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Angwin, Jennifer, Shacklock, Geoffrey and Blackmore, Jill 2001, Once you get into the box you can't get out : Schools managing at risk students and their post-school options, *in AARE 2001 : Crossing borders : New frontiers in educational research : Australian Association for Research in Education conference proceedings*, Australian Association for Research in Education, Coldstream, Vic.

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"Once you get into the box you can't get out":

[Schools managing at risk students and their post-school options](#)

Jennifer Angwin

Jill Blackmore

Geoff Shacklock

Deakin University

Deakin University, Geelong, 3217

03 52271483

Fax: 03 52272014

Email: jillb@deakin.edu.au,

geoffs@deakin.edu.au

ja@deakin.edu.au

This paper explores student and teacher understandings of what it means to be 'at risk' in a Northern metropolitan Melbourne school located in the area of high cultural diversity and unemployment. The research team undertook a range of interviews with 20 Year 10 students and their teachers as part of a research project investigating teacher and student attitudes to the role of the school in how at risk young people understand their futures. Drawing on Bourdieu's notion of habitus for a conceptual framework, we describe three 'anecdotal cases' that exemplify the 'static' nature of the relations between the school, the teachers, the students and the community. The cases highlight the following paradoxes: (i) a teacher discourse of care that fails to address student motivation and attempts to change; (ii) a lack of agency for both teachers and students when dealing with at risk categories and attempts to best manage post school options; and (iii) the apparent alienation from the school of parents in an otherwise cohesive local community. These tensions were manifestations of staff composition and dynamics, cultural attitudes, and a limited sense of location that worked against resilience, mobility and capacity building for the students.

Paper presented to AARE Annual Conference

Perth, 2-6 December 2001

Risk has become a major feature of social life. Shifting relations of gender, class, race and ethnicity are evident with more rapid flow of people, images, bodies, goods, services and money. It is a highrisk society in terms of unemployment, even for the middle class. But is even riskier for the next generation of school leavers as labour markets radically change in a postindustrial service economy and university and training places are limited and costly. Education and training are perceived in such times to be the solution to risk -- in solving social problems of suicide, violence and health-- as

welfare providers.

At the same time, schools have exhibited exclusionary tendencies that arise out of particular educational policies and localised practices, exclusionary practices arising out of the type of curriculum provision, disciplinary policies, strict adherence to appearance and uniform policies, as well as teacher-student relationships (Dwyer 1995). Booth (1996) lists the students most vulnerable to exclusion in the UK -- boys, African/Caribbean boys, school age mothers, students with low attainment, disabled students, travellers and children or young people in care. These are the students most in need of support to improve their options, and they are most at risk. Furthermore, exclusions have arisen out of systemic education policies eg systemwide restructuring to selfmanaging schools and the trend to marketisation. In Victoria, during the Kennett period 1992-9, there is evidence that when schools close or are amalgamated, at risk students were most likely to disappear.

Student exclusion statistics often only refer to when the student is officially told to leave. But there are other forms of exclusion at work. Many early school leavers merely 'drop out' of school, becoming invisible. Schools have traditionally been warehouses for 'reluctant stayers', whether for reasons of age, lack of employment or, most recently, in order to obtain the Youth Allowance. Increased competitiveness between schools led many schools to 'cool out' poor achievers and troublemakers who failed to obey rules or use bad language, preferring to attract well behaved high academic achievers as good market indicators of school performance (Gewirtz 1998, Blackmore 1999). Gilborn (1994) argues that the failure of schools to develop inclusive education (eg comprehensive curriculum of vocational as well as academic subjects, and a range of assessment practices, leads students to feel excluded; boys tending to become disruptive and often formally excluded, whilst girls are more likely to quietly disappear

Restructuring towards more market oriented, and supposedly client responsive schools, have not produced the learning outcomes promised for all students as popular schools increasingly tend to select students in their niche market, rather than students choosing the school. Less popular schools take on all comers, and therefore often have to deal with a wider range of educational issues. Exclusions therefore occur through self selection of parents who are put off by images of a particular school and school enrolment policies that select particular types of student. This market orientation has shifted values in public education away from a sense of all schools being responsible for 'at risk' students and the individualisation and privatisation of both costs and risks. Individual schools are held responsible for at risk students as systemic infrastructure supporting welfare and equity have been hollowed out and competitive not cooperative relations between schools rewarded.

This paper therefore focuses on the more subtle ways in which students become disengaged with schooling. As Dwyer points out, 'the decision to leave school is a negative one that is often made in opposition to school and with no specific post school destination in mind' (1995, p. 474). It is this 'negativity' towards schooling or alienation from school that we wish to explore here.

This study was undertaken in the first years of the Brack's Labor government after nine years of the Kennett Coalition government which had stripped public education back to the bare bones, reduced per capita expenditure, reduced the teacher labour force by 20%, closed and amalgamated 350 schools, and devolved counselling, professional development and integration support down to schools or outsourced these services to private providers (Blackmore 1999). The lack of middle level support and the restrictions of global budgets in poor school communities, meant that schools with the greatest social mix (socioeconomic, gender, ethnic, racial diversity) often had less discretionary funding than wealthier schools with parent communities and sponsors able to purchase these 'extra' services such as counsellors, student welfare coordinators or integration staff (Thrupp 1999). There was little mobility within the system, with teachers unable to move between self managing schools without putting themselves at professional risk, adding to the sense of powerlessness and low morale in a period of radical change.

Schools sank or swam without system wide support. Poorer schools could no longer afford pupil

welfare coordinators as well as provide a broad range of extracurricular subjects. The choice was between student welfare or drama, large class sizes or more experienced teachers. These were most often the same schools that bought in VET programs from local TAFE institutes at a high cost in order to meet the diverse needs of their local student populations, and in so doing had to reduce their VCE options. These poorer schools with a more diverse social mix therefore found it difficult to compete with other schools that could offer a more comprehensive curriculum. The poorer schools were often more actively providing welfare support and pastoral care, as well as alternative courses, attending to the specific needs of their students, than more popular schools or those in better off suburbs. Yet this was not the community perception. Yates (2000) noted that in a comparison of a technical and high school in a provincial town, the high school was seen to be the 'well behaved' school and the technical school the 'rough' school. Yet bullying was common in both and only the technical school had procedures in place to deal with it.

Finally, these same schools were forced to rely increasingly on locally raised funds for both essential (computers) and discretionary spending. In these schools the majority of parents work long 'flexible' hours for low wages, without the same professional skills, with many single or no income families, and thus had a lower capacity for local fundraising than many schools with wealthier homogenous middle class populations. Such schools, located in working class communities with high levels of NESB parents, failed to attract either aspiring parents or sponsors, who like winners, or additional government grants for wellfunded programs eg. gifted students, technology centres. This withdrawal of state responsibility for students most at risk is exemplified at Ashfield Secondary College, part of a network of schools with similar problems, that voluntarily pooled their limited equity funds to provide, for a fixed period, a special unit to meet the needs of the most disruptive students who were not able to fit into mainstream schooling. There was ongoing refusal by the Kennett government to pick up or support this unit. The post welfare state, rather than offering full provision, now seeks to target social policies in more cost efficient ways-- devolving risk down to the individual school and thus being seen to manage risk better.

Since the election of a Labor government in 1999, there has been a proliferation of government reports naming early school leavers and falling retention rates as targets. Schools similarly have been asked to address issues of risk management in a series of reports and policies. Specifically, the Kirby Report (2000) on post compulsory education and training in Victoria which highlighted the complexity of the tasks confronting secondary schools and in particular, the post compulsory years. The review openly acknowledges that schools and teachers can no longer be expected to meet the complex needs of growing numbers of young people. The current academic structures, school organisation, the limited curriculum options available in many schools and the difficulties young people experience in moving beyond their school to VET or work, for the first time in recent policy, are acknowledged to require complex and systemic change, through the reorganisation of resources directed in a more holistic sense, for the well being

The problems are all bound up in each individual, but the resources are not. (Carter, 2001)

The review suggests that in order for schools to improve outcomes for young people, more resources need to be made available to support services, welfare and career planning. Schools are encouraged to link with other agencies to provide these services within the school and beyond the school, through the Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) which link all sectors of post compulsory education and training with employers, support agencies and the community, devolving funds and responsibilities for local programs and decision making to the local level. A further policy change as a result of the Kirby Review, aimed to decrease the numbers of early school leavers had been the introduction of the managed Individual pathways (MIPs). Schools are now being funded to ensure that all young people engage in a series of careers planning activities and that schools 'track' all students who leave school. In an attempt to broaden the curriculum for students at risk of becoming early school leavers, a new qualification framework is being trialled, the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) which will include a range of options other than the current VCE and

VETIS programs. A second key policy reform has been Public Education: the Next Generation (PENG). This report makes a commitment to quality public education and the ongoing for funding public education. PENG also advocates monitoring and supporting teachers' standards, to ensure that quality teaching will become central to improving outcomes for young people (Connors 2000).

At the same time as these two reports acknowledge the differences amongst schools, their local communities and outcomes, and the Bracks government has committed over \$65 million dollars to this end, contradictions in the policy context remain. The Premier also asserted that schools will

- increase the percentage of young people who complete year 12 or the equivalent.
- increase the number of adults undertaking education and training and so increase the overall level of educational attainment and literacy levels in Victoria.
- make near-universal participation in post-school education and training the norm in our society. (Bracks 2000).

This paper focuses on how schools, teachers and students manage risk.

The study involved three university researchers meeting with leading teachers and principal to discuss what they saw as issues relevant to students and risk for the school. The researchers then met and interviewed a range of students in Year 10 that included students perceived to be 'at risk' and those that were seen to be doing well. The intent was to get a clear sense of options and desires related to staying-on, or leaving school. Our study followed on an emerging tradition that focuses on the listening to students (Gordon 2001; Rudduck 1996, Smyth et al 2000)

The Northern region of Melbourne was named in the Kirby (2000) report on Post Compulsory Education as being an area with high levels of unemployment, and youth unemployment, as a result of de-industrialisation through the 1980s and 1990s as global disruptions had local ripple effects. Kirby maps the links between low retention rates, low VCE achievement, high youth unemployment, and high levels of VET courses. This is the social and educational geography of which Ashfield Secondary College is a part.

The school was located next to the local library, sporting facilities and walking distance from the neighbourhood strip shopping centre. There was a private Muslim girls school nearby that attracted many local families. The school had endured declining enrolments due to demographics and also open enrolment policies between public schools. At Ashfield they were prepared to take all comers, and there were negotiated transfers of 'at risk' (troublesome) students between local public schools with exclusion a limited option both in terms of government policy but also because of need to maintain enrolments.

The community also had a high cultural mix, with 36% of the population born overseas (ABS 1996 Census of Population and Housing < <http://www.abs.gov.au/>>), and a population that was largely formed through displaced population migration, with nearly half speaking a language other than English. McDowell (1999) argues that while the collapse in time and space and increased mobility of a globalised world, the effects that were impacting severely on the local labour market for this northern region of Melbourne, with large international automotive industries and metal industries, this has not necessarily produced a lack of local attachment. Indeed, for most people, 'everyday life continues to take place in a restricted locale' and there is evidence of an intensification of a sense of the local and of place. Places are contested, fluid and uncertain'. Places are made through relations of power and exclusion, constructing the rules and defining the boundaries. 'These boundaries are social and spatial --they define who belong to a place and who may be excluded, as well as the location or site of experience' (McDowell 1999, p. 4). 'Different groups inhabiting the same spaces can create and shift boundaries by subtle means' (McDowell 1999, p. 5). In turn, identities are constructed in and through space and place, identities inflected by race, ethnicity, class and gender, the representation of domestic space and place that Bourdieu refers to as habitus. Central to sense of identity and belonging to place is the notion of home and community...the home being the domestic space of reproduction,

but also in educational discourses, as a site of the product of the student. The home is central to notions of school success and who is at risk, a site for many women and children, of both security and risk.

Bourdieu's notion of habitus together with feminist social geographers discussion of the socio-spatial such as McDowell are useful because they capture the relationship between agency and structure dynamically while addressing the materiality, location and embodiment of identity. Bourdieu views habitus as

Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or a mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively regulated and regular without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being a product of the organising action of a conductor (Bourdieu 1990, p. 53).

Habitus deals with social practices and relations that are part of everyday lives, that frames options. Habitus involves a sense of cultural understanding and how dispositions are learnt in homes, schools and communities, recognising how the past and present shape futures. Students who are most likely to be excluded from schools, particularly more popular schools, often lack the cultural capital that prepare students so well for the academic achieving school (Bourdieu 1984; Teese 2000). Moi (2000) argues that just as social class infiltrates and influences every other category, so too does gender and ethnicity. Gender, class, race and ethnicity are categories that intersect with variability, influence, modify and mix in different contexts, each with their own social and symbolic capital.

Habitus is about identity but also about location, space and networks of relationships. We found in the stories of the students and of how the teachers saw the students and community -- a strong sense of place, and indeed parochialism. The students, while only 20 kilometres north of the city, rarely visited. They saw the local university and TAFE as the only training and further education possibilities. They did not travel much for leisure or work outside their neighbourhood. For many of the students interviewed, their sources of knowledge about work, training and education possibilities were family and friends, not the school or the careers officer or local employment of educational agencies.

Racist and gender discriminatory discourses do not exist outside the self, but shape the sense of self as the habitus. Children's and youth's identities are located in a plurality of fields which manifest all levels of social formation...they are embodied habitus, racialised and gendered. It is this fluctuating relational aspect of Bourdieu's work that is so valuable.

Being working class and Lebanese does not necessarily make for negative capital in all contexts. There were strong familial networks that assisted many of these students to have a strong sense of their occupational future.

I done work experience at my uncle's place but he treated me like everyone else, you know, he knows what's going on and all that so we don't get treated differently, we do the work. He has a panel shop, mainly detailing and that, spray painting and stuff so 2 weeks like normal, even though its my uncle, we don't bludge or nothing, same thing, works got to be done My cousins in year 10, he's in my class, he's probably going to come see you later, he's dropping out too, both doing the same thing... it's not just because of the family, it because we just basically want to do the same job, just us because we always hang around, we're always together and we always talk about that kind of stuff, what are you going to do next year and all that stuff and that's the only job we came out with. [Said, Year 10 student]

Such conceptual frameworks have relevance to understanding youth at risk, youth whose dispositions draw from a range of relational and social networks and spaces within specific locations and from their peers, parents, relatives and friends in constructing a sense of agency and options.

Care

Both students and teachers referred to Ashfield SC as a 'caring' school, where there was little overt harassment of students, where the relationships between students were strong. The Assistant Principal (new in 2001) has noticed this in various ways:

I find the kids here much more wanting to engage with you than at Hillside... the first couple of weeks I walked down the corridor, I felt like the Pied Piper... Miss, Miss come here, and there is a willingness to engage... which I love, I think its just terrific, there's a... dynamic about the kids.

Year 11 student, Mem, saw Ashfield as a multi-cultural school, a harmonious place compared to other nearby secondary schools.

[at other schools] there's fights, all the schools have a list except for Ashfield because Ashfield is just a mixture because Byrneside is just 90% Turkish and Gully High is 80-90% Lebanese and Halpin is all the Australians and Somalians and all that and they just clash so Byrneside, Gully, at lunch time they'll go there with their friends and just pick a fight but Ashfield is just educating to a multi culture place and no one...just comes [to fight] there because it's a friendly place. Yeah, everyone just gets on here... because everyone knows each other, but bigger schools, you turn the corner and go, oh who's this guy....

At the same time, the students expressed a sense of lack of challenge, curiosity or focus on core work of teaching and learning, leading to student disengagement and disinterest. For some, those with a sense of direction, school was valued not for what it offered in the present, but as an instrumental means to obtaining a particular future. For Year 10 student, Selena, being at school was important because *"it gets you somewhere, and if you want a job, you do subjects and you've got them then"* and *"helping me find what I want, like that job I need, I wouldn't know what to do and what I need and helping me find where I can work, give me places to look at"*.

The new Principal quickly identified that despite this discourse of care, in what was an ageing staff who had been in the school for many years, the school was not addressing the core work of teaching and learning, most particularly student motivation. The new (2001) Assistant Principal noticed this in the attitude of some staff to new ideas and to student engagement:

Generally in terms of the staff there is a group of staff that ... its like they've shut down... its like a unwillingness to engage and an acquiescence and so you say, okay lets do this, and you think everyone is going to say yes but then actually no one is going to implement it... there's not a lot of risk taking, taking place...I mean look there's a group of people that definitely do and then there's a group...they're going through the motions... [we have a] little band of kids who are just naughty, they're not seriously damaged children but they're paper throwers...this is a thing I've never encountered before, people throwing papers and a teacher calls you because children are throwing papers... its obviously behaviour that's going to get up somebody's nose and so it can escalate so you've got a whole class throwing papers so that seems to me to be not so much an issue of really seriously damaged children but just disengagement with the curriculum, [and] teachers who don't feel empowered to say stop.

Agency

The school was providing a range of VET programs, in association with the local TAFE institute, with the media course being particularly strong with 10 students. These students saw the local TAFE as only preference for their post school education. But only two of the ten were accepted into the TAFE course. The careers teacher commented: "The students did not get their head around what they had to do. They had low ENTER scores across the whole group except for two academically strong students. They don't know how to work it and the administration of VCE and VTAC is so incredibly complex for students. Getting their VCE did not lead to automatic entrance. The parents did not realise that the students needed higher level of achievement and the need to consider a range of pathways". Yet VET courses were developed to create pathways for such students into TAFE. On querying why so few of these students gained a place, and what did the school or parents or students do when their seeming success was not good enough, the teacher indicated that as far as she knew the students were still not in training, education or even work. That is, they had disappeared, and were no longer the school's responsibility.

This anecdote exemplified how teachers, parents and students at the school felt incapable of changing the inequalities embedded in the system. Whereas in some middle schools, there would be less acceptance that such a large number of students did not gain access through a VET program set up to provide pathways into post school training and the TAFE's entry procedures would be challenged. Here the teacher blamed the low expectations and lack of realisation of parents and students rather than the school raising expectations, providing the necessary advice or indeed, in the exclusion, of advocacy for the students with the TAFE. So even when all the VCE class passed their VCE in Multimedia, there was little sense of praise, and indeed, this achievement was lost as the school failed to find out why the local TAFE College had not taken on the students that the seamlessness of VET was meant to facilitate.

While many of the students did not seem to have expansive notions of their futures in terms of mobility both physical and social, evident amongst these students was a sense of future and of resiliency. Mahmoud had a definite grasp of what was right for him and what needed to be done about it. *"I'm leaving school, going to TAFE... I started looking at my reports, I found it would better if I went and done.... if I don't finish year 12, even if I pass or whatever, I'm still going to do the same job because that's what I want to do. I think that's good for me"*. They were not the 'docile bodies' often assumed in policy (Dwyer 1995). Indeed, some of these students had a strong sense of destination and how they had to get there-- complete VCE, get into TAFE etc. Howard & Johnson (2001) found in a review of resilience that 'certain community characteristics seem to operate as protective factors. The strength of social support networks provided by kin and social service agencies, for example, is one such factor' (p. 2). They also suggested that protective factors can be from the school; that is, if the family situation is discordant then students are more resilient in schools that have 'good academic records and attentive caring teachers' (see also Howard & Johnson 2000).

Community

The paradox here was that Ashfield teachers spoke about the closeness and cohesiveness of the local community that had a high level of cultural mix -- and yet there was a sense that the school was not part of that community and of *the alienation of the school from parents in what was otherwise a cohesive local community*. The careers teacher referred to the absence of many student's parents at career nights. In schools where the majority of parents are of non English speaking background, the lack of parental engagement with their children's education is not new. Amongst many groups within the Australian community, schools are not welcoming places to parents; this is not defined simply along ethnic lines, but also concerns class, socio economic status and their own success or failure in formal educational settings. For parents who feel that their own levels of English are not adequate to engage in discussion with teachers nor that they understand the school system, believe that teachers will make the best decisions for their children and indeed that it is the teachers responsibility to ensure that teach and that their children learn. The gap between Anglo Australian teachers and parents from different cultural backgrounds understandings remains to be bridged.

This was about place and identity.

I think that Ashfield misses out a bit in that it's the top of the City of Fasham and then its on the edge of the City of McEwan as well and just generally not many resources spent on it, it's a bit of a little island... I mean going down to Albert Street is just amazing I think because it's this vibrant strip shop and people shop there rather than going over the ring road... I mean physically we're alienated... not alienated but isolated from the rest of the world, with the ring road, the Basalt Creek and Casey Highway, its in this sort of little pocket but the kids feel that yeah it's a dump, Ashfield is a dump. [Ashfield SC Assistant Principal]

The retention rate was 70% in school, but there was a tyranny of distance, sometimes evident in a reluctance (or refusal) on part of students to travel—perhaps, part of the 'migrant experience'. Consequently, perhaps like the young men in McDowell's (2000) study, futures were tied to relatively settled notions of locality and informed by family experience of what might be considered appropriate work and training.

There's an Islamic college there, high school there, my cousin goes there, and I asked how do you get to it because all my uncles done their certificates at Batman TAFE, I didn't know exactly where it is, my auntie knew where it is because she goes there every week, every day to drop of her kids, so I took her with me and we went down there and I went down and I asked them and she goes, there's a test on today, I just said, I'll do it, I came back at one o'clock... [Said, Year 10 Student]

The tyranny of locality and the reluctance to venture too far from what is known was evident in one teachers' comment about a Year 9 girl who, as part of a special project to enhance student engagement, accompanied her teacher and fellow students to shops two suburbs away from Ashfield.

It was actually an experience for one girl, she'd never been on a train before and took her into Brunton and they're things you don't realise, she was as nervous as, but she did it. Yes, they're very sheltered in that sort of thing. [Kate, Teacher Ashfield SC]

Students seemed to have implicit understandings about their peers dropping out. For instance, students referred to how one of the girls in their group just did not attend and one of the boys was acting up (as a way of easing out). Selena (Year 10) said "*One of my friends just left last term, not a close, close friend but like good friend... think he didn't like school... we knew he was leaving but I just didn't ask him [why]*". The same rationalisation of likely early school exit against observed behavioural indicators are sometimes evident in how teachers talk about at risk students. For instance, the careers teacher referred to how the boys make a fuss if the system doesn't work-- act out; girls just 'slip away'.

Jean Rudduck argues that when you ask students about their experiences at school, a different range of exclusionary practices become evident. It is the least successful school performers that can explore what in a system or school that constrains commitment and progress (Rudduck 1996, p. 177). As did Pomeroy (1999, p. 2), we found that it was the processes and practices that produced a sense of disengagement and exclusion within many students. Ben was a good example of this. At the end of Year 10, he had had enough of school and didn't want to return for Year 11: "*I just haven't enjoyed it here, I'd rather get out and get some money... I'll do any work, so I don't have to come to school*". Ben told how he couldn't shake off a bad reputation and became the target of a male teacher who wanted him out of the school.

He tried to suspend me 2 weeks ago, for doing hardly anything, nothing wrong, everyone else was doing it... he's just saying, you might as well leave now, goes to my mum, when something like that happens, he tells her straight away... every time something bad, they ring up straight away complaining, [but] if you do something good, no they don't say

nothing, if you're do something bad they chasing straight away....

Other students were not excluded formally in the sense of being forced out of school or because they were not in a caring environment with sound personal relations between staff and students. But they were excluded from a culture of success that focused on teaching and learning, had high expectations and that addressed their specific transition needs.

Conclusion:

What do these anecdotes say about systems, schools and students managing risk?

First, with respect to systems. It interesting after two decades where the trend is towards self managing autonomous schools have been seen to be the solution to the post-Fordist society—there is now a recycling of notions of large scale reform. The gurus in change theory (Wong,1999) are now referring to systemic-integration strategies. The question is does this spread the responsibility for students at risk, or does it merely assume that structural reform will resolve the issue through coordination of networks eg. LLENs. While this may lead to greater coordination, does it address the issue of community and individual engagement? Will structural responses solve relational problems when students indicate that they do not utilise these networks, and indeed are as disengaged from the post compulsory networks and the types of informational capital they provide as they were from the school pedagogical network that gave others access to reward systems (Angwin et al 2001)?

Second, with respect to schools. This study indicates that schools respond to students out of their own institutional habitus and dispositions. There is history, established processes and contexts that come into play in different schools that impact on their 'effectivity' with particular types of kids and that the capacity of schools to add value to individual kids is lost in large studies of school effectiveness (Yates 2001, p.3). This school had endured a period of reduced funding, declining enrolments with local private schools

Finally, the students. It was evident that the school believed that they are doing certain things, in creating a caring and safe environment. Students and teachers alike spoke about the good peer culture and how the cross years peer mediation was terrific. But in providing that social safety net, there was no sense of intellectual challenge or risk. But as much student research indicates, the Year 10 student's perceptions and understandings of what was happening pointed to the highly individualised approach to learning as "it was up to them", their lack of ownership over the curriculum, the lack of extracurricular activities eg sport and drama that would provide a positive sense of achievement across a range of activities, the lack of praise for any achievements, lack of engagement and curiosity driven work. Students took responsibility for their failure on themselves (Notes 20/10/00). Psychological studies and socio cultural studies on resilience in adolescents at risk characterise resilience building as developing social competence, problem solving skills, mastery, autonomy, and a sense of purpose and future (Howard & Johnson 2001, p. 1). Evident in this school was overcompensation with focus on the social, on a sense of connection and safety, but under-emphasis on the issues of achievement, praise, intellectual challenge, and autonomous learning.

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