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In this chapter we present an account of the policy paradox of establishing a Young Parents' Access Project (YPAP) for students at a senior secondary college in the state of Victoria, Australia. Within a policy climate of endless reform and new policy initiatives, 90 per cent of all secondary school students in Victoria are expected to complete 13 years of formal education or training, and to be supported to make successful transitions from school to work or further education. Yet young people who are pregnant or parenting and who wish to complete their secondary schooling are invisible within the policies that construct the work of schools. In response to enquiries from teenage parents interested in returning to school and confronting the challenge of juggling home life, childcare and school work, Corio Bay Senior College (CBSC) decided to establish a multi-dimensional project that was underpinned by the provision of fully licensed on-site childcare.

Context

The first discussions about the educational needs of young parents in Corio took place over coffee at a meeting of a local post-compulsory education and training network. The principal of CBSC, a person from Centrelink (the Australian federal government agency responsible for welfare provision), one of the staff from a government employment agency, and one of the authors, began talking about teenage parents 'disappearing' from school and eventually finding themselves unskilled and on long-term welfare benefits. The principal commented that, every week, young parents who had dropped out of school, either as a result of their pregnancy, or even before they became pregnant, would come back to ask him about returning to complete their secondary certificates. At first, the school had responded by allowing the young parent to bring their baby with them and, occasionally, the principal or the teachers would look after the baby. The school would also adjust the curriculum and attendance arrangements, and assist the student in accessing welfare support, arranging transport, interacting with childcare providers and so on. Although, as a rule, it was not supported because of the disruption caused to other students, many teachers would also accept the presence of children of teenage parents in classes when a lack of childcare got
in the way of them realizing their desire to re-engage with schooling. This had caused as many problems as it solved: it placed pressure on teenage parents to minimize the visibility of their child, it was distracting for teachers and other students, and it did not allow any attention to either ongoing childcare needs, or the developmental needs of the child.

After this first informal chat, a meeting was called of the network of agencies with which the school already had working relationships. Anecdotally, it was apparent that access to secure childcare was one of the major barriers that made even contemplating the challenge of combining parenting and schooling too difficult for many teenage parents. By access, CBSC meant not only availability but also feasibility. Even if places were available in community childcare, teenage parents often lived some distance away from it and in the vicinity of the school, and did not have access to transport. The logistics around using public transport to take their child to community childcare and then to get themselves back to school in time for classes was a significant disincentive. On-site childcare would address this barrier, as well as allowing parents and children to see each other through the day. But how could this be achieved within an education system that was largely silent on the question of the education of teenage parents and had no brief to provide childcare within secondary schools?

This chapter draws on research at CBSC by a team of researchers at Deakin University's Faculty of Education conducted during 2002–3. The study included an analysis of existing research and policy on pregnant and parenting young people and their educational participation, interviews with young parents at CBSC and interviews with key school personnel including staff of the YPAP. It also involved observations of teenage parents’ school activities. Before discussing elements of our insights, we wish to provide some perspective on the extent of teenage parenting in comparable international settings, as this perspective will help us to understand the importance of the YPAP for this community of students in Australia.

The extent of teenage parenting

While focused media attention may have led to community perceptions that the teenage birthrate is reaching epidemic proportions, international research indicates the opposite is true. Across western Europe, the number of births to teenagers has decreased considerably over the last few decades (Social Exclusion Unit 1999). However, the United Kingdom exhibits a different pattern. In the United Kingdom, there was a steep fall in births to teenagers during the early and mid-1970s. Since that time, however, the rate has remained relatively level (Social Exclusion Unit 1999). By the late 1990s, within western Europe, the United Kingdom had the dubious honour of having the highest rate of teenage births: Scotland, Northern Ireland and England had birthrates around 30 births per 1,000 women aged 15–19 while Wales had a teenage birthrate of 37.7 per 1,000 women aged 15–19, a rate that was also evident in certain areas of England (Social Exclusion Unit
Teenage parents at secondary school in Australia

1999). The difference in part reflects the well-established link between teenage pregnancy and socio-economic status (Furstenberg et al. 1987; Social Exclusion Unit 1999; Weatherley 1991): the risk of becoming a teenage parent is almost ten times higher in those areas occupied by the poorest social classes compared to those from families with professional backgrounds (Teenage Pregnancy Unit Department of Health 2002). However, even in the highest socio-economic areas, the teenage birthrate was high by European standards: the rate in the United Kingdom as a whole was twice that of Germany, three times that of France and six times that of the Netherlands (Social Exclusion Unit 1999). After adopting a range of initiatives to reduce the rate of teenage conception, and to ensure better provision for teenagers who are parenting (Social Exclusion Unit 1999), some progress is evident, with teenage conception rates dropping steadily since 1998 (Teenage Pregnancy Unit Department of Health 2002).

While the teenage birthrate has been of focused concern in the United Kingdom, the situation there pales by comparison with statistics recorded on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. In 1999, the birthrate for women in the United States aged 15–19 was the highest on record: 55 per 1,000 (Social Exclusion Unit 1999). Teenage birthrates in the United States were, however, also on a downward trend. Having peaked in 1990 at a rate of 60.3 per 1,000, by 2000 the rate of teenage births had declined to 47.7 per 1,000 women aged 15–19 (Alan Guttmacher Institute 2004). It is argued that a factor in the falling teenage birthrate in the US is the recent introduction of long-lasting contraceptives (Social Exclusion Unit 1999).4 As is the case in the UK, teenage birthrates varied considerably by location and socio-economic status. The highest teenage birthrates (66–71 births per 1,000 women aged 15–19) were in Mississippi, Texas, Arizona, Arkansas and New Mexico; the lowest teenage birthrates (23–29 per 1,000 women aged 15–19) were in New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, North Dakota and Maine (Alan Guttmacher Institute 2004).

The Australian birthrate for females aged 19 and under is lower than both those for the United Kingdom and for the United States. However, it is high in comparison to the rate of other OECD countries. While the teenage birthrate has declined from 28.1 births per 1,000 women aged 15–19 in 1980 (Boulden 2000), it is believed that the rate in Australia is likely to be underestimated (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2003). In 1999, with a rate of 18.1 births per 1,000 women aged 15–19 (Boulden 2000), Australia still ranked as the 11th highest of 28 OECD countries (Social Exclusion Unit 1999). In 1999, Victoria had the lowest Australian teenage birthrate by state, with the Northern Territory non-metropolitan areas recording a rate of 98.7 births per 1,000 women aged 15–19. Thus, the national rate masks the striking statistics in specific locations, and underscores the level of concern for our school in Corio, where the teenage birthrate exceeded 92 births per 1,000 women aged 15–24 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001).5 Corio, a northern suburb of the second most populous city in Victoria, has been identified as one of the top ten communities of disadvantage in the region (Brady 1999). Social disadvantage persists in the area, with Corio
holding its 1999 ranking into 2003 as one of the most disadvantaged postcodes in Victoria (Vinson 2004), evidenced in part by the lowest concentration of high-income earners and levels of tertiary qualification (Mukherjee 1997). This community disadvantage is evident within the CBSC population. In 2002, CBSC had an independent student population – students who had already left their parental home and were living independently – of 57 students from the overall enrolment of around 366 students. In the CBSC population 52 per cent held health cards – only available to the lowest income earners – and only 45 per cent of students or their families contributed financially to the school by way of voluntary school fees of a few hundred dollars per year.

The international teenage birthrate is declining. Even so, internationally in 2003 some 14 million young women aged 15–19 gave birth (United Nations Population Fund 2003). In certain communities, the extent of teenage parenting, coupled with prior socio-economic disadvantage, is a compelling source of community concern. Whereas once adoption was a common choice for unmarried women who became pregnant and gave birth, internationally, in recent decades, there has been a steady decline in the number of adoptions: one consequence of this is that the teenage mother has become highly visible. Yet, it is a paradox that in a context of educational policy hysteria, educational provision for the Australian teenage parent is discussed only in a whisper.

**Policy reform or policy hysteria?**

In the United Kingdom, a range of initiatives was implemented by New Labour to counter the adverse effects of teenage parenting. For teenage mothers these included: *Getting Back into Education*, assistance with childcare, financial incentives to remain in education, learning mentors for those disaffected with learning and *Sure Start Plus*, a personal support for pregnant teenagers and teenage parents under 18. Teenage fathers were also being targeted with measures designed to encourage them to accept financial and moral responsibilities for fatherhood (Social Exclusion Unit 1999). At the same time, education authorities did not position returning to school as a priority for a teenage mother, and did not recognize school-related issues, such as incompatibility of curriculum, teaching practice, school organization and culture as risk factors and barriers (Bullen et al. 2000; Social Exclusion Unit 1999). As well, many of these initiatives remained silent on the social landscape of the teenage parents themselves (Ball et al. 2000) – teenage parents often start with a background of poor educational experience and attainment at school and are excluded from school during their pregnancy. The focus on moral responsibility in the multi-faceted approach of the Blair Government has been criticized for its contribution to the stigma of teenage parenting, a situation that has also been identified in both the United States and Australia.

Given the levels of teenage parenting, it is not surprising that the United States leads the world in the education of teenage parents. However, this provision is
often framed by a high degree of surveillance and control (Bos and Fellerath 1997) – what Luttrell (2003) calls the ‘responsibilization’ of teenage parents. While provision differs markedly by state, across all states there are strong disincentives against repeat pregnancy (Baragwanath 1999). These are framed by the federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. The Act limits welfare provision to a maximum of 60 months cash assistance over the lifetime; the Act also includes a requirement for minor unmarried teenage parents to participate in education once their child is at least 12 weeks old. Teenage parents must live with a parent or guardian or in an adult-supervised setting unless the state determines that an exception is appropriate (Library of Congress 2001).

In Australia, responses to teenage parents also differ by state. At the level of the federal government, a stance of ‘moral responsibility’ means the provision of childcare is potentially in tension with the conservative federal government’s traditional values. This opens up discussion about whether teenage pregnancy is being ‘endorsed,’ a position that has consistently been refuted by research (Boulden 2000; Dellanno et al. 1999; Kirby 1997). At a state government level, there is, to all intents and purposes, a policy void. While schools are provided with an injunction to support pregnant and parenting students by, if necessary, modifying the curriculum programme, this falls short of the innovation required to provide on-site childcare and long-term integrated multi-dimensional support. In Victoria, there is no detailed education policy on school responsibilities to teenagers who are pregnant or parenting. The Victorian Department of Education and Training provided advice for schools in relation to pregnant and parenting students as part of the former Schools of the Future Reference Guide (Department of Education, Employment and Training 2002) which affirmed the right of pregnant students to continue their schooling, but required a medical certificate in relation to fitness to attend school after the thirty-fourth week of pregnancy. The current Schools Reference Guide (Department of Education and Training 2006) which replaced the Schools of the Future Reference Guide (Department of Education, Employment and Training 2002) appears to make no reference at all to teenage parents.

Despite this pocket of silence, in the broader Australian educational arena the past decade has seen a raft of policy reform. Stronach and Morris (1994) have argued that recently governments across the globe have been far more concerned with policy development and new policy initiatives than trying to address seemingly intractable problems within communities. They describe this situation as a climate of policy hysteria, characterized by shortened cycles of reforms, multiple innovations, frequent policy switches and a tendency for reforms to become more symbolic in nature. Policy hysteria involves the erosion of professional discretion by giving governments control at the same time placing responsibility on the local level for achieving policy outcomes. Frequently, new policies draw on untested and untestable success claims to justify their continuance.

At federal, state and local government levels in Australia there has been an increased focus on the causes and consequences of non-completion of senior
secondary school (Smyth et al. 2000). At federal level, a major policy driver influencing the education arena is the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 1999). In 1999, the Prime Minister established a Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce to build on the vision of the Adelaide Declaration. The resulting report, *Footprints to the Future* (Eldridge 2001), called for the earliest possible implementation of the Adelaide Declaration's goals within a framework of six principles: a national commitment to young people; education and training as the foundation for effective transitions; career and transition support; focused local partnerships; changing the ways young people are supported; and responding to diversity of need.

The election of a 'reformist' Labor government in Victoria at the end of 1999 also fostered a surge in policy activity. In relation to young people and their education, the Victorian government implemented two reviews of education and training early in 2000: the *Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria* (Kirby 2000) – commonly known as *The Kirby Report* – and *Public Education: The Next Generation* (Connors 2000). The school sector has also been the focus of the *Blueprint for Government Schools* (Department of Education and Training 2003). At the local level, these policy documents have led to the implementation of a range of initiatives around youth transition, including Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLEN), Managed Individual Pathways (MIPS) and On Track. These initiatives intersect with a set of community building initiatives, including Best Start, Neighbourhood Renewal, Community Capacity Building, Building Better Communities and finally, A Fairer Victoria. In one form or another these various documents represent attempts, from across a range of Victorian and federal government departments, to forge community capacity building.

This policy context has shaped the development of the Young Parents' Access Project in specific ways. A proposed Skills Centre component of the Project rested easily with policy discourses articulated within the work of the then federal Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and the Victorian government's focus on skills development. However, the on-site childcare centre lacked any policy anchor. Because of this lack of specific policy recognition of the needs of pregnant and parenting teens who are attempting to complete their senior schooling, there is also no allocated funding for the additional costs of providing for their in-school support. While all government departments were supportive and recognized the alignment of the Project with the broader policy injunctions, no one department was able to make it 'fit' their specific brief. Furthermore, while many policies declare a commitment to working in a 'joined-up' fashion – an approach central to such a multi-dimensional project – and while public servants involved in the YPAP made every effort to support its development, the government resources that were available remained within departmental 'silos' to the extent that a departmental staff member could use the bureaucratic barriers to the implementation of the YPAP as 'an excellent example of how not-to-do-it'.
This combination of circumstances is unique to CBSC and intersects with other unique aspects of the case—such as a principal who was determined to pursue his agenda. Nevertheless, this particular story also offers insights for others attempting to engage with the desire of teenage parents to claim their right to pursue their education. While cases reveal ‘complex specificness’ that heighten their circumstantiality they may also reveal implications and relevance for other contexts (Wolcott 1994). We now turn to make explicit the role of schools in supporting teenage parents, before discussing in more detail ‘what happened’ at Corio Bay Secondary College.

The role of schools in supporting teenage parents

Early parenthood is the greatest single cause of dropping out of school for teenage girls, and the younger the mother is, the more likely it is that she will never complete her secondary school (Boulden 2000; Brindis and Philliber 1998; Swann et al. 2003). To a lesser extent, early parenthood is also linked to dropping out of school for teenage fathers. Teenage mothers do not achieve as much education as older mothers: they are often pressured, either overtly or covertly, to leave school or find it difficult to ‘perform’ to the level required (Pillow 2004). Research in the United States indicates that, in general, teenage pregnancy usually precedes dropping out, but a substantial minority of teenage mothers drop out before becoming pregnant (Furstenberg et al. 1987; Social Exclusion Unit 1999). Their chances of ever graduating are worse than those who were still in school when they became pregnant (Brindis and Philliber 1998).

Young women students who were not succeeding at school are disproportionately likely to become pregnant and to drop out of school when they do become pregnant (Pillow 2004). Educational competence and motivation lead to higher educational aspirations and commitment, and those reporting higher aspirations are more likely to remain in school throughout their pregnancy and to complete high school. In addition, school experiences during pregnancy and immediately after childbirth are important predictors of economic status in adulthood (Osofsky et al. 1998). The provision of on-site childcare enables a minimal delay in a return to study after childbirth and can ensure that the sometimes fragile personal resources of teenage mothers do not erode (Polit 1992). At CBSC, the intent was to provide not only on-site childcare and a modified curriculum but also access to a Parent Support Worker to support these ‘fragile’ resources.

Schools also have a vital role in providing a balancing perspective against the ‘moral panic’ that surrounds the question of teenage parenting. Young women are ‘demonized as agents of social disruption’ if they choose to mother before the age of 20 and outside the traditional social order that privileges ‘the family’ (McDermott and Graham 2005: 59). Teenage parenting is constructed as a social threat through discourses of ‘normal’ motherhood, family and sexuality
(McRobbie 2000). It is rarely acknowledged (McDermott and Graham 2005) that there are positive aspects of teenage parenting, including protective health effects (Bingley et al. 2000; McPherson et al. 2000; Wolkind and Kruk 1985) and the opportunity for significant emotional development (Kiselica and Pfaller 1993; Osofsky et al. 1998). While ‘successful’ teenage parents are not socially visible, ‘unsuccessful’ ones are frequently brought into view by the media, particularly if they are dependent on welfare. Teenage parenting does not, in itself, ‘doom even disadvantaged mothers and their children to a life of poverty and welfare dependence’ (Weatherley 1991: 21). However, when combined with poor academic performance and low aspiration, and the pressure of social stigma, the odds are increased:

One of the major problems ... is that young women are highly likely to accept such social stigmatizing. The result can be a negative and self-limiting self-image and an acceptance of extremely constrained options for the future.

(Milne-Home et al. 1996: 6)

Given this context, Brindis and Philliber (1998: 243) suggest that schools are in a unique position. They are able to provide both primary prevention interventions, such as sex education, and secondary prevention efforts aimed at ameliorating the consequences of ‘too early’ childbearing.

**Over the margin and into school**

Teenage parents remain not only at the margin of education, but often outside the margins – their bodies are absent in educational policy and planning. Statistics presented in the *Kirby Report* indicated a gender difference in reasons for early school leaving, with ‘health reasons’ being listed as the motivation for dropping out for girls at over double the rate for boys (Kirby 2000: 55). Despite this, there was no specific recommendation in the *Kirby Report* regarding the particular issues surrounding teenage pregnancy and parenting in its intersection with schooling. There is, however, an integral connection between how a school defines the ‘problem’ of teenage parents and the policies and services they put in place. In our research we have drawn on two discursive themes identified by Pillow (2004) to explore how the existing treatment of teenage parents is justified (see also Harrison and Shacklock in this volume). According to Pillow (2004), the theme ‘pregnancy as a cold’ leads to parenting students being treated as any other student.

If pregnancy is like a cold, then it is temporary, not serious, does not inhibit learning, and while the pregnancy may impact school attendance, it will only briefly impact the teen’s normal life as a student. Like a cold there is no additional treatment needed for pregnancy – the student will recover on her
own. Also like a cold, the teen mother will not require any special treatment after her 'recovery', the birth. However, at the height of 'contagion’, when the effects of the cold reach their height, the pregnant teen may be advised not to attend school to avoid spreading her germs to other students.

(Pillow 2004: 99)

‘Pregnancy as a cold’ responses situate schools as only needing not to discriminate by not actively restricting attendance; responsibility for success is placed upon the student and their status as a parent should not be used as ‘an excuse’. Thus in our research we would hear:

Well the issue really is the fact that they are being provided with childcare and so if they drop the child off then they should be here. They really shouldn’t drop the child off and then go out.

(Teacher)

Why are they using the [child]care as a dumping ground and not coming to class? Actually what’s happened to that student is that she’s been to the doctor and he has told her she needs rest. The only way she can do this when she is the sole parent is for the child to be in [child]care. She’s gone home to rest.

(Parent Support Worker)

The contrasting discursive theme, ‘pregnancy as a disease’, also has the effect of restricting educational opportunity. Pillow argues that often the only way to get modifications in schools is if you are either special or disabled in some way: deficient by virtue of being a teenage parent. Not only do such discourses reinforce stereotypical understandings of teenage parents, they also feed ‘contamination discourses’, which lead to practices of separation and removal which are argued to be for the good of the parenting student and for the ‘regular’ student body and school community. During the research we would hear that some local parents would not enrol their non-parenting children at the school because of the YPAP and its perceived endorsement of teenage parenting. This metaphor can be seen in statements around pregnant and parenting students not ‘fitting’ into the school. Pregnant students who go on to keep their child have ‘invented’ their own disability, and this is therefore seen to justify reducing the support to which they are entitled.

The consequences of policy silence

Reform initiatives become more symbolic in nature, answering a need to legitimize a political response rather than solve an education problem.

(Stronach and Morris 1994: 7)
In our research at CBSC the consequences of policy silence in the midst of a context of policy hysteria have played out in both the establishment and operation of the YPAP. In establishing the Project the hardest part was:

On the one level trying to get government to find a pathway to support us because on the surface they think it's a wonderful idea. Our school has been quoted by Ministers in terms of an example of what happens in education in this state. I found that to be a bit hard to take at times when on the other hand I am not winning the battle with the bureaucrats about how to fund this and how to support this. And that’s a major disappointment because this battle - I use the term battle, that’s probably the wrong term, but it feels like that at times – where it shouldn’t have to be that way.

(Principal)

At a policy level, political and ideological factors influence the support on offer to projects such as YPAP. Under a conservative federal government, widely reported assertions about the important role of schools in promoting traditional values were in tension with policy commitments, such as those articulated in the Adelaide Declaration. Responses to teenage pregnancy and parenting, as both advocated by international research and drawn on by CBSC, often contradicted or exceeded government policy. In seeking support through federal initiatives, any application the school made for funding required a skewing of the Project to 'fit the existing boxes' and, in the process, compromised the Project's initial multi-dimensional intent.

While government was willing to give abstract or in principle support to the YPAP as a good idea, it may also have been reluctant to commit funds to the Project because of risks associated with the unknown and unpredictable consequences of new ways of working beyond the scope of existing systems – and especially in regard to a particular group of students who could be constructed as a social threat. This placed the burden of risk on CBSC and, in particular, the principal. The school, by making a major resource commitment for educational provision to a minority group that could be seen as transgressive by some of the school community, created the risk of negative publicity. This, in turn, created immediate pressure to prove the students would deliver the normal educational ‘outputs’ that could be used to defend the school. Yet, the greatest outcomes of the Project would be delivered in the middle to long term, even as far into the future as in the educational achievements of the children of the teenage parents.

This can be categorized as an instance of policy dissonance. While the innovation sits outside practices sanctioned and supported by existing policies, at the same time it aligns with the overarching policy discourses of innovation and joined-up government (Angwin et al. 2004). As government struggled to deliver on its various policy commitments, the need to provide for the children of enrolled teenage parents persisted. Staff at CBSC waded through complex and rigorous regulations for childcare services that were well outside the experience of school
personnel yet there was no funding to employ specialist staff. The commitment to progress led to an incessant focus on cobbling together sufficient funding for the physical establishment of the childcare centre that underpins the Project. This, in turn, resulted in a shift from a primary concern with integrated and multidimensional provision to teenage parents as students, to a focus on how many children were needed to financially ‘break even’ with the childcare centre.

In June 2004, the Project was officially launched by the Minister for Education Services and Employment and Youth Affairs. At the time of the launch, the Minister for Education Services announced state government funding for the capital works of the Project. This funding enabled the school to be reimbursed for the capital establishment costs it had borne. It would also fund the construction of the second stage of the childcare centre. However, the ongoing challenge to fund the operating costs associated with the broader Project, and in particular to fund the employment of vital Parent Support Workers, persisted.

At an operational level, educational discourse within the school sector remains firmly focused on only some dimensions of learning. Progress is measured by levels and test scores, including achievement against the various requirements of the certification regime which, in Victoria, means achievement against the compulsory requirements of the four units of the final Year 12 certificate, and these include attendance requirements. Luttrell (2003) argues that there are a number of ways to understand an individual’s learning curve but, in schools, institutional ways prevail. For teenage parents, with their unique blend of needs, this is highly problematic and has become more so given the YPAP is now operational and has ‘fitted into’ the school’s everyday operation. In their invisibility as parents, as well as students, their right to an equal education becomes their own responsibility, a responsibility undertaken against the odds. In attempting to realize their declared policy intentions for all students it is time for governments to make visible the teenage parent in school and to explore the options for a meaningful education. As Luttrell (2003: 177, original emphasis) notes:

Educators have foreclosed on the question, ‘What might girls learn about themselves as a result of pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing?’ What would schools look like if educators took a stance of interest and curiosity rather than discipline and punishment towards girls’ fertility?

Ultimately, the story at CBSC is a victory narrative. Despite the paradox of working with policy silence in a context of policy hysteria the childcare centre was constructed and licensed, and now caters for over 20 student parents, including two teenage fathers, and their children. Some students have moved into this disadvantaged area for no reason other than to be able to enrol at a school that allows them to openly acknowledge their dual roles as parent and student. Yet the struggle continues. Tensions remain within the policy constraints and the day-to-day workings of a senior secondary college. Some teachers remain sceptical about supporting teenage parents at school through the provision of childcare, and
have difficulty in managing the ‘same yet different’ tensions that teenage parents confront in trying to manage their school work along with their commitment to being a good parent (Harrison and Shacklock in this volume). Funding issues create further tensions and rivalries, as different departments within the school see themselves competing for scarce resources against the high profile childcare centre. How much more of the full vision for a multi-dimensional Project might have been achieved in a context where education policy celebrated the desire of teenage parents to continue their studies and appropriately funded schools in their efforts to respond to students’ right to do so?

Yet this in itself is insufficient. In the United States, Title IX, the legislation guaranteeing the pregnant or parenting student an equal education, was passed in 1972, but did not serve as an impetus to schools to coordinate their responses to parenting students (Pillow 2004). Pillow argues that in part this reflects a lack of funding: there has been little incentive to proactively work to secure the rights of teenage parents to access formal education (Pillow 2004: 86). In Australia, the paradox of educational provision for the teenage parent remains. There is no legislation to underpin schools’ attempts to work with young parents who are committed to returning to school. Furthermore it is illustrative that, notwithstanding the absence of a legislative framework, there was support for this Project, including high levels of personal determination within the school, its community and the state educational bureaucracy. However, even their shouts for support were rendered silent within dominant discourses about the role of schools and the outcomes that should be sought from them. What must be pursued is the triad of detailed policy, dedicated funding and an appreciation of the educational potential of teenage parenting for those students who were previously disengaged from their school.

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Notes

1 Senior secondary colleges enrol only Y11 and Y12 students, that is those students enrolled to complete either the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) or the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), the senior school certificate.

2 See Harrison and Shacklock in this volume for an overview of the broader research context.

3 The research was funded by Deakin University’s Quality Learning initiative and formed one part of a Taking Your Baby to School research project.

4 Research in the United Kingdom indicates that even when young people do use contraception they can use it incorrectly, or spasmodically (Social Exclusion Unit 1999).
5 The figures for the Corio area for 15-19 year olds only were unable to be drawn out of the data.
6 The Department of Education, Employment and Training underwent a process of restructure in 2003 and was renamed as the Department of Education and Training.