

Paths to Pathways: Vocational Education and Training (VET) provision for Educationally Disadvantaged Groups

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ABSTRACT

The proposed research will inform policy and practice in Vocational Education and Training provision for groups whose current qualifications and skills do not give them access to the lower levels of existing VET. The Finn, Carmichael and Mayer reports all advocate the increased involvement of young people in VET both in school up to year 12 and beyond. The national targets advocated by Carmichael for 19 and 20 years olds involved in VET are beyond access for early school leavers and other educationally disadvantaged groups. The study, while focused on regional needs will have a national significance, in the application of the findings to other similar areas already identified by ABS and DEET. The research will therefore be able to explore relationships between programs, providers and identified needs. The region to be studied has been severely affected by labour market restructuring and several groups with special needs have already been identified as not participating in even the lower levels of Vocational Education and Training. The research will identify student attrition and completion rates aiming to identify the reasons behind these rates.

The research will examine established links with industry and document the local experience in employment and VET of these young people and long term unemployed with a view to documenting successful strategies for further application in other regions nationally. Drawing together local providers, young and long term unemployed people to examine these issues and the policy which drives, will provide research data which can be used to improve the implementation of VET programs and the gaps in provision which are not currently addressed in similar regions nationally.

Introduction

Throughout Australia there are certain areas where VET does not appear to be meeting the needs of disadvantaged young people. Geelong is one such regional centre, within which the suburb of Corio is the most severely affected. In this paper we will be describing the work in progress in the ANTA RAC funded project we are conducting at Deakin

University this year. We will be discussing the work we have undertaken to date and some of our interim findings and recommendations. This research project grew out of the concerns of providers and trainers already working in VET, ALBE and Labour Market Programs in the Corio area. A number of different providers agreed that they found it extremely difficult to provide training programs which appealed to these young people. Lack of participation in these programs by early school leavers for example, has been identified by DEETYA and VET providers, both 'public' in the sense of TAFE, AMES, ACFE, and new 'private providers', as a major concern and cause to suggest that considerable numbers of young people in this area are not being reached by existing programs. They found they were unable to fill their courses or courses began and within a few weeks the students

dropped out.

There is an extremely high rate of early school leavers in the Corio area with many young people leaving school before the end of Year 12 and disturbingly high rates leaving before completing Year 10. For these young people there is no clear pathway into VET programs (ACOSS Paper No 77). Many of these young people leave school by mid year but until they have been unemployed for six months they are not eligible for a range of post 'school' or Labour Market Programs. It seems that for some of these young people leaving school with low levels of literacy and numeracy skills, they were unable to access VET programs and appeared to be unwilling to go back to 'school' where they had recently experienced failure and alienation, into a basic skills program which would prepare them for entry into the main stream VET programs.

There remains an extremely high rate of unemployment in Corio, the highest for the Geelong region. The youth labour market in the region has virtually disappeared. The traditional pathways from school into vocational education and training have become scarce, resulting in high levels of unemployment amongst young people in the region. New VET options have not as yet become established as viable for those with the lowest levels of skills. There is an urgent need to understand

- why young people are and are not making their way into VET,
- how various approaches of linking young people with VET are faring, and
- how these links to VET might be increased and improved for NESB learners, including for example family members of disengaged young people.

There are significant instances of intergenerational unemployment, with as many as three generations in the family being unemployed. some program providers have reported having both parents and children in the one VET program, a difficult situation for all concerned. When young people are surrounded by family, friends and their peer group, with very few adult in fulltime employment, establishing a positive link between VET and employment outcomes is

extremely difficult to sustain.

As well as this, the area has large numbers of people from non English speaking background and some Koori communities. These generally fall into two groups: long term residents who migrated twenty to thirty years earlier and immediately found work in local enterprises. With the recession of the eighties, these people along with many others in the region, have been retrenched, who now may find that their English literacy skills are not adequate for reemployment. Recently there has been new migration, mainly of refugees, many of whom have experienced interrupted schooling and the trauma of war and find it very difficult to move into the labour market.

The reasons that VET seems not to be meeting the needs of young people and other special groups living in this community are complex and appear to cut across the boundaries of targeted programs. The aim of the proposed research is to identify the reasons for lack of participation in VET in this region with a view to providing more access to VET for disadvantaged groups in the future. The situation in Geelong is mirrored in other regions of Australia where the manufacturing base has declined or shifted in emphasis; it is expected that the study will inform VET practice throughout Australia. A serious concern is the relationships between these special needs in the area and their role in the reproduction of disadvantage. The researchers recognise that these educational and training needs intersect with other community needs and that these require documentation to ensure that VET interacts constructively with other

community enhancement programs.

There is a growing body of research which documents the fact that certain groups of young people are not being reached by existing VET provision. This proposed research project aims to identify and refine

- the definition and description of these groups
- their attitudes towards existing VET programs
- their participation, reluctance and attrition rates .
- relationships between programs, providers and identified needs of young people (15-20 years of age) in the Corio area of Geelong.
- future courses of action for similar regionalized industrial centres.

Thus the project objectives are

- to identify groups of young people who at present are unwilling or unable to participate in the current range of VET provision and explore their experiences and expectations
- to interview young people as to their experiences of participating or not participating in VET
- to explore relationships between programs, providers and identified needs in the Corio area of Geelong
- to document successful strategies for further application in other

regions nationally

- to examine student participation, completion and attrition rates aiming to identify the reasons behind these rates.
- to draw implications for other similar areas nationally .
- to examine established links with industry and document the local experience in employment and VET of these young people and long term unemployed .
- to identify the understandings of VET amongst the local providers and the senior secondary colleges.

The research will inform policy and practice in Vocational Education and Training provision for groups whose current qualifications and skills do not give them access to the lower levels of existing VET. The Finn, Carmichael and Mayer reports all advocate the increased involvement of young people in VET both in school up to Year 12 and beyond. The national targets advocated by Carmichael for 19 and 20 years olds involved in VET are beyond access for early school leavers and other educationally disadvantaged groups. That is, disaffection, failure and alienation with formal education in the area begins early, and has effects which are likely to be relevant to efforts to entice young people into other educational and training settings. The study, while focused on regional needs will have a national significance, in the application of the findings to other similar areas already identified by ABS and DEETYA. The research will therefore be able to explore relationships between programs, providers and identified needs.

The region to be studied has been severely affected by labour market restructuring and several groups with special needs have already been identified as not participating in even the lower levels of Vocational Education and Training. The research will examine established links with industry and document the local experience in employment and VET of these young people and long term unemployed with a view to documenting successful strategies for further application in other regions nationally. Drawing together local providers, young and long term unemployed people to examine these issues and the policy which drives, will provide research data which can be used to improve the implementation of VET programs and the gaps in provision which are not currently addressed in similar regions nationally.

There are several sites in Australia where economic restructuring and subsequent slow recovery are impacting adversely on the employment options for young people and those who have become unemployed.

Preliminary work by ABS and DEETYA suggests that such areas can be identified in a number of communities in a number of states and territories. Geelong is such an area; a large regional centre which has been adversely affected by labour market reconstruction. The region includes both rural and urban areas, some parts being quite affluent, some experiencing high levels of unemployment and social fragmentation. In the past Geelong was a centre for the textile

clothing and footwear industry and the automotive industry, as well as a number of other heavy industries and transport serviced by the port. Many of these industries have closed down whilst others have cut back their employment base markedly. Thus the labour market in the Geelong region has declined rapidly, with little sign of recovery yet present. It is unlikely that the labour market in the Geelong region will increase substantially in the near future; industries which used to operate in the region are unlikely to resume operations at high levels.

This research, while focusing specifically on the situation in Geelong, can be seen as an indicator of similar patterns on a national level. The findings of this research project will have implications at a number of other sites nationally and similar projects could be replicated in such areas.

There are a range of national and regional factors impacting on the region. The continued decline of the youth labour market has impacted in a similar manner to both national and international trends. Whilst the national rate for youth unemployment now stands at around 27% (Reith 1996) in this region the rate is much higher. All the factors identified as resulting in disadvantage with regard to employment are found here: few jobs, low levels of skills amongst the early school leavers and a range of social factors which make it very difficult for these young people to maintain employment. Many of the young people have left home and move around a great deal in the process of reestablishing themselves, some experiencing periods of homelessness.

As well as the national factors impacting on employment opportunities for young people and the related VET programs which might be offered, there are a range of regional factors to be taken into consideration. The impact of the restructuring of the 80's on the Geelong region is still being felt. Geelong experienced extensive closure of the textile, clothing and footwear industries which have not been replaced. Thus the traditional vocational pathways into employment for many young people have been lost without any significant replacement. The recession in Geelong continues; BHP, ALCOA, and Ford, three of the major employers, are all experiencing further restructuring and jobloss in the hundreds is being mooted.

This continued jobloss from the eighties has impacted heavily on the Corio community which remains an area of low socio economic status. There are now high levels of intergenerational unemployment, and in some schools more than fifty percent of the parents are unemployed. The area has a relatively mixed community with a large non English speaking background community as well as some Koori groups. Many of the adult in the area have low levels of skill in terms of literacy and numeracy and thus find it difficult to find work in such an employment climate. There is a considerable need for young people in particular to move into VET. The region experiences levels of unemployment higher

than the national average, with particularly high levels amongst young people.

The research will recognise and collect perspectives of various 'stakeholders', such as employed and unemployed people living in the

area, providers of VET programs, welfare agencies working in the community, local schools, particularly the Corio Community College, DEETYA, CES, local enterprises and employers and community groups. The relationships with the secondary education program and subsequent providers in the area needs to be researched and perhaps new sets of relationships and options developed for those who at this time are choosing to leave school before completing Year Ten. In recent discussions with DEETYA, ACFE, the Corio Community College and a number of Neighbourhood and Community Centres, this issue has been identified as a matter of concern as the current approaches are failing to reach the target groups at a satisfactory level. All these providers agree and support the need for a project to research this failure to involve young people in this region in VET programs at levels aimed for in current policy.

With limited employment options available to young people in the area, other difficulties with regard to VET have already been identified. The region has a range of VET and labour market programs already in place, which are proving successful for those living in other areas of the region. Providers and educators in the area are concerned about the low participation rates in higher levels of schooling and VET in the Corio area but as yet have not been able to identify in what ways the VET programs are failing to meet the needs of this disaffected and educationally disadvantaged group. The longer that the young people in particular remain unemployed and outside VET, the more difficult it is going to be for them to begin to participate in the labour market. A common form of employment for youth is that of part time low skilled work. Whilst others might see this unfavourably as the development of a secondary market for youth (outside the VET sector) with little opportunity for advancement, the actual preferences of young people themselves need to be researched, understood and associated with training aspirations.

Research methodology

The research is being conducted using a combination of case study and action research methodologies. The aim has been to document young people's views on a range of issues impacting on participation in VET programs. The aim has been to include young people in the research as much as possible, by working with young people who have become interviewers, research assistants and recorders of both audio and video tapes of local events. The researchers aimed to involve these young people in the research project itself, rather than use outside researchers as the chief investigators. The researchers will work

closely with VET program providers and practitioners to review existing practices and to reformulate policy, pedagogy, organisation and support.

The research aims to identify current successful outcomes in terms of program provision, pedagogical practices and gather participants' views of how provision might be enhanced and improved. The researchers work closely with participants and other stakeholders to ensure that the process of enquiry itself begins to exert immediate effects on policy and practice at the local level in the first instance, but extending to a national level as the findings of the study become more explicit and consequently make appropriate recommendations for change at a wider policy level. That is, the project will be reflexive as a process, as well as providing formal reports for use beyond the site of study.

The methods used included audio and video taped interviews, both individual and group, which were later transcribed and participants will have the opportunity to make any corrections. Young people are working on making a video as a representation of their understandings

of these issues which at a later stage will be presented to the young people for their feedback. A series of community focus group meetings have been held, with all those groups who have an interest in the provision of VET, further education and Labour Market Programs in the area as well as those community service agencies working with young people. A series of interviews have been undertaken by both student interviewers and Deakin researchers. Those being interviewed fall into several groups.

Interviews have been conducted with the young people in the target groups – the potential 'students' and other young people who have at some stage participated in VET programs. The first group were young people of both English and non English speaking background who had left school before the completion of Year 12 as well as those who had left at an earlier stage. Many of the school students had friends in the local area who had left school and had not participated in VET courses.

A second group of interviews with providers of VET and Labour Market Programs, program managers and teachers and trainers, including TAFE, AMES, ACFE and other registered private providers have been conducted. Interviews with other community service providers, for example, Neighbourhood and Community Centres, Brotherhood of St Lawrence, Salvation Army and family agencies to ascertain their views on the particular difficulties and possibilities for VET in this area. A third group fall within the government agencies working in this sector.

Interviews with DEETYA staff including CES Case Managers and those with responsibility for a range of youth focused programs. A fourth group of interviews have been conducted with local school staff including careers, welfare and VET teachers and coordinators. And finally interviews with local employers as to their employment patterns

and attitudes towards the employment of these young people who at this stage of their lives are still in need of a great deal of support, before they are able to become employable, productive adults.

Interim findings

While the field of VET remains one of the most problematic when compared with other sectors of education (being a largely deregulated, de institutionalised and extremely diverse range of programs aimed to cater both for those in employment as well as those seeking to enter the labour market) we have found a tremendous degree of enthusiasm, commitment and motivation amongst those working in the sector. There is a tremendous sense of pride and achievement in the positive outcomes which have been achieved, a very strong network, amongst agencies and providers and a great deal of 'strategic' planning in order to find the best support and training opportunities for young people

These young people with low levels of general educational skills, remain at the bottom of the pool of job seekers. They have become alienated from education and learning during their schooling and are thus resistant to the idea of putting themselves back into an educational setting. They are surrounded by an extended network of young people and adults who are not working and are unable to find work. They are aware that few jobs exist and those jobs that do exist will go to the 'high fliers', those who complete Year 12 with scores that would get them into University. Many lack the support networks of family or friends who could assist them to gain access to the labour market, a factor which is being seen as increasingly relevant in finding a job. Through these experiences of alienation and rejection, many of these young people have feelings of low self esteem and see little point in trying to find work.

For those working in VET programs with these young people, there is seen to be a need to develop a far more integrated approach to both general and VET education within the VET programs. Those currently working in VET programs report difficulties in working with young people with little academic achievement, and consequent poor self esteem, who fall into the youngest age group. Regular VET programs appear to be unable to cater for their needs as is shown by the poor attendance and high drop out rates. The success of the VET program depends on the development of the young people themselves - through a sustained focus on the development of personal skills which will enable these young people to find and remain in employment. The focus on 'life skills' in a range of VET programs examined to date appear to be far too short term to really support these young people at this crucial stage of their lives. Some trainers have expressed concerns as to their difficulties in dealing with this aspect of the VET programs.

For the young people who are unable to access mainstream VET programs due to low levels of basic skills, the options do not appear to be very appealing. The location of programs and 'youth friendly venues' are seen to be a crucial factor in maintaining the young people in VET programs. Many programs are run in neighbourhood centres which also run hobby and craft programs and activities for mothers with young children. These venues, whilst appealing to the retirees are hardly appealing to young people. One community centre in the region has gone to some lengths to address this issue and have made part of their venue far more 'youth friendly' which is proving quite successful. Those working with these young people believe that the physical arrangements of the programs are particularly important in sustaining a successful program for these young people. When comparing some of the settings to the local TAFE college for example, many programs are located in very poor settings. Those young people who attend a TAFE college can expect a cafeteria, local bands performing and the ubiquitous pinball machines alongside a well equipped library and computer labs. But those young people attending a VET or Labour Market Program might not have access to any of these but might find themselves in a much starker venue. Providers need to be made aware and acknowledge peer culture and networks in the success of VET courses; networks play an important role in employment but also in accessing and completing training courses. The importance of these factors will be explored further.

There remain differences in participation rates in the region with some providers claiming to have huge waiting lists whilst others cannot fill classes. Many of these young people find it almost impossible to work within a regular VET setting and require very expensive pedagogical relationships. Some of the most successful programs appear to have almost a 1:1 ratio of workers and young people. These very sorts of pedagogical arrangements appear to be the most successful and the most expensive in the short term. But in the long term these programs might well prove to be the most cost effective.

Policy Changes

Over the past few years there has been a marked turning away from public funding of education, in a process of redefining education itself. Arising out of the late eighties with Australia Reconstructed followed by the Finn, Mayer and Carmichael Reports, there was an attempt to redefine education away from the traditional social good to being an instrumental good in terms of work outcomes (Marginson 1993). At many levels there has been an attempt to lay the required economic reconstruction at the feet of school education, whilst ignoring the effects of globalisation on the erosion of the labour market and in

particular the disappearance of the youth labour market (Rifkin, Aronowitz, Anyon).

At policy level there needs to be some acknowledgment of the difficulty this disappearing youth labour market places on the young people and the trainers in terms of the shift towards narrowly defined outcomes as a means of future funding arrangements. In an area such as Geelong where the total labour market continues to decline so that the pressure for any job increases, current policy will mean in a growing number of young people being lost to the labour market forever. All those working with the young people commented on how difficult it is to work with young people the longer they are out of school or VET and unemployed. New policy funding initiative must be made to enable agencies to work with young people at the crucial stage when they first leave school, without having the long waiting periods for 'eligibility' by which time, alternative ways of spending time have already been established.

At the moment the field of education and training is undergoing a period of extensive change which has impacted on this research project.

With the change of government and subsequent withdrawal of funding, many people we had been working with lost their jobs and research that was in progress was drawn to a halt. Whilst the region faced closures, amalgamations and compulsory competitive tendering, we found that during this time of re organisation a number of people withdrew from meetings and interviews, as their concerns turned to their own employment and survival.

The slashing of the Labour Market Program funding will further adversely affect these young people for without such programs they are unready to access the mainstream labour market. For example, whilst this government has criticised the LEAP programs as having poor outcomes, according to local CES Case Managers, these programs were particularly effective in this area. Geelong is surrounded by the 'Surfcoast', a major tourist area for Victoria. Many young people growing up in the region spend a great deal of their time at the surf beaches, as the beach is, for many Australians, a source of relaxation and pleasure. The LEAP programs did a great deal of work around the coast, building paths, improving barbecue areas, maintaining the foreshore, useful and satisfying work. The young people gained various certificates during the programs, for First Aid, and various building and horticultural skills. LEAP projects were also run in Warehousing, Motor mechanics and Hairdressing, all with positive outcomes for the young people but the funding for these programs has now been withdrawn.

These policy shifts have also seen the closure of Skillshares and the amalgamation of other providers of VET programs. This has resulted in widespread job loss for teachers working in the field as well as experienced program managers. Whilst all this reorganisation is underway, many young people have dropped out of the networks which were formerly working with them. The youth workers stated that one of the

difficulties of working with this group of young people is their transitory nature, 'they move around a lot and it easy to lose contact'. Many of these young people have moved out of home, some experience periods of homelessness, many move from house to house. When they find that their local centre has closed or is being restructures and the person they trusted has lost their job, further alienation is experienced. One local community centre was 'trashed' when a group of young people found that the person who worked with them had lost her job and a new person arrived to take over. Another centre has had the committee of management sacked due to a breakdown in

working relations and the centre has been closed 'until further notice'. The welfare agencies who work with these young people are stretched to the limit. Further school closures have been planned for the area placing future pressure on declining resources in the school sector.

When we proposed the research project we were concerned to focus on young people between 15 -20, those who had already reached the school leaving age. We were aware of extremely high rates of young people leaving school before the completion of Year 10. However almost all those interviewed wanted to draw our attention to a growing problem in the area of much younger children dropping out of school, those between the ages of 12 -15. Many of these children have become so alienated form the school system that they find it impossible to continue attending mainstream programs. The children have often experienced failure in even basic numeracy and literacy and consequently have developed low self esteem concerning their ability to learn. As the demands of secondary school increase these children often find they are unable to keep up and thus a series of behavioural problems develop. As schools in Victoria are facing increasing pressures to 'market' themselves in a highly competitive climate, with ever decreasing government resources to support their work, it seems to be becoming too hard to keep some of these children in school, due to their disruptive behaviour. Resources are often being channelled away from student welfare support staff into program which are seen to benefit all children. Schools do not want to gain a reputation for having too many difficult students as other parents are not supportive of these children and might choose to send their children elsewhere. There has recently been a general increase in class size, the reduction in aides who work in the classroom with children with special needs, so that the pressure on the general class teachers are increasing, making it even more difficult to work with these children at risk.

A second factor which appears to be impacting on the general education of these group of young people from the teacher's perspectives, is the narrowing of the curriculum as is being experienced by the redescription of school curricula into the eight key learning areas. Where in the past schools and individual class teachers had the

challenge of developing curricula to meet the particular needs of their students, the introduction of the Curriculum Standards Frameworks has resulted in more teachers following an externally 'prescribed' curriculum rather than tailor this framework to the needs of their particular students. Under the constant pressure of performance appraisal and accountability it is easy to see how this situation has arisen, but in terms of these young people, this narrowing of curriculum options appears to be further limiting their opportunities to develop basic skills.

In the interviews conducted both with teachers, school welfare workers and out of school community agencies there is a great deal of concern as to the growing numbers of these children in the area. At present there are only two programs which are specifically designed to cater for these children, yet both programs can only place around twelve children at a time. There is general agreement that the waiting list for such programs in the region is 'in the hundreds'. There have been some very effective programs developed in the area which have been able to provide an integrated program of both general education, life skills alongside VET. One very successful program designed specifically for these young people has been the Bike Program, where this youngest group have been learning to repair, maintain and sell bikes, having an immediate tangible outcome for their learning which the trainers see as critical to the success of programs for these young people.

Unfortunately this program has recently lost its funding and at this stage it does not look as if the program will be able to continue.

Those working in the provision of VET and LMP commented that they believe that VET oriented programs do not begin early enough in the school system. One of the providers is now moving to locate some programs in a local secondary school and believes that some sort of VET orientation should be developed in the primary schools as well. That is not to say that these providers are necessarily suggesting a refocussing of the work of primary schools; rather that a growing number of young people appear to be becoming alienated at an earlier stage in the school system and leave school with totally unrealistic expectations of the labour market. VET in schools is commenced too late for these young people. A considerable number of parents also appear to have a limited understanding of the erosion of the youth labour market and believe that even children who leave school as early as 13 years, will be able to find an 'apprenticeship' even though apprenticeships, when available, now require a Year 11 entry level. As yet there do not seem to be any ways of redressing the problem.

One of the difficulties in the current funding arrangements is the short term programs which are offered when these young people need much longer term programs. With the forecast shift to outcome based funding the prospect for young people who need a series of programs in order to

become 'job ready' the providers are concerned as to the options which will be available. Outcomes need to be viewed more broadly than fulltime employment, but perhaps need to be seen as a progression towards employment through a series of supported and integrated programs.

Perspectives of those working in the field

For those people who are working in the field of VET in the region, this sector of education remains one of the most difficult of all to work in. The sector is perhaps most unlike the school sector which in contrast is highly regulated. The sector is deregulated in terms of teachers and trainers qualifications, curricula processes and industrial conditions. Teachers and trainers in this sector are often employed on extremely short contracts, some for only six weeks and they might be unemployed for some time before. Many of the teachers and trainers are working in de institutionalised settings, without the professional supports that a teacher working in a school or TAFE setting might expect. Some are working without photocopiers or computers, without access to a professional library, nor a professional 'staff room' with colleagues to offer them both personal and professional support. Many are working in several different programs at the same time, in order to make a livable wage. The rates of pay vary markedly, with some working well below the award in other sectors of adult education.

Perhaps of more concern for the field of VET as a whole, which is attempting to be seen as providing best practice in terms of training, is the apparent lack of support structures for the teachers and trainers own ongoing professional development or the possibility to develop career pathways for themselves. Of the trainers interviewed to date, none has participated on a regular basis in any professional association or networks. None has been offered any professional development whilst working in recent programs. There have been no opportunities provided to critique the curriculum packages they are delivering, nor to offer any professional input into their adaptation and further development relevant to the needs of their particular students. Very few had any paid opportunities for group assessment,

evaluation or moderation procedures, nor was such time built into their course work.

A further tension for those working in the field is the uncertainty of funding which surrounds their work. As one provider commented

How can we hope to keep committed people when this sword of Damocles is always hanging over their heads, never knowing if their job will survive the next round of funding.

Russell

There appears to be a tremendous difference in working conditions in the field which needs to be further investigated. Few of the teachers and trainers interviewed have ongoing employment which funds them for a full year. Few are accruing sick leave or long service leave, few are developing a 'career pathway' leading them on to more certain and senior positions in the field.

One other factor which impacted on this research has been the impact of compulsory competitive tendering on the work of teachers. Rather than participating in a collaborative and supportive environment which exists in other fields of education, since the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering these former strong collaborative relationships have broken down. In a regional centre such as Geelong, where agencies need to work more closely in a time of funding constraints so as to not to duplicate services, these collaborative relationships are perhaps even more important than in a major city. Out of these collaborative relationships in terms of administrative matters can develop ongoing professional relationships which benefit programs, teachers and students alike.

Conclusions

Young people who have been early school leavers, with low levels of skill are unable to benefit from a narrow VET approach. They need to have their personal development/ life skills/ healthy living issues addressed as an integrated aspect of VET courses in order for them to gain maximum benefit from VET. Such programs needs to belong' to the group ie student centred pedagogy rather than a prescriptive CBT curriculum package which is not adapted to the specific needs of the students. Teachers and trainers will need on going professional development in order to enable them to deal with issues of moderation, accountability and standards whilst taking a professional approach to local level curriculum development. In order to focus on the needs of these individual young people need to adopt a community development approach, involving a student centred pedagogy, with flexible delivery and timetabling. There is a need a general module as an integral part of all VET courses which can identify and work on personal issues whilst developing workplace skills.

For these young people who are experiencing a range of personal problems associated with leaving home, low levels of skill, failure to find employment, repeated rejection their social personal and physical needs must be addressed before they can hope to gain from VET courses. There needs to be more attention given to their general education, including life skills, social needs and the relationship between these issues in a young person's life and their successful transition into employment. One key difference between the Australian model of VET and the often cited German model is that general education continues alongside the vocational aspect to a much higher level. There is a need to develop some generic modules following the Mayer

competencies, which can address these issues which run for the whole length of the VET course and can be worked on in relation to the VET

course.

Regardless of the difficulties these young people might present to schools, teachers and trainers, in order for them to gain a better chance in the labour market, they need to acquire the skills which will enable them to gain access to participate in VET programs. These young people need to be seen as an integral part of the community as much as high achieving young people are, and thus a co-ordinated approach towards their VET needs must be developed between a range of agencies and enterprises. Given the continued high rates of youth unemployment, the high cost to the community of alienation and disengagement needs to be accepted by the community, including local enterprises and some co-ordinated responses put in place.

As with many of the issues identified to date, there appears to be a question of 'ownership'; whose problem is it any way? The primary school, the junior secondary, senior secondary, post compulsory or welfare? Whilst 'the problem' is pushed from bureaucratic department to department, increasing numbers of young people are continuing to leave school and disengaged from the broader educational system. Schools appear to be loathe to divulge the actual numbers of children who drop out before the completion of Year 12 or the numbers of children who drop out at other times or the development of clear pathways between the various sectors of schooling. In Victoria due to school closure and amalgamations many high schools have become multi campus schools, with a junior and a senior campus. There appears to be emerging a pattern of dropping out at the transition points, between primary school and junior high school and junior high school and senior high school. The community needs to take some responsibility in providing community based VET which will assist these young people to gain some self confidence, self esteem and to feel valued at the same time as they can develop their general education which will in turn assist them to develop life skills to equip them for employment at some stage in the future, and from this starting point, for local industry to give them a chance.

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