

**Teachers Work and the Construction of Contemporary Working-Class  
Schooling in Victoria, Australia**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Education has long been identified as a social institution that both constructs classed differences and can ameliorate their effects. So what is the relationship between social class and education today? This thesis examines the way schooling and its distinctive configurations of knowledge and labour mediate class formation at the start of the 21st century.

I report on interview-based research that investigated teachers' work in VCAL, a form of schooling that uses an applied learning approach to support young people to complete their final years of secondary schooling. Drawing on secondary sources, I show that VCAL is a particular contemporary form of working class schooling in a longer history through which technical education in Australia was mobilised in ways that formed working class identities. I use interview data to highlight the different approaches to schooling developed in VCAL learning spaces and document the way VCAL teachers engage students in processes of applied learning. These different learning spaces reveal how VCAL teachers' progress educational approaches enabling young people to participate in and transition from school to work and further learning.

I argue that VCAL is a contemporary form of working class schooling and, like earlier forms, has contradictory effects on young peoples' educational opportunities and life chances. Through the thesis it is revealed that VCAL teachers' labour is connected to the repurposing of schooling where schooling others differently at once challenges and affirms hierarchies in knowing in schooling where the academic is normatively valued as the dominant and superior pattern of schooling.



## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution, and that, to the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis.

John Pardy  
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## CHAPTER 1

### TEACHERS' WORK AND WORKING CLASS SCHOOLING

In the seminal education research about Australian schooling, 'Making the Difference' (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, and Dowsett, 1982) it was concluded that:

State school teachers should come to see themselves for what they really are: the teachers of the working class. Not the only ones (given the Catholic system), and not all of them (given the state schools in ruling-class suburbs). By and large, however, that is what they are and long will be. Until teachers recognise it, and indeed take pride in it, the real character of the problems they face will remain obscure ... Teachers cannot do it all alone. The potentials for a progressive educational response ... have to be met with encouragement and support from other groups who influence the situation in schools and influence people's ways of thinking about it ... In a society disfigured by class exploitation ... the only education worth its name is one that forms people capable of taking part in their own liberation. The business of the school ... is equipping people with the knowledge and skills and concepts relevant to remaking a dangerous and disordered world. In the most basic sense, the process of education and the process of liberation are the same (Connell *et al.*, 1982. pp. 207-8).

As this quote from Connell *et al.* suggests, particular forms of teachers' work have long been central to the relationship between schooling and class differences. Schools are one of the dominant social institutions that structure the way class and education are made, learned and remade (Bernstein, 1975; Bowles and Gintis, 1976). The problems that beset schooling in Australia where some do well and others get a raw deal are often explained in terms of individual effort. This research considers the social arrangements of schooling that attends to some learners and not others. This research, through interviews conducted with teachers considers the social relations of learning in an 'alternative' senior secondary curriculum to examine how schooling is made possible in different ways.

Schooling is a place-bound local experience made through social, political and economic rationales that enact desired sets of experiences to form different patterns of schooling. Schooling as a social endeavour inducts and enculturates social groups in spite of, and through their differences, relative to government policy that shapes the purposes of education in terms of social and economic participation and cultural inclusion. These learning experiences are framed by local, national and, in present times, global expectations and are mediated by teachers' labour and the terms and conditions of their work.

Australian education research (Connell, 1982, 1985; Dwyer, Wilson and Woock, 1982; Teese, 2000; Teese and Polesl, 2003; Yates and McLeod, 2008, Te Riele, 2011) has shown that different forms of teachers' work are embedded in distinct social relations of learning. The social relations of learning in schools vary greatly depending upon the school and its location, history, student body and the teachers' work that is enabled within the school. The different ways in which teachers work, equips people with the skills and knowledge to encounter and remake the world. Early studies of the social relations of ruling class and working class schooling (Connell *et al.*, 1982) have been extended by studies that reveal multiple patterns of schooling working-class and middle-class people (Dwyer, Wilson and Woock, 1982; Seddon 1997; Seddon and Deer 1992; Yates and McLeod, 2008; Teese and Poloelsl, 2003). Different patterns of schooling are distinctive in their social relations of teaching and learning in contrast to those made through the dominant and dominating academic curriculum, that selects and sorts students for university admission and higher-level job opportunities.

Working class schooling in the past and still today is located at the margins and formed through social relations of learning where teachers and students encounter and

make schooling differently. Teachers in working-class schooling work at the edges of education and often outside of or in opposition to the precepts of dominant patterns of schooling institutionalised as ‘academic’ education that provides the basis for accessing tertiary education. They teach students who are disconnected from or disinterested in schooling as arranged through academic education and who would otherwise be excluded and miss out on an education. Academic education in secondary schooling includes relations of learning where teachers’ work is geared toward supporting students to achieve university admission. Teachers engaged in forms of schooling not geared toward university admission work on the frontline of moves toward a contemporary reworking of comprehensive schooling. They pioneer new subjects and new ways of assessing and recognising students’ learning and abilities. These teachers like other educators of the working-classes over time not only perform a working-class education but are makers of patterns of schooling that progress and privilege specific forms and types of knowledge, knowledge that can be really useful for multiple life experiences and contexts.

How schools make differences and the particular differences of ‘working-class schooling’ is what is examined in this research. Historically ‘Progressive education’ (Selleck, 1972) movements in the early part of the twentieth century suggested that forms of working class schooling are possible, and that these go beyond official definitions of the schooling the working classes. Working-class schooling today supports people to become capable in their own liberation (Connell *et al.*, 1982) in ways that are different to how this occurs through the dominant patterns of schooling as arranged through a competitive academic curriculum which emphasises admission to university as a core indicator of school success.

Different kinds of schooling and the teachers who enact it make differences that are distinctive and can be socially useful and have benefits for individuals, their families, communities and networks. These benefits are directly connected to prospects for liberation or, more specifically, freedom in an emancipatory sense. Working-class schooling historically and today continues to be grounded in cultural experiences made by teachers' work with students that provides people and communities with resources to make lives and worlds differently.

In working class schooling the work of teachers today operates through a 'hands on' or 'non-academic' curriculum and provides this research with a basis for the exploration of contemporary contexts of such schooling. It involves teachers in teaching work that is peripheral to the competitive academic curriculum but central to policy targets that drive full participation in schooling. The statutory requirement in Victoria from 2010 is that all young people are now to be engaged in learning or earning up until the age of seventeen. (Victorian Government, 2009). Such a change has placed new pressures on schools and on teachers' work to support and address the schooling and learning needs of more diverse groups of younger people. Working-class schooling organised through applied learning processes are today critical to the achievement of government policies of increased participation targets. They require teachers to work inventively and constructively to bring schooling to people who would otherwise have gone without. How schooling is institutionalised in this applied 'hands on' approach and what it formalises is examined in this research.

Teachers' work as enacted and organised in working-class schooling entails political choices and actions that effect learners and their learning. These effects are both consciously intended and unconscious. As Seddon points out:

Teachers' practice in economic and cultural production creates asymmetries in individuals' and groups' capacities to define and realize their needs. Teachers' work is therefore also political action because, consciously or unconsciously, it serves to confirm or contest the prevailing social order (Seddon, 1997, p.705).

As a social resource schooling is made through the political action of teachers who choose to and are directed to work in specific ways in order to make schooling differently from the norms defined by the dominant pattern of academic schooling. Schooling can either confirm or contest social orders and how it does so changes over time. These changes occur through the changing practices of teachers as political imperatives shift. School systems, individual schools and different patterns of schooling make differences in a range of ways. These differences and the existence and persistence of patterns of working-class schooling have been made through the historical shifts away from elite, exclusive patterns of schooling. It is this confirmation and contestation as manifested through working-class schooling that will be made apparent through this research.

### **Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) teachers and working class schooling**

The idea that there are no real or significant class differences in Australia is an enduring national self-deception. From the outset this research thesis has been inspired by my enduring personal and political interest in the relationships between education and social class. The struggle involved in thinking through and researching class and education is multifaceted in a national context where both the idea and social realities of class are either denied or disavowed. So using a category like 'class' to apprehend, describe and explain different approaches to schooling is fraught. Class is a problematic concept in that it signals status, value and worth, and also points to the divisions that

arise from social and economic structures. Status, value and worth, together with social divisions and differences, have subjective and personal ramifications that underline the social importance and persistence of class in all peoples' lives. Where people live, where and how they are schooled, how they speak and the places they work, signify class in various ways.

This research reports on the historical continuities and discontinuities of working-class schooling as understood by teachers by examining its forms at the start of the twenty first century. A century prior to this research the schooling of the working classes was only starting to be considered and instituted. Schooling at the beginning of the twentieth century beyond the elementary level was an exclusive and elite experience. Throughout the twentieth century secondary schooling evolved and expanded to become a mass and universal experience. This research into contemporary working-class schooling represents a further point in the history of the schooling arrangements of different class groups (and gendered and raced groups for that matter).

Technical education and technical schooling more specifically provide an important historical template in recognising and knowing about working-class schooling (Sweetman, Long and Smyth, 1922). In Victoria, the first technical education facility was opened in 1871, namely the School of Mines, Ballarat (Murray-Smith, 1971). From 1880 technical schools emerged as important institutional spaces offering 'alternative' forms of continuing education or secondary schooling, and select types of tertiary education. Not all students who were schooled in technical schools were working-class, although the vast majority were. Yet this pattern of schooling represented an original institutional form of working-class schooling. Technical schooling and technical education were important forms of schooling that were known

in contrast to ‘academic schooling’. Technical education was understood as practical and hands on and was premised upon the ‘individuals “self-improvement”’ (Murray-Smith, 1971, p.315).

The education and training of a working-class was fundamental in Australia’s industrial capitalist expansion in the first half of the twentieth century (Blake, 1973; Murray-Smith, 1965, 1971, 1987; Rushbrook, 2009; Selleck, 1982). This schooling was separate and premised upon streaming, which divided secondary technical schools from high schools in terms of value and worth based on different forms of knowing. Crudely, technical schools prepared students for manual work or blue-collar jobs while completion of schooling in high schools prepared students for white-collar work and further education made available through tertiary study. The emergence of more comprehensive patterns of secondary schooling occurred in Victoria in the 1980’s where these divisions and differences between different types of schools were reformed. The formation of new institutional arrangements produced ‘comprehensive secondary colleges’ that offered access to all, while continuing to stream students through the organisation of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

The character and purposes of the education made available through comprehensive secondary schooling were reoriented to be more inclusive. Initially through the introduction of Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and, since 2002, the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) has been offered as a ‘hands on’ option made available to senior secondary students to complete their schooling (Victorian Qualifications Authority, 2005). VCAL too, like its historical predecessor technical schooling, is a ‘hands on’ and ‘non-academic’ pattern of schooling. The forms



of schooling made through teachers' labour in VCAL are used in this thesis to consider contemporary forms of working-class schooling.

The VCAL first piloted and trialled in secondary schools in Victoria in 2002 represents another Year 11 and 12 option alongside the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). Policy makers and education bureaucrats at the time stressed that VCAL is not 'alternative' but, rather, an 'equivalent' Year 12 qualification (Victorian Qualifications Authority, 2005). Where VCE serves as a selection device that gives some students access to university, VCAL seeks to further accommodate differences in schooling by providing a Year 11 and 12 option for young people whose schooling needs do not 'fit' the model of schooling geared toward university admission and tertiary study. 'Equivalence' signals a similarity in value and status, and also something that belies and smooths over the material differences involved in the existence of different patterns of schooling. It is teachers through their labour practices that have been instrumental in making schooling differently through VCAL.

VCAL is a curriculum reform and response that reformalises schooling for students whom, it was determined through policy discourse, had effectively ceased formal learning (Kirby, 2000). The bind that young people find themselves in today is that they are increasingly now required to be in school. This recent statutory requirement in the State of Victoria and is also becoming a normative social and cultural expectation. The VCAL augments a reconsidered structure and experience of schooling provided on changed footings for purposes other than university admission (Henry, Dalton, Wilde, Walsh and Wild, 2003). As a curriculum format VCAL reorients the schooling experience, which is organised through three distinct levels and four curriculum pillars. The three levels, foundation, intermediate and senior operate

hierarchically in terms of degree of sophistication. Foundation VCAL is usually offered to students who have struggled in the middle years of schooling (years 8-10) with literacy in particular. This option is especially for young people outside of schools in community settings and for refugee students who are schooled through English Language schools to prepare them to join and enter ordinary secondary schooling in Melbourne. It is the intermediate and senior VCAL that is predominantly used for the senior secondary years of schooling (Years 11-12) in schools and in other educational settings. From the outset VCAL has been badged as a 'pathways' qualification and 'hands-on' schooling option (Henry *et al*, 2003). VCAL as a new curriculum policy response and construct both encloses and endorses new forms and strategies of schooling. It is teachers' labour that has been fundamental in shaping these forms and making these strategies possible.

The VCAL curriculum consists of four pillars, Numeracy and literacy, Industry specialist study, Personal Development and Work Related Skills. The focus of the teacher interviews for this thesis were asked about the work in Personal Development and Work Related Skills. The learning outcomes for both Personal Development and Work Related Skills (Appendix One) make possible particular teaching approaches in the later years of secondary schooling (Years 10-12). Interviewing the teachers about their work in the two subject areas was selected to gain a 'way in' to thinking about working-class schooling.

Through schooling organised by the VCAL curriculum, teachers' work focuses upon Personal Development and Work Related Skills. Both these subjects are deliberately broad and can be made into something that is interesting and relevant for the students the teachers are working with. There exists room for accommodating those

previously deemed ‘hard to school’ and space is made for those labelled ‘unteachable’ to be taught. VCAL, as a broad curriculum framework, provides legitimacy to teachers’ work with young people that historically would have not been present in schools. In this framework sufficient room to manoeuvre is made for teachers to teach in ways they deem necessary.

Table 1: VCAL Curriculum Levels and Subjects

Level	Subject Units			
Foundation	Numeracy & Literacy	Industry Specialist Study	Personal Development	Work Related Skills
Intermediate	Numeracy & Literacy	Industry Specialist Study	Personal Development	Work Related Skills
Senior	Numeracy & Literacy	Industry Specialist Study	Personal Development	Work Related Skills

Source: Victorian Qualifications Authority (VQA), 2005, ‘Pathways for a better future’

It is teachers’ understandings of themselves and their labour as educators, teachers and workers that provide the empirical basis to the knowledge claims and arguments explored in this thesis. Through interviews with the ten VCAL teachers this research utilises descriptions and accounts of their work to outline the discernible characteristics of contemporary working class schooling. More importantly in support of the research agenda the teachers provided the key experiential insights through descriptions and explanations of their work and what working in VCAL programs entails to explain persistent and emergent forms of working class schooling.

Education researchers and sociologists have analysed schooling and inequalities, especially class inequalities and differences in terms of reproduction (Bourdieu, 1976) and resistance (Willis, 1977). Rather than using resistance and reproduction type

explanations of working-class schooling, this research surfaces the dynamic social contexts and conditions involved in the making of contemporary working-class schooling in an Australian context. This study analyses, through a critical sociology, the changing contexts of schooling and the way that 'other' purposes for participating in secondary schooling are opened up and legitimated to reveal the shifting patterns of working-class schooling.

Class is an over-laden sociological concept that signals value and worth (Sayer, 2002). 'Working-class' more specifically is known and understood through its relationship with 'middle-class' signifying class hierarchies. This research about contemporary working-class schooling was pursued with the intention of illuminating the value of contemporary working-class schooling not in contrast or comparatively with other classed forms of schooling but by outlining its key features and distinctions. It is teachers' labour and their perspectives about their work in VCAL that provide this research with ways of explicating the value and worth of working-class schooling.

Teachers are central to all schooling experiences. Their work is a form of labour that mediates and intervenes in classed, gendered and racialised power relations. This work by teachers is framed by the state and carried out in collaboration with students, families and communities. It happens through powerful exchanges and relations where teachers' work is shaped by and in turn constitutes schooling in different ways. Seddon points out that:

teachers' work involves them, either consciously or unconsciously, in social and political projects which have effects within and well beyond the walls of the classroom and the lives of each individual (Seddon, 1997, p.702).

It is the conditions and experiences of teachers working outside the parameters of the dominant patterns of secondary curriculum that this research focuses on to examine working-class schooling. Schooling in all its classed forms involves teachers working in specific ways to make education and learning possible.

The question that has guided this research is, What does teachers work in VCAL involve? The question emerges out of my personal and professional interests and previous research into the divisions between vocational education and general and academic education. Two specific sub-questions were used to organise this study:

*What practices of teachers' work organise and arrange student learning in working class schooling?*

*What are the key purposes of working class schooling that teachers make through their work?*

I approached these research questions through an investigation of VCAL, as a case of contemporary form of working class schooling. I selected VCAL because it is being made outside the contemporary form of 'competitive academic curriculum' (Connell, 1985). Focusing on this context of senior secondary schooling, which is arranged and organised through the VCAL and the ways it presses teachers' work in different directions, reveals other purposes and experiences of schooling that exist beyond the pursuit of competitive advantage via university-based educational and employment opportunities. In focusing upon these often-overlooked purposes and experiences of schooling this research provides insights into contemporary forms of working-class schooling.

The rationale for this study into working-class schooling is to illuminate schooling that has value yet is either routinely overlooked or ignored. Working-class

schooling has taken many turns and forms since the changes that undid exclusive and elite arrangements in schooling. The historical shifts in patterns of partial and elite participation in schooling to levels of mass participation have been driven through increased access. When something such as access to education is denied and disavowed, power relations are signalled about what can be known, whose knowledge has value and who has status. Teachers as workers are subject to and objects of social forces that make schooling in a range of ways. Having worked as a teacher in different contexts my work is constituted and formed through a division of labour that orders experiences, practices and ways of knowing. It is also implicated in power relations where value and worth are attributed to some and not others and is instituted through a politics of schooling (Bessant and Spaul, 1976).

While working in Technical and Further Education (TAFE) as teacher, curriculum and education policy worker, I undertook in 2006 research into TAFE learning by interviewing students. That research found that through TAFE learning, students encountered and developed resources for living and experiencing life differently. This finding was presented as a critique of the narrowed policy focus on qualifications and credentialing. As a consequence of that research I have pursued this doctoral research using interviews with teachers to explore their understandings of how through their encounters and exchanges, education is made possible in various ways under certain conditions.

While a predominant focus of secondary schooling is geared toward university admission, it is also an important socialising and educative force assisting people to prepare and transition into adult life. Schooling is not a singular, common experience but is made and formed through social, cultural and political conditions in ways that

result in different people having different schooling. While much is made of student results and outcomes in terms of study scores and the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) in explaining the value and worth of schooling such rankings often obscure the social experiences of schooling in their entirety. Additionally there can be different schooling experiences within one school. It is to the different schooling experiences as arranged through an 'alternative' curriculum that this research turns to understand and explain working-class schooling.

To do research about working-class schooling relies on a sociology that is critical and moves past taken-for-granted and normatively accepted understandings of schooling. This research through its focus on teachers' work in VCAL as forms of working-class schooling is interested in the power of schooling and its impacts upon peoples' lives. Yet this research acknowledges the changing conditions and patterns of schooling in Australia and internationally. Being a former British dominion has been an important historical factor shaping Australian schooling systems and its scholarship about education. This research draws upon British sociologies and American philosophies of education to contribute to and progress an Australian sociological inquiry into schooling and class. British sociology has long emphasised class differences and inequalities in schooling while American philosophies have underlined the importance of education to the existence of inclusive democratic polities. This research therefore considers working-class schooling and its differences as they relates to inequality, difference and inclusive democratic polities and does so through a critical sociology.

The social relations and practices that support learning as understood and explained by VCAL teachers in Victoria provide a material basis for knowing about

contemporary working-class schooling. At a surface level this research describes the class dimensions of seven sites of schooling in Victoria from teachers' perspectives. Describing their geographic location, resources, student demographics and curriculum content and highlighting the effects of teachers' work makes possible the knowing of specific experiences of schooling. In focusing on teachers' work in VCAL, the study explores how teachers are involved in creating contemporary forms of working-class schooling in State schools, Catholics schools and in other institutional settings outside of conventional secondary schools.

As will be described in the methodology chapter ten VCAL teachers, working both inside and outside schools, were interviewed for this research. Through their accounts of their practices within VCAL, these teachers are making and creating schooling experiences, which attend to and seek to address the individual and group differences of students whose needs are otherwise not addressed in the dominant (or mainstream) patterns of schooling. The emphasis on the practical and the 'applied' in VCAL is premised upon longstanding conceptual and cultural divisions that presume individual dispositions and personal attributes are characterised by a mental and manual dichotomy. This social division also underpins patterns of stratification, which shape the freedoms and security potentially offered to individuals by schooling. This investigation of working-class schooling examines the work that teachers do in providing schooling experiences to young people as a result of this division of mental and manual knowing.

The ten teachers who participated in this research talked about their work with students and were able to articulate and explain how doing schooling differently remakes the schooling experience. Their conversations about their work and specific



techniques, strategies and practices provide an empirical basis for knowing about contemporary working-class schooling.

This research takes seriously the work of teachers in providing students with fruitful and worthwhile schooling experiences. These learning experiences are distinct yet apparently equivalent in value and worth to those experiences made possible by the hegemonic academic curriculum. Schooling provision has long been shaped through historical changes in society, shifting cultural patterns and through changes in knowledge and its use and worth. Working class schooling existed differently in the past, and today it is very much characterised by a preoccupation with processes of individualisation and the formation of subjectivities and the ways in which people can be schooled to make a life and to remake the world. To research and speak about working-class schooling I am being cultural, political and historical at once by drawing upon social theories of class.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century working-class schooling is being remade in different ways and is being called upon to 'bring-in' those whose schooling needs would otherwise not be met. The power of schooling to shape lives is well recognised and it is teachers' work in schooling that is a decisive factor in ameliorating the dire effects of exclusion from education. Teachers by working cooperatively with students daily break new ground and make inroads into approaches to education that instigate contemporary forms and patterns of schooling that can be legitimately recognised as working-class. In doing this teachers are involved in democratising schooling by making possible others ways of knowing in, and experiencing schooling.

Patterns of instruction institutionalised in schools change over time, as do societies through cultural and political changes and subsequently schooling in all its

forms. Teachers and teaching is a central and key factor in forming and realising different patterns of schooling and provide a way of apprehending working-class schooling. This research is especially important in a historical time and political context that eschews and denies the social, political and cultural significance of class and its dimensions in effecting schooling and its various forms.

Yet the teachers and students engaged in schooling in all its forms, especially those that are not well understood or valued, are routinely confronted by challenges and struggles in countering the invisibility and negations of their experiences and practices. This can happen within schools themselves, where different patterns of schooling are constituted, and in social contexts where different schooling experiences are realised and occur but are not readily known or understood. This was certainly the case for earlier iterations of working-class schooling where technical schools operated under misunderstandings and misapprehensions concerning their value and worth in the twentieth century (Crocker *et al.*, 2005; Rasmussen, 1982; Murray-Smith 1965, 1987 Bessant and Spaul, 1976, 1982; Blackburn, 1985). In curriculum studies research it was argued that the curriculum in technical schools was not well articulated or understood and was rarely specific (Musgrave, 1982). Such findings emphasise the importance of researching teachers' work and the knowledge dimensions of schooling in patterns of schooling where the social relations of learning differ from those institutionalised through dominant patterns.

By inquiring into working-class schooling in contemporary times this thesis is interested in teachers' work in a specific curricula context. In particular this thesis considers the different patterns of instruction initiated and the forms of schooling that emerge from these practices. Schooling in all its forms and manifestations is based upon

specific student populations, social expectations, cultural precepts and political processes that can be known through distinctive knowledge practices and actions.

### **The genesis of this research**

This research has several beginnings and origins, but they have all coalesced around an intellectual interest in recognising and surfacing the persistence of class differences and inequalities and their manifestation in changing forms of education and in this instance, patterns of schooling. The research project's origins are biographic and socially informed through my employment history in vocational and tertiary education.

Doctoral research is a solitary and personal quest. It includes a freedom to pursue research interests that are deeply felt and intently studied. Meeting people for the purposes of research is personal, social and political at the same time. Entitlements to education are bestowed unevenly and known and encountered differentially. At the beginning of my doctoral candidature I spent the first three months at the Sunshine and Districts Historical Society's interpretation centre located in the Deer Park community centre. At the centre I would spend two days a week perusing the Sunshine Technical School (1913-1991) archive to get an idea about something I wanted to research called 'working-class schooling'. Sunshine Technical School epitomised working-class schooling because as an institution it offered secondary schooling to a community who up until then, only had opportunities for elementary (primary) schooling.

Rather than locate the research in the historical past I was interested in undertaking a sociological inquiry into working-class schooling in contemporary contexts. VCAL as a different form of schooling and a recent addition in the arrangements of secondary schooling was identified. Teachers' work in VCAL provided

a fertile ground for inquiring into working-class schooling. Consequently this research is not objective in a positivist sense because of its decisive disobedience when it comes to actions and questions of neutrality, detachment and a disinterest.

Having worked as a teacher, my family experiences and encounters with schooling were all influential in wanting to know something about class differences in education and schooling. The making of knowledge involves compromises and decisions about specific questions and ventures into knowledge fields and traditions, different knowledge networks and conversations. The research is organised around the refusal to concede objectivity as,

An ethically neutral social science is not just difficult but impossible to achieve, because in the description and explanation of human action, fact and value are so fused that they cannot be distinguished (Bernstein, 1976, p. 39).

Values are part and parcel of this education research in that social facts do not exist separate from or apart from values. Values (Gerth and Mills, 1970, p. 57) play an important role in determining and shaping what can be facts. So while values enter into the inquiry and research process it is how they are dealt with that is central to the credibility of the research. Drawing on local and contingent practices involves knowing human action, practice and sensibilities. The sensibilities that give rise to this research are social, located in experiences that are also personal and subjective.

The initial ideas for this research project and thesis about working class schooling comes from biographic and institutional experiences. Firstly, my historical experiences and employment in education; secondly from a recognition that people's encounters with schooling are shaped through discernible social and cultural arrangements; and thirdly, from my own family origins and background. My own schooling occurred in the 1970s and 1980s and my employment from the early 1990s

was as a teacher in post-secondary education as organised and instituted through TAFE organisations in Victoria. In this the value of what is being researched comes directly from the researcher.

### *Biographical*

I was born into a large Irish Catholic family in the Melbourne suburb of Springvale. I was the eighth child out of nine. Along with my eight siblings, I was schooled in Catholic schools. Out of the nine children, five completed their Year 12 (sixth form) whilst the remaining four left school at Year 10 or 11. Three out of four of my sisters completed Year 12, and two of the boys out of five completed Year 12. While talent, ability and ‘brains’ are the usual explanations of educational success in schooling I was always of the view that it was somewhat more about chance, persistence and being in the right place at the right time. Being in the right place involved encountering teachers who you could identify and work with. In my case, what I mean by this, is that depending on birth order, the historical time in which I was schooled, the teachers I encountered, the fellow class mates I learnt amongst, and my own sense of entitlement to knowing; these things amongst others all affected and influenced how well I was to do in school.

My mother completed her Leaving Certificate (Year 11 in today’s pattern of schooling) and then went on to complete her Certificate in Mothercraft Nursing. My father on the other hand left school with his Intermediate Certificate (Year 9 in today’s schooling) and went on to join the Royal Australian Air Force at the age of 18 and served in Europe from 1942-1945 in the Second World War. After the war he trained as a motor trimmer and upholsterer. All of my siblings, whether they completed school or not, had access to more educational opportunities than our parents. All of us, my

parents, my siblings and myself were educated in Catholic schools. My parents were schooled in Catholic boarding schools in country Victoria, and my siblings and I in local working-class Catholic schools in the Springvale area.

Twenty-five years after the end of the Second World War my father ceased work as an upholsterer and our family lived on a Veteran Affairs entitlement (Totally and Permanently Incapacitated) pension. Given these circumstances, technically my family was not working-class because my father was not in paid employment but was rather unemployed. Yet culturally and politically we felt that labour politics and trade unions were organised around the interests of people like 'us'. Catholicism was also experienced as a culture of marginality that shaped our lives where stories of the sectarian divisions and prejudice in Australia had historically prevented Catholics gaining access to 'good jobs'.

I was schooled in a time of immense social change in Australia. In 1972, when I commenced primary school, Gough Whitlam, who went on to become Australia's first Labor prime minister after the Second World War launched his eventually successful campaign in Springvale Town Hall. It all felt local. This proved to be an era of intense optimism about Australia as a fair and egalitarian society. Amongst many progressive reforms Whitlam's government made university education free and was committed to access for women and the working-classes. Multiculturalism was inaugurated as a national policy. In this period, at my primary school, I shared classes with children who had come to Australia to seek refuge from East Timor, after Indonesia's military annexation of the country, children whose parents were escaping the repression of Chilean dictator Pinochet, amongst many other people from around the world, who at the time were made to feel safe from persecutions and the dangers they encountered in

their countries of origin. Class was an everyday experience in a socially diverse and rich context of difference. In these classrooms we learnt from each other about each other and the changing world in which we were living.

As I continue to visit and frequent Springvale today, I encounter young children who are doing what I did during the 1970s and 1980s, going to the same school, wearing the same uniform, the difference being that while my family settled in Springvale from country Victoria, many of these young people's parents or grandparents have come from a range of places around the world. The later generations of Irish Catholics are in school with later generations of East Timorese-Australians, Vietnamese-Australians, Chilean-Australians, Maltese-Australians, and now African-Australians. The teachers, the students, their families and this pluralising community continues the work of making schooling at schools like the one I attended, which are at the same time familiar and different from my own experiences. Yet there remains a connective thread intellectually, socially, politically and educationally.

I was raised in a time when social movements such as women's liberation, gay liberation, anti-racist and land rights movements challenged and gave rise to identity politics premised upon rights, freedoms and principles of self-determination. Each of these movements is also connected to knowledge traditions (feminism, gender studies, queer theory, post-colonial theory, critical social theory) that continue to inform my own intellectual inquiry and insight. These movements and the ideas associated with them have been important in assisting me to consider the political aspects of knowledge production. It is from this biographic context that this research about patterns of working-class schooling springs. Yet it also has a further genesis in the social and

cultural arrangements of education that I encountered and came to appreciate as a TAFE teacher during the past couple of decades.

### *Social and cultural arrangements of education*

Elite schooling, selective schools and private schools signify class divisions and differences, as does working-class schooling. Such schooling has distinctive constituents and provides particular forms of knowledge. As an arts graduate in the early 1990s I gained employment as a TAFE teacher, teaching workers from institutions for people with disabilities. As I had worked as a residential carer in a community facility whilst undertaking my degree in sociology and politics I was charged with the tasks of teaching these workers about working in the community. This was during a historical period of deinstitutionalisation in Australia. Institutions and asylums were being closed and ‘community living’ and integration were being progressed in a policy and lived context. It was from this experience that I began to appreciate the important aspect of knowledge and change, in patterns of education. The students I taught in TAFE were workers compulsorily sent to TAFE to ‘retrain’ and those who did not see their work outside institutions and in the community did not participate.

TAFE Colleges, as they were known then, provided trade education, further education for ‘paraprofessionals’ such as community workers, real estate agents, accountants, project engineers and IT workers to name a few. While occupational orders provide material evidence of the results and outcomes of different schooling experiences, the prizes of education are unevenly distributed or ‘hoarded’ as the case may be. These arrangements and patterns are perpetuated through specific social practices and relations.



Not long into my employment in TAFE, I learned that institutions such as TAFE were engaged in an education that is culturally and socially often not well understood or recognised. This may be due to the chameleon features (Anderson, 1998) of such institutions but I also felt that it was linked to the way education had served the students who pursued education in such colleges. This is a generalisation, but it quickly linked with my employment as a teacher in TAFE as I became aware of the sentiments and policy discourses of 'skills' education or training and 'second chance' education. The exclusion from and denial of education occurs as a result of institutional formations that make knowledge available through curriculum controls, and structural arrangements that have epistemological implications. I became aware that a hierarchical conceptualisation and evaluation of different knowledges as cultural systems and structures of representation in education were premised upon the repetition of class differences. This is most obvious in the education areas of the classical trades, such as hairdressing, cookery, plumbing, carpentry, mechanics, and electricians. Trades, as I knew them from my secondary schooling, were for adolescents who were not 'academic'. What I came to learn after a couple of decades working in TAFE as a teacher and curriculum worker was that, actually, there are different forms of knowledge which were just as complicated as 'academic knowledges' and they also had important social consequences. The division of labour results in class divisions and these divisions frame what is known and made available in different forms of schooling,

Formal education as provided by schools, universities and in TAFE colleges emanates from systems and structures of representation. From basic 'drill and practice' systems to forms of scholarship, formal education arranges and organises knowledge and people through processes of instruction and assessment. All of this is formalised, so

to speak, through social practices of giving and seeking reason or, more accurately by elaborating assumptions, understandings and explanations. Central to these formalised arrangements of education institutionalised spaces for learning operate where constructive and generative exchanges between teachers and students produce moments of education.

Working as a teacher in TAFE I very quickly became aware of how hierarchies operate through knowledge and the organisation and provision of education. In particular it was through the way some knowledges were associated with particular groups of people that I came to understand education provision as politically loaded. For a five-year period I worked as a coordinator of a diploma level course in community development, teaching sociology, social policy and social action. Initially, the program was called the *Associate Diploma of Social Science (Community Development)* but it was restructured and rebadged through reforms, which turned it into a competency standards based *Diploma of Community Development* (Pardy, 2007). Often when students completed their diploma studies in TAFE that included the study sociology and politics they would without fail find it difficult to have their learning recognised or valued when seeking options for university learning. This was usually because it was from a TAFE.

As a teacher in TAFE my work involved working out how to engage with students and this was dependent upon knowing and recognising difference. Teachers either know and recognise the different education needs of students, or not. Like any occupation teachers know their knowledge domain and patch. TAFE classes, characterised by differences in terms of identities, histories and mixed abilities, made this point of difference palpable. Teaching in these contexts was refracted through

discursive power relations that involved known and recognisable patterns and irregularities between people and knowing and being. The classes invariably involved people who knew about class, race and gender intellectually from prior education, together with people who knew these objects of knowledge through their lived experience but were underprepared in using conceptual ideas used to understand and make meaning of these experiences in an intellectual sense.

TAFE teaching did involve its own sets of requirements and ‘professional’ responsibilities, not least being the duty of care to prevent personal injury in such mixed learning environments. Accountabilities concerning content and curriculum along with the ‘compliance’ to prescribed measures of teaching and assessment techniques and expectations, disciplined this work. Teaching in a TAFE I encountered many people: young and old, students, colleagues and other workers whose experiences of educational success were hard won. The prizes of education, the freedom to move, and affirmation and public recognition of one’s abilities and values have long been skewed by the ruling and middle-classes.

The maintenance of this state of play in education has been disrupted and destabilised somewhat as a result of increased school participation. Yet, I learnt as a teacher in TAFE that this has not resulted in dramatic shifts in class mobility or more egalitarian cultural arrangements but, on the contrary, has sharpened boundaries and made class differences in schooling more visible and obvious in new and different ways.

One of these ways is the case of knowledge and its distribution and how it is recognised and valued. Blackburn’s (1985) claim that engineering when taught in a university holds different levels of esteem compared to when it is taught in technical

tertiary institutions and secondary technical schools resonated in my experiences as a TAFE teacher. While there are many ways of explaining this claim, my experience suggested that other pedagogic and educational conditions were being made in those different sites through the work of their respective participants. Students and teachers alike contribute to, and constitute through their relations the making of distinctive pedagogies where knowledges are exchanged and produced, but the value of these pedagogies is not easily recognised or valued. The challenge of understanding these practices and their value to students inspired this research into working-class schooling.

This brief biographicity (Alheit, 2002) concerning aspects of my personal background including a sketch of my schooling and my work and employment as a TAFE teacher seeks to provide the beginnings of an understanding of the intellectual motivations that informed this study. It is presented as an insight into the material and subjective contexts from which this research has resonances with the importance of education arrangements and experiences which encompasses education arrangements made through individual and personal efforts through different institutional contexts.

The main premise of this research is that an absence of privilege, power and advantage does not mean powerlessness. People who share spaces and experiences in education and social settings build relationships and make knowledges that are often obscured or not made visible as a result of monopolies of power, privilege and competitive advantage. Drawing on VCAL teachers' experiences in specific times and places this research progresses a phenomenological study of working class schooling to reveal patterns of schooling that are all too readily overlooked and discounted. It is phenomenological but critical in that it refutes 'common-sense' explanations that deny the value and worth of working-class anything and schooling in this instance.

## **Chapter organisation**

I report on this research through eight chapters that examine the way teachers' work in VCAL constitutes contemporary patterns of working-class schooling. I begin by drawing on literature to develop a contemporary understanding of the sociology of 'class'. This review considers conceptual understandings of 'class', their scope and limits. It then examines changing patterns of schooling and knowledge in the curriculum. In thinking through knowledge the review introduces a notion of craft in order to move beyond the commonplace binary division between academic and practical ways of knowing in schooling. The themes that emerge in the literature review frame this investigation of teachers work in VCAL and the types of schooling it produces.

Chapter three explains my methodology. It considers the production of educational knowledge and the contribution that is being realised through this research. Three key themes of empirical, interpretive and critical knowing are emphasised as a key feature of the approach used in this social and educational research endeavour.

Chapter four outlines the context of the policy and curriculum changes that gave rise to VCAL. The chapter sets to scene of how VCAL came about and is historically placed. These developments are nested in a longer historical trajectory from separate and streamed schooling to the modern comprehensive school system.

Chapter five presents data from interviews with three teachers who are involved in extending and augmenting patterns of comprehensive schooling.

Chapter six looks at how four teachers in two different settings, one a school and the other an annexe at a TAFE College called a "Technical Learning Centre" are involved in the remaking of a kind of technical schooling.

Chapter seven presents a pattern of schooling that is local and community based. The three teacher interviews presented in this chapter highlight the oppositional character of working class schooling made inside and outside schools.

Chapter eight synthesises the findings and presents an analysis of contemporary working-class schooling as it is made through teachers work in VCAL.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **SCHOOLING, CLASS AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE CURRICULUM, A LITERATURE REVIEW**

Secondary schooling in Victoria and in Australia more generally has been reoriented through the increased participation and retention of students and the formations of education markets (Seddon and Deer, 1992). Both of these developments, students staying on and the marketisation of schooling brings to bear an intensification of competition in schooling. Competition is the wellspring of capitalism and is subsequently fetishised through education structures and arrangements. This fetish makes university admission the main prize of school completion and academic success. The idea that there exists a meritocratic basis of schooling premised upon opportunity actually signals the 'structure of power, consent and control' in schooling (Seddon and Deer, 1992). Strategies to keep young people in school who are not aiming for university admission, or who are excluded from and alienated from the academic curriculum, demands a reordering of schooling. 'Other' imperatives in schooling need to be endorsed and given prominence.

Patterns of schooling made through a 'subordinated curriculum' (Connell, 1985, p. 92) are organised with 'students in mind' whose attachments to school are not secured through the 'competitive academic curriculum'. Students deemed 'not academic' are accommodated through rationales of being more practical and hands on. Such patterns point to and underline the detrimental effects of the competitive academic curriculum as the hegemonic curriculum. Such patterns point to and underline both the hegemony and the detrimental affects of the competitive academic curriculum. This reveals a politics where 'other' ways of schooling are overshadowed, ignored, devalued and misunderstood. The quality and worth of secondary schooling in such a politics is

narrowly confined to schooling made through the ‘hegemonic curriculum’. As Connell maintained:

The hegemonic curriculum is based on a hierarchy of academic knowledge and organises pupils learning in the form of individual competition ... New curricula bidding for a place in the schools’ program include new academic fields, alternative curricula for ‘non academic’ students, and political and experiential curricula constructed in opposition to the hegemonic pattern (Connell, 1985, p.102).

This research rests upon a critical sociological approach to draw out the differences and status issues associated with the knowing made that is made available through schooling as arranged through a subordinate curriculum. Such a critical sociology revindicates the social substance and effects of the social relations of schooling. That people are different is not in question in a critical sociology what is emphasised is that people can make a difference. In Bauman’s words,

One can take, as the founding principle of critical sociology, an a priori rejection of the possibility of invariant endowment – whether transcendental or natural – which characterizes the human species once and for all (Bauman, 1976. p.89).

More specifically people make and remake their social conditions differently and always have done so throughout history. Schooling is an important resource in such a struggle. Distinctive forms of schooling are made therefore made through particular social relations of learning that constitute and constrain the way such struggles can be mounted and by whom. These relations in schooling are social, and VCAL is a site of these differences. The VCAL curriculum endorses different relations of learning and exchanges in knowing through schooling.

Classical sociology provides important theoretical resources for understanding and explaining social differences and inequities. Not least Marx’s historical materialist theory in giving consideration to how people come to know the world and the currency



of knowledge as refracted through a division of mental and manual knowing. Marx maintained in *The German Ideology* that,

There exists a materialist connection of men with one another, which is determined by their needs and their mode of production, and which is as old as men themselves. This connection is ever taking on new forms and thus presents a 'history' independently of the existence of any political or religious nonsense which in addition may hold men together (Marx, 1978, pp.166-7).

Historical materialism embeds peoples' experiences to the organisation of production and its attendant material contexts and relations thereby circumventing idealist or speculative accounts of the conditions that affect peoples' lives and circumstances. This perspective sees the empirical patterns of society and schooling as historically and spatially specific forms of social relations that are organised through particular modes of production.

Historical materialism illuminates different forms of ownership associated with the various stages in the development of the division of labour. So when Marx proclaimed that the

division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears (Marx, 1978, p.167-8).

Marx was conceptualising a 'primordial' situation namely the coming of state society. Modern state society came into being in direct contrast to 'archaic' forms of society. The separation of mental and manual labour according to Marx not only pre-empts the possibilities for true consciousness but more importantly this division signals the birth of class society so essential to commodity production in capitalist relations of production. And at the same time the beginnings of modern antagonistic society.

The differences between mental knowing and manual knowing provide ways of understanding and explaining patterns of working-class schooling. Such pattern of schooling made just through this mental and manual division of labour, so central to class society as described by Marx have persisted in Australia's industrial and post-industrial histories. The access to knowledge as made available in schooling can be apprehended and understood by examining different patterns of schooling. The division between manual and mental labour and its curricula manifestation in secondary schooling provides a key conceptual way into understanding working-class schooling in this research. In order to focus on and examine contemporary working-class schooling this division provides a fundamental theoretical starting point.

A more 'integrated framework' of class analysis useful to the critical sociology deployed in this research emerges through Marxian and Weberian sociologies that consider the politics of class with issues of status (Wright, 2009, p. 114). While Marx emphasises class struggle in terms of the mode of production he emphasised the significance of economic and not cultural relations. Weber on the other hand emphasised bureaucracy, rationality and power in terms of status and prestige. An integrated framework provides a way for this research to consider working-class schooling politically and culturally through a 'critical sociology' (Bauman, 1976).

In examining teachers' work in VCAL to better know and understand contemporary working class schooling this research is immediately political. This research starts from an assumption that VCAL students are not less able or less intelligent as students who complete their schooling by participating in the VCE. Such an assumption rather than descending into a relativist conceptions about talent and

ability seeks to illuminate how subjective differences are a key aspect of pluralist responses to and overall engagement in schooling.

In using the phraseology of working-class schooling this research places itself historically into education research traditions that explicitly recognise and acknowledge structural inequalities in schooling provision (Connell *et al*, 1982; Connell, 1985; Dwyer, Wilson, and Woock, 1984; Brown, P. 1987; Lawton, 1975; Willis, 1977; Aronowitz, 2008). What students get from schooling and the ‘kind’ of schooling people get has important implications for the life choices and chances of secondary school students. In particular, schooling as it is made through teachers’ work and mediated by a curriculum frame of reference is central. As a result notions of knowing and the relationships of knowledge to social participation and the accession to personhood play an important role in understanding and explaining working-class schooling as it is presently made by teachers’ work in VCAL.

‘Selection’ and choice (Seddon, 1996) are fundamental to any social science or education research endeavour. This literature review considers social theories of class along with sociologies of education that have addressed working class education and knowledge in schooling. The literature review includes an outline of critical sociologies of class to illuminate its continuing conceptual relevance and limitations to research and its uses in understanding and explaining contemporary patterns of schooling. The scholarly work of American philosopher of education Jean Martin (1982, 1992, 1993, 2005) provides a basis for thinking about schooling, education and change. The literature review then considers the sociology of education debates about knowledge in schooling. To this end, social theories of craft, practice and manual work provide a critical basis for rethinking knowledge and its implications in patterns of schooling and

the curriculum. Along with these ideas the review engages theories of craft as a resource for reconsidering contemporary conditions and patterns of schooling that are normatively understood and referred to as ‘non-academic’. Such references as a consequence uncritically connect non-academic to working-class.

The transformation of craftsmen and artisans into workers (Bauman, 1982) was central in the historical emergence of industrial capitalism and it is argued that today craftsmanship (Sennett, 2008) and notions of craft provide a buffer to some of the demoralising affects of capitalist cultures. This literature review shows how social theories of craft provide a way to redress the impasse about knowledge in the curriculum as theorised in the ‘new sociology of education’ (Young, 1971, 2005). Overall, the literature shows that key epistemological ideas and social concepts are embedded in and constituted by material practices. Theoretically the research hinges upon the recognition that working-class schooling involves a specific engagement with knowledge. Methodologically the mental-manual division of labour provides an important entry point for re-thinking class and education. These moves are useful to thinking through working-class schooling in contemporary times to underline the key factors for critically appreciating and understanding teachers’ work in VCAL.

### **Undying class and class change**

*“Memory is the after-life of history”* according to Bauman in, *Memories of Class*, (Bauman, 1982, p.1), signalling the resonance of ideas and concepts after or out of their time. Bauman takes up class as a field of knowledge that has its own history. The history of class for Bauman emerged through changes in the organisation of society. In historicising the pre-history and afterlife of class, Bauman maintained that:

Perception of class as the ultimate human reality was born of the discourse of conflict (1982, p. 38).

For Bauman, following Marx, the antagonisms between labour and capital sediment class as an important sociological concept. In this historicity of class, Bauman locates class as a material reality and a sociological concept that is drawn directly from notions of rank in pre-capitalist societies and economies. Rank historically then was a necessary pre-condition for capitalism emergence, rather than its product (Beilharz, 2000).

The history of class according to Bauman owes much to the genealogical method associated with Foucault. The new power that ushers in class society is understood as an outcome of a 'disciplinary force' with the factory system as its emblematic institutional form. Bauman traced this emergence of class society from the social patterns found in the former institution of enclosure, the workhouse. For Bauman, enclosure operates as an important strategy in separating order from disorder. Schools became important in this social transformation, as Bauman (1982) writes:

Like hospitals, prisons and poor-houses, schools were the first and foremost instruments of confinement. They kept the children of the poor off the streets and away from mischief. They extended surveillance of their conduct over days and hours when the factory foreman rested. Their contribution to public order was therefore immediate and obvious. A somewhat less obvious, but far more substantial, contribution consisted in the long-term training of the young in the habits of obedience and respect for the rules set by their superiors (Bauman, 1982, p.73).

Efforts were made through the development of schooling to extend this new form of control over the lives of the poor who were not credited with the requisite moral or intellectual faculties to partake in universal human reason.

Bauman argues that class as a pre-condition of capitalism was constructed through the existing social differences in pre-capitalist society where those with power and wealth were considered to have a monopoly on moral propriety. For Bauman the control over human labour with the advent of capitalist arrangements became unlimited, and the school as an institution of enclosure was important for order and social control.

The reorganisation of the social conditions of labour outlined by Bauman make his historicity of class compelling. It is particularly the consequences of the factory system in the lives and livelihood of artisans and craftsmen that is an important marker of the formation of class society. Bauman singles out the transformations of craftsmen and artisanal production in pre-capitalism as significant.

To the craftsmen and artisans the growing ambitions of the factory system meant, above everything else, the threat of the loss of independence; more specifically, of control over their own labour which they theoretically, and to an extent also practically, had maintained since mediaeval time (Bauman, 1982, p. 56).

The arrangements of scientific knowledge that propelled the emergence of industrial capitalism eclipsed traditional craft practices and knowledge. The demise of the 'employer household' as the place of life and work for the craftsman is the most obvious indicator of the historical instituted separation of home and work. Changes such as this had flow on effects in terms of the social, political and moral order.

A new social order based on the economic imperatives of industrial capitalism reconfigured the value of work, labour and knowledge. This new valuation economically and morally was tied to a 'work ethic' that was wholly constructed in market terms. This work ethic in effect reduced the inner value (individual, personal) of labour and historically prior values as contained in craft guilds and other such communities to a ubiquitous monetary value that was symbolised in and through the 'wage'. The cash nexus cemented value with a monetary value. The 'work ethic' buttressed and represented a new disciplinary process that became necessary in colonising the will of workers to participate voluntarily in the new economic (industrial capitalist) order.

The crafts in Bauman's historical reckoning of class represented a resistance to and provided credible oppositional views and understandings of this emerging capitalist moral order and its work ethic.

The crafts still unscathed by the advance of the factory system set the pattern of autonomy and control now visibly under threat; while the expanding factory system, the embodiment of the new disciplining power and total impersonal control, gave shape and flesh to the threat to be staved off. The basic forms of the class organisation of labour were gestated in the clash between the two (Bauman, 1982, p.91).

No longer were communitarian and guild ways of knowing, practice and production epitomised through the activities of craftsmen and artisans in their workshops seen as effective. In this new order apprenticed craftsmen and women became workers/producers in the factory system and did not see their fate, tasks or skills as coterminous with, or even continuous with those of their boss-employer.

Prior historical conditions of the master and apprentice in the home workshop enabled an exchange of knowledge and skill development that saw the master-apprentice bond provide continuity in the making and production process. This historical pattern of knowledge and skill exchange was usurped by a factory production process resulting in radically individualised labour. Labour prior to the industrial revolution was 'part and parcel of social bonds' whereas in the arrangements of industrial capitalism labour was reduced to a mere economic transaction. Labour was enclosed through its institutionalisation in the industrial capitalist factory.

For Bauman, class as a social category and a concept emerged as useful to the theorisation of society at a meta-social level and could be legitimately used to understand and explain the social relations of industrial capitalist societies. Education and schooling played a key role in the historical transformations that formed the class society of industrial capitalism by,

The deployment of old and new agencies in the service of retraining the free-spirited and refractory craftsmen in a fashion more appropriate to the discipline of the factory...the family and the rapidly expanding system of education were perhaps the most prominent. Both acted as grass-roots, diffuse and ubiquitous agencies of discipline power...(that) consisted in the 'individualization' of workers, achieved simultaneously through the weakening of communal authority and reorientation to personal success (Bauman, 1982, p.116).

Bauman's sociological explanation of class emphasises the conceptual lines of freedom and power. Industrial capitalism involved the formation and re-formation of a range of social institutions, including the school. In particular schools became important for status allocation and social security. Disciplinary power divides and individualises and does so through institutions of enclosure such as the factory and the school. Power and freedom operate in the function of education as a disciplining process; through enabling the formation of the necessary individual will that is imperative for capitalist expansion.

In his pre-history and afterlife of class Bauman charts both the emergence and decline of class as general explanatory tool in sociology:

At the later stage of industrial society, the stage we live in now, there is no group, or assembly of groups, whose interests could withstand a discursive scrutiny as the 'universal' interests of the society as a whole (Bauman, 1982, p.194).

For Bauman, the emergence of class society and class conceptually occurred through the ascendancy of a new type of power. No one group or groups are today afforded or inflicted with the pressure and universal expectation to forge a fairer or more egalitarian social order. The contradictions inherent in contemporary social arrangements according to Bauman do not only reside in class divisions but can be found in divisions premised upon age, gender, ethnicity or any other such divisions based upon the 'cumulative effects of deprivation'. This deprivation could arise through illness, disability or other circumstances of 'brute luck' (Callinicos, 2006). This has consequences for how sociological knowledge is produced and made. Bauman does not



herald the ‘death of class’ but mitigates its purposes and underlines its limitations for macro-sociological theory.

Bauman argues for using class contingently to interrogate contemporary and existing patterns of social exclusion, isolation and difference. Bauman’s sociology of class signals the ethical imperatives of contemporary sociology and argues that the basis of exploitation in contemporary social contexts cannot be solely explained on the basis of the tensions between capital and labour. Bauman’s treatise on the pre-history and afterlife of class deconstructs class as an “analytically over valued category” (Beilharz, 2000) that loses its potency as a universal explanatory concept when projected back in time.

In his historical analysis of class from pre-industrialism to the industrial factory production and to the contemporary corporate capitalist consumerism, Bauman outlines the limitation of class for sociology in political terms by arguing that:

The provision of conditions for the continuing reproduction of society has become a directly political problem which extends far beyond the ‘economy proper’ (Bauman, 1982, p.195).

The ‘deprived sectors of social life’ are the result or ‘collateral damage’ that results from the ‘functioning of the system’. The system is not just the forces of capitalist economic production but also the processes for distribution and consumption and the power structures and values that promote order and mitigate latent disorder(s). Bauman’s sociological intervention into class theory provides an important understanding of class societies and their subsequent transformation into corporatised consumer societies. Unlike sociologists who heralded the ‘death of class’ (Pakulski and Waters, 1992), Bauman’s points out the brittleness of ‘class’ as a general sociological concept that cannot wholly explain contemporary society and its structural inequalities.

Yet it remains implicit to his sociological reckoning of modernity and what he has come to call liquid modernity (2000, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2010) and important in explaining contemporary experiences of exclusion and deprivation.

The antagonisms between capital and labour and the attendant politics of exploitation do not, according to Bauman, account for all forms of social deprivation. Class remains an important conceptual tool, for understanding and explaining social experiences. But for Bauman class is only part of the story. Social experiences such as schooling at a national and, local level, is one place where the social, political, economic and cultural significance of class can be still apprehended and used for purposes of social understandings and explanation.

For Bauman the emergence of the consumer economy has blurred the perceptions of 'class distinctions'. Like the transition from feudal to industrial capitalism the new power arrangements of consumer societies represent an historical transition that brings about reconfigured power arrangements.

The new powers are articulated in terms of self-identity, authenticity, fullness of life, etc., and none of these articulations has a room for the traditional oppositions (Bauman, 1982, p.18).

The good society hoped for or anticipated by those committed to the revolutionary overthrow of the exploitative power of capitalism has been swamped in societies where the abundance of goods has overtaken the scarcity of goods made available for consumption. In Bauman's words the possibility of a 'good society in a society of goods' has become much more difficult to imagine (1982, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006), let alone attain. Consequently, Bauman's theorisation of the limitation of class as an explanatory sociological law has resulted in his recent sociological theory becoming

preoccupied with the 'logics in modernity' that are not reducible to capitalism (Beilharz, 2000, p.16).

### **Cultural renditions of class**

While Bauman's sociological engagement with class theorises its contingency and limitation as an overburdened concept Bourdieu (1984) on the other hand and sociologists who have taken up his theories underline the cultural dimensions to class. Skeggs using Bourdieuan frames, feminist theory and drawing from other critical social theories progresses a theory of class formation that provides ways of thinking about, knowing and using class in the contexts of empirical research. Skeggs' theory suggests a culturally imbued rendition of class where the subject is constituted as a classed subject. Skeggs tackles class with a focus on inscription, where 'making through marking' shapes classed bodies and behaviour through socio-cultural frames and structures that are political and personal:

Class formation is dynamic, produced through conflict and fought out at the level of the symbolic. To ignore this is to work uncritically with the categories produced through this struggle, which always (because it is a struggle) exists in the interests of power. Class (as a concept, classification and positioning) must always be at the site of continual struggle and re-figuring precisely because it represents the interests of particular groups (Skeggs, 2004, p.5).

Unlike Bauman's historicity of class that tracks the emergence of class through rank and the paternalisms of pre-capitalist society, Skeggs locates class culturally to examine its manifestation and impact on both the social body and individual bodies.

Skeggs following Bourdieu proffers a sociology of dispositions refracted through the conceptual quadrant and metaphors of economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital. It is from the cultural and the symbolic capital that Skeggs' sociology

of class draws to theorise class formation and the production of classed subjectivities

For Skeggs:

The self is seen not as a subject position, but as part of a system of exchanges in which classed personhood is produced through different technologies, such as narration...(where) different forms of personhood and individuality (were) [are] integral to how class interests become inscribed onto different bodies in the name of 'the self' (Skeggs, 2004, pp.5-6).

While Bauman's historicity of class foregrounds meta-social narratives, Skeggs apprehends the cultural and more precisely the symbolic dimensions of class formation at the level of the subject to illuminate the political dimensions of class made through culture. Subjectivities, Skeggs' argues, are unevenly accorded value and differentiated through moral distinctions that underwrite class difference.

That not everyone can become a valued subject, or become the 'optimising individual' necessary for neo-liberal times, underpins the cultural politics of class formation in Skeggs' sociology. The self, according to Skeggs, like class is produced through exchange relationships. Skeggs' sociology of class considers the politics of attending to the distributional aspects of the relationships between power and inequality:

The maintenance of the division between those who 'reform' and those who are seen to be in need of 'reform' is central to the institutionalization of class divisions. (Skeggs, 2004, p.88).

Nowhere more so in the area of knowledge is this apparent, as Skeggs points out through the,

way in which class is marked and difference known is through drawing boundaries around certain practices and knowledge, in order that only some people can be seen to comfortably make use of them. By deriding those who step out of place, boundaries are maintained (Skeggs, 2004, p.108).

Skeggs' sociology of class provides a detailed explanation of how entitlement is resourced through the institutional and property rights enshrined in bourgeois cultures. What people are entitled to and how these patterns of entitlement are produced is refigured through culture and played out on bodies.

Bodies that are marked as brilliant and clever stand in stark contradistinction to those slovenly, dull and unintelligent bodies. The self is classed through the methods of its constitution. In exchanges, subjective and cultural bodies are positioned and fixed as deficit while other bodies are able to move and to assign, to appropriate and to consume value.

Skeggs, through her sociology, provides an account of class formation that includes four distinctive processes and aspects. These are inscription, exchange, value and perspective. Skeggs' sociological treatment of class shows:

how some forms of culture are condensed and inscribed onto social groups and bodies that then mark and restrict their movement in social space whilst others are not but are able to become more mobile and flexible (Skeggs, 2004, p.2).

Skeggs' use of power problematises Bourdieu's sociology by bringing into relief the existence of responses to powerlessness by highlighting that powerlessness does not equate to being culturally powerless. While Bourdieu's sociology of class utilises capital this can at times be indicative of a deficit reading and positioning of those with less power (Livingstone and Sawchuk, 2004). Skeggs' feminism enables a more critical reading of class differences than Bourdieu's and her sociology moves past Bauman's thesis of 'class as memory' to demonstrate its markings on the body socially and subjectively. Whilst there is much energy put into knowing, defining recognising and moralising the working classes, according to Skeggs the working-class go about their

business using their own definitions (Skeggs, 2004, p.40). Class is tackled objectively and subjectively in Skeggs' sociology. It is concerned with how value is attributed dispositionally through political struggles that are cultural and subjective. By using the lexicon of neo-liberalism, subjects of worth and value are understood by Skeggs as being formed through a power dynamic where those with power, resources and 'propriety' make perspectives that (re)make class advantage and privilege.

Class for Skeggs is highly differentiated and is not concerned with repeating the heroic white patriarchal and masculinist notions of working-classness. Class is concerned with the abilities and resources people have to author for themselves a subjectivity that is accorded value. It is about the power people have and the power enacted upon people. So Skeggs' rendition of class is concerned with how "*The self becomes obliged to 'become' in a particular way.*" (Skeggs, 2004, p.73). Class, subjectivity and position, provide a way to assess and evaluate whether people 'fit in' or are 'suitable'. This politics of inclusion and exclusion does have real and actual repercussions that cannot be easily shrugged off by individuals with 'robust', 'resilient' or strong subjectivities. Central to this rendition of class are the processes of evaluation, moral attribution and authorization and how this happens through exchange relations.

Another sociologist and feminist scholar, Diane Reay (2001, 2005, 2008) also extending Bourdieu's sociology makes links between individuals' emotional worlds to external social and structural processes and practices to illustrate ways in which class is implicated in psychic processes and the formation of the self. Developing an affective lexicon Reay argues that the 'individualised working-class' inhabit psychic landscapes premised upon defence, shame and envy, whilst 'middle-class egalitarians' psychic dispositions include guilt, defensiveness, empathy and conciliation. Where Skeggs'

(1997, 2004) highlights the cultural dimensions of class that have important moral implications and overtones, Reay proposes that the presence or absence of emotional capital signal patterns of self-worth where confidence, security and entitlement especially as they relate to education and success in education are important class issues.

In particular Reay's theorisation of class utilising emotional capital points to the consequences of selection at play in schooling and education. As Reay states:

One consequence of the growing preoccupation with testing and assessment is the fixing of failure in the working classes (Reay, 2005, p.916).

The concept of emotional capital points to not only the fixing of failure on to the working classes but more importantly an interiorisation of affective value at the level of the subject. So much so that class at a structural and subjective level comes to be naturalised in education systems that operate with a veneer and pretence of meritocracy. Achievement then through education is monopolised or hoarded (Wright, 2009) by the middle class.

For Reay (2001) there is not a valued place within education for the working-classes, schooling at best contains or pacifies.

In the majority of cases when working class plus education equals academic success education is not about valorization of working classness but its erasure; education as an escape (Reay, 2001, p. 334).

More often than not the 'unschooled', the 'drop out', the difficult to school or the hard to teach are not credentialed and are marked to use Skeggs' (2004) term as 'use-less subjects', incomplete, or failures. Such normative evaluations write off large numbers of young people and are read as problems in the organisation and arrangements of schooling. Patterns and processes for the development and recognition of abilities that

only accommodate the education and schooling needs of a section of the population point to skewed patterns of schooling. Bauman's sociology of class leads to understandings of schooling as 'enclosure', while Skeggs along with Reay point out the symbolic and subjective dimensions of class made through exchanges that are cultural and have affective implications.

The sociology of class historically has been theorised as 'injury' (Sennett and Cobb, 1972) and 'refusal' (Willis, 1977) as a result of cultural and affective structures and processes that unequally value different subjectivities. Bauman's sociology of class together with Bourdieuan sociology as critically refracted through the feminist scholarship of Skeggs and Reay points to class as conceptual resource that continues to explain the contingencies of social phenomena that have important subjective implications. Class is a contested and contestable terrain in social inquiries that seek to illuminate limitations to freedom and the curtailment of justice. The ways different types of schooling enclose and authorise exchanges and ways of knowing, results in different subjectivities. The school curriculum and teachers' work are central in these processes. The freedoms and justices made available through schooling have changed in time and form. Working-class schooling, it follows, provides the basis for particular types of freedom. Freedom made through specific exchanges, through particular enclosures of teaching and learning.

### **Schooling, social change and education**

In her research and theoretical writings, education philosopher and feminist scholar Jean Roland Martin (1982, 1992, 1993, 2005) questions and reconsiders the organisation of schooling to better address and respond to social and cultural changes. Martin believes that schooling in contemporary times needs to become much more



responsive to the contexts and situations young people are living. Martin, while researching and writing about education and schooling in America, makes important claims about patterns of schooling and the social relations of learning that have resonances for Australia and for this research. Schooling institutionally for Martin is made through curriculum and teachers' practices that arise from these curricular arrangements. Given the dramatic social changes of the past few decades Martin argues that a 'new vision for education' is required. To this end she explains how the changes in the composition of families and what constitutes a family has profound consequences for how young people come to school. According to Martin (1992) no longer do the majority of young people live in two parent households where there is a 'male breadwinner' and a 'female homemaker', this heteronormative ideal of the family has become a minority experience.

Families today may involve two parents heterosexual or same sex, engaged in paid employment, sole parent families who have paid employment or not as the case may be, mixed households including several generations or blended households where two families have come together through relationship changes. These family and household arrangements are just some of the changed situations and contexts young people now live. The point being for Martin that as social bonds shift the conditions of schooling must also adjust and respond. Preparing young people through school in the contexts of these shifting social arrangements and new patterns and social bonds needs to be tackled at the institutional level of schooling and in the curriculum

Martin argues that curriculum needs to be freed up to be useful and responsive to the circumstances and contexts in which young people live. Some subjects in schooling

are understood as ‘god-given’ or ‘immutable basics’ and as such have come to represent the ‘two dogmas of curriculum’. Martin argues that:

The decision of what to make the basics of education, like every major curriculum decision, depends not simply on the way the world is but on the way we think it should be, on the kind of life we believe to be worth living, and on the kind of society we believe to be worth living in (1982, p. 19).

The concern with the three Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic) as ‘god-given’ and ‘immutable basics’ that is, subjects that are upheld as unchanging, as fixed and non-negotiable in terms of their place in schooling, according to Martin does not and cannot always in all times guarantee a just future, a worthy life or indeed a worthwhile society. The three Rs are ‘basic’ because they are generative, but what to teach, and what content and context emerges from the generative power of the three Rs is an important consideration raised by Martin in thinking through how more inclusive and relevant models of schooling can be progressed. Martin further claims that the generative power of the three Rs is not universal or in fact timeless.

Reading, writing and arithmetic are an expectation of schooling patterns in modernity. Prior to the twentieth century education theory was concerned with how to teach (methods) and the education of people (systems of provision) according to Martin (1992). Debates about what to teach (curriculum) became important in shaping patterns of education and schooling and intensified when schooling as a universal right and entitlement begun to be a defining social and political concern (Johnson, 1983). Schooling in all its forms is an important social institution and for Martin (1982, 1992, 1993, 2005) it’s capacities to underpin an inclusive and democratic polity and society lies in the ways it is arranged to deal with and treat difference. In the twentieth century curriculum politics gained prominence as an important area of educational research

interest and was understood to have important implications in teachers' labour, student learning options and the generation, production and transmission of expected social and cultural mores and norms.

The new problem of education is concerned with the recognition and legitimisation of differences, Martin argues, for going beyond the 'two dogmas' of god-given and immutable basics in curriculum. A common curriculum as progressed in models of comprehensive schooling is for Martin no guarantee for a unified polity of self-reliant possessive individuals. For Martin:

the best way that curriculum can contribute to the manufacturing of unity is by including diverse voices and viewpoints, developing ways of teaching that require everyone to take seriously the experiences and points of view of people unlike themselves, and explicitly rejecting stereotypes while working through racial, ethnic, religious and gender antagonisms that divide us. It is also by providing everyone with a solid foundation in the three Cs of care concern and connection (Martin, 1993, p.102).

Martin's philosophy of education identifies the curriculum as central to organising teachers' work in schools and thus shaping and determining the value of the school experience, socially, culturally, politically to have individual and collective benefits. In addition to this her education philosophy with its focus on the 'three Cs' of care concern and connection takes teaching out of a service discourse and relocates in a social and cultural paradigm where teaching is about relationships between people and their worlds. Encountering and knowing difference in Martin's philosophy of education moves schooling beyond a competition for position to an engagement with the world and its people that is made through difference. The accommodation of multiple interests through education and schooling for Martin (1992, 2005) more often than not involves the profusion of different kinds and types of schooling.

Martin's philosophical arguments draw on Montessori's philosophies of education amongst others including Kant and Dewey, to call for reconsidered patterns of schooling to be more instructive in supporting people to become citizens with participatory capacities. Martin (1992) believes that Montessori's seminal work *Casa dei bambini* has been mistranslated as the 'house for children' and that 'children's home' would be a more accurate translation. Martin is also of the belief that Montessori's educational philosophy was accepted as a method rather than a philosophy because of her gender.

In privileging the three Cs (care, concern and connection) Martin's philosophy of education sees value in schooling that teaches students how to live. This notion of teaching people how to live is underpinned by an appreciation by Martin of the value of domesticity, dwelling and being at home in the world. Martin's philosophy of education recognises that education results in a metamorphosis (2005) of the individual that involves gains and losses for individuals and communities. To illustrate this point Martin describes the losses and gains experienced by Rita, in the Willy Russell stage play and later film *Educating Rita*. For Martin, the metamorphosis that results from education can be either educative or miseducative. These whole person or identity changes that occur through education are understood as 'culture crossings' according to Martin's philosophy of education. According to Martin:

Every single one of us undergoes an educational metamorphosis from being a creature of nature to an inhabitant of human culture (Martin, 2007, p.66).

This notion of cultural crossing while understood as an individual experience is for Martin also a social phenomenon where societies change. One such example is the desegregation of schooling as a result of the changes brought about civil rights in

classrooms across America. Such changes are described as a culture crossing, from a culture of segregation to a culture of integration.

The purposes of schooling in contemporary times have expanded to become an important aspect in the processes of self-formation, where processes of the fashioning of subjectivity are made available through dedicated curriculum objectives and schooling as a social resource (McLeod and Yates, 2006). That is, people in schools are becoming subjects, or indeed citizens and students who are deemed able and attributed with the value and entitlements of being subjects through exchange processes that occur in schools between students and teachers. Yet appreciating the limitations and transformations to previous separate and streamed tracks in schooling has brought about these changes.

### **Working-class schooling and difference**

Dwyer *et al.* (1982) in their research into working-class schooling in Australia argued that:

Any curriculum or programme which accepts the existing hierarchy of social organization as given, or which assumes that working class children will step into the production process in the same way as their parents did, is fundamentally inadequate (Dwyer, Wilson and Woock, 1982, p. 143).

For schooling to be educative a broadening of schooling is required so that schooling becomes inclusive of differences. The defining features of classed patterns of schooling are not given by the presumed populations of working-class or middle-class people that come to such schooling, but rather by the enclosure of knowledges in curricula and teaching practices and teachers' actions that make them possible. People who undertake schooling that can be known and understood as 'working-class' are not being prepared for jobs their parents had as these jobs generally do not exist anymore. Yet different

classed forms of schooling undoubtedly have different implications for the sorts of occupations people go into.

For Dwyer *et al.* (1982) working-class schooling that is effective is premised upon a respect of students, on the mitigation of the demoralising and intimidating aspects of schooling, and on valuing the students' cultures, languages and perspectives. The curriculum was identified and viewed as central to the formation of an effective schooling in being useful to young people's lives. Permanent social exclusion, Dwyer *et al.* (1982), argued has dire consequences both for the individual and socially. Specific cultural forms of knowing, when privileged over others, forms class dimensions in this sort of ordering of knowledge in the curriculum.

Linking class with culture had a particular historic salience for understanding schooling and curriculum as far as Dwyer *et al.* (1982) were concerned.

The historic distinctions between the academic and the trades, between mental and the manual, have been central to schooling... as a justification for the systematic failure and exclusion of working-class children. Because they appear unable to cope with purely academic subject matter, and because they appear to be hostile toward intellectual skills and theorising, working class students have been dismissed as low achievers and anti-intellectual (Dwyer, Wilson and Woock, 1982, p. 54).

Positioning of the working-classes in this manner was an inevitable outcome in a schooling arrangement that negated working class people's experiences. Connell made similar arguments and went further to suggest that:

Things that working class people confidently and securely know are pushed aside or devalued as not being proper (Connell, 1982, p.169).

The status, value and worth of knowing in specific ways underpin classed patterns of schooling. When considering Martin's philosophies of education the so-called 'immutable basics' and 'god given' subjects reflect patterns of schooling that attend to some people's experiences and not others. Further to this, her challenge to the

two dogmas of curriculum is that what is basic and god given changes through time, so that what is valued as 'academic' is also subject to change.

Schooling is a powerful institutional project that can have both developmental and detrimental effects, which may be recognised at the time or well after the fact. As an institutional project schooling seeks to teach people in order that human culture can persist and continue. It is a challenging task when, not all people learn in the same way and not all people come to education equally. Secondary schooling in the formerly post-compulsory Years 11 and 12 is shaped by university admission wherein other aspects and purposes of schooling are considered subordinate to this main task.

Patterns of schooling such as comprehensively organised schooling have provided ways for different people to learn different things together. Patterns of exclusion abound when divisions in knowing and the privileging of narrow purposes of schooling such as university admission distort the schooling process and experience. In their research into working-class schooling Dwyer, Wilson and Woock found that:

It is instructive to consider the outcomes of schools and programmes with smaller numbers of students, extended contact between teachers and students, and an emphasis on informal social relations. This is not an argument for *laissez-faire* learning, but for a different quality of relationships (Dwyer *et al*, 1982, p.60).

Dwyer *et al.* (1982) identified the quality of relationships as a key determinant of successful participation in learning and education in schools. Appreciating differences without the conceit of superiority as Dwyer *et al.* (1982) suggest is possible in contexts where relations are less formal in an authoritarian sense and more respectful of differences as suggested in Martin's education philosophy and Connell's sociology. Bauman's enclosure and Skeggs' exchange shapes the experiences of schooling in terms of institutional forms and the exchanges produced in the social relations of learning.

Today, early school leaving is discouraged and new strategies and methods are again being introduced to provide ways of keeping young people in school. When Connell (1982; 1985) theorised the competitive academic curriculum as hegemonic, the subordinate curriculum was understood as a schooling experience that was vocational and usually had relevance to the students' immediate life concerns. Yet today the immediate life concerns of students who have not, historically, been present in senior secondary schooling are again difficult for those schooling systems to know.

Knowing and knowledge organised as a common curriculum was a central theme among education theorists, and policy researchers and activists when they advocated for comprehensive schooling. It was argued that, as the school curriculum is a selection from culture and certain kinds of knowledge, attitudes and values are important, warranting their transmission to the next generation by professionals (teachers) in institutions (schools). This notion of a common curriculum is derived from a belief in and commitment to a common culture (Lawton 1975). The use and deployment of comprehensive schooling to better accommodate differences in the curriculum and to organise more inclusive patterns of schooling were important reforms. Yet it can now be seen that the broader social structures that produce power and privilege remained largely unaffected by comprehensive common schooling reforms.

A key point, well made by Lawton (1975), who was an advocate for comprehensive schooling, was that knowledge itself is not classed. To describe school curriculum subjects such as mathematics, music or art as middle-class or working-class for that matter is ludicrous yet, he argued evidence shows that access to knowledge is indeed differentiated by and made through class distinctions. The commitment to



comprehensive schooling occurred in order to ensure wider access to knowledge through expanded offerings of different forms of knowledge through a more comprehensive school curriculum. Schooling as an institution provides status and legitimacy to knowledge through curricula. That there are different types and kinds of schools further complicates political struggles for comprehensive schooling.

It is access to knowledge as enabled or constrained by the structure and organisation of education that Lawton (1975) decried as having class and cultural implications. For Lawton a common curriculum based on a selection from culture is based on a minimum and a consensus understanding of knowledge that is important to social participation and engagement. Such knowledge, for Lawton (1975), was not to be found in “non-academic” courses. These courses, Lawton argued are sinks for the children labelled as less able and ‘contain little or no worthwhile knowledge’ (Lawton, 1975, pp.61-71).

Ford (1969) argued, conversely to Lawton, that ‘comprehensive schooling’ no matter how inclusive it strived to be could not eschew the connection between schooling, employment and the labour market. It was Ford’s point that equality in schooling could only ever come about when schooling is decoupled from the selection into the labour market. In his book, *Social class and the comprehensive school*, Ford questioned the limits and possibilities for equality and schooling in the following way:

If we are to produce any change at all we must completely free the schools of their function as selection agencies for occupation.  
But could a non-selective school system be devised? (Ford, 1969, p.136).

Schooling no matter how it is arranged is unable to avoid the tasks of selection and segregation (Ford, 1969). Lawton (1976) maintained that any curriculum is basically a selection from culture and claimed a common culture, although contingent, could bring

about more equitable schooling arrangements. Such a characterisation of curriculum makes culture a cornerstone concept in thinking about schooling. Ford (1969) argued, in opposition that social change could not be effected through such an education reform no matter what selections from culture are enshrined in curriculum.

Yet Martin's (1982) call to go beyond 'dogma' in making curricula and schooling differently was taken up by those who reformed schooling through the implementation of comprehensive models of schooling (Blackburn, 1985; Lawton, 1975). The struggles to make schooling more inclusive, in order to redress issues of social inequality continues today with those who grapple with the tensions of limited participation and selection. The issue of knowledge in schooling remains central to more just and free approaches to schooling and, following Jean Martin's philosophy of education, holds fast to the notion that social change can happen with and through schooling that responds to rather than covers over differences.

### **Knowing in schooling**

The 'new sociology of education' identified the curriculum as a significant factor in the production of equitable outcomes in schooling participation. The core debate in this 'new sociology of education' was between objectivist and constructivist understandings of knowledge (Young, 1971). This earlier work foregrounded the emerging debates about the relativity and indeed the plurality of knowledge and ways of knowing. More recently Young (2005) has continued to argue that knowledge is central to curriculum and outlines the importance of:

The distribution of the experiences that the curriculum needs to take account of if students from diverse backgrounds are to have opportunities to acquire knowledge that takes them beyond their experience (Young, 2005, p.23).

Young proposes that a 'social realist' approach to knowledge avoids relativism in curriculum by locating the objectivity of knowledge in its social character. This perspective recognises the collective means by which knowledge is made, including actions of scientific discovery and research and the ways in which knowledge is acquired through teaching and learning. These practices of knowledge building provide a basis for objectivity, in the sense that there are ways of knowing the world that are formed and validated independent of an individual's experience. This sociology of education in emphasising the curriculum privileges knowledge that emerges through dialogue between 'cognitive interests and specialist communities and the codes of practice that support them' (Young, 2005, p.31).

The differences between academic knowledge and vocational knowledge in the curriculum, as understood by Young (2005), can be found in the tensions between 'knowledge-based' and 'standards-based' approaches to vocational education. For Young a general academicist curriculum is knowledge based, where knowledge is codified in school subjects. On the other hand, vocational curriculum, in referencing expected performance requirements of skills and abilities is 'un-codifiable' and exists in the form of standards. It is Young's argument that:

The nature of the connections between codified knowledge of the college-based curriculum and the tacit and often un-codifiable knowledge that is acquired in workplaces (that) is the basis for what is distinctive about vocational knowledge (Young, 2005, p.144).

Young's argues that these differences between the knowledge embedded in general and vocational education curriculum are centred by the historical and social origins of knowledge that provide different bases for objectivity. His position then disregards a social constructivist view of knowledge understood as a result of practices that always represent perspectives, interests or standpoints. In doing so knowledge is understood

hierarchically that privileges codified knowledge over living knowledge. Living knowledge that is always co-constructed by people through their experiences and everyday encounters in the social worlds in which they dwell. The lack of clarity between these types of knowing allows Young to overlook their importance.

Resolving the differentiated 'parity of esteem' between general and vocational education according to Young resides in achieving greater clarity about what knowledge is to be acquired through vocational education. The circuitry of Young's arguments lies in his commitment to 'connectionist specialisation' where he argues for the potential connection and unification of general and vocational education. In such an argument the differences between the theoretical and practical, the mental and the manual, the material and the manual, the head and the hand are reiterated. That things can be known in ways other than through theory is subjugated in Young's accounts of knowledge. Connective specialisation, as Young argues, implies that clarity about other ways of knowing rests upon codifying knowledge not on tacit or performative ways of knowing.

One of the difficulties inherent in the arguments of the sociology of education as espoused by Young is its 'compartmentalisation' of knowledge and knowing. More recently researchers investigating the value of work, craft and knowledge (Adamson, 2007; Crawford, 2008; Sennett, 2008; Rose, 2004; Kemmis, 2005) offer up other ways of conceptualising non-academic knowledge that transcend the theory -practice binary be it vocational or applied. By considering issues of practice and technique embedded in manual work and their intellectual, cognitive and emotional dimensions these theorists in their work demand a reconsideration of knowing and knowledge. All of these scholars seek to move beyond a differentiated notion of general and vocational knowing by underlining the mind work involved in manual labour.

Historically, the forms of labour that developed through broader social and economic relations underpinned connections between knowledge, schooling and employment. Young (2005) concedes this social foundation that created the inevitable differences between academic and vocation curricula:

That like all education structures, academic/vocational divisions have their origins in the division of labour in society and not in the education system alone. Only a society without a division of labour – and this means either a utopia or the primitive communism described by Marx – could have an education system without academic/vocational divisions (Young, 2005,p.163).

The division of labour in society, and knowing through schooling in a mass context produces an inevitable plurality of practices, ways of knowing and learning. This is done through and with capital and labour. What is assigned as ‘capital’ is prefigured by a political-economy where the inevitable uneven distribution of status, worth and value. Young’s sociology, with its interest in the socially distributed effects of knowledge, follows the earlier work of Bernstein (1975) and considers the classification, codification and framing of knowledge at the expense of interrogating the politics of how value is attributed to what and whose knowledge. This is in contrast to Bourdieu’s sociology, which suggests that the parameters, which define who has a meaningful life, happens through the regulation of capital. Criticisms by critical sociologists and feminist scholars challenge the attributions of deficit to people based on their class, gender or ethnicity. As a consequence, the attribution of deficit results in ‘other’ peoples’ actions, interactions and knowledge being debased. Scholars who resist deficit readings have argued that ideas about the framing and distribution of knowledge can at times be ‘read as highly sophisticated defences of deficit theory (i.e., the limited capacities of lower-class and other subordinated groups) while ostensibly aligning themselves on the side of equity and justice (Livingstone and Sawchuk, 2004, p.49).

The misrecognition of the value and worth of ‘other’ ways of knowing results in undermining the status of knowledge made possible in schools. Such knowledge is made through the labour, and exchanges between teachers and students in ways that diverge from, and challenge the god-given and immutable basics. In applied learning contexts this involves troubling a manual and mental divide in knowledge and knowing.

### **Re-crafting schooling to accommodate more**

All forms of schooling, be it ‘general education’, ‘vocational education’ and now ‘applied learning’ enclose particular teaching and learning processes and practices. Schooling is shaped through its provision of knowledge that legitimise certain ways of living and different cultures. Ability and talent are either recognised or overlooked in the enclosed schooling practices because they are framed by these different ways of providing knowledge. Comprehensive schooling expanded patterns of recognition and produced an expansion in participation. Applied learning follows on from this historical trajectory, further pushing the boundaries of schooling to ‘enclose’ those that have previously not been included. Rather than institutionalising a difference based on academic and technical (vocation) education, applied learning reorganises the provision of academic and vocational knowledge in ways that prefigure the self, personhood, and subjectivity in schooling. This applied curriculum goes beyond an interest in the subjective dimensions of general and vocational tracks of schooling by recognising the way prefiguring of the self contributes to processes and practices of knowing and making the world. Theories of craft provide a theoretical insight and basis for knowing about knowing in this “new” or third stream in schooling in Victoria.

Sennett (2008) and Adamson (2007) develop theories of craft that problematise the distinction between the brain and the hand and the intellectual and the practical split

inherent to the forms of knowing. Sennett (2008) in *The Craftsman* argues that ‘making is thinking’ and similarly Adamson (2007) in *Thinking through craft*, treats craft as an idea that underpins and informs technique, practice and design. Both Adamson and Sennett make important claims about craft and its centrality to human existence and human knowing and the formation of democratic polities.

For Adamson, craft is an approach it is an attitude and a habit of action whose inferiority relative to art may just be ‘the most productive thing about it’ (Adamson, 2007, p.2-4). In signalling craft as a ‘conceptual limit’ in relation to art, Adamson argues that it is ‘through an examination of the terms of its subordination that the prejudices that attend craft can be addressed’. This is equally the case for vocational or applied learning as a subordinated curriculum. In focusing on craft and its relationship to skill Adamson claims that historically in the twentieth century movements like the Bauhaus progressed an appreciation of craft where ‘skill was discussed not only as a way of making things but also a way of making people: a means of social improvement (Adamson, 2007, p.70)’.

It is in vocational education that he identifies craft and skill as a political subject. Drawing on the insights of artists such as Josef Albers and education theorists like Dewey, Adamson’s theorisations of craft especially as they relate to skill and practice provides a critical orientation to distinctions between knowing and doing. Considering the progressivist movement of the early twentieth century that sought to make schools places of social reform, Adamson singles out Dewey’s notion of experience as central to understanding the politics of craft and skills. Experience is the moment where people encounter interactions with objects and processes. Craft in this sense is seen as entirely

compatible with general education. Adamson sees a class bias in debates and tensions between a practical (craft) education and liberal education.

The working-classes were encouraged to engage only in manual work, while the children of wealthier and more educated families at non-vocational schools were encouraged in intellectual pursuits. “To my mind” one educator wrote, “we may as well give up the boast of democracy if we are to have industrial education for the masses and a liberal education for the favoured few (Adamson, 2007, p.79).

In the early twentieth century progressive educationalists saw craft as useful not just in terms of the physical development of skill as a utilitarian strategy, but that it was also important to the development of moral integrity, and intellectual development. Craft enabled learning by providing spaces in schooling for people to be self-expressive. Adamson cites Dewey as an education theorist committed to just these efforts to expose people to the value of manual work in order that they become ‘industrial citizens’.

Craft allows people to feel their way in tactile process with objects such as clay, timber, steel, textiles, and paint. Walter Gropius, a principal of the Bauhaus in Weimar Germany, shared Dewey’s commitments to craft. Gropius “hoped craft would serve as a basis for a democratic, mass-produced modernism” (Adamson, 2007, p. 83). Josef Albers, a painter, taught at the Bauhaus and then before the Second World War (1930s) went to America to teach at Black Mountain College in Carolina. Black Mountain College was established by drawing on the philosophies of John Dewey as well as the principles of the Bauhaus movement in Germany. Josef Albers’ story as a teacher traverses the Bauhaus (Gropius) considerations of the value of craft and Dewey’s influence in the importance of practical work and craft in the United States. Albers, after teaching at Black Mountain College, went on to teach colour technique at Yale. Albers viewed the objectives of his work as a teacher as the need “to open eyes” (Horowitz and Danilowitz, 2006). Developing perspective for Albers emerged from



one's own experience and a belief that dedicated experimentation surpassed purely theoretically oriented book study.

Learning is done not through the mastery of theory and knowledge, but the inductive experience of doing (Adamson, 2007, p.85)

In Albers approach to craft skill, people were given opportunities to sense what it feels like to know and do. Learning to see and exposing people to actions and procedures was central to critical engagements in learning. Albers' teaching approach was influenced by continental philosophies and American ideas about craft and practical action. In emphasising experimentation, Adamson uses Albers' teaching work as a case in point to underline the importance of 'open ended skill' in contrast to 'fixed technique' in his exploration of craft and skill.

Sennett's (2008) social theory of craft extends the sorts of arguments made by Adamson into a social theory where 'making is thinking' and that 'man is his own maker'. Yet capitalism both in the past and presently does not sufficiently recognise this and as a consequence overlooks the value of good work. Consequently for Sennett,

Schools may fail to provide the tools to do good work, and workplaces may not truly value the aspiration for quality (Sennett, 2008 p. 9).

Manual skill according to Sennett does not fully take account of the individual and social impulse to do 'good work', to encounter the depth of thought, care and effort in doing such work. In craftsmanship people can 'feel fully and think deeply' (Sennett, 2008, p.20) in doing things. For Sennett this stands in contradistinction from the practices that constitute many workplaces in the present economy where there are not real rewards for doing a job well for the sake of it. That schools do not provide the necessary tools for doing good work is also part of this story for Sennett. The social conditions to do 'good work' through schooling as a student, depends on one's social conditions and how one is viewed and understood. That people may 'refuse' schooling

(Willis, 1977), or be ‘bored’, ‘injured’ or even demoralised by schooling is an outcome of schooling arrangements that operate with narrow and blinkered views of what ‘good work’ is and can be.

That students are labelled as ‘weak’ or ‘slow’ in schooling relies on comparison in a competitive context that defines the arena for success. Keeping up and keeping pace, reaching levels and standards, means that some people get sidelined in such rushes for glory and success. Yet it is people that need to make things as they make themselves. As Sennett argues:

Invidious comparison of speed has distorted the measure of quality. Yet the passion to race drives science; those in the grip of this competitive obsession easily lose sight of the value and purpose of what they are doing. They are not thinking in craftsman-time, the slow time that enables reflection (Sennett, 2008, p. 251).

Craftsmanship according to Sennett is not to be rushed. Time, consideration and thought, trying things out all take time. Rushing or hurrying undermines doing a ‘good job’. Comparison reveals our sense of abilities in relation to others rather than considering self abilities on their own terms and in relation to the matters immediately at hand. It is not just time and effort but also thought that is a central characteristic of craft for Sennett. Practice, technique and repetition are the keys to quality work in craftsmanship.

Craftsmanship was developed in workshops not classrooms, where the master, out the front demonstrated and worked while the apprentices mimicked the master’s techniques and practices. The method was ‘show don’t tell’ and sometimes it worked and at other times it failed. Tacit knowledge is buried deep in action, practice and technique. As a result:

Craftwork embodies a great paradox in that a highly refined, complicated activity emerges from simple mental acts like specifying facts and then questioning them (Sennett, 2008, p.268).

Sennett's social theory of craft hinges on an appreciation of the unity of the hand and brain rather than their distinction that echoes the divisions of mental and manual labour as theorised by Marx. It is the social conditions and consequences of this division of labour that is fatally flawed, which allows Sennett to show his argument for appreciating the case of the 'intelligent hand'.

'Coming to grips' with the importance of tactility in understanding action involves 'grasping' the embodied dimensions of intelligence and thought. The most obvious and demonstrative example of the 'intelligent hand' includes keyboard skills, whether through piano playing or in the use of computers. The hand knows through memory and physical touch how to both play a tune and type prose. Touch not only enables thought but also is essential to knowing and understanding. In a similar vein, Sennett argues, that through craft and an appreciation of craft work we can come to see counter intuitively that concentration is more a physical act not just a cognitive one.

Sennett argues that:

The skill of physical concentration follows rules of its own, based on how people learn to practice to repeat what they do, and to learn from repetition (Sennett, 2008, p.172).

In maintaining the physicality of concentrated engagement craft as theorised by Sennett challenges educational practices that presume inevitabilities in the binary divisions of general and a technical or vocational schooling. The breadth and depth of craft abilities, habits and intelligence are often overlooked as a result of the privileging of the mental over the manual labour socially, culturally and politically. This privileging of the mental and intellectual over the manual and practically productive overlooks the entanglements involved in being in and making a life and a world. It also has consequences that impact

in the schooling patterns and how people are sorted and selected to acquire the prizes of education and schooling.

The effects of divisions in knowing mentally, manually, intellectually and physically that Sennett's theory of craftsmanship underlines has resonances in historical materialist critiques of knowledge (Sohn-Rethel, 1969, 1973, 1978) and the eighteenth and nineteenth century patterns of radical education for the working-classes (Johnson, 1981, 1983). Through a Marxist critique of science Sohn-Rethel (1969, 1973, 1978) argued that the antithesis between mental and manual labour is a fundamental trait of all forms of class society. For Sohn-Rethel:

The independent intellect arises as socialised thinking divided from individualised labour. It can neither prevent nor remedy man's [sic] loss of control, over the social process incurred on consequence of commodity production. On the contrary, it is the very corollary of a blind society. Society as ruled by economic law and by the emergence of independent thinking are both effects of the same cause. They are linked, not only in time, but causally. The rationality of the independent intellect can never be more than the 'indispensable light to enable man [sic] to live in a world plunged in darkness (Sohn-Rethel, 1973, p.35).

Sohn-Rehel's theorisation of science and knowledge is embedded in an appreciation of commodity production in capitalist relations being premised upon the 'desocialisation' of manual labour where commodity exchange becomes a relation between strangers. Yet it is through exchange that Sohn-Rehel identifies the real abstraction where an action is given the form of thought. For capitalist production to be possible commodities have to be fetishised. This fetishisation occurs at the level of exchange where property the material nature of the object, takes on a different status and value through exchange. Through exchange, a price is paid and action is given the form of thought as exchange value. Use value is concerned only and entirely with the material nature of the object and its 'sense impressions'.

Only when manual labour is re-socialised as in forms of intellect and thinking can the division between head and hand and classes be overcome. Resocialising manual labour involves collective forms of working in Sohn-Rethel's historically materialist theorisation of knowledge. Exchange becomes the basis of society although not in the fetishised form of commodity production that presently characterises capitalist arrangements. In such a resocialisation the truth of being overcomes the truth of thinking in a historical materialist sense where people's social existence is known more accurately to determine their consciousness.

Johnson's (1981, 1983) historical exploration of the implications of the mental and manual split had effects in the experiences of ordinary people's lives and their cultures in eighteenth and nineteenth century. It was through the subjective encounter with the world that they understood that knowledge was worth having. The value of knowledge, its worth socially, culturally and politically was mediated by what counts and is made to count as 'useful knowledge and its counterpart 'really useful knowledge' (Johnson, 1981, 1983). Like Sennett's theories of craftsmanship, and Sohn-Rethel's sociality based upon socialised manual labour, they provide cases that point to the social embeddedness of knowledge and subjective experience.

The development of 'really useful knowledge' was constructed in opposition to what the ruling class ordained was necessary for the lower classes to know and learn. Radicals and the working-classes opposed this notion of 'useful knowledge' with their own notion of 'really useful knowledge'. The nineteenth century English "Really Useful Knowledge" movement provide a basis for thinking about the value of knowledge for the purposes of social participation:

Really useful knowledge involved...a range of resources for overcoming daily difficulties. It involved self-respect and self-confidence, which came from seeing your oppressions were systematic and were shared. It included practical skills but not just those wanted by employers (Johnston, 1983, p. 22).

Really useful knowledge was derived directly from working-class culture, the lived experiences of the lower classes and from a suspicion of 'provided education'. There was recognition by radicals and the working-class alike that 'provided education' threatened subjection and represented the interests of the bosses, the factory owners, the church and state.

Yet the notions of knowledge that these radicals progressed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were egalitarian in their position on intelligence and ignorance. As William Cobbett one such radical of those times, claimed:

Men are not to be called ignorant merely because they cannot make upon paper certain marks with a pen, or because they do not know the meaning of such marks when made by others (Johnson, 1983, p.13).

Johnson identifies informality and practicality as key defining features of nineteenth century working-class education. The practical aspects of early working-class education were understood as 'un-intellectualist' or 'un-academic' and informality was an important characteristic in these patterns of education. This form of working-class education represents an historically specific form of the relations of knowledge and the social relations of learning.

Craft and the division between intellectual and manual labour resonate with distinctions about what is useful and really useful knowledge. The differences in knowledge and patterns of knowing as considered by Adamson, Sennett, Sohn-Rethel and Johnson underline the social contexts and embedded aspects of knowledge. In addition to the social conditions, practical action is understood as potentially involving

both an intellectual and manual endeavours. This is done through the historical recognition of the conditions of making (production) and exchange socially and personally. These sorts of issues have been recently considered in light of schooling practices by researchers such as Rose (2004) and Crawford (2009).

### **Different classes, making selves**

Matthew Crawford (2009) argues that ‘learning by doing’ is a form of ‘soulcraft’ fundamental to the formation of an engaged self:

For thinking is inherently bound up with doing, and it is in rational activity together with others that we find our peculiar satisfaction (Crawford, 2009, p.208).

The value of work, generally and more specifically, as manual work, Crawford believes is overlooked in the modern day schools and classrooms. Shop class as it was known in the United States of America, involved tool work and machine work with lathes, milling machines, table saws and grinding machines. The disappearance of these machines from schools and education more generally has resulted in an impoverished self and a skewed schooling according to Crawford. Learning how to make and fix things provided a basis for understanding and knowing about ‘stuff’ that has become extinct in schools and hidden in life more generally. Shop class historically was implicated in the schooling of both the middle classes and the working classes in America.

As societies have become more complex and with ‘difference’ an everyday and routine encounter, Crawford maintains that schooling and the prizes of education have been ‘funnelled’ toward university study and ‘knowledge work’. With regard to schooling Crawford outlines a current paradox where:

It is a rare person who is naturally inclined to sit still for sixteen years in school, and then indefinitely at work, yet with the dismantling of high school shop programs this has become the one-size-fits-all norm, even as we go on about “diversity” (Crawford, 2009, p.73).

This is despite the realities that manual skills, craft abilities, technique and the practical applications of ideas are essential to living, working and learning. For Crawford “*real knowledge arises through confrontations with real things*” and it’s his concern that contemporary patterns of secondary schooling reduces the opportunities for such confrontations and encounters and makes people less resolute spiritually and intellectually. ‘Book learning’ or ‘computer-mediated’ learning simulate the world in contrast to practically based, action oriented and manually based forms of learning. Crawford argues that ‘learning by doing’ assists in the formation of subjectivities that can better endure uncertainty.

The place of manual work in the curriculum has a revealing history in Crawford’s reckoning:

The children of the managerial class could take shop as enrichment to the college-prep curriculum, making a bird feeder to hang outside Mom’s kitchen window, while the children of labourers would be socialized into the work ethic appropriate to their station through what was now called “industrial arts” education (Crawford, 2009, p. 30).

This compartmentalisation of learning in schooling undercuts the wider educational value of manual learning according to Crawford. It results in distorted patterns of schooling where a successful school is one where everyone achieves university admission. More detrimental is the separation of thinking from doing. In this climate where consumption shopping has replaced production and making, ‘self-realisation and freedom always entail buying something newer, never conserving something old’ because the abilities to make or fix things have been sidelined in schooling and in society more generally. It is specifically the abilities to make and fix oneself that is acquired according to Crawford through a schooling experience that involves ‘learning by doing’.



Mike Rose (2004), an education researcher at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), considers work and ordinary occupations to be rich with knowledge that is routinely overlooked or undervalued in schools and in society more generally. According to Rose (2004), knowing is ‘visual, tactile and practical’ and is present in both knowing about things (declarative) and procedural knowing (know-how). Declarative knowledge and know-how are separated out in schooling and thus lead to a narrowed schooling experience.

The binaries between brain-hand, abstract-concrete, intellectual-practical, academic-vocational, pure-applied, reflective-technical, reinforced by notions of ‘new knowledge work’ in contrast to ‘old industrial work’ result in a hierarchy between ‘neck up’ and neck down knowing and ability (Rose, 2004). The division between mental and manual knowing distorts knowing and ways of connecting to knowing in schooling. For Rose:

Its interaction, interweaving ambiguity, fuzzy borders, that characterizes human activity-and survey where mind and work are concerned. The binaries...limit our ability to see, and to honour, the considerable lay of mind in physical work (Rose, 2004, p.166).

In researching the work of waitresses, carpenters, teachers and surgeons, Rose excavates the routines, duties and practices of these occupations to unearth how all work includes intellectual and physical techniques that meld to enable the work. It is Rose’s sense that:

Most policy and curricular deliberations about vocational education have embedded in them assumptions of cognitive limitation- (on the part of learners)- and these assumptions shrink our curricular imagination. To vitalise that imagination, we need...to reassess long-standing and seemingly self-evident distinctions among levels and kinds of knowledge (Rose, 2004, p.185).

Preparing students for life after school for Rose needs to become more attuned to the cultivation of both the intellectual and the practical capacities in order that people can think critically and act with prowess. According to Rose those teachers who work at the breach of academic and vocational education are ‘applied political philosophers’ who are engaged in bringing in people and knowledge into schooling that make schooling come alive. Rose, like Sennett, (2008) and Crawford (2009), challenge notions of good schooling/bad schooling by emphasising how knowing through practice and action can be vitally important to the quality of schooling experiences. As Rose concludes *Minds at Work*,

Beliefs about intelligence and the social order that underlie curriculum are as important as the content of the curriculum itself. It is at this point that democratic principles and educational practice become one, an act of intellectual and civic realization (Rose, 2004, p.194).

Rose argues that this applied political philosophy informs ideas, thinking, research and appreciations of differences in schooling. In the work of these scholars of craft, practice and work, the ‘materiality of craft’, and the ‘physicality and mindfulness of work’ and the ‘embodiments of practice’ point to patterns of schooling where knowledge and change is encountered materially.

Changes in knowledge in schooling have shifted. They were able to change as the people participating in schools and schooling itself was changed. The binaries between, intellectual and manual labour, academic and technical or vocational education are again being reshaped by notions of applied learning which is reformalising schooling for some students. ‘Making as thinking’ and ‘learning by doing’ as craft, present new opportunities for connecting people to schooling in applied learning where different knowledges can be given currency. Making and doing the self is a key feature of applied learning as instituted in VCAL and it is teachers’ work that

makes options possible for schooling others differently. Making selves that can do school work through making and doing is happening in VCAL through teachers' work.

### **Teacher labour and making schooling**

Teachers are workers inside and outside schools (Connell, 1985). In thinking about the professional knowing of teachers Kemmis (2005) argues for the importance of 'situatedness' and the 'embodiment 'of practice-based forms of knowing.' Like Sennett, Crawford and Adamson, Kemmis turns to the idea of craft to think through the professional knowing of teachers. Kemmis believes that a distinction between 'theorising practice' and 'knowing practice' is developed through time in spaces where practice happens. A knowing practice is a form of action that is mindful of the ways that knowledge is developed in spaces where practice happens. In his theorisation of practice Kemmis relies on notions of craft and noted that:

Craft knowledge is also knowledge in the face of uncertainty, which requires not only practical deliberation before action begins but also exploratory action that is open-eyed, open-minded and continuously reflective and reflexive about the nature and consequences of practice, revealed in practice as it unfolds (Kemmis, 2005, p.421).

What Kemmis is seeking to do in his theorisation of practice is to consider the actual changes that occur through thinking and by changing actions. This is an everyday and routine activity of teachers generally and for the teachers in this research more specifically. Kemmis's theorisation of practice works past the binary of the mental and the manual and the general and vocational in a knowledge and educational sense to consider the interactions inherent in thought and action. For Kemmis, practice makes useful or really useful knowledge out of deliberative action where activity makes possibilities.

Inducting learners into knowledge in its multiplicity of forms is the professional marker of teaching work. Blending the intellectual with the practical requires freedom and imagination on the part of teachers to expose students to thoughtful practices where the materiality, physicality and embodiment of aspirations and interest can be harnessed. This depends upon and involves a constructive approach to schooling that occurs locally where teachers in partnership with students in school communities are able to work cooperatively to make and forge cohesive learning experiences.

In elaborating a sociology of teachers' work Connell identified three significant aspects of teaching labour, the capacity to labour, the capacity for interaction and the capacity for politics, as key features of it as form of 'transformative labour'. Teachers, Connell believed, represent a 'specialised workforce' that are involved in enabling people to participate in society, culture and work. They have for this very reason been referred to as 'cultural workers'. They transform 'objects' to subjects, which in the instance of teachers' labour are students from being one thing to becoming another (Connell, 1995, p.97). The transformational aspects of teachers work not only change individual students, and society but also have impacts on schooling itself. The following table provides an account of Connell's thesis of teachers' labour as transformative labour, developed from her writings on the subject.

Table 2:  
Transformative Aspects of Teachers' Work

<b>Transformative aspects of teachers' work</b>	<b>Individual student capacities</b>	<b>Social dimension of teachers' work</b>
Capacities to labour	Literacy Employability	Employable
Capacities for interaction	Social exchange Cultural engagement Communication	Identity formation
Capacities for power	Exercise political responsibility Autonomy	Steer a life course Navigate change Social and political entitlements for civic participation

Teachers' work, according to Connell (1995), involves developing student capacities to encounter the world and themselves with knowledge and ability. The connection between education and work (both paid employment and the work of living) are based on capacities. The increased participation of students in schooling has demanded new, and reconsidered existing, capabilities of schooling to respond to these changes.

Teachers' labour in the education system is shaped by institutions, policy, government, business and industry and by broader social and cultural pressures and expectations. Teachers as professionals are regulated to carry out work that complies with and yields to these multi-factorial dimensions. As a profession, teachers have expertise about how to teach people, and how to assess learning. Their expertise is formed through teacher education and through their practice in workplaces. It is through practice in particular settings that teachers come to develop techniques to support students to learn. If learning is about developing people's capacities to labour, interact and participate responsibly (politics) in the world, it is through teachers' labour that this occurs. Teachers prepare students through dedicated classroom and school based

activities or other activities outside the formal classroom setting to develop these capacities to interact, work and use power responsibly. Yet teachers are not free to do what they think is best or do anything they want. Their work is shaped through a range of juridical, social and political factors. As Connell argued:

The politics of education can best be understood as the struggle to control the production of capacities for practice, and thus to limit or shape the social capacities that emerge and the society they in turn generate (Connell, 1995, p. 101).

Teachers' work and the consequences of their work contribute to how society is shaped and generated. These social and economic outcomes hinge on the controls and freedoms, which govern the terms and conditions of schooling and teachers' labour. Controls place limits around what constitutes acceptable and legitimate teaching practice and what is not. Whilst on the other hand freedoms are imperative to creativity, inventiveness and innovation in teaching practice. As a professional group, teachers are differentiated by the places they work and the students they teach. Yet their work and labour is transformative in theory and practice.

Teachers' who work outside from the hegemonic, competitive academic curriculum, are subject to, and position their own work, through contested notions of status, value and worth. Working-class schooling today is made through teachers' labour in the subordinate curriculum. It represents a re-crafting of schooling in ways that connect to earlier historical patterns of schooling formed through the mental-manual division of labour. Yet working-class schooling today is also distinctive in bringing to bear new ways of being schooled. Teachers' work with students in VCAL uses knowledge from, and that is also different and distinct to that contained in the competitive academic curriculum to redress exclusion. Students are included in schooling through applied learning in ways that respond to structural inequalities and in

other ways that seek to democratise and expand what schooling can be. This work by VCAL teachers' involves struggles against attributions of worthlessness, low value and diminished status to their work and the knowledge exchanged with and by students they work with.

## **Summary**

This literature review through a consideration of schooling and change and the sociology of class and craft lays out key conceptual resources for understanding working class schooling. Yet in using 'class' analytically in contemporary contexts it is necessary to recognise the sociological changes to class that Bauman and Skeggs sociology underline. Theorisations of 'class' have shifted from an emphasis on 'objective' sociological conceptualisations, to recognise class as historically changeable and a 'subjective' experience inscribed on bodies. Bauman's historicity of class emphasises the loss of power, influence and control that craftsmen once held to illustrate the rise of capitalist arrangements that made the 'un-freedoms' of class society possible (Bauman, 1976). For Bauman class is memory, a not always accurate way of knowing. The significance of Bauman's historicity of class is historico-epistemological in that craft knowledges, craft habits, and craft practice did not entirely disappear as a result of industrial capitalism but the possibilities for their expression and exchange were significantly curtailed by the factory system. Yet it becomes apparent through the work of Sennett and Crawford that the value of doing and making still involves thoughtful, mindful and considered action. Skeggs' sociology of class underlines the subjective dimensions of class and the way it is attached and ascribed on bodies through instituted cultural exchanges. Skeggs' sociology of class impresses the continuing

salience of classes as it is formed through exchanges where the attribution of value and worth are made.

Schooling happens in a range of ways through different types of schools and curricula that represent different selections of culture. This was highlighted through the concentration on the changing patterns of knowledge and their theorisation in the new sociology of education and the social theories of craft. The idea that there are ‘basics’ or ‘immutable’ givens for schooling curriculum reifies and fixes schooling. The division between academic and vocational education in schooling were also well rehearsed through the literature review. Yet theories of craft represent a way to further trouble and transcend seeming intractable divisions in knowing. The different ideas contained in the literature reviewed provide conceptual resources for thinking through and presenting the findings from the interviews with the 10 teachers that participated in the research. Debates about knowledge and the institutional enclosure of patterns of schooling and their social and cultural dimensions frame the approach to this research and were central for organising and understanding the findings from the interviews.

The following chapter outlines the ways in which this research into working-class schooling by looking at teachers’ work in VCAL was designed and implemented. The methodology and the ideas about knowing and the practices of knowledge production utilised in this research are outlined and explained.



### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **RESEARCHING WORKING-CLASS SCHOOLING, METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This research is based on a constructivist approach to education inquiry and draws upon phenomenology to progress a critical sociological inquiry into working-class schooling. Phenomenology acknowledges the subjectivity of knowing things and in so doing considers experience through a focus on ‘intentionality’. This study seeks to understand the reality of the teachers’ experiences and ‘to understand what is happening’ and to ‘construct theories and models from the data’ (Gray, 2009, p. 23). All of the teachers interviewed for this research share the identity and experiences of being VCAL teachers. All of them teach in the two subject areas Personal Development and Work Related Skills, yet the interviews with them were filled with divergent yet related stories and perspectives. These perspectives provide insights into the intentions of their work. It is their shared ‘lived experiences’ (Creswell, 2007, p.57) therefore that provide the focus to this phenomenological research.

Phenomenology distances itself from the standards of the physical sciences in recognition that such standards would empty social phenomena of what is distinctively human. Bernstein (1976) argues that contemporary social and political theories have been radically restructured moving past empiricism, through the ‘linguistic turn’ and interpretivist approaches associated with the ‘phenomenological alternative’ and hermeneutics. Phenomenology enables the researcher to consider the processes of the constitution of meaning anchored in human subjectivity. Phenomenology advances knowledge of structures and the processes of their constitution. It is through phenomenology that a critical examination of the ‘taken-for-grantedness’ of the social

worlds can be advanced (Bernstein, 1976, p.232). Yet for any social knowing to be critical it must challenge 'common-sense', and nature like readings of the social (Bauman, 1976).

In his essay, *Towards a Critical Sociology, An essay on commonsense and emancipation*, Bauman argued for the need to go past phenomenology's tendency to reinscribe common sense understandings and explanations in social theory. To come up with a 'possible reality' Bauman argues phenomenology must be open to what may initially seem uncommon. For this to occur, Bauman explains,

To discover alternative kinds of practice which have been suppressed and temporarily eliminated by the unique course of man-made history, one first has to accept them as a possibility; and that requires a hypothetical refutation of the finality of commonsensical evidence (Bauman, 1976, p.77).

This research as 'a cross-sectional study uses a "snapshot" approach where the data collected' (Gray, 2009, p. 34) relates to the time of the study. Yet by paying attention to the structures of experience this research uses teacher understandings of their work to make a case and argument for VCAL as a contemporary form of working-class schooling. It does so by refuting common-sense, or lay normative explanations that position VCAL and those involved in it, teachers, students and communities as having lesser value, status or worth. More specifically in this research it is VCAL teachers who having provided views 'from with-in' the situations of VCAL enable such an argument.

Working-class schooling as an experience historically, materially and culturally includes, patterns of schooling, different from the hegemonic and/or ruling class patterns of schooling. As illuminated in the literature review it is precisely the differentiated value, worth and status attributed to anything working-class that reveals not only its existence but also its differences. Working-class schooling encloses and is

enclosed through exchanges where value is made and challenged, worth is struggled over, and status is contested. In all instances working-class schooling involves knowledges embedded in, and encountered through the division of mental and manual labour.

### **Researching VCAL, a critical sociology of working class schooling**

This qualitative research project investigated teachers' experiences of their work in specific formal education contexts to understand the nature of 'applied learning' and its manifestations in what can be termed and understood as working-class schooling. My focus was on patterns of schooling organised through the un-academic and less formal curriculum (Johnson, 1981), also referred to as the subordinate curriculum (Connell, 1982). In teaching this curriculum, the teachers interviewed for this research teach particular forms of knowledge with distinct student constituencies. The interviews with the ten teachers focused on their work and the ways in which they accounted for and explained their practices and underlying intentions in teaching 'applied learning'. In this respect the research provided, a partial account of contemporary working-class schooling by examining different experiences and patterns of schooling to reveal knowledge that is mobilised through a particular form of the curriculum.

While working-class schooling could also be understood and explained as schooling for working-class people or the schooling that occurs in locations where the lack of resources and privilege are the norm, this study examined the patterns of schooling that are made through different 'selections from culture' (Williams, 1961; Lawton, 1975). It explored these selections of culture through policy and teacher practices and intentions in order to understand 'applied learning', to whom it was 'applied' and for what purpose and effect. Examining teachers' work in VCAL in this

cultural and political sense reveals how different forms of schooling and are made possible through teachers' practice in different contexts.

Applied learning was made legitimate by the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). It recast the purposes and value of schooling in an age of mass schooling. As Schon (1987, p.4-5) maintained with regard to research and knowledge production:

Depending on our disciplinary backgrounds, organizational roles, past histories, interests, and political/economic perspectives, we frame problematic situations in different ways... Those who hold conflicting frames pay attention to different facts and make different sense of the facts they notice (Schon, 1987, p.4-5).

Given there can be multiple constructions of the same research problem/issue points to the inevitability that a construction that is theory-laden and value-laden is thus researcher-laden. This is not to suggest that there can be no real scientific basis to education research such as this. Rather, this signals the radical contingency of the truth claims in this research, where the validity of these claims lies in the research and researchers' intentions, procedures, artefacts by explicitly detailing theses strategies and tactics and their selection and the conclusions drawn from them. This is to say that this research is located in and generated through a specific time and context for particular purposes. The immediate purpose of this research is the fulfilment of the requirements of doctoral study yet more important than this is the desire to make a contribution to knowledge about working-class schooling.

The teachers interviewed for this study are known as and some would describe themselves as VCAL teachers. This is a relatively new teacher identity in the Victorian education and schools system. Their work and their practices in the subjects of personal development and work related skills provided a contextual basis for exploring the

patterns of schooling that are involved in producing through their work. It is through teachers' practice in VCAL and in the subjects' of personal development and work related skills that this study engages with class as a category and as a marker of difference in patterns of schooling. These teachers' identities and their reflections about their work in VCAL destabilise commonly held ideas and notions of teacher practice as performed in general schooling. Their proclivity to do the work they do to include those who historically have been excluded from schooling is enabled by sets of practice that undercut and extend lay normative understandings of teachers' work and teacher identity. The 10 teachers interviewed in this research are engaged in practices premised upon an ethos that everyone can learn and, more specifically, everyone has the capacity to achieve success through schooling given the right conditions.

Phenomenologists believe that "multiple ways of interpreting experiences are available to each of us through interacting with others, and that it is the meaning of our experiences that constitutes reality" (Greene, 1978). This research is interpretivist in using interviews with VCAL teachers' to consider what working-class schooling is and looks like. The interviews nonetheless provided an empirical basis to the research. The methodological approach of this research recognises that individual behaviour is determined by the experience gained out of one's direct interaction with the phenomena being studied. Phenomenological understandings elucidate the central structures, structures that are themselves constituted by intentional consciousness (Bernstein, 1976, p.134). This enables recognition of teachers' work and its attendant labour as subjective in its intentions and as having agency. Such an approach circumvents a naturalist reading of their work. A naturalist reading would inevitably lead to reproductionist-type interpretations and explanations of the teacher interviews. Whilst the reality of the

social world inflects teachers' labour and work with students, it is the structures of meaning that are subjective and intentional that makes teachers' work amenable to phenomenological research. The teachers' interviewed refused 'common-sense' assessments of their work as having little value, or that the people they are teaching were 'unteachable' or 'low-achieving'. The practical interests of the teachers and their everyday encounters in their workplaces with students include relationships with people and with knowledge. This knowledge made through schooling experiences and the curriculum included inter-subjective relations inside and outside classrooms.

The interviews that make up this study provide a way to appreciate the 'afterlife of class' (Bauman, 1982) and the exchanges and their inscriptions (Skeggs, 2004) as its found in the different form of schooling organised and arranged through VCAL. It is in VCAL that these teachers' practices are afforded a level of legitimacy, yet this legitimisation is not achieved easily or smoothly. These teachers reveal structural impediments as well as systemic and personal barriers to providing a different form of schooling through teaching practices that at times veer from the standard and expected practices usually found in schools. Applied learning teachers in this research it is argued gives rise to schooling that represent a contemporary albeit contingent expression of working-class schooling. Normative appreciations of 'good schooling' schooling that is seen to have value is generally that of middle class or ruling class schooling charged with producing fine citizens and future government leaders and captains of industry (Peel, M. and McCalman, 1992). The useful and worthwhile dimensions and aspects of schooling as performed through the teachers' work interviewed in this project often goes unnoticed even within their own schools not to mention in broader social contexts.

This research acknowledges the subjectivity of knowing (O'Toole and Beckett, 2010, p.43) both from the standpoint of the teachers interviewed and the researchers' standpoints and researchers' processes. The intention of this research is to delineate from the data produced from the teachers' interviews an explicit account and map of the forms of schooling made through their actions and practices. These discernible forms are grounded in the teachers' experiences of social reality (Gray, 2009) both through their work and their life more generally. This is a methodology where it is assumed that there exists 'an internal logic' (Gray, 2009, p.22) to the distinctive practice of teaching in VCAL that these interviewees share and have in common.

The research seeks to argue that what is recounted and provided by the interviewees of their experiences of their work in VCAL can form the basis of knowing working-class schooling and that such a knowing can be legitimately made and claimed. This is then an interpretive and descriptive research endeavour about the characteristics of ten individual teachers' labour and work as VCAL teachers. Further to this then, the 'internal logic' of working-class schooling have a history that was institutionally located through specific arrangements. For this research the separate and streamed former system and structures of technical schooling system are an important historical and cultural point of reference. The logic of separated and streamed schooling have today given way to differentiated schooling patterns premised upon multiply different curricula forms. Applied learning is one of these forms used for the purposes of senior secondary schooling.

## **The research procedures, recruitment, interviewing and ethics**

### *Recruitment*

Ten teachers were recruited for this study via Victorian Applied Learning Association (VALA), a teacher-run professional network. It was established in 2005 in response to the rapid growth in Victoria of applied learning in the senior years of education. The association provides development and advocacy opportunities for educators of applied learning working in schools, TAFEs and the community and not-for-profit sectors. The association's work supports a web presence, workshops and conferences, where over a 1,000 teachers engaged in teaching VCAL can exchange and share ideas and strategies about their work.

VALA was used as a means of recruiting participants in this research because it was an independent and autonomous teachers' association. It was anticipated that such autonomy would enable prospective participants to contribute to the research freely and without potential interference from their employers. A notice about the research was placed in the VALA newsletter made available on the Association's website in May and June 2009. Hard copies of the Association newsletter were also made available to VCAL teachers in schools, TAFE and community organisations.

Interviews were conducted between July and December 2009. Five teachers from schools, who saw the notice in the newsletter, contacted me through email to express their interest in participating. One of these teachers indicated that another teacher who she worked with was interested in participating in the interview. Another teacher from a community-learning centre made contact with me to indicate her willingness to participate in the research. A teacher who was on leave from the school



that she had been working at responded to the newsletter notice to express her interest. She was working in an education different from her substantive school of employment and explained that together with two of her fellow colleagues was interested in being interviewed. Having called for participants through the VALA newsletter the research is premised upon a 'purposive sampling' approach.

### *Interviewing teachers*

All of the interviews were carried out at the teachers' workplaces at mutually agreed times, at the convenience of the participants. I was interested as a researcher to see where the participants worked and to appreciate their local surroundings and the geographic places and locations in which they were working. It provided me with a more insightful appreciation of the contexts that the teachers' work was located.

Each interview was semi-structured and framed around a set of questions about teaching practices in personal development and work-related skills. These subjects were chosen as the focus of the interviews as a consequence of subjectivity and knowledge dimensions associated with class as explored in the literature review. A deliberate decision to recruit teachers from VCAL who have experiences teaching in the two VCAL units, *Work Related Skills* and *Personal Development* was undertaken for several reasons. This first reason being that these two subjects are specific and contribute to the distinctive character of VCAL as a curriculum. Further to this, after familiarising myself with the learning outcomes (Appendix 1) it was clear that for this research interested in class patterns in schooling where class does have personal and employment implications, these subjects would provide a valid way to anchor the interviews. The research is not interested in the efficacy of what the teachers do in these subjects in any real detail *per se* but was rather interested in the personal and work dimensions of

working-class schooling. The teacher interviews about their work in these two subjects provided a contextual basis to thinking about, reflecting upon and exploring teachers' work in VCAL generally to gain insights into knowing about contemporary working-class schooling.

The interviews were organised using questions designed to capture and collect data about how the teachers' practices enable individuals to participate in schooling. I was interested to gain information into the educative purposes of the arrangement of schooling through VCAL especially the individual and cultural implications. A set of twelve questions was developed as a guide for the interviews. These questions focused on the context of their work, the type of school, the teachers work lives as teachers and what they were seeking to achieve in their work with students in VCAL. The questions then focused on what they actually did in the subjects Personal Development and Work Related Skills (See appendix 2). While this research sheds light on what 'applied learning' involves from the teachers' perspectives, the teachers described their work inside and outside classrooms in the community, workplaces and other organisations. The research was particularly interested in how the needs of students who are not immediately seeking university admission education needs are being addressed at the classroom level. The data by having focused on what is involved in teaching and schooling students in VCAL provides a contribution to understandings about the wider social purposes and future arrangements of more inclusive approaches to schooling. The primary data for this research are interviews which were transcribed (February – June 2010) and sent back to the interviewees for confirmation and changes.

The normative conditions of teachers' work are not always obvious. The empirical data drawn from 10 teachers' words about their work and practices are

factually accurate from their perspectives. These teachers who live and know applied learning do not use the lexicon or phraseology characteristic of “academic” discourses and research about working-class schooling. The facts of this research are related to the material contexts and experiences of these teachers’ practices. The value of the research design is located in apprehending teacher understandings of their work. How they describe it, how they identify those that it is aimed at, and what it offers that is different provide insight into the class dimensions and implications of applied learning.

### *Ethics*

Ethics clearance was sought and granted by the university’s human ethics committee (Appendix 3). In accord with the requirements of this clearance all participants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality in deciding to participate in the research. All names of participants were changed as were their locations and the names of students they may have mentioned through the course of the discussions.

While the interviews focused on their work and what they did, the issues of social class and its implications were not talked about directly or addressed in detail through the interviews. I was concerned that in some ways this research interest in class in not being spoken directly in the interviewees could be construed as a possible betrayal of the participants, given their generosity in sharing their stories and experiences. This was felt given the relative value and worth attributed to social class and the personal embarrassment it can at times engender. Having considered how at times the use of concepts like class has these personal aspects I have been careful to work with the interview transcripts in ways that do not distort the participants contributions with notions of class that reinscribe deficit attributions of value to their

work in VCAL. Yet class remains an important way of thinking about the differences VCAL teachers make in forming different schooling experiences.

### **Teachers as key informants**

The interviews conducted for this research were semi-structured and organised around a set of 12 questions (Appendix 2). Not all 12 questions were asked in each interview; rather they were used as a guide and prompt for the interviewees to talk about VCAL and their work in the two subjects: personal development and work related skills. The purpose of the questions was to locate the teachers' labour in their workplace in order that they explain and recount what they are attempting to and achieve through their work in VCAL. The first question asked the teachers to talk about their place of work to describe what kind of school it was, that is, to describe its education and broader social purpose.

Through the interviews, issues of teacher styles, and their respective approaches to their work emerged from reflections on their own biographies, life experiences (conscious and unconscious), knowledge and capabilities. In this sense the interviews carried out for this research represented 'controlled interference' (Bernstein 1976, p.137) wherein by participating in the research they were confronted with a situation where they were required to consciously consider the context, conditions and purposes of their work as VCAL teachers. Change and transformation are 'big ideas' and involve deliberate actions on the part of teachers. This research is interested in the underpinnings of these actions not just in a personal sense but more specifically in the terms of what they were seeking to actively institute through their work. It was the intention of the semi-structured interviews with the 10 teachers to yield insights into

how their work developed capacities for labour, interaction and politics (Connell, 1995) and its implications for ascertaining the forms and patterns of schooling it gives rise to.

Teaching is a physically and intellectually demanding activity and its value can often overlooked or discounted in thinking through teacher practice. In thinking through notions of change and transformation metaphors of growth and cultivation abound. The teachers who participated in this research revealed through the interviews practices they institute in order to grow and cultivate schooling that meets the needs of students who have up until recently not been accommodated. While routine and regularity can provide safety and security in schooling and teachers' labour and employment, this is a luxury or circumstance not always available to teachers who encounter new students new ideas, new knowledge and ways of knowing on a regular basis.

Even though the school week, school term and school year shape teachers work, it is the everyday and unpredictable factors that also shape teaching work. How a teacher is prepared to deal with both the regularities and irregularities of their work were important factors in gaining insights of definitive patterns of schooling and education and learning. Given the recent implementation of VCAL in schools not much could be taken for granted about teachers' actual work and their attendant practices in this context. While the VCAL curriculum with its four pillars provided a loose frame for the interview questions the actualities of the work of VCAL teachers and the type of schooling it progresses was largely unknown and thus resistant to a formulaic controlled intervention in generating data that would shed light on the patterns of schooling as organised through this subordinate curriculum form.

As Josef Albers artist and original member of the Bauhaus School maintained in his reflections on his work at the Black Mountain College in Carolina,

The lack of formulas “makes a place interesting”...”everyday was a new revelation... I have always said in my saying or teaching, ‘Make the result of teaching the feeling of growing.’ That is the greatest incentive to continue developing yourself. The feeling of growing. And today a little bit more than it was last year. You see? That you feel: I’m getting wider and deeper and fuller... I have made a sport of growing myself. That was big sport, and therefore helped me with the sport to make others grow (Doberman, 1972, p.61).

Teachers’ work enables people to see anew, to see differently to opening their eyes in order to encounter the world differently. Yet it is through teachers’ labour and its dispositions located institutionally that collectively makes different patterns and forms of schooling. This is not just the case for the students they are working with but for their parents, families and the communities where the schooling takes place.

The work of these teachers shape schooling approaches that challenge and extend the conventions of schooling to include people who have not previously had a place in schooling. This is not always a comfortable let alone reassuring exercise socially for either the teacher or the students. The feeling of growing can be exciting and at the same time daunting. Unsettling perceptions and taken for granted ideas or assumptions by exposing students to insights not previously encountered is a fraught activity. This requires skill on the part of the teacher to ‘unsettle’ taken for granted views, and then to ‘reassure’ the students who have been made uncomfortable. Yet such revelations ‘progress’ students to the next steps in the further complexities of the knowledge, skill or learning context they are engaged in. More importantly for this research the emerging patterns of schooling instituted and given form through the teachers’ labour at times challenge and unsettle pre-existing known forms and expectations of schooling.

The teachers who have participated in this study were asked what they do with their VCAL students. To reflect upon and consider what is personal development? What

are work-related skills? In addition to this they were asked about how are these things taught to the students. Overall, what they are trying to achieve in their work in VCAL provided a base for knowing about the rationales and logics that underpinned schooling in VCAL. Teachers' labour practices in this research is interested through teacher aims to get students to see through a repertoire of encounters that insist on other ways to know and encounter schooling that are up until now have been unfamiliar both to the students and other teachers.

The majority (8) of the teachers in this study had at least 20 years of teaching behind them. Two have had careers prior to teaching and drew on these experiences to inform their practices that enabled schooling to be organised on a less conventional basis. The teachers recruited do not represent VCAL teachers *per se* but rather their experiences and reflections about their work provides a way into examining schooling in VCAL and how it pushes the limits of what schooling is and can be apprehended as a form of working-class schooling. The teachers interviewed, like most teachers, are motivated to make differences to the lives of their students.

The actual stock of knowledge at hand in the everyday world differs not only among individuals, depending on personal experience, but also among various groups and classes, depending on the common-sense knowledge that they share (Bernstein, 1976, p.148).

In their common sense knowledge these teachers shared through the interviews their ideas about doing 'good work'. The point of difference of these teachers with teachers who do not work in VCAL, is that they work with students who have been deemed 'difficult' and 'unruly' and who have, by some teachers in some schools forfeited their entitlements to schooling. VCAL teaching refocuses schooling to the students' lives and in many instances, culturally and morally, and valorises the students' differences. Schooling as a conventionally solid and consistent force is fragmented in VCAL by the

irregularity and variety necessitated by the, until now, unmet needs of the students' enacted through teacher practices in VCAL.

All of the teachers interviewed for the research teach in VCAL in either school or non-school settings. The research is inspired by an interest to better understand and explain the broader social purposes of schooling. In this research it is the specific work of teachers that is examined to understand and explain patterns of schooling that can be known as working-class.

### **The teachers, the VCAL sites and a data analysis strategy**

This section of the methodology chapter introduces the 10 teachers who participated in the research through interviews. The table below provides a brief description of their employment contexts, years of employment as a teacher and the subject areas of their work. Then the data analysis strategy deployed in the research to (re)present a contemporary account of working class schooling will be outlined. The 10 teachers interviewed for this research all teach VCAL in a variety of contexts. It is the teachers' sense of themselves and their work that provides a way to examine the contexts and conditions of working-class schooling in this research.

Locating these teachers' and their reflections and accounts of their labour does not overlook the dimensions of their work spatially and geographically. Out of the 10 teachers who contacted me to be involved in this research 5 were located in country and regional Victoria. Of the five in the city, three of these teachers were located on the fringes of the city over 40 kilometres from the city centre in a former farming area that has recently become part of Melbourne's 'urban sprawl'. Seven of the sites (schools and centres) were located in country areas, with three in metropolitan areas. In considering 'working-class schooling' it would be convenient for this study to come to the



conclusion that rural and regional country areas equate neatly with class distinctions. Whilst there are spatial dimensions to class distinctions, especially geographic markers of class, working-class schooling in the city and the country follows similar patterns. The proximity of the country from the city did not represent a barrier to the research participants who volunteered their time and stories to this research being carried out by a doctoral student from a city university. These teachers were enthusiastic about wanting to share their stories and experiences about how through their practices they make a schooling that is different in order to contribute to ways of knowing how to make schooling better for all students. Yet country schools are different from city schools in that they represent an important community resource for students who are more geographically dispersed than their city urban counterparts. These teachers like all VCAL teachers in the state of Victoria are involved in the formations of new patterns of schooling. Their labour is central to this process.

Of the ten interviewees, Catherine, Noel and Michelle were engaged in work that augments and extends ‘comprehensive schooling’ as developed through the reforms of Blackburn. Yet their work pushes up against the limits of schooling and they are actively engaged in changing schooling. Joseph, Angelina, Joanna and Cheryl are doing teaching work that challenges the curricula limitations of schooling by progressing a form of schooling that they seek to describe rather ambiguously as ‘technical schooling’. Anne, Mary and Peter on the other hand are actively making a schooling experience that is very ‘community’ focused in its orientations. All of these VCAL teachers wittingly and unwittingly are enclosed and engaged in the formation of different types of working-class schooling. And all of them work in ways that make

schooling possible in ways that are novel and indicate the historical continuities and discontinuities of working-class schooling.

Table 3:  
Research Participants and VCAL Sites

<i>Teachers</i>	<i>VCAL site</i>	<i>Years at school/centre</i>	<i>Subjects taught in VCAL</i>	<i>Initial teaching method</i>	<i>Total yrs teaching</i>
Catherine	St Benedict's Catholic College	20	Work Related skills Personal Development	English Careers Education	22
Noel	Chisholm Catholic College	20	Personal Development	Mathematics Photography	26
Michelle	Western Suburban Secondary College	20	Personal Development Work Related skills	Music Social Studies	20
Joseph	Northern Suburbs Catholic Boys College	22	Work Related skills Personal Development	Commerce Legal Studies Politics	27
Angelina	Technical learning centre	1	Work Related skills	Business Studies, Information Technology	6
Joanne	Technical learning centre	2	Work Related skills Personal Development	Art Metalwork	20
Cheryl	Technical learning centre	2	Personal Development Work Related skills	Psychologist	7
Anne	Tallangatta education centre	25	Work Related skills Personal Development	Science	30
Mary	Regional city Secondary College	5	Personal development Work Related skills	Media English	18
Peter	Regional city Secondary College	25	Work Related skills	Woodwork Mathematics	32

Arranging and analysing the data from the interviews around these three forms of schooling emerges by from paying attention to the ideas that informed each teacher's reflections on their work in VCAL and the contexts of their work place/spaces. These ideas and contexts have histories that have been manifested institutionally in different forms and through different practices. Some of the teachers' ideas were personal, others

were located in public discourses about education yet all of them emerged from their own practices as teachers.

Analysing and presenting the data by considering the teachers' locations in schools such as *public* and *independent* and *outside of schools* offered up one reading of the patterns of schooling as made through teachers' work and the perspectives provided through the interviews. Such an interpretive analysis would have over stated the public, independent and 'alternative organisational and institutional basis of the interviewees' workplaces. Teachers' identities also represented another way into analysing the data in thinking about school teachers, those who did not identify as teachers and those who operated with more of a counsellor/mentor type approach. Both the 'type of school' and the teachers' work and their identity did not sufficiently detail the patterns of schooling being made through their work in VCAL in ways that revealed the classed aspects that inhere in different forms of schooling.

The historicity of class and its culturality offered ways to understand working-class schooling by understanding the teachers' ideas about their work in its material forms. These material forms happen through institutional enclosures premised upon specific and different teacher practices and education. Therefore in analysing the data arising from the interviews this research moves between a micro-social and macro-social by considering the teachers' practices and the institutional enclosures of schooling. The teachers' accounts of their work and approaches to schooling people through VCAL are at once intimate in a micro-social sense yet are shaped in accord with and in opposition to macro-social precepts and discourses (Smith, 1989). These micro-sociological insights underpin the specific social relations of learning made through the work of the teachers in VCAL.

The handling of the analysis of these interviews began with the recognition that the research participants/respondents knew they were being interviewed. And that,

neither the interviewer nor the interviewee can know in advance, and sometimes even after the fact, what impact an interviewing experience will have or has had (Patton, 2002, p.405).

While their interviews were rich with detail about their work and what they are doing in VCAL, organising the data required an appreciation of the realities that,

Human beings are self-interpreting beings, and this fact is of central importance for understanding social and political life (Bernstein, 1976, p.61).

What they related to me in these interviews were representations of how they understand and explain their work as VCAL teachers. The interview data describes teaching activities specific to working in VCAL. This research study describes teachers' practices in VCAL in terms of its cultural markers and its significance as evidence of the phenomenon of working-class schooling.

The practices and approaches to teaching as recounted by the ten teachers in the interviews is shaped through subjective dispositions to teaching work and is made through interpersonal relations in a specific organisational context. VCAL as a curriculum policy is operationalised and given form through institutional or organisation contexts that are controlled by the state in terms of administration and political intention. Moving between these interpersonal and institutional contexts provides a data analysis strategy that outlines the distinctive social relations of learning made possible by teachers work in VCAL. These relations are in turn situated historically, politically and culturally in discernible patterns of schooling. These patterns of schooling provide an empirical basis to understand and appreciate contemporary working-class schooling.

## **Summary**

This interview-based study utilises the empirical data from interviews with ten VCAL teachers to construct an interpretation of what working-class schooling looks like as described by the teacher accounts of their work. The approach adopted in this research seeks to progress a critical reading of working class schooling so that it can be known and understood as having value. This is made in its opposition to schooling as made through the competitive academic curriculum. These three aspects of the research approach empirical, interpretative and critical present the phenomena of working-class schooling in a way that it can be recognised and subsequently valued.

The following chapter provides a historical context for the emergence of VCAL through a preliminary exploration of earlier institutional forms of working-class schooling. The chapter (chapter four) outlines the changing policy contexts of working-class schooling as made through the subordinated curricula and as institutionalised in secondary technical schools. The point being to show how these schools are central to understanding working-class schooling and its institutional form in Victoria, Australia. The chapter examines the changes that saw the emergence of patterns of comprehensive schooling and the changes that brought VCAL into being.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **TECHNICAL FOUNDATIONS OF WORKING-CLASS SCHOOLING**

This chapter draws upon institutional and policy histories to document the processes that gave rise to and shaped working-class schooling through time. This history has its origins in the formations of a mass schooling system. The mechanics institutes of the eighteenth and nineteenth century are an important institutional starting point for thinking through class differentiated education and schooling. Mechanics Institutes and the subsequent establishment of junior technical schools are two examples of the institutional emergence of working-class schooling as a distinctive schooling approach in Australia (Barcan, 1980, p.181).

Mechanic Institutes were assessed as not practical enough to educate the industrial classes and as a result technical education, which commenced in 1870 slowly and surely emerged as a specific form of working-class schooling. Through their introduction in the last decades of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century it was junior technical schools that were a historical precursor and institutional necessity for achieving mass secondary schooling. The formation of continuing education through secondary schooling open to all was politically contested by those who sought to restrict education and those who argued for all peoples right to a general education into the secondary years (Selleck, 1982).

The social distribution of knowledge through formal schooling prior to mass provision occurred through the exclusion of working-class men and women, the poor, and 'othered' socio-cultural groups. The divisions of schooling into general and academic and technical and vocational at the beginning and subsequently throughout much of the twentieth century resulted in a selection of schooling 'content' related to

and connected with employment and work options and the patterns and composition of the labour force of the day.

The division between technical schooling and high schooling was premised on assumptions about who should get what sort of schooling in preparation for different forms of work. It was the children of manual workers who were directed to technical schooling and the children of the professional classes to high schools. Victoria led the establishment of technical schooling in Australia, creating differentiated schooling experiences through technical schools and high schools, and resisted comprehensive schooling by maintaining a separated and streamed system (Barcan, 1980, p.351). Comprehensive schooling became the norm following the education reforms proposed through the Blackburn report in 1985.

Technical schools offered learning for work that was usually in the trades and service areas and more often than not involved manual labour. As the *Sunshine Advocate* reported in 1933 “*The technical school was not the place to send a child if it were going into the professional class.*” (The Advocate, November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1933). Other forms of schooling in private schools or in public high schools offered a general and academic schooling that prepared people for a professional life that could involve a university study track directly after school.

Technical schools were established for the express purposes of schooling vast numbers of workers for the expansion and development of Australian industry, especially agriculture and manufacturing. The composition of the labour market and the relations of production are enduring economic markers that became institutionalised as class differentiated schooling that catered to different groups of students. School assessments distinguished between students who were perceived to have predispositions

toward manual or mental labour was understood and viewed as suitable for the era of mass industrial production and expansion (Crawford 2008). Those assessed and predetermined as suitably useful and practical were usually from the working-classes whilst the middle-classes, whilst the middle-classes were schooled for the professions and management. Implicit in this division was the privileging of the mental over the manual labour both scholastically and socially in patterns of schooling. Academic schools that offered elite provision prior to the twentieth century were considered superior and therefore suitable for the professions.

Technical schools engaged young people in schooling for specific forms of craft and trade employment and labour. For example, in Victoria at the beginning of the twentieth century, Collingwood Technical School was established in a suburb where cobblers, hide and leather, and other textile industries operated, which influenced the character of schooling. Young people attending this school were considered likely to have work lives that included cobbling, tailoring, leatherwork and upholstery. This textile manufacturing work was carried out in large and medium scale factories and this local industry context directly influenced and shaped the schooling experience of young people attending Collingwood Technical School in the first half of the twentieth century. The Sunshine Technical School on the other hand schooled young men for factory positions in the H. V. McKay Harvester Works. The heavy manufacturing industry carried out at the Harvester Works produced tractors, farm implements, and other metal fabrication work. The Harvester works affected the schooling delivered at Sunshine Technical School. For example it was the owner of the Harvester Works, H.V McKay who supplied the Victorian government with the seeding grant to establish the Sunshine Technical School in 1913. Young people from Sunshine Technical School



were tracked towards work lives that included becoming leading factory hands, boilermakers, fitter and turners and engineers. Many of these students would work in factories such as the Sunshine Harvester Works, or in the railways, and other engineering based jobs in heavy manufacturing type industries.

Sunshine Technical School's (1913-1991) motto was *Mente et Manibus*, (with minds and hands), signalling an epistemological basis to the pedagogy of technical education. Teaching and learning in technical schools was physical in a manual sense and mental in a technical sense. This technical sensibility was inextricably tied to the forms and patterns of industrial capitalist production. The tools, machinery and spaces for manufacturing, trades, services and commerce shaped technical know-how. Knowledge expressed as know how (*savoir*) or to know why (*connaissance*) underlined the delineation between doing and knowing that distinguished secondary schooling that was either technical or general and academic.

Technical education represented a distinctive schooling that privileged practical work, doing and making things as a way of being a worker. How a society develops is connected with specific industries and cultural practices. Australia's early history was as a source of raw materials and resources for the British Empire and the schooling system accorded with the nation's development. The broader histories of technical schooling in Australia (Murray-Smith, 1965, 1971, 1987 and Bessant and Spaul, 1976; Jolly, 2001) underline an enduring and important connection between schooling and earlier patterns of industrial capitalist development and the social divisions that resulted from this mode of production.

These patterns of technical schooling involved a practically oriented learning and knowing that was shaped by prevailing social, cultural, political and economic

factors. Social experiences in early twentieth century Australia were organised through agricultural and industrial relations of production and associated cultural activities and practices that affected and shaped patterns of schooling for students and the teachers alike. The schooling in technical schools, and in parallel agricultural schools, were premised upon craft-based ways of knowing and practice such as metal and timber crafts and trades or farming crafts, such as horticultural and agricultural practices and animal husbandry. This craft-based knowing, although originating in medieval villages and pre-industrial workshops as artisans ways of knowing, had been subjugated and disciplined by the factory system of work that became the engine of early industrial capitalist development (Bauman, 1982). These economic conditions influenced the shape and formation of different patterns of schooling, which involved the privileging of general and academic schooling over technical schooling. As a consequence the knowing and knowledge involved in technical and agricultural schooling was made invisible and accorded less value than academic knowing.

### **Locating working-class schooling- the technical/high split**

The emergence of technical schooling in Victoria, along with the elite Church of England private secondary schools established by the colonial governors, were the main forms of secondary schooling in the early twentieth century. Barcan (1980) argued that education and schooling in Victoria historically represented the best and worst in Australian schooling and that the influence of class on education was 'marked'. (Barcan,1980,p.254). The divisions in schooling in Victoria for most of the twentieth century involved,

District high schools [that] provided an academic education leading to the professions mainly for middle and lower-class children with ability; technical schools selected the best from lower social levels providing access into the ranks of skilled labour; post-primary central schools, higher elementary schools and

girls' schools provided vocational training of a more restricted character (Barcan, 1980, p.255).

The establishment of technical schools preceded the emergence of secondary high schools. The elite independent schooling system was powerful in ensuring that any 'socialist' ideas about more inclusive approaches to broaden the secondary schooling system was seen as unnecessary in Victoria in the early twentieth century (Selleck, 1982, pp.200-206). Technical schools were thought to represent no real threat as they provided practical training and education for the lower classes. In those times the idea that people knew their place was widespread and that education, if not managed correctly could result in giving 'the lower orders ideas above their station (Lawton, 1975, p.2)'.

Frank Tate as the Director of Education in Victoria from 1902-1920 was instrumental in establishing and developing the State's primary and secondary schools system. He argued at the beginning of 1910 that there was a need to, "build up a complete national system. We have State primary schools, State technical schools and a State university. They are incomplete and ineffective without provision for State intermediate and secondary schools (Selleck, 1982. p.187)". Secondary High schools were initially established in country areas so as not to threaten or provide a competitive challenge to the established elite church schools in the city. Technical schools were not perceived as a threat to elite schools principally because the knowledge involved in such schooling was seen as subordinate to that acquired through High Schools. It was understood to be useful yet benign. By 1924 twenty-four high and nineteen higher elementary schools were established with only three in the city (Selleck, 1982, p.195).

Secondary Technical Schooling initially provided schooling to the level of junior certificate (year 8) and then to intermediate level. The formation of the 'Technical Instructors Society' in 1925 was initiated following the passing in the Victorian parliament of the Teachers Act. The purpose of the Society was to:

Influence public opinion as to make it a matter of course for technical education to be acknowledged not only as vocational, but also, and perhaps primarily, as a legitimate and fit aspect of general education...At the same time, in order to raise the prestige of technical teaching profession, the technical instructors must, as a body, of themselves strive after the highest qualifications in their members, both professionally and culturally (Bessant & Spaul, 1976, p. 57).

Whilst the terms 'primary' and 'secondary' schooling indicate stages in schooling, 'technical' represented a 'kind' of schooling. According to the teachers in technical schools, it was a legitimate form of 'general education'. The struggle for technical education to be recognised as a legitimate form of 'general education' marks the history of technical schooling throughout the twentieth century. Yet technical schooling could not entirely shed the perception that it was lesser or not as prestigious as general secondary schooling which was made available through elite schools and high schools.

The tensions between proponents of technical schooling and those who favoured generalist academic 'High' schooling were persistent. They became explicit in the fraught relationship between the Victorian Director of Education, Frank Tate (1864-1939), and Donald Clark (1864-1932), the chief inspector of technical schools from 1910 to 1930 (Selleck, 1982, pp.200-209). Technical schooling in Victoria whilst under the control of the Ministry of Education operated with a degree of independence through locally controlled school councils. This allowed such schools a level of autonomy in responding to the schooling requirements of the local communities where

they had been established. Some of these technical schools were closely connected with industry while others were less so.

Donald Clark, the Chief Inspector of Technical Schools from 1911 till 1930 and was a strong advocate of technical schooling. As he put it:

A well trained academic scholar... derives internal satisfaction from his knowledge of classical and modern literature, and from his mathematics', but his knowledge is self contained and bookish, and the community does not benefit. By contrast the man who can apply knowledge which enables him to deal with things... becomes at once a pioneer and missionary of industrial progress (Selleck, 1982, p.202).

Technical schools according to Clark provided socially useful schooling whilst general and academic secondary schools were focused on intellectual development. Knowing and knowledge was not only experienced differently in certain 'types' of schooling but ordered as a hierarchy.

In the second and third decades of twentieth century in Victoria, secondary technical schooling developed as an 'alternative system' free from the centralism of the education department. Initially through the establishment of junior technical schools, followed by girls' technical schools and then full service secondary technical schools that provided schooling to 'Leaving Certificate' (Year 11), these schools were less constrained educationally by Department of Education curriculum requirements than the secondary high schools. Technical schools consisted of purpose-built, architecturally-designed buildings, with courses and teachers' work organised around industrial practices and were different in ethos to secondary high schools. They provided schooling for students in a distinctly different manner. Selleck (1982) argued in his biography of Frank Tate that,

Tate failed to appreciate that however rich the educational experiences which the junior technical school offered, however liberal its teaching, its place in Victoria's educational structure ensured that its pupils had inferior social and

economic opportunities. Donald Clark was later to complain that the system created class distinctions because teachers directed the poorer pupils toward technical education. (Selleck, 1982, p.204)

From very early on in the history of organised schooling in Victoria it was recognised that opportunities afforded to students who attended secondary technical schools were less than and inferior to those who attended secondary high schools, not to mention those that attended the elite private schools.

The original thinking in developing junior technical schools was that they would be important feeders of students into higher level technical colleges such as the Schools of Mines, Working Men's College and later the Emily McPherson College of Domestic Economy. This was an era where the technical needs of industrial capitalism were central to thinking about the purposes of knowledge and schooling. It was Selleck's (1982) view from a historical perspective that:

The technical/high school division did not create class distinctions; it reflected distinctions, which Clark and Tate took for granted in establishing it (Selleck, 1982, p.204).

These distinctions that both Clark and Tate took for granted were deeply etched into the social imaginaries of education pioneers who lived through the era of the expansion of industrial capitalism and in Australia's development from a colony to a federated nation-state progressed a schooling system inflected by class differences. Schools were not classed *per se* but patterns of schooling and their associated social relations of learning were anchored in social conditions overlain by class divisions inherent in industrial capitalism. From the Schools of Mines of applied sciences and mining engineering that emerged out of the nineteenth century gold and resources booms, technical secondary schools initially developed for specifically manual trade purposes. The split between manual and mental ways of knowing and being a worker was fundamental to the thinking of the times and critical in establishing the architecture of

secondary schooling systems in Australia. Yet knowledge was narrowly construed as a feature of general education and a specific form of academicism.

Boys' and girls' were also differentiated in technical schooling through the development of different schools with distinct purposes. 'Domestic Arts Schools' were established in the first half of the twentieth century for women. Tate pointed out *"woman's education should include preparation for her special function of homemaker, wife and mother"* (Selleck, 1982, p.223). These 'Domestic Arts Schools' were basically technical schools for girls that were established in industrial suburbs. The daughters of the middle-classes on the other hand were schooled in private schools and state High Schools. Such schools in the early days of Victoria included Methodist Ladies' College established in 1892 to provide schooling and opportunities for boarding to the elite families in all of the colonies of Australia. Elite boys' schools also took boarders from all of the colonies and prepared these young men to become the future government leaders and captains of industry for the young nation of Australia. The gendered division of schooling was replicated across class lines.

Demands for schooling grew throughout the 1930s and 1940s in Victoria and secondary schooling began to develop yet it was secondary technical schools that provided a schooling experience 'independent' from the Victorian State Department of Education. The 'Technical Instructors Society' and later on the Technical Teachers Association of Victoria played important roles in shaping and determining school experiences at technical secondary schools.

After the Second World War technical schools continued to expand into the suburbs of metropolitan Melbourne and in a country and regional centres. Technical schools existed alongside high schools. They provided different schooling experiences

for young people up to the age of 15, which was organised through a division between mental and manual ways of learning and knowing. Secondary technical and high schools established different paths and patterns of transition into the 'adult', grown-up world outside school.

Technical education grew, above all, from a conviction from 'above', from the firmly based, confident and increasingly prosperous middle classes, that the ignorance of the working man, and his lack of opportunity, struck at the roots of social order (Murray-Smith & Dare, 1987, p.6).

Technical schools developed for the express purposes of order building and as an instrument for economic development. The achievement of mass schooling would take another 30 years to become a reality. The stratification in schooling premised upon class and gender, not to mention faith, provided the foundations for secondary schooling in Victoria and in Australia more generally.

Working-class women were schooled to be mothers and housewives or the mother craft nurses for middle-class families, while working class men were schooled to become proficient manual labourers and skilled workers for factories. These forms of schooling were organised by the captains of industry for the economic development of the country. This development of schooling in early twentieth century Victoria had important effects on the organisation of society, cultures and politics. These early arrangements of schooling institutionally endorsed the division between manual and mental labour and naturalised assumptions about differences in intelligence, between men and women, and between the middle and working-classes which entrenched social divisions based on inequalities. Such schooling also had effects on the way social groups could shape and determine how society itself was known and understood.



The development of separate academic and technical schooling rested upon the formation of curricula formats that instilled hierarchies of knowing. It is these hierarchies, sedimented into education trajectories and life chances that shape a person's life. In an advertisement (The Advertiser, September 12<sup>th</sup>, 1930) for Sunshine Technical School in a 1930s newspaper it was expressed that, "*Technical instruction moulds character and morals, develops culture health and understanding*". Working-class schooling as it materialised in the early twentieth century was premised upon the stratifications organised by the divisions of manual and mental labour that were associated with and connected different ways of knowing and arranged accordingly through differentiated school curricula.

This link between Australian schools and differentiated status was both personal and social:

The strongest thing secondary school impressed upon me was that if you were diligent you were promoted each year and then had a chance to go to university. It was a high school in the classical mould; a coeducational schooling serving a working-class community in one of the older suburbs. You knew that if you went there rather than the local Technical School you were a cut above at least some of the other kids at primary school and that if you took advantage of what the place offered you'd end up at least in something 'better' than an apprenticeship. In the eyes of the local community it was the school where we could improve our station, since a solid proportion of our fathers, including my own, were tradesmen (Hill, 1977, p.35).

Hill's recollection and personal understanding of schooling emphasises on 'individual effort' as a basis for invidious comparison. Being a 'cut above the rest' while indicative of a scholastic evaluation also has broader socio-cultural resonances about who has more value and worth; a tradesman or someone who goes to university and becomes a professional. In addition to this view of school as a means of social mobility is taken for granted by the author, if you are clever. Being clever signifies superiority over those

who are less clever. As Hill correctly identifies schooling has a powerful effect and may, in some circumstances, enable social mobility, especially if it is a 'high school in the 'classical mould'. Schooling in all its forms aims to establish the basis for individual and group participation, socially culturally and politically.

### **Comprehensively included or from *Sunshine to Blackburn***

Nearly 50 years later, reforms were initiated to address levels of participation in secondary schooling that was moving towards mass participation. By the 1980s the effects of class differences associated with the split between technical and secondary high schools and their differentiated curriculum were criticised in terms of "parity of esteem". Jean Blackburn, the chair of the *Ministerial Review of Post-compulsory Schooling (1985)* argued that the high and technical split in secondary schooling unnecessarily reinforced a differential status connected with prevailing social norms that inscribed a different value for mental and manual work and labour.

Jean Blackburn's policy reforms sought to redefine and broaden the schooling experience by reworking the last two years of the secondary school curriculum. These changes to the curriculum sought to make education more relevant to those who had historically been excluded from schooling that provided pathways to coveted social positions and access to further and continuing education opportunities. Blackburn's policy interventions were aimed to address the 'silences' in the curriculum that reinforced exclusionary social processes. The report argued that:

Some types of traditional studies were originally designed for a minority of students, especially males occupying high social positions. Such studies were associated with the way of life of a social group. They were deliberately abstracted from the concerns of ordinary people's lives and from productive activities, since most of those engaging in them were by birth and definition not involved in either (Blackburn, 1985, p.22).

Blackburn's policy interventions sought to radically open up schooling especially in Years 11 and 12. The narrow curriculum was understood as a major contributing factor to schooling structures that produced social divisions based on class, gender and race. When evaluations of different types of learning and knowing were concerned with access to knowledge, they institutionalise forms of power and inequality that represented the specific interests of white middleclass men as the norm. The explicit organisation of schooling 'for all' required amelioration of these entrenched social inequalities. The technical school Leaving Certificate (today's Year 11 and/or 12) and the high school certificate were both judged to be both too narrow.

Jean Blackburn argued for not only a more comprehensive curriculum but for a reconsideration of what constitutes general education:

It is the equation of general with traditionally academic which has now to be challenged, along with the presumption that goes with it that only a selected minority should have access to, or is capable of, serious encounters with the major ideas and concerns of its time and culture (Blackburn, 1985, p. 25).

The need for a schooling curriculum that was more inclusive especially in the final two years of secondary schooling depended upon recognition of different ways of learning that were immediately relevant to young people. Like Clark, in the early part of the twentieth century, Blackburn recognised that general education was more than just the traditional school subject disciplines. Policy moves to increase those excluded from participation in a full secondary schooling experience were underpinned by a reconsideration of what general education is and can be.

The report was 'ground breaking' in that it spearheaded the institutional realignment of secondary schooling through the establishment of comprehensive

secondary colleges and a common credential. The common credential was a way of expanding learning options by promulgating a more comprehensive curriculum. This curriculum moved beyond the traditional divisions based on manual and mental schooling, as operated in technical and high schools, and broadened the traditional subject disciplines that made up the secondary schooling curriculum. The report recommended that dismantling separate secondary technical and high schools and integrating vocational and technical learning into a broader common credential, would redress 'parity of esteem' in the different types of secondary schooling. The aim was for a student studying chemistry in Years 11 and 12 and the student pursuing metal fabrication would be seen as having similar educational value and worth. The use of a common credential was intended to redress the uneven parity of esteem between general academic education and technical education by reconsidering the social function of the and important final two years of secondary schooling.

The Blackburn report focused upon exclusion and relative advantage by redressing inequality and schooling through broader curricula and learning options. In particular the Blackburn Report called for the inclusion of learning about *Work in Australian Society*. It was Blackburn's express belief that if young people learned about work and how the world works in terms of employment and labour traditions, and patterns then they would be in a better position to think through their education and future work lives.

According to Blackburn struggles for access and success afforded through secondary schooling, especially in Years 11 and 12, were constrained by outdated ideas that were echoed through education policy, which assumed for example that:

The separation of theoretical and applied studies and the lower prestige of the latter except when located in universities is one of these echoes. Another is the assumption that whole classes of people are incapable of sustained intellectual effort (Blackburn, 1985, p.22).

Blackburn's policy work inspired an explicit consideration of class and its continuing significance in schooling and social inequalities. A more critical understanding of knowledge and its contribution to life chances, and the way it affected participation in schooling was brought to the fore. The review assumed that all people no matter their class, gender or race were capable of sustained and critical thought.

The decision to close secondary technical colleges in Victoria was based on a recommendation in the Blackburn Report. The '*Ministerial Review of Post-compulsory Schooling*' argued:

Existing high and technical schools should be amalgamated to give all students access to a more comprehensive curriculum and to broaden the opportunities of students in technical schools. The workforce structure to which technical schools originally related no longer exists (Blackburn, 1985, p. 51).

The broadening of opportunities for technical secondary school students was also connected with changing occupational patterns and also broader social, economic and cultural changes. These changes to schooling paralleled the epistemological changes in ways of knowing work and life in a changing world. Technology such as networked computer systems, were emerging to drastically transform all social and cultural life. Employment changes and workforce restructuring have since resulted in the rise of non-standard employment patterns and experiences (Watson, Buchanan, Campbell, and Briggs, 2003). The mode and means of production in Australia today were reoriented through global arrangements in trade and the mass expansion of consumerism. Consumerism as both a cultural practice and marker of class has become ever apparent.

It was this emerging trajectory of change that the Blackburn review addressed in rethinking the arrangements of senior secondary schooling. The Report did not want the split between secondary technical schools and high schools to further deepen educational inequalities but rather to ameliorate them. It sought to overturn outmoded distinctions between ways of knowing, that directly affected 'ways of belonging' socially and economically:

It may now be seen, in retrospect, that the early division of prospective workers with hand or brain represented by the technical/high split and in the structures of postsecondary educational provision has framed a concept of general education which excludes the history and experience of significant sectors of the population, and separates theory from practice and from its application. These twin forms of exclusion — social and intellectual — must be addressed in a new concept of general education (Blackburn, 1985, p.25).

Learning that privileges the interests and perspectives of powerful and dominant groups to the exclusion of other people's lives, interests and perspectives compounds structural inequalities.

The introduction of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), as the 'common credential' underpinned by a comprehensive pattern of schooling, sought to better equip students for a changing world. In order to do this, the divide between academic schooling and technical schooling was reconsidered. Technical schooling was dismantled as a separate system and schooling became more comprehensive in its curriculum offerings. The Blackburn Report sought to redress the disparity of esteem between academic schooling and technical schooling by arguing for a new notion of 'general education'. A general education was needed that would speak to all people's experiences, including those of women, migrants, Aboriginal people and the working classes. Blackburn's policy reforms disrupted the predominant white, masculinist middle class cultural representations endorsed through the curriculum and overtook

streamed separate schooling. The comprehensive secondary school was considered both by Blackburn and many education researchers as the ‘wave of the future’ (Campbell and Sherington, 2006. p.91).

Despite these interventions and the radical reforms of schooling, secondary schools today still face challenges to ensure that all people get a ‘fair go’ and that their potential abilities and talents are harnessed in ways that accommodates their particular educational needs and aspirations. The struggles that were articulated in the Blackburn Report have not disappeared but have rather been reconfigured as participation in secondary schooling has reached mass proportions. Today, the trend is still for well resourced students to outdo those students who are less well resourced, educationally, socially, culturally and economically in contemporary education arrangements.

Comprehensive schooling along with wider social changes has been central to expanding participation in secondary schooling to mass levels. Working-class schooling in the latter part of the twentieth century, thanks to the Blackburn Reform, was more comprehensive because options in schooling content had dramatically expanded. Yet, marketisation along with changed regulatory arrangements and the emergence of ‘specialist schools’ and a ‘drift’ away from public comprehensive schools (Campbell and Sherington, 2006, p.125) p.129) has resulted in a further reorganisation to the patterns of schooling.

### **Continuity and discontinuity in working-class schooling- applied learning**

Comprehensive senior secondary schooling became the norm in Victoria in the second half of the twentieth century. This was based on new understandings of ‘general education’ that were subsequently implemented in the comprehensive curriculum (Blackburn, 1985). The curriculum reforms initiated through the work of Jean

Blackburn produced not only a more comprehensive curriculum but also a broader view of general education,

It is the equation of general with traditionally academic which has now to be challenged, along with the presumption that goes with it that only a selected minority should have access to, or is capable of, serious encounter with the major ideas and concerns of its time and culture (Blackburn, 1985, p. 25).

This more inclusive approach to schooling, especially in the final two years of secondary schooling recognised different ways of knowing and learning relevant to young people lives and their personal and social contexts.

Fifteen years after the Blackburn reforms the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) was introduced because it was argued that:

It is apparent that upper-secondary qualifications now need to cater for a much wider range of students than that anticipated by the Blackburn report in 1985 (Kirby, 2000, p.78).

VCAL is a curriculum reform that reformalises schooling for students who according to the policy work of Kirby, had effectively ceased formal learning. The bind that young people find themselves in today is that, increasingly they are required to be in school till seventeen years of age. This is a recent statutory requirement in the State of Victoria and is fast becoming a normative social and cultural expectation. The VCAL augments the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) by providing a reconsidered structure and experience of schooling for purposes other than university admission. As a curriculum format VCAL reorients the schooling experience for young people in Victorian schools from years 10-12.

From the outset the implementation of VCAL was badged as a ‘pathways’ qualification and ‘hands-on’ schooling option. VCAL is a new curriculum policy response and construct that both encloses and endorses new forms and strategies in



schooling. Unlike the Blackburn reforms that sought to expand the curriculum offerings through new subjects, VCAL is organised around four curriculum pillars where teachers, through dialogue with students and through connections with communities and employers and businesses, make schooling differently. It is teachers' labour that has been fundamental in shaping these forms and making these strategies possible.

As a consequence of the Kirby Review, the *Ministerial Review of post-compulsory education and training pathways in Victoria* (Kirby, 2000), VCAL was given life as another way of participating in senior secondary schooling. The review examined young peoples' opportunities for education, training and work. As a result, VCAL was developed to provide a more pathways oriented schooling option. The Kirby review can be read as continuity, in a policy sense, with the issues and reforms instigated through Blackburn fifteen years earlier. Blackburn put knowledge and people at the centre of rethinking secondary schooling. Kirby (2000) follows this policy trend by updating and seeking to make schooling available to young people also through a reconsideration of knowledge in schooling and the development and implementation of VCAL.

The Kirby review recognised that school level innovations were being developed to accommodate those students who were disconnected from, or learned differently through schooling. The Kirby Review reported that, in any one year, nearly 11,000 young people leave Victorian schools because of disinterest and other reasons. These young people will usually leave school either during or at the end of Year 11. The two main factors cited by the young people influencing their decision to leave school before completing Year 12 were "the desire for work and the lack of interest in schoolwork" (Kirby, 2000, p. 54). The review found that,

Poor results at school are likely to discourage early leavers from continuing in some form of education or training (Kirby 2000, p. 58).

VCAL provides a bona fide legitimation to schooling others differently. Making schooling interesting, and connected to young peoples lives and the worlds and cultures they inhabit has resonances with the earlier reforms instigated by Blackburn. For schools to connect young people with learning they need to be relevant to their lives. For this to occur, the Kirby review argued, schooling should be transformed.

In designing and establishing VCAL it was the intention of the Kirby review to have a schooling option that met the needs of young people who had limited and poor outcomes from school. It sought to respond to young people who had a lack of interest in school work and who would rather be in work and employment.

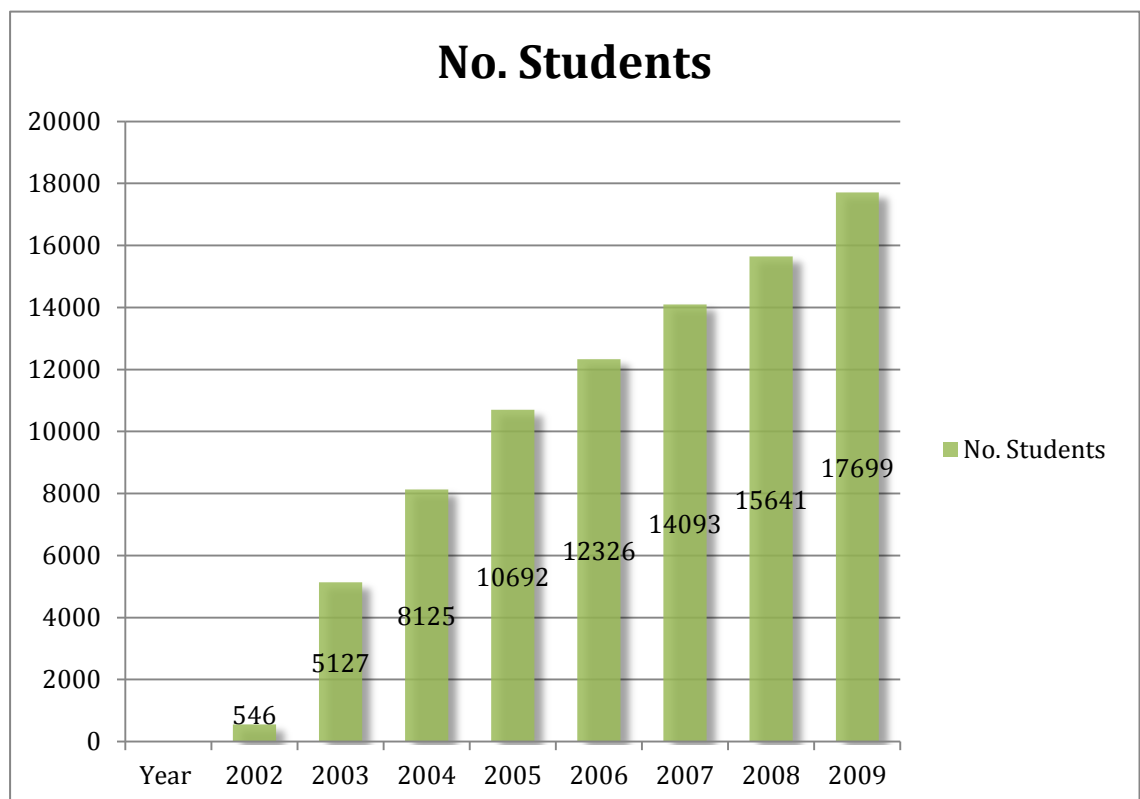
VCAL is characterised by a curriculum that resists the domination of the theory/practice dichotomy that distinguishes VET in schools from general education. VCAL also affords and enables teaching approaches for secondary school students that are informed by the principles of adult education that take the lives and knowledge that students have or aspire to attain is taken seriously. VCAL is concerned with schooling experiences where literacy, numeracy personal and work-related learning are made available through specific contexts and projects.

Applied learning is often conflated with vocational education and training (VET). Yet as formalised through VCAL applied learning becomes a policy signal and curriculum response that seeks to transcend of the view that schooling is either about VET or university admission. Schooling arranged through a subordinate curriculum such as VCAL emphasises different ways of learning in the senior years of schooling. It is a site where reconsidered notion and purposes of schooling are brought to fruition by

attending to the different schooling needs of students who, historically were not present or required to complete Years 11 and 12.

Since its trial introduction in 2002, VCAL participation rates have steadily grown (Figure 1). VCAL makes schooling possible for young people in senior secondary schooling through a reconsideration of ‘knowledge in the curriculum’ and a reorientation in the schooling experience. In 2009, 17,699 students were enrolled in VCAL, while there were 98,832 enrolments in VCE and 44,520 enrolments in VET programs (VCAA, 2010). What these figures obscure is that there will be VCE students doing VET units and there are also VCAL students who will be doing VCE units and/or VET units. Yet since 2002 enrolments in VCAL have continued to grow so that VCAL has now become a critical presence in senior secondary schooling in Victoria.

Figure 1: Number of VCAL Students



An evaluation two years after VCAL started it was found that VCAL reconceptualises a quality curriculum that resists abstracted knowledge (Henry, Dalton, Wilde, Walshe, Wilde, 2003). It also found the development of innovative and connected teaching approaches was necessary and that VCAL reconsiders schools' role in providing a place for young people with different learning requirements. It is this issue of changing schools and schooling that VCAL inadvertently comes to represent a challenge to secondary schooling by insisting on 'other ways' of doing schooling. Most obviously VCAL sanctions opportunities for students to learn and be schooled in contexts that are not defined by 'traditional curriculum divisions' (Stokes, 2006). Almost 20 per cent (see figure 1) of all students undertaking Years 11 and 12 are now doing VCAL. This represents a shift in how schooling occurs and it is teachers' work that makes VCAL a reality.

In this chapter, I have argued that working class schooling historically has been about equipping and preparing people as workers with the resources to make a life. The historical trajectory of this form of schooling has developed through subordinated curricula that were organised initially through technical schooling for boys and domestic science schools for girls. These curricula were classed and gendered by being aligned to the mental-manual and gendered division of labour. In the 1980s comprehensive curriculum reform broadened the ways of knowing embedded in secondary schooling, which began to address the hierarchies of knowledge that were previously institutionalised in schooling. As social changes have driven mass participation in schooling, working class schooling has been further reformed through applied learning. VCAL is a contemporary form of working class schooling.

The way that teachers work with students in VCAL provides a window on the ways of knowing through which contemporary working-class schooling is being remade. The hierarchies of knowledge, the ‘competitive academic curriculum’ (Connell, 1984, 1985) that is recognised as central and valuable, and those subordinated curricula that are practically based and offer ‘hands-on’ ways of knowing, provide an important lens for thinking about education and class inequality.

The next three chapters present the data from the interviews with the 10 VCAL teachers as outlined in the previous methodology chapter. These teachers’ work connect to and in other ways represent new forms of working-class schooling different from and in other ways continuous with the historical beginnings of working-class schooling in Victoria.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **APPLYING LEARNING TO COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOLING**

The introduction of VCAL in Victoria could easily be read as the fracturing of the education settlement brought about through comprehensive schooling after the Blackburn reforms. Yet paradoxically, VCAL in practice further consolidates the inclusion agenda progressed through those reforms. Applied learning extends and reworks the comprehensive schooling project that commenced in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a result of the Blackburn reforms in ways that were unforeseen in those days.

The notion of the ‘common credential’ as argued for in the Blackburn Report and materialised in the form of the VCE, has now splintered with the availability of VCAL as an offering alongside the VCE. Yet as is revealed in this chapter the organisation of the senior years of secondary schooling, as it presently occurs in Victoria, is complicated. The senior secondary years of schooling are not offered through an either VCE or VCAL arrangement but rather these credentials operate as complementary, interchangeable and interactive credentials in making schooling available to more young people. Added to this is the fact that many students in these senior years doing VCAL or VCE will also undertake VET studies as part of their senior secondary schooling experience. Students in VCAL may also take on VCE units as part of the schooling and the teachers interviewed and presented in this chapter outline how their work involves teaching across these two schooling experiences.

This chapter presents the data from interviews with three teachers who work in three different schools. The interviews provide evidence of the new directions in the patterns of comprehensive schooling that have emerged as a result of the introduction of

VCAL. These patterns of comprehensive schooling as revealed in these teachers' interviews are of schooling arrangements that involve community participation, along with participation in Vocational Education and Training (VET) and in some instances VCE units. It is a pattern of comprehensive schooling underpinned by ambivalence as expressed by the teachers about the purposes and value of schooling. At the schools where these interviewees are employed, patterns of schooling have been reshaped through the implementation of VCAL to make schooling possible for those who up until this time had very few places in schools. Implementing and making these new patterns of learning as a consequence challenge and extend what schooling is and can become.

The three teacher interviews presented in this chapter are from schools that having implemented the VCAL have reshaped the relations of learning at the schools where they are employed. Two of the schools are independent Catholic secondary colleges and the other is a Government secondary college in the metropolitan western suburbs of Melbourne. The two Catholic secondary schools are located in rural and regional settings in Victoria. All of these schools are similar in that they provide a breadth of secondary schooling as organised both through the 'competitive academic curriculum' and the 'subordinate curriculum' and all three are co-educational schools. Chisholm Secondary Catholic College and Western Suburban Secondary College are Years 7-12 schools located on one site while St Benedict's operates from two campuses with the senior campus having nearly 2,000 students in Years 10-12.

The Western Suburbs Secondary College provides schooling to a culturally mixed community and is a comprehensive public secondary college. St Benedict's Catholic Secondary College, where Catherine is employed, caters to a rural community that she described as "really Anglo". Catherine, like the other two teachers, whose

interview data is represented in this chapter, seeks to explain the contexts and conditions in which they work. Michelle, a music teacher, who has taught at Western Suburban Secondary College for the past 20 years also discusses the cultural mix at the school she is employed at. While Noel, who teaches at the other Catholic secondary college as a mathematics teacher, has worked at Chisholm Catholic College for over 20 years, and describes it as an 'ordinary secondary school'. While this may or may not be the case, this chapter is interested to explain how an extended and more pluralised pattern of comprehensive schooling has emerged as a result of the implementation of VCAL.

VCAL in non-metropolitan urban spaces happens in communities made through and between the distances from the metropolitan centre and from each other. Country towns cater for the schooling needs of a mix of young people from town residents to farmers' children and others dwelling in rural areas farther away from regional centres (Pini, Brice and McDonald, 2010). Noel and Catherine teach at Chisholm Catholic College and St Benedict's Catholic College, respectively. Noel trained in education with a focus on photography and mathematics, and stated that he has never taught photography in all his twenty-six years as a teacher. Catherine moved to the regional country town after marrying a local, she's originally from the city and as she explained she is not a Catholic and that the town is a 'real Catholic town'. After her marriage ended, Catherine has stayed on and has made a life for herself in the town and at the school over the past twenty-two years. The two Catholic schools have a similar student body to the western metropolitan secondary college, yet the Catholic schools differ in that they provide a faith based schooling experience.



The combined experiences of these three teachers reveal patterns and purposes of schooling where practices of learning, inside and outside the school grounds and include making and project based learning where the VCAL students are provided with opportunities to go through ‘the process’ with the teacher. It is this ‘going through the process’ as explained by these teachers where a form and pattern of schooling that is personal, useful and important for students on their way to a work life after school is made. The teachers talk about their work in VCAL in ways that underline the personal, psychological, social and political dimensions of their labour. Catherine speaks emotively of the destruction of students’ spirit to know and their desire to know, ‘when they are told to sit down, shut up and copy off the board’. Michelle explains that as a VCAL teacher she plays an important role in her students’ life, because she ‘cares’ about her students learning and futures in ways that other teachers and sometimes the students’ families do not. Noel is much more psychologically driven in his teaching in VCAL and outlines the influence of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) as a motivational device and communication technique that he actively utilises in his teaching.

These teachers’ work in VCAL involves working to keep students interested in schooling and learning and each interviewee reveals the different ways in which VCAL is organised and instituted in the school where they work. These teachers identify and describe themselves occupationally and professionally as schoolteachers who have adjusted their work to a student body that has changed. Each of them outline the conditions in which VCAL operates underlining the disciplinary effects of both education policies and the school organisation and how this plays out to formalise applied learning as a schooling option and as an important component of their labour as

teachers working in schools. Through their work in VCAL they are politically engaged and active in giving form to working-class schooling.

### **Applied learning at St Benedict's**

Catherine describes and contrasts faith based schooling and its almsgiving predilection for care with the more general 'academic control' of schooling. For Catherine, caring is premised on a schooling approach that seeks to accommodate all students by responding to their varying needs and making a place where they can feel valued. Innovation and the space to be progressive in schooling for Catherine are made between care and control. As Catherine describes her workplace:

St Benedict's has a strong sense of helping others in need, and I really like that. And I like the way that whilst schools are controlled by academic education, they've allowed... St Benedict's is quite innovative and progressive in terms of its ability to provide other programs for kids who don't fit a traditional mould, and I've been very lucky in that basically... I'm almost like my own boss. I've been allowed to just develop things and I try and meet the needs of the kids at the school.

(Catherine)

Comprehensive schooling as envisioned in the Blackburn reforms sought to progress a form of schooling through a common curriculum that speaks to all students' experiences. Yet as it has transpired historically the intensified competition for a tertiary education place has resulted in foreclosing truly comprehensive schooling experiences. The seeming freedom that Catherine describes of her work at St Benedict's to form and construct a place and space for those that do not fit into conventional schooling belies the struggles and conflicts in terms of the restraints of the school as an institution where all teachers encounter pressures and tensions that shape and affect their labour. Being left to 'just develop things' points to the limits of schools like St Benedict's relying on the labour of teachers' like Catherine to remedy and adjust the schooling experience in

order that it does accommodate and address the needs of students whose needs would otherwise not be met.

Making different patterns of schooling possible involves the organisation and development of cohesive and educationally sound approaches to student learning. Catherine is involved in ‘innovative and progressive’ work as she described it because it involves thinking about and finding ways that will make spaces for students who because they do not fit and are considered for other reasons as ‘trouble’ within and by the school. In talking about how VCAL is viewed at St Benedict’s Catherine explains:

Originally, it was viewed as a very ...that’s their problem, it’s over there, they cause a lot of problems. It wasn’t viewed positively beyond the fact that it would be good for the kids involved. There was no allowance for timetabling. The fact that the course came out with very little curriculum structure, if you compared a VCE study design with the VCAL, you couldn’t compare because... and the staff were struggling. Preparation times didn’t allow for the extra work. There was a lot of community involvement and partnership arrangements had to go on, and a traditional school environment doesn’t allow easily for that to happen. It was fortunate, I was already VET coordinator at that time, and I fell into VCAL. So in October of one year I was told we were doing VCAL for the next year. By that time staffing had been done, timetabling and all that. And I had to somehow make that fit in what was two months of school. It was terrible. (Catherine)

As a relatively new curriculum arrangement for schooling the success and soundness of VCAL as a credible schooling approach is dependent upon teachers who are prepared to work in other ways to make a schooling experience for those that do not fit. At St Benedict’s, as Catherine explains, the students destined for VCAL are those that do not fit and generally it’s “their problem, over there”. VCAL, with its broad learning outcomes, (Appendix 1) is described as having ‘little curriculum structure’ yet required an immense amount of work that takes the teacher outside the school to make links and connect the student learning with community and potential employment

experiences for the students. The balance between care and control institutionally at the level of the school becomes a curriculum issue in Catherine's work. Yet it also underlined the dimensions of Catherine's work in the school. Her labour involved the traditional aspects of teachers work in developing content. It also involved the administrative tasks in making VCAL fit within the school organisational parameters, alongside establishing and making connections with community organisations to make a different schooling experience work. Catherine also described the need to be inventive because the controls around the curriculum are not as prescriptive as they are in the traditional frames of the competitive academic curriculum.

Making schooling through VCAL at St. Benedict's involved collaborative efforts on the part of Catherine and the teachers she works with. Yet these dimensions of her labour as a teacher involve pushing against the conventions of the school. As Catherine described it:

I think there were three or four of us involved in it, and you could see the potential, but, gee whiz, you were stuck within the constraints of the school. Over time, and through much foot stamping and dummy spitting, and resigning, and lots of other childish behaviour on my behalf, because I learnt over time that was the only way I got a response, was if I became quite petulant that things started to change. (Catherine)

The burdens of making schooling differently pushed up against the routine controls of established schooling conventions. It was through, at times abrasive encounters with other school employees that Catherine's work as a teacher enabled her to get things underway and realise a different approach to schooling. As a teacher Catherine was charged with the tasks of establishing the conditions of schooling in applied learning. The struggles in doing this led Catherine to acting up to ensure that she is both heard and, but more importantly, able to formalise a different way of

teaching and learning within the school. An approach that she described as having potential yet an approach that was unknown to her and the school.

Working with students in VCAL is according to Catherine informed by her previous employment experiences (VET coordinator, Special Education and Careers teacher) in the school. These experiences are characterised by change and reinvention in her employment at St Benedict's. As Catherine explained:

Because St Benedict's Catholic College is so big... I haven't been to the Junior side, I've only ever been at the Senior side, which is Years 10-12, but I've been able to reinvent myself a couple of times. I started in Special Ed, Careers and English, which is where I've ended back now, but I've done ... like I was in charge of the sport, I've done different subjects, I've worked in different areas, so every five or six years I've been able to do something different, because it's so big you can move around within the school. (Catherine)

St. Benedict's is a large school with around 2,000 students in the senior school has had to change and reinvent itself organisationally. So, while Catherine describes the changes in her work roles at the school and the possibilities of reinventing herself she underlines the nexus between the school organisation and changeable character of teachers' labour given these changes. The capacity for movement around and within the school affects teachers' work like Catherine's, as well as student experiences and also remakes and reconstitutes what schooling entails.

VCAL as curriculum intervention shifts the contours of teachers' work and establishes different premises for schooling. Catherine outlines the particularities of the atmosphere that characterises classroom practice in VCAL:

The teaching practice that occurs in the classroom is different. You make a point that you don't yell at the kids. That you speak calmly. That you always say "Hey, I talk to you and pay attention to you when you're talking to me, I deserve the same respect back." Make them responsible for their decisions. You have to be firm and consistent but you also have

to be able to adapt. So if they just had a bad run in at lunchtime with a friend, and the friend's told them to nick off, they're going to come in angry, so it's no good working with them because their mind is still with being angry with their friend. So you've got to work through that before they will sit down and do the class work. Rather than in mainstream subject, we'd say "bad luck, deal with that later, we're in English now; we've got to get this work done". So there's a lot of work on personal stuff. Blowing their nose. Saying 'please' and 'thank you'. (Catherine)

'Blowing their nose' provides a figurative reckoning of teachers' work and the social relations of learning in VCAL. Such a figurative reckoning points to the actual and symbolic care that Catherine previously talked about, and it further elaborates an intervention and approach to schooling that is personal. The 'mainstream' provides a normative benchmark of the speed and pace of schooling whereas spaces are made in VCAL classrooms at St Benedicts' for 'personal stuff'. Whether this is about deportment or disposition can never wholly be entirely disentangled from the actual learning, yet it is relational in the sense that dealing with the personal is central to teachers' work in VCAL. In VCAL it is not a case of 'bad luck' but rather an acknowledgement that there are contexts and incidents that prevent students engaging in class room learning that need to be noticed and responded to.

The types and sorts of learning that occurs remains an important feature of VCAL. They help to explain how schooling is made to respond, fit and be 'scholastic' for students who otherwise would not really fit or participate in the conventional arrangements of schooling. The impact of teachers' labour in VCAL is refigured through what Catherine has already described as having 'little curriculum structure'. Yet the VCAL curriculum does insist that the learning outcomes be achieved in ways that are developed locally that have social and personal implications.

At St Benedict's Catherine teaches VCAL students to learn about the ways and how things can get done. Catherine recounted a story that involved a student-initiated

project, which supported a range of learning for the students. As became clear in the experience as she retold it, it was learning how to go about organising things that was the core learning experience for the VCAL students:

Last year... I don't know if you noticed outside this big hill down the middle of the school, they wanted to have some sort of go-cart race down there. So I said, the rule, go and see the principal. The principal then sent the kids to the Property and Maintenance OH&S guy, who then rang the insurance company and said they can do that – that's OK. And I'm like "what?" I'm thinking the answer's no. But they had to work out how could they shut the road so that the kids couldn't stop. Would the police allow them to say shut the road between 12 and 1pm. But the fact that they were allowed to do it blew them away. They're like "we never thought the school would agree to that". And then they knew that they had to meet these requirements. And in the end they couldn't figure out how they could stop the go-carts running into the gutter across the road, and not causing serious harm. So they let the project go. But because they were allowed to do it, and it was totally up to them to solve the problems they thought it was quite a lot of fun. They were going to make the go-carts as well. And then run competitions... it would have been a lot of fun.

(Catherine)

Catherine's surprise and enthusiasm about the students being allowed to put on their go-kart race speaks to possibilities involved in making schooling in different and novel ways through VCAL. This experience not only challenged the students' perceptions of school strictures but also Catherine's. Drawing upon and utilising school resources such as the good will of other staff at St Benedict's who appreciate and are supportive of the purposes of VCAL is central to making schooling differently. As reflected in Catherine's description of this incident, VCAL is a form of schooling where the 'kids' are left alone yet guided to find ways and figure things out for themselves. Catherine explained that the principal at St Benedict's is really supportive of the program and is always willing to be involved in student-initiated projects. VCAL at St Benedict's necessarily pushes the limits of what is generally known and experienced as schooling. Students are assessed on how they went about the particular project, the go-kart race

that did not materialise as an end or outcome is considered in terms of the 'process'. The process of knowing how to arrange things and go about getting the necessary permission to make something happen overrides the actual completion as the main outcome of the learning in VCAL in this instance. In relaying this story Catherine talked about how the students made decisions about who was going to talk to the principal, and take on other such task requirements which all involved taking the students out of the comfort zones to solve problems and make decisions.

VCAL opens up a schooling approach that Catherine believes is more accommodating for kids at the school with particular traits:

These kids they were ... their history would be that they didn't submit work, they didn't attend classes, they may or may not have been into drugs, they may or may not have been sleeping around, they may or may not have had stable families, they weren't interested in doing Maths, Science, English. ...And they didn't fit. And they knew they didn't fit. ...but they also knew that they weren't dumb. But they just couldn't fit into our school environment. And schools, from the time you're in Preps to Year 10, you're basically told "sit down, shut up and do what I say."  
(Catherine)

To Catherine, people who come to VCAL are marked morally as 'not good' students in a structure of schooling that cannot see or ignores different interests and capabilities. Catherine underlines that those who are excluded know they are 'not dumb' yet she describes them as non-compliant. VCAL at St Benedict's provides a space where student initiative is drawn on and where differences are accommodated through more diffuse experiences of schooling. Diffuse in that the subject matter of VCAL privileges the 'process' of projects and activities such as organising a camp, a community service or event.

The projects Catherine and the other teachers at St Benedict's progress through the class are aimed at getting the students to think and act past their immediate needs



and interests to focus upon the social world. As Catherine explains teaching in Personal Development occurred in the context of religious education.

When we started because of RE (Religious Education) we decided these kids should do RE as part of their VCAL program, and because they're very egocentric, we thought, they need to be helping others to try and move beyond themselves. So we've set up, at Year 11, that the focus that that year is to be involved in community groups. So they do volunteer work and they do projects that will benefit other people.

This year we're making little pamper packs for the women's refuge centre. So if the mums have to do a runner in the middle of the night, they get a candle, a packet of bath salts and lip balm. And the kids are decorating them and trying to make them look nice.

It takes them a little while to think "oh, is this school" but they don't actually realise that's teamwork. The planning. They had to get permission from the school. They had to get permission from the organisation.

*(Catherine)*

Doing different things to provide opportunities for students to work and learn in co-operation with others in ways that are at first recognised as schooling. Different experiences connected to life outside school includes doing things that relate to those contexts providing a basis for teaching and learning where content and social contexts are encountered interchangeably. Learning takes on practical and relevant affectations of doing something that has immediate uses.

VCAL for Catherine addresses the student interests through making spaces for students to follow what is going on, and keeping up. Catherine describes the schooling experiences of the VCAL students in the following way:

A lot of them have problems tracking from the board to the paper, so by the time they have written something down, they've lost their spot and so it takes them such a long time to do that... With the VCAL and that they can slow down. You would write something on the board but leave it there and they would do it at their pace; pace is what is the problem. A lot of the kids want to do the work but they can't maintain the pace.

*(Catherine)*

Finding your own timing, your own pace is central to productive engagements with learning. Knowing that your pace slows or quickens through various points of the school day, or your school life, occurs when you do not lose your 'spot'. In applied learning, the application is unmistakably about the 'self'. Catherine knows the young people in her classes want to do the work yet in VCAL they are provided with a space where they are marked not as students but rather as 'applied learners'.

### **Learning to know**

Like past forms of working class schooling, such as that provided in separate and streamed technical schools, these young people are marked differently when they become 'applied learners'. Applied learners, at the schools where these teachers' work are learning amongst other students yet are achieving a different schooling.

While schooling through VCAL involves the participation in numeracy, literacy, personal development and work related skills as its four curriculum pillars it also includes a fifth pillar which is general education and/or vocational education. As Catherine explained,

We've got a girl who is doing Health. She can't maintain that pace and the quality that's required, but she just really is interested in the subject. So I've negotiated that she enrolls: that parents and student knows that she will fail it because she won't be up to the standard but she gets credit then in some of her VCAL stuff. (Catherine)

Student interests are sometimes known and responded to in the school environment yet specific rules and structures can limit potential responses and narrow participation in schooling. In VCAL learning to pass or learning to know because of your 'interest in the subject' is not dependent on 'academic performance' but rather a 'personal' curiosity. Failure is offset by the experience and the abilities afforded through participating and learning for 'other' purposes. The normalisation of failure for this

young woman as an ‘applied learner’ ensures that class ‘boundaries are maintained’ and can also be viewed as fixing failure onto the working-classes (Connell, 1977, p.166; Reay, 2005). Yet it also affords different opportunities for participating in teaching and learning that would otherwise be closed off as a legitimate way of schooling.

That the student doing health will fail the unit is not considered a big deal by Catherine who explained that:

She can redo it... like she failed in the ... where they have the babies, her baby died because she tilted its head and stuff. She was upset. So she’s redoing it. But if she was doing VCE, that would have been a fail – bad luck. But, because the pressure’s off her now, we then negotiated for her to have the baby again, so she’s got the feeling of success; she’s passed it, she’s accomplished it, she’s learnt from it and there’s no pressure. (Catherine)

Making exceptions and/or working against the formal requirements of the competitive academic curriculum occur in applied learning where participation for other purposes is made possible.

In the interview, when I asked Catherine how the student felt about failing the subject she explained:

She’s just rapt that there’s no pressure on her now. She can just do the best she can do – at the level and pace she can do. You wouldn’t do it all the time. It can be a bit messy and tricky, and it’s at Year 11 level not Year 12. I don’t think the Year 12 teachers would cope with that yet. And all the outside stuff that goes on. Unit 1 and 2 you can get away with it. So this particular girl, we didn’t want her ending up pregnant so she needed to know what it was like to have a baby, so there was a lot of real life learning stuff in there as well. And she aims to do what the other kids are doing – that’s, well, now she’s going “Oh, I tilted the baby’s head again.” So she’s starting to link her actions with a consequence, which is, if you had a newborn, and the head’s flopping, that’s not a good thing, whereas before she didn’t get it at all.” (Catherine)

This example shared by Catherine reveals a personal dimension to schooling that seeks to provide the student with a learning opportunity without the pressure but with the life

lesson of what having an infant may possibly entail. This simulated experience while in no way like the actuality of caring for a baby is used to reinforce a moral precept about young women getting pregnant and having a child. Whether it has any effect or a paradoxical effect remains to be seen. Yet it does reveal a moral economy to the schooling approach instigated for this young woman's personal interests and situation. This example provides an insight into how VCAL at St Benedict's is actively involved in processes of 'schooling the self', that is ways to place the students subjectivity at the heart of the patterns of schooling.

The example of the student learning about child rearing in health provides a gendered example of the pedagogic approaches to VCAL. This is also reiterated in examples about responding to the schooling needs of the young men. According to Catherine, what the young men in VCAL are aiming to do in their lives after school is not only typical in gender terms but is also subject to 'fads'. Catherine explained the students are really interested in leaving school to get a job. Whereas what the girls go for is:

Hairdressing and childcare, and boys... the flavour of the month at St Benedict's College at the moment is Building, two years ago it was Horticulture. (Catherine)

Catherine qualified her statements about the students' employment goals and prospects by explaining that the students understood that further learning would always be a part of their lives. This was explained in terms of 'pathways' and the way these student go about getting on in life. Catherine explained:

Actually some of the kids know that they can't cope with exams at VCE. That they're quite capable but they don't' cope with the pressure so some of them actually plan a pathway, through VCAL, to then get a trade and then go back as a mature-age student at say 24, where they don't have to worry about the VCE scores and passing the exams, so they're becoming

quite clever in how they can figure out how to overcome the problem with exams. That's quite good. (Catherine)

While being proficient at sitting exams is a marker of talent or ability, the skill to overcome exam nerves and to sit down and complete an exam is something that Catherine's students are not interested in pursuing. According to Catherine, they know where they want to get to and in most cases they know how to navigate themselves to where they want to get 'without doing exams'.

The place of VCAL in the school at St Benedict's five years after being established has changed and is now better understood according to Catherine. Yet she does explain that there are still 'ill-informed' teachers in the school who challenge the legitimacy of the labour Catherine and her fellow VCAL teachers are engaged in:

I think now VCAL is seen as a great outcome for a particular cohort of kids. From the kids' point of view, I would say generally speaking it's quite positive. From the staff who are involved in the program it's very positive. For the ill-informed, they would say "I don't know how you teach those kids", which is the comment you get. (Catherine)

At St Benedict's Catherine, along with the other teachers she works with, and in collaboration with the students in VCAL, manages to make schooling experiences that reorient learning at the school. This reorientation is premised upon relationships between teachers and students and the school and the community. Dealing with hostility about teaching those that have been written off by others she works with also characterises Catherine's work in VCAL.

### **Knowing how to know more**

Michelle who is employed at Western Suburban Secondary College describes herself as a 'music teacher by training'. She has been teaching at the school since 1991. Michelle was employed at Western Suburban Secondary School just after she

completed her education degree. Michelle maintained that music teachers are “*highly sought after and there’s not very many who are unemployed*”. Michelle has worked continuously at Western Suburb Secondary College except for a ‘few stints’, outside that included working at the Education Department’s sports unit, working at another school in the northern suburbs and doing a community leadership program with the Country Fire Authority. All of these outside experiences Michelle relates to her work as a VCAL teacher. Throughout her 21 years at the school Michelle has taught music, studies of society and environment (SOSE), geography and history and personal development and work related skills in VCAL.

At Western Suburbs Secondary College 950 students attend the school, and it’s a school that promotes itself as an academic school and sets itself apart from other public schools in the area because of its focus on academic education, and is further distinguished by its music curriculum. Evidence of the school’s academic orientation is found in its Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) results where the school is able to hold its own. As Michelle explained:

The school has been widely promoted in the last 12 months as being a school that’s actually improved in their VCE results even though the demographics would show that we shouldn’t have. Our VCE results have gone up. There are a couple of factors behind that. We introduced VCAL obviously a few years back when VCAL first came in, which took the 20 the less academic children out of each year level. It also meant that those students weren’t interrupting the other kids in the classes. (Michelle)

VCE operates in Victoria as a key determinant and normative measure of value and overall performance of different secondary schools (Teese, 2003). Student VCE scores play a large part in determining students post-school options, and whether or not students gain entry into university study. These scores also operate as a measure of the reputational capital of different secondary schools. That the ‘20 less academic children’

are moved into VCAL reflects the stakes in maintaining or protecting these measures of reputation and performance. VCAL is presented as a diversionary program through Michelle's description of its place in the school and its make-up, where potentially or actually 'disruptive students' are taken out of the VCE classes.

Since graduating as a music teacher, Michelle has undertaken studies in a careers education course, that she sees as important to her work in VCAL in assisting students to pursue and access work options they are interested in. Teaching music, history and geography in the 'mainstream' curriculum provides Michelle with job satisfaction as does teaching personal development and work related skills in VCAL:

In my class we do a lot of career-related work, so we're looking at different types of jobs and we have guest speakers that come in. We went for a tour down the road to the local TAFE to have a look around all the different localities down there and hear from some of the kids that are doing the apprenticeships down there. (Michelle)

Michelle's philosophy, as a teacher is that schooling should provide students with, 'the knowledge to find more knowledge'. That is, schooling should ideally prepare students to know how to access more knowledge. In this sense schooling for Michelle is understood as a key resource to support students to live in an 'informed' manner. Underpinning this 'knowing how to know more' philosophy in Michelle's teaching work are strong relationships with the students. It is teaching in VCAL that Michelle feels she is given the scope to develop these stronger relations.

At Western Suburban Secondary College, VCAL starts at Year 10 as a foundation year, then students go back into the academic VCE in Year 11 and then can go back into VCAL again in Year 12. VCAL is also offered at Year 11 but as an 'exit point'. In explaining how VCAL operates at Western Suburban, Michelle expressed concern that the model was not something she agreed with:

Year 10 takes out students who are struggling to keep up with the mainstream work as such and we've created a Year 10 VCAL class which also takes 20 of the less academic students out of classes; it makes it easier for the other students. And Year 11 VCAL is an exit point at this school. So if students do Year 11 VCAL they have to leave, which is the current policy. If they do Year 11 VCE they can go into Year 12 VCAL, at this point that's the current policy. It's a bit controversial because there are people that feel that sending students off when they're 17, having only completed Year 11 might not be the best educational path. So if they do Year 11 VCAL they have to leave. So if you did Year 11 VCE you can then do Year 12 VCAL, which is what a lot of the Year 10 VCALs do; they go back in, they struggle for 12 months, which is ridiculous, and then they go into Year 12 VCAL. (Michelle)

The arrangements of VCAL at Western Suburban Secondary College involve the movement between applied learning then back into the competitive academic curriculum and then back to applied learning. Michelle does not know why this model was instituted in the school but had strong feelings about its logic. The stark realities of working within school guidelines and policies that go against her own personal feelings and professional expectations of how schooling should be arranged and the optimal approaches is necessary for a quality experience is made apparent by Michelle:

My opinion of it is that I don't agree with it, but it's the school policy.  
(Michelle)

The disciplinary force that results from the school's approach to VCAL underlines a 'new order' in the school for both students and, in this instance, the teacher and point to the structural imperatives that sort the students and organise the teachers' work. Although the teachers' work in VCAL involves differently oriented expectations by being focused less on a prescribed curriculum it becomes more framed upon known and perceived 'student needs and interests'. The emphasis upon 'less academic' kids and how VCAL as a diversion makes it 'easier for the other' kids underscores the privileging of some students needs over others and different teachers' motivations about what is important in their work in schools. This seems to especially be the case at



Western Suburban Secondary College that emphasises its 'academic' reputation in contrast to the other secondary schools in the area, both government and Catholic.

Michelle explained that she came to work in VCAL when the school principal invited her to start up a 'Youth Development Program' that was focused on community action and was run in conjunction with the Red Cross. The program involved students doing four periods of community action and from there 'they go out and about and do volunteering out in the community and it creates links'. Michelle viewed the program as an opportunity to create links for students within the school and with outside organisations. The program also operated as 'leadership' type education approach to schooling.

You could see that there would be some students who weren't academically brilliant who would really find these things great because they could go out to the local op shop and help. They actually loved it. From there we actually established running the VET Community Services course, which I still teach now. (Michelle)

VCAL at Western Suburban Secondary College is connected with VET and in Michelle's explanation of how VCAL emerged as a schooling option, it is represented as another pathway at the school. That the initial 'youth development program and subsequently VCAL are provided to 'students who were not academically brilliant' repeats and reinforces applied learning as it relates to VET as hierarchically less challenging or valuable as the competitive academic curriculum. Yet Michelle believes VCAL is more engaging in a personal and in an 'outside' sense. Identifying that the students 'loved it', underlines Michelle's commitment to making sure schooling experiences are pleasurable and enjoyable. Experience is emphasised as an option for making learning pleasurable and enjoyable in an 'op shop' where the potential to tacitly come to knowing is sought.

Michelle has a professional commitment within the school and with the students of appreciating the need for good relations with students. She believes the students

like me and the other people that are teaching them VCAL because we reward them for having a go. (Michelle)

There is compassion inflected in Michelle's description of her work as a VCAL teacher that reflects her concern for students schooling experience and life after school and further underpins the advocacy role she takes on with the students deemed 'academically weak'. Michele presents an oppositional perspective to the hegemony of the academic focus of schooling as she describes:

I am not someone who likes to push the academic line maybe. I like to see that students are engaged and enjoying themselves rather than necessarily going to get an ENTER score of 99 points or whatever, I'm not into that. (Michelle)

Not being measured or determined by a numeric score is an important characteristic of the work Michelle engages in both teaching in VCAL and in her other teaching work. Her students' value and worth are tied up more with having a go, exploring different organisations and types of work options and finding their own strengths through experiences that challenge their views of what schooling involves. There is also a commitment in Michelle's work in VCAL to ensuring that the students are provided an 'education opportunity' that at times goes against the grain of her colleagues' views and expectations of what schooling is and should be.

Michelle's apparent appreciation of a not so academically focused schooling is further tied to a social commitment to schooling that she feels prevents students from going astray, personally and legally. She seeks to convey these thoughts to her fellow teachers who at times question the value of the work that is carried out by teachers like herself in the school who through their work make VCAL possible:

Some other people around the school when they see some of these students who might have had a history of being naughty in the past, they sort of say “Oh, why have we still got blah, blah here?” “Why haven’t we got rid of blah, blah?”

Rather than acknowledging that them getting extra education and still being in education is actually valuable for everybody in society. I have a line that I use sometimes when I get a bit angry about this. And I sort of say “If you don’t want your house broken into on the weekend, you need to make sure those kids are still in education, so they don’t need to turn to crime”. And that’s the line that I use. (Michelle)

Michelle’s work in VCAL occurs in an atmosphere of misunderstanding and at times in outright opposition to her fellow teachers beliefs about education and who is entitled to be at school and under what circumstances. Students who misbehave or are ‘naughty’ apparently forfeit their entitlements to be in school and this is a sentiment expressed by teachers Michelle works alongside. Michelle relies on a defence of her work in VCAL that represents schooling as a diversionary and recuperative project that prevents social ills.

### **The personal burdens of being different and the bonuses of VCAL**

Teachers’ work in school is controlled and regulated by policy edicts and associated *edu-metrics*, where measurements of student performance, schooling outcomes and retention rates are used to shape the schooling process. Teachers’ work is directed by and is mindful of complying with and seeking to reach or fulfil these agendas. As Michelle describes in this encounter she had with some VCAL students:

Schools are under pressure to have data that shows that they’re improving and that they’re literacy levels are going up and this, that and the other is improving all the time. You’re always going to have ... and every society is always going to have students whose skills aren’t in reading or whatever it might be, so you’ve got to find a place for them where they feel that they’re contribution is valued. And this class one day came back from general assembly actually (the whole school assembly) and they raved on at me for 10 minutes about how the principal doesn’t like them because they don’t do well at their school work. And I said “well, that’s not true, everyone likes you. And we all have different

skills, that's why you're in this class and that's why we do different things because we're recognising that you've got different skills, and you've got different skills to me, and everyone likes you. The principal likes you, and that's why the principal has offered you this different class. (Michelle)

The performance and measurement culture that disciplines, rationalises and regulates education and schooling not only shapes teachers' labour but also impacts upon and is felt by students. In particular, according to Michelle, among students who feel that they themselves are not performing the way they should be. This awareness of being different and having different skills does not appease or soothe Michelle's VCAL student body of the injury they feel about letting the school down and not being liked by the principal. They feel the burden of not succeeding in ways that are expected by school cultures that are under pressure to continuously improve. The students know they are different and being in a different group reinforces this perception of their difference. Yet it is through Michelle's teaching labour where her efforts are directed toward supporting the students to see that they actually have worth and value and that this can be realised through VCAL.

Michele believes that despite the differences the students feel, that the students have had 'bonuses' out of being in a different group. In VCAL, students are engaged in a range of options that include excursions, projects in school and out in the community. These experiences involve explicit and at times implicit education purposes. Michelle explained that often students are not aware of the reason for the different curriculum experiences that are made available to the students in VCAL:

Once a month they're allowed to choose a lesson to have Game Day. So they're allowed to nominate which day they want and then we play board games, and they don't know that the reason behind it is that it makes them interact positively with other people and share and communicate etc; they just think it's something that I just chose to do because we can do it. They don't know the actual reason behind it. (Michelle)

The ‘actual reason’ for playing games and being temporarily relieved of the burdens of everyday school work on a monthly basis is understood by Michelle as having educative value in an interpersonal way. Students are provided with playing games as a pedagogic strategy of developing the skills to be personable and to interact in ways that seek to provide them with opportunities to improve their soft skills. The VCAL students are also responsible for the school-recycling program that, according to Michelle provides them with ways to learn about the environment and contribute to the school’s efforts in this area. VCAL students at Western Suburban Secondary College are also actively supported to consider vocational pathways and obtain the information about what it takes to obtain their desired employment aspirations.

Overall, VCAL at Western Suburban Secondary College allows students to have a schooling experience that is fun or more precisely a relief from the pressures of schooling as arranged through the competitive academic curriculum. VCAL provides a basis for success in schooling that is afforded through achievement in participation in education inside and outside the school. The great thing about doing this work in VCAL for Michelle is that it is all about the students:

They achieve lots of good things, and we get to do lots of good fun excursions they go on a work placement and the employer says that they were excellent. Or I’ll go and visit them on work placements and the employer says “Oh, gee, this is a great student”. One of my students from last year went to a retail outlet and when I went to visit her the manager came out of his office, from upstairs, to come and speak to me to say that she was the best student that they had had for years – of any work experience student. And she was from VCAL. They are different when they go out and about. (Michelle)

VCAL for Michelle allows her to work with students inside and outside the school in order to prepare them to move into employment or further learning. The further learning can involve VCE or a TAFE program. Unlike previous institutional forms of working

class schooling such as that provided in technical schools, applied learning involves vocational preparation along with the opportunities to combine elements of schooling through the competitive academic curriculum as part of their VCAL or as an option after VCAL.

VCAL as a pattern of schooling at Western Suburban Secondary College is made through the competing tensions of the competitive academic curriculum and is associated with the lower prestige VET schooling track. Whilst the VCAL students at the school move between VCAL and VCE, an approach Michelle does not agree with this arrangement seems to reiterate the importance of the academic focus of the school at the expense of making dedicated efforts to provide the required to support students deemed ‘academically weak’.

Michelle throughout the interview outlines the necessity and the potential of VCAL in providing a worthwhile schooling experience to students who for a variety of reasons are not making it at school. In the following comment on the value of VCAL Michelle highlights the potential but also the tyranny of perception that can either enable or constrain VCAL as a useful schooling experience:

Yeah, it's a good thing as long as people don't see it as a Mickey Mouse option, and so long as it's targeted at the right students to create options for them and not just a dumping ground to get rid of the students that certain faculties; possibly mainly the commerce faculty in this school, don't like the difficult students. Wouldn't want them in their classes. If it's run properly it's a really good option. Which involves making sure that they are actually doing constructive things and it's not just a babysitting service. Making sure that they have got possibilities of going on constructive excursions and finding out what's in the community so that they can access those services if they need to etc. Not relying on the usual methods of having them read lots of stuff and write lots of stuff, and getting them to remember they have to bring their own pens. (Michelle)

That schooling can be about constructive experiences and possibilities where access to futures is made real in the goals of schooling in VCAL at Western Suburban Secondary College. Michelle's account of VCAL at Western Suburban Secondary School unearths some of the limitations of VCAL in relation to dominance of the competitive academic curriculum that characterises many secondary school cultures. There is tension that schooling approaches like VCAL amplify and that is the issue of making spaces for students with different learning support needs and their construction in such school cultures as the problem or the potential impediment to a school's success and reputation. This is a frustration that Michelle highlighted in the interview about her work and it also is something that has detrimental effects on VCAL students' sense of their own worth and entitlement to education.

### **Worthwhile Teaching**

Noel grew up and went to school in the country. After finishing school he went to the city to work. Three years later he went to a Catholic teachers' college in country Victoria to become a teacher. For Noel, having 'life experience' after his schooling and before commencing work in schools as a teacher was vitally important. He recalled being at a party with people who went straight from school to teacher education and back into schools and was adamant that this was not a satisfactory strategy. As he recounts:

And they're talking about all this stuff in relation to how to teach and what to teach and all those sorts of things. And I looked at them, these kids were just so green and I'm thinking "my god and these people are going back into the classroom and teaching our kids". With no background of life to be able to teach kids. I thought this is wrong. But, anyway, that's how I got into teaching. (Noel)

Noel is strongly of the view that the teacher's life experience plays a large part in the quality of teaching. Bringing the world into the school and the classroom is an important aspect of teaching in VCAL for Noel.

VCAL makes learning part of people's lives who otherwise would not have their education needs met. Learning to be a teacher for Noel involved learning something as 'part of his life'. Noel became a maths teacher and as he explains:

I was trained in Maths and Photography believe it or not. Now I don't teach Photography; I never ever taught it but I did a Major in that, but that's part of my life and one of the things I do for the school now is I photograph lots of things around the school; that's another medium that I use, and I actually use that in my teaching anyway. I still teach Maths, Phys Ed, Food Technology, Health and Personal Development and Numeracy, and the VCAL stream. Oh, yeah. I've worked in ... I've been to three other country schools and then come here and we had amalgamation of a few catholic schools to form this school. (Noel)

Country schools are important resources for social connection and putting things and people together to do things. Country high schools historically were 'precursors of the comprehensive school' (Campbell and Sherington, 2006, p.79) with their more diversified curriculum. Schooling and patterns of education are always located geographically and shaped epistemologically through curriculum and institutional politics. What a teacher teaches under certain conditions hinges on place, space and teacher and student bodies. VCAL provides a space within the school to carry out what Noel calls 'worthwhile teaching'. For Noel, these places have always been rural, regional and Catholic. Noel has been at Chisholm Catholic Secondary College for the past two decades, which is actually a new school, recently formed through mergers and amalgamations. Noel had worked in one of the former Catholic secondary schools that now makes up Chisholm.



Noel coordinates and leads VCAL at Chisholm Catholic College and he sees the purpose of VCAL and his role as a VCAL teacher as:

Dealing with young people. It's making a difference in their world. It's making a change. It's making a difference in their world: to help them, assist them and put bigger targets out there for them. Have something that's bigger than just finishing school; to stretch their dreams – that's what I love. (Noel)

Noel's impassioned approach to his work goes beyond accountability and outcome based rationales that shape and describe schooling experiences. For Noel making a difference is personal. Noel's work with VCAL students in the classroom is geared toward an orientation to experience and trying to assist students to find out what their interests and desires are:

A lot of our students don't know what they want to do. A lot of students don't. And that's a normal thing. The thing is, what I try to get them to do is "OK, you don't know what you want to do, and that's fair, but go out and try some new different things, go out and experience the world, go out and get a part-time job, go and do work experience here, go and do things", and then I get them to analyse, "OK, what is it that you liked about that? Or what is it that you didn't like about it?" So that they can make an informed decision about their decisions that they are making. (Noel)

Noel's teaching in VCAL reflects an ethos of 'trying things out'. At the school Noel is provided with the space and resources to establish a VCAL program that works with students around their interests. Noel assists students to pursue opportunities outside of school and uses the classroom as a space to reflect on the experiences that come from these opportunities.

VCAL at Chisholm Catholic College involves students working with teachers such as Noel in a dedicated space yet the students also participate in 'mainstream' subjects. In considering the place of VCAL in the school Noel talked about the community perception as follows:

I think a lot of the community see it as ... it's just for the dumb kids – the kids that don't do well; we just chuck them in there. That to me is the attitude. I myself am fighting that as hard as I possibly can because it's not like that. These kids operate I think differently. A lot of these kids if they had their chance they would be in the outside world. Outside working. They'd be working with their hands, they'd be doing something, they'd be creating something. A lot of these kids operate like that. Yeah, for sure, there are some kids that really academically wise really do struggle, that's a percentage of them, but there are a lot of kids that are very bright kids but that form of... what I would call sitting in the classroom, what I call regurgitating all the crap back to the teacher because he'll get an A for it because they've regurgitated everything that the teacher has actually said. To me, that's not learning. That is not learning whatsoever, to me that is learning to regurgitate. We are not teaching the kids to think by doing that. (Noel)

Noel in his descriptions of VCAL at Chisholm Catholic College emphasises a different approach to schooling. This approach is premised upon a critique of the dominant 'compliant student' model of 'regurgitating all the crap back to the teacher'. He includes as part of his work fighting misconceptions about the value of VCAL. For him, VCAL provides a place where student interests are used as a starting point to organise and arrange experiences that will provide a basis for the students to become more fully aware of themselves and their interests. Because the students are now required to be in school and if they had their way would not be, shapes Noel's approach to teaching in VCAL. Sometimes according to Noel, the kids are very bright and as a consequence require other ways to do school. Learning for Noel in VCAL is about connection not 'regurgitation' but thinking and experiencing things.

### **Joining the dots**

In an example about a particular student, Noel explained the student was someone that went out and tried bricklaying but did not like it because he did not like the early mornings. The student did identify through another experience that that he

enjoyed putting things together. Noel's teaching work is centred on eliciting these insights through a range of experiences:

I had a particular student that went out and did some work experience being a bricklayer. After a while, he didn't want to be a bricklayer. Money was great, but he didn't like it. And my question to him was: "Why didn't you like it?" His answers were: "I didn't like getting up early. It was hard work" all those things. Now, to me, I see those as a positive because he can identify what it is that he doesn't like about it as opposed to saying: "I don't like it". Now, my job is to draw him out, is to go and say "Why he didn't like it". Then I'd say that's fine. I say "Well done. Now go and find something else". He then was building a cabinet for his sister. And I said to him "What is it that you actually like doing?" "Is it that you like putting this together or is it that you like putting it together for your sister?" And his answer was "I just like putting this together full stop". So I'm seeing then what I'm helping him do is what I call put the pieces together, joining the dots to say this is what I like. So I'm saying "OK, what professions can you use where you're actually putting things together?" So I'm helping him in a guided direction to say "Well, OK, try and find some work doing this." But what they've got to analyse is the experiences that they have. If they haven't had the experiences they've got nothing to make a judgement on. (Noel)

The schooling approach in VCAL at Chisholm Catholic College as described by Noel relies on student initiatives to go 'out' of the school and try things in order that the experience can be used to generate understandings about preferences and personal interests. Noel's acknowledgement of doubt and indecision as 'normalcy' points to the school as a space of orientation where exploration is encouraged. Schooling is in this instance remade through patterns of participation and requirements for inclusion. Not knowing is accepted by Noel as 'normal' so provides a basis for different experiences for the purposes of finding out. Orienting people through experience characterises Noel's work in VCAL.

In Noel's guiding or orienting engagements with the students he locates the learning in analysing their experience. There is an atmosphere of the guidance counsellor teacher in Noel's descriptions of his work. Thinking through practices are

emphasised through a pedagogy that could very easily read as ‘therapeutic’ as it is enclosed in Chisholm Catholic Secondary College. Making judgements and informed decisions are important aspects to Noel’s personal pedagogy that largely rests on analysing experiences and supporting students to reflect and speak their experiences. Not knowing is an important pre-requisite for coming to know in the approaches Noel uses in his approach to teaching in VCAL.

Drawing upon student experiences leads Noel to discuss what he calls the model of ‘their’ world. Noel is referring to the VCAL students’ perceptions of themselves and their world and represents an important platform for Noel’s teaching to progress a form of schooling where applied learning is experienced and exchanged. Getting to ‘their model’ requires questioning and a changing minds and memories. As Noel explained:

I would teach them my questioning technique because a lot of the times we don’t do that. I would teach them that there is more than just getting something so-called right. They need to be able to express what they’ve got here (Touches his head). A lot of our kids in the classroom we don’t give them time to think. The poor kids, you ask the question and all of a sudden he gives the wrong answer and we say “No, that’s wrong”. From that perspective, there’s going to be wrong answers sometimes, but how about asking the kid how did you come to that answer. And all of a sudden when they explain that to you, you might think “Ah, I never thought of it like that”. And from their model of the world, they’re right but we have our little parameters set about what is so-called right and what is so-called wrong, so I’d be teaching a lot of that content. One of the things I do in my class is particularly at the start of the year I lay my foundations down; pretty solid. And it’s a mindset. It’s a mindset change.

(Noel)

The teaching strategy as described by Noel operates as a foundation for engagement and exchanges where student interests are surfaced and then provided as a basis in forming teachable moments. Evident in Noel’s approach to teaching in VCAL are moral evaluations that seek to trouble the binaries of the right and wrong as it is formulated in conventional classrooms. Yet it is from the students’ *model of the world* that Noel’s

teaching work in VCAL seeks not just to reinforce the student's experience and perspective but also to use that as a basis for further exploration and encountering different ways of knowing and explaining things. That students who have an answer or response that is immediately understood provides a basis for an inquisitive stance in VCAL classrooms and the basis for exploratory engagements.

Noel explained that he had completed a Masters in Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) and outlined how this experience has enabled him to augment and extend his teaching work. Noel draws on his employment experiences as a schoolteacher together with 'neuro-linguistic' frames of reference to converse with VCAL students to focus on their individual thoughts and perceptions. This has impacts on the way schooling is organised temporally and the types or ways of knowing in schooling made available in VCAL at Chisholm Catholic College. For Noel, ways of knowing are directly related to and connected with his own experiences and further education and he insists is also connected to appreciating VCAL students' ways of knowing:

My masters in NLP – it's the best thing I have ever, ever done. It gives me the ability to be able to literally listen to the language the students are using and then challenge them on their language. Challenge them not so much on their language but their thought process going. A very simple example: a student might say to me, "I don't know" and I said "Well, if you did know how would you answer?" And I had one kid just looked at me and said "I hate that question" but he loves it at the same time because he has to come up with an answer. And that's what our system in the past... we've allowed the kids to get away with it. We have trained our kids in the past... they've gone and said "I don't know", we go and ask somebody else. The curriculum is so quick we have to get it so we don't allow the kids the time to think – I do. (Noel)

The capacity to listen is identified as imperative to the work Noel is doing in VCAL. The students' language and thought processes are used to support student-teacher dialogue where the challenge of learning and knowing are encountered. Noel develops

his teaching strategies and approaches in ways that seek to redress what he identifies as the closure of right and wrong in order that other perspectives can legitimately have a place in the VCAL classroom.

Doing schooling differently is central to the teaching work Noel advances and deploys inside and outside the classroom. As he says of his work in VCAL that it has:

Enabled me to... all my philosophy in education that I had for years and years, I've been able to put into practice, this has freed me to finally what I call educate kids – educate students. Allow them to see their true potential. Allow them to actually blossom. Allow them to grow. It is so good when you get to the end of the year and you see these kids absolutely massively smiling. I get a bit emotional at times. I'm not afraid of that. When you take a kid from where they were to where they are now...I'm taking them from a position of where their self-esteem is pretty low, they really don't want to be at school, they're really not too sure what they're doing, they don't know what their skills are, to a stage where they are competent enough to be able to interact with people, they're competent in their relationships with their family, with their friends, they're competent enough to be able to walk up to a prospective employer and they'll know how to recruit themselves, how to present themselves, they know what skills they need to do, they have skills that they have, they know what strategy is in place that if they want to go from here to there they know there's a process and they know what that process is. (Noel)

Rather than a prescriptive content driven approach to teaching Noel identifies 'process' as the main driver of his teaching work in VCAL. VCAL *finally freed* Noel to teach what he thinks is important educationally to engage young people in their learning in school. Supporting the students to know what they want and how to plan and act in strategic ways in order that they can achieve what they want is how Noel operates as a teacher in VCAL.

### **The worthiness of projects of applied learning**

At the three schools represented in this chapter where the teachers who were interviewed work all of them identified projects as a common feature of how learning in

VCAL is made. In this sense these initiated projects make the VCAL schooling experience different from conventional VET and VCE programs. Noel provided an extended example of how in VCAL at Chisholm Catholic Secondary College projects such as making biscuits provide a simulated experience for students to learn about business processes yet also to explore how they work and operate in such simulated contexts:

One of the projects we did this year... we did actually two projects. The first one we did was just making yo-yos. Now, from a point of view of doing that, most people would say "Oh, let's just make biscuits". But what we did we set up a business structure around that. And the thing is they had to do all their own management. They had to research the biscuits: how to make them. Had to work out what recipe we were going to use. What quality control do we use? What costing? How do we market those? Then we start to market and the orders come in, who's going to be looking after the money. And we went through that whole process. And we actually had so-called Board meetings were I'd allow different kids to take control of the meeting. They had to record all the meetings; all the information that they had. (Noel)

This simulation of the wider processes and commercial imperatives associated with the making and production of biscuits is presented to the students as an example of how things work in the world outside school. The veracity of such scenarios as being reflective of the actualities of the 'real world' are overshadowed by the experience of the project as a vehicle for the teacher along with the students to consider and measure their abilities as reflected in their level and efforts in participating in such a simulation.

In discussing the different student levels of participation and effort, Noel explained that different students achieved different things in the project. In his own words:

Some would come up to the plate, some wouldn't. And that's where you find out where your real leaders are. Some kids can't cope with that. And a question I'll put to them: "Why can't you cope with this?" Or "What is it that you don't like about this?" I had one kid, for example, that he was voted to be leader of the group, two weeks later he said "I can't do this, I

don't want to". And I said "Fine. Why?" And he explained why and I thought, "Gee, at least he identified that". That's what I'm pleased about. Instead of saying "I can't do it" and fail him, I'd pass him for the fact that he tried, realised he couldn't do it and he identified clearly why he couldn't do it – it's not his personality type. That's not what he's about. Tell him what to do and he will do it, but don't put him in the role of telling other people what to do; that's not him – massive learning for him. (Noel)

One of the dangers inherent in using projects as simulated learning experiences as Noel's example reveals is that there is a tendency to objectify and reify student interests through the lens of a personality trait or characteristic. In the context of this project as described by Noel it would be more accurate to conclude that in this instance the student was not interested in leading but to conclude that this 'massive learning' is an enduring insight reveals the intended and unintended outcomes of overemphasising the personality in schooling. This can occur at the expense of appreciating the contexts that at times can enliven or as the case here suggests dampen and fail to inspire the students participation. Leadership has become the recent buzzword in school education in Victoria that depends upon individualised achievement at the expense of collective participation and experiences.

Noel explains that in this particular project the students are required to assess themselves and their peers against levels of participation. This is carried out through attributing a monetary value against their efforts. As Noel explained:

And at the end, when I did all the assessment of all those kids, I then got the kids to stand up in front, one-on-one, and say, "OK, how much are you worth from a dividend point of view?" and the kids would actually give their answers. And the other students in the class then would either raise it up or raise it down.

So with the dividend... they had a dividend between 5 cents and a dollar on their project. Based on what they had done in the project, in other words, the work that they had done, what roles they took on and how much they really stepped up to the plate and did their job. And they'd stand up and one kid said "yep, I've done ... I've organised the recipe,



I've got that, I did the quality control on that, I know I did as best as I could, I deserve 80 cents. And the other kids would look at it and say "Yeah, that's fair". Another kid might say "Well, I did all the accountancy stuff, I kept a control of everything, I earned 35 cents". And the rest of the kids would say "No, you earned at least 90 cents." My question to him was: "Where else in life do you undersell yourself?" And he got it. He got it so well. There's only one kid that actually gave... wanted a higher dividend than he was worth, and the other kids just turned around and said "No, you don't deserve that because you didn't do everything. (Noel)

While Noel explained that this can result in some students not recognising their own worth and other students over inflating their value to the project, this process of valuing, which is limited in its subjective reckonings has very real personal dimensions. Personal dimensions that seek to mimic existing social and economic patterns that narrowly ascribe value and worth through monetary measures.

## **Summary**

The interviews with Catherine, Michelle and Noel underline that another way of schooling is possible where students can find a place and have experiences where 'not knowing' is normalised. It is not the students that are the problem but rather the school and schooling. Each of the teachers in their own way and within the constraints of the school they work in are involved in remaking schooling. This is a schooling form that pushes comprehensive schooling into new directions. Participating in a VCE subject for personal reasons is encouraged where interests in knowing for other reasons other than credentialing is privileged over academic achievement. The primary consideration becomes the student's interest. Failure is rethought in these patterns of schooling and social relations of learning where it is valid if you do not like something because it is not 'you'. What is encouraged and endorsed as central to the schooling experience is opened up through VCAL by teachers work. Applied learning makes schooling comprehensive where knowledge is a resource amongst other resources and where

going through the process becomes the primary concern. The academic score as an indicative value is not pushed by these teachers and is viewed as more an obstacle than as an enabler and not always a helpful measure of learning ability. This is a form of schooling that involves more than getting things right. Leaving students to find out and make schooling applied occurs through more collaboration being built into comprehensive schooling.

To be sure VCAL as Michelle reminds us is a diversionary schooling for the academically weak yet it is also about finding places for those who feel and know their differences. This changed direction or augmentation of comprehensive schooling results in a challenge to the knowledge in the school where the competitive and the subordinate curricula cut across each other. It is freedom that each of these teachers talked about and identified as a key to working differently in VCAL. This freedom was about going through the process in contrast to achieving outcomes such as numeric marks and then deciding what to do next. Working-class schooling as made through teachers' work in VCAL is therefore premised upon a freedom obtained from moving past competition as an organising principle in the social relations of learning. In the following chapter, VCAL not only moves past competition but also is implicated in remaking schooling in ways that prepare people for work in specific ways. In doing this VCAL is used as strategy to refashion a type of contemporary technical schooling.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **REMAKING TECHNICAL EDUCATION**

In this chapter teachers' labour and the relations of learning organised in VCAL reveal that technical education is being made as a distinctive form and pattern of schooling. Four teachers across two sites convey perspectives and ideas about how schooling with a 'technical' orientation is being progressed in ways that make space for students to participate in schooling in ways similar to yet within wholly different historical contexts and reworked terms of engagement from earlier patterns of technical schooling. Prior to the educational settlement that established comprehensive schooling as the predominant pattern of schooling in the last two or three decades of the twentieth century, technical schools were distinctive feature of secondary schooling in Victoria. In the 1980s 'there were 110 secondary technical schools with about 72,000 students and 7,500 staff' (Hooley, 2008, p. 38). Technical schools are not being revived in a systemic sense through dedicated and distinct institutions but rather technical sensibilities and sentiments are infusing the organisation and establishment of VCAL in some education settings. Technical schools as distinct educational secondary schools prior to the settlement of comprehensive schooling were 7-12 school institutions. VCAL on the other hand only operates as a schooling option for students in Years 10-12 and is being used to remake technical schooling not systemically but provisionally.

The four teachers discussed in this chapter, Joseph, Cheryl, Joanne and Angelina provided insights into patterns of schooling that connect VCAL with preparation for trades education and training in both the classical manual trades and in other 'non-technical' vocational fields and occupations. Joseph is employed at Northern Suburbs Catholic Boys' Secondary College while Joanne, Cheryl and Angelina all work at a Technical Learning Centre (TLC). At both sites, one a school and the other a TLC

organise schooling through VCAL where it is being co-delivered with pre-apprenticeship programs and other VET Certificate II level qualifications. The Certificate II programs are mostly pre-apprenticeship courses that prepare students to be employed as trades people or assistants with the goal of becoming indentured as apprentices who will achieve a Certificate III trade qualification. The TLC is a recent Victorian government education initiative. There are five TLCs in the state and they are all co-located on TAFE campuses in urban and regional Victoria. The TLCs are aimed at providing technical and trade based education to school-aged young people in Years 10, 11 and 12. Together with the Australian federal government's policy initiative of trade training centres in schools, both the TLC and schools like Northern Suburbs Boys' Secondary Catholic College are progressing new forms of schooling that seek to remake technical schooling in certain ways. Technical schooling in the past and in its current reappearance involves a heavily gendered pattern of schooling in a vocational and trade sense, yet this is offset by a personally responsive approach to technical schooling where the personal is refigured into the schooling process in new ways as will become clearer from the data of the teacher interviews presented in this chapter.

Whereas in the past, technical schools, especially in Victoria, were established to ensure the supply of skilled manual labour (Hooley, 2008; Murray-Smith, 1987, 1971, 1965) the mode and relations of production that gave rise to shape such patterns of schooling have changed. Processes of globalisation have resulted in the dispersal and truncation of modes of production and their attendant supply chain processes to operate on a more transnational basis. For example, raw materials such as iron ore are mined and exported from Australia, processed and manufactured in other countries and then sold into markets in other countries. The flows and movement of capital across national

jurisdictions occurs through investment patterns where production processes and their associated labour processes result in different patterns of consumption. These production processes also in turn shape and affect contemporary economic arrangements. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when the Australian economy was expanding, it occurred in a distinctly industrial capitalist form with mining, manufacturing and agriculture as three important and distinctive features of the Australian economy up until the last quarter of the twentieth century. As a result of these patterns, technical education and technical schooling emanated from and was organised around the preparation of a labour force that could work in these industrial areas. This resulted in the formation of schools of mines, agricultural colleges and technical schools.

The purpose of technical education and different forms of technical schooling are in contemporary times not so enmeshed or anchored in the modes of production as they were in the past. Skills shortages (Richardson, 2007) and concern about the lack of qualified people such as trades people is often used to argue for a more relevant and skills based approach to education and schooling. Yet after the emergence of comprehensive patterns of schooling the notion and practices of what technical education entails have changed through the de-anchoring of technical education institutionally and through changes in knowledge and technology that have reoriented what it means to be skilled or to have skills and also technical proficiencies. It is these issues that make these teachers interviews compelling given their collective emphasis on technical education and the way their respective organisations are progressing a contemporary form of technical education and schooling in and for post-industrial times.

### **A coach with a mission**

Joseph has worked at Northern Suburbs Catholic Boys' Secondary College for the past 20 years. He established the VCAL program at the school and is working to expand what he describes as the 'technical education' offerings in the school. Joseph had a Catholic schooling himself, a lot of his 'mates went to this school and he ended up here 20 years ago when the school needed a teacher who could also act as the school football coach. Sport and religion are important aspects to Joseph's work as a teacher. He is assistant chief examiner of religion and society for Year 12 and has moved into 1 'faith development' from his original disciplinary fields of commerce, legal studies and politics. His background in sport is important as he says:

I was football coach and I had a different relationship with the boys, that was more pastoral but still I am pretty tough with them. Like as an example that they are in a transition program and seeking employment I will only provide assistance to them if they are respectful, their behaviour is good and they cooperate. (Joseph)

Joseph has always only ever worked in Catholic schools and only ever at boys schools. Joseph uses sport to make connections with the students and he feels that the teamwork inherent to sports like football and cricket provide a foundation in self-respect and respect of others. Joseph's work as a teacher, while shaped by Catholicism, is further shaped around and through masculinist cultures where sport and being 'pretty tough with them' is the dominant atmosphere.

Working in an all male school Joseph's references to school students is concerned exclusively with young men and boys, and a rigid narrowed appreciation of gender issues and patterns of education. The Catholic culture of the school is located in a network of surrounding suburban parish communities where through their primary schools young boys are recruited and thus these arrangements define and shape the

‘local character’ of the learning experiences provided at the school. This local character of the Catholic boys’ school is further evidenced in the emphasis on classical and traditional trades, education in a geographic location where a strong manufacturing base once existed in the local economy. At Northern Suburbs Catholic Boys’ Secondary College today VCAL is central to the formation of a schooling approach that emphasises trades in plumbing, carpentry, mechanics and electrotechnology, with some consideration of other vocation education such as horticulture, hospitality, tourism and music. The manual trades sit comfortably with representations of Australian working-class masculinities.

The use of team sports such as football and cricket have been important to Joseph’s work as a teacher at North Suburbs Catholic Boys’ Secondary College. He explained that the school is known as a ‘footy school’. Joseph’s faith and his sporting interests not only connect him to the school and the students, but provides a basis for anchoring the school and its students in the wider local community where the school is located. This occurs with both for current students and with ‘old boys’:

There’s great rewards here because when you’re teaching 16-18-year-olds sometimes its like you’re banging your head against the wall ... but, by being a local boy I see a lot of these ex-kids as adults, at 26 and 35 and they tell me their life story; what they’ve done. They’ve been really successful, and kids that I have worked intensely with who have been very marginalised that turn out very happy, they’re very successful. So I see a lot of boys too in sport because some of the boys play sports in my local area. I’m involved in the local cricket club, I’m the footy club I coach at the “northern suburbs” and so I see a lot of boys in that, and our old boys if they see you they’ll immediately seek you out. That’s that type thing – 25, 35, 40 - they’ll come over to you too. (Joseph)

The old boy collegian ethos that Joseph’s describes underscores the commitment the school seeks to foster amongst its student body. Yet it is the emphasis on sport and being ‘really successful’ that points to a particular relationship between the school and

its concern and interests in current and past students. The school culture is sharply defined through specifically accepted male practices and identities that are connected with the competitive prowess inherent to exclusively all male team sports such as cricket and football.

### **Marginalised by the curriculum**

In describing the school and his work there Joseph relates to the work of the school and the sort of schooling it provides with the original founder of the Catholic order that established and continues to inform the schools mission:

The founder of the religious order that formed the school worked with homeless youths. He had a calling to work with the marginalised and a calling to serve by the gospels. And with these homeless youths what he did was establish a school, but he also established a bakery and a tailor shop to give them trade skills. And so they would break the poverty marginalised [sic] cycle. And so that is the founder's vision and that's our vision as a school of that catholic order. And so therefore applied learning and the types of kids who are marginalised by the curriculum, by behaviour, by engagement, fits very well into the catholic orders vision and our vision as a college. (Joseph)

The 'founding father's' philosophy is reflective of a religiosity connected with the virtuosity of skilled work such as tailoring and baking. A sartorial schooling made to measure and fit those others in order to be really useful (Pardy, 2010). Joseph's description of the story of the founding father and his approach to the marginalised points to a notion of skill as a manifest aspect of the pattern of technical schooling now being progressed in the school.

The school has changed through time; initially it was a highly selective school with entrance exams located in the centre of the Melbourne business district. It was established in 1871 and had a largely 'academic focus', it was then relocated in 1968 to a large tract of land in the northern suburbs. Up until the early 1990s, the school operated alongside a 'working farm' and a religious training seminary. These sites have



since been sold off as housing developments. Through these changes Joseph explains his own transition from an academic teacher to a pathways teacher and how these changes occurred as a result of the changing 'clientele' of the school:

I was an academic teacher with a different clientele, because I came here when there were still remnants of the entrance exam students, so we were very academic. So I was a very academic teacher but when the clientele changed, it changed the engagement because kids used to leave in their droves in year 9 and 10 because there was no place in the curriculum for them. And when the clientele slightly changed I had to decide can I change the clientele or do I have to change myself, and so within that transformation I moved into faith development and stuff like RE (religious education) coordinator and then pathways like since about 1995 kids started doing TAFE courses and then VCAL came along and VCAL pathways. Now we have received over a million dollars in funding to establish trade training in the school. (Joseph)

The changes in schooling that Joseph highlights are occurring alongside changes to the geographic location of the school. In the time Joseph has been at the school it has gone from being a school amongst paddocks with an academic focus to a school in fairly new suburbs that has expanded its offering from wholly academic to include further schooling options such as VET and now VCAL. VCAL and the government funds to establish a trade training centre are reforming the school experience where technical education is being reinstated albeit in a different form to its historical antecedents in as found in technical schools.

VCAL and its arrangements at North Suburbs Catholic Boys' Secondary College involves students learning in mainstream and in the trades learning area of the school. In explaining the numbers of students in VCE and VCAL and how their learning is organised Joseph provided the following understanding:

Look, we have about 350 in Year 11 and 12 all up, and have about 30 VCAL Year 12 people, and in Year 11 that would be up to about 50. And then Year 10, where we have a vocational program, that's now down to about 30... it was 60. Because what's happened with the trades centres...

because previously without the trade centre doing a vocational program they had to go into pathways program. Now, because now we've got the trade centre, the carpentry, the bricklaying, electrical and furniture is on site, they can stay in mainstream education because we have period zero at 7.30 in the morning, and then we go to 11 o'clock, as the first periods 1 & 2, and so that's practical then we have two single periods as their theory or mainstream. (Joseph)

The use of the term mainstream by Joseph signalled combined VCAL and VCE classes where the boys would do English and religious education together and then have different classes such as 'zero period' at 7:30 in the morning where they would do dedicated trade training learning for their VCAL subject in work-related skills. Joseph frames the work that VCAL is doing as expanding the curricula offerings in the school. Throughout the interview, although he emphasised traditional trades, he did explain that the school was seeking to move beyond these experiences to include other forms of schooling. Work has commenced in thinking about those boys and young men not interested in the classical trades. Although Joseph agreed more work is required:

And so the boys who are not trade kids, who are not engaged in curriculum, that's where we have to work. We now set up... some will do Certificate II in Music, some will do Certificate II in Hospitality, some will do Certificate II in Business somewhere else. (Joseph)

The changing interests of young people, and young men in particular, is connected with changing notions of work and personhood in the changing cultures of societies for want of a better term.

For Joseph VCAL and the emergence of trades education the Northern Suburbs Catholic Boys' Secondary College point to changes to the patterns of schooling without any real settlement or definitive explanation about what constitutes 'applied learning' and how it is being formed in different schools by particular teachers' work. So while Joseph emphasises pathways, it seems the school he works at is itself in transition while it is also engaged in transitioning young people into and out of schooling through an

applied learning that is describing itself as moving away from the academic. Whether this move away constitutes a modernised form of technical education is difficult to claim. The definition of applied learning at Northern Suburbs Catholic Boys' Secondary College is concerned with pathways and providing trade pathways and, is informed by a history of technical education associated with the earlier institutional incarnations of the school. Joseph explained that when kids would leave in droves in Years 9 and 10 before the 1990s they would:

Go to the local schools, to tech. To the old technical schools before they closed. We also had Richmond, which was closed in 1994, Richmond – St. Peter's Technical College, Richmond. (Joseph)

This organisational history together with the focus on pathways that Joseph talked about, and the development of a trades training centre at the school, signals a reengagement with technical education refracted through an applied learning approach to schooling. Yet with changed economic circumstances the students are being geared toward trades where they can operate as sole traders as the collective basis of manual and skilled trade employment situations have largely evaporated in Australia's post-industrial economy.

### **Connected locally and personally**

In his work at Northern Suburbs Catholic Boys' Secondary School, Joseph believes he is seeing the school shift to a much more technically oriented schooling. The school has secured millions of dollars of funding to establish comprehensive trade and technical training facilities and the building of a school wing dedicated to this type of schooling. Joseph believes VCAL was the beginning of this shift in the schools direction. Although he outlines that at least 60 to 70% of students will go onto university studies, with 20% going to TAFE and the rest going directly into

employment. It is the 20% he believes were marginalised by the curriculum that was too centred on university entrance. Joseph is motivated in his teaching work in VCAL and pathways to make a place for students who otherwise would not have a place in the school.

The old boys' school network is utilised by the VCAL teachers at Northern Suburbs Catholic Boys' Secondary School for the purposes of securing VCAL students employment and work based learning opportunities:

The kids that are doing VCAL, and what are we are doing with them, and it's been an education, a culture change, and the significance of VCAL has probably raised this because we've got to get them employment experiences and we want them to get apprenticeships and we've got nearly a 100% success rate in that. And we use our old boys' network for arranging for jobs. (Joseph)

The long and changing history of Northern Suburbs Catholic Boys' Secondary School and the maintenance of a strong links in its former and more recent communities means there is an extensive network of old boys and associated catholic parishes that the school and its teachers can draw upon to connect the schooling experience to the outside community and employment experiences.

The language of resilience has become popular in public social discourses where self-development and how people forge ways of surviving are psychologised. Joseph discussed the need to support students at Northern Suburbs Catholic Boys' Secondary School in these ways. When considering the purposes of VCAL beyond the immediate tasks of preparation for work in identifying how it contributes to personal development Joseph explained:

Hopefully we're giving them resilience that some boys are streetwise but they're not very resilient. They could handle themselves on the street and in the street-kind of culture but find it very difficult with getting

knockbacks for jobs. A boy started an apprenticeship with a mate of mine and said to him... his first words "I'm dumb but I'm a hard worker". And so that part about it, and we focus on skill sets that each person's given and the success of your skill sets...and we say 'listen this is really worthwhile'.

(Joseph)

This sense of a worthwhile approach to schooling is what Joseph believes is being realised through VCAL at Northern Suburbs Catholic Boys' Secondary School. Wherein VCAL provides a curriculum that adjusts and adapts to address the personal in order that issues of self worth can be addressed alongside other curriculum requirements.

Teaching in VCAL according to Joseph involves its own sets of issues, not least engagement and monitoring. Working in VCAL for Joseph involves a level of agility that is not required in other areas of teaching as he explained:

I reckon in this area it's the person because you have to be able to dance on your feet to meet challenges and problems that do arise in the classroom. I think it's about not being rigid and black and white. I've got some friends who are fantastic teachers, but could never work in the program. Because their vision of what to be a teacher means and the skill set they want to bring in the classroom wouldn't suit. With VCAL the process is about presenting information that's going to be engaging and monitoring engagement, and output.

(Joseph)

Being able to 'dance on your feet' involves making schooling in new ways. Ways that Joseph and Northern Suburbs Catholic Boys' Secondary School describe as technical schooling. Joseph and the work he is engaged in through VCAL has a commitment to fostering and reproducing belonging in a religious and ministerial sense and trade education is emphasised as a valid way to achieve this. This is made apparent when Joseph talked about the boys' lives after school. VCAL provides a way that keeps the boys connected to school and he feels provides opportunities for the boys to develop personally. According to Joseph the need and purpose for the boys at Northern Suburbs Catholic Boys' Secondary School to stay on at school is as he puts in his words:

I think for maturity and I think about the sense of belonging, and it's a high sense of belonging here. That you would get 30-odd blokes at a 30th birthday stand around after a few beers singing the college theme song. There's a heavy sense of belonging that they went here, and they get a lot of satisfaction, that in VCAL they achieve success. It might have been the first time in education that they're actually achieved success, and success has life implications. (Joseph)

The 'high sense of belonging' at Northern Suburbs Catholic Boys' Secondary School points to a cohesive school culture where places are made for the students to become men who know success.

Establishing VCAL with its technical flavour at Northern Suburbs Catholic Boys' Secondary School expands the school cultures' strategies to proffer success as Joseph suggests. Yet this is done so in a way that points to the inevitability of the formation of particular types of men and not others. Success in this Catholic boys' school has specific meanings and implication and one of these is revealed in the jibing between VCAL students and VCE students. Joseph outlined how in VCAL students at Northern Suburbs Catholic Boys' Secondary School become people with confidence. So what they gain from VCAL according to Joseph was described as follows:

For them as people, they gain the confidence to go forward. Some of these boys didn't have the confidence... some did have the confidence. It makes them confident so that they can achieve and they feel successful. A lot of boys don't go onto TAFE after VCAL because they want money. If they go to a commercial site they're getting a heap of money, like say if you go to a domestic site. And you learn more skills but the difference between a first-year domestic and commercial is about \$350. They will say to the VCE kids who work at McDonalds "How much money are you getting?" "How are the hamburgers going?" (Joseph)

The place of pecuniary interests and financial returns from education in justifying and legitimating VCAL echoes wider contemporary social understandings and explanations of the purpose of schooling. Yet in this instance these VCAL students feel they are engaged in proper or more substantial employment than their VCE counterparts who are

employed at McDonalds. Money and wages in particular are used as evidence and as an indicator of the value and worth of the students schooling achievements in VCAL. The VCAL students gloating about their earnings reflect just that.

### **Technical education and sometime teachers**

Joanne, Cheryl and Angelina who all work at a 'Technical Learning Centre' outlined another formation of technical schooling that rests upon VCAL. Angelina responded to the notice about the research and was enthusiastic about talking about her work as a VCAL teacher, and her initial contact took the form of an interview on the phone. As an outcome of this conversation Angelina invited me to come to the TLC to interview her and two other teachers. As a result of this I subsequently went to the TLC and interviewed Angelina along with two other VCAL teachers, Joanne and Cheryl.

When I went to meet with Angelina, Joanne and Cheryl I arrived at the campus and asked a middle age male, who I assumed to be an employee, the whereabouts of the TLC, and the man responded facetiously, 'That's where the ferals are', he then preceded to point me in the direction of the TLC buildings. I was taken aback by his attitude and wondered whether the teachers I was going to meet and interview, and the students they work with, are unfairly and possibly routinely tarred with such negative and hostile type attitudes. The TLC has been purpose built to provide trade oriented and technical and applied learning and education. The buildings consist of open areas, workshops for timber, plumbing and metal work, meeting rooms, classrooms and computer rooms. The teachers at the TLC through their work are progressing redefined notions and practices of technical schooling for post-industrial times. The conditions of technical knowledge in post-industrial economic arrangements focus on industry skills yet also emphasise interiorised soft skills and other capacities premised upon becoming a 'skilled person'.

Learning at the TLC is organised around student preferences socially and culturally along with seeking to respond to the sorts of work students are interested in pursuing.

These three teachers work alongside and in partnership with trades people, trade trainers and instructors to provide an integrated learning experience that involves general, vocational and technical learning. The notion of ‘technical education’ and technical schooling is understood and embraced by the three teachers with a degree of pride and ambivalence. The TLC allows Angelina, Joanne and Cheryl to engage in teaching work that is in their terms ‘not like school’. At a very functional and task specific level they explain, that unlike work in schools they are not required to undertake routine tasks such as yard duty, they also do not discipline students in the ways that can occur in schools where students are given detention for misbehaviour. While in some ways the three teachers have a sense of pride and even nostalgic regard for technical education, in several ways they trouble the notion of ‘technical schooling’ by explaining that vocational courses in fields such as health, childcare hospitality or even IT are not really understood or perceived by the teachers or the students as technical. As Angelina indicated at the start of the interview having just been in a meeting with other teachers earlier on that day:

I think the difference has been in terms of what the tech is offering, is that the tech students want to be here because they want to do a vocational education, and this is why... if you talk to the Allied Health ladies, this is the meeting we had or Allied Health or childcare, they don't see themselves as 'tech', whereas tech is your plumbing, your carpentry, etcetera. (Angelina)

What technical means has gender implications along with the divisions made through occupational distinctions. The manual trades of plumbing and carpentry point to secure understandings and appreciations of what tech is. Yet other apparently non-manual, and



gendered occupations signals the uncertainty surrounding technical education in contemporary times.

Inherent to this uncertainty are issues about who this approach and type of schooling is aimed at. Similarly to Northern Suburbs Catholic Boys' Secondary School the tendency is to respond to boys' schooling needs through technical education. Cheryl expressed concerns about the gendered nature of technical and trades generally and talked about her goals to get more girls interested in trades. The TLC is less than three years old and Angelina, Joanne and Cheryl are engaged in work that is more than teaching. Their work involves working outside the TLC and involves liaising with employers and communities to secure opportunities for work based learning for the students. The teachers also promote the TLC to recruit students. Cheryl does this sort of work and outlined how she would do more of this with an emphasis on encouraging more girls into trades at the TLC:

There is going to be a bigger campaign in the next year. I'm going to be participating in that so at the same time I'm marketing. But not just to one gender, we want to try and market; we want to see more females into the tech and trades.  
(Cheryl)

The interview with these three teachers highlighted that the arrangements of schooling at the TLC were emergent and in formation.

Angelina, Joanne and Cheryl had all worked together in VCAL at other schools and are now working at the TLC in the subject areas of personal development and work related skills. Before becoming a teacher, Angelina worked in IT and has now been teaching for seven years. Angelina's interest and motivations in teaching are characterised by oppositional views of teachers as a worker in schools. Joanne, on the other hand, has worked as a teacher for over 20 years and explained that she has always

taught in 'these sorts of areas with these sorts of students'. Joanne is an art and metalwork teacher and in some ways says that her work in various schools has involved 'making do' in inventive ways to work with students that often misunderstood or whose talents and abilities are not really recognised. Cheryl on the other hand has a work history in employment placement roles and is a qualified psychologist with a master's degree. Cheryl has the minimum qualification required to work in VET, a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

Cheryl is vocal in the interview about how she and her colleagues, including Joanne and Angelina, together with the other people they work with such as the trades teachers do not really at all times see themselves as teachers. Throughout the interview, Angelina, Joanne and Cheryl underline and emphasise that the work they are engaged in and how they actively seek to make spaces for students to be who they are and pursue learning in ways that are not possible in schools.

The ways in which Angelina, Joanne and Cheryl understand their work at the TLC and the value they ascribe to the education work they implement in collaboration with students who have for several reasons not been able to pursue conventional schooling is premised upon an ambivalence about schooling and teaching more generally. Joanne and Angelina use the interview to talk about their teaching work in other schools where they have been able to form and shape experiences they identify as similar to the pattern of schooling they are seeking to make at the TLC. These three interviewees outline how they recognise the worth and talents of students they work with, and how such actions contradict their own views and opinions of what constitutes schooling and what is involved in being a teacher. These interviewees underline the reworking of expectations of students specifically and of a pattern of schooling more

generally. In many ways these interviewees, as teachers and as educationalists in a broad way are engaged in re-institutionalising the ways in which the young people they encounter and work with come to schooling and to know and experience themselves as learners capable of knowing and pursuing knowledge.

### **Technical learning, recognising ability and remaking schooling**

Joanne has worked as a teacher for over 20 years and during the interview she reminisced about her work history. Joanne has always worked in ‘different schooling programs. This maybe explained by the fact that she is a metal work teacher, yet it is also about her preference for working with certain groups of students. Joanne explained that she came to the TLC because of her preference for working constructively with students who are more often than not dismissed as hopeless causes. At one school Joanne worked at she outlined the context and the conditions of schooling where engagement with the students and their families in the community they lived in are an important aspect to making schooling successful:

I was at a very small school that was losing numbers in an area where there was a low demographic, socioeconomic demographic – kids would come and go. The school had only about 300 kids, generational unemployment and the kids learnt to survive on the streets and make extra money other ways. There was a lot of drug dealing going on. There was a group of disengaged kids coming up from Year 8, and when they got into Year 9 and 10 they were such a problem, the teachers couldn’t really cope with them; so they clumped them all into one group and this was prior to establishing VCAL at the school. So in Year 10 there was the ... I forget... they called it the ... it was called the, yeah, I can’t even remember, it was some sort ‘Creative’ sort of name, and it was our version of VCAL before there was a VCAL. Those kids actually went on and they ended up finishing their VCAL and getting their certificate in Year 12. They were the sort of kids who would have otherwise dropped out of school. But that brought me to the “How did they survive?” Because in this particular unit I was Metalwork, Art and we used to collect all sorts of rubbish and make things, and then sell it to the staff. I can remember one boy, whose father used to be a handyman, and this boy would go round during hard rubbish collection and bring all this stuff, and we had a whole shed at the school – there was just crap

everywhere. That's how his father had survived with five kids, and he was very resourceful. He'd come in and say "I'll clean the metalwork". He'd collect all the copper and take it away and sell it on his bike. That was the sort of kids that they were. It was very Anglo-Saxon, the area. But they were somehow quite naïve. (Joanne)

Joanne relates this experience in a manner free from moral judgement or panic. By relating evidence of her personal teaching style in schools that are charged with schooling people whose immediate family contexts involve ways of getting by that are not premised upon education and careers in a conventional sense. Surviving and being schooled on the streets, is spoken about in a very matter of fact way where drug use and drug dealing is accepted as part of these students' cultural and economic life. That some teachers 'couldn't cope' whereas others like Joanne not only coped but provided spaces for the students and their family to participate in the school is identified as important. Joanne describes a schooling experience that is made from nothing, 'crap' that is remade and sold on to teachers who obviously see some value in the transformation of the 'crap' into creative pieces. That Joanne mentions the ethnicity of the school population as 'Anglo-Saxon' and their attendant naivety points to cultural ascriptions of 'white-trash' (Skeggs, 2004) where those who are marginalised are positioned in deficit ways.

Joanne described the school she previously worked at as "personal, small, interesting, with very loveable kids, nice close staff with an admin that was off the planet and had no idea!" Such sentiments reveal the way teachers like Joanne work against administrative edicts to connect schooling into the lives that students live. An example of this is evident in Joanne's uncanny ability to recognise students' talents and abilities or for want of a better term skills. Joanne recounted that the talents that the

students possess are in some instances superior to those of teachers. She argues that these students know about 'survival' in ways that teachers quite often do not:

I was thinking back because this has made me think of a school I used to work at. I was thinking back about this boy whose name I can't even remember, who was forever getting into trouble for swearing, he was total loudmouth, looked like an absolute slob, but he was so resourceful that they built a little trailer to put on the back of his bike and during metalwork lessons, certain times of the year, he would go out and he would collect stuff. That is a skill that the teacher... if the world fell apart and they lost their jobs, how would they survive? They would not have those skills. These are very sophisticated life skills that we could learn from. And yet, all he got was "Shut, up Brad". That was his name. "Shut, up Brad". He'd take off. "You can't go out of the school". That kid... they would have chased him away. That's what lack of success, yet this kid was very, very talented in that particular way. And you know Brad has now got his own handyman business. He's doing exactly what his father did, with his father, but he's making a good living. (Joanne)

Recognising talent, or having sophisticated life skills is central to working constructively with students and engaging with them in school experiences that differ from predominant and conventional forms. Joanne sees the possibilities of schooling young people that are often dismissed or disregarded as productive students before they are given a chance. Joanne understands being resourceful and having knowledge and skills to 'survive' as having an important place in learning and in organised education whether it's in schools or at the TLC where she currently works. Throughout the interview Joanne reiterated the importance of freedom in schooling for students and teachers alike.

Recognising students' talents and abilities beyond the structures of curricula scripts, prescribed assessment models within institutionalised schooling settings has long been a major feature of Joanne's work as a teacher. In her words she believes that acts of compulsion and enforcement work against the possibilities for engagements in learning. For Joanne coming to learning and participation in school needs to be

voluntaristic, rather than compulsory and the more students are required to do and be something can often work against and undermine the purposes of schooling to engage students in education. So for Joanne:

The enforcement part of it is anti-learning. It's teaching them to be bored and non-productive. It's teaching them to be sheep. I was just thinking, it's anti-learning. (Joanne)

Joanne underlines that the 'disciplinary force' (Bauman, 1982) of schooling that can work to undermine opportunities for students to appreciate and extend their capacities and abilities. At the TLC Joanne believes she can continue to work in ways that are not anti-learning.

### **The small stuff and technical learning**

Cheryl echoes similar views to Joanne when she explains that her work along with Angelina and Joanne's is seeking to remake a schooling/education experience that departs from the disciplinary effects of standard schools. When asked whether the TLC is a school, Cheryl responded:

I don't think so. I think we are trying to get as far away from school, although sometimes our classes reflect school. They come and it's a really big change for them, and it takes so much time to lose that mindset of school. They still call me Miss. I'd like to... like we call each other names as adults, I'd like them to be able to feel comfortable enough to engaged with me so that they do feel comfortable calling me Cheryl. It's still taking a long time to remind them of that. That's sort of drilled into them at secondary college or at high school. It's hard for them to lose that. (Cheryl)

For Cheryl, the 'mindset of school' represents a powerful impact and practice of schooling that she identifies that her work, like that of Joanne and Angelina is seeking to disrupt and change. All three of these interviewees believed that their work at the TLC was making a different form of schooling or arrangements of learning possible for those whose needs are not generally met or dealt with on a constructive basis in schools.

Student behaviour is accommodated in ways where unruliness, such as swearing or playing up, is ignored. As an example of seeking to make schooling possible and productive Cheryl explains the need to focus upon and highlight what the students do well. As Cheryl explained:

We don't sweat the small stuff. Like, I certainly don't sweat the small stuff. If they're swearing, if they're throwing an aeroplane, they're acting like they're at secondary or high school – it's not an issue for me. If they're productive and getting the work done I'm going to acknowledge that. I'm actually not going to pay any attention to the misbehaviour.

(Cheryl)

Cheryl associates 'secondary or high school' with teachers as disciplinarians and students as those who need to be disciplined and corrected. These sentiments connect the work of these VCAL teachers to doing education differently outside school. So the TLC involves teachers in different labour patterns. While these teachers at the TLC are remaking technical schooling they are doing so by recognising talents and abilities that are often overlooked and are generally not given any value or worth in conventional schooling settings.

The focus of VCAL requires that the teachers at the TLC provide opportunities for the students to do practical and useful projects outside in the community. Cheryl believes this is a form of 'giving back' where students are engaged in projects that take the teachers and students outside the TLC and that seeks to engage the students in their local community. The example Cheryl provides could be understood as community service, yet the educative purposes are always centred upon skills:

And they do try to give back to the community, the seniors were doing a community project in Year 12, they did a primary school disco in the area. As a result of the disco they ran a fundraiser and they actually raised money and donated it to the CFA for the fires and all that sort of thing. But the whole idea of that project was oral communication, team

building and communication again, and all that sort of thing, organising, planning – a whole range of skills. (Cheryl)

The identification of the types of learning that occurs through such projects is ambiguous in the way Cheryl speaks about the projects that form the basis of learning. While Cheryl identifies skills such as communication, organising and planning, ‘the whole range of skills’ underlines an amorphous and not well-defined aspect to the teaching and learning. The amorphousness and fluidity that characterises such projects and the teaching involved in them are not encountered or identified at all as problematic by the three teachers at the TLC. Angelina, Cheryl and Joanne throughout the interview emphasised a need for teachers in VCAL to work differently.

### **Working differently**

Working differently as explained by these teachers involves being less prescriptive or pre-planned in the sorts of class activities that elicit learning. VCAL provides a curricula space for teachers like Joanne to do just that. Joanne is able to illustrate what this involves by describing an experience that occurred with a new teacher at a school she previously worked at:

The last school I was at – I was only there for a little while. I taught in VCAL with a second-year English teacher who was very limited in his outlook and he could not cope with the fact I came in as the expert and he virtually said “Well, where is the curriculum?” I said “Well, you design the curriculum around the needs of the kids”. And he said “Oh, yes, yes”, but after about one week he had written his own curriculum and said “I can’t work like that, this is what I’m doing”. So I thought “OK, I’ll back off and see how you go”. He would do things like “Write your goals for the future” and somewhere he put at the uni because he was so far detached from TAFE and these kids and what they were thinking. They just sat there... it was the same as ordinary English but just put into ... there was nothing applied about it whatsoever. And that was because he felt that if he didn’t have a written curriculum... what he was concerned with was justifying himself. (Joanne)



Applied learning as explained by Joanne is connected with students and their interests and the actual conditions of their lives. The curriculum and its content is a secondary consideration for Joanne while for the other teacher she sites who could not cope he justifies his work through curriculum prescripts.

What applied learning is it seems in this technical education context at the TLC is shaped around students and teachers capacities to respond to student learning requirements. So while preparation for employment in the trades or being taken on as an apprentice shapes the student learning, applied learning at the TLC emphasises teachers responding to and making schooling that fits the student individually yet in a collective context. So as Angelina explained:

VCAL is not a fixed curriculum; it is an ongoing developing curriculum, and that's one of the things that the outcomes do suggest is that you need to be open minded to that. And that, for example, what worked this year with the group, is not necessarily going to work next year with the group, and so you have to be flexible and this is when you said what do you like about VCAL, and I said to you freedom. It's that flexibility ... I'm not teaching the same set of curriculum. (Angelina)

Not teaching the same set of curriculum content year in year out characterises the three teachers work at the TLC. Yet establishing and making a legitimate schooling experience possible at the TLC depends upon students, teachers operating in a learning context that emphasises movements into employment mostly in the trades. The accountabilities associated with teachers' work can at times cut across what Joanne describes as the 'kids' needs'. Providing evidence that the content of curriculum has been taught and assessed as per the requirements of the curriculum presses teachers work in specific ways. Yet with VCAL as explained by these three teachers from the TLC the scope to make learning possible has to take into account the student.

Joanne along with Cheryl emphasised throughout interview the need to ‘not sweat the small stuff’ and not work in ways that are ‘anti-learning’. Angelina shares these views of teaching in VCAL as being different although she expresses the need to not operate as a ‘conventional’ teacher like those in schools:

I think what we’ve got to understand is that unless you have those work experiences, unless you have those broader experiences, you’re not going to be able to think outside of your classroom because if you’re taking a teacher who’s just out of teacher’s college, or teacher training at 21, who’s come out of school at 18, gone through teachers’ college and at 21 here I am back in my classroom, now you give them a book and say this is your curriculum, or this is your syllabus, they’ll be as happy as Larry, because they know what to follow. But, when you come out industry you’ve got those broader experiences. If you give me a book I’ll be looking at it and going “I don’t work that way”. And if I was to do a project in industry, I don’t work in a sequential order. Reality here, and this is life, you might want to plan your day but you’ve got to be able to deviate from the plan. And that’s what I think... (Angelina)

Being comfortable to adapt to uncertainties or unforeseen circumstances are important criteria for Angelina for teaching successfully in VCAL. Angelina expresses that her own work life is made up of moving between different types of employment from IT to education. This change in itself allows Angelina to identify as a different type of teacher, a teacher that has other life experiences before retraining to become a teacher.

### **Everything but teachers?**

The views expressed by Angelia, Cheryl and Joanne were powerfully inflected with the point of view that they were actually in many circumstances are ‘not teachers’ actually or in a traditional or conventional sense. While they are all employed as teachers they expressed the view that they are not *like* teachers. The ambivalence about being teachers was an important point that they continually returned to throughout the interview. I asked what they meant by this and Cheryl responded with the following comment:

We're trying to be more guides and mentors and not that power authority  
– the old teacher. (Cheryl)

Angelina qualifies this point of view and sentiment by claiming the term 'facilitator' to describe their work and discusses the practices of facilitators in contrast to teachers in the following way:

However, in terms of what teachers see themselves at in secondary school is they're not those facilitators who are delivering... they are happy to just deliver the knowledge; they're not interested in looking at the knowledge and skills, and the performance of those skills, which is what VCAL is about. (Angelina)

Angelina goes on to qualify what she means about knowledge in VCAL:

"So, yes, a kid may know that I know how to use... let's say if I'm in plumbing, I know how to use the tools: the ratchet, but if he doesn't know the name of that then he doesn't have the knowledge does he? (Angelina)

Angelina's qualification of the distinction between the work that Joanne, Cheryl and herself are engaged in at the TLC contains a contradictory logic. This contradiction is tied to different forms and types of knowledge associated with different vocational practices and their place in schooling and teachers' work. To be sure the work that they are engaged in at the TLC is teaching yet it is different from the work they would be engaged in as teachers in schools. As they had previously mentioned they do not have to do yard duty. The students they work with come to the TLC after exhausting their options for productive engagement in learning in schools. As the TLC is co-located at a TAFE Institute, this provides a non-school and tertiary oriented learning space. A space where more onus is placed upon the student to manage and direct their own learning. Adult learning principles that take heed of the students experiences and interests better describe the ideas and principles that inform the actions and activities of the teachers and their work with the students at the TLC.

The points they associated with not identifying as teachers were adamantly expressed and argued for by Angelina, Joanne and Cheryl throughout the interview. This notion of the teacher being ‘old’ and signifying ‘power authority’ were further explained in relation to practices they sought to progress with the students at the TLC. The conditions of Angelina, Cheryl and Joanne’s work at the TLC enables them to work in ways they believe are not readily made available or even easily made possible in school settings. In a discussion about not being teachers they offered the following claims:

You don’t have that freedom in mainstream teaching. So the IT teachers or the Maths teachers or the Science teachers are isolated within their... what’s now known as the domain. (Angelina)

And ticking off things and making sure that this is the class that we get this outcome in. We’re even advocating for team teaching. We might have different ideas about Personal Development but we can kind of bring it together, and you’re flexible to do that. (Joanne)

We collaborate. It’s the environment - the teaching environment – here gives us that flexibility. And the students like that they’ve got more teacher ratio to student or mentor ratio to student. They kind of like that.

(Cheryl)

Despite the fact that each of them defer to the identity of the ‘teacher’ when explaining how they are not actually or really teachers their collective point that they are doing things differently from the schools they have worked in, at least for Angelina and Joanne. On the other hand, Cheryl’s training as a psychologist and as an employment consultant in education settings has always had a tenuous relationship to the teacher identity.

Joanne is the longest serving teacher among the three and while she agrees with the claim of not being a teacher, her work as a teacher has always been made on the margins. As a woman who is a metalwork teacher as well as an art teacher she

explained that much of her work in schools has involved making learning possible in schools that is often seen as non-core and also working with ‘difficult’ students. The organising principle in Joanne’s work in and out schools is that learning has to be enjoyable:

I went to Melbourne Teachers College before Angelina was born! I taught Art for many years and then metalwork as well which I specialised in. So I went to an outer eastern suburbs secondary college to help set up the Metalwork, which was good fun. But then I sort of got a bit bored so I branched out into the English and History, and then VCAL came along and because there was the Art and there was a limited number of staff, I ended up setting up the VCAL there. It just came naturally because Art and Metalwork were practical background, and all the difficult kids got put into my classes, which became VCAL classes, which we had a great time, and the kids wanted to come in. (Joanne)

Angelina’s development as a teacher in schools and now in the TLC is influenced and shaped by her relationships with people like Joanne and Cheryl. In particular, Angelina identified how hearing tales and stories from Joanne about her employment experiences had assisted her to think differently about her work as a teacher. Angelina relates these experiences to a mentor type relationship.

If you were to look at the mentor’s role, from the point of view of industry, so if you looked at it... in this case let’s say look at the relationship Joanne and I had because I consider her as my mentor in terms of VCAL. When we initially started over at another school... she didn’t realise but from her experience at other schools ... I was able to then look at that and say well what can we do here, and it was great to bounce ideas off. (Angelina)

The relationship that Angelina identifies between herself and Joanne based on co-operation and shared and mutual learning infuses the broader relations between all of the staff at the TLC and the students. Joanne, Angelina and Cheryl emphasised the

importance of displaying consistency to provide a constructive and productive learning environment for the students.

Collaborative relations where power and authority are confined to strategies and tactics that rework the relationships between students and teachers and teachers and students characterise the teachers' views of their work at the TLC. The theme of mentoring between the teachers at the TLC was raised in terms of their identity and their approach to their work was further utilised to describe the relations between the teachers and students. The differences between teachers and students were understood generationally and in relation to maturity and with that came the responsibility that teachers were deemed to exercise. As Cheryl stated:

“We’re more experienced, there’s not so experienced. They’re young adults, or they’re going into young adulthood, so it’s about us being more mentors than... so we’re taking our work experiences as a place to what a teacher experiences, so if you look across the board in the staff that are here, they have work experiences outside of the secondary setting.

(Cheryl)

Cheryl again underlines how they are not like ordinary secondary teachers. Accordingly, experiences outside schools are upheld as central to giving the students at the TLC a broader and possibly more relevant experience of schooling.

The issue of relevance is an important feature of teaching in VCAL at the TLC signals to goal of preparing young people through different forms of schooling for life after school. Angelina explicitly makes this connection to her work with the students by highlighting the personal dimension of this work. In doing so she further extends the notion of mentoring and how this informs the relationship between teachers and students.

But in terms of, because a mentor is the idea that we're trying to promote, to get them into industry and move on with career progression. It's the idea that they're going to get a career... move into a career. But the difference is that with these kids here, we don't necessarily... even though we mentor them, we're mentoring them on their skills in terms of personal skills, how to behave, what to do, when to confront situations and so forth. And it's OK to have a quirky, we all do it as adults and that you need to deal with that. (Angelina)

By 'quirky' Angelina is referring to the need for people to be themselves and care for themselves in ways that will enable them to endure. As a follow up to what she meant by quirky she explained that there are days where we all feel like a diversion from routine. The example she offered was that at times people need time out. This expression of quirky seemed to suggest that it is important to give students freedom to take time out of their routines.

### **The young person, development and technical education**

Working with students at the TLC was discussed in terms of the 'whole person'. While a seemingly admirable ethos and approach to schooling and teaching, the focus on the person appeared to have a particular slant toward personal accountability and self-regulation. As Angelina explained, as a personal development teacher, she seeks to emphasise the formation of a self, a person who is 'strategic' and plans in a focused way for their future:

Well, I look at personal development skills as a way an individual develops... as a student develops his individualism or his or her individual... so they're able within that personal development skills they look at themselves: "What am I about?" "What are my goals?" "What do I focus on?" "Where do I want to be in five years, where do I want to be in 10 years?" "What's important to me?" "My goals and values. Understanding that my values come from whether I've grown up, so there are influences. (Angelina)

In dealing with the external or social contexts and conditions that the students dwell in, Angelina further refines her approach to personal development by seeking to illustrate

to the young people she is working with that they are a member of a global citizenry. In particular, Angelina illustrates that the class she works with has links with students of a similar age in China and that they connect using the internet. Through these exchanges Angelina aims to demonstrate to the students that they like young people, even in China, are moving through developmental stages that involve becoming a self, yet a self that is a productive person. In seeking to outline what it means to teach personal development at the TLC Angelina said:

I'd give you a diagram of what I think personal development skills is, and it's almost like an onion. Where you start with the individual to begin with, then you look around and work out who their influences are based on their goals and values. And then you look around further and say "well, how does that then broaden out to their community? How does that broaden out to their country, and then how does that broaden out to the world wide web", and for me this where the e-learning has come in for personal development, is that all of a sudden these kids, although they're monocultural here within their school, realise they're individual students. In China where they're doing a similar course as they are and guess what, they like to muck around and play music... and maybe they don't have a guitar but they like doing karaoke on the weekends, and they go out to restaurants with their friends because you know that's the done thing in China, not the local pub to booze down, but they are kids. They are of that age and these are the people that they're going to be dealing with in the future. And that's what personal development skills are. That's not available in classroom ... of my English class... of my Maths class... of my IT class. I can't do that within that curriculum. Yeah, sure I can often make a connection to China but I do from an IT perspective, I do it and teach them about the product, the media, going from one connection to the other and how this is working from a phone line. That interpersonal stuff... the worm and fuzzy stuff, I can't teach in IT, but I can in personal development. (Angelina)

Self-understanding, connected to selves across the world signals a unitary effect of being young, in Angela's personal development classes.

Cheryl made a similar contribution about personal development being about providing opportunities for students to know who they are.



And then I think just finding out what their needs are, and really then trying to appreciate each ... and maybe individual inclusion; it's not about grouping and categorising and labelling. (Cheryl)

Making places for young people constructively in education institutions happens in such places as at the TLC. Tailoring the learning situations to students' personal circumstances is an important theme that comes out of the interview with Angelina, Cheryl and Joanne. Cheryl believes that the VCAL curriculum, along with the context of the TLC represents a way of schooling and learning that is distinct from conventional schools. What makes the TLC different according to Cheryl is its focus on the personal:

Well, I think it's a combination of what they are learning from the curriculum that we have a base to follow, and making that applicable to even their personal life as well. So the personal development skills, some of the knowledge that they're hopefully gaining about learning about the self and about the self-awareness and about awareness of others, and learning about all types of personalities, and the fact that there is a balance and that we need each other, that everybody is necessary, and how they can be resilient. (Cheryl)

When I asked Cheryl what she meant by the term resilient, Joanne made the following contribution:

It means that there are bad things going to happen in your life but you have alternatives to deal with it. To bounce back, yeah, problem solving, flexibility, and being able to change when the situation changes rapidly. (Joanne)

Cheryl and Joanne's discussion of resilience is central to their work as VCAL teachers, working with students to make a schooling experience where the 'self' is used as a resource to generate useful learning. Learning that aims to prepare students for inevitable difficulties and uncertainties. 'Bouncing back' is presented as a desirable and necessary skill and trait that these teachers feel will serve the students well into their futures. The measurability of the teachable dimensions of such a skill or trait while difficult to determine operates as an organising logic in their work with VCAL students.

In the interview with these teachers from the TLC, like the interviews with the other teachers in this research, they all point out that teaching in VCAL includes the remaking of schooling with different terms of reference. These terms of reference all involve the need to distinguish the applied learning experience from the ‘general’ patterns of schooling. Angelina explains the importance of these acts of distinguishing with an example of the experiences she is seeking to relieve the students from:

We’re talking about success. Now, what you’ve got to remember is a lot of these kids have come through private schools ...they’ve come through private schools where they’ve been pounded that they haven’t been successful. They don’t fit the mould. They’re not quite right. You’re not wearing your tie. The hair is too long; you’ve got to cut it. One of the students has just come in, he was talking about “I had to take my blazer off with my shoes on and put my runners on to ride home from school. He was chased by the assistant principal and told that he had to have his blazer and shoes on ... “by the way, you’ve got a detention Wednesday night”. And he goes “I’m going home”. And he goes “Oh, it’s great... I was a great student up to Year 9, and then I thought “No, that’s it, I’ve had enough.”  
(Angelina)

Angelina’s example reveals the disciplinary aspects of schooling and in this example it is a single instance of private schooling. Yet it also highlights the precarious relationship students and, in this example, a young man has with school. While this could be read and explained as one individual’s reaction to the school’s expectations it is patently concerned with orders and how they are transmitted and implemented. It seems Angelina is at pains to point out that where there is no give and take, or dialogue based on reasonable negotiation and explanation, schooling can become completely incomprehensible to some students.

In explaining the characteristics of the model of schooling that is being progressed at the TLC, the following discussion by the three interviewees touched upon the amorphousness, changing nature and fluidity of their approach:

Everything's not black and white, and this is what this place is about; it's not black and white teaching, this is that flexibility of learning.

(Angelina)

And it's valuing what the kids can contribute. They finally realise that they're successful at something.

(Joanne)

We try not to... learning is anywhere; this is just location where we base our staff really.

(Cheryl)

The orientation to education and schooling that Angelina, Joanne and Cheryl articulate is known by its differences to 'normal' or 'standard' approaches to school, yet it is also described by its changing and changeable character that is omniscient. Being flexible, including the students contributions makes learning possible anywhere and everywhere for these teachers.

Given Joanne and Angelina's shared work history where they were VCAL teachers at a secondary school together, before working together again at the TLC, they talked about the value of a VCAL schooling experience for students who are not in VCAL. In articulating the value of the VCAL experience they report the struggles involved in having their work and the work of VCAL acknowledged. Because of its flexible less formal approach it becomes difficult to measure and subsequently difficult to value:

I think what we were doing at the other school we worked at we were trying to do the same thing, and it was a school, and I would like to see it in school. What we did there and it was very successful, and what was happening at the other schools where Joanne used to work prior to that was very successful. Unfortunately, you're sort of fighting the school in doing that because you're not conforming. They're trying to get us to conform as well. They can't put numbers on it.

(Angelina)

I can't think of any kids that wouldn't benefit from this sort of... and again, I'm thinking ... I keep thinking back to high schools. Even academic kids, like, if they're going to choose an academic pathway, the way they learn should be more applied.

(Joanne)

Joanne and Angelina are interested in a schooling experience that defies measurement yet according to them works to make places for learning that otherwise would not exist. The notion of ‘applied’ while notoriously difficult to pin down in any consistent definitional way seems to be about the students’ personal and cultural contexts and interests.

The relations between the teachers and the students in VCAL at the TLC and its intimacy is underlined by Cheryl when she explains that she learns a lot about the worlds of young people and their lives. Cheryl is in awe of what the students live with, endure and have to grapple with on an everyday basis.

I’m learning stuff all the time from students, about their age group, about what they’re going through. Some of the issues that they’re dealing with is amazing. I would have had no idea. You know, relationships with their parents and friends and stuff. (Cheryl)

Acknowledging the complexities, difficulties and struggles that the students share with her, allows Cheryl to utilise and draw upon these experiences as resources for a more collaborative basis of schooling. Joanne adds that such knowledge, as personal as it is, is the basis for making the schooling learning experience worthwhile and work in ways that conventional forms of schooling do not.

The whole thing is based on real life, that’s what I was saying. The way to engage these groups of kids is to relate it to what they need and their experience and their skills, and it’s also relating it to real life situations in the workplace, so keeping it real. (Joanne)

In talking about and reflecting on what Cheryl, Joanne and Angelina like about their work at the Technical Learning Centre it is change, the experience of success and freedom. As they shared at the end of the interview:

I get off on every small change. I see small changes from the beginning. The small changes in the students, from being completely rebellious to stopping their rebellion or reducing it. They're not as rebellious. I will commend students for questions. I commend ... I like that spike and I like that vigorous debate, and I like... if it's articulated and if it's got some substance. (Cheryl)

It's like seeing kids who have never experienced success in their life, being appreciated for the skills they have, and from there they'll go forward. (Joanne)

Yeah, for me it's the freedom. (Angelina)

These teachers at the TLC personally develop and prepare young people, mostly boys and young men at this stage, to find things they are interested in by learning in a trades based learning context. Whether the students they teach get apprenticeships and become qualified trades people is a secondary issue, wherein the primary issue remains that these teachers make learning possible where making things and attempting to learn about yourself are part and parcel of this contemporary remaking of technical education.

## **Summary**

These four teachers identify the curriculum as the problem in schooling others and are engaged in making a schooling experience that they ambivalently refer to as technical. At Northern Suburbs Catholic Boys' Secondary School, technical schooling is being formed as a 'parallel' schooling experience where all students are schooled together, yet are at times engaged in different and distinct experiences of learning. At the TLC, on the other hand, technical learning is being organised and arranged in a tertiary learning context of a TAFE college, that is separated from the TAFE through a dedicated annexe with dedicated teachers who have come from schools. These teachers are working with trades men and women who have come to the TLC to make a contemporary version of technical education. Yet this version of technical education at both sites is uncertain about what it means to be technical in contemporary times. It is a

notion of technical education that involves forms of schooling made in opposition to the hegemonic curriculum. Its oppositional character provides a reworked basis for social relations of learning that are concerned with doing things in a way that is not anti-learning. At both sites technical education is conflated with preparation for trades' apprenticeships together with some non-trade vocational learning contexts. All of the students experiencing technical schooling at these sites, like the students from the schools discussed in the previous chapter will receive their year twelve certificate through VCAL. Ironically the differences of technical learning and technical education result in distinctive communities of students doing things differently. In the next chapter, teachers' inside and outside schools use VCAL to progress forms and styles of community schooling.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **RESPONDING LOCALLY AND COMMUNITY SCHOOLING**

The three interviews with the teachers presented in this chapter involves localised and community approaches to schooling through VCAL. Two of the teachers work in a school setting while the third works outside of a school in a community education setting. However given the different institutional contexts their reflections on their work in VCAL involves forming patterns of schooling that respond to and address the education needs in ways that take heed of the students living contexts. These three teachers employ approaches to schooling and learning in rural and regional geographic locations that shape their work. Mary and Peter teach at Regional City Secondary College while Anne is a VCAL coordinator and teacher at the Tallangatta Education Centre (TEC). All of their work involves arranging schooling experiences around students' social and personal circumstances. Regional City Secondary College is known as an excellent 'VET in schools' school and operates an integrated VCAL and VCE program. The TEC on the other hand schools young people who have not been in school because they were home schooled, left school early or were excluded from schools together with adults seeking to access Years 11 and 12 schooling.

Both Regional City Secondary College and the Tallangatta Education Centre through their VCAL programs include their local communities by responding to and accommodating the learning requirements of diverse groups of people. What these teachers' interviews surface is a pattern of schooling that is a form of community schooling. VCAL in these settings from the perspectives of the teacher interviews presented in this chapter is premised upon an approach that is community oriented in its location, purposes, practices and ethos.

## **Schooling differently**

Mary and Peter teach in VCAL at Regional City Secondary College; Mary, for the past five years, and Peter for the past 25 years. Mary came to the school from a neighbouring school because this school had a larger VCAL program. Peter got a transfer after working in Melbourne and is proud of his work at the school. As he reflects on his work at the school he says:

I have been here for 25 years and I don't regret that. Now a lot of people say, "Oh, you're working at Regional City Secondary College" –but I've enjoyed the time working. (Peter)

In talking about his work at Regional City Secondary College, Peter is aware of a need to counter people's negative and diminishing perceptions of the school and its pupils. Yet he is also very clear about his purpose as a teacher within the school and in VCAL more specifically. That Peter, without prompting, felt the need to defend the school points to the prominence and impact of public discourses about school reputations and their relative value and standing.

Being a 'good school' or a school recognised and known for having 'good' performance outcomes has implications not just for students but also for the teachers who work in schools that are labelled as underperforming or not so good. In some instances these evaluations can severely curtail the status of the school as a school. A school that does teaching work that is not recognised or valued because it does not figure on league tables or where its edu-metrics are deemed 'below par' has to counter narrowed and prejudiced conceptions of what schooling is. On the other hand such schools are central to understanding the 'other' purposes and functions of schools and schooling.



In describing the school by referencing the students that attend the school, Peter indicates how his work along with the other teachers in the school is shaped. In the work carried out with the students by Peter he emphasises the value of the school and the schooling that it offers.

These are groups of kids who are in need. And if we can help.....my philosophy is if I can help those kids in need and move them on from where they are then that's what I will do. (Peter)

For Peter and Mary, VCAL is about teaching for change and they make this clear when they answer a question about the challenges involved in teaching in VCAL. As far as Peter and Mary were concerned, VCAL is about including and involving the students and giving them a schooling experience that prepares them for life after school. For them VCAL is about:

Getting the kids to see that there is value in education and then they can move on, that's the biggest challenge that we've got at this point in time. (Peter)

And also improving their self-esteem because a lot of the kids think that they're really dumb, and they're doing VCAL which is the dumb course, blah, blah, blah – especially our Foundation kids. Trying to tell them all the time that they've got good brains and that they can do things is half our struggle. (Mary)

Regional City Secondary College is a secondary school located in a regional city where there are other secondary schools. These schools are often more subscribed than Regional City because Regional City is considered a 'tough' school given its student body and their backgrounds. With the support and input of other teachers, Peter and Mary work in a school that has always sought to attend to the education needs of its students. The school population is characterised by people with specific characteristics that include young people who maybe homeless, whose parents live with social and health issues such as substance use and mental health. The school also caters to the

schooling needs of young people who are at the same time young parents who are supported to stay on at school whilst they raise and grow their children. Peter and Mary express an intimate appreciation of the school's students learning requirements that emerge from an informed, non-prejudicial and matter of fact understanding and acknowledgement of the students' life circumstances and situations. They expressed throughout the interview that most of the teachers at the school are similar to them in that they accept that the situations that many of their students find themselves in situations not of their own making.

Regional City Secondary College is located on the fringes of a large Victorian regional centre. Many of the students at Regional City Secondary College live in public housing and the main industries in the area are manufacturing, oil refinery, and transport, and service industries such as retail. The area is presently transforming from an economy based on manufacturing to becoming a much more service based economy with an emphasis on tourism. The students at Regional City Secondary College if they complete school will have out achieved their parents in term of schooling. Peter and Mary explained that through VCAL they support the students they work with to stay on at school.

Mary's move to this school because of its VCAL program was driven by commitment to creating schooling experiences where students can experience success. Mary felt that at Regional City there was more scope to do what she thinks is important for all young people in school and that is to interest and engage them in learning. When I asked Mary why this school, and what she was able to do with students in VCAL she responded:

Just the program, VCAL, that they can engage with, and actually do things and experience success. Doing a task that they can manage, I suppose. (Mary)

VCAL, for Mary, is understood as accommodating differences in teaching style and learning options differently from the conventional patterns of schooling that emphasise the academically based Years 11 and 12. Making schooling in such ways where students can manage for Mary is not about intelligence or lack thereof but rather about forming schooling experiences that are interesting and relate to the students' life circumstances.

Working in VCAL enables Mary to develop programs based on her assessment of what the students are interested in doing and so she believes she is involved in reshaping the schooling experience not just for the students in VCAL but within the broader school community. Mary loves teaching in VCAL and is enthusiastic about her work, because she enjoys the challenge, variety and the freedom to create learning options that give the students 'the skills so that they can move on'. In responding to student needs Mary explains that agility is a key feature of her work at this school and in the previous school she worked at.

When I was at another school kids are interested in fishing, and they were interested in cars because they're kids... their parents, a lot of them working at the car factory and it was the Ford and Holden things and all that sort of stuff, so you write up all these templates and blah, blah, blah, and then you come here and they're not interested in those things; they're interested in tattoos, they're interested in rock bands, they're interested... so you're changing all the time, and next year's lot like I did things with my kids last year that they're not interested in this year. It's evolving, it's always changing. You always have to keep your fingers on the pulse.

(Mary)

Being able to change and respond to student interests makes schooling, especially in VCAL, interesting and innovative. The formative aspects of schooling are made and

remade through the creative engagements and exchanges between teachers and students in VCAL at Regional City Secondary College. “Keeping your finger on the pulse’ requires a connection by the teachers with the students, and listening to what they want and setting about to provide that.

A particular case in point detailed by Mary was an example of using student interests in tattoos to enable her to organise two terms of learning based around the things the students are interested in. Mary explained that getting students involved in learning has to come from student interests or else they ‘just won’t turn up’. So using student interests in tattoos she said:

I got the kids... we went and had a look at a tattoo place. I just came up with an assignment where the guys had to make posters, and went out and had a look at tattoo parlours. We went and had a look at the health and safety implications with it. We did this because a lot of them have them. Then they actually took photos of people they found in the streets with tattoos and made a survey about did they regret the decision and why did they choose that design. The history of tattoos and we looked at designs, and this went on and on, and then we had a big thing in the library. They showcased their work and all their photos and surveys and things, and the kids loved learning about it. It was all those things that we had to do but in a format where they were interested in the subject. We also did a newsletter for a rock band on Publisher. They then had to give a talk. A whole lot of things that they chose. (Mary)

That Mary ‘just came up with an assignment’ is an example of how through VCAL Mary constructs a schooling experience that generates student involvement and participation. Student interests and teacher choices around curriculum content is utilised by VCAL teachers like Mary and Peter to stimulate student participation and interest. Mary’s example of student interest in tattoos also involved student engagements with thinking about design, community attitudes and the employment contexts of tattooists. As far as Mary was concerned she ‘could have done tattoos all year’. What Mary described in the tattoo themed learning is a schooling experience that engaged the

students because it drew upon their cultural references and interests. Mary explained that when they did this over two terms the students attended school every day. The form of schooling Mary describes is generated by student interest, yet it is Mary's knowledge base as a teacher that is a 'knowing practice' (Kemmis, 2005) that is central to Mary's formation of this schooling.

In doing this sort of work with the students, Mary and Peter both believed it was important that the students not only participate but also showcase their experiences to the rest of the school. They both felt that getting the kids to present their work publically in the school allowed them to practice presenting information to larger audiences and also to promote that their schooling is fun, interesting, as well as educative. In presenting the information about their learning in a public way, say for example in the library or at school assembly according to Peter:

They find it difficult, but once they find a topic that they are happy with,  
you can't shut them up. (Peter)

Building skills such as public speaking it was argued by Peter and Mary develops the students' confidence and belief in them and what they are doing and learning at school.

Peter explained that VCAL is important because it provides a 'real' basis to address and respond to student interests that he believes is imperative to experiencing success in schooling. In knowing or getting to know the students, Peter explained that schooling could then be shaped around the range of experiences and cultural contexts that are meaningful to the students.

We try to tailor our programs to suit our students. We want to try and get them skills that they can move on in life. Whether that be going to work or being able to function in the community, we try and build up the skills levels so they become an all-rounded person; that's what we're looking at. If that means improving their literacy and numeracy we do it. If it

means helping them get some practical skills so they can go and get a job, then we'll do that. It's about developing the person. (Peter)

Peter is describing a schooling approach that is sartorial in form in that it attempts to shift and change to fit and suit students and the contexts in which they find themselves living. Developing the person is a goal of most, if not all, forms of schooling and the implied goal of all teachers' work. Yet in VCAL, the 'all-round person' is a person who comes to school to be taught about things that interest them. This pattern of schooling disrupts the pattern of schooling where the 'content' is selected and arranged through clearly defined and shaped subjects and disciplinary domains formed long ago and far away from the worlds where these young people reside. Yet this does not involve to disposing of these knowledge practices or traditions, but rather emphasises a context in which such traditions may be explored or that may spark interest in such traditions.

Teachers like Peter and Mary reveal a proclivity to being interested in the 'challenging' students who resist, refuse or find schooling not to their liking by drawing on their interests and curiosities. Along with this proclivity in their labour these VCAL teachers treat the curriculum as a space to include educational knowledge in the classroom that may not always be considered. The purpose of VCAL at Regional City Secondary provides a space for students to develop their reading and writing abilities alongside and through engagements in schooling that are interesting. VCAL interacts with VCE at Regional City yet is also an end in itself. Peter explains why such different approaches are required:

They wouldn't succeed because their literacy skills and numeracy skills are at such levels that they wouldn't be successful in VCE. We're finding some of our kids who go to a VCAL program they might do Intermediate VCAL as like a bridging course and then they move up into VCE, but they develop the skills and then they move on to the VCE. It's just, like I said before, we're just developing the skills in the students so they can move on. It might be VCE. (Peter)

‘Moving on’ underlines a purpose to schooling through VCAL that involves preparation for future learning and work. VCAL teachers like Mary and Peter who shape schooling to fit particular groups of students are engaged in activities that shift schooling to a level of the person whereby knowledge is exchanged between students and teachers in a manner where context operates as a primary motivation.

Mary and Peter explained that because in the VCAL curriculum the learning outcomes are ‘very wide and broad’ they are afforded the freedom to do ‘whatever you like’. As Peter expressed it in VCAL:

The learning outcomes are very wide and broad; you can almost do whatever you like. You have got a lot of freedom to meet their leaning needs. (Peter)

The freedom to do whatever you like can be interpreted in several ways. In the first instance VCAL represents the institutional and systemic limit of mass schooling whereby those who are deemed hard to school’ are left to teachers such as those who have participated in this research to deal with. It is the inventiveness, knowledge and experience of these teachers that make schooling through VCAL work to remake schooling that suits ‘other’ students learning needs. In addition to this there is an express concern manifest in these arrangements that trusts teachers to deal with students who are not easily schooled.

From the interview with Mary and Peter it became apparent that it was not only teachers working in the VCAL program at Regional City Secondary College that were collaborative in their work practices but that this was feature of the relations with all students and teachers at the school. The shared commitment and philosophies in working in the VCAL program along with the school culture signified the distinctive

position teachers at this school take with regard to inclusion and participation. In identifying the main purpose and character of VCAL Mary said:

Well I reckon here it's not really behaviour issues – I don't reckon, its more just engagement. Getting them to stay. (Mary)

Getting them to stay is central to the formation and persistence of the school as a community and culture premised upon learning. Both Mary and Peter expressed that the purpose of VCAL is to engage students in schooling in ways that are not possible in the 'mainstream'. The freedom Peter talks about, and the commitment Mary emphasises in giving the students a chance to enjoy schooling, is about making schooling meaningful and relevant to the immediate life concerns of the students. For Mary, if the students are not interested or do not see schooling as related to their life then they are likely to not attend.

Mary enjoys working alongside other teachers in VCAL because of the tangible benefits she believes these relations have for the students. In talking about her teaching practices in VCAL, Mary wonders whether she and her fellow teachers are really meeting the students' needs and giving them a well-rounded experience, or whether she and her colleagues are just drawing on their own experiences, expertise and interests. Mary questions whether her preference for teaching in VCAL is about her enjoyment and the other teachers' enjoyment rather than the students. When I asked Mary how does she know she is doing interesting or valuable work with the students, her response reveals her ambiguity about teaching practice in VCAL and schooling more generally.

You start thinking about other schools and what other teachers are doing, even in the same school, like Peter he's a woodwork teacher and we have another teacher here who's a hospitality teacher and I'm an English and media studies teacher, I am a disabilities coordinator so the VCAL program is tailored toward the disability areas, and personal development, hospitality and woodwork. That's great because we are



experts in those fields, but whether we are giving kids an all round experience as in personal development I wonder. (Mary)

In thinking aloud in the interview about her work and the work of other teachers in VCAL at Regional City and VCAL programs elsewhere, Mary reveals a palpable and strong reflective temperament that infuses her work as a teacher. Mary in this reflective moment in the interview is hinting at the ethos that teachers teach themselves, that is teaching as an occupation involves the giving of the self to others for the purposes of making a self. In her teaching practice in VCAL, Mary draws from her disciplinary base of English and media studies yet also includes a disability, woodwork and hospitality focus in her classroom practice in bouncing off the other VCAL teachers' interests. The tension between the teachers' own interests and the students' different interests is something that she grapples with and is mindful of when discussing her work. Using comparative assessments or evaluations with other schools represents a limited tool for insight given that other schools are made up of 'other' types of students and different teachers.

### **Making schooling**

Peter identified that the schooling needs of students being catered for in VCAL at Regional City Secondary College existed prior to the development and implementation of the VCAL schooling option. Like the other teachers interviewed for this study, Peter was involved in establishing schooling experiences that sought to better accommodate the different needs of students who came to the school prior to the implementation of VCAL.

We got to a stage about 10 years ago where we were a VCE college. We discovered VCE wasn't meeting our student needs so we started to develop a program where we could help these kids underneath the VCE and build up their skills. By the time we developed and were running the program the Department brought out the VCAL program so we just dumped this program into that. And that was because of our needs. And

we have gone along that track. Whether we are ahead of VCAL or not I don't know but we seem to be using what we know and advancing our students all the time. That's what is happening at this college all the time since I've been here. (Peter)

Being ahead of VCAL underlines the social realities for schools like Regional City Secondary College that seek to respond to the education and schooling needs of their constituencies. Peter, who worked as a woodwork teacher in secondary schools for over 30 years, has always combined his woodwork teaching with supporting students who are challenged by mainstream and conventional requirements of schoolwork to become more 'skilled'. He believes this is important so that they can encounter schooling and life after school with confidence in their abilities to make things. He has done this by teaching in social studies, and mathematics as well as woodwork. Yet there is an ethos to Peter and Mary's work that is part of who they are and also something that emanates from the school culture that they are makers of and subject to.

Peter and Mary both throughout the interview about their work as VCAL teachers impressed the importance of teaching that is responsive to the student where they are at and where they hope to get to. It is Peter's view of his work that he is there for the students and in being there for the students he is able to be present and from that there can be a mutual satisfaction of needs. For Mary coming to Regional City Secondary College has allowed her to teach in VCAL where she is able to work in ways that take her past the predictability of mainstream teaching to teaching work that involves a variety of challenges with an unpredictability that enables her to do 'good work'. As Peter outlined, the schooling they provide in their community is all about success, where success is made through assisting students to go on. Success is relative and relational, and in the context of Regional City Secondary it is about the

constituencies that make that success possible which involves teachers, students and the communities they live and work in.

Regional City community is a very disadvantaged community; the students we get. Most of the kids that we get are seen to be a success in their family unit. Most of their families have gone... in a family unit parents have left school at 15 to have their children. And the kids that we're getting here are being the furthest educated in that particular family unit. So they're seen... just by getting to Year 11, they're seen as a success. A lot of our students haven't experienced a lot of success. For their parents, well, school's been hard work for them - failed all the way along. Because the family unit have not ... the parents have not had a good experience at school, and so they're not encouraged at home. And of course our students, a lot of them have dysfunctional families. It's not mum and dad, brother and sisters, it's one parent, that doesn't belong to them, it's the socioeconomic climate that they're in. (Peter)

Having a good experience at school involves teachers and students challenging each other and pushing past entrenched expectations of what is involved in schooling and how schooling can be made. Seeking to keep students at school involves knowing about students' lives to respond to and form ways for them to be interested in learning and to continue their schooling.

While it seems that teaching in VCAL, from the interview with Mary and Peter involves freedom to work in whatever way engages the students, the program logic as they describe it is associated with a VCAL experience that does emphasise learning that is applicable. What the VCAL subject personal development entails and the ways in which subjects such as work related skills are translated into schooling experiences largely depends upon local contexts and personal interests. All four curriculum pillars of VCAL are addressed through projects that provide students with opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy abilities and learn skills useful to the worlds of work by drawing on and responding to the students' personalities and personal circumstances. Mary and Peter talked about how often they draw on the students to

make the school experience interesting. For both of them it is all about getting permission from the students about content and generating schooling experiences that way. Mary outlined how this worked in the school she used to work in and how it continues in her work at Regional City.

It's about asking the kids too what they're interested in. There's no point in us trying to ... that's with VCAL, that's what I don't particularly like, I don't like all this administration that goes with it. I'm talking about just all the documents that we're supposed to fill in, which we do, but I'm just saying it's hard. (Mary)

Engaging students is understood as a priority that can at times be undermined or threatened by administrative imposts. Imposts that distract teachers such as Mary from what they identify as imperative in their work.

Teaching in VCAL occurs by alongside the administrative requirements that teachers document how they organise and arrange the learning for students in VCAL. The tension of complying with administrative requirements for quality assurance purposes and responding to students' interests signals the competing accountabilities of teachers' work especially as it is formed in VCAL. Mary and Peter expressed that they are accountable to the students they work with and to the school and its culture of seeking to include all students. Externally imposed accountability requirements can cut across Mary's work and can at times be the cause of frustration.

In an era where schooling in the last years of schooling has become compulsory Mary and Peter pull no punches in recognising that for some students schooling is endured for the purposes of maintaining their entitlements to social security payments.

I think a lot of kids come here for the Youth Allowance. That's the reality. "Let's come to school. Oh, we don't like it but we want to get paid so we'll just come occasionally and just keep up. It just happens. (Mary)

Mary and Peter explained that children and young people attending school for the express reason of eligibility for a social security entitlement is the exception rather than the rule, but that it is something they are aware of and seek to deal with through their work. Often this requires considerable imagination and effort on their part to work with the students to bring them into contact with a schooling experience they may spark their interests and give them an option that interests them enough in themselves and school in order to learn.

The need to make schooling fit involves making sure when possible their work is flexible and needs to adjust to accommodate the idiosyncrasies of the students' lives.

As Mary explained,

Some are so disengaged that they're just bloody rude. Although they're pretty good on the whole.

How do you deal with it?

How do I deal with it? Just individually as a teacher? It's about mutual respect. I don't swear at those guys, I'm not rude to them. I'm always positive ... I'm always nice to them. I'm always encouraging them and telling them they're doing well and stuff, so I get ... where is this coming from, but as Peter mentioned before, these kids, a lot of them are couch surfing. They don't have permanent homes and they don't ... that's lots of times why they don't come to school; they come really late because they've been up all night, or drinking or smoking. And they've got this on top, they're coming in and they're grumpy, they haven't slept. They've got all these issues and dramas and things. So you've got to tread pretty lightly. There's no point going into a fight because there's no point. So I just sort of deal with it that way. (Mary)

Mary makes allowances for these students by 'treading lightly' not pressuring them in the mornings and allowing them to get used to the fact that they are at school. Mary went on to explain how later in the day she will require the students to do school work after having given the students space to get into their day. Avoiding conflict by not taking a combative stance and posture with students allows schooling to happen for the students and teachers alike on a more mutually accommodating and respectful basis.

## **Making things happens**

VCAL involves projects that enable the teachers to work constructively with the students around literacy and numeracy where such projects lend themselves to education and learning that is 'applied'. In the interview Mary and Peter related several examples of the students involvement in projects where they made things. This included making things through woodwork, making jam and re-making and redecorating a community centre. As a woodwork teacher, Peter talked about making kennels and heat boxes as a form of a negotiated curriculum. This project occurred in and around the fire season and had extra significance for the students because of the severe bushfires that affected Victoria in February 2009. The project was organised by Peter with his students and was carried out for an animal rescue and shelter organisation within the school's regional district. Peter explained:

We made dog kennels, we've made boxes for animals in the fire, we're now making heat boxes. But that is a negotiated curriculum. We've negotiated it as we had to do a community project. And they (the students) come up with a whole range of ideas. They said "But we want to do something about animals". Alright, let's go. So we rang up a couple of companies and they said "Yes". So we've all ... everything that I've done in the past has always been negotiated with the students; we've found something they wanted to do. Because it was a charity organisation, they're ready for all sorts of things. When I rang the organisation the very, very first time, the person said "Oh, yes, we'd like this", and I said tell me what you want. She told me. So I didn't have any more input with them. I went ahead and made the project, and six months later rang them up and said "I've got 'x' number of dog kennels. "Have you really?" I said "yes". She said "lots of people make promises but they never carry them out." I said "well, that's not the case with us." So we've now got an ongoing relationship with them. She rings us. The last three weeks ago she rang me "can you do this for me?" The kids enjoy doing this work for an organisation and helping other people. These kids enjoy helping others. They like making them. They're learning new skills.

(Peter)

This project that Peter organised with the community organisation involves liaising with the organisation, sourcing materials, and harnessing student interest and commitment to

the project. This takes Peter's teaching work out of the school and beyond the customary work of schoolteachers. Following through is an important lesson for the students and maintains the schools link to the organization that provides a basis for the students learning, where they get the satisfaction of making things.

The significance of this sort of activity involves connecting students with needs outside of themselves and outside the school. Making things according to Peter, both a woodwork and mathematics teacher is formative and provides the students with unique learning experiences, both experientially and generationally. As Peter explained:

They enjoy making things. It's one of those things. They probably never made anything in their life before and making something, and being able to give it to someone, and getting the recognition for it, they really enjoy it. I think that's one of the things that we've lost in our schooling for a couple of decades, is this ability to make things. But that's just my own opinion!  
(Peter)

Peter is referring to the ubiquity of book-based learning and computer mediated experiences inside and outside school in his comment about 'one of the things that we've lost in our schooling'. Connecting this making project to a community need affords not only recognition but gratitude and connecting school learning to community contexts. From this activity of doing something worthwhile and useful provides an enjoyable schooling experience for the students.

Mary also shared an example of using this strategy of making in her VCAL classes. In personal development and work related skills, Mary describes a project that involved the students making VCAL jam.

We do a lot of stuff on team work and things which is OK at the beginning of the year. Then we did something... because we wanted to do something to help the bushfire people, we did a big unit on advertising, because I'm a media teacher too. So we did lots of stuff on that. Then we come up with VCAL Jam. We wrote to the local fruiterer,

who's got a big fruit and vegetable place so they donated big boxes of fruit to us and then we got someone who makes lots of jam to come in and teach the kids how to make all this jam and stuff. Then we went round and sold it around the community. (Mary)

A domestic activity like making jam provides a basis for Mary to generate a range of learning opportunities connected to the processes of coming up with a product to make to sell. Mary shared what some of the students said about doing this.

Oh, they loved it. They thought it was fantastic. They're having a great time. But it was really good. It was more like... it wasn't just one week "let's make jam" it was really looking at advertising and how we're going to promote it and where we were going to sell it, and how much we were going to make and all this. And they came out with jamming jam things and different advertising techniques. So that was good. It was just a good thing. That was just one little thing that we did. (Mary)

Mary builds and incorporates literacy into this unit where the students are making things and learning about marketing and selling things and addressing dimensions of numeracy through business planning. The project involves a community member from outside the school coming to work with the teacher and students to demonstrate and show them how to make jam, sterilize and seal the jars. As a teaching opportunity Mary explained:

We did Literacy things in there too, like we had to write formal letters to the woman that came to teach us about how to do jam, and she wrote back to us. She's fantastic so that was good too. Then we looked at how we were going to sell it after we made the jam. Where we were going to take it and sell it. So that was really good. (Mary)

'Really good', signals an arrangement to schooling where the pressure and potential enjoyment in learning are made through inventive pedagogies. Yet there is an ambivalence in the teaching in VCAL as described by Mary where literacy in the sense of spelling, grammar is counterbalanced with experiences that are about participation and work.



The space of literacy in the schooling experience of making as explained by Peter and Mary is secondary to the requirements to participate and be engaged in learning. As Mary outlined about the projects she has organised with VCAL students:

I am not really looking at whether they can spell it properly, or putting things in sentences. I don't expect them to do that. It's more about the ideas and what they got out of it. It's good. I like PDS. I've only taught it for two years but I think you can go a long way with that. And also, when I was at North, this was a really good thing: I had boys like in Year 12 boys, about seven of them and they were disengaged and stuff. One of the teachers said that the local table tennis centre had all these big boards and everything – huge boards – and they were rotten and horrible, and said “would you guys like to come over and measure them up and update them”. I took the kids down there and we measured them up, and then we went into town and got all this material – beautiful card – and we covered the whole lot. This went on forever. Then they made all these beautiful laminated signs and it just looked terrific. And they had fun and at the end the table tennis centre was really rapt and they said what a wonderful job the boys had done. It's stuff like that. They were rapt.

(Mary)

As Mary explains about ‘the boys’, doing a good job makes schooling possible for people in different settings. The settings nonetheless are made real through ideas. What's inside and outside schooling is highlighted through schooling in VCAL where there is a tendency and desire to include outside activities. In schooling those historically outside schools both in and out of the school different patterns of schooling are affected. Mary's focus in teaching PDS in VCAL is getting the students outside school into the community.

Encountering difference in school work for students and teachers alike applied learning represents a getting away from ‘school’, which entails a ‘weighing-up’ of options through projects and activities. Doing things; going out and doing things to learn ‘stuff’.

They looked forward to going out and doing stuff on the Wednesday, being in the community and getting out of school. Not getting out of

school but getting away from the school setting and doing something different, and meeting different people, and learning stuff. (Mary)

Getting away from school is the sense of a narrow experience of school and schooling seems to inflect Mary and Peter's work at Regional City Secondary College. VCAL challenges schooling to broaden its reach, both demographically and in terms of education knowledge and experiences, that bring learning to those who are often not included or overlooked. It is responding to communities by developing a community or communities where applied learning is about the person and about the work of being persons engaged with other persons in different places.

### **Not hands-on, relevant**

Anne works at Tallangatta Education Centre (TEC) and has done so for the past 25 years. The centre is a large adult and community education-learning centre in a regional town about three and a half hours outside of Melbourne. Anne expressed in the interview how VCAL lets her work with all sorts of people in a variety of ways that is important for the community and its members in the surrounding rural areas. The town where the centre is located has an established arts precinct with theatres, and a gallery where local and national and international artists work is exhibited. The town also hosts a music festival that attracts international artists and musicians. These features and characteristics of the town were obvious when I travelled to meet and interview Anne but their importance were further impressed upon me by Anne throughout the interview as central to the life of the community. Anne made mention that there were now three Australian composers that resided in the area as if to indicate that the town in spite of its remoteness from the city is indeed cosmopolitan in its own ways. Anne through the interview made mention of how the arts character of the town is often drawn upon or utilised in the course of teaching and learning in VCAL.

Anne works at the learning centre because it is a place where she can do teaching work that is different from the work she did in schools earlier in her work life. Working outside of schools is a deliberate strategy in Anne's approach to her work in education. Understanding Anne's approach to her work as a teacher lies in appreciating her entry into the teaching profession and her experiences of working in schools. Anne came to teaching through the opportunity of university study because she was strongly encouraged. As Anne recalled the beginnings of her entry in her work life as a teacher:

I got a teacher's scholarship. My father hadn't finished his secondary schooling and I really respect the fact that even... well, some of my friends' parents were teachers; they never really encouraged their daughters, so I was really and strongly encouraged. But it wasn't a natural mix. And when I got to uni I was really interested in Psychology, and I wanted to convert my Dip. Ed to a B. Ed. "Oh, we need Science teachers..." and off you go. And so I poured myself into that and did a very good job as a teacher, I think in terms of ... I tried to make it as creative and applied I suppose. It was kind of a natural way that I wanted to teach I suppose.

(Anne)

Anne's father did not have the education opportunities made available to her and this seems to explain Anne's valuing of education as an opportunity. "A natural way" presupposes Anne's early recognition of other more lateral and less linear ways of working, even though initially "it wasn't a natural mix". A generational shift between Anne's education opportunities and her father's reveals a basis for appreciating knowing in different ways yet it was her father who through his valuing of education encouraged her to pursue teacher education. That her father and not the other parents who were teachers encouraged her was significant for Anne.

As a science teacher in a secondary school Anne talked about her work history in schools and with curriculum. Anne was keenly aware of the disciplinary order of schooling institutionally and both resisted and sought to make changes in her teaching

and in schools and the ways learning was arranged in schools. As Anne explained using an example of one school she worked in:

I came to a so-called Christian Community School in the country and worked with some really interesting people, but a whole lot of us left because we questioned the integrity of the headmaster over two years. That's when I went to do the dance and I got very involved in dance education, and was on the Accreditation Committee for the first Dance Curriculum in Victoria. (Anne)

A 'so-called Christian' points to Anne's critical capacities when explaining her experiences as a teacher in schools. Anne left the teaching profession temporarily to pursue other interests. Movement and dance, materially and physically reorients Anne's identity as a teacher and as a person. Anne's long work history, twenty six years at the TEC and ten or so years prior to that in other settings has been characterised by changes in direction and focus despite having spent that last twenty six or so years at the TEC. Anne moved outside her interests in psychology and science, to find another interest in dance. Dance provided Anne with a way to move back into teaching on a different footing. Dance broadened Anne's capacities as a teacher.

In thinking about and explaining the facets of her work in VCAL Anne explained that she does not like the term "hands-on", yet immediately refers to one of her student's mechanical and manual acumen.

Well, I don't like it equating to 'hands-on' because I think that sort of ... people have talked about hands and head and heart and I think that it's not just hands-on because that can often suggest that VCAL is tradie, it's techie, it's for those who can't do the academic stuff; and I don't like using the word 'academic'. I like talking about literacy skills or numeracy skills. In fact, I've been talking to quite ... there are a couple of students this year who have got exceptionally good organisational skills around mechanical things. There's a young man who pulls apart motorbikes and puts them together again, and builds all sorts of things and he actually came to us with a statement which says that he's got... a report from the school that said he had Personal Development at an Intermediate level. So, he was going a bit slow in terms of the project he

was going to do, and then his mother actually said “He’s been building a house with a friend, and he wanted to develop some carpentry-type skills – building skills – so I worked it [VCAL] around that. Yet I said I’m asking you to do the writing; not because you need to write in Personal Development skills, but you need to improve your literacy skills, don’t you, Peter? Yes, yes, yes. And then I had a conversation with him for about an hour and a half over two periods about asking him to tell me things about what he did. Just had a conversation but brought in the learning outcomes, and then actually went through and said here they are, you’d done this, and this. You told me you had such and such; I’ll show you now... matched up. Sometimes I say, “No, I don’t think you should do it this way. (Anne)

Anne insists that notions of ‘hands-on’ and ‘academic’ represent two polarities in thinking and conceptions knowledge in schooling. Schooling through VCAL for those that do not fit is indeed about knowing. For Anne it is about ‘literacy’, and while she signals writing as an example as the interview progressed it became apparent that literacy also signalled the student’s capacities to understand their life context. So, while in this instance Anne supported this particular student to get access to carpentry skills, she focused her teaching on asking the student to do the writing. Her work also involved explaining to this young person’s mother that what he was doing in his life, ‘building a house’, could also be used as part of his learning in VCAL. Anne’s teaching work at the TEC and in VCAL involves advocating to students, their families and the community that schooling can be a lot more than just being in school doing ‘school work’. School work that encompasses the students’ life interests, concerns is built into the activities of VCAL at the TEC.

At the TEC Anne encounters different students and experiences in her work. Anne is passionate about her work and this comes through in the interview in stories about different students and her enthusiasm to show me things the students have made and achieved. Working with home schoolers at the TEC has been a great source of enthusiasm for Anne.

So with some home schoolers – that's been very interesting. They got to be 15, 16 and their parents have thought they needed to have some socialisation. They are extremely confident, highly literate, very thoughtful people. As a teacher, that's been incredibly exciting working with them - really exciting. One of them got a senior VCAL last year and she did some work in a school in TAFE, Distance Ed and she'll get a VCE this year as well. (Anne)

Using VCAL to induct and socialise students into the habits of formalised and institutionally oriented learning through a community context such as provided at the TEC connects students into education. The need for socialisation and the uses of VCAL to 'bring in' those outside schooling is highlighted by Anne's interest in her work with homeschoolers. It is 'really exciting' for Anne because her work contexts afford her the space to encounter people with different education histories and experiences and to use these difference as a basis and resource for continued and further learning.

Making schooling 'fit' for more students involve relating schooling to people's lives in different ways. Ways that are as different as the people doing VCAL, yet it is not an individualist schooling but rather a schooling made through dialogue, tensions, and imagined in novel ways that place the students life circumstances and biography in the formalised and institutional contexts of learning. The VCAL curriculum frames emphasise project-based approaches to learning. It is the projects developed around student interests with teachers considering and building in the educative and pedagogic purposes. Through these projects students work with each other in and out of school settings on things that have meaning for them individually and effect new social relations of learning making n schooling patterns and practices anew. Of these projects Anne believes that should be relevant.

I talk about relevance; it's about...VCAL will give you an opportunity to get credit for what you're doing and what you want to do. A lot of it's around my imagination. I always talk to them about those sorts of things that are their hobbies or what they might want to do or the things they

like doing. I said, 'We just have to work together to find the sort of project.'  
(Anne)

Working together underlines the labour involved in VCAL and the centrality of teachers' labour in forming this pattern of community schooling as it is described by Anne. Making schooling differently requires teachers to work for change within the schooling context and in the community. Participation in 'a schooling' through VCAL is geographic and biographic. Anne, like Catherine and Noel, and the other teachers in regional and rural Victoria, are engaged in place based, situational and as a consequence personal pedagogies yet Anne, like Mary and Peter, is involved in a pattern of schooling in VCAL that are intimately characterised and shaped by their local communities and their constituencies.

Making schooling through teaching and learning involves relations to the self, work and the 'world'. At the TEC 'adult learning' is hugely influential pedagogically and philosophically. Anne's work at the TEC is premised upon and made through ideas and practices of adult education. One of those practices includes the recognition and utilisation of student biographies. Anne explains the motivation of students in VCAL at the TEC.

So I think for adults many of them have wanted to kind of get something that they haven't been able to get in the past; they left school early, and they wished they'd stayed at school but sometimes they partnered, had kids, and then they think I'm either obliged to by Centrelink or I want to go to work. But people have talked about in terms of gaining confidence. I'd say 80/90% of people would have said "It is confidence that I've got. I've got confidence to do things.

So there were a lot of conversations about unpacking confidence. It's not just that you can do things it's really got to do with how people think about themselves. So that I think has extended into working over a couple of years to actually get a VCAL and feel they've got some sort of qualification.  
(Anne)

VCAL extends conversations about the constitution of schooling and the formations of personhood. People are deemed to have worth because they have completed their schooling by getting a Year 12 through VCAL credential in a non-school context. This has become a normative expectation in both urban and rural Australia. For Anne this is a key component that drives her work to provide a basis to include those who otherwise would not be included.

In the subject of personal development, Anne explains that her work involves developing opportunities that she describes as really rounded projects.

One student was really interested in photography; she's the one who got a senior last year and VCE this year. Very interested in photography, so both her work-related skills and personal development skills used that interest. And she told me that she... I asked her to go away and think about it... I gave her the learning outcomes and I said it's a really rounded project that you might want to do. And I'll help scope it with you. And I'll mentor you. She said "Oh, I've got this idea I'd like to..." she lives in a tiny little town by herself, and in that she said "I've sort of got interest in the community, and I'd like to do a book about it". So that's what she did in terms of the ... collecting photos, taking photos, deciding how she was going to get the material... falling in a bit of a heap around that and then she became friendly with another homeschooler, who was a brother of somebody she was studying with.

(Anne)

Connecting students to learning through VCAL results in further learning in VCA, VET and or university. Getting the student to engage directly with the learning outcomes of the subject provides the basis of a dialogue between Anne and the student to think through doing schooling that is relevant and useful and interesting. Talking about the student falling in a heap also indicates the level of connection and concern that infuses the work Anne is engaged in at the TEC. The personal development of the students is achieved through the mechanisms of undertaking and completing a project drawn from the students' own interests.



In detailing the intricacies of this students schooling experience in personal development Anne explained that through conversations she was able to address the students' barriers to doing the work that were apprehended by attending to the personal.

As she explained:

Well, the process that she put in place to actually collect the material of working, she put it in the newsletter, and she went down to the hall one day. And so I said, 'Well, maybe you need to go and talk with people about it'. She's fairly shy and doesn't really like doing that. And then... I wish I had actually taped the conversation... I had really rich conversations with her around how she might approach it and what she might do. She said "Oh, I can get Mick to come with me. I feel more confident that way". And she did it. She used a computer. I can show you the book.

(Anne)

Having 'really rich' conversation is routine and pedagogically important in Anne's work. Anne deploys care as an important aspect and characteristic in her work in VCAL at the TEC. In this particular instance Anne was very enthusiastic about this student's achievements. Anne explained what happened with the student.

She produced four copies and then the museum down at Euroa and somebody else in the organisation she wants to buy it, and get some more and they want to pay for them. She gets interested in history this year and then she's going off to university. In History. And I think her... she's a young woman who's really struggled with her creativity, which is her parents are scientists. I think it was over a pet died and it was such an emotional response that... and she only told me a little bit about it but she struggled being a creative person. But I think the History has enabled her to take that creativity into a kind of structured context. If she doesn't get 40+ in Australian History I'd be really surprised.

(Anne)

Anne because of where she works and the community she works and resides in has continuing relationships with students she has worked with. She explained that the young woman who is now at university still attends the centre and uses it as a resource to assist her in her university studies in history. VCAL in this context has a very 'academic' inflection where the student has written and published a local history text.

Paradoxically this underlines Anne's uncomfortableness, about the use of 'hands on' and 'academic'. Building a house and writing and putting together a book are examples Anne provides about how VCAL lets students do schooling differently and enables her to teach that, moves students' past their own circumstances and experiences to complete schooling.

### **Creating schooling**

In teaching Work Related Skills Anne relates and describes forms of teaching where student engagement and dialogue around their interests characterises the schooling experiences. Anne reveals the breadth of the students' learning options and experiences in the following example.

There was somebody else who had got into compering for a sports commentary for a community radio for a local football club down in Bennelong. So we scoped around that in terms of him learning, working with the older guys, learning the technical stuff and then I said, "what's something else you might do that you need to organise and plan for, and whatever?" And he said "Well, they've kind of talked about doing something for the Under-18s. And I've got some friends who might like to do this". So this young group kind of put this commentary sort of thing together. He actually got an award – a VCAL award for that. (Anne)

Anne, in doing this work with the students, takes it to the relevant state authorities to promote the students' achievements but also to show and promote that schooling in VCAL is interesting. Anne sees that this is her duty, not just to the students but for people in the community who have narrow conceptions of what schooling is and should be. Anne is proud of what the students who come to the TEC achieve.

Testimonies and evidence of what students are doing and do is important for Anne when describing her work in VCAL. As she explained with regard to one student who was a musician:

There's a guy whose interest in music is ... he's just done one Intermediate level (VCAL) and he just documented it all and talked with me about all this amazing music that he'd done. And this was his idea. He's made this plan, there are teachers, there are instruments, there is an organisation, there's gigs and he was actually ... he's got three or four bands he's in and all that sort of stuff so he really had it all there and I talked with him about the kind of evidence that he needed to produce. It's all on the computer and he got into really interested in jazz improvisation and all that sort of stuff. It was very difficult for his mother to actually understand that he was working; that he was doing all this, and this was going to provide evidence for his VCAL. (Anne)

While credentialing students' experiences and activities may represent an overemphasis on outcome at the expense of the processes of learning Anne, through dialogue, supports the student to speak and become more explicitly conscious of their learning and schooling. It is the students in dialogue with Anne and with other students they meet and encounter at the TEC that constitute the schooling experience. Even supporting the students parents to recognise the legitimacy of the schooling experience as arranged and validated through VCAL becomes part of Anne's job as a VCAL teacher.

In explaining the intricacies of schooling in VCAL outside of school at the TEC Anne points to relations of learning where the student, their life circumstances and their community are used in such a way that schooling is shaped around what they are already doing.

Often at times it's really just packaging what they're already doing and showing... talking with them about how they can fulfil the learning outcomes. And I write it all up according to the QA... QA work plate in terms of what the project is and what the student has to do, what I'm going to do and what the evidence is that they have to produce, and tick it all off. So it's kind of creative. (Anne)

Being creative seems to both underline and reveal the common feature of all schooling in VCAL. Yet it is teachers' labour, in this specific contexts teachers like Anne at the

TEC where she is working with particular students where schooling is being made in new and different ways.

In outlining approaches to learning in VCAL in the subjects of personal development and work related skills Anne explains that:

The students have individually organised programs; it's not quite true to say that nobody does exactly the same programs but it's almost the case. I'm very interested in working with students around their interests and goals, and I think that I bring to it... a catalyst personality and for thinking about opportunities. So it seems to be that there's a good match in terms of the personal development skills and work-related skills, and being able to scope projects with students. (Anne)

Thinking about opportunities in the context of VCAL at the TEC is not some abstracted goal for inclusion but rather about engagements in life that have educative aspects, teachable moments and learning involved in them that Anne utilises from the students lives to making schooling possible, enjoyable and done in ways that work.

## **Summary**

Mary, Peter and Anne in their work in VCAL connect schooling to students' lives as they are lived in their different communities. The distinguishing feature of what can be described as community schooling as it is made through the work of these VCAL teachers in different institutional settings and geographic contexts is promise. These teachers see the promising aspects of their students lived lives, in these contexts the students they work with are constructed as having promise. Warmth characterises the relations of learning at Regional City and at the TEC. In these community forms of schooling the promise of recognition of differences and value is made through the teachers' work. In these learning contexts schooling is made through commitments to understanding and making schooling together through projects where dialogue and

differences are encountered gently and safely. Students are not pushed but rather encouraged, spoken to and considered in ways that elicit connections to knowing and living. Yet this community schooling made possible through VCAL may at times be derided as not proper or having value and its legitimacy as 'real schooling' is questioned where the predominance of rankings and scoring make schooling a competition and a race. A race that at times can be encountered as directionless, with a finish that is far removed from the immediate life concerns and interests of the people who do not want to be or cannot be part of that race.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **TEACHERS' WORK AND APPLIED LEARNING**

Teachers' work impacts on how schooling can be arranged differently, this is especially the case in the patterns of schooling made possible through VCAL. As a subordinate curriculum of applied learning VCAL represents a site that provides a way into understanding teachers works and its implications in the formation of patterns of contemporary working-class schooling. This research has sought to draw upon teachers' perspectives of their work in VCAL to explain working-class schooling as a phenomenon that represents a distinctive patterning of schooling that is more than just the schooling of the working-classes. Pedagogically and educationally working-class schooling is made through divisions in mental and manual knowing. Applied learning as operationalised by teachers' work through VCAL is implicated in the formations of working-class schooling in ways that are historically continuous and discontinuous.

The legacies of education and school reforms in Victoria from the 1980s that resulted in comprehensive schooling are continued through teachers' work in the implementation of VCAL. Yet the remaking of technical schooling and technical education through teachers' efforts in VCAL is discontinuous from the earlier institutional forms of technical schooling as a result of changed social, economic and political circumstances. Working class schooling was shown in this research as organised and instituted through VCAL where schooling is connected to localities and communities that seek to make schooling anew and differently from the conventional hegemonic forms.

## **Working-class schooling in the twenty-first century**

The 10 teachers who participated in this research are all engaged in practices constituting an ‘applied political philosophy’ (Rose, 2004) in that their labour is central to the formation of working-class schooling. Patterns of schooling where those who would otherwise be outside and excluded from schooling are brought in through social relations of learning where teaching approaches accommodate differences. As a consequence these teachers’ through their labour are making visible those made invisible through the competitive academic curriculum. As a consequence these different patterns of schooling in VCAL represent different forms of working-class schooling where other ways of knowing are encountered, exchanged and given credence.

VCAL is schooling that is successful in getting students to stay on in school so that they experience learning and complete their schooling inside and outside of schools. It is schooling organised through teachers’ labour that responds to overlooked needs to provide learning that takes care and depends upon and is concerned about how students can learn. It is made possible through freedoms and spaces for teachers to be inventive, and creative in order to guide students in learning that is immediately meaningful and relevant to their lives. It is not result oriented in a competitive or numeric sense but is pitched around the subjective experiences of growth connected with providing opportunities for (young) people to encounter school learning with more confidence. It is a schooling that ‘helps those in need’ and responds to those who do not fit the mould, and it is about getting on and becoming connected and engaged.

These teachers ‘don’t sweat the small stuff’ they facilitate exchanges and encounters that connect schooling to the person, to the self, to desires and aspirations

that are routinely unheard, unseen and overlooked in conventional and predominant patterns of schooling.

Teachers' practices in this research are informed by knowledge of, an interest in and appreciation of the value of students' needs, and depth of experience. The expertise of having worked as teachers over an extended period of time enables the teachers to make, craft and forge schooling patterns and experiences that work. The majority of the teachers interviewed for this research have had decades of experience as teachers. The two that are relatively new come to the work with extensive work histories in other fields. While music, media, English, woodwork and so on represent these teachers with an identity and discrete set of practices; their work in VCAL scrambles these well-defined identities. What is required of teachers in applied learning is not always found in education books or continuing and professional development opportunities. These teachers improvise and draw directly on the students to make a schooling experience that works. Much of the work of teachers' is extemporaneous yet responsive to the immediate community and social contexts of students who otherwise fall out of schooling.

The patterns of working-class schooling formed through teachers' labour as described in this research brings in students, draws upon different cultures and traditions to breathe life into and remake schooling cultures. Using the subordinate curriculum as a way for knowing about, explaining and understanding working-class schooling provided an important starting point into identifying the existence of different social relations of learning and patterns in schooling. This research has shown that access to different forms of knowledge and ways of knowing and experiencing school makes working-class schooling.



The teachers' practices and labour as revealed through the interview data is made through the tensions between an 'education' and 'applied learning'. Where education and applied learning are stipulated in the different curricula formats of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), the VCAL teachers' labour makes and forms schooling differently. Whilst the 'education' approach privileges the disciplinary subjects and student mastery of content through competitive academic performance in assignments and examinations, 'applied learning' emphasises the subjective, the personal and the processes where knowledge is encountered through actions as living, meaningful and relevant. Subjects like Personal Development and Work Related Skills provide spaces for teachers and students alike to encounter each other, their worlds and contexts in ways that are focused on learning and not 'anti-learning'. The assignment or, more accurately, the project in these subjects and in VCAL more generally is the self as a knower and assessment is premised upon participation and connections to a self focused on making learning.

Developing the person is not new to schooling or to teachers' work and labour yet the spaces to do this where teachers in dialogue with students, school communities, the local community and businesses and community agencies abound in contemporary working-class schooling. The work that the teachers described in the interviews in this research and the patterns of schooling being formed are not a panacea and exist in education contexts where their existence is always precarious. The atmosphere of schooling is reworked through teachers' practices in VCAL. Applied learning leaves behind the technical education of machinery and industrial literacies and capabilities to

underline the application of learning to the self in terms of interests, aspirations and life prospects in social contexts that are subject to continuous change.

These teachers, through dialogue with the students and within the parameters of their environments (schools and non-schools), organise and arrange schooling that matters enough for participation to be enabled. It is schooling where things are made, where teaching and learning happens empathetically inside and outside the classroom and the immediate environment of the school or the centre. It is schooling that is subjunctive in that responds to student interests and their ideas and notions of success without a pre-fixed notion of what schooling should be. It is a schooling that prepares students outside of the 'competitive academic curriculum' in a pace that accords with the students own timing. Life work and employment is emphasised and explored in this schooling where teachers' practices shape each encounter differently. These teachers' practices challenge student notions of what schooling is. In doing this they also challenge long held notions of what schooling is and can be socially, culturally and politically.

In using the term 'working-class' this research sought to speak into sociological traditions in education research that explore educational inequality. Just as Willis (1977) sought to explain 'why working class kids get working class jobs' this PhD was interested in contemporary working-class schooling as a distinctive pattern of schooling. Willis maintained that the working classes 'refuse' the potential offerings or dividends of educational success as they see in secondary schooling that the teacher is like the 'boss' is in the workplace. Sennett and Cobb (1972) on the other hand thought about class and educational achievement or lack thereof as the 'hidden injuries of class'. These hidden 'injuries' refer to the individual's inability to gain self-respect that for

Sennett and Cobb (1972) refers to 'freedom' and 'dignity'. There is resistance and injury does and can occur, working-class schooling provides spaces that work with resistances to redress injury. This research found three distinct and discernible forms of working-class schooling that are an antidote to schooling that can be injurious. These forms of working-class schooling constitute refusals of existing forms of schooling yet also signal the creation of new forms of working-class schooling where freedoms and dignity are enabled.

The three forms of working-class schooling unearthed in this research thesis that drew on teacher accounts of their work identified the augmentation of comprehensive schooling, the remaking of technical education or more precisely technical schooling, and distinctive forms and patterns of community schooling. Each of these types of schooling is made through an enclosure that institutes different ways teachers work to bring students to knowing. Working-class schooling is premised upon exchanges based on lived experiences and knowing being legitimated to endorse other forms of schooling. Of course there are other forms of working-class schooling not least schooling that is arranged in the competitive academic curriculum and hegemonic forms of schooling as it occurs in public and independent secondary schools. In addition to these, there are other forms of working-class schooling being made through teachers' efforts and labour that are constituted through other patterns of schooling. This research has only glimpsed the surfaces of working-class schooling.

That working class schooling in its augmented comprehensive, technical and community forms has value and worth has been revealed through this research. It is value recognised and known by this involved and those who know the experiences for what they are. Broader social and cultural assessments that routinely devalue and

question the worth of working-class schooling are the result of exploitative power dynamics that teachers' labour and student action on its own cannot immediately overcome. The teacher accounts and the stories of connecting students to learning are indicative of the counter claims that can illuminate the worth and value of working-class schooling. The status, on the other hand of working-class schooling will continue to be defined and shaped through exchanges that intentionally and unintentionally reinscribe a monopolistic value on dominant, hegemonic forms of schooling where privilege as entitlement is protected and inequalities are personalised and naturalised as inevitable.

That education and schooling in Australia occurs unevenly and not all people come to education equally has long been known. This research has shown how working class schooling in its contemporary forms does 'good work' in the sense that it makes, forms and crafts knowing and learning where entitlement and value can be experienced. That working-class schooling is valuable schooling and has worth deserves to be known without hesitation. Not through paternalistic, condescending or conceited utterances but through the voices and experiences of people whose social conditions make working-class schooling a lived reality. Referencing and using socially valued forms of schooling as either benchmarks or, worse, as aspirational models for how all schooling should be organised and arranged limits the possibilities for knowing the value and range of other ways of knowing and makes invisible other forms of schooling.

Working class schooling and education has a long and distinguished history in Australia. From the working men's colleges, schools of mines, domestic colleges, agricultural colleges, Catholic schools through to secondary high schools and technical schools, there have been extensive experiences, and institutional contexts that are decisively working class. That the histories and social contexts of these schools and

different forms of schooling are overlooked and made absent through the privileging of the schooling of the privileged is challenged by research that examines schooling others differently. This PhD, by exploring teachers' work in VCAL, has shown that working class schooling in an Australian context has changed in shape and form just as society has shifted in form and character. Schools as institutions have shifted from separated and streamed working class schooling that provided a particular sort of education such as in the former secondary technical schools.

Comprehensive schooling in Victoria today has shifted to provide students with a broader education experiences to deliver to students a 'freedom to move'. Yet comprehensive schooling finds itself on the move in different shapes and directions where teachers' labour is reoriented to changing student demographics and a marketised education context that creates anew divisions that beset contemporary schooling. Just how this is happening today is connected to working out what is really useful education from the viewpoint of those who shape and influence the schooling experience. It is teachers who are at the forefront of these moves. Many of the teachers in this research explained that well before VCAL come onto the scene they were involved in making schooling work as a response to ways it was not working for many of its constituents.

Changes to schooling like those instigated by the implementation of comprehensive schooling, and more recently in approaches like VCAL reorient teachers work and take schooling into territories to break new ground about what schooling can be. The teachers who participated in this study were enabled to act through the VCAL curriculum framework and their work was made visible and legitimate. It is from their own repertoire of practices that these teachers draw upon to make a schooling that in many instances provides for student success in schooling through VCAL. Their

practices are instituted in schools and outside schools but more particularly they are made tangible and possible through the exchanges with students, involving communities to facilitate learning. Their own repertoire of practices are drawn from their individual lives, their biographicity as well as being drawn through cultures they inhabit and are inhabited by, making these patterns of schooling both continuous with and discontinuous from earlier historical forms of working-class schooling.

Applied learning does not seek to reproduce hierarchies as it was presented as a policy gesture as an 'equivalent' Year 12 program but what it does do is trouble hierarchies in schooling. Working-class schooling historically has always challenged such hierarchies. Debates about the purposes of schooling persist. Teachers work in VCAL troubles knowledge in schooling by underlining the importance of students' interests as a basis for learning. Schooling that is about knowledge and skills has external purposes yet when student interest is validated as having education worth it must have both external and interior purposes. Schooling through 'applied learning' involves becoming a self that can be schooled. Schooling is divided along cultural lines as represented through different knowledge forms. The academic that has been privileged over the technical and practical, is now further unsettled by a notion and experience of schooling that is being made in Victoria through applied learning.

This time-limited interview-based research project was bold in its aims in that it contemplated and considered applied learning as working-class schooling. Yet its partial findings are important to the continuing story of working-class schooling. Yet this research does show that any consideration of working-class schooling is and has always hinged on questions of knowledge and how teachers' labour is important in forming and making knowledge with students.

Working-class schooling in this research involved the reworking of the social relations of learning. In addition to this working-class schooling was localised in a community sense geographically and pedagogically where the constituencies party to the relations of learning learned to know and recognise the cultures in which the relations of learning were located. These patterns of working class schooling as a form of community schooling operates on principles of adult education and learning by recognising and working with the students' life contexts and experiences as both a resource and point of departure for further learning. And the historical gesture of reasserting technical education and schooling as another form of working-class schooling involves a reconsideration of knowledge. These repetitions especially of technical education and schooling are not reproductions of earlier classed patterns of schooling but are rather re-presentations of working-class schooling. The economic conditions of industrial capitalism where large public and private organisations routinely recruited and trained qualified tradespeople has evaporated. Working-class schooling today is also formed in ways that are premised upon a 'making'. Yet this making is less collective and more individualised. How things, people, practices, and relations come to be made and remade is foundational to the forms of working-class schooling identified in this thesis. The formalisation and institutionalisation of learning in contemporary times is by its very nature pluralised, dispersed and parallels with multiply different patterns of schooling.

The three forms of working-class schooling uncovered through this research are the tip of the iceberg. Schooling is made through the interactions and relations between teachers, knowledge, students and social and political contexts, just as people are formed through their schooling. These enclosures and exchanges endorse different ways

of knowing and being inside and outside of schools. In interviewing these 10 teachers and asking them about their workplaces they were able to generously contribute experiences and stories about their work that makes schooling. Working-class schooling is many things socially and politically. Working-class schooling in its many forms, both those presented in this research and those occurring in other spaces and presently being made anew, are spaces to be, spaces to make and spaces made in order that people can learn.

In all its forms, working-class schooling has and continues to be connected to a subjective basis of knowing, where biographically people are always seeking places in a positional sense but much more than this, spaces where the political is personal. The exchanges between teachers and students are powerful enough to make schooling differently and this has been shown to be the case through the work contexts of VCAL teachers in this study. This constitutes a politics where the personal is deployed to push the limits of schooling in order that it be made over in ways that accommodate those not usually or regularly involved. This is a form of schooling where the political is personal.

In a recent political meditation on education, in a piece entitled, *The world inhospitable to education*, Zygmunt Bauman lamented,

Education took many forms in the past and proved itself able to adjust to changing circumstances, setting itself new goals and designing new strategies. – the present change is not like past changes. At no turning-point in human history did educators face a challenge strictly comparable to the one presented by the current watershed. The art of living in a world oversaturated with information has still to be learned. And so has the yet mind boggling difficult art of grooming human beings for such a life. (Bauman, 2010, p.101)

I would argue after meeting these teachers and talking with them in their workplaces at length, that VCAL makes for qualitatively different relationships between students and teachers. The modes of instruction are premised upon relations of learning where



student interests are central in the formation of working-class schooling. It provides a basis for different ways of schooling that have their own class implications. Applied learning presents a way of leading and supporting students through schooling experiences that draw on academic, vocational education and applied experiences to produce schooling to fit those that do not fit and to know about what does not fit. Like earlier forms of working class schooling it is subordinate in some senses, yet critical in a contemporary sense. Applied learning is concerned with the recuperation of the personal and lends itself to forms of schooling that groom people in learning to live at a personal, social, cultural and political level through different approaches. Working-class schooling is different because the mental and manual are both given credence and endorsed as legitimate ways of knowing and being schooled. Outside of working-class schooling the monopoly of academic achievement is premised upon mental knowing that mostly derides manual knowing.

### **Hands on, teachers work and working-class schooling**

Applied learning refigures schooling at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Working-class schooling as made through VCAL involves knowledge connected to the self and practices of making selves more certain of their abilities is the mainstay of teachers' work. What VCAL teachers' through their work tell us if anything about working class schooling is that it makes spaces for people to become involved in schooling. How to understand the work of VCAL teachers and contemporary working-class schooling is found in schooling experiences that disrupt reproductionist tendencies of schooling that repeat reflected social inequalities. Questions about the nature and organisation of knowledge (curriculum) beyond the education requirements for university admission are a central feature in shaping the teachers' works in working-

class schooling in this project. It proceeds from the recognition that there is more to participation in schooling than getting a university place or even a job. These teachers were interested in schooling experiences that gave young people access to '*really useful knowledge*'. Really useful knowledge includes experiences and knowledge that have long characterised working-class education.

Really useful knowledge involved a range of resources for overcoming daily difficulties. It involved self-respect and self-confidence (Johnson, 1983, p.22). Really useful knowledge is particularly important to knowing working-class schooling because as Johnson argued,

The elements of really useful knowledge that do exist in schooling occur in the cracks of the system and in spaces won away from, or in tension with, its main pressures. What happens here is an appropriation and transformation of elements of the approved disciplines and curricula, a hard, bitter and very contradictory struggle to produce critical knowledge. (Johnson, 1983, p.23).

The VCAL teachers represented in this research do not exist in the cracks of the system; they are now part of the system in Victoria. While their work is at times overshadowed by the glow of education prizes that illuminate the value and worth of high examination scores, and excellent test results, these teachers' see that they are involved in work that will change schooling for everyone.

Through their work VCAL teachers are actively engaged in the socialisation of the practical or manual through privileging the process and project as opposed to the outcome or the grade and rank. The mental and manual division that has historically characterised working-class schooling through the separate institutions of technical and general education secondary schools continues to shape the common experiences of schooling. Yet it is done so through different institutional and pedagogic arrangements

and relationships where those being schooled differently are now often in touch and in proximity with others being schooled differently. While secondary schooling has become comprehensive diversity and difference abounds. VCAL teachers are involved in the production of new patterns of working-class schooling. These patterns of schooling blend the academic with the vocational and the applied and involve knowledges that connect the manual and mental in ways that provide students with different ways of knowing. Yet differences, whether they involve school experiences, knowledge differences and social differences always involve challenges, as difference is as threatening as it illuminating. Working-class schooling as made in its various forms through teachers' work in VCAL illuminates freedoms, oppositional work and promise. Reforged social relations of learning can make schooling freer when done so in opposition to the competitive academic curriculum. This in turn makes good on a promise to recognise differences in ways that enable students to connect with school learning.

Education research that considers class and in particular working-class, middle-class or any classed forms of schooling raises questions and dilemmas about the uses and purposes of schooling. These are important questions and issues that do not just have individual impacts but social and political impacts and implications. Re-engaging in research into social class and schooling is imperative in times when schooling is shifting toward a compulsory requirement for qualifying for social participation. This research makes just that sort of intervention and contribution.

## APPENDIX 1 – VCAL LEARNING OUTCOMES

Victorian certificate of Applied Learning	Work Related Skills		Personal Development	
Foundation Units	Unit One	Unit Two	Unit One	Unit Two
Learning Outcomes	Learn about a selected workplace or industry setting	Prepare for simple work activity	Plan and organise a simple activity	Plan and organise a health or community service goal/activity
	Communicate the major features of OH&S in a workplace context	Communicate basic work related activities and information	Solve problems specific to an established goal	Clarify the rights and responsibilities of all participants in a group/team activity.
	Plan organise and manage a simple work related activity that complies with OH&S guidelines.	Plan organise and manage a basic work related activity	Demonstrate knowledge and skills to an established goal	Communication information about health issues and /or community services.
	Identify OH&S problems that may arise in the workplace	Identify and solve a problem relevant to a simple work related activity	Demonstrate teamwork skills	Work effectively as a group member
	Work in a team to complete a safe work procedure for a simple work related activity.	Work in a team to complete a simple work related activity.		
	Use information and communication technology in relation to simple work related activity	Use information and communication technology in relation to simple work related activity		

<b>Victorian certificate of Applied Learning</b>	<b>Work Related Skills</b>		<b>Personal Development</b>	
Intermediate Units	Unit One	Unit Two	Unit One	Unit Two
Learning Outcomes	Learn about basic conditions and entitlements of a specific industry.	Learn to analyse and organize information for a work related goal.	Plan and organise a complex activity.	Identify planning and organisation skills relevant for the management of health or community service activities.
	Obtain and communicate information in response to a work related OH&S issue.	Communicate information and ideas for a work related goal	Demonstrate self-management skills for goal achievement	Demonstrate skills relevant to complex problem solving
	Develop knowledge and understanding of OH&S in a work related context.	Plan, organise and manage activities for a work related goal.	Demonstrate knowledge, skills and abilities in the context of an activity or project.	Demonstrate knowledge and skills relevant to a hobby, study or interest.
	Identify problems or safety hazards that can affect the safety of the work environment	Identify and solve problems for a work related purpose.	Demonstrate leadership skills and responsibilities.	Utilise research and development skills to present information to an audience.
	Contribute to team objectives to achieve safe work practices	Work with others and in teams to achieve a work related goal.	Utilise interpersonal skills to communicate ideas and information	Use spoken language and active listening skills to communicate complex ideas and information.
	Use information technology in relation to a work related activity.	Use information technology in relation to a work related activity.		

<b>Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning</b>	<b>Work Related Skills</b>		<b>Personal Development</b>	
<b>Senior Units</b>	<b>Unit One</b>	<b>Unit Two</b>	<b>Unit One</b>	<b>Unit Two</b>
Learning Outcomes	Research information about career pathways, functions and layout of a specific industry or workplace	Collect, analyse and evaluate information in a work environment	Plan and organise to completion a complex project involving a range of related activities.	Develop personal goal/s involving strategies, sequences and time constraints related to a personal area of interest.
	Communicate ideas and information about OH&S requirements for a work environment	Communicate ideas and information in a work environment	Apply an awareness of cultural values within a complex project.	Apply evaluative and problem solving skills to planning
	Assist in the Hazard Identification Risk Assessment and Control Planning Process to meet OH&S requirements in a work related context.	Plan, organise and manage activities in a work environment, incorporating quality assurance processes.	Apply strategies to improve organisational communication	Demonstrate knowledge of facts and concepts specific to a specialist and/or technical activity
	Develop an OH&S plan for a work environment that addresses at least five OH&S issues	Identify and solve problems in a work environment.	Demonstrate leadership skills for group and teamwork.	Manage the coordination of an activity or program.
	Work with others and in teams in a work environment in accordance with defined workplace procedures.	Work with others and in teams in a work environment.	Use decision making skills in a group or team context.	Present and communicate ideas and information
	Use information technology in relation to a Complex work related activity.	Use information technology in relation to a Complex work related activity.		
	Use technology in accordance with OH&S guidelines in a work related context.	Identify, apply and evaluate technology in a work environment.		

## **APPENDIX 2 – INTERVIEW TOPICS AND QUESTIONS**

1. How would you describe the school you are employed at?
2. How did you come to work at this particular school?
3. What do you enjoy most about your job as a teacher?
4. What are your areas of teaching expertise?
5. How is VCAL located/placed in school learning options?
6. What do you teach in personal development/work related skills?
7. What are the aims of teaching, learning and assessment in these subjects?
8. What teaching strategies are deployed in the subject?
9. What knowledge, skills and abilities are promoted through these learning activities?
10. What are the objectives of applied learning?
11. What techniques are deployed in the school to engage students in applied learning?
12. What are the learning needs of students in VCAL at your school?

## APPENDIX 3 – ETHICS APPROVAL



Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH)  
Research Office

### Human Ethics Certificate of Approval

Date: 22 May 2008

Project Number: CF08/1188 - 2008000597

Project Title: Purposes and participation in post compulsory schooling: Applied learning

Chief Investigator: Prof Terri Seddon

Approved: From: 22 May 2008 To: 22 May 2014

#### Terms of approval

1. The Chief Investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, if relevant, and a copy forwarded to SCERH before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation. Failure to provide permission letters to SCERH before data collection commences is in breach of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
3. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by SCERH.
4. You should notify SCERH immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash University letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must contain your project number.
6. Amendments to the approved project (including changes in personnel): Requires the submission of a Request for Amendment form to SCERH and must not begin without written approval from SCERH. Substantial variations may require a new application.
7. Future correspondence: Please quote the project number and project title above in any further correspondence.
8. Annual reports: Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report. This is determined by the date of your letter of approval.
9. Final report: A Final Report should be provided at the conclusion of the project. SCERH should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
10. Monitoring: Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by SCERH at any time.
11. Retention and storage of data: The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.



Professor Ben Canny  
Chair, SCERH

cc: Mr John Pardy

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