Student Services Workshop
On
Dealing with Chronic Truants & Handling Very Difficult Students

Where: Warnbro Community High School, Admin Conference Room

When: Monday 8.30 to 11.30 Week 3, August 6th, 2001

Whom: Student Services Teams, Rockingham District High Schools

Please confirm your attendance with your school psychologist.
**Student Services Workshop -- PROGRAMME**

**On**

*Dealing with Chronic Truants & Handling Very Difficult Students*

Where: Warnbro Community High School, Admin Conference Room

When: Monday 8.30 to 11.30 Week 3, August 6th, 2001

Whom: Student Services Teams, Rockingham District High Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.45-9.15</td>
<td>What are you doing now?</td>
<td>Round robin report, discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.15-10.30</td>
<td>What is happening elsewhere?</td>
<td>Present truancy flowchart Presentation/ process evaluation by truancy officer 10 min Does it work?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.30-10.45</td>
<td></td>
<td>Present Deb Nunan’s truancy model</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.45-11.30</td>
<td>What may we do differently?</td>
<td>Small group discussion followed by whole group</td>
<td>Document outlining new strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.30</td>
<td>Further Meeting Discussion and Finish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey

Re: Topics for Student Services Workshop

There is interest in holding a workshop for student services staff in the three Rockingham high schools. A list of topics has been suggested. Please tick responses to the questions below.

Tick if you feel a workshop for student services staff in Rockingham High Schools is needed. [X]

If so, select two topics from the list below and rank these topics as 1 and 2.

Dealing with very difficult truants
How to handle confrontational power struggles with very difficult students
Exploration of alternative programmes for alienated teenagers
Developing suitable relevant curriculum for boys
Teaching anger management strategies
Counselling techniques with suicidal students
Diagnosing and counselling depressed students
Recognising and alleviating stress
Using Work Experience with alienated students
Active Listening skills

Other topics: EATING DISORDERS / DIFFICULTIES [X]

What would you suggest for length (tick 1)
2 half days a week apart [ ]
a half day [X]
a full day [ ]
Other [ ]

What location would you suggest for this workshop?

Please return this survey to your school psychologist by June 30. Thank you for completing it.

Name: [Signature]

Date: [Signature] 30/6/93
Children's responses to the loss of a very significant other, usually a parent

- The bereaved child does grieve and mourn
- but
- because of their different emotional, physical and cognitive development
- children exhibit behaviors different from adults
- and different from one another

Clinicians, your take home message is

- Children do not
  - grieve
  - as adults
  - do.

What is important is this

- That you recognise the grieving behaviours
- That you teach the surviving parent and those special others how to recognise these behaviours
- and

That you teach facilitation of the healing process for the child by meeting their needs at the developmental stage that they are in.

Today

- I will look at grief and children by looking at their ages, and by giving you some suggestions as to what the child may need at that age and stage of development.
- I will also give you answers to the three most difficult questions children ask: "What is death?" "Why did s/he have to die?" "Where do you go to when you die?"
Although I am using ages

- All ages and stages have a blurring. So this way of explaining grief is not set in stone, but rather to be used as an aid to help you deal with clients in the future.

Under one year of age

- Behaviours:
  - Feeding and crying
  - Sad crying and angry crying
- Needs:
  - Surrogate parenting
  - Consistent responses
  - Similar routine

We think

- That there is no lasting damage if those needs are met.

Between the ages of one and two

- Behaviours:
  - Anger, protest, sadness, despair, and regressive behaviours
- Needs:
  - Surrogate parenting
  - Consistency
  - And similar routines

However

- We know that the loss is not replaced, and that there are renewed vulnerabilities later in life.
- Research indicates a vulnerability to depression.

Two to five years

- Behaviours:
  - Anxiety, it's an unsafe world
  - Anger, frustration
  - Regression
  - Belief that their behaviour "caused" this
Five to eight years of age

- Denial, because it makes them feel so helpless
- Taught to contain emotions
- May imitate parents past ways of handling emotions
- Still believes in being the direct cause

Needs

- Be gentle with their denial. Remember it is a coping mechanism.
- Facilitate expression of thought
- Promote continuity.
- Involve teachers, other carers
- Recognise the behaviours. Accept the grief in “Bursts”

And more

- Belief that their child caused this
- Demandingness
- Yearning and looking for
- Fear of abandonment realised
- Mirror adult grief
- Fantasises

So what will help?

- Recognise these behaviours as a need for stability
- Care from surviving parent
- Normalcy where possible
- Truth and honesty

- Inclusion to their level of understanding
- Clear statements “you did not”
- Care that others do NOT idealise the parent (Remember there is still one parent left)

- Grieves in bursts
- Adopts “role” of parent who has died
- Internal distress, which cannot be voiced “If Mum can die…. Whal’bout Dad?”

- Include them in family matters to their level of understanding
- “Special” times with the remaining parent
- Straight talk
Eight to Twelve years

- Behaviours:
  - Denial
  - "Brittle" behaviour
  - Coping exterior
  - Anger and irritability
  - "Difficult," especially at school
  - May idealise the lost parent
  - Symbolic behaviour

- NB. This grieving is often missed at this age and is "discovered" later in life.

Needs

- To mourn the loss
- To help their yearning, helplessness and sadness recognised and acknowledged
- To acknowledge their fear for themselves and for their family

Continued

- To be involved in family discussions
- To be helped to see the parent realistically, humanly

A Special mention, 12 year olds

- They may exhibit behaviours that are death-defying, and show a frightening carelessness of self, and the behaviours can be fatal.

- Needs:
  - Be alert, be supportive, be "there" for them
  - No matter how they may treat you, this is a time of demonstrating love of the person, and dislike of the behaviour.

And now onto adolescence

- Where we often feel confused, don't know how to help, get away with them and more.

- So let's examine what may happen for the teenager

Teenagers

- Behaviours:
  - Similar to adults, but often overwhelming them, and they resist into denial
  - Private grieving
  - Shock, numbness and fear
  - Ambivalence
  - Emptiness
  - Waves of distress
**Teenagers cont**

- Anger - turned outwards
- or turned inwards.
- And there lies the danger of suicide.

**We can meet a teenager's needs**

**Firstly:**
- They need someone in whom they can trust. It may be a favourite Auntie, favourite teacher, or a mate, Mother, or their girl friend/boyfriend. And that's OK.

**Work through them! Support them!**
- They need to talk, and to be listened to, and to find their ways of getting relief. Allowing support is difficult for the family, remaining silent may not be their choice (it's TOO PAINFUL to see their hurt.)

**Continued**

- They need to be included in the family rituals and discussions, and to have CPAUS minimised.
- The support should be consistent, and where you can create normalacy do so.
- Watch out for excessive alcohol, encourage his or her friends to be especially caring at this time.
- Remember the drug availability in Australia, discuss this fear you have about this at an appropriate time.

**And Now those Questions**

**What is dead?**

**Dead is**

- Use an example if possible
- Remember when we saw that animal lying by the side of the road. It was still, and it wasn't breathing, and it wasn't moving. It's heart wasn't beating anymore. That animal will never breathe, or move again. It was dead.
- It's the same for people. The body doesn't move, it doesn't breathe and the heart doesn't beat. The body is still, and peaceful, there is no hurt or pain.
- That is what being dead is.

**Some people like to use the idea of plants and flowers**

- growing tall and strong,
- with green leaves, or beautiful blooms,
- and then they die

Children understand this concept very well

The book *Beginnings and Endings and Lifetimes in between* By Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen.
Should family be taking a child to the Church or Cemetery for the Funeral Service

Always prepare them. Give them enough information for them to understand, and to expect that people will cry, wear soft music, say prayers or whatever the appropriate ritual is that will be marking the service for their loved one.

This applies to taking them to see the dead relative for the last time. Prepare them for the colour and the cold, and for the fact that they don't need to be warm, and that the colour comes from our blood rushing around our body. And that they can leave little gifts in the Coffin if that is deemed appropriate. No explanation has to be graphic, but simple and straight forward.

They will ask odd questions

Like "Will they need clothes in heaven?"
"Why don't they take a suitcase with them?"
"Why didn't you put their toothbrush in with them?"

Where do you go to when you die?

- Heaven? Where's that? Do they know about Heaven? What sort of a person takes my Mother away?
- Gone to sleep? But I go to sleep every night?
- Gone on a journey? Like a Holiday to Nana's? So when is she coming back?
- Gone away? But why? Doesn't she love me anymore?

No, try

- If the family have a religion stay with their religious explanation. Be careful about abstracts though, remember developmentally that they may not understand abstracts.
- No religion? Stay with the concept of the body being like a special skin coat which she doesn't need anymore, so what made her that special person is just out there (describing an all around-us-ness like the wind, or the breeze. It's concrete and children understand what is concrete).
Story Time

Mummy, I'm going to get you a new Daddy!

Is there a life hereafter?

Any Questions?

Any story you would like to share?

THE END
Attendance Procedures

Student Absent

Note from Parent?

Form Teacher Prepares Absentee Note - Mailed from Front Office

Note Returned?

Explanation Satisfactory?

Record in Roll

Note Filed Centrally

Stop

Form Teacher Informs Year Coordinator

Year Coordinator Contacts Parents

Attendance Restored?

Yes

Inform Form Teacher

Record in Roll

Note/Inform Filed Centrally

Stop

No

Year Coordinator Seeks Support for Student from G.O., Unit, Curric Coord., W.C.E., Abolitional Support

Attendance Restored?

Yes

Inform Form Teacher

Record in Roll

Note/Inform Filed Centrally

Stop

No

Year Coordinator Informs Deputy

Deputy Explains Regulations and Legal Implications to Parent

Attendance Restored?

Yes

Inform Form Teacher

Record in Roll

Note/Inform Filed Centrally

Stop

No

School Welfare Officer Notified

Further Stages May Involve Community Welfare Law Courts Working with the School and Parent/Guardian

Courtesy of Jill Hughes
Deputy Principal
Esperance S.H.S.
OBJECTIVES

- More effective monitoring action system for absent children.
- Children to want:
  [a] to be there
  [b] to be active in their own learning program
  [c] to be active in controlling/running their school/class
  [d] to feel school/teachers/peers are part of 'extended family life' and life PESE.
- Provide meaningful learning program to children.
- Provide clear structure to child's entry/place in school.
- Involve parents more in child's life and school life.
- Develop -
  [a] teacher concern for absent children.
  [b] peer active concern for absent children.

STRATEGIES

- Develop 'BUDDY SYSTEM'.
- More immediate action eg phone call to home from BUDDY.
- Peer support.
- More relevant school curriculum - especially more active/fun activities.
- More responsibility.
- Role in the scheme of things.
- Create positive PR re school in community.
- Whole family activities eg Christmas cards.
- Develop goal setting program, staff-student negotiation re content/level of difficulty.
- Clear curriculum review/evaluation process.
- Survey of student interests.
- Development courses based on interests/abilities.
- PD - staff -
  - learning styles
  - purpose of behaviour
  - different approaches to teaching
  - stepping out.
- Replace Lower School Pathways with a learn outcomes focus.
School Refusal

Most school refusing families are very close. They display little mobility from generation to generation often living in the same house or next door. Further, schooling goes against their traditions in that it prepares the child for an independent life away from home and family. Such families could be thought of as sick or pathological, but 100 years ago they represented the norm and are still the norm in most traditional societies. It is likely that their refusal to change with the times is an index of wisdom and health, not pathology.

(Moshe Lang, 1982)

Onset

There are three peaks of onset for school refusal. The first is at school entry where the most likely cause is anxiety about separating from parent(s). A second peak occurs around the transition years between primary and secondary, at about 11 years of age. Issues at this point seem to be related to changing of schools, developmental issues relating to growing up, being bullied and feeling unsafe at school, and for some children, anxiety. The third peak is in early adolescence at around 14 years of age when depression, anxiety about academic performance, perfectionism, social worries and hopelessness about school are more common causes.

Traumatic death, loss or injury may also influence school refusal at any of these times.

School refusal affects 5 per cent of all children. Most school-refusing young people are of average intelligence. They are usually the eldest (first to attempt) or youngest (last to leave) child. In some cases, depression and mood disorders in the parent(s) seem to be an important factor.

School refusal usually begins with vague complaints about school or reluctance to attend school, sometimes with accompanying psychosomatic
complaints, and progresses to a total refusal to attend or to stay at school. Sometimes it will be preceded by conflict with a particular teacher or an unpleasant experience with school peers. Rapid onset is usually accompanied by a life-threatening event to a relative.

**Factors underlying school refusal**

1 **Anxiety-based disorders**
   a Separation anxiety affects many children and about 3½ per cent of children to a problematic extent. In extreme family situations there may be a very close parent-child relationship that cannot tolerate physical separation.
   b Anxiety about the school situation including worries about physical safety, bullying, toileting and poor work performance. This is quite common.
   c School phobia – fear and avoidance of school. This is the least common (10 per cent).

2 **Depression**
   This is more common in older children and adolescents. Often the parents also have depressive features. There is also a high incidence of death/threat of death of a close relative prior to onset in this age group.

3 **Psychotic or other disorder**
   While this is relatively uncommon, some young people who refuse to attend school do so because of severe emotional disturbances. One example is a young man who developed obsessive compulsive disorder and spent most of the day completing rituals around his dress and appearance to the extent that he couldn't get to school.

**Common patterns in the families of school-refusing young people**

Eight main patterns in families have been identified.

1 A parent suffers chronic anxiety regarding attachment figures and retains the child at home as a companion (Bowlby, 1973).
2 The young person fears parents may be harmed while he or she is at school and stays home to prevent this (Bowlby, 1973).
3 The young person fears some harm may come to them if they are away from home (Bowlby, 1973).
4 The parents fear the child may be harmed while at school (Bowlby, 1973).
5 The young person believes their anger may kill parents (Krupinska, personal communication, 1991).
6 Due to cultural/religious/sex role expectations or reasons, the family either deride the value of education or view the world as a hostile place.
7 There is distance between the school refuser and the same sex parent (usually male) and that parent was an irregular school attender (Chable, personal communication, 1991).
8 Following marital break-up, school refusal may occur as a form of protection.

The above patterns may appear in combination or separately in school-refusing families, and the existence of different patterns means that therapy needs to be tailored to the specific value system of each family. Nevertheless, it is possible to draw some overall structural patterns that appear in school-refusing families and Hawkes (1981) points out that the most common family type for school refusal has the following attributes:

- over-protective, ambivalent relationship between the school-refusing child and one parent,
- a similar ambivalent relationship between the over-involved parent and his or her own mother, and
- a disengaged passive position for the other parent.

There is often a failure of the parental subsystem, with the school-refusing child displacing one parent in the marital subsystem. Because of the enmeshment between parent and child, the sibling subsystem may also be poor.

Moshe Lang (1982) compared 40 chronic school refusers with controls (average age 13 years). Findings showed that school refusers had:

- older parents,
- more feelings of anxiety, worthlessness and emotional sensitivity,
- more depression,
- more pre-occupation with illness and death, and
- were more over-involved with their mothers than controls.

Lang proposed a feedback model between school refusal, depression and skills and abilities, i.e. inability to attend school reinforces feelings of worthlessness leading to social isolation. The school refusers' negative self-concept
2 If past therapists or workers have been involved, it is crucial to gain parental permission to contact them.

3 A thorough assessment period needs to occur in which the parents and school refuser need to be clear that nothing will be done by the therapist to try and change the current situation. Alternative forms of schooling can be arranged if necessary.

Assessment issues of particular importance are:

- The presence of depression and physical health problems in any family member. These need to be communicated if found as they are often unexpressed or kept secret.
- Cultural/social/religious beliefs – how the family members view the world and how they view success.
- Is there any activity that the school refuser feels competent in (gently suggest more of this activity, if possible, in a setting outside the home).
- How the family works together to solve problems. Does one parent side with the young person against the other parent?
- How is distance/separation and limit setting tolerated and how is it resolved?

4 As therapy begins to 'bite', families usually respond with great anger as their protective mechanisms and cherished beliefs are examined. For this reason it can be useful to contract with the family that they agree to attend a final termination session should they at any time decide to terminate therapy.

5 From an assessment of the family values, school refusal can be reframed. Some possible reframes include:
- home addiction,
- on strike,
- early retirement,
- security guard,
- nurse,
- safety officer,
- mistaken sacrifice,
- and, perhaps most importantly, sadness.

6 Depending on family dynamics, a number of possible approaches can then be used in therapy with the school refuser and their family. These include:
- Remedy cross-generational coalitions either by involving the disengaged parent with the school refusing child, disengaging extended family
members by setting parents the task of educating their child in the dangers of the world in secret from any other family member, or by using invariant prescription methods (Selvini-Palazzoli, Cirillo, Selvini & Sorrentino, 1989).

- Career pathing – exploration of school versus non-school future.
- Pressure testing – raise the dilemma of whether it is better for your child to stay at home and be safe or to go out into world (and to school) so that they will be better able to recognise dangers.
- Raise the notion that the school refuser is not yet convinced that the parents really want him or her to go to school (Chable, personal communication, 1991).
- Where the family’s values seem to be a major impediment to the child returning to school, it can be useful to consider using a respected person such as a church leader, cultural advocate or police constable to advise the family on social and safety matters.
- As the adolescent is often in a powerful position being the main intermediary between the school and the parents, it is important to modify this position by arranging a direct consultation between the parents, the school and the therapist. As Green (1985) has pointed out, it is important to maintain the focus on the adolescent and to promote a collaborative relationship between parents and the school thereby removing the adolescent’s role as communicator. Green also stresses the importance of preparing both the parents and the school prior to the joint consultation and of protecting the family’s privacy.

In summary, school refusal can be an indicator of more serious troubles in a family’s or young person’s life. The decision not to proceed with education is a major life choice with increasingly marked consequences. The common issues of despair, fear and depression in families with a school-refusing member mean that it is vital to incorporate parents into the treatment plan and to work collaboratively with them.
TRUANCY: FROM CAUSES TO PROGRAM DIRECTION

Marilyn Leeds
Assistant Youth Consultant
Youth Co-ordination and Planning Unit
NSW Department of Environment

This article considers recent research on truancy in Australia. The research reports consider what factors operate to cause young people to truant. The main reasons seem to be aspects of school organisation or 'pre-dispositional' factors such as socio-economic class. These reasons are not incompatible and help to explain why only a portion of school students truant. Program directions for dealing with truancy follow from consideration of what causes can be realistically worked on.

Truancy usually refers to school students' non-attendance which does not have a 'legitimate' excuse in the eyes of school authorities. School authorities see school absences as 'legitimate' if they are for a good reason such as illness and if that reason is then explained by a parent. Illegitimate absences are those which lack a good reason but may be taken with parents' active or passive approval (parent condoned absences). Illegitimate absences are also taken without parents' knowledge. Truancy may arise from infrequent absences or it may refer to frequent absences: the chronic truant. Chronic truants tend to ignore causes of absences and may be produced.

The Child Welfare Act 1939 - allows a complaint to be laid against a child for school non-attendance which can be a ground for neglect proceedings. In New South Wales a new act, the Community Welfare Act, is being introduced. However, at this stage it is unclear what can be done under the Act with a child who truants. Section 44(4), in defining a child in need of care, does not specifically mention truancy. Apart from legal requirements, attendance at school is considered important because it is believed that schools promote equality of opportunity. Moreover, school and credentials are believed to be protection against unemployment. For this reason, some educationalists and labour market analysts have suggested school leaving age in Australia should be increased so that a more skilled, less unemployment-prone labour force may be produced.

Reasons for non-attendance

The bulletin of the National Childcare House for Youth Studies

The bulletin of the National Childcare House for Youth Studies

The bulletin of the National Childcare House for Youth Studies

In 1979, with the help of a Schools Commission Innovations Grant, the Care Force Learning Centre was set up to work with chronic truants. It ran for two and a half years, with 31 attending. The experience of the staff attached to the centre suggests other factors caused the population they dealt with to be school non-attenders. The majority of their students were quiet and well-behaved when at school. Academically, they were under-achievers, though only a few were of low intelligence. Many of those who were intelligent or had achieved quite well at school regarded their own achievement as hopeless. Many had experienced a great deal of family trauma although conditions were often stable. Many were living in single parent families.

What is interesting is that the truants voluntarily attended the learning centre. The truants explained that the learning centre was small and people cared more about each other: schools were too big. While truants were at the centre many became ambitious to continue their education; when they returned to the larger school they could not cope. Denne concludes that truancy will stop when young people feel comfortable at school and the experience of the Care Force Learning Centre was that most chronic truants were retreating from a massive school system in which they could not cope (Denne, 1981). These views reinforce earlier statements by Howes (1979). She wrote, the one fact that is constant in all cases is the child's inability or unwillingness to cope with the socially-imposed compulsion of school for a certain number of days per week. She suggests several areas where students may be alienated from schooling: the curriculum, teacher-pupil relationship, discipline, competition and educational achievement, control within schools, and school rules.

In 1985 a report was done on non-attendance in the Mount Druitt area (Eades, 1985). It was considered that Mount Druitt had a similar percentage of absent students to other schools but of these the percentage of chronic non-attenders, including parent condoned absences, was higher than elsewhere. To obtain insights into non-
attendance the researcher used several methods, one of which was to spend six weeks observing non-attenders and talking with them. These observations were carried out in shopping centres, on the trains, in and around the stormwater drains and other hangouts for non-attenders. The results of these observations are very interesting. The majority of non-attenders observed in shopping centres were girls and tended to be 'genuinely helping the mother with shopping or carrying the shopping'. Groups of young people predominately male were seen riding the trains (often smoking). In and around stormwater drains 'jumpers' were predominantly male and most were away from school without parent approval.

Eades' interviews with young people indicated their reasons for not being at school. They felt the teachers did not know, like or understand young people from Mount Druitt. Teachers came for a short period of time and left. They had little capacity for listening, they just kept picking on shouting, threatening and 'going mad'. Classes were too big for slow kids, much work was unexplained, they were made to feel 'useless'. School and learning had little intrinsic value to the group. Eades sees school-based factors as the prime cause in Mount Druitt 'in the sense of being the direct cause' but he feels these only operate because of a pre-disposition towards non-attendance created by socio-economic factors. Socio-economic factors also have a causal relationship with familial factors which in turn influence non-attendance. Eades cautions that this truancy model may not work in other areas, such as areas of high socio-economic status.

Implications

Much of the current Australian research literature shows that school-related factors are the immediate precipitating events which cause young people to truant. Yet it is clear that, even if school factors have this potential, not all young people at school truant. One explanation for truancy occurring only in a section of school populations is linked to forms of resistance. Hawkins (1982) has pointed out that schools, because they are organised as power structures, produce the unintended effects of resentment and resistance. Resistance may take several forms, such as dawdling between classes, inattention, truancy and many other forms. Thus students who are alienated from the school system select a particular form of resistance.

The explanation from the Victorian report Skippen School was that truancy was more prevalent among students 'who had lower levels of relative educational achievement and more negative perceptions of the importance of school and schooling...'. (Coventry et al., p 126). The report pointed out that the status origins of families and their schooling experiences were important influences on commitment to schooling. These findings are compatible with Eades' research which showed that there are pre-dispositional factors at work which make truancy more likely for some students.

On the other hand, Denne's report on the Care Force Learning Centre locates the problem of truancy in school organisation and school size. The presumption is that some young people are less able to tolerate the organisational stresses but indicators of who this group will be are not discussed. Further research on this group might have shown it had characteristics observed by Coventry et al. and Eades. However, Hawkins and Hounslow suggest that alienation with the school system may be quite widespread. From recent research in Australia it appears then, the young people who truant dislike school organisational features and have a pre-disposition towards truancy which is related to a complex of characteristics including socio-economic status.

In dealing with truancy it seems most realistic to direct attention to the school aspect of the problem - that is, to acknowledge school organisation adversely affects many young people and should be changed. The 'pre-disposition' side of the problem should not be totally ignored but obviously it is much harder to change such aspects as socio-economic status. However, schools need to be aware of the 'pre-disposition' and take steps to overcome, where possible, family attitudes, fears and so on. If we are truly concerned about equality of opportunity for all, then the present format of school education must be able to accommodate various student groups including truants. Much good work is currently done with disadvantaged groups; truants now must be recognised as a group with special programming needs. It would be ludicrous to increase the school leaving age before the problem of truancy has been solved.

References


BROWN, Robert

School Refusal: A Literature Review.

Welfare in Australia


Workers with youth are often confronted with the school refuser, and with his/her perplexed parents who are at a loss to 'explain' the course of his/her behaviour. In this review the author traces the development of the two distinct literatures dealing with the truant and the school phobic and how these theories and more recent and divergent studies have all offered findings to account for school attendance and school refusal.

† indicates Abstract entries
The Tasmanian Retention Analysis (TASRA)

A large scale study of secondary and tertiary retention in Tasmania has resulted in isolating certain factors affecting whether secondary students drop out or remain in school after Grade 10. Such factors include where the student lives - particularly students in rural areas attending district high schools, material disadvantage, and job opportunities. Girls have higher dropout rates than boys and fewer girls go on to tertiary education. Interviews with students indicated that many students felt unprepared for Grade 11 studies, especially students in government and district high schools; girls felt particularly disadvantaged by lack of preparation, and suggested more homework and help with exam and study techniques. More attention should be focused on unintended school leavers, particularly girls in general, and boys from rural areas attending district high schools.

The Tasmanian Retention Analysis

Joan Abbott-Chapman
Research Fellow
Department of Teacher Education
University of Tasmania

A large scale study of secondary and tertiary retention in Tasmania has just been completed by researchers at the Centre for Education, University of Tasmania, to examine the educational and career paths of a total year cohort throughout the State by means of an Entrants' Data Analysis of 2,640 known individuals who attended Grade 11 in 1982 (within both the government and non-government institutions) and two subsequent questionnaire surveys. The resulting report (Abbott-Chapman, Hughes and Wyld, 1988) has been submitted to the Australian Commonwealth Schools Commission, and copies are now available from the Department of Teacher Education, Centre for Education, University of Tasmania. It is commonly impossible to summarise all the findings in a short article, but it is perhaps useful to concentrate upon some findings relating to target groups at risk of premature dropping out and who represent a waste of human talent. Among these most notable are girls throughout the system, and rural boys.

In brief, certain demographic institutional and personal factors have been found to influence retention and participation at both the secondary and tertiary levels. Some of these factors have been noted in earlier research, others are perhaps more unexpected.

Demographic factors

Demographic factors relate to area of home residence and reflect access to and availability of certain sorts of educational institution, as well as to community values and culture, and socioeconomic factors. The impact of rurality for instance is widely noted in the literature (see, for example, Behrens, 1975; Stoessiger, 1980; Beswick, 1988). What we have attempted to do, and what the current phase of the research continues to do, is examine exactly those parameters and characteristics of what is meant by rurality or indeed urbanity. In regional terms, residents of Hobart are over-represented at entry to Grade 11, and to tertiary institutions, whilst residents of the North West, and especially West are under-represented. Rather unexpectedly, however, Launceston, Tasmania's second city, is under-represented relative to both inner and outer Hobart.

Tasmania is by various measures the most rural of the states, but residents of rural areas in localities of 999 population or less (which represent 25 per cent of the State's population) are grossly the influence of where people live on educational survival past compulsory secondary school age that certain postcode areas are seen to be associated with positive or negative retention patterns - irrespective of whether a government or non-government high school was attended. Residents of the more affluent residential areas of Sandy Bay, Taroona and Kingston for instance are over-represented at entry to both Grade 11 and tertiary institutions.

Influence of institution attended

Modifying influences upon advantage or disadvantage experienced in a demographic sense are exercised by educational institutions attended at Grade 10 and at Grade 11. In addition, relationship with teachers in a pastoral as well as instructional sense, and the degree of preparation given for each succeeding educational stage have been found to be positively related to improved retention. Not only are there differences in opportunity and retention related to attendance at a government or non-government school at Grade 10 - but there are differences between the types of schools within these categories. District high schools and high schools associated with non-government Catholic and non-Catholic schools are associated with different retention patterns, different work, and study 'mosaics' and different levels of unemployment experience. In all this, those who attended district high schools in our cohort appear to be most disadvantaged. Rurality may thus be exacerbated or ameliorated by institutional differences attended, and at the secondary level only 16.9 per cent of those who had attended a district high school survived into Grade 11 at a government secondary college compared with 29.6 per cent of those who had previously attended a government high school. Comparable figures for movement into Grade 11 of non-government Catholic and non-government/non-Catholic school students are 42.7 and 35.5 per cent. Figures put out by the Education Department on average year 7-11 survival rates 1980/81 also show the district high schools as having the worst survival rates of all the government schools (see Abbott-Chapman, Hughes and Wyld, 1986, Vol. 2, p. 109). This is not to say that over time the district high schools have not improved the opportunity for rural youth, since historically rural retention rates have been much worse than they now are (Phillips, 1985).

The Bulletin of the National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies

Vol. 6 No. 1

24
not only to real costs of further or higher education but also to perceptions of gain or sacrifice, especially among children of lower socio-economic status families. The 1981 Tertiary Education Allowance Scheme (TEAS) evaluation study highlighted this (Beck et al., 1981). Students from lower socio-economic status backgrounds, students from Catholic schools, older students and particularly students from country home addresses were more likely than others to turn down places because of the anticipated cost factor.

A larger proportion of country school students from the district high schools than the high schools in the TASRA study experienced material disadvantage. Perhaps surprisingly, 24 percent of the girls who had attended district high schools and gone on to secondary colleges said they had suffered some material disadvantages, whilst it is likely that more boys in this disadvantaged situation had dropped out. This factor contributes to the over-representation of girls from the rural areas at the secondary college level.

Our interview program supplemented the evidence of the questionnaire data by showing reactions to existing financial assistance programs. A general criticism about the low level and condition of TEAS was expressed, and about the struggle to continue with education against material and financial disadvantage. Lack of suitable, affordable accommodation, and adequate economic transport, for those outside the main urban centers, aroused much comment. Those receiving TEAS considered it only adequate if they live with their parents (a factor in the large bias towards Hobart residence of university students). Many students from disadvantaged areas at both the secondary and tertiary level, even if not deterred from continuing studies, scrape along in the most difficult of circumstances.

Experience of unemployment among the whole cohort was widespread and as many as 40 percent of secondary college leavers and 28 percent of non-government school leavers had experienced one or more periods of unemployment. The career paths of young people appear less and less as a series of ladders and more and more as a complex kaleidoscope or a mosaic as they pass in and out of work, study and unemployment, often deferring study for financial reasons or to get a job and qualify for TEAS.

The Bulletin of the National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies  
Vol.6 No.1

Motivational patterns

Reasons given for students' decisions to stay or drop out were ranked important, emphasising the importance of getting a job in a climate of economic depression and growing youth unemployment, findings supported by earlier studies. Fifty nine percent of secondary college leavers and 20 percent of non-government school leavers said that 'liking to study' was important in their decision to continue with their studies, whether or not they related this also to the need for qualifications — although the lower proportion among non-government school leavers may be found surprising. Need for qualifications was important to 83 percent of secondary college leavers and 60 percent of non-government school leavers.

In the analysis of responses it became clear that certain patterns of reasons ranked as important by the students recurred consistently. On the basis of these findings certain motivational categories in relation to work and study were drawn up. These are as follows: academic, professional and vocational, job oriented students, unintended leavers, non-academic workers, anti-academic workers. (A full description of the meaning of these categories will be found in the report.)

Some illuminating variations are found among the gender distributions within these motivational categories. From these we find that a higher proportion of girls than boys in both the government and non-government school samples are classed as academic, whilst few are 'unintended leavers'. There has been some suggestion elsewhere that substantial numbers of girls stay on past Grade 10, especially in the secondary colleges — 30 percent of girls from secondary schools and 36 percent of boys, compared with 42 percent of girls from non-government schools, and 41 percent of boys. In addition, boys to a much greater extent than girls, undertake part-time studies, often in combination with work.

Preparation for Grade 11 studies

In looking for institutional factors associated with retention we asked whether leavers felt they had been prepared by their high school for Grade 11 studies at secondary college or their non-government school. Unfortunately in general the responses to this question were not very positive — only 35 percent of those in government schools said they had been sufficiently prepared, compared with 55 percent of those in non-government schools. These figures are even more illuminating when we categorise by institutional type — showing that 18 percent of those who had studied at non-government/non-Catholic schools, 32 percent from non-government Catholic schools, 46 percent from government high schools and 58 percent from district high schools said they had not been prepared sufficiently for the Grade 10/11 transition.

When asked how matters could be improved, leavers suggested additional information and guidance services, especially regarding subject choice and career options, and perhaps surprisingly higher academic standards, more help with exam and study techniques and more homework.
Tables 1 and 2 show the gender differences in response to the question about preparation. These reveal quite starkly the degree to which girls from both government and non-government schools say they were not adequately prepared for the Grade 10/11 transition - approximately 2 to 1 in each category. As many as 50 per cent of the girls from government schools compared with 39 per cent of boys said they had not received sufficient preparation. When asked how matters could be improved the most quoted suggestion by girls was 'more homework' including more advice on preparation of assignments, and writing of essays. (Some teachers say that girls are just more conscientious!)

Girls appear to do well when there are strong institutional supports, good guidance services on range of options available and positive role models to emulate. Otherwise even those of higher ability levels, may be at risk of dropping out especially if they suffer demographic and material disadvantage. All projects and programs which give girls educational encouragement and show them the range of educational and career options open to them are to be welcomed.

Influence of rurality

The same remarks equally apply to boys who live in rural areas and attend district high schools. The pressures of family values and demands of the rural economy, coupled with material disadvantage and lack of sufficient encouragement to stay on in some school environments, leads to a heavy loss of rural boys not only at the Grade 10/11 transition - but even prior to this stage. Research into the Grade 10 cohort (the 7075 students from whom the Grade 11 cohort under study are drawn) has revealed interesting evidence on this point.

It appears that there has already been substantial loss before entry to Grade 10, presumably of those who, having reached statutory leaving age, are allowed to leave mid-year or prior to Grade 10. The highest proportion of dropouts occurs among male students of the district high schools, as many as 11 per cent by entry to Grade 10. This accentuates the imbalance towards female students at Grade 10 and beyond who are drawn from the rural areas.

Other figures at hand from the continuation study reveal a 24 per cent survival rate for females and only a 10 per cent survival rate for males across the Grade 10/11 transition from the rural district high schools into the secondary colleges (Abbott-Chapman, Hughes and Wyld, 1986/7).

Recommendations for action

If retention is to be improved, and if student wastage is to be reduced, we must ensure that the unintended leavers or those who would otherwise benefit from continuing their education beyond post-compulsory level are enabled to do so. This means that resources must be used to develop retention strategies for the target groups at risk rather than merely across the board. Girls, in general, and boys from rural areas who attend district high schools, comprise two such target groups in Tasmania. Certain disadvantaged areas or regions, as in the West and North West of Tasmania, have higher concentrations of these target groups.

School based initiatives which address the particular needs of those at risk must therefore be developed within the local setting if we are to see substantial improvement in secondary and tertiary participation. These would include extended information and counselling services, secondary college 'orientation' courses of the kind presently being set up, and greater attention to guidance on subject choice and subject mix, which would prepare students for further and tertiary study. More help with study and examination techniques has also been requested by students and, surprisingly perhaps, more homework!

On a state-wide level there is a need for resources designed to reduce the impact of material disadvantage and rural isolation, especially in the areas of subsidised accommodation and travel. Financial and practical help in these areas would contribute considerably to rural retention, and the retention of students from low socio-economic status families, and disadvantaged areas.

References


Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 10 high school preparation</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Row total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>56.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLUMN TOTAL</td>
<td>672</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>1172</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 11 high school preparation</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Row total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>54.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLUMN TOTAL</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>210</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>471</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

...
The future for CYSS lies in a client-centred evaluation and the development of labour market programs. The presumption that young people need welfare is not developing their potential, is restricting their capacity to contribute to the wider society and not giving them skills to re-create our communities.

Note: The Tasmanian State Advisory Committee has sent this article to the Central Office of DEIR for comments. In light of the general debate about CYSS and the finalisation of guidelines, the author would welcome comments on it.

References


OECD (1984), Australian Youth Employment Policy Review.


Kirby, Peter (1985a), The Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Labour Market Programs, AGPS, Canberra.


A SURVEY OF 23 ABORIGINAL EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS CURRENTLY UNEMPLOYED

Athol Gillon, Eric Knight and Dr Mark Harris

Medical Centre, Bourke, NSW

This article surveys the reasons for Aboriginals in Bourke leaving school early and their attitudes towards further education and work. It also examines the effect of unemployment on their health and lifestyle.

Introduction:

This survey was undertaken in May/June 1985 in Bourke to examine the effect of unemployment on young Aboriginal people between the ages of 14 and 24. It sought to look at some of the reasons for the high drop out rate among Aboriginal high school students, the effects unemployment had on their health, and their ability to cope financially, as well as their attitudes to further education and work.

Respondents were randomly selected and interviews were carried out on the street, at the Community Youth Support Scheme office or in the respondent’s home. All were asked the same 19 questions and some made more than one reply to each question. Twenty three people were interviewed: 11 male and 12 female. Their average age was 19 at the time of interview; the average age that the respondents left school was 15; the average class at which they left school was Year 9; and the average length of unemployment was 3 years.

Reasons for leaving school

As shown in Table 1, problems with teachers was a major contributing factor to the respondents deciding to leave school, together with problems with the work being either too hard or too boring. No respondent cited problems or difficulties at home as a major reason for leaving school.

Table 1. Reasons for Leaving School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not up to standard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angry at school scene</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expelled</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work too easy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work boring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work too hard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual responses</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BACK ISSUES - SPECIAL OFFER

We have limited sets of back issues of Youth Studies Bulletin and Youth Studies Abstracts available at a reduced rate of $50 for journals from 1983-1985 inclusive (32 volumes).

Please send your orders to:
The National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, University of Tasmania, G.P.O. Box 252C, Hobart, Tasmania 7001.
Effects of unemployment

Table 2 clearly shows the perceived effect of unemployment on the respondents. They felt that they drank and smoked more as a result of their unemployment; use of marijuana was also seen as related to their unemployment. Tiredness, anger, sleep disturbances and sickness were seen as associated health problems. Two respondents felt that their unemployment was having an effect on their parents and relatives.

Table 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health Effects of Unemployment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Individual responses

Further education

The majority of people interviewed stated that they wanted to return to school. Eight of the respondents had been to technical college and a further eight had thought of going. All respondents said that they regretted leaving school so young. They all believed that having a good education is important in getting a job.

All respondents said that they were having difficulty in finding work. Table 3 shows that they saw lack of qualifications, possible racial prejudice and having to leave Bourke as the biggest problems in finding work.

Table 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Difficulty in Finding Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Individual responses

Source of income

Respondents were asked their source of income and whether they were able to cope on this amount of money. The main source of income for males was unemployment benefits while women were receiving supporting parents benefits and unemployment benefits. Two respondents had no income and one was receiving the Tertiary Education Allowance.

Respondents expressed difficulty in surviving on the money they received. It was clear that all are having trouble coping on their income, especially those who are also trying to raise children.

Type of work sought

When asked what type of work they were interested in doing 12 were interested in the motor industry, 8 in clerical and office work, 5 in motor trades, 4 in rural employment and 4 in the service industry.

Summary of the results of the survey

- the majority of students left school because of problems with teachers and difficulties with school work;
- all the respondents regret having left school as they see a good education as necessary for finding work;
- the majority would like to have the opportunity to return to school;
- not having qualifications, possible racial prejudice, and having to leave Bourke were seen as major difficulties in finding work;
- all but two respondents, who had no income, were on some form of Social Security Benefit;
- many were having real difficulties coping on their income;
- respondents felt that unemployment had affected them and their health. Drinking, smoking, feeling angry, sleep disturbances, tiredness, and use of marijuana were cited as problem areas as well as symptoms of depression.

Action needed

The survey shows there is a need for action in the following areas:

- Provision of opportunities for students to return to school;
- Problems leading to students dropping out should be addressed by the high schools;
- Introductory and mainstream courses should be provided in areas where respondents are looking for work; an introductory course may improve the young person's general education level as well as encourage him/her to leave Bourke for further study;
- Community recognition that unemployment is having effects on the respondents and leading to abuse of alcohol and tobacco which have long term health consequences;
- Support should be given to any moves to increase the level of Social Security Benefits.

Invitation to Contribute

The Editor would like to hear from people who would like to write on youth related topics. Such topics include: secondary education, training, PEP, youth support schemes, disadvantaged youth, housing, welfare, health, leisure/culture, needs of ethnic youth, and young women. There is a guide to contributors in the back of this edition.