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## GLOSSARY – ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APRG</td>
<td>Adolescent Parent Resource Guide</td>
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<td>ARC</td>
<td>Australian Research Council</td>
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<td>BAYSA</td>
<td>BAYSA Youth Service Geelong</td>
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<td>CBSC</td>
<td>Corio Bay Senior College</td>
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<td>CGEA</td>
<td>Certificates in General Education for Adults</td>
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<td>DE&amp;T</td>
<td>Department of Education and Training, Victoria</td>
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<td>EMA</td>
<td>Education Maintenance Allowance</td>
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<td>GRADS</td>
<td>Graduation, Reality, and Dual-Role Skills</td>
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<td>LLEN</td>
<td>Local Learning and Employment Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>LYNX2YP</td>
<td>An ARC funded linkage project with Deakin University &amp; SGR LLEN</td>
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<td>MIPs</td>
<td>Managed Individual Pathways</td>
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<td>SAC</td>
<td>School Assessed Coursework</td>
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<td>Smart Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network</td>
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<td>SWL</td>
<td>Structured Workplace Learning</td>
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<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Technical and Further Education</td>
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<td>Teen-Age Parents Program</td>
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<td>Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning</td>
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<td>YPAP</td>
<td>Young Parents’ Access Project</td>
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<td>YPP</td>
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RESEARCH TEAM

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• Deakin University, Faculty of Education
• Australian Research Council
• Smart Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network
So they’ve got to find an in-between where it doesn’t seem like they’re treating us differently because that’s not fair ....but, they do have to be compassionate sometimes, there are times when they have to think, ‘Well hang on, she’s not just an everyday student, she’s a mum’.

YPAP Student

INTRODUCTION
This is the second report about the Young Parents’ Access Project (YPAP) at Corio Bay Senior College (CBSC). CBSC is a State senior secondary school situated in the northern suburbs of Geelong, Victoria, Australia. The objectives of the YPAP are to:

- retain, re-attract and support young parents into the education system
- improve education levels and future educational and employment opportunities for this target group
- improve the parenting skills of the students
- provide positive role modelling for the parents and their children, and life skill education to the parents, and
- develop opportunities for CBSC childcare students to utilise the centre for work placements.

The first report was concerned with the establishment of the YPAP at CBSC. This second report is concerned with teaching and learning issues for the school and the young parents who are accessing the Project. It includes an overview of legal, policy and educational contexts within which CBSC and the YPAP function. This report also includes observations relevant from the three international studies about teaching and learning for teenage parents. As well, it presents the stories of experience assembled from information provided by students, teachers and other staff at CBSC. The report ends with a discussion of the issues that emerged from analysis of collected data.

This report on teaching and learning and the YPAP has been compiled from information collected at CBSC by a Deakin University Faculty of Education research team between 2002-2005 as part of the Taking Your Baby to School and the LYNX2YP research projects.
READING THE REPORT

This report has been constructed from multiple perspectives and presents more than one story about the needs and educational participation of students enrolled in the Young Parents Access Project.

Each section of the report can be read as a separate entity and the voices of policy makers, researchers, teachers, and pregnant and parenting students are discernible throughout. The report does not offer explicit recommendations because the issues canvassed here are difficult and not easily reconciled or resolved. The intention is not to tell those represented what they should be doing but more to generate a productive dialogue about these issues and their possible solutions.

The report begins with an overview of the current legal and policy context in Victoria as it impacts on CBSC and on the educational participation of students in the YPAP. This is followed by comprehensive reviews of three recently published texts that deal with issues around identity formation and the social construction of difference, as well as focusing on the teaching/learning, emotional and psychological needs of pregnant and parenting students. Although the research reported in these texts was conducted in North America, a different social and cultural context to CBSC, the issues and dilemmas raised resonate with those faced by various players in the YPAP.

The report contains stories about pregnant and parenting students that present contrasting perspectives on the issues and dilemmas posed by the YPAP’s intention and implementation. What they demonstrate is that there is no one truth to be told by, or about, pregnant and parenting students and their educational motivations and needs. This is a deliberate strategy that seeks to open-up rather than close-down conversations about the educational participation of pregnant and parenting students in mainstream settings.

Professional and personal investments play a role in how people perceive, interpret and evaluate both social and educational issues for these young people. When you read these stories you bring those investments to your engagement with them. This is no accident but a testament to the power of discourses about pregnant and parenting students to construct them as different, difficult and even deviant. The impacts of these discourses are largely invisible to us, embedded as they are in language, policies and practices in the structure and performance of major institutions such as school systems. As such, these stories of experience at CBSC should be read off the educational and policy contexts that produce these students as problems to be fixed rather than resources in a system that can acknowledge, respect and attend to difference.

The final section presents a discussion of teaching and learning issues identified during the research project. The issues identified are grounded in the experience of students, teachers and others as reported in collected data. While a list of recommendations does not appear, teaching and learning practices identified as central to the CBSC context and problematic in the conduct of YPAP are discussed in detail. Based on the principle that local problems require local solutions, this section of the report is also designed to stimulate thinking and discussion rather than to provide definitive answers.
POLICY RESPONSES TO TEENAGE PARENTING

Although lower than both the United Kingdom and the United States of America, the Australian birth rate for females aged 19 or younger was ranked 11th highest of 28 OECD countries in 1999\(^3\). In 1998, the birth rate in Australia was 18.1 births per 1,000 women aged 15–19\(^4\). While this figure was lower than the previous decade and proportionally birth rates for young mothers are falling in Australia\(^5\), they can be much higher than the average in specific locations. For example, in Corio the 2001 birth rate exceeded 92 births per 1,000 for women aged 15-24\(^6\).

The United States leads the world in the education of teenage parents where provision is often framed by a high degree of surveillance and control\(^7\) and an imperative to have teenage parents take responsibility for actions and consequences\(^8\). In the Australian context, responses differ from state to state, while at the federal level direct attention to the educational needs of teenage parents sits uncomfortably with a conservative-led government’s stance on ‘moral responsibility’ and traditional family values. Despite such political positioning, the impact of young motherhood on the social welfare system is high and the likelihood of poor employment outcomes and life prospects not dependent upon welfare are reduced without direct educational opportunities and assistance\(^9\).

In general terms, at state government level, there is to all intents and purposes a policy void on teen parents. While schools are provided with an injunction to support pregnant and parenting students, by ‘modifying the curriculum program if necessary’, this falls short of the innovation required for provision of long-term integrated multi-dimensional support (including on-site childcare)\(^10\).

In Victoria, there is no detailed education policy on school responsibilities to teenagers who are pregnant or parenting. In recent times, 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*\(^11\) which affirmed the right of pregnant students to continue their schooling, but required a medical certificate in relation to fitness to attend after the 34th week of pregnancy. However, the current *Schools Reference Guide*\(^12\), which replaced the previous guide, appears to make no reference at all to teenage parents.

THE POLICY CONTEXT IN VICTORIA

Following patterns evident in the United Kingdom, the Victorian government has instituted policy reform and departmental reorganisation that now favours an
interagency approach in finding local solutions to local problems. While there are a number of different models of partnership, described as ‘interagency, multi agency or joined up’, planning that is ‘deliberate, conceptualised and coordinated’, with stakeholders negotiating new ways of working collaboratively together as equal partners for a common goal, is not as evident.

The strategic nature of these new policies, along with an apparent lack of departmental articulation, has created a context where schools are expected to engage in partnerships and networks with community agencies and education providers to support young people in new ways.

In Victoria, the Kirby Report into Post Compulsory Education and Training advocated that schools further develop partnerships with local community agencies to support students to successfully complete their schooling and make effective transitions into further education, training or employment.

Research indicates that transitions continued to be highly gendered with teenage parenting remaining a significant reason for early school leaving. Yet the irony remains, that despite the northern suburbs of Geelong having one of the highest rates of teenage parents there are still no direct policy provisions for young parents who need to complete secondary schooling before they can begin to undertake further vocational training, further or higher education, leading to future employment.

Within this policy climate for partnerships and networks with community agencies and education providers, a major initiative has been the establishment of Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs). These networks cover the whole state, linking education and training providers, industry, local government and other stakeholders in a shared responsibility for young people in the post compulsory system and their transitions into employment, further education and work.

In Geelong, the LLEN (SGR LLEN) has been instrumental in facilitating new networks and in sponsoring further development of vocational opportunities and pathways. In recognising that young parents need to complete secondary schooling before they can begin to undertake vocational training, further or higher education, leading to future employment, the SGR LLEN provided strategic support for the development of the YPAP and some initial funds for the establishment of the childcare centre at CBSC.

**POLICY TARGETS IN VICTORIA**

Since the Kirby Report, efforts to make strong links between learning pathways and transitions, lift school retention rates, increase students’ vocational skills and work readiness have become central systemic concerns in Victoria. Consequently, policy change in the post compulsory years of education has seen schools receive funding to develop and implement a range of retention and transition programs such as Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) and On Track.

The introduction of the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), the new senior secondary school certificate, was another attempt to re-engage young people in post compulsory education at the same time as better prepare them for employment.
after completing school. Schools have been encouraged, and supported, to strengthen School Based New Apprenticeships (SBNAs) and Structured Workplace Learning (SWL) in the provision of broader learning options for students in mainstream educational settings.

These learning options address educational and training participation for certain cohorts of students in certain schools by keeping them in education. However, they do not impact long term on the local employment situation.

**SCHOOL ATTENDANCE**

Attendance is an issue of concern for all secondary schools, particularly in lower socioeconomic areas, where attendance appears to be lower than for schools in higher socioeconomic areas. For most students there is a direct correlation between attendance, missing classes and outcomes. To date, there has been little research into problems with attendance in the post compulsory years.

All schools find some students who have real problems with attendance, despite a commitment to staying at school to complete a post compulsory credential. There is a case to gather from students and teachers clearer understandings of patterns of attendance and the complexity of causes for missing classes.

The monitoring and reporting of attendance can be directed towards understanding the reasons for non-attendance or as a reason for punitive actions designed to enforce compliance. Input from the students about the barriers they experience that prevent them from attending is not usually a part of either process.

Higher rates of absence are routinely found amongst students receiving the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and students living independently. Typically, young parents find additional difficulties in maintaining regular attendance. They have many responsibilities in their lives that extend beyond their identity as a student.

Attendance data in 1998 showed high rates of school absence for Barwon South Western Region schools. This peaks in Year 10 and can continue to be high in Years 11 and 12. Many students find the jump in academic demands made in Year 11 far greater than they had expected. This is a particular concern for students who had previously been out of school for some time and have returned to formal schooling at Year 11.

**SCHOOL ABSENCE POLICY**

Absence from school and class will affect a student’s learning and how a teacher plans and organises content, teaching and learning, and assessment. High rates of
absence can impact on all students in a class, not only the absentees, because of its influence on how the teacher structures teaching and learning activities.23

All schools establish an attendance requirement for VCE that must be met in order for students to remain eligible to complete School Assessed Coursework tasks (SACs). Each school adopts an attendance policy thought to be effective for the school and its context.

At CBSC, an 80% attendance policy is designed to set limits to absences and link attendance to successful completion for all students. Falling below this level can lead to an automatic failure regardless of work completion. The 80% rule is also linked to the school’s responsibility to monitor attendance of students in receipt of government benefits and allowances.

A zero tolerance, one size fits all, attendance policy may present an obstacle for some YPAP students under circumstances where the unpredictability of parenting responsibilities may lead to absences that exceed typical patterns found amongst the wider peer group. Fixed rules requiring predictable behaviour do not usually sit well with contextual circumstances that can change without warning.

At CBSC, students are encouraged to take ownership and responsibility for their attendance requirement and completion of their work. There are processes in place to encourage students, in a supportive and supervised environment, to make up missed classes and complete set work. The ‘Fifth Session’ classes assist students with the work they have missed. A system of rewards - such as movie tickets - is in place as an incentive to encourage students to make up missed classes.

ENROLMENT PROCESSES

The enrolment process for re-engaging young people or adults back into formal educational and training programs can present ongoing difficulty for students and teachers. It is not uncommon for people in post compulsory education and training to arrive at a venue and expect to begin a program the next day. Open enrolment or continuous enrolment is unlikely to be a successful strategy for the group, individual students, or teachers. Enrolment decisions that are informed by educational histories and linked to readiness assessments and pathway planning are likely to take more time but prove more effective for both teachers and students in the medium and longer term.
RECENT LITERATURE ON TEENAGE PARENTS AS STUDENTS

In this section of the report, three recently published books are reviewed. Each book reports on research about teenage parents and their educational participation. While these books report on North American settings, the issues that are raised about pregnancy, parenting and participation in mainstream schooling speak clearly to those found in the social and educational contexts in which YPAP and CBSC exist and function. The reviews have been included here for this reason.

Sections of the following text are highlighted where an issue, dilemma or practice that is reported on has a clear resonance with YPAP and CBSC.

The books reviewed are:


**Pregnant Bodies, Fertile Minds: Gender, Race, and the Schooling of Pregnant Teens by Wendy Luttrell**

Wendy Luttrell’s compelling book takes us into the hearts and minds of a group of (mainly) Afro-American pregnant teens attending a special educational program in one under-funded public school in the United States. It describes the processes of self and identity formation amongst these young women, set against a backdrop of race, class and gender inequalities. She outlines three themes that are central to these young women’s experiences: ‘…the institutional force of discipline and punishment; the power of personal feelings; and the search for respect and respectability’ (p.vii).

Although the book deals with a different social and cultural milieu to CBSC Luttrell’s five year study contributes to understandings of how pregnant and parenting students are subject to particular and insidious shaming and pathologising practices that diminish their sense of self and profoundly effect their chances of success in and beyond school.

Luttrell’s goal is to take readers inside the label of ‘pregnant teenagers’ and to ‘get up close and examine what it is like to live inside it so that the dynamic interrelationships of inequality, social distinction, and personal meanings can be made clear’ (p.xv). By the book’s end you are left with powerful and disturbing insights into what it feels like to be a problem teen.

The book focuses on the cultural and psychological minefields these young women have to negotiate, particularly in the school setting, and highlights how strong
stereotypes related to this group: poor, working class, failing in school, are produced and reproduced in the school setting, making them scapegoats for a range of social ills. As well, she demonstrates how pregnant bodies are ‘unfit’ for schools – they can’t fit into desks, they are expected to minimise their ‘showing’ they should carry themselves in ‘proper’ ways – and that these things are overlaid with raced and classed ‘rules’ regarding appropriate bodily deportment.

Luttrell considers how psychological theories of deviance hold sway when we try to make sense of why young women become pregnant through questions such as:

- Why would they do a wrong thing like that?
- What makes these girls different from those that don’t get pregnant?

Once teenage pregnancy is constructed as an individualised problem, explanations such as ‘they have low self-esteem’, ‘they are looking for love’ or ‘they have low aspirations’ become common-sense ways of understanding such ‘deviant’ practices.

Luttrell’s ‘person-centred’ approach, in which she uses methods such as role-plays, collages and self-portraits (which she calls ‘self-representation activities’), is an attempt to portray ‘what it is like to live here’. As a result, common sense understandings derived from deviance theories become much more contingent and problematic and the various ways in which these young women resist appropriation of their bodies and minds by these discourses are highlighted.

Referring to Deirdre Kelly’s work (also reviewed in this report), Luttrell identifies four contending groups and discursive frames related to pregnant and parenting teenagers: Bureaucratic experts and their ‘wrong girl frame’; social, religious and economic conservatives and their ‘wrong family frame’; oppositional movements (such as feminism) and their ‘wrong society frame’ and the teenage women who invoked a ‘stigma is wrong’ frame. The last two focus on social and cultural determinants of inequality whereas the first two rely on deviance theory and are the key discourses affecting policy making in this area.

*Deviance perspectives ignore the social and structural determinants of inequality. They effectively point the finger at those young women who make choices that don’t ‘adhere to a “normative” life trajectory, that is, finish school – get a job – marry [then] have children’ (p.27).*

Luttrell points out that the concept of resilience, which is strong in educational discourse and policy, reflects white middle class expectations of achievement and assumptions about what a successful or normal life trajectory should be. Those that fall short, risk being viewed in pathological terms. Luttrell suggests that recourse to the ‘babies having babies’ and ‘looking for love’ rhetoric that is part of individualising discourses that reflect deep seated fears and anxieties about social instability, vulnerability, dependency and the disappearance of childhood.

The group of pregnant and parenting teens studied suffered from multiple dislocations; structurally through their forced segregation into special programs; socially through public knowledge of their sexual and reproductive behaviours, and psychologically through shaming practices and hostility. This meant that they were forced to cope with tainted identities at the same time as they are returning to school and balancing both student and mother identities.
In the school setting reported on, the dominant discourse is education as a responsibility rather than as a right. When operating within this discourse, a young mother would say that she was at school because she was ‘doing it for her baby’. Teachers would also invoke this discourse when they said ‘If you can’t do it for yourself do it for your baby, in an effort to keep the girls motivated and at school.

Teachers saw a ‘tough love’ approach as preparing the girls for the world outside school. These girls needed more, not less, discipline than other students. The emphasis was on being responsible for someone other than themselves. This responsibilisation of young women is also evident in sex education programs that cast girls and young women as responsible for safe sex and, by default, responsible for getting pregnant.

Boys, young men and the fathers of the girls’ babies are invisible within this discourse, and unfortunately all too often absent in body as well. Luttrell is quite damning about the state of sex education and its dilatory effects. While the state of sex education in the United States is much more parlous than it is here it is worth quoting her at length because her comments have relevance in the Australian context.

Developmentally speaking, rather than focusing on the “whole person” and how sexual feelings and actions get incorporated into adolescent identities and relationships, sex education is highly fragmented, often focusing solely on health-related behaviours and risks. Sociologically speaking, but not directly addressing the contradictory pressure girls face about how to act as women, sex education mistakes as “personal” what is also a deeply cultural and social conflict regarding gender, race and class relations. This does a disservice to youth, but especially to girls. (p.141)

Her view is that denying, banishing or punishing sexual feelings leaves young women unprepared for a key task of adolescence - ‘reconciling personal desires with social demands’ (p.141).

Luttrell turns her attention to class based individualism in American culture, which is also relevant to this study. The young mothers in her study exhibited what she describes as ‘hard’ individualism, characterised by attitudes such as ‘standing alone’, ‘facing the world by myself’, ‘depending only on myself’, ‘not letting anyone walk over me’ (p.54). This form of individualism is characteristic of the working classes sits in contrast to the middle class version described as ‘soft’. In this version the adolescent is seen as a ‘flower opening up to the world’ (p.55) full of potential and only needing guidance to reach it. Individuals can hold each orientation but the emphasis tends to be different based along class lines.

Luttrell identifies forms of agency at work in these young women characterised by ‘connection’, ‘responsibility’, and ‘taking the consequences’ rather than ‘intentions’ and ‘wills’ (p.12). The latter is the form of agency best understood in educational settings and is implicit, if not explicit, in a range of curriculum documents. These differences can have a profound impact on relationships in schools where most teachers are middle class and most pregnant and parenting students are working class.

Luttrell describes as the myth which posits mothers as having natural instincts for care-giving and self-sacrifice, effectively masking mothers’ own subjectivity,
ignoring the social and environmental forces that shape conditions under which children are reared. Luttrell argues that unless these young women can see themselves as subjects (with their own needs and wants) they are more likely to be influenced by this myth that has standards that are impossible to achieve.

She identifies two types of resistance in these young women; ‘resistance for survival’ characterised by quick fixes and short-term solutions (answering back) and ‘resistance for liberation’ (identifying and naming issues and confronting them). The latter is to be encouraged, and educators have an important role to play in providing opportunities for these young women to interrogate and challenge these myths, and in creating opportunities to explore and express mixed feelings.

Luttrell sees social divisions; gendered, racial and class-based, at the heart of personal conflicts and observed that the young women in her study filtered their feelings about the hardships of their lives through these divisions. They were constantly moving between an internal dialogue with the self, “Who am I?” and society, “Who do others think I am?” She discerned a sense of grief in these young women for ‘lost bodies, lost opportunities and lost innocence’ (p.56). She says that educators are notoriously bad at managing grief in the school setting, often mis-recognising it as acting up.

In the final stages of the book Luttrell sees both researchers and teachers as ‘split at the root’ because they are often pitted between two distinct ways of knowing: ‘detachment and analysis’ versus ‘emotional participation in what one is seeing’ (p.163). She argues that what you need to do is ‘forget yourself’ long enough to take another view.

She sees schools as sites of profound anxiety for teachers, students and parents who all have concerns about “…fitting in, being judged and measuring up to their respective roles’ (p.173). Speaking particularly in relation to the unrecognised [bodily] knowledge of pregnant and parenting students, but the principle is also applicable to other students, Luttrell asks: ‘What would schools look like if educators took a stance of interest and curiosity rather than discipline and punishment toward girls’ fertility? (p.176). As she maintains:

Adolescents bring distinct curiosities (and anxieties) about their bodies, an interest that is not only ignored, but actively suppressed in schools. (p.177)

Unfit Subjects: Educational Policy and the Teen Mother by Wanda Pillow

In her recent book Wanda Pillow acts on her dissatisfaction with earlier research that uses the teen parent as the unit of analysis by engaging with questions including how teenage pregnancy is constructed as a problem, for whom and how educational policy has responded as well as why and how some teenage parents ‘fit’ into schools better than others.

Teenage pregnancy attracts attention and is understood to have implications for education however it has not been situated as an education policy issue nor has it been the subject of educational research. As such the education system has situated itself
as an implementer of the policy of other sectors rather than taking the lead. Pillow speculates that this is because schools themselves are conflicted over whether teen pregnancy is ‘a school issue, or a social issue, a moral issue, a family issue, a women’s issue, a local issue, a government issue, or a welfare issue’ (p.4).

**Pillow argues teenage parents are ‘hypervisible’ in social welfare and sexual morality debates and this reproduces stereotypes at the same time as it masks gaps in knowledge and the potential for other ways of knowing.** Issues of race, gender, sexuality and class are ignored and silenced. At the same time, what is said and what is unsaid about teenage parents produce each other in binary, and hierarchical, relationships. It is this binary relationship that enables some teenage parents to be constructed as bad, that is as ‘welfare queens’ while others are constructed as good, that is, good girls who made a mistake and can be saved.

The discursive structures that construct teenage pregnancy enable it to be resituated as an equal opportunity issue. However what equal educational opportunity means for parenting students is unknown given the lack of research based knowledge. Instead, opinion is offered authoritatively about what teenage parents need or, more often, deserve. These opinions are often voiced without reference to the rights of teenage parents, leaving their education open to local decision-making. Pillow notes that teen parents may need support specific to their needs however ‘they also need the support that any mother parenting as a single-parent with limited income needs' (p.11).

**Schooling Responses to Teen Mothers**
Pillow has found an absence of information on how and where teenage parents are being educated in the United States. Schools have been central in continuing this absence and Pillow argues this lies in denial and fear about engaging in dialogue on an emotionally charged issue. The lack of research and information makes it difficult to refute prevailing ‘crisis and epidemic’ (p.82) talk about educating teenage parents. As frontline decisions are made in a context where such discourses prevail, responses focus upon control, regulation and surveillance of teenage parents.

In the United States as recently as the 1970s any woman who was pregnant – regardless of her marital status or whether she was a student or teacher, could, and usually was, asked to leave school. Legislation guaranteeing the pregnant or parenting student an education equal to her peers was passed in 1972. However Pillow argues the legislation did not serve as an impetus to schools to coordinate their responses to parenting students. Schools are often unclear about their legal obligations and, where efforts have been made, they often rest in the dedication of a single individual. This seems very evocative of the CBSC story.

**For Pillow, there is an integral connection between how a school defines the ‘problem’ of teenage parenting and the policies and services they put in place.** If an alternative school setting is available, school personnel can avoid facing decisions about ‘what to do with’ the teenage parents (p.97). Where this is not available, the case will often be placed in the hands of a social worker to ‘work out’. Pillow argues that while this acknowledges the need for additional support, it also ‘situates the issue of pregnancy as outside the realm of education’ (p.98).
Pillow argues that two metaphors describe educational approaches to parenting students: pregnancy as a cold and pregnancy as a disability/disease. There are limitations in these models as pregnancy is sometimes neither a cold nor a disability and sometimes it is both. These common discursive themes justify existing treatment of teenage parents.

The theme ‘pregnancy as a cold’ leads to parenting students being treated as any other student. While this seems to achieve the desire to be treated ‘normally’ and situates the pregnant and parenting students as fully capable, it also means that they do not need, and do not have the right to, additional support services or special modifications.

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. (p.99)

This metaphor can be seen in statements around pregnancy not being ‘an excuse’ within which are embedded “‘tough love’ approaches to teenage parents – they got themselves in this position and need to be responsible for it” (p.99). This discourse works against directives which state schools should make accommodation to ensure the student can remain in school and receive an equal education. Pregnancy as a cold responses situate schools as only needing not to discriminate by not actively restricting attendance and therefore responsibility for success is placed upon the student. Furthermore, even where parenting students are told they will be treated the same, students noted they were treated differently being ‘watched a lot’, ‘glared at’ and ‘always having to act like I’m not pregnant’ (p.126).

‘Pregnancy as a disease’ discourses also restrict 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. Under this discourse the parenting student is only afforded additional support or special modifications by first being identified as deficient by virtue of being a teenage parent. Not only does such discourse reinforce stereotypical understandings of teenage parents, it also feeds ‘contamination discourses’ which lead to practices of separation and removal which are argued to be for the good of the parenting student and the ‘regular’ student body and school community. Such separation and removal limits educational provision and has not provided a comparable level of academic excellence. This metaphor can be seen in statements around pregnant and parenting students not ‘fitting’ into the regular school. Pillow argues that how pregnancy is seen as a disability occurs in highly nuanced ways, often related to race and class. Pregnant students who go on to keep their child are conceptualised as ‘inventing’ their disability and this reduces the support to which they are entitled.

*Teenage Parents as Students*

Teenage parents are often assumed to be poor students. These assumptions influence a trend toward providing them with a basic minimal education or vocational education. While ‘victory narratives’ have been offered by way of contrast these often serve as
an ‘exception to the rule’ which reifies our understandings of the typical student by portraying the successful student as ‘atypical’.

While both ‘good’ and ‘bad’ students get pregnant, some students ‘handle it better’ which means, according to Pillow, keeping your pregnant self and/or mothering self separate from school (p.115). Those who do not keep themselves suitably invisible are often those who were already disenfranchised from school and who return to school when they are pregnant. She notes that ‘teacher attitude toward the girl as a student impacts how teen girls who become pregnant described their schooling experiences’ (p.122).

Pillow identifies a range discrimination practices that occur at both administrative and classroom levels. These barriers are physical (school facilities that do not ‘fit’ a pregnant body or children), structural (policies governing absences that do not fit the situation of pregnant and parenting students) and attitudinal. Policies around attendance are ‘often the first site of trouble’ - if schools do not have written policies explicitly addressing how to make decisions about absences for parenting students the decision will rest on individual discretion and this has not worked to provide equitable access (p.124).

Pillow notes that programs should be developed around questions about how best to provide an equal education. Even where teachers were ideologically supportive, a factor that impacted dramatically on pedagogy, they, and the students, were always operating ‘under, within, and against predominant discourses’ (p.140). As such, programs often have conflicting goals based in a dual-role discourse with the only acceptable dual roles being mother and worker. Education is only necessary to the extent that it prepares the teen mother for the work force. This discourse is strongly focused on those teenage parents seen as being at risk of being welfare dependent and the location of a school and the race and socio-economic status of the students greatly influence the strength of ‘dual-role’ discourse.

Graduation, Reality, and Dual-Role Skills (GRADS)
GRADS is a nationally disseminated school-based program for teenage parents in the United States. It is managed through home economics programs with teachers attending a training program on how to use the 1,300 page Adolescent Parent Resource Guide (APRG) and is funded in thirteen states. In these states it is recognised as a successful program in increasing school attendance and graduation rates while decreasing the rate of second births.

The GRADS program operates as a support program within regular or alternative school settings and involves contact of one hour a day. The program does not replicate or replace the student’s academic program. The APRG emphasises practical reasoning through development across four areas – positive self, pregnancy, parenting and economic independence. The practical reasoning model lays out pedagogy and includes teaching modules with lesson planning sheet(s) and materials. Each area covers three or four topics which are broken down into specific issues. Program units include:

- Why work?
- The need for a diploma
- Employment yesterday and today
Pillow notes that increasingly programs for teenage parents have been linked to welfare reform. The need to earn a living wage has forced educational programs to expose young mothers to non-traditional occupations. However the programs do not address the structural barriers they will continue to face as teenage parents. While GRADS worked to incorporate role models into the program, specifically women who were positive role models as wage earners and mothers, schools found it difficult to find role models in similar socioeconomic circumstances as the teenage parents.

Pillow notes the existence of assumptions that practical reasoning skills can be taught with a didactic curriculum that can ‘fix’ a teenage parent and her messy life. Yet evaluation of many programs showed that students who had already left school and returned after becoming a parent did not have success in the job market even if they did manage to graduate. While teenage parents are trained to make rational decisions, ‘the expectations that programs and policies have of young mothers are not rational given the constraints of parenting under economic stress’ (p.162).

**Pregnant with Meaning: Teen Mothers and the Politics of Inclusive Schooling by Deirdre Kelly**

In her book *Pregnant with Meaning* Deirdre Kelly reports on up-close studies of two secondary schools that run programs for pregnant and parenting teenagers in the Canadian province of British Columbia. Her study of these schools and their programs maps the policy context for inclusion of pregnant and parenting teenagers in regular schools, the social context of how teenage mothers are represented and, as well, describes specific experiences of administrators, teachers and students in those settings.

It is a rich account of experiences because of the inclusion of the voices of parenting teenagers and school personnel and it is a challenging account of issues because it clearly sets out to show what works well and what gets in the way of program effectiveness and worthwhile outcomes. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the book is its use of the dilemma of difference to interpret and analyse the contradictions and tensions that are produced through the inclusion of teenage parents in mainstream schooling.

The findings in the book are highly transferable to an Australian context because the contradictions and tensions are common to the politics of inclusion found in such programs irrespective of the setting.

Kelly conducted her studies through preliminary and later more focused and intense research over a four year period (1992-95) at two large public secondary schools with mostly poor and working-class students in grades 8-12. The schools – City School and Town School – each had more than 1000 students and were ethnically and socio-economically diverse (though in different ways). City School was home to the Teen-Age Parents Program (TAPP) that provided self-paced instruction or integration into
Despite extensive input from advocates with professional interests in teenage pregnancy and parenting, the respective programs took time to win support and become established. Appealing to conservative arguments based on the likely outcomes being directed toward getting young women off welfare were crucial in securing funding. The result was that both programs were jointly funded by non-profit organizations and branches of government and administered by advisory committees “composed of interested ‘stakeholders’, including teen mothers (current program participants as well as alumnae” (p.96).

The aim in both settings was to integrate teenage mothers as fully as possible into regular classes because of a belief that they were more like other students (in the school setting) than they were not. However, at City School teen mothers received support, such as meeting daily in the TAPP room, and participated together in a range of activities that led to a group identity. In addition, their names were on a special TAPP class list and consequently they were seen by many outside of TAPP as a different group. At Town School, there was no equivalent special list for YPP students and no designated space for them to meet regularly as a group. As a result there was less chance for early identification of problems associated with attendance and achievement and also fewer options for addressing these issues when they arose. A tension between being different and the same exists for both the teenage mothers and for those that support them in targeted programs, or teach them in (integrated) mainstream classrooms.

In order to explain various contradictions between intents and outcomes in how the programs operate in meeting the needs of teenage mothers in school, Kelly draws on the concept of the dilemma of difference described by the legal scholar Martha Minow. The dilemma is presented as a question: ‘when does treating people differently emphasize their differences and stigmatize or hinder them on that basis? And when does treating people the same become insensitive to their difference and likely to stigmatize or hinder them on that basis?’ (p.92).

This goes to the heart of how young parenting students navigate their personal and educational lives both within and outside school. Moreover, it also goes to the heart of the educational and welfare efforts that administrators, advocates and teachers deal with in supporting and teaching them effectively. Kelly sums it up quite well:

Once students are identified as teen mothers and are provided with services based on that difference, school adults may begin to notice traits – both positive (e.g. “teen mothers are more mature than other students”) and negative (e.g. “teen mothers use their babies as excuses”) – that distill into stereotypes. Yet were these school adults simply to ignore the differences of teen mothers from other students,
then the teen mothers might not receive due consideration of their heavy responsibilities and, as a result, might fail their courses or be asked to leave school due to poor attendance. (p.92)

Kelly notes that the schools in her study have dealt with this in different ways. City School emphasized the difference and Town School tended to ignore it. Each approach produces problems because it is never as simple as attending to only one or the other end of the dilemma. Given that managing the dilemma of difference can lead to stigmatizing and stereotyping, and therefore inappropriate outcomes, it must be dealt with in ways that respect the complexity of what is at stake.

At each school attendance and progress was monitored and at both schools the attendance patterns of teen mothers was presented a significant issue by teachers. Some teachers believed that having a baby was sometimes used as an excuse for no-attendance. City School had an 80% attendance minimum standard and a series of steps involving warnings, contracts and finally exit from the program. This caused problems because teen-parent students at City School did not like being monitored in this way when non-parenting students were not required to meet the same minimum or monitored in the same way. At Town School the process of monitoring attendance was not as obvious.

Kelly concludes that the two schools were generally successful in making students feel included by teachers and peers. The attitudes of teachers do affect the behaviour and the learning of the students with students mostly feeling respected and understood (with some exceptions). Teachers can be categorized on a continuum from ‘hard-liners’ who cut no slack and suspect parenting-students of trying to get out of work and ‘social-workers’ who want to make a difference in the lives of the teenage mothers. Students objected to being singled-out, ridiculed or excluded from support due to absences or other circumstances associated with their difference as a parenting student. Kelly found that students ‘most appreciated teachers who showed flexibility with regard to assignments and makeup work yet maintained high expectations and treated them like competent learners’ (p.103).

Other points noted by Kelly include the absence of the voices of young people in how the support programs are run, the importance of on-site day care in allowing students to handle the demands of mainstream schooling, the benefits of highlighting success stories within the school community, and the need for advocacy with and for teen mothers. Advocacy has a number of benefits such as countering stereotypes and maintaining a focus on the key issues, highlighting success stories within the school community, and lobbying for change to policies within (and beyond) the schools that set up conditions of disadvantage for teenage mothers.

Within a larger frame than reporting on the study of TAPP and YPP and City and Town Schools, the book considers and contests a number of popular and dominant discourses about teenage pregnancy and parenting that negatively portray teen mothers. These include categories such as: stupid sluts, children having children, teenage rebels, girls that nobody loves, welfare mums, dropouts and neglectful mothers. Kelly identifies and deconstructs the assumptions in each of these categories and demonstrates how they become ‘catch-all’ labels that support stereotyping and the non-recognition of the complexity of risk in the lives of teen-parents.
Gender and sexuality, social class, and race are discussed as four lenses and informants of unequal relations of power ‘that represent the major intersecting axes of subordination that position teen mothers’ (p.42). These things determine who is likely to become a teen-parent and how institutional arrangements like health, welfare and educational services and support are accessed and utilized. Clear understandings of how these lenses operate on participation, on policy, on surveillance systems and on definitions of success and failure are required by administrators and teachers in order that the institution (system), and not the individual, bears the responsibility for change.

Deirdre Kelly’s book captures the essence of the challenge faced by systems, schools and individuals in responding to the dilemma of difference in ensuring successful participation by learners who both different to the rest and just like all the rest. The title – Pregnant with Meaning – captures the space perfectly.

**STORIES FROM CORIO BAY SENIOR COLLEGE**

This section of the report presents four case study narratives, or stories, of the teaching and learning experience at CBSC for students who are a part of YPAP. The narratives are constructed from data collected during interviews and focus groups conducted with students and staff as part of the research. Given this, they are composite portrayals of ‘being there’. They are neither documentaries nor fictions - but somewhere in between.

The stories in these case profiles are presented in ways that recognise the complexity of the lives and work of those involved: students, teachers, managers and support staff. The intention is not to simplify the issues, but instead to present dilemmas, contradictions and accounts of lived experience in ways that invite interpretation and further discussion.

In three of the narratives, parallel stories present an opportunity for multiple readings of the same event and people. They can be read together or separately, either wholly or in fragments. Different readings will likely invoke different interpretations and questions.

It is possible that the stories will seem familiar, or strange, because they ring true in some generalised way, or because they allow a new perspective on something that had been taken for granted. It is hoped that both of these responses will occur because this is how conversations about local solutions to local problems and new interpretations of systemic conditions will occur.
Dawn’s Story

I’ve never liked school. No, I did when I was at primary school, but Mum made me go to City West High School and I didn’t want to go there. She said I had to go there because my sister and my Nanna did. So, I went but it didn’t turn out for the best.

In Year 7 I did well but after that I was what you could call pretty average. In Year 7 I got As & Bs but after that I was just an average C. The teachers they weren’t nice, well some of them could be nice, but these were very few, most of them tried to be very strict. I don’t like that hard-nosed way teachers have and only just tolerated it when I went to City West.

I didn’t like it when you did your work and they gave you more, the same again, to do. And then if you did it all, you got more for homework. It was boring and I just didn’t do it. I hate that, I really do.

After a while, I didn’t particularly want to go to school and found better things to do …socialise and what not. Some of my friends – we just wagged a bit and we would go into town and shop, or go down to the beach, or meet up with friends, or anything rather than do school work. At school they said that if I kept doing it, that it might be better if I found somewhere else, but I just kept doing it and they never told me to leave. They sent notes home and stuff like that.

It didn’t bother me that much because I thought that I would leave at the end of Year 10 anyway because I didn’t want to do Year 11 and 12. I wanted to get at least my Year 10 because I knew for a lot of courses you need it and there are a lot of jobs that like that but I ended up leaving school in first term of Year 10. I found out I was pregnant and that sort of sealed the deal. I told them at school

Dawn’s just new to us this year - a very bright young woman and seems to be very motivated particularly in some subjects. She’s got potential, but we have to be careful because she’s got attendance problems in a couple of classes and that’s where we need early intervention if that starts dropping away - but she has the potential to do well.

I did a little bit of checking and found that she wasn’t attending all of her classes although her attendance has improved. She hasn’t missed one of mine and as I’ve said she’s going to finish the year’s work in half a year. She arrives on time and she stays right to the end.

She has been required to do some things that she resists. I spoke to her about it and she said, ‘They suggested I might do it because you know I hadn’t finished Year 10’ and but I think that she could have handled it without that. She doesn’t find the other work hard. She is a girl able to cope I think with whatever she’s doing.

She said that she likes the self-paced learning thing because it’s much easier to just come and say, ‘Right, what am I doing today’ and
and they said that I could stay there and like I didn’t have to wear the uniform once I got too big for it and they would try and accommodate me as best they could, but I knew there wasn’t really much that they could do.

Mum knew I hated school and that nothing she could do would keep me there so … yeah there was not much she could do, and so I just left. I did try and get jobs for about the first three months but most employers as soon as they found out I was pregnant it was sort of “no sorry this job isn’t suitable for you”. I stayed at home or, ‘cause my sister had just had her baby in January, I’d go around to her house and help her with him or we’d go into town or something like that.

After my baby was born I got bored. Staying home every day is very boring. There wasn’t a day care for him and it was hard for me to go anywhere ‘cause I haven’t got a car or anything.

A lady from BAYSA rang me up and she just asked if I could come in for a chat and she said she would help me. She found out if there were any places going at Corio and any childcare as well and we just arranged an appointment and we came up here and they showed us around. I decided to give it a try ‘cause it’s not exactly a school, you don’t have to wear uniform and you don’t have classes every single lesson. And you are, oh until I came here you were, allowed to go to the Village and stuff. They have stopped that now you’re not supposed to go to the village in your spares, not that I listen, I still do it. I don’t think some teachers know who I am anyway. Spares are good because I can do things that I don’t have time to do when you have a baby … if I have to pay a bill or go to Medicare, I can just duck over there and do it.

I think she realizes that she has to support her child and get back into the workforce and so she sees this as a way of getting a job. And so she is going to do it and that is why she doesn’t miss a class.

I really think it’s just incredibly difficult. It’s difficult enough for a student anyway, a teenager to do VCE and they’ve got someone at home to cook their meals and do the washing and they don’t have to worry about paying bills and all that sort of stuff. You know, for most you just come to school and go home. But these young mums have got to do all that themselves.

Just to get back into the swing of it, plus all the responsibilities of looking after a child, getting here in the morning and then at the end you got to go home and feed the baby and all that sort of stuff and then if you’re going to do any homework you’ve then got to set that aside and do that when you’ve had a full day anyway.

I don’t know for what reason, but they’ve picked up a work load that’s too heavy I think for them. They should have had a reduced work load and they should have been
I still don’t like school much ‘cause it’s just school and I have to do things that I’ve done before. I should pass my subjects but I have some catch-up classes to do ‘cause I have a lot of absences because of my son. He was in hospital and I had catch-up classes to do here but I had to miss them ‘cause I was up there for three days. Now it will be “Oh, Dawn I’ve been looking for you, where have you been?” For one subject I have only missed one class but that’s a 1.25 to 4.30 class.

Next year I’m doing Year 12 subjects, but I’m not doing Year 12 ‘cause I’ve only done half a year this year. I’d have to do another year after next year, but I’m not coming back another year after that. I’ll be back next year ‘cause I have nothing else to do … but I’m gonna plan on looking for a casual job or something in between school next year … see what happens.

We eased back into it. It’s hard enough anyway coming back.

So I think, I think along the way there is a misleading impression that they can get their VCE in two years, but they should be looking at a three maybe four year VCE. In Dawn’s case, she realises it’s going to be a three year VCE, and she’s now saying, ‘No I don’t want to come back next year.’ For her, this is really daunting.

A lot of students are back in that two-week timeslot at the end of the school year doing extra work to catch up. I did ask her to stay back there one week and she didn’t make it. She didn’t turn up.

**Sara and Claire’s Story**

Well, I left school when I was 17. I was pregnant; I wanted to continue my education but they asked me if there was anything I had to tell them and, when I told them I was pregnant, they told me that it wasn’t possible to be at school. I was out of school for years before I came back here and enrolled to do Year 11. It was a really big step to come back when you’ve been out of the system. But once you do it you realise it is okay and you don’t look back. Now I am really glad that I came back and I want to get my VCE. If I succeed, I will be the first one in my family to have achieved VCE.

And after I came back I encouraged Claire to come back – she’d been out of school for 12 months. Her family had tried everything – and now she is here and doing VCE and her newborn is in the childcare centre. What makes this school work well for people like me and Claire is having the childcare centre actually at the school.

We encourage each other to get here in the morning.

Having the childcare centre is motivating in its own way and because we are in the Project we have the support of each other and we go to class. It would be much harder if you were a ‘one-off’ in a school. There is another aspect to that too – it
would be much harder and more isolating to have to go to a new school if you were pregnant and wanted to continue your studies straight after your child was born. Students here can stay in a place they are familiar with and that has got to make it much easier to handle being a student at the same time you are a new parent.

The social network is so important. When you come to school, you get to come to school and see friends. You have friends in your classes, you didn’t know them at the start of the year, you just picked your classes and they have become your friends. We encourage each other to actually get here in the morning. And if you’re not working hard enough when you do get here, your friends know it and can push you to try harder. The teachers will push you too, but your friends have more influence and there are more of them.

I don’t feel discriminated against in this school. I guess in part that is because it is a senior college and they have a different culture. It only took about two days in class as a mature age student and then I was just a normal student to the rest of the class. There is only one problem and that is you get a few immature girls making comments like, ‘Oh I want to have a baby, it’s really cool, look at them,’ and you think, ‘If only you knew; don’t be so silly.’

There are a few students that seem to think we don’t socialise enough and stick to our room in the gymnasium. But what they don’t understand is that we use that room to support each other. It is a space where we can take the children. If one of the children is unwell and can’t go into the childcare centre we work together: whoever doesn’t have a class will mind the child which means the parent doesn’t miss class or have to ask to take the child into class.

The 16 absences thing is hard when you have kids because you just don’t know that they’re going to be sick or when things go wrong. I don’t think we need more than 16 absences, but I do think we need a bit of flexibility in how it is managed than students who don’t have parenting responsibilities. I understand the reason for the 16; if you miss 16 English lessons that this a lot to try and make up. Not just because of assessed work, but because you miss the discussions that take place and they are so important.

I think the difficult thing is that most of us are trying to do VCE over an extended period. So when a teacher says, ‘You will remember this from last year,’ I am left thinking, ‘Well, no, I don’t.’ So it is hard for the teachers to be aware of the point we are starting from and a few of them just expect us to do what everybody else does. It is like they forget that not only do we have children in the childcare centre but when we go away at the end of the day we have homes to run. It would drive me insane to be at home all day now but being here has meant having to compromise on the housework.

Most of the teachers are great; if you approach them and say, ‘I have no idea what you’re talking about,’ they will spend time with you and will link you into the support
They realise that sometimes we need to be treated differently to be treated the same.

systems we have in the school like the Resource Centre. I also think it would be good to have Fifth Session made compulsory. It is a balancing thing – we need some spares, all the students do. But it is difficult to keep connected when you have just one class on a day. It is also really good that we have support from the YPAP as well as support from teachers. You couldn’t have a teacher provide the level of support that the program does. We need both parts of that.

I guess the other hard thing for the teachers is that they want to be seen to be fair, but that goes both ways. They realise that sometimes we need to be treated differently to be treated the same. So they’ve got to choose, they’ve got to find an in-between where it doesn’t seem like they’re treating us differently because that’s not fair but I think they do have to be compassionate sometimes, there are times when they have to think, ‘Well hang on, she’s not just an everyday student, she’s a mum’. They have to come to an agreement somewhere in-between; I don’t want other students to think that I’m getting privileges that they don’t get because that’s not fair and might make them push us aside. They won’t want to know who we are then and we don’t want that.

**Kaitlin’s Story**

*Story 1*
She’s quite capable when she wants to be and when she does produce work, she’ll work well.

She’s physically at school but she attends very few classes. She’s definitely never attended one class in my subject. She’s been on the roll, she’s been spoken to about it, but she’s still not attending.

I think it’s the case that she had to be enrolled in a certain number of subjects to qualify so she enrolled for them and I think she’s picking and choosing. I’ve told program staff they need to impress upon her that she needs to come.

But, she’s the sort of girl that if you did drag her along she’d make the class almost unworkable for everybody else. She can be quite aggressive.

For Kaitlin being here was mixed experience because she was quite far behind and then had a number of disappointing things happen to her during the year.

One of those was that she had a child who had been very ill and then her younger one became sick too. So she had these illnesses to deal with and as a result now she’s got quite a poor record of attendance.

She also had an issue where she wanted to swap to another class. The prevailing view is based on a ‘what-if’ question. What if there are other students that don’t particularly want to be in that class, how is moving Kaitlin justified? Because she’s a young parent? Well that doesn’t really wash because it’s not fair.

But, what is fair? Another response might
I think that there should be some contract that as part of taking a child into the daycare centre. Some commitment to attend certain classes, minimum hours or whatever. Or, provide a medical explanation for why not - not just these stories about ‘I’ve got issues, I’ve got problems’.

No matter where you are in the workforce you still have to be able to come to work. Well the issue really is that they are being provided with childcare and so if they drop the child off then they should be here.

**Story 2**
Basically, a not terribly intelligent girl. So, she struggled anyway to do any form of schooling and the complexity of being a mum to two kids.

Obviously she had not had a good experience at school earlier on because she had a real attitude – very fiery.

She got some staff very much off side. Kaitlin said what she thought, very bluntly, expletives thrown in, so she was a challenge from the start. You know, pretty rough around the edges.

Basicall, she did not have a lot going for her in terms of doing VCE. She was struggling and getting extra support, but we were frustrated because her attendance just dropped right away. People said ‘She just can’t be bothered’.

She had very low self esteem in her own ability. She was really up against it in terms of her intellectual ability, her family have been, ‘Well, what is it that’s making students not want to be in that class?’

In the end she only attended six classes out of 24 and that’s an automatic failure.

At the end of last semester she had been working so hard to catch up in the subject but hadn’t formalized the process with the student manager by explaining that she was doing make-up classes. This wasn’t acceptable and she had to accept an N on her report.

So after she’d gone through all that, it was like, ‘Well this is all just too hard - why am I here.’ I could understand exactly what she was saying.

In this instance it meant that she has withdrawn from school. Because she’s done the same thing before, probably she won’t be considered for re-enrolment next year. This will be a huge blow to her, because she’s an exceptionally capable young woman.

My view is that sometimes we do need to think about the whole story about why a student’s away. You know, what are the extenuating circumstances?

Kaitlin has a child who’s four and able to go to school next year. She was teetering about whether she’d send her to school next year or wait, because she’s in that age range where you can wait and finally decided she will send her to school. But the child’s had no kinder experience, so it’s really important that she stay at the day care centre for that developmental stuff. She tried to get her into a kinder, but there are no places.
background, and an absence of any sort of modelling of learning and achieving in education from the home base.

**Story 3**

There was a problem with a particular class. The teacher thought they could live with it but she decided she couldn’t.

We did put her in this other class to avoid the issue. But, when she wanted to change another subject a problem occurred. She had the choice of either staying where she was happy, or by picking up the other subject, to go back to the original class. So we didn’t have much in the way of options, it was just the way it worked out.

My understanding was that she was adamant that she was not going to that particular class. And she just couldn’t handle the thought of going to it. The teacher was happy to work it through but the student was adamant they were just not going to. It was an issue that went back a long time.

The end result was I don’t think she even went once. So whether that was an excuse to drop a subject I’m not sure. She had a choice of not picking the change, but she wanted it and that caused a clash.

In the end she’s an adult and she has her choice and you can’t do any more than encourage them.

So now she feels really pressured about, ‘Well I need to get my children into day care but they’re taking away my funding’. Others involved feel pressured too because they cannot make exceptions.

It could have been so different, if back there with the issue with the subject there had been a different outcome. It may not have happened but you do think about what could have been. At least she would have had some success along the way and some sense of hope.

Naturally, we know that teachers are very watchful about what’s happening. If students are coming to school, dropping their child off and going home or not attending their classes.

There is always a bigger story, but then, who needs to know? Some would say ‘maybe they just shouldn’t be here if that’s what’s happening for them’.

Sure, for some the time won’t be right this time round but we need to give them some successes along the way so they have an incentive next time to come back and re-engage. Otherwise we really have failed them. Do we want to send them away feeling more damaged than they did before. ‘Well I tried to come back to school and hey I was just so hopeless that it didn’t work anyway.’ I think that would be dreadful.
Annie’s story

Story 1
I’d seen Corio Bay College on the news. It was the childcare centre and it didn’t matter what age you were. So, I decided to enrol at the school while I was pregnant.

I didn’t even have a tour, didn’t get spoken to, I just enrolled. I knew what I wanted to do. I knew what I wanted for my family and my future.

I was out of school a year before I got pregnant. I had started Year 11 but there was a family trauma happening. I had to redo it as I just couldn’t handle it that year.

When I found out I was pregnant, I decided that my child was going to need a future and that I was going to need one. I want to be a mechanic but I don’t know if I will get there.

Story 2
I was getting behind because I had to stay home because my boyfriend expected me to have the house clean, the washing done and his dinner on the table before he got home from work.

And I got really behind in my history and English classes and I spent every night trying to catch up.

After school, when he got home from work I’d give him Hayley to look after. Because I’ve got my license, I used to take his car around to Wendy’s house which is just near here. I’d stay at Wendy’s place until eleven.

It’s daunting for them to go back into the school system. They’re so vulnerable because they’ve been especially if they’re a little bit older. To come back into classes with younger ones is a big challenge.

We’ve got to keep in mind the things that may affect how young parents that are returning to study see themselves.

They are given such negative messages at times. I’ve heard people say to them, ‘you’re just dumping your child in care’.

If they’re not comfortable leaving the child here for whatever reason they’re not going to be thinking what they’re doing in study. They’re going to be thinking about their child.

They might have had a bad night with the child and next day the last thing they want to do is go to school and study. But, even if they don’t have school that day, they can still bring the child here. It gives them a bit of time for themselves to do a bit of homework, study or assignment and know that their child is happy and being well cared for so it’s a great benefit to them.

Most of the young people in our program have quite insecure housing. Their finances are reliant upon some form of benefit and some don’t have any extended family support. So it’s really hard, they’re always worried about life things. About being safe, do they have a house, do they have food? With all of this happening, it’s difficult to then think about
twelve o’clock doing my history work.

But, I couldn’t leave him at home with her because I’d come back and she’d be screaming her head off and he’d be asleep in bed. I had to get out of there. Then I had nowhere to live, so I had to move back to mum’s and then I had no way of coming to school or anything.

I think it gets very blurred at times.

DISCUSSION

In this section of the report, a list of focus topics that arose from the research team’s analysis of the collected data is presented. These topics refer specifically to teaching and learning at CBSC or to systemic and school policy and organisational practices that impact upon teaching and learning experiences for YPAP students and school staff.

Each of the identified topics is discussed with the intention of raising questions about practices and constraints that may lead to a teaching and learning issue or dilemma for the school, for teachers, for students. It is envisaged that the discussion will allow informed and critical reflection on the success, or otherwise, of current and future practices.

- Previous educational histories
- Individual re-entry challenges
- Readiness assessments and subject choices
- Pathway counselling and planning
- Induction to school as a learning site
- (Re)induction to learning practices
- Transitions and early success
- Flexible modes of learning and assessment
- Progress monitoring and review
- Positive teacher-student relationships
- Support and advocacy
- Attendance
- Same-yet-different tensions

The issues that arise for students and for the school as an organisation within these focus topics tend to overlap considerably. The topics above are listed in like-groups but there is no implicit priority or importance in how they are ordered.
Previous educational histories
Students enrolling at CBSC arrive with different educational histories. Some enter Year 11 from Year 10 following a continuous experience of compulsory secondary education. Others are returning to formal education after a period of absence from schooling – which may be weeks, months or years. An absence from education in a school setting may, or may not, mean participation in other forms of education and training or in workplaces. YPAP students are likely to fit each of these patterns, but given pregnancy, birthing and parenting most will be returning after some absence from education.

The nature of previous educational participation impacts significantly on the transition into learning and organisational environments at CBSC. Information about each student’s educational history is important for enrolment personnel, student managers and support staff in making decisions about subject choice, pathway planning and the identification of need for specific support. This may vary from student to student and typically but not exhaustively this may involve asking questions like those below.

- How much compulsory schooling has the student completed?
- Has the student experienced success at school?
- Which forms of teaching and learning has the student experienced?
- What are the student’s strengths and weaknesses as a learner?
- Does the student have specific and identifiable learning problems?
- Has the student a history of non-attendance, alienation or inappropriate behaviour?

The answers to these, and related questions that appear under headings that follow, are required to map prior learning and enhance the success of likely transition into courses, classrooms and the organisational climate of a senior college such as CBSC.

Students and staff referred to the role played by non-disclosure or absence of information about educational histories that led to poor choices, inadequate support and insurmountable hurdles during the transition phase. Of course, students may not wish to make available information because they seek to start afresh and leave previous problems behind them. However, sensible study loads, effective induction, targeted support and successful transition are dependent upon reliable information about such things.

The questions that need to be addressed are how to systemise and manage the collection of information and how to use it in ways that benefit and respect the students without disadvantage from legacies of past educational participation.
**Individual re-entry challenges**

Directly related to the above are challenges for individual learners that arise from their previous educational experiences. For YPAP students, this particularly relates to the time-gap in educational participation. It also relates to recognition of prior learning, skill levels, expectations and attitudinal dispositions.

Assumptions by the school, teachers and advocates that all students re-enter school with similar attributes as learners are likely to lead to problems that may have been anticipated. Practices built on such assumptions have the potential to weight failure higher than success and is unfair to all concerned.

The identification of learning and participation challenges for individual students can assist students, their teachers and advocates in preparing and responding to strategies geared at enhancing induction to learning and organisational environments.

The question that needs to be addressed is how to construct individual profiles of re-entering learners that are simultaneously acceptable and useful to both students and their teachers.

**Readiness assessments and subject choices**

Teaching staff and, to a lesser extent, students commented on YPAP students undertaking unsuitable, or too many, subjects. Often this was a reflection on poor enrolment choices and very often linked to a student’s desire to complete a qualification, VCE or VCAL, within a given (usually minimal) period of time.

Counselling of students in subject choice and study load should be based upon accurate assessments of readiness to cope with learning, assessment and organisational demands (including attendance). A desire for speedy completion and for study loads that match those of peers may not be congruent with timelines and subject choices that will ensure early and subsequent success.

This is a complicated arena for both the school and the students. It relates to the points addressed above and also to those about pathway planning that follow below. Inevitably, retention and completion are finely balanced. Those responsible for assessing readiness and for counselling students on study choice and load must be able to manage the tension between realistic loads and student optimism and disappointment.

The question that needs to be answered is how readiness to deal with demands of study load can be assessed and used effectively in making decisions about which - and how many – subjects can be reasonably undertaken.

**Pathway counselling and planning**

YPAP students may or may not seek a return to school with a clear understanding of post-school and post-YPAP destinations and possibilities. Conversations with students indicate that some see a return to school as a stepping stone to employment or further education and training. Some see the completion of a school qualification as an end in itself. Others see the educational and social components of their participation in YPAP, going to school and accessing childcare, as simply a better life in the short term.
The absence of knowledge about pathways will impact on the capacity of students and enrolment personnel to make decisions about courses and subjects. The question of ‘where does what I am studying lead me to?’ needs to be answered. An assumption that all students know the answer to this question is almost always unfounded. It is for this reason, that counselling about pathway planning should begin before enrolment is finalised.

The process of re-engagement with formal education and the conversations with teachers and peers that it brings does allow students to begin to think systematically about personal futures and pathways. However, ongoing participation in pathway counselling and planning needs to be formalised as a part of the commitment to YPAP made by enrolling students.

Questions that need to be answered are how pathway counselling and planning can be designed to meet the needs of individuals and how it can be integrated into the contractual process of subject choice in each semester.

**Induction to school as a learning site**
Students returning to formal education after an absence and especially after prior unsuccessful participation in school settings require (re)induction into school as a learning site. In particular, this should include attention to expectations and responsibilities of students, teachers and other staff. This requires information about organisational structure and etiquette – both at school and system levels.

It would be risky to assume that students will find out what they need to know through informal networks and peer-interaction. Disappointments and indiscretions through unfamiliarity with process and protocol in the early stages of a return to school can lead to frustration and anger that can impact on motivation and relationships with teachers and peers.

It is recognised that CBSC does provide support in this area through input from the Parent Support Worker and through orientation activities and camp for YPAP students. A question that warrants discussion is how this can be implemented and monitored in measured ways that are not superficial.

**(Re)induction to learning practices**
It is recognised that YPAP support staff do understand the importance of basic student skills in the return to formal schooling. For some this may simply be an induction to new requirements for studying at the senior years, but for many it is a re-induction to a broad range of skills in ‘being a student’. These skills includes things like: note taking, listening, asking questions, purposeful reading, presenting work, study planning, ICT skills, working in groups, finding and using resources, negotiation strategies, conflict resolution and time management.
The re-induction to learning practices is acute for YPAP students who have not recently attended an educational setting but it cannot be assumed that other students following usual transitions will have any (or all) of the required skills in a form suited to their learning needs in VCE or VCAL. It is important that students quickly acquire ‘identities of confidence’\textsuperscript{28} that can be applied toward meeting early learning milestones.

A question that needs considering is how important the re-induction to learning practices are to successful re-engagement with schooling. Another question is where and when these skills need to be addressed - is it the responsibility of subject teachers, or does it warrant specialist attention?

This may be addressed through development of a required learning skills module perhaps as a Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA) module\textsuperscript{29}. This module might be taught by a CBSC teacher who has experience in CGEA, issues of adult literacy and numeracy and an awareness of the standards expected of beginning students by VCE/VCAL teachers.

**Transitions and early success**

In any new endeavour, early success is the key to ongoing optimism, motivation, commitment to goals and confidence to keep pushing boundaries. Depending on the resilience of the individual and the support available from others, non-success can reduce any, and all, of these things.

The markers of early success are likely to vary considerably from individual to individual. For some, this will be small steps and for others more substantial achievements can be expected. Understanding this requires an understanding of the transition in learning and life experience that the individual student is undertaking.

Comments from students and some teachers reveal that many YPAP students are fragile learners and highly vulnerable to significant losses in confidence and motivation when early success is not achieved or acknowledged. This is most likely to occur when students are presented with (for them) unreasonable hurdles or when teachers fail to recognise that significant stages in progress have been reached. Assisting students to acquire ‘identities of competence’\textsuperscript{30} should be a key objective for all staff.

A commitment is required for building achievable goals and markers of success with students based upon understandings of previous educational histories and the nature of the transitions being undertaken. These need to be clearly stated and capable of being monitored by both the students and their teachers.

Questions that need to be considered include how early success is monitored and recorded and then acknowledged for the student and the program. For instance, is a system of rewards and school community recognition appropriate within YPAP? Another question is how to deal with non-achievement of early success markers. Should non-completion of agreed milestones lead to changed enrolment and short-term expectations?
Flexible modes of learning and assessment
The data from students and teachers has revealed that some students produce much more work and obtain better results in subjects where flexible modes of learning and assessment are in place. There appear to be two reasons for this happening.

Some YPAP students have irregular attendance and benefit from learning which is not tightly connected to classroom presence and activities. That is, in classes where missed work can be made up easily during intense periods of self-directed study, these students are less likely to fall behind or experience discouragement due to the time needed to catch-up. Secondly, students who have not recently experienced school settings may prefer applied and adult approaches to learning over approaches based upon assumed continuity between junior and senior secondary school.

An important question that needs careful consideration is how senior school subjects might be organised and taught so that work requirements can be completed through intense engagement when time is available as well as through sustained, paced forms of structure and instruction. For example, learning modules that are competency-based rather than time-based do not irrevocably lock achievement into attendance patterns. It is recognised that this is simultaneously a curricular and a pedagogical question and that it is not easily answered within a context of statewide content and assessment.

Progress monitoring and review
Students are enrolled, inducted and then immersed into teaching and learning. While moral support and some arm’s length monitoring may occur from coordinators the student is primarily sent on their way with reviews of progress linked to formal assessment and dependent upon informal communication through teacher networking. This is the usual pattern in the senior years of secondary school.

For students re-entering school after some absence – is this enough? Given that early success is important and that such students are highly vulnerable to loss of confidence and direction – and that this may vary considerably from one student to the next – are more regular reviews of progress required for YPAP students?

It is evident that the YPAP Parent Support Worker monitors individual progress based on information supplied through networking with teaching staff. While this has proved successful in addressing serious problems, it is very dependent on the effectiveness of networking and informal communication channels and may not be an efficient means for early identification of problems with progress. Also, given the number of students in the program and the variation in stages of progress between students, a more comprehensive system of review may be required.
How can student progress be monitored in ways that benefit students and teachers without sending messages of surveillance and lack of trust to students? This is a question that needs to be addressed by teachers and YPAP students and staff.

Positive teacher–student relationships
The data shows that some YPAP students believe some teachers to be unsympathetic to the program and possibly antagonistic to the establishment of the childcare centre at the school. This appears to be linked to views on the allocation of resources and the suitability of young parents in a mainstream school setting.

Research about successful ways of working with at-risk students indicates that teachers who are perceived to be helpful, patient, fair, friendly and empathetic are more likely to be effective in motivating, challenging and disciplining such students. School cultures where judgmental social values are communicated to students, even implicitly, are not conducive to conditions for effective teaching and learning of pregnant and parenting students.

Deidre Kelly portrays teachers as distributed along a continuum. The hard liners at one end and those with a social work/welfare orientation are at the other. Programs that have more teachers situated toward the social work/welfare end of the continuum appear to be more successful. This means that CBSC has to make some tough decisions about who teaches these students.

The question that presents itself is quite difficult – how does the school match teachers and students where possible so that poor teacher-student relationships do not impact on significant gains in other areas?

Support and advocacy
YPAP students consistently speak well of the support that the program provides to them, their learning and to their children. They are appreciative of the opportunities provided by CBSC and delivered through the work of teachers, the Parent Support Worker and the staff at the childcare centre.

A word search through this report will find that support and words derived from it – supportive and the like – appear more than most others. Support is the key driver in the design and structure of the YPAP program.

Collective identification as part of the YPAP is also recognised as an important mechanism of support for at-risk students. Students commented on supporting each other as students and parents through their shared identification with YPAP and the challenges of returning to school. The sense of knowing what others have been through and have to regularly face in their lives as students and parents works to reduce feelings of isolation and the potential for hurt from the edginess of difference.

The Parent Support Worker has acted as advocate for students at CBSC. This has worked well because of the trust that students have in this person to understand problems and to act on their behalf. It has not worked well when educational and non-educational issues sit in tension or conflict with each other. As the Parent Support Worker is not a member of the educational staff at CBSC there have been occasions when expertise and authority disputes have limited the potential for satisfactory
outcomes for students. This has led to frustration and occasionally anger for some or all concerned.

The question that remains is how best to provide both social and educational advocacy for YPAP students, as a minority cohort with a unique mix of needs, within a mainstream setting where uniformity of response has long been assumed as fair for all.

**Attendance**

The collected data shows that the key educational issue is irregular attendance. It is the one issue constantly mentioned and returned to in every interview and it generated powerful and often stressful feelings amongst all participants both at professional and at personal levels.

The bottom line is that if these students are not at school their chances of achieving successful educational and life outcomes are severely diminished. Deidre Kelly, Wendy Luttrell and Wanda Pillow - as reported earlier - discuss tensions between discipline, punishment and positive inducement in teachers’ efforts to ensure educational success for pregnant and parenting students. Given system imperatives, and the existence of strong and often opposing ideological investments amongst the various players - often existing in tension in one person - regarding what schools are for, these tensions are not easily reconciled.

It is recognised that this issue is not one that is confined to pregnant and parenting students. A wealth of literature generated on this problem indicates that it is much more endemic. What is evident however is that students who do not attend school regularly, or in some cases not at all, are an intractable systemic problem. It is not a problem unique to CBSC and is not a reason to dismiss it as a cohort-specific problem.

The question is therefore how to turn the problem of attendance on its head, or to remove it from the educational equation. In this particular localised context, how does the school make education, rather than attendance, the issue? This is not to suggest that education is not of concern to the school, but what seems to happen is that it becomes the silent ‘other’ when attendance is valorised and equated automatically with success. As long as maintaining the integrity of the system is seen as paramount, and YPAP students do not fit well within this system, pregnant and parenting students will always be seen as a problem because of attendance.

**Same-yet-different tensions**

Through the YPAP, CBSC supports young parents as students different to the rest but, whether intended or not, or explicitly stated or not, the school’s teachers operate from an expectation that students need to conduct their participation in learning as if they
were not pregnant or parenting. This is a contradiction and sets up conditions for failure. It is important to recognise that YPAP students have the same desires for learning and school success as other students but that this desire is translated into practice through different life circumstances. While the school may be good at providing personal support, it may also struggle to provide the necessary educational support through additional (or extended) opportunities to do work missed and to complete and hand-up work on different time-lines. This is crucial because it is about working to ensure success as opposed to hoping that these students can marshal the stamina and personal resources to cope like any other student.

This same-yet-different tension is described as the dilemma of difference and is central to what Deidre Kelly calls the politics of inclusive schooling. The dilemma of difference works in both visible and invisible ways through assumptions and practices in mainstream school settings. Schools deal with this in different ways; some emphasising the difference, others ignoring it. To do only one or the other produces problems because both tactics need to be deployed strategically and flexibly. The dilemma of difference is fundamental to understanding how YPAP can deliver on its aims. A question that needs to be considered is: where do same-yet-different tensions become contradictions that produce conditions under which YPAP students are more likely to experience failure?

Observations on good practice
Many issues identified from the data about teaching and learning in the YPAP at CBSC can be linked to themes present in literature about learning in alternative settings and working effectively with at-risk students. While not surprising, it is a reminder that insights from experience and research in diverse settings can speak to specific contexts. The congruence between issues at CBSC and those reported in Australian case studies and by Luttrell, Pillow and Kelly from North American settings is evidence of that connection.

The key principles for sustainable programs for at-risk students in alternative settings described by Cole for the Dusseldorp Skills Forum reflect the topics identified from the CBSC experience (and discussed above). They are that young people at-risk:
- can learn and want to be appreciated and successful
- must be provided with learning options
- must be provided with programs that cater for their individual development needs
- must be provided with programs that are sufficiently flexible to respond to individual needs and circumstances
- must be provided with programs that are effectively linked to vocational pathways.

While arguably already present to some extent at CBSC, most of these characteristics can be developed further through reflection, innovation and experimentation.
Summary
The discussion of identified issues presented here has not sought to provide answers but to provoke further discussion and to raise specific questions. The questions raised are summarised as:

- How can the collection of student information be systemised, managed and used in ways that benefit and respect the students without disadvantage?
- How can individual profiles of re-entering learners be constructed that are simultaneously acceptable and useful to both students and teachers?
- How can readiness to deal with demands of study load be assessed and used effectively in making decisions about subject choice?
- How can pathway counselling and planning be designed to meet the needs of individuals and integrated with the enrolment process?
- How can induction to organisational structure and etiquette be implemented?
- How can skills for re-induction to learning and re-engagement with schooling be successfully taught?
- How can early success be monitored, recorded and acknowledged for the student and the program?
- How can senior school subjects be organised and taught so that work requirements are competency-based rather than time-based?
- How can the school match teachers and students where possible?
- How can student progress be monitored in ways that benefit students and teachers without sending messages of surveillance and lack of trust to students?
- How can the problem of attendance be ‘turned on its head’ to remove it from the educational equation?
- How can both social and educational advocacy be best provided for YPAP students as a minority cohort with a unique mix of needs?
- How and where do same-yet-different tensions set up contradictions and conditions under which YPAP students are more likely to experience failure?

A further discussion of the issues related to the questions above can point YPAP/CBSC stakeholders towards the development of good practice through application of the principle of local problems requiring local solutions.

One of the pitfalls in research of this kind is that it deals with a dynamic and evolving situation and can only ever presented as a snap shot in time. As such, those involved in the day-to-day administration of the project may well be aware of the issues and questions discussed above and may have been working to address and answer them.

A final list of recommendations has not been presented and the findings from this project are, therefore, open. However, at the core of the discussion of issues and questions is the principle that the school itself needs to take charge of defining success for these students, a success that is achievable for the individuals involved and is cognisant of their life circumstances.
REFERENCES


