before it was too late, he changed and stuff and he wanted to be a police officer, but he didn't get a good enough OP, so he never got to do that.

These students' comments reflected the findings of Stevenson and Clegg (2011) who found that young people bracketed off imagining a future beyond further academic study. The latter comment indicated also that the students were aware that the transition to post-school life might not be a simple linear progression. Nevertheless, all the students interviewed appeared to see their individual transition as a linear progression from school to study to work. That this will be the case is borne out by statistics provided by both the school and the *Next Steps* report (Department of Education and Training, 2009) referred to earlier. That is, both the school and the students saw a successful transition in terms of the 'learning or earning' approach.

This study of transitions to post-school life at Sunny Beach College reflects the findings of Savelsberg (2010), who noted that successful or quality transitions were characterised by responsive and meaningful curriculum, positive learning culture (particularly teacher/student relationships) and the support of peers and family. The data from the teacher and student interviews indicated that Sunny Beach College facilitated a positive learning culture and that, in the main, the students found the curriculum meaningful. In addition, students reported receiving support for their engagement with schooling from peers and family. They reported also gaining both information and skills from their experiences with part-time work, supporting the findings of McKechnie et al. (2010).

All students at Sunny Beach College appeared to accept that they were responsible both for making decisions about appropriate pathways and for the success of the transition they ultimately made. More than one student commented on the importance of 'not screw[ing] up'. That is, the students in this study saw themselves to be active participants in the transition process, investing that process with their own ideas and strategies (Vickers, 2007). These findings mirror that of Ball et al. (2000) who note that 'young people see themselves as individuals in a meritocratic setting, not as classed or gendered members of an unequal society' (p. 4). That is, the students have accepted the tenet of individualism, which holds individuals more and more accountable for their own survival and where decision-making is seen as individual choice (Ball et al.).

However, as Billett et al. (2010) note, students' choices about transitions evolve through the interplay of individual decisions and pathways in the context of institutions and macro social structures. This interplay has been described by Shanahan and Hook (2010) as 'bounded agency'. Students' agency is bounded because their capacities, and those of their teachers, to negotiate contextual and structural factors are varied and not distributed evenly across school populations (Evans, 2002). That is, the context of schooling provides an important explanation of students' achievement (Mills & Gale, 2011). As noted earlier, Sunny Beach College ranks slightly above the national average in terms of educational advantage. However, it offers an advantageous institutional context that appears to provide the requisite resources to

give the students a sense of choice and control over their education and so to support students making a successful transition to post-school life.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the enactment of a particular policy on transition in one Australian secondary school, Sunny Beach College. It details how the college used a key element of the policy, the SET planning process, as a catalyst for changing the senior secondary program in order to ensure that multiple pathways, both academic and vocational, were offered to students. Accompanying the introduction of these pathways was a commitment to providing information about possible options. Students at Sunny Beach College responded to the SET planning process with feelings of being pressured and scared. For some students, the pressure was positive and welcome. Others resisted the process, but ultimately all students accepted that they needed to prepare themselves for post-school life and saw senior secondary schooling as the place to do that. In addition, all students accepted the responsibility for making decisions about pathways and for the success of the transition made by following that pathway.

Both students and staff at Sunny Beach College saw successful transitions as a linear process that resulted in students 'earning or learning'. However, this process did not depend on a single pathway. Rather, it was seen to be the result of a multiplicity of possible pathways, many of which were facilitated by the school. That is, Sunny Beach College offered an educational context that facilitated the making of such linear transitions. Further, the students and teachers at Sunny Beach College recognised and accepted agency for their part in the interplay of individual decisions and pathways, which is inherent in the transition process. However, there was no indication in the data that either the students or the teachers recognised the bounded nature of this agency. That is, they did not appear to recognise the importance of the context offered by this particular school.

The findings of this chapter demonstrate the pervasiveness of discourses on linear transition and on individualism in both education policies and in the everyday lives of students and teachers as they enact transition policy. However, the chapter also provides evidence that such linear transitions are facilitated in institutional contexts such as Sunny Beach College. The findings point to the importance of the social context in the transition process and to the need for a consideration of context for understanding issues impacting on making a successful transition to post-school life.

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Chapter 12
A Critical Focus on Family-School-Community Partnerships: St Jude's Secondary College Transition Program for 'At-Risk' Students

Greer Johnson and Stephen Billett

Improving Youth Transitions

Improving youth transitions from school to work or further study was agreed upon as a key priority at the 2006 meeting of the Council of Australian Governments. This goal is often couched in economic terms. For example, the state of Victoria's Treasury's economic modelling suggests that increasing the basic level of educational attainment could add 3.2% to the state's GDP by 2030, and this goal could be driven by improvements within school and in more effective transitions for students from schooling (DPC, 2007, pp. 8, 48 cited in Bond, 2009). Yet, given the numbers of young people who fail to make satisfactory transitions between school and work, realising this goal requires significant and effective schooling interventions, which extend to engaging with the community and securing parental support. For instance, in May 2008, 13.3% of all 15–19-year-old Australians were neither in full-time education nor in full-time employment (Bond). Young people in the developed world live in rapidly changing circumstances, especially in the realms of education and employment, and their demands are increasingly being premised on educational achievement. The linear progression from school to work or university, according to the affordances and constraints of social class, gender and race, can be far from straightforward which increases the potential of many students to be positioned as being 'at risk' in some form. Anlezark (2011) provides three of the more common categorisations of the term 'at risk' when applied to young people such as school leavers:

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- *Disengaged youth*: young people who are not engaged in full-time education or full-time employment. This definition has been adopted by the annual *How Young People are Faring* report series as an indication of an unsuccessful school-to-work transition. Young people who combine part-time work and part-time study are also included in this definition as 'disengaged youth'.
- *Unemployed youth*: young people who are actively looking for work, who are not employed and who are available to start work. This definition includes full-time students who are actively looking for work.
- *Young people who do not complete their senior secondary education*: otherwise known as Year 12 non-completers. Completion of Year 12 (or its vocational equivalence) is considered the minimal education level for preparing young adults for the first stages of their post-school career, whether this is further study or in the workforce.

Young people positioned in these kinds of ways are perhaps most at risk of being caught in low-paid and insecure employment, restricted in opportunities and prospects for advancements and yet are most vulnerable to unemployment at restricted participation in economic life and societal engagement. Indeed, consistently, social theorists claim that developed societies increasingly emphasise the imperative for individuals in the modernist world to be able to manage risk (Bauman, 2001; Beck, 1992, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Sennett, 1998). Yet, the capacities and prospects for effective management of risk are not distributed symmetrically across populations. Nevertheless, traditional sources of inequality seemingly continue to reproduce advantage and disadvantage among the younger generation, although contemporary social changes may obscure some of those gaps (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). Many students in the latter years of school, especially those from lower socioeconomic circumstances, might not even be able to aspire to pathways because they are not known to their families or within their community. It is reasonable to suggest then that such individuals might be more at risk of faltering with plans for transition out of school if strong support systems are not in place, not only at the institutional level but also within their community and family.

Certainly, greater accessibility to a range of educational pathways inside and out of school education across social classes, genders and race can lead to the belief that most individuals are free to choose, and change, whatever pathways they like inside and outside school. Yet, societal and personal constraints can cancel out the apparent benefits of freedom of choice. Economic turbulence is such that levels of employment rise and fall more quickly than in the past, with the impact falling disproportionately upon those with low levels of education, in forms of contingent work or whose racial or cultural origins place them at the margins of employer preferences (McBrier & Wilson, 2004). It follows, therefore, that with a growing demand for educated workers in technical, para-professional and professional roles (Billett, 2006), there is increased pressure on all young people to study longer to avoid being at risk of not progressing from school on a pathway towards productive, viable and worthwhile employment. In response, some schooling systems are now providing opportunities for students while still enrolled at school to engage in what was once post-school

preparation. One example is the provision of a school-based apprenticeship system, which is seen as offering a viable alternative pathway to that leading to tertiary education. Yet, beyond such provisions, there is also a need to redefine at-risk youth: labelling young people unnecessarily as being at risk is not helpful if it means that they become stigmatised (Ryan, 2011). Consequently, educational provisions and practices in schooling need to find ways of preparing students of all kinds for effective post-school transitions, and this includes securing a fit between their needs and the available options that will avoid such a nomenclature.

The Institutional Setting and Goals

St Jude's College's mission focuses on non-traditional pathways to support transitions for a majority of students at the school whose post-school aspirations do not include university entry. That is, unlike many private and, indeed, public sector schools, its programs are not directed towards university entrance. The college is located in a rural location adjacent to an Australian metropolitan city. It is a coeducational school commencing at Year 8 (13 years) and is within the jurisdiction of the national Catholic system. At the time of the study, the college had capped its enrolments at approximately 250 students. However, its success with its student cohort has brought pressure from the community to expand its intake. Some, but by no means all, of the students at St Jude's College have left other schools for various academic and personal reasons. Tuition fees at the school are relatively modest and met by families who are mostly lower-middle to working class. The majority of students and their families have chosen to enrol there until the completion of the Queensland Certificate of Education. For the most part, the young people profiled in this case opt to enter the workforce directly after leaving school, at the completion of Year 12. This post Year-12 pathway mostly leads to structured entry-level training such as apprenticeships or directly into paid employment. Some students combine work with further vocational education. On the school retention characteristic alone, the students at the college do not conform to the common definitions of at risk, as proposed above by Anlezark (2011). In the main, the students have come from feeder primary schools within the Catholic education system. Although the staff consider all students enrolled at the college to be at risk in some way, they do not assign such labels. Consistent with the social justice philosophy of the college, there is a high emphasis on staff support for the families of the student cohort, which involves most classes being capped at 20 students.

The descriptions of the kinds of support offered by the college on its website point to its focus on social inclusivity and post-school destinations. For example, the college's website describes Structured Workplace Learning (SWL), a program in which students engage to 'fine-tune all the skills and knowledge they have learnt throughout the year'. In addition, the website discusses the Young Achievement Australia (YAA) Business Skills Program, which provides 'young people with challenging, inspiring and educational experiences that promote lifelong learning and

foster qualities of leadership, innovation and entrepreneurial spirit' and which allows the 'Year 11 students to apply their skills and knowledge, develop teamwork, communication and leadership skills and see how their technical skills contribute to job effectiveness'. Students from the college have won several awards within this national program on multiple occasions. Unlike many other schools that champion academic achievements, this college emphasises programs like YAA, thereby avoiding the stigma that such programs and outcomes might attract at other institutions.

The diverse curriculum at this college allows students to undertake work placements and TAFE-accredited courses and other training options. At the end of Year 10, students are able to choose from a variety of educational pathways leading to the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE), tertiary study, a trade or employment. The college's school-to-work transitions program is supplemented by external programs offered in the community. All Year 12 students who successfully complete school-based traineeships are held to be 'workplace ready' by the college. The college also offers a limited number of places for students with specific learning/social needs to pursue a course of study leading to the Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement (QCIA).

Overall, the college communicates a consistent message to parents, students and the wider community that the students are nurtured to stay in school, to excel at what they do best and to make a successful transition to the world of further education and/or work. The social and curriculum policies are dovetailed to support progressively smooth transitions from primary school to the first years of high schools (Years 8 and 9), and then into Year 10 with a focus on transitioning to work or into Years 11 and 12, and into further learning and/or work for those who choose to complete senior schooling. In Australia, completion of Year 12 (or its vocational equivalent) is these days generally considered the minimal education level for preparing young adults for the first stages of their post-school career, whether this involves further study or joining the workforce. For those students who choose not to complete Year 12, St Jude's College offers a Year-10 school-to-work transition curriculum to assist them to move directly into employment. These efforts are consistent with current considerations of how to effectively prepare students who leave school early.

Design and Method of Analysis

The data discussed here is drawn from interviews with the school principal and from a series of focus groups with several teachers who are involved with the transitions programs in Years 10 and 11 and with students from those years. Phone interviews were conducted with self-selected parents and employers. All interviews were audio-recorded, and the data were transcribed. The data were scrutinised for key themes related to the notion of agency and dependence due to the importance of these issues demonstrated in the literature. Accordingly, each of the transcripts of interviews and focus groups was examined for information relating to the key 'characters'

mentioned in the talk—how the characters (i.e. teachers, students, parents) were 'positioned' by the speakers in terms of the part they were reported to have played in the transition program—in order to draw conclusions about how roles and responsibilities for transitioning out of school played out in this school. The term *positioning* is used in a similar way to that within post-structuralist literary theory (Klarer, 1998). Within post-structuralism, it has long been accepted that no text is neutral: that all texts attempt to coerce readers and listeners into accepting certain views of the world. Although he is not explicitly post-structurally oriented, Kress (1985) has discussed how successful texts position readers (and, by extension, writers and speakers) to read in agreement with the invited reading of the text. Evidence of the 'characters' and the positioning of those characters are demonstrated through a lexical analysis of the transcripts as used by Johnson (2009). The lexical analysis has involved a close examination of the actions that are reported by the respondents as applied to key stakeholders in the transition program. The actions extracted from the lexical analysis have been triangulated with an initial analysis of interview and focus group data conducted using the computer software analysis package NVivo 8.

In the sections that follow, the tabulation of data summaries is used to display the analytic process and summarises salient excerpts from the data to support findings as discussed in subsequent sections of the paper.

Perspectives of the Efficacy of the Transitions Program

The analytical aim of treating the qualitative data is to distill key support and constraint mechanisms impacting the school's transition program. The findings will inform suggestions for enhancing the college transition program. In the first instance, the data generated in an interview between the college principal and one of the authors is presented (Table 12.1) and discussed. Next, summaries of focus group interviews with Years 10 and 11 students (Tables 12.2 and 12.3) and St Jude's College teachers (Table 12.4) are presented. Finally, key aspects of phone interviews with employers and parents are summarised in Tables 12.5 and 12.6. The purpose of summarising the data in this way is to display the different stakeholder perspectives on how parents were engaged in the school's transition program.

Attention to the actions reported in Table 12.1 supports the claim that the college is positioned by the principal as engaging most in the transition work with students, while employers/workplaces participate to a lesser extent and parents do not do much. The principal clearly does not regard leadership as a positional post which takes charge of all school activities. He practises a distributed leadership model in his college (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). More specifically, the interview identified the principal's understanding of and support for the leadership of the transition program by the vocational educational coordinator. In practice, the two staff leaders work together to coordinate a program that is consistent with a social justice perspective of education. Such a leadership approach is also consistent with a provision of education which necessarily needs to engage community, including

Table 12.1 Principal's perspective

Speaker	Characters profiled in speakers' talk	Speakers' position
Principal	Students at risk	All students at this school are at risk in some way, and a focus on vocational education helps them to leave this category
Interviewer	The College Transition Program Staff	*How does college prepare students for transitioning to the outside world?*
Principal	Voc Ed Coordinator	The Voc Ed Coordinator is in contact with parents of students who are keen to join the work force straight after Year 10. For students who struggle at school, the school focuses on vocational education
	Parents	[The school] usually hosts two nights a year where the parents come in and they are walked through the SET plans with them and so make sure that the parents also know what is happening at the school
		Providing that the students are happy, parents are satisfied with that arrangement, but that is the extent of the support they offer. The school takes almost all of the responsibility
Interviewer	Parents	*So do the parents take much initiative in—have they got anything going themselves that they bring to the school to help you?*
Principal	Parents	*It is only a small number. Who help us. There are two reasons. One is that there are not many parents that can assist their own children like that*
		One area that I know for a fact is a big mystery. Talking about transition is a transition from year 12 to tertiary studies for example … when I start talking about QC and Points and Rank and all that, most of them have no idea what you're talking about

local employers. As these are outside of the managerial ambit of college, such an approach is also required to engage with external partners.

The data generated in focus groups by Year 10 and Year 11 students talking is presented in Tables 12.2 and 12.3. In these tables, the students show their proactivity in enacting the school's programs, which is demonstrated in their arranging their own work experience. They also report that their expectation is that their parents will be on hand at home to discuss issues related to work life after school. That is, parental engagement is central to the effective enactment of the program.

Yet, in Table 12.4, the teachers are reported emphasising the parents' inability to advise their children of transition pathways and processes. However, they are not critical of the parents in so far as they view the parents as not wanting to assist their children, but rather being able to effectively perform this element of program.

The perspectives of employers are presented in Table 12.5. They report that productive transitions for students rest on the need for the school, parents and employers involved in transition programs to share similar ideas about attitudes to work. They claim that parents do not always engage on this level.

Table 12.2 Year 10 students' perspectives

Speaker	Characters profiled in speakers' talk	Speakers' position
Interviewer	Students and their work trajectories	*What do you want to do in the future, including the year after you leave school?*
Student	Students and school subjects	This student's subjects are food sense, agriculture and ITD. Student plans to finish Year 12 and then go straight to work, hopefully as a tradesperson, for example, a builder or a cementer
Student	Student work experience	Students had to approach employers to request work experience. This student participated in work experience with an acquaintance who is a builder. The school visited students during their work experience
Student	Student work experience	This student went to the Australian Army Band Barracks. At first, the experience made the student doubt her abilities, but she then accepted that she would acquire skills over time
Interviewer	Parents	*Do you talk to your parents about being a carpenter or was it your idea entirely?*
Student	Parents	This student's mother 'goes along with it'
Student	Parents	This student's mother helped by 'being there'
Student		The students have to fill in a SET plan: *We pretty much just had hours and hours of talking about it with our parents and the teachers*
		The student with teachers, the principal and parents have to talk through how to break down what they wanted to do for every year at school from year 10. Employers are also present to present workplace information. Students then combined all available information and fill out the SET plan
Student	Parents	*My parents dropped out in Year 10 and they have convinced me to stay at school and get a QCE as well so I've got something, if the apprenticeship doesn't work out I've got a QCE so I can do something else*

Finally, in Table 12.6, the voices of the parents who agreed to be interviewed are presented. Very few parents of students at the school were willing to be interviewed. The school approached 10 and only two accepted, one mother and one father, from different families. They chose to speak individually to the researchers by phone. One parent whose talk is profiled here had a child who left school in the previous year. The other had a student still at the school. However, there are some key themes in these data: parents liaised with the school to seek information about entry requirements for particular kinds of employment. In addition, parents, usually mothers, talked to their children about work ethic issues and the need to be active participants in the workplace. However, as indicated below, there is a perception that this level of engagement was insufficient across the student cohort.

Table 12.3 Year 11 students' perspectives

Speaker	Characters profiled in speakers' talk	Speaker's position
Student	The school	The school teaches self-management skills, for example, to be on time and to wear the correct uniform; organisation
	The school	The life experience gained from being at school and communicating with others is helpful; experience at school helps students to learn about separating personal and work lives
	Teachers	Teachers take students to interviews for traineeships/work placements if they don't have transport
	Teachers and parents	Students spend much time talking with parents and teachers about what students have to do each year at school. *It's also good when they're willing to support you, but also to share like their experiences with you. So what they've found out through their life with like getting jobs and school and everything*

Findings and Discussion

The analysis presented through attention to the lexical nature of the talk supports a claim that productive transition processes and practices in this school site are due to:

1. High investment of staff time and curriculum design expertise to target student needs
2. Some employers' engagement in school-based curriculum through work placements
3. Some parent engagement in the transition process, primarily through interactions with their child at home

It is clear from data generated by all informants that the students at this college are highly engaged in the school transition program. They report being supported by the teachers and empowered to achieve their personal goals. The productive nature of the college transition program stems from the school's 'can do' assumptions about the capacities of the students to achieve that focuses on the kinds of programs that are suited to these students' capacities and readiness. Such an approach positions young people as a resource and as an element of national future (de Roeper & Savelsberg, 2009). In contrast, many less successful school transitions programs are focused on a deficit model of disability (Piper & Piper, 2000). Such transition programs see youth as a 'social problem' reminiscent of the mid-twentieth-century youth gangs in Australia and the United Kingdom (Spergel, 1995).

However, even though the school is highly engaged in developing its transitions program for its at-risk students, there is a consistent theme that the school (i.e. its administrators, teachers, and employer community) reports that increasingly the weight of the responsibility for achieving this outcome falls to the school and teachers. The key constraint voiced by the school, and to a lesser extent employers who assist the school though placement provisions, is the nature and extent of parent and family participation in the school's transition program. In their responses to interview questions, school staff stated that involvement by more parents in the school transition program would help alleviate the load taken up by the current school community.

Table 12.4 Teachers' perspectives

Speaker	Characters profiled in speakers' talk	Speaker's position
Voc Ed Coordinator	Principal and teachers	The strengths of the transition program are that everyone in senior is involved in some sort of vocational program, and that is the purpose of our being. There are senior teacher meetings, and we work together to plan what we are doing. Regarding assessment, the school has a matrix of what is expected. Often evidence will be collected for one student from several subjects
Interviewer and Voc Ed Coordinator	What could your school do better to assist students?	Change pedagogy—use adult education principles rather than primary school principles to better engage students with low literacy and numeracy levels in learning
Voc Ed Coordinator	Parents	Parents are less supportive than they used to be
Teacher	Parents	This teacher agrees that parents are less supportive than they were previously
Voc Ed Coordinator	Parents	Most parents work and are not in a position to offer their children much support, so support must be provided by the school
Teacher	The school/teachers	It seems that the school is expected to provide support
Interviewer and Program Support Officer	So what does the community do well? Is it providing the placements?	Some workplaces provide placements each year. For example, Sizzler is providing placements for three special-needs students, one of whom is doing an apprenticeship. In addition, the local Council is supportive of the Year 11 students. The Council attends our events, pays for the school to do the program and has paid for the school to celebrate the National Awards
Voc Ed Coordinator	Parents	Parents are the least supportive. *I think it is because we come from such a large catchment area that a lot of them don't have any idea about the philosophies of school and the way we run and I think they have probably had a battle all the way until they get here and so they are just resuming the battle when they arrive, I think*
Teacher	Parents	*I agree with [the VE coordinator] and some of the difficulty is that the kids have so much choice and I mean my own son is here in Year 11 and as a parent, to sit and down and go, 'Well where do you want to go, what path do you want to take?'*
Teacher	Parents	*And also mum and dad that come to grips with the fact that if you go and do a Diploma in something or a Cert III or a Cert IV and then a Diploma, that you can actually articulate into university from that pathway. Because when they were at school, you left in Year 12, you got your TE score and off you went*

Table 12.5 Employers' perspectives

Speaker	Characters profiled in speakers' talk	Speaker's position
Interviewer	Students	*Do you think the students value add to your business?*
Employer	Employers	Employers gain productivity from students, and are able to see students' attitudes towards work, and their skills. Attitude is more important than skills
Interviewer	Parents	*Do you think parents and TAFEs and these sorts of things have a role to play as well?*
Employer	Parents	Parents definitely play a role in students' work experience. There is a visible difference between students who have support from their parents, and those who do not. There is a different in work ethics between students whose parents are supportive, and students who view work experience simply as time off school
		You can see the difference between some of the students who have a lot of support from their parents, as opposed to the ones that don't have the support and backing of their parents. You can see the work ethics changing and a lot of parents are very willing to drive their kids off to the work experience and assist them in whatever way that they can, but unfortunately there are those that think that it's just a day off school for them
Employer	Employers and parents' view on collaboration	*One of the things I say to the [work-experience] kids in the presence of teachers and parents is that we are aligned with your parents, we are aligned with your school, so whatever those two groups say and ask of you we are going to ask the same and other people including parents sometimes don't see the importance of that alliance*

Presently, it appears that parents seek information from the school on a one-to-one basis and then use the information to conduct individual discussions with their children at home.

Parent Engagement

The literature suggests that, in general, a key constraint to the success of school transition initiatives for at-risk students of different kinds is the lack of parent engagement in these programs. The OECD (2008) reports that low-SES families' engagement in children's learning at home and at school is lower than in earlier reporting periods. The complex quality of parental engagement in learning is problematised by acknowledging its socioeconomic, gendered, classed and raced nature (Crozier, 2000) and halting a cycle of blaming those families who do not appear to measure up (Mills & Gale, 2004). It remains the case though that schools are

Table 12.6 Parents' perspectives

Speaker	Characters profiled in speakers' talk	Speaker's position
Interviewer	Parents	*I wanted to find out a little bit about yourself and your children and then talk about different sorts of ways that students can have for making a good transition between school and work*
Parent 1	The student and the school	This parent's student is in the ASD spectrum. The parent, family, school and friends noticed a significant increase in the student's confidence and ability to deal with things, since Year 11. The parent believes that this change was facilitated by the school, especially the YAA Program
Parent	The school	There is a fantastic transitions program and a fantastic leader. This parent talks with the Voc Ed Coordinator—employment recruiting agencies
Parent	Student	This parent encourages their child to gain skills that will be valuable in out-of-school life. This parent also explained how her discussions with her student focused on his not feeling too comfortable about being part of the family business straight after leaving school. She wants him to get some experience in the business first and then to go out and get wider experience and bring it back to a longer term career in the family business
Parent	Parents	This parent encourages their son to not view his Asperger's [syndrome] as a disability or an excuse. So we try not to bombard so, we have tried to you know plant the seed [encouraging an aspirational mindset for employment] and just continually water [that idea to achieve]. The way she does this is to introduce the idea little by little. She just keeps planting because the whole spontaneity thing with him just doesn't work
Interviewer		*Can you think if there was any kind of extra help that parents could get to help their children make the transition from school?*
Parent	Parents as partners in the transition program	This parent believes that a role model who visits school to discuss ideas with students would be helpful
Parents	Parents as supporter of the school	*I spent a lot of time at the school when the first three years anyway, cause Jack had a lot of ups and downs. I was able to go and talk to [the VE coordinator] and support her as best as we could*
Parents	Parents as supporters of students' aspirations	*I really believe that most parents try pretty hard to see their child come out of there [school] and do whatever they want to do*

expected to take the brunt of the load for preparing students for accreditation and exit from school. This is especially the case for non-mainstream communities and schools (MacBeath et al., 2007) such as St Jude's.

For more than 30 years, partnerships between homes and schools, especially those in low-socioeconomic environments, have been at the centre of international debates about school improvement and student achievement. Policy reform and school initiatives have invested heavily in bringing parents into schools. In Australia, first, *the Australian Disadvantaged Schools Program* (DSP), enacting the Karmel Report (1973), opened new opportunities for parents and community participation in decisions not only about school maintenance and finances but also in curriculum matters. Most recently, the *Australian Family–Schools Partnerships Framework* (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2008) reconfirmed this objective. Additionally, it presents partnership principles to support student learning through acknowledging the importance of leadership in building, maintaining and renewing partnerships. Internationally, low-socioeconomic parents remain least likely to be involved in schools (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002; Jeynes, 2005).

There is an emergent home-school partnership research base (Saulwick Muller Social Research, 2006). In Australia, Spry and Graham (2009) have noted in particular Catholic education's attempts to move to more socially just, activist, home-school partnerships by focusing on parent leadership capacities, of which St Jude's is a part. Outside Australia, for example, in New Zealand (Bull, Brooking, & Campbell, 2008), Canada (Clandinin, Pushor, & Murray Orr, 2007) and the United Kingdom (Harris & Goodall, 2007), there is an emerging trend in policy terms of shifting the position of parents as corporate partners to various alternative forms of parental engagement. Sometimes these are at school but also at home—the site with potentially the greatest impact on students' achievement. These alternative approaches commonly seek to 'engage critically with the voices of the least represented beneficiaries … in the construction of reflexive alternatives' (Smyth, 2010, p. 113). The efficacy of this approach for low-SES parents to partner with schools needs to be examined further in the Australian context (Smyth & Hattam, 2001). Currently, there is little empirical evidence into the impact of the family-school partnerships on student learning about school-to-work transitions. What is evident is that when it is absent the consequences can be quite dire. One exception is reported in Bedson and Perkins's (2006) evaluation of the Parents As Career Transition Supports (PACTS) program. PACTS was a pilot project, run by the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) on the Mornington Peninsula on Melbourne's southern fringe. It aimed to empower parents to better support their children's transitions from school to work and/or further education by building parents' knowledge of post-school pathways and today's job market. The pilot ran from late 2003 until December 2005, funded by the federal Department of Education, Science and Training as one of 23 Career and Transition (CAT) Pilot projects around Australia. The PACTS pilot was delivered to at least 598 parents in 12 secondary schools. The program's findings were that careers and transition programs should assist parents to understand careers and the labour market, know how to access and use transitions resources, understand their own influence in the transition process and engage with and support children in

a positive way (Bedson & Perkins, 2006, p. iii). The findings of this report speak directly to the issues identified by the principal and the staff at the college.

The need to consolidate the gains made at St Jude's College, especially as it is under pressure to increase its enrolments, is palpable. One means of achieving this outcome is to concentrate resources on engaging families and community members in more diverse ways to collaborate in the school's transition program. Epstein et al. (2009) suggest six forms of engagement, one of which endorses the upskilling of parents' capacities to make effective education-related decisions by providing parents and interested community members with a systematic program of workshops that provide up-to-date knowledge related to career, further study options and alternative transition pathways for young people. The evaluation of the PACTS program found that:

> … knowing about transitions options was seen to play a significant role in a parent's ability to provide positive and effective support for their children's transitions. Improved confidence—feeling that they had some idea what they were talking about—was the first step towards opening lines of communication with young people about their transitions. PACTS empowered parents by pointing them 'in the right direction' and giving them a better understanding of the maze of pathways. In particular, parents felt they benefited from lessons on how to use the Job Guide; techniques to help young people match their interests with a career; and understanding that there are certain decisions and steps young people must make for themselves. (Bedson & Perkins, 2006, p. iv)

Presently, it appears that parents seek out information about post-school options for their children from the school. The school's distributed leadership model could perhaps be extended to the parent and community body, more fully to increase support for students to transition from school in place of that which is not being provided by parents. Yet, more strategically, raising of parents' and the community's awareness about the high possibility of needing to transition across careers during a working life, due to voluntary and involuntary circumstances, could value add to the staff input (Fouad & Bynner, 2008).

Supporting Effective Transitions

Informed by the case study of St Jude's College, this chapter argues that in the Queensland context where families are relatively free to choose schools, albeit with financial constraints of meeting tuition fees in the private and Catholic systems, school curricula must meet the requirements of the targeted student cohort and their families. This chapter focuses on what is working in the school-to-employment transitions curriculum for students who might in other circumstances be considered at risk of leaving school early and without the necessary capital for a productive start to post-school life.

A key feature of the success of this case study school is the underpinning philosophy shared by the school, parents and community that these students are resources to be nurtured for individual and national posterity. This case study profiles a school where being a student 'at risk' does not mean traversing a pathway to failure. Students

are not understood or treated as deficit or disabled. It is also clear from the analysis of data that students see themselves as part of the same productive discourse. Follow-on evidence shows that at this school students are in the main engaged, many are participating in work while at school, and most are on track to complete a school-leaving accreditation. That is, the transition arrangements in place at St Jude's College are already enabling students to meet the requirements of Queensland government legislation, as outlined in *Education and Training Reforms for the Future* (Queensland Government Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2002). The risk is that the staff are in danger of not being able to uphold the standard. Alternatively the school might encourage families and communities to re-imagine what it means to engage with their children's schooling (see Johnson & Jervis Tracey, 2011). This chapter outlines an evidence-based pathway for parents and community to assist in maintaining and extending what is already working in one college. In all, it emphasises that realising effective transitions for students who are potentially at risk is not something which can be wholly managed and secured by schools alone. Instead, there is a requirement for the fulsome engagement of local employers and perhaps the most local of sources of support: students' parents.

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Chapter 13
The Impact of Interrupted Schooling: Recent School Leavers' Accounts of Transitions

Esther Beltermann, Jill Ryan, and Stephen Billett

Transitions: Structural and Personal Factors

In recent years, a number of studies ranging from large-scale surveys to more focused, primarily qualitative, research on particular groups of young people have made important contributions to understanding the range of factors which may be involved in post-school transitions in contemporary times. The diversity of approaches to the topic is evident in research which in turn is grounded in equally diverse theoretical assumptions. Therefore, it is not surprising that contradictory perspectives occasionally emerge. The perennially thorny issue in social research of the relative importance of structural factors and individual agency is one that has emerged in the study of young people's transition processes and outcomes. In the first section of this chapter, we look briefly at how this debate has played out in some recent transition research and present a framework for the research reported here.

The research involved a thematic analysis of first-hand accounts of transition from nine recent school leavers. Thus, it aligns with many other small-scale qualitative studies that have sought more nuanced understandings of how particular factors, identified in many larger surveys, play out with particular students. The specific context in which the study was undertaken has emerged in the last decade in Queensland

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as reforms to senior schooling policy in the state have made it virtually compulsory for all students to complete the equivalent of 12 years of schooling. The key features of these reforms and their impact on senior schooling are outlined in the second section of this chapter.

The remainder of this chapter describes the study itself, beginning with the key research questions, the approach adopted to answer them and the process of recruiting participants. The accounts of transition that were generated from our interviews with recent school leavers were initially coded in terms of the participants' perceptions categorised into three broad contexts—school experiences, workplace experiences and other community experiences (i.e. those which do not fall into the first two categories). In this chapter, reflecting the emphasis of the participants' accounts, we focus our attention on their experiences in school contexts. In particular, we look at the extent to which they planned their school career and how they engaged with the flexibility of senior schooling. We draw on these analyses to examine some of the implications of the current Queensland policy on post-school transitions for young people such as the participants in the study.

Conceptualising Transitions

When considering what constitutes transitions, it is helpful to consider the relations between structural and personal factors that shape this process for young people. In the following sections, these concepts are elaborated, and a consideration of affordances of social settings and practices used to explain these relationships is advanced.

Structure and Agency

Transition is a recurring topic in youth studies research and policy: either in the broader sense of the transition from childhood to adulthood or more narrowly, as it is considered in this study, as the transition from school to work. The conceptualisation of transition, though, is often contested. For example, Stokes and Wyn (2007, p. 495) maintain that the term transition provides 'a limited and outmoded conceptual frame for understanding young people's engagement with work and learning'. They suggest that notions of transition that inform much current youth policy focus largely on outcomes, and that a reconceptualisation of transition as a dynamic, idiosyncratic, non-linear process of identity development might offer a more useful way of thinking about young people's experiences as they move through the later stages of schooling to further education and/or employment.

While acknowledging the shortcomings of the term transition, Shildrick and MacDonald (2007) claim that the contestation over its usefulness is essentially another facet of the agency/structure debate. That is, researchers who question the notion of transition are arguing that many current studies in the field place too much

emphasis on how social structures can predetermine transitions and not enough emphasis on the active, reflexive role of young people in the transition process. They contend that even though contemporary youth transitions may be more complex than they were in previous times, there is still value in taking a 'broad and long view of youth transitions, situated in a panorama of socio-economic change' in order to understand 'the twists and turns of individual biographies and the coming together of these in socially structured patterns of inclusion, exclusion and inequality' (Shildrick & MacDonald, p. 589).

In their argument, Shildrick and MacDonald note that a concept such as 'bounded agency', which acknowledges that individual decision-making may be constrained by macro-social structures (Evans & Furlong, 2001 cited in Shildrick & MacDonald, 2007), can be a useful way around this impasse. Another way to accommodate the interplay of social structure and individual agency in conceptualising youth transitions has been used by researchers in a large-scale research project conducted by the European Group for Integrated and Social Research (EGRIS) (Biggart, du Bois-Reymond, & Walther, 2006). At the heart of their analysis is a notion of motivation, not as a personal disposition but as a far more dynamic accomplishment that results from experience in particular social contexts. Learning, in a very broad sense, is also an essential component in the EGRIS transition framework (Biggart et al., 2006):

> Biographical transitions imply a passage from one status to another; from one set of role expectations to another, and these are necessarily connected to *learning* processes. (p. 12)

Specifically, the conceptual framework for the EGRIS study proposes that young people's motivation to learn occurs as a result of participation in decisions which affect their lives and is therefore dependent not just on their ability to actively negotiate between personal interest and the demands of the society but as well on their access to resources and opportunities to enable such participation.

Affordances and Engagements

In devising a framework for the current study, we concur with Shildrick and MacDonald's view that a detailed examination of transition should attend to both broad social structures and individual biographies, although the in-depth interviews with recent school leavers who comprise this study mean that our analytical focus, in the first instance, is on individual accounts of transition. To contextualise these accounts in broader social categories, we have drawn initially on the motivation and participation framework adopted in the EGRIS project. However, in order to understand the process of transition as relational rather than subjective or intrinsic, we have incorporated the notion of affordances into the framework.

The conceptual scope of the term *affordances* has evolved considerably since the 1970s when it was originally used by Gibson to link the way that individuals perceive objects in the environment with how they subsequently act. He explained: '…the affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides

or furnishes, either for good or ill' (Gibson, 1979, p. 127 cited in McGrenere & Ho, 2000, p. 1). In this study, we draw on a conceptualisation of affordance that has been developed by Billett (2002a, 2002b, 2004, 2006) to explore how workplaces can be viewed as spaces that can be more or less supportive of learning. The relational perspective of Billett's interpretation of affordances, as the 'invitational qualities' of a space, focuses our attention on the interdependence of the environment and the individual in the process of transition.

In other words, while the conceptions of motivation and participation developed for the EGRIS project acknowledge the duality of structure and agency in young people's transitions, we sought to reinforce two particular points about contemporary youth transitions. First, that an individual's motivation to learn through participation is neither simply a subjective response to a particular set of circumstances, nor do those circumstances possess intrinsic properties that either enable or constrain individuals, resulting in participation or non-participation, respectively. Rather, the transition to post-school life is better understood as an interdependence between the affordances of the various physical and social environments in which young people find themselves and their engagement—how they elect to take up that participation—with what is afforded by the different environments.

The variety of pathways that are available to young people as they make their post-school transitions is the second point that we sought to emphasise. For instance, the senior school policy reforms that are outlined in the next section mean that students may participate in senior schooling across and between different sites. In addition, many young people undertake casual or part-time work in their final years of secondary schooling. Framing transition in this way enables us to move beyond the notion of transition as a single movement from one context and its practices (school) to another context and its associated practices (either straight to work or to work via higher education). Instead, it can more accurately reflect the ebb and flow between concurrent attendance at school together with part-time or casual employment, or participation in school- or community-based work experiences, and/or other community institutions, which are characteristic of many young people's lives today.

'Earning or Learning': The Queensland Senior Secondary Education Policy Context

Over the last decade, policy decisions have led to reforms of senior secondary schooling across Australian education systems (see Chap. 8). In essence, the purpose of the reforms has been to develop a more inclusive senior phase of schooling to allow more young people to participate in some form of education or vocational training beyond Year 10. Governments have argued that this will enable more young people to develop the necessary skills to engage productively in an increasingly complex world, thus ensuring better prospects for themselves and for the nation as a whole.

The changes to legislation and the senior school curriculum that occurred in Queensland have been described in more detail in Chap. 9. An important aspect of these reforms was an acknowledgement that many young people are not motivated to participate in academic courses that have traditionally been the mainstay of senior schooling. Therefore, to encourage more students to participate successfully in the senior years of school, several changes were initiated. First, the senior curriculum was broadened and made more flexible to ensure that all young people would be engaged in 'worthwhile' learning (Pitman & Herschel, 2002). The range of learning options for senior students was extended over a variety of settings so that senior school subjects, vocational education and training courses, workplace and community learning and university subjects undertaken while still at school could all count towards a QCE. Second, students were provided with opportunities to plan for their education and future career through Senior Education and Training (SET) plans based on their abilities, interests and goals. The SET plan is an agreement between the student, their parent or caregiver and the school that is initially formulated in Year 10. Ideally, according to policy, (Queensland Studies Authority, 2004), SET plans should be revisited periodically thereafter. Career guidance is also an integral part of SET planning. Lastly, students were required to register and open a 'learning account' with the Queensland Studies Authority. This would enable them to record details of their studies and to monitor their progress towards a QCE (Queensland Studies Authority, 2010). The flexibility of the senior curriculum and the provision of education planning procedures might be thought of as affordances that invite more young people to remain in education during the compulsory participation phase. As such, they provide apposite starting points for examining the perceptions of post-school transition experiences that are held by the participants of the study.

The Research Approach

Despite the reforms outlined in the previous section, some young Queenslanders still fail to engage, or struggle in their engagement, with senior secondary schooling. In this study, our goal was to understand the transition experience from the point of view of recent school leavers who might be characterised as having struggled through their final years at school. The impetus for this selection, in terms of the overall program of research reported in the second part of this book, was a belief that interviews with such young people would provide a valuable counterpoint to the data which would be gathered from the interviews with current students in case study schools (see Chaps. 10, 11 and 12).

Two strategies were adopted to recruit the participants for the study. Information about the study was forwarded (1) through a youth affairs network's email newsletter to providers of youth services throughout the state and (2) through people in community organisations whom we already knew and anticipated might have contact with the target group. Ethical considerations meant that the recruitment process was a lengthy one. The initial recipients of the information were required to liaise itera-tively between potential participants and researchers over some

weeks before interview times could be arranged and informed consent to participate in the study could be obtained. Based on the previous transition literature, we did suggest in our recruitment information some characteristics of the former students whom we sought to interview (e.g. poor academic achievement at school, leaving school before completing Year 12 without the prospect of work). However, the initial judgement of whom to approach was made by the youth workers that we contacted. The nine participants whom we interviewed were drawn from the three youth service providers and one individual contact that persevered through the recruitment process.

Table 13.1 presents an overview of these nine recent school leavers (pseudonymously named) who contributed to the study. We categorised the participants into two broad categories: early school leavers and Year 12 completers. Early school leavers have been defined as those who leave school before completing Year 12 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999, 2001). More recently, some transition-related research has proposed that participation in either school or vocational alternatives provides a broader, more appropriate categorisation and has examined the factors associated with non-completion of school or its vocational equivalents (Curtis & McMillan, 2008). Under this broader category, five of the study's participants— Shawn, Lisa, David, Patrick and Adam—could be identified as early school leavers. Such young people have been the subject of considerable research in Australia (Curtis & McMillan, 2008; Hodgson, 2007; Lamb, Dwyer, & Wyn, 2000; Marks & Fleming, 1999; Queensland Government: Department of Education & Training and the Arts, 2008, 2009; Taylor, 2009; and see Teese et al., 2000). The other four participants—Aaron, Catie, Jenna and Carl—had all completed Year 12 at the end of the previous year. However, in different ways, their experiences of the transition process did not fit the Queensland policy's vision of students who, together with their parents and their teachers, carefully plan and then embark on individual journeys through the flexible and inclusive senior phase of learning.

Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit information about how the participants perceived their transition from school to post-school life. Comparability between the interviews was maintained by asking participants the same general questions about their experiences at school and other educational institutions; in workplaces, either as paid workers or as part of some structured work placement organised through school; or in any other community activities in which they had been involved. The semi-structured approach enabled the interviewer to engage with the participants flexibly and to follow up on individual participants' responses (Flick, von Kardorff, Keupp, von Rosenstiel, & Wolff, 1995).

The interviews took place in four provincial cities in southeast Queensland, Australia. All of the interviews were conducted in an environment familiar to the young people: eight of the nine participants were interviewed at the youth service that had been our initial contact; the ninth was interviewed at his home. At two of these locations, the participants requested to be interviewed together—a pair at the first service provider and a group of three at the second. The other four participants were interviewed individually. We were mindful that group interviews could present particular problems associated with 'the dynamics of self-disclosure'

Table 13.1 Overview of interviewees' participation in 'learning or earning' during their transition phase

Participants (gender)	Age	Age left school	Current participation in 'learning or earning'	Previous participation in 'learning or earning'
Aaron (m)	18	17	Job seekers' program (short course—linked to payment of Youth Allowance)	Completed Year 12, commenced school-based apprenticeship at school (discontinued), completed an initial work preparation program
Shawn (m)	17	16	Job seekers' program (short course—linked to payment of Youth Allowance)	Left school in Year 11; has had casual jobs at a supermarket, unloading shipping containers, making tool boxes at a steel factory; completed an initial work preparation program
Lisa (f)	17	16	*Get set for work* program	Left school in Year 11, has completed short TAFE course (Cert II)
David (m)	15	15	*Get set for work* program	Left school in Year 10, has worked as a cabinet painter and car painter
Patrick (m)	15	15	*Get set for work* program	Left school in Year 10, commenced apprenticeship as chef (discontinued)
Jenna (f)	19	15/18	–	Left school after Year 10; returned to complete Years 11 and 12 after year's break; some (unspecified) casual work during the break from school; commenced traineeship in office administration after Year 12 (discontinued)
Carl (m)	24	23	TAFE: Diploma in Accounting	Completed Year 12 (secondary school in Australia Year 9–12); previous education to Year 6 in country of origin
Catie (f)	18	16/17	Traineeship in office administration	Left school during Year 12 for several months but returned to complete year, had casual jobs in a bakery and a fast-food outlet while still at school and while waiting for a 'real' job
Adam (m)	16	15	Casual work in produce store	Completed Year 10 (modified program including some work experience); completed a work preparation program

(Morgan, 1998, p. 90). Nevertheless, we acceded to their preference for the group interview as we saw this arrangement as one that would best establish rapport and a sense of trust with the participants. Such arrangements, we believed, would enhance opportunities to gather rich data by encouraging the participants to talk freely and ascribe meaning to their experiences.

As Table 13.1 shows, six male and three female participants aged between 15 and 24 contributed to the study. Interviews were conducted in March and April of 2009, and all interviewees had been enrolled in Year 10, 11 or 12 at state secondary schools in the previous year, though some had not regularly attended school in that time. In the next section, we briefly describe the youth services through which our participants had been located for the study and the explanations they gave for their current circumstances.

The Participants and Their Immediate Post-school Circumstances

Apart from Adam, the final participant listed in Table 13.1, who had been identified through a personal contact, the participants were contacted through a range of youth services. While each of these services worked with young people, they had diverse purposes. The first was part of a multipurpose community-based organisation with a focus on fostering employment opportunities, particularly for those from migrant and refugee backgrounds. One aspect of the youth services' component of the organisation was to provide high-level support for young people who had disengaged from the education system. It offered employment services including short-term government-funded programs designed to improve employment prospects but also allowed local youth to use the facilities more informally.

Shawn, who had left school at 16 to take up work, and his friend Aaron who had left the same school at 17 but had not yet found a job, were contacted through this centre. Both had previously attended an initial work preparation program at the centre but, at the time of interviewing, were participating in a similar type of course through a private provider. However, they continued to 'drop in' to the community centre a couple of afternoons a week. The centre still welcomed them—ostensibly to assist in their job searching but also for recreation (playing computer games and meeting friends).

The second community-based centre offered a structured work preparation program catering specifically for young people aged between 15 and 17 who had disengaged from the education system. Lisa, David and Patrick all participated in this program. Lisa, who was 17, had left school early in Year 11, in the previous year. In the intervening time, she had participated in a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Certificate II course that she hoped would help her prepare for the hairdressing job she wanted. David and Patrick had both left school at the end of Year 10 when they were 15 years old. Both indicated that behaviour management issues during their final year had played a part in their leaving.

Lisa's mother and David's parents had found out about the program and encouraged them to attend. Patrick had found out about it through a friend.

The third youth service which provided participants for the study was primarily involved in assisting young people who, because of family breakdown, were at risk of becoming homeless. Although we had negotiated to interview several early school leavers at this centre, none were present on the day we had arranged. Instead, we interviewed three recent school leavers who had completed Year 12 at the end of the previous year.

The first, Jenna, had first become a client of the youth service when she had left home and school at 15. She had since returned to school to complete Year 12 and had also found somewhere to live. She had commenced a traineeship in office administration after finishing Year 12, but she had discontinued it after a few weeks. She hoped to enrol in a Certificate in Social Work through TAFE when the next course commenced. In the meantime, she had returned to the centre hoping they might be able to help her in achieving this goal.

Carl was a member of a sizable refugee community in the city who had found his way to the service through friends. He visited the centre to receive informal assistance with the written assessment associated with his studies. Although he had lost all the members of his immediate family in his country's civil war, he had support from the refugee community, which included members of his extended family. After Year 12, he had commenced an accounting course at the city's TAFE college. Carl stands apart from the other eight participants in many ways: his age, his experience of war with the consequential dislocation from formal education, movement to a new country and status as a refugee and orphan. It is perhaps not unexpected then that his reflections of transition differ in many respects from the other participants'. Strictly speaking, in moving straight from Year 12 to full-time study at TAFE, his transition can be defined as successful rather than as troubled. Nevertheless, we have included his account as part of the data set as representing a different sort of struggle with transition and one that can shed some light on the assumptions underlying policy.

The third interviewee, Catie, had moved interstate during her last year of school and identified difficulties in coping with new subjects she was forced to take as the reason for leaving school part way through Year 12. However, after some months' absence, she had decided to return to school eventually completing the year and gaining a QCE. She had just commenced a traineeship in office administration at the youth service's office.

The final participant, Adam, reported having experienced difficulties in school for many years. During Year 10, he had participated in a modified school program. He left school at the end of that year with his parent's support. Between finishing school and being interviewed, he had participated in a job preparation program. When interviewed, he was working one day a week at a produce store.

In order to examine the various accounts of transition experienced by the participants, interviews were fully transcribed and then coded and analysed using NVivo software. In accordance with our framework, we sought to understand what participants perceived as the affordances for transition that schools, workplaces

and other community institutions might offer and how they explained their motivation to engage, or to resist engagement, with these affordances.

Recent School Leavers' Perceptions of the Transition Process

Although our initial framework had envisaged young people moving across a broad range of school, work and community settings with each contributing to the overall transition experience, the reality for our participants was not quite so varied. All had had school experiences over the last year, though for most, workplace experiences were limited to those that had been organised through the school they attended. As well, of course, some had participated, or were still participating, in initial work preparation programs. When asked to identify any other activities they had participated in since they left school, only two could nominate any organised involvement in the wider community: sports (Catie) and volunteering at his church's vacation care program (Carl). For the others, most of their leisure time was spent 'hanging out' with friends. To reflect the scope of their accounts, we limit our discussion here to their perceptions of school experiences, though workplace experiences are touched on in the discussion of the flexible curriculum. Specifically, in terms of school affordances, we focus on the extent to which they have taken up the invitation to plan their future education and training and how they have responded to the range of curriculum offerings available to them.

School Experiences: Planning for the 'Compulsory Participation' Phase

As part of the process for informing the processes of school education reform, the Queensland government commissioned a number of reports. One of these (Pitman & Herschel, 2002) looked specifically at the senior phase of learning. They proposed that participation in senior schooling should involve young people making 'individualised commitments', that is, 'each learner must take responsibility for his or her own learning' (p. 49). The proposal was taken up by the Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF) policy (2002) in the requirement that schools develop individual student plans for the senior phase of learning. As outlined earlier, these SET plans are an agreement between students, their parents or guardians and the school. The SET planning process is initiated in Year 10, and at this stage, it is often highly scaffolded for students. Even so, as SET plans appear to acknowledge, young people may need adult assistance to fully appreciate the individualised commitment they are making. Though the opportunity for SET planning is likely seen as an affordance from a policy and a school perspective, it did not appear to be seen in the same light by the recent school leavers in the study.

Perhaps what was most striking about their accounts was that, apart from Carl's, planning for the future barely rated a mention. Certainly, many were able to articulate

a desire to leave school and get a job; but details about a specific type of work or what might be required to get that work were sketchy. Any job, as long as they could leave school, would do. To illustrate how SET planning may not always be a motivational element of senior schooling, a comparison of Carl's and Jenna's quite different approaches to thinking about the future is revealing.

Carl and Jenna had one thing in common: neither had parents to support them through their senior schooling. Though while Carl was able to talk, at times with great poignancy, about his parents' ambitions for him when he was a child, Jenna recollected a more precarious childhood with parents 'who weren't really there'. Even though both were older than average senior school students, both had recognised the need to have adults with more worldly experience to help them through their senior schooling. Carl had cousins 'who have always been there to tell me the things that I should do like my studies'; 'who just kind of make [me] happy'; but who also helped him in very practical ways so that he was been able to complete high school and begin TAFE study. His teachers also played an important and helpful role, both in his everyday school life and in his planning for the future, as they supported him in organising school-related tasks and advising him about future careers.

In contrast, from the time Jenna left home during her first attempt at Year 11, her transition appears to have been shaped by a number of spur-of-the-moment decisions. Even her most recent decision to leave her traineeship seems to have been sudden:

I got a job in January. And I worked until February. And then, recently, I've just had time off from that. I'm trying to see if I could do something else, like, what I was doing wasn't really what I wanted to do.

She explained what she describes as her philosophy of life:

No plans. My life doesn't revolve around plans. I just, you never know if you're going to wake up in the morning or not. So you live every day like it's your last day.

At one point in the interview, she contrasted the lack of support she received from her parents when she was younger with the help she received from the youth service when she returned to school. She described them as 'like a family' and explained how they encouraged and supported her to continue her education. It is probably not surprising then that, after this positive experience, she has returned to the same youth service to see if they can help her to enrol in TAFE to complete a social work course.

It would be all too easy to extrapolate from Jenna's account and suggest that neglectful parents are one of the main reasons for troubled transitions. However, amongst the other participants, it is only Patrick who describes a similar sort of family dislocation. For the others, families appear to play an important part in their life and, particularly, in their school and career planning, even though that planning may seem fairly perfunctory. The simple desire to get a job is explained in several of the interviews by identifying strongly with family members who had not gone on to complete Year 12, but nevertheless had good jobs. Shawn's comments about his family exemplify this. His extended family encourages him 'all the time' to get a job. They have been instrumental in the past in helping him get a number of casual jobs. At the time of his interview, he is looking for work since in his previous job 'the work was getting quiet'. This represents the

norm for the family: all his cousins have 'good paying jobs' even though only one of them 'finished school'. 'That's us as family' he concludes. It's easy to see how his plans revolve around getting a job rather than continuing with further education. The implicit neoliberal sentiments that underpin the notion of SET planning—taking personal responsibility for starting out on a lifelong learning process—may have little meaning for young people, like Shawn, and their families. While his family has the social networks to enable him to apparently obtain unskilled, casual work with relative ease, this is not the sort of social capital that enables them 'to exploit the education system to their children's advantage' (Gewirtz, 2001, p. 367). The sets of attributes possessed by middle-class parents which advantage their children in school, which Gewirtz identified being active consumers of education who closely monitor what schools provide and possessing particular forms of cultural and social capital, are the very prerequisites that are implicit in the SET planning process. Without access to these appropriate forms of social and cultural capital, SET plans appear to have little traction.

School Experiences: The Flexible Curriculum

Pitman and Herschell's (2002) report also proposed that students have a greater degree of flexibility during the senior phase of schooling. This recommendation was incorporated into the ETRF policy, and, as a result, many schools broadened their senior curriculum by offering vocationally oriented school subjects and making it possible for students to combine study at school with a traineeship or apprenticeship. This usually involves 1 or 2 days a week in the workplace with the remainder of time undertaking a reduced set of subjects at school.

But by the time the three youngest interviewees had reached Year 10 and were able to take advantage of the more flexible senior school curriculum, all had already decided that they would be leaving at the first opportunity. Adam, David and Patrick all described their time at school in terms of coping with learning and behavioural difficulties, with little help from unsympathetic teachers. Rather than referring to recent school events to explain their departure from school, they each turned to more distant events—changing primary schools, not regularly attending school for over a year while travelling overseas with family and difficult family circumstances—which they saw as contributing to ongoing problems at school and the desire to leave as soon as possible.

Both Adam and Patrick had been offered a more flexible curriculum in their final year of school. During Year 10, Adam had participated in a modified school program. In relating this, Adam's earlier, largely negative assessment of teachers is countered by his recollection of how a particular teacher, Mr Brown (a pseudonym), had helped him during Year 10:

> There was one Mr Brown like if I got in trouble at school he'd always try and help me and he gave me a part time job so that I could do just English and maths and then I worked the rest of the time that I had to be at school so that was good. But the one job that I did get it

wasn't that good and I just went back to normal school and just did English and maths and had spares like in all the other subjects. So then I'd just do my assignments and then spares and stuff so it made it easier for me. Mr Brown is not really a teacher he's the principal but he made it easier for me to learn.

He concluded, 'I didn't like school; some people do, some people like school so it's really up to you if you like school or not'.

Throughout the interview, Patrick related a number of stories of his flexible participation in Years 9 and 10. On one occasion, he explained that he 'dropped out' of Year 9 to take up an apprenticeship, but then discontinued that because 'the job sucked'. He also talked about being offered an apprenticeship at a local restaurant:

… they said I was excelling so they gave me an apprenticeship and I did about a year from, like, the start of last year to the start of this year and then I just basically, yeah, drugs and stuff.

Finally, he told how the school counsellor had tried to get him to stay on at school and take up a school-based apprenticeship:

But that didn't work. Like cause I got kicked out of all Queensland schools. I'm not allowed in any of them cause I got expelled. So that made it hard for me to get where I wanted to be.

Looking beyond the variations in these accounts, it is still fairly clear that Patrick recognised that an apprenticeship provided an alternative, potentially more productive, pathway through school and into work. He presented himself as someone who is both capable and motivated, but like Adam, this motivation was thwarted by his desire to leave school: 'I didn't really want to be there [at school] I just wanted to get a job and move out of there'.

Three other participants, Aaron, Shawn and Lisa, had also followed a more vocationally oriented pathway during their senior schooling. Although both Shawn and Aaron made many negative comments about teachers and schools that were similar to the younger participants', they could also identify the affordances of the subjects they had selected. Shawn who felt he was wasting his time at school could still concede that vocationally oriented subjects such as one he had taken had a role in 'like preparing us for apprenticeships in like building, construction, yeah'. Aaron agreed: '[The school] helped me get an apprenticeship and that, and pushed us along, but while I was in school I was just too lazy but I had to like keep doing it'. Shawn later adds a final comment on the topic: 'I don't know really, the building was alright at the start but then I just did the same stuff and the teachers just said it was up to us to make something of our lives'.

Whereas Shawn and Aaron's first choice for senior schooling had been a vocational pathway, Lisa's route was somewhat different. Her account of her school experiences is couched in terms of disappointment with what she expected:

I always had in mind that I wanted to do year 12, I wanted to get an OP and everything, but then that kind of just went downhill for me. I decided I didn't want to do that.

The pressure of senior secondary schooling led her initially to change from academic to vocational subjects at school, and eventually, when she was still finding

it difficult to cope with these, to leave school and to enrol in a TAFE course. In explaining to us why she had not heeded the advice given to her by family and friends, she asserts:

> They seem to always say "Stay in school - go through Year 11 and 12." and everything… [but] school's not for everyone. You know, it wasn't for me.

Lisa's lack of identification with the world of school is reiterated in Adam's conclusion 'it's really up to you if you like school or not'; in Patrick's claim 'I didn't really want to be there, I just wanted to get a job and move out of there'; and when Shawn explains 'I just got sick of school, had enough of it'. Thus, despite the affordances of a flexible curriculum, these young people have still not experienced school as a participatory environment, that is, one which motivated them to stay on in order to improve their future employment prospects. Although Aaron had stayed and completed Year 12, his comments indicate that while he might have been in attendance, he too had not been motivated to engage fully with the affordances that a school-based apprenticeship presented.

In one sense, these responses can be interpreted as having some sense of agency. In the general tenor of their statements, there is a realisation that, in order to make some sense of forward movement in their transition to adulthood, they will need to venture outside of the formal education system. As has been found in other studies (Khoo & Ainley, 2005; Lamb, Walstab, Teese, Vickers, & Rumberger, 2004), for some of them, this was not a sudden realisation but was the result of a long-term disengagement from schooling. On the other hand, and contrary to our conceptualisation of motivation, the recent school leavers seem to perceive their lack of motivation as a personal failing. Adam's and Patrick's accounts of schooling draw on a diagnosis of behavioural and learning problems; Aaron and Shawn see themselves as 'slack' and 'lazy', and Lisa talks about her inability to cope with stress. Blaming themselves may be a response to their perception of schools as non-participatory settings, but in some ways, it is also a self-fulfilling prophecy. The provision of a more flexible senior school curriculum may encourage some students to remain in school when they would otherwise leave. However, for others who have already decided that the school environment does not cater for them, it seems that a flexible curriculum may not be sufficiently invitational.

Conclusion

This study was guided by the belief that the experiences of transition can be understood through a consideration of the participatory practices that are afforded to and engaged with by young people both within a school environment and outside the school in community and workplace settings. Thus, rather than separating out learning from working, we aimed to understand transition through a consideration of the overlap of both context and practice. That is, we were interested in how classroom experiences, school-based work experiences, part-time work and/or any

other community involvement could contribute to a young person's experience of transition. However, in emphasising continuities between school and work, our way of thinking about transition seems to be at odds with many of our participants' perceptions. For the five early school leavers and Aaron, the distinctions they made between the different worlds of school and work were clear and consistent, if at times based more on wishful thinking than on personal experience. Jenna's predisposition to live in the moment also seemed at odds with making connections between learning and earning. Catie's traineeship and Carl's TAFE study were really the only exceptions. When looking at the data, it is evident that youth services play an important role for many young people who become disengaged from school. That is, as well as families and teachers, youth workers in the community were seen as valuable sources of support and advice. It seems that reforming the senior school curriculum may not be a sufficiently motivating and participatory experience to convince all young people of the worthiness of Pitman and Herschell's (2002) vision that:

> … As a result of their educational experience, students are eager and able to pursue lifelong learning, and do so — formally and informally — as life chances present themselves. (p. 5)

In addition to reforms in senior schooling, young people appear to need support and guidance from trusted adults to help them negotiate the challenges of transition. Families may afford such support for many students. However, for others, community institutions and agencies, located outside the formal education system, provide an alternative source of guidance and support, and their role in post-school transitions needs to be more widely recognised.

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Chapter 14
The Translation of Transitions Policies into School Enactment

Cheryl Sim, Stephen Hay, Greer Johnson, and Sue Thomas

The Contexts of Post-school Transitions: International, National, Local

For three decades in Australia, the transition of young people from senior schooling to post-school destinations has generated a raft of policies and much debate amongst policymakers and academics. More than a quarter of a century ago, Kemmis, Cole and Suggett noted:

> A common strategy used by policy makers for promoting change is the formulation of a new rhetoric, a new set of words that in shorthand way encapsulates the reasons for the desired change … Transition education sits in a prominent position in the current hierarchy of education rhetoric. (1983, pp. 1–2)

At that time, the debate in Australia around transitions was largely centred on concerns with collapsing youth labour markets and youth unemployment due to economic restructuring (Sweet, 1987). However, since the national policy, *Strengthening Australia's Schools,* was introduced in 1988 (Dawkins, 1988), the rhetoric driving policy on transitions has been focused more on the need for developing high-level occupational skills deemed necessary for maintaining competitiveness in an increasingly globalised and competitive economy. This policy focus reflects the growing influence of intergovernmental agencies such as the OECD which has set itself the task of identifying common policy problems in education and highlighting preferred solutions (Henry, Lingard, Rizvi, & Taylor, 2001; Peters, 2001;

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Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Consequently, the OECD's statistical surveys and international comparisons have been very influential in achieving an international policy consensus regarding the importance for countries and regions to achieve near universal rates of Year 12 completion. These completion rates have, accordingly, been interpreted by policymakers globally as a proxy measure of a country's future economic competitiveness (Hay, 2009; Wolf, 2004). It follows, therefore, that the policy focus on increasing the proportion of young people completing Year 12 or its equivalent is common across both the Australian case studies and transitions research reported in Part II of this volume from North America and Europe.

In the Australian context, policy relating to transitions has also been influenced by the local political context as evidenced by the widespread adoption of social investment policy approaches in education. It was noted in Chap. 8 that within social investment, education and training are regarded as a key policy instruments for achieving the dual objectives of securing economic competitiveness through human capital development and supporting social inclusion by improving people's employability. Social investment is an example of a post-bureaucratic political program (Maroy, 2009) that, through various social governance strategies, seeks to shift responsibility for solving social and economic problems away from government and on to stakeholders such as communities, interest groups and individuals (Rose, 1999, 2000). As such, the process of the Senior Education and Training (SET) planning for the school case studies reported here is significant as it provides the Queensland Government with a mechanism for making stakeholders at the level of schools and their communities responsible for managing transition risks for young people through their curriculum decisions. It is noteworthy that these case studies required data to be gathered not only from school teachers and students but also parents and employers as they become part of the transition process.

As noted in Chap. 10 (Hay and Sim), SET plans are a strategy aimed at managing transitions principally for those students who are at greatest risk of failing to complete Year 12. Yet, it became evident that the strategy was adopted and adapted in different ways across the three school contexts investigated in this study, thereby emphasising the importance of factors associated with the enactment of education policy. In short, a global sentiment, captured in federal schooling funding priorities and exercised in particular ways through state government policies, was still subject to localised factors at the school level that shaped its implementation. Clearly, policies aimed at retaining students in schooling have increased accountability of schools to assist students to make productive post-school transitions. However, as the case studies demonstrate, issues of and concerns about risk are not equally distributed across schools or across student populations. The unequal distribution of risk across schools significantly influences the range and diversification of strategies employed across schools: albeit all aimed at realising the uniform goal of managing and realising effective transitions for high school students.

By what has come to be an accepted definition of 'risky transitions' in Australia—that is, exiting school and not entering either employment or further education and training (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 1998, 2007)—students leaving school to enter higher education are considered relatively low risk. Chapter 10 drew on the work of

Teese (2007) and Teese et al. (2000) and emphasised the importance of the enactment of the school curriculum as a crucial element in providing students access to positive post-school experiences. Depending on the kinds of perspectives on curriculum and quality of decision about it at the school level, the curriculum as experienced by students can potentially present barriers to those students who are less academically capable or socially disadvantaged, for instance. Alternatively, as noted in Chap. 12, they can be mandated to address the needs of such students. Accordingly, the pressure on schools to enact their curricula in particular ways and organise school structures to assist students in their transitions is quite distinct and weighs particularly heavily on schools with proportionally larger at-risk populations than those schools possessing the capacity to selectively recruit academically inclined meritorious students whose pathways are more singular: tertiary entrance.

It follows, therefore, that differences in the senior curriculums of schools together with the range of strategies for managing transition is to a large degree a reflection of attempts by schools to manage the central problematic of transitions dependent to their market position or school profile. Illustrating this point, the three Queensland case studies presented in this section show a continuum across the schools in terms of their deviation from traditional academic pathways reflecting differences in the academic capabilities of their student populations. For example, Southside's capacity to select students based on academic ability was reflected in its traditional academic curriculum profile supported by having very few non-Authority subjects (i.e. those not part of the state's standard high school selection of subjects) and VET offerings. In contrast, the student population of Sunny Beach College displayed a wide range of academic abilities. Consequently, as Thomas and Ryan report in Chap. 11, the strategy adopted at this school to cater for students was to diversify the curriculum and to offer academically and vocationally oriented subjects across all year levels. Moreover, there was a greater emphasis on pathways through school-based apprenticeships and traineeships at the school. The school with the greatest numbers of students at risk in their transitions was St. Jude's College as reported in Chap. 12. The mission of this school was focused explicitly on catering for at-risk students. As such, student pathways here have the least connection to the academic curriculum of the three schools with the focus predominately on pathways through vocational education and training and direct entry to employment. In this case, the school's partnerships with local community networks that connected students with training opportunities and employment were privileged over institutional links to higher education through traditional academic pathways.

Students' competitiveness in the academic curriculum and schools' market positioning for securing academically successful students are therefore seen as central to understanding variations in how schools organise their senior curriculum and implement strategies for managing post-school transitions. However, these imperatives interact with a host of other local contingencies influencing how transition policies are enacted in schools. As was evident at each of the three schools and as articulated in the case studies, these factors include the philosophy and ethos of the school, its geographical location, local industry involvement through industry-school partnerships, community engagement, and expectations of parents.

These local contingencies' mediation of policy implementation suggests a conceptualisation of education policy as not so much a product, but a process (Ball, 2008). While there are centrally mandated policies in the Australian states for improving Year 12 completion rates and managing transitions, the critical issue is how these policies have been interpreted and enacted at the level of schools. As Braun, Maguire, and Ball (2010) emphasised, a variety of people, depending on their specific contexts, are involved in interpreting policy. This process of interpretation is salient to the enactment of the policy.

Similarly, Spillane et al. (2002) describe policy enactment as a negotiated and contested process. Contestation is to be expected as it is through curriculum that theories, concepts and ideas are interpreted and enacted as classroom practices, which in turn form the basis of what is intended for and provided as experiences for students. As transition policies are interpreted and translated by actors in a contested process in local sites, what schools do and how they do it becomes a central curriculum issue. Curriculum is constantly being redefined, depending on the context and community in which it is being used. As a consequence, the curriculum development process is complex and contested and leads to distinct curriculum enactments. Indeed, Section C has illuminated the strategies implemented by three differently constituted schools to achieve a productive transition curriculum for their students, albeit in particular and distinct ways.

In Chap. 1, the concept of the 'experienced curriculum'—what students experience and learn from what is planned and enacted by schools—was explained as being accepted as one of the most important curriculum concepts. In the case studies, by inquiring, gathering and considering the accounts of the participating students' experiences, it has been possible to place these alongside the accounts of teachers and parents/carers about what was enacted (i.e. the enacted curriculum) and also what was intended (i.e. the aims and goals of the school and its curriculum as presented in documents and their school websites). In this final chapter, we examine and compare the cases to highlight common themes and differences relating to policy enactment evident in these Australian schools. The differences include diversifying the senior secondary school curriculum by relying to a greater or lesser degree on a range of affordances to support productive transitions.

From Policy to Curriculum Decisions in Schools

The remainder of this chapter illuminates the transition policy enactments across the case studies through a consideration of their curriculum approaches. As noted at the commencement of this chapter, the transition policy environment has been influencing the school curriculum for at least the last three decades. Yet, the final decisions regarding changes to curriculum in response to policy directions are made within individual schools as they strive to assist students' transition to post-school destinations. Stenhouse (1975) defined curriculum tentatively as 'an attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal

in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice' (p. 4). This chapter offers cross-school critical scrutiny of the case study schools' implementation of transition strategies through a comparative approach.

The case studies were conducted in schools from the independent education sector (Southside College) and the Catholic Education sector in Queensland (Sunny Beach College, St. Jude's College). These school case studies identified how some students, about to undertake transitions, come to experience the various programs and structures enacted by these three schools to assist them in effectively managing their post-school transitions.

In examining each case it is clear that each school has introduced particular strategies premised on the expectation of specific stakeholders as well as the human and material resources available to them. This includes the students who are enrolled in these schools. Table 14.1 is organised to accommodate five elements used to synthesise information across the cases. These elements are (1) *context*, (2) *curriculum approach*, (3) *curriculum decisions*, (4) *specific strategies* and (5) *consequences* that can be drawn from the findings within the three school case study chapters. In each row under each of the three schools' cases, key information has been drawn from each school site and summarised. The *context* row is used to identify and aggregate any significant contextual features that would have an impact on curriculum decision-making around post-school transition strategies.

The row below provides an evaluation for each case through the lens of three curriculum approaches. Certainly, there is a range of literature about how curriculum should be evaluated, and these are the source of much debate. In 1974, Eisner and Valance's book—*Conflicting Conceptions of Curriculum*—proposed that the ways in which we think about curriculum and, therefore, often enact it are dominated by five different conceptions: academic rationalist, cognitive processes, self-actualisation, social reconstructionist and technological. Later work revisited these, and during the 1980s, key additions were made including changes that were occurring in the economic and social context of that decade (Vallance, 1986). The value of considering curriculum conceptions for the purposes of this chapter is that these conceptions reflect concerns about the goals of education and, therefore, their evaluation. Three approaches have been created here from a combination of a number of conceptions of curriculum to enable the analysis of the decisions involved in the case study sites around providing transition strategies. It is acknowledged that other conceptions could also be used. The approaches we use are termed (1) transmission, (2) adaptation and (3) transformation. These terms also incorporate the earlier work of Eisner and Vallance (1974), of Kemmis, Cole, and Suggett (1983) and the more recent work of Shawer (2010).

Transmission is used to describe a curriculum approach to transition which incorporates recommendations from policy documents in a technical way and which impacts minimally on the overall senior school curriculum. Overall, these strategies that are introduced often appear as 'added-on' to already existing school curriculum. Kemmis et al.'s (1983) use of the term 'technical approach' to curriculum implementation reflects a similar frame. Overall, the decisions have not engaged with more complex curriculum possibilities, such as providing flexibility in the delivery of in

Table 14.1 A summary of the cases

The case	Southside College	Sunny Beach College	St. Jude's College
Context	Coeducational independent school	Coeducational Catholic school	Catholic coeducational school
	A diverse academic curriculum	A diverse curriculum, recognising both academic and vocational opportunities	Non-mainstream school
	Inner suburb of a large metropolitan city	A regional coastal setting	A rural location adjacent to a large metropolitan city
	Student population from suburbs beyond the local area	Student population from suburbs beyond the local area	Student population from the local community
	82% Studying university entry subjects	65% Students continue to further education and training	Capped enrolments at approx. 250 students
	Around 27% of students awarded one or more VET qualifications	Most students have part-time jobs mainly in hospitality and retail industries	Most move from school to workplaces
	Families are mostly middle class	Importance of casual work to making friends and money but also the development of broad employability skills	At-risk students
			Families are mostly lower-middle to working class
Curriculum approach	Transmission	Adaptation	Adaptation/transformation
	Student success in university bound subjects in the curriculum	Accessibility to a range of academic and vocational offerings in the school	Focused on assisting 'at-risk' students
	Encouragement of school-based traineeships—reliant on parent contacts	Senior school curriculum with a strong vocational component	Strong support mechanism is a school responsibility
	Priority given to transition to university and as a result limited enabling strategies for students in 'alternative' vocational education and training pathways	Transitions are seen as multiple, but still linear as the focus is still on a straight school to work or study pathway	A high emphasis on staff support for the families of the student cohort

Curriculum decisions	Linear approach to pathways with a focus on the processes (e.g. SET plans) Offers only 2 VET Certificate II courses 24 Academic subjects Access to parents for identified work/professional roles as useful resources No work experience	Partnership with TAFEs and universities Close relationships with the immediate local community School certified as registered training organisation Career education subjects and vocational certificate subjects, work placements, apprenticeships and traineeships Encourage volunteer work	Pathways provided by the community seen as facilitating decisions about particular post-school options and, in particular, entry into the workforce Offers a Year 10 school-to-work transition curriculum to assist those students who do not want to complete Year 12 move directly into employment Offers a limited number of places for students with specific learning/social needs to pursue a course of study leading to the Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement (QCIA)
Strategies to assist transition	Careers counsellor Web-based career guidance program Subject selection day Subject selection evening SET plan and interview Industry visits and work experience around accountants, architects, lawyers, some of the larger firms in the city	Specific leadership position Structured work placements Working with industry employers Parental education about senior options Student education about options through core subjects, information days, newsletters and personal communications	All senior students are involved in some sort of vocational program Visiting careers expos and guest speakers School-based structured workplace learning (SWL) Apprenticeships and traineeships

(continued)

Table 14.1 (continued)

The case	Southside College	Sunny Beach College	St. Jude's College
Consequences of decisions	A clear distinction between academic and vocational pathways	Enabling students to keep options open, through the use of selection ranks	High investment of staff time and curriculum design expertise to target student needs
	Identified academic pathways as more desirable choice	Positive towards vocational pathways and the value of students having part-time work	Some employer engagement in school-based curriculum through work placements
	Vocational pathways encouraged for those students who were viewed as having shortcomings such as poor organisational skills	SET planning process viewed by teachers as a catalyst for changing the curriculum	Parent engagement is problematic
	The level of responsibility that parents particularly take for their student's education	A commitment to the future as being about further study—whether TAFE or university	The school's 'can do' assumptions about the capacities of the students to achieve
			Students are successful in winning industry-based awards

school and out of school choices to enable students to fully engage. For Eisner and Vallance (1974), the approach is characterised as being process focused, very concise and specific and systematic.

The second approach—'adaptation'—provides evidence of changes which have clearly incorporated decisions that have resulted in significant change. This approach provides evidence of greater adjustments having been made to respond to community engagement. However, arrangements intending to impact on the underpinning social and economic conditions are limited. One factor in this approach is curriculum decision-making that seeks to provide for real student choices through the enactment. This approach impacts more widely than the first on students and the school community. Kemmis et al. (1983) use the concept of the 'liberal progressive' curriculum in describing decision-making which seeks to change curriculum with learners at the centre of any decision. Eisner and Vallance's (1974) use of the concept 'self-actualisation' incorporates some of these features.

The third curriculum approach may be characterised by community engagement and enables interaction, creativity and participatory decision-making in its implementation. Kemmis et al. (1983) call this approach 'socially critical' as it enacts a social justice imperative such that strategies are focused on assisting those that are disadvantaged in some way. Shawer also describes a similar approach referring to it as 'the enacted' curriculum. Eisner and Vallance's (1974) 'social reconstructionist conception' regards schools as agents of social change. For the purposes of this chapter, although not an ideal term, 'transformation' has been used as a representation of these researchers' concepts.

The table is used to propose that two of the three cases (St. Jude's and Sunny Beach) have an adaptation approach to transition enactment. In many respects, the first and the third cases in the table are at either end of the continuum. Southside is a school that is focused on delivering an academic curriculum. Curriculum decisions appear to be made ensuring that this goal remains its priority. Methods for achieving this curriculum goal, and therefore any changes to curriculum offered in the vocational area, are process driven, ensuring all resources are directed towards progressing students along academic pathways—with only minimal disruption caused by any option other than a transition to university.

The third case, St. Jude's, with its focus on non-academic pathways is very different from Southside. Its curriculum approach reflects its goal of enabling what would be identified as at-risk students to successfully transition to post school work. The concept of social justice is a significant aspect of St. Jude's context. As a site which is specifically designed to engage young people who would be at risk of leaving school early, the consistency of this philosophy is essential to its success. Indeed, St. Jude's philosophy places it outside the competitive schooling market, dominated by selective schools such as Southside, marking it as a very much in demand 'alternative' school.

The range of opportunities in and out of school offered at Sunny Beach, the second school, demonstrates a curriculum approach that is aimed at giving students real choices. Decisions have been made that would have transformed a traditional academic senior curriculum into something much more complex. Community

engagement is evident, but Sunny Beach is more focused on providing opportunities for the students than on opportunities to impact on the community.

The third and fourth rows, *curriculum decisions* and *curriculum strategies*, are interrelated. The information represents what opportunities students are offered to enable their transitions to work or study and also how these opportunities are delivered in the school curriculum context.

At Southside, the major director of transition enactment is the school's careers counsellor (CC). The SET planning process was the catalyst for pathways offered at the school. A process was firmly in place with a timetable for individual student meetings with the CC, and each Year 10 student was expected to complete the requirements for constructing their SET plan. These meetings determine the subjects students chose for their senior years and the choice was dominated by academic subjects that provided entry to university. Using resources gathered by the CC, students were kept informed through a 'Common Time' which all Year 10s and Year 11s attended each week. 'Events' such as information evenings for parents were organised throughout the second part of Year 10. These were the major strategies for parents and their children to hear about options after senior school. Major presenters were TAFE and universities. Information on traineeships and apprentice-ships was also available. However, the level of accessibility to students to these two employment-related options was limited by several constraining factors. VET options were not catered for in the school timetable, and thus had to be fitted around the academic curriculum of the senior school. There was no timetabled subject in the students' senior school program associated with traineeships or apprenticeships. For students wanting to pursue VET, this often meant juggling study and assess-ments because of time lost away from the school during term. The teachers at Southside played a limited role in facilitating post-school transition choices for students. This was almost entirely the role of the CC. Overall; there was a linear, rather than a multiple, view of the options for transitions. Moreover, the explicit academic focus of the school meant that there was a generalised (as opposed to individualised) approach to managing transitions. This aimed to enable students to defer choice by 'keeping their options open' through strategic subject selection.

At Sunny Beach, there is evidence of a school vision which emphasised community and inclusion. The notion of multiple linear pathways was evident with academic and vocational opportunities able to be worked together in the senior schooling curriculum. The school adopted subject selection procedures to provide an alter-native pathway to further study. For Sunny Beach, the SET planning process in Year 10 was an important catalyst to the curriculum changes that had taken place in the school. Furthermore, there had been a significant investment in staff, particu-larly through the creation of a middle management role, the School Pathways Coordinator who was responsible for overseeing the transition programs in the school. Teaching staff were employed to deliver VET certificate courses, and to do this the school became a registered training organisation. Evidence from students revealed that teachers across subject areas incorporated information and material that fed in to the knowledge and skills needed to support transitions into further study or work pathways.

Other than this important investment in staffing, other enactment strategies were identified at Sunny Beach. These include (1) structured work placements relevant to the vocational certificates taught at the school, (2) the availability of school-based apprenticeship and traineeships and (3) the opportunity for students to be able to combine academic subjects and vocational subjects in their senior program. Finally, the data from this school indicates that there is explicit recognition of the value and importance of the students' part-time work not only to their developing knowledge and skills for the future but also to building community networks for the school. In relation to this latter point, there is another important dimension included—that of encouraging the students to be involved in volunteer work. The closing of the perceived gap of the community and the school is enabled by this volunteer work.

St. Jude's has implemented its transition curriculum as a whole school approach. In its context of specifically targeting students who would otherwise leave school early, St. Jude's has directed its strategies at other than university pathways. Accordingly, the school had chosen a strategic vocational approach to its senior curriculum to enact transition. However, the school offered 'multiple' pathways. Even though there seems to be only limited pathways from school to post-school employment and/or learning offered to students—school to work pathway though vocational opportunities—the school had not eliminated the choice of aspiring to a university education for its students. However, a frustration for staff at the school was that parents and the community did not seem to appreciate—or perhaps fully understand—how that option was made available to students.

In this school, the key constraint to having a fully transformational curriculum approach was achieving a fully collaborative and participatory approach including parents, the school and its community for implementing its transition curriculum. As with the other two cases, the specific strategies were influenced by the ETRF reforms including the SET planning process. However, unlike the case of Southside where SET plans were the subject of a 15-min interview with the CC, St. Jude's approach to implementing SET planning was much more comprehensive. Indeed, the strategy was described by students as involving 'hours and hours of talking about it [SET plan] with our parents and teachers'. Overall, St. Jude's invested highly in staff time, strategies and resources for enabling a productive transition curriculum. Resources were focused on vocational opportunities with a senior member of staff employed primarily to work as a transitions program coordinator, appointed by the principal. Classroom teachers also were actively and intensively involved in the program (e.g. visiting the students during work experience). Employers recognised the extent and significance of their partnerships with the school referring to their 'alliance' with the school. Moreover, in contrast to Southside's general strategy for managing transitions, St. Jude's strategy was highly individualised, drawing on and inclusive of detailed information from students and their parents/carers.

Braun et al. (2010) make the point that when strategies are enacted, there can also be some unforeseen consequences. These consequences might be exemplified by students' interpretation and experiences of various strategies at different stages during their last years at school. For example, the students at Southside did not see

it as the role of their classroom teachers to have any input in to their options for particular university or work pathways. Consequently, some students viewed the curriculum of the school as unrelated—other than indirectly through tests—to the reality of their post-schooling lives.

At Sunny Beach, the students did acknowledge the role of teachers in providing information and support. They particularly valued the role of the Pathways Coordinator in helping them to follow the selection rank pathway. However, many Year 10 students felt pressured and scared by the SET planning process, which required them to make decisions about the future. It is noteworthy that the same feelings were not found in the Year 11 cohort who had gone through the SET planning and were now settled into their chosen study pathway.

Conclusions

As our case studies have demonstrated, 'being at risk' is not equally distributed across schools or across student populations attending them. This unequal distribution of risk across schools is a significant influence on the range of diversification strategies across schools aimed at managing transitions for students. In addressing these differences and the nature and consequences at the school level, this chapter has discussed specific curriculum approaches, strategies and consequences in relation to enacting transition policy in three school sites. These interrelated elements depended on each site and their specific contexts. For each school, the intention to provide productive transitions for a specific range of students is evident.

Southside College's enactment of transition policy could be described as linear and limited. Strategies used did not affect the overall curriculum established at the school. Any strategies such as traineeships were 'add-ons' which students needed to make work alongside their 'normal' senior subjects. For the CC and the students in most situations, the traineeships were an opportunity to explore options rather than any firm commitment to long-term employment. At Sunny Beach, these strategies were considered to be an integral part of the school program. This finding points to the importance of the institutional context and the bounded agency of the actors responsible for implementing policy in local school sites. St. Jude's enacted a purpose-built curriculum that articulated closely with policy documents, in so far as students would leave school earning or learning. However, the curriculum, although purpose-built, might also have provided barriers for some students who wished to transition to university directly from school. Fortunately, for the cohort participating in the study, this was not an issue.

Overall, the comparisons across these three schools indicate that what constitutes worthwhile transitions, the means by which they are conceptualised and enacted, and also evaluated are very much premised on school level precepts and decision-making. Not the least of these factors is the scope of options made available to students and how these are supported and privileged within each school. The notion of support for transitioning out of school also extends to the degree to which parents

and the local community are engaged in the schools' processes. Moreover, the study points to the need for school leaders and teachers to be cognisant of the need to individualise strategies for transition. Our case studies show that it is insufficient for schools to provide structures at the school level assuming that these alone will facilitate students' post-school transitions. For example, at Southside, selective admission, high economic and social capital amongst parents, strong support and encouragement for students to succeed academically, transition planning processes and abundant human and material resources—conditions that would be regarded as optimal for supporting students in transition—actually worked as constraints for the minority of students who sought to engage a VET pathway. This instance of a mismatch of school strategies and the personal aspirations, capacities and social contexts of some students raises questions for schools in designing curriculum and for families when selecting schools. This finding points to implementing transition policies in schools that maximise flexibility of curriculum choices and pathways, while remaining sensitive to the needs of parents/carers, the private sector, local communities and students themselves as partners for managing transitions.

While there may well be global trends that emphasise the need for effective school processes to support productive transitions, national funding schemes to support this trend as well as state government policies, ultimately it is how these are enacted at the school level that determines what is provided for students and what they experience and learn. The findings about how local school strategies shape students' pathways to transitions across three Australian schools could well have implications for schools' transition planning and critique more widely.

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Sue Thomas is Associate Professor in Education at Griffith University. Her research focuses on education policy. The research is transdisciplinary, drawing on policy sociology, leadership studies, and Critical Discourse Analysis. As a critical social scientist, Sue has a strong commitment to social justice, evident in projects that focus on at-risk students and teacher education students' understandings of cultural diversity. Currently, she is researching policy enactment in school contexts. To facilitate this work, she has developed a framework that draws on insights from CDA and Bernstein's work on pedagogic modalities.

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Index