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## **A model of employment literacy: Young people in Western Australia**

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**A model of employment literacy:  
Young people in Western Australia**

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**MA Public Policy; Bachelor of Social Work; BA (Sociology)**

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**This thesis is presented in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy**

**School of Communications and Arts, Faculty of Education and Arts,  
Edith Cowan University**

**February, 2009**

## USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

## **Abstract**

This exploratory study aimed to examine the meanings of employment literacy among young people undertaking vocational education or training (VET), trainers, funding representatives and employers in Western Australia. A further objective was to develop a model of employment literacy that would inform training or educational organisations. Employment literacy incorporates the personal and social dimensions that young disadvantaged people require to secure and maintain employment. It also includes the understandings and capacity to access information from a variety of sources and negotiate with a range of people in employment related settings.

In-depth interviewing was the main method used so that different interpretations of employment literacy could be examined. In total ninety two interviews were undertaken. These included sixty six with young people, nine involving trainers, eight representatives of funding bodies and nine employers. The young people were interviewed on two occasions to consider the implications of the education or training programs. Nvivo was used to assist in the analysis of the data across and between the four groups included in the study.

The main findings of the study included the discrepancy for many of the young people between their home environments and those that support regular working. These differences include the lack of modelling of work by family members and household practices that facilitate ongoing working. Most of the young people reported a poor school experience. In the course of the training a number of the young participants did develop understandings of the training environments and ways of navigating the application for employment process. Support for individual differences and direct feedback enabled some to gain understandings of the appropriate meanings. A range of literacies contributed to the process of learning to read the contexts and responding in ways that were relevant to the setting. The employers in general though not exclusively considered that skills were transferable from school settings. In the application for employment interactions some of those interviewed were disadvantaged due to the visibility of ways of talking, appearance and mannerisms and their link with socioeconomic standing.

I am proposing a model of employment literacy which consists of a number of dimensions including the impact of the home settings, literacies, workplace relationships and culture, identifying and applying for jobs and job readiness and employability. The model has potential in VET contexts in that it offers a framework to teach the reading of employment contexts through the exploration of meaning systems.

## **Declaration**

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
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I also grant permission for the Library at Edith Cowan University to make duplicate copies of my thesis as required.

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## **Acknowledgements**

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I would like to acknowledge Hills Community Support Group Inc and the Department of Education and Training Western Australia as the industry partners and supporters of the research. Craig Meldrum and Jack Wenn walked the extra mile in helping me with the participants and the interviews. I would also like to recognise the contribution of the young people who participated in my study.



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## Chapter One: Introduction

The concept of employment literacy, the subject of this thesis, evolved through a community organisation identifying the need to consider the effectiveness of employment related training provided to disenfranchised young people. This organisation, Hills Community Support Group Inc (HCSG), is located in the eastern metropolitan region of Perth in Western Australia. HCSG contacted Edith Cowan University (ECU) to discuss ways in which research could enhance their service delivery. The importance of job readiness was raised by HCSG as the provider of pre-employment programs for disadvantaged young people and for those who had been unemployed, in order to equip them to succeed in gaining and retaining employment. While the term job readiness was used frequently, HCSG staff claimed it was ill defined and difficult to operationalise. Approaches to the Western Australian Department of Education and Training (DET) revealed that the issue was also relevant to employment training at a state level. There was a lack of an established body of knowledge relating to job readiness. This meant that HCSG and DET (WA) could not evaluate their strategies or approaches as a provider of training in a nongovernment setting and at a state level in Western Australia.

The key stakeholders were identified. These consisted of the young people undertaking training, those delivering pre-employment training programs, funding bodies and employers. Professor Sherry Saggars and Dr Elizabeth Reid-Boyd from ECU submitted an application to the Australian Research Council Linkage Projects for an Australian Postgraduate Award Industry, *Employment literacy: Young people, job readiness and employability in Western Australia*. The submission included HCSG and DET (WA) as industry partners and collaborators in the research. The successful application (LP0348735) provided a scholarship for a PhD candidate to undertake an exploratory study. Firstly, the study aimed to explore the meanings of employment literacy for young people, trainers, funding organisations and employers. Secondly, it proposed to construct a model of employment literacy that could be taught by training organisations in Western Australia.

Employment literacy provides a framework to critically examine the ways in which young people develop understandings of how employment works and a capacity to negotiate with a range of people in employment settings. The navigation of

relationships applies to the application for employment and in workplace settings. Employment literacy therefore includes the personal and social characteristics that enable young people to gain and retain employment. Previous research has focussed on discrete aspects of the application process such as the completion of a résumé, completion of application forms or the development of interview techniques. An emphasis on the understanding of a more holistic approach to seeking employment may assist those young people who are unequally positioned in the job market on the basis of socioeconomics, race or gender.

It was hoped that a model of employment literacy would integrate the accessing, understanding and integration of information from a number of sources which are important components of the job search process. This includes the gathering of information on potential jobs. Previous research found that the acquisition and evaluation of information relating to employment drew on print as well as social and cultural literacies (Reid Boyd & Weatherill, 2002). Social literacy within that study involved becoming sensitive to the political and social developments that impact on employment. Technological literacy can also be considered as a component of employment literacy. It incorporates not only the capacity to engage with the technologies but also to read the contexts and the information appropriately. The inclusion of some of the traditional literacies of reading, writing, and oral skills with newer technological literacy has potential in the training context.

At a national policy level, the Employability Skills Framework outlines a range of skills and attributes that are considered necessary for employment (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry & Business Council of Australia, 2002, p. 3-4). While these skills may be considered desirable by employers the process of achieving these skills needs to be examined. When and how do young people acquire these skills? Young people's experience in the home and school coupled with an analysis of the training practices may present a more coherent picture of the factors they identify as assisting their learning of the negotiation of different work contexts.

Employment literacy is an innovative concept in that it seeks to examine the process of seeking and maintaining employment for young people through the inclusions of a number of literacies. The academic literature to date has largely focussed on separate components of this process which are mainly descriptive rather than examining the

understandings and competencies required to participate in the overall process. The concept of employment literacy potentially provides a framework to bring together the capacity to access and integrate information and the navigation of employment related contexts. Employment literacy can make a distinctive contribution to vocational education and training in the reframing of the traditional notion of skills to the ability to consider the underlying meanings, together with the notion of context appropriateness. The focus is therefore on reading the context.

Within the study I sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What do terms such as employability and job readiness mean to young people, providers of education/training, employers and funding representatives?
2. How are these terms evaluated by the study participants?
3. How are employability and job readiness promoted to young people?
4. Is there a model of employment literacy that can be applied throughout Australia?

The following chapters outline my research process and findings. In Chapter Two I contextualise the research with both broad sociological literature on young people and employment, and multidisciplinary more specific literature on the application for employment process, the development of workplace relationships and the ways young people acquire understandings of work. Chapter Three provides an overview of the research methodology. The policy contexts at federal and state levels and a description of the nongovernment organisations in which I recruited the study participants are outlined in Chapter Four. In Chapter Five the contribution of the family and the school to young people's preparation for training and employment is discussed. A discussion of reading and writing literacies as well as technological and social literacies from different study participants' perspectives is included in Chapter Six. The influence and importance of workplace relationships and culture is considered in Chapter Seven. The process of identifying and applying for jobs and the role of cultural capital are outlined in Chapter Eight. I discuss the differing interpretations of job readiness and employability in Chapter Nine. In the final Chapter Ten, I present a model of employment literacy as a composite of factors identified throughout the thesis and make some recommendations on how the model might be applied to better equip young people for work.

## Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

This exploratory study of employment literacy attempts to move beyond the concept of employability to consider the elements that prepare young people to participate in employment contexts. These elements incorporate the process of application for employment, the development of workplace relationships and understanding the ways in which employment operates. To contextualise my study I will initially focus on the broader employment context outlining the established links between educational qualifications and securing employment, employers' expectations of future employees, identified aspects of the application process and workplace relationships. I will outline the role of family, school, networks and neighbourhoods in the development of workplace understandings and potential employment options. Understanding literacy as a sociocultural practice and the role of primary and secondary Discourses sets the scene for a more nuanced study of employment literacy (Gee, 1996, p. 137; Lankshear, Snyder, & Green, 2000, p. 99). I will draw upon Bourdieu's (1984, 1986, 1990) concept of cultural capital to explain the reproduction of the dominant culture which includes the failure of young marginalised people in education and in society more broadly.

The transition from education to work is part of the trajectory into adulthood. Researchers have commented on this stage as having become more protracted, less predictable and more fragmented over the last thirty years (Furlong & Carmel, 2007, p. 34-35; White & Wyn, 2008, p. 152). Furlong and Carmel (2007, p. 34) suggest that the more predictable transition to work for young people was reflective of the Fordist period. Thus it can be implied that global changes in the employment market may impact on this adolescent phase. Researchers are divided on the role of individual factors or agency compared with social structures such as class, gender or location to help explain this transition. Those who maintain that young people's environments are more risky and uncertain advocate the need for individual solutions by these young people (Beck, 1992; Du Bois-Reymond, 1998; Giddens, 1991). Other authors, while recognising the unpredictability of the employment context, point to the determining influence of social structures such as class, gender and location (Furlong & Carmel, 2007, p. 35; White & Wyn, 2008, p. 173). It will become clear that it is the latter, structural approach that I have found more persuasive.

In the current global employment context, researchers have commented on the notion of precariousness (I. Campbell, 1997; White & Wyn, 2008). The concept includes “a bundle of measures applying primarily to the job” (I. Campbell, 1997, p. 11). These include low pay, employment insecurity and working time insecurity. Australia has one of the highest rates of part time employment within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Many part time workers are also casual (Vosko, 2007, p. 45-46). Researchers have drawn attention to insecure forms of employment undertaken mainly by young people in Australia and the United Kingdom (Furlong & Kelly, 2005; Mac Donald & Marsh, 2005).

### ***Connection between credentials and employment***

A number of researchers in developed countries have commented on the need for credentials or academic qualifications in order to gain employment (Esping-Andersen, 1996, p. 258; Furlong & Carmel, 2007, p. 19; Jamrozik, 2005, p. 220; Raffo & Reeves, 2000, p. 148; White & Wyn, 2008, p. 143). Within OECD countries the private returns for individuals who hold degrees has been documented (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development., 2000, 2004). Some authors claim that education is the greatest determinant of occupational success (Bassi, 1998; Muller & Shavit, 1998). The need for qualifications and the decline in the availability of full time jobs in Australia is also reflected in an increase in school retention (White & Wyn, 2008, p. 179). In the period between 1985 and 2005 the percentages of males and females in full time employment in the fifteen to nineteen age range has decreased for males from 76 per cent to 44.8 per cent. Similarly the percentage for females in the same age group has declined from 62.8 per cent to 22.5 per cent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). Researchers in developed countries have noted that those who fail to complete the equivalent of high school are vulnerable to unemployment. School completion is significant in connection with employment prospects in the United States, OECD countries and Australia (Dusseldorp Skills Forum., 2007, p. 13). Young people in Australia without school qualifications find it difficult to maintain labour force participation (Jamrozik, 2005, p. 170). One study reported that those who do not complete high school or equivalent were twice as likely to be unemployed at age twenty four compared with those who undertaken that level of education (Sweet, 2006).

However, the established link between credentials and employment may not apply universally within Australia. Some argue that university and vocational education and

training (VET) qualifications serve different functions. University degrees are used to gain entry to employment as they are often completed at the end of the initial period of schooling. This may not be the case with VET (Keating, Nicholas, Polesel, & Watson, 2005, p. 9; Ryan, 2002). Ryan (2002) pointed out that individual factors such as age, gender and whether there was loss of earnings to undertake the course were considerations in VET. A further complicating factor could be that previous research may not include the current changes in education policy due to the raising of the school leaving age in Australia. In 2004 in Western Australia, the then Minister of Education and Training raised the “leaving age in 2006 to the end of the year in which young people turn 16, and in 2008 to the end of the year in which they turn 17” (Carpenter, 2004, p. 2). The aim was to create opportunities for students to engage in “meaningful and certificated combinations of schooling, training, higher education and work” (Carpenter, 2004, p. 2). This change may increase the role for the VET sector in relation to the greater numbers of young people undertaking education or training as preparation for employment. In summary, studies indicate that there may be differences in the role of VET and university qualifications in initially securing employment. However, the raising of the school leaving age may change the situation. Keating and colleagues (2005, p.13 ) commented that while there is a significant body of literature that examines qualifications in terms of human capital and screening mechanisms there are gaps in relation to the expectations of employers.

### ***Employers’ expectations of future employees***

There is a body of mainly psychological literature that examines the factors that employers consider significant in interview performance. The role of the broader employability debate may also influence employers’ expectations. Research on interviews has considered the factors that employers generally use in selection interviews. In some instances interview impression has been found to be a greater predictor of success than credentials (Kinicki, Hom, Lockwood, & Griffeth, 1990). Other findings reported the significance of personality traits, demographics, clothing, appearance and verbal messages (Forsythe, Drake, & Cox, 1985; Littrell & Holm-Peterson, 1980; C. K. Parsons & Liden, 1984; Parton, Siltanen, Hosman, & Langenderfer, 2002; Ugbah & Evuleocha, 1992). The research evidence establishes a strong connection between verbal and nonverbal aspects of interview presentation and being successful.



In Australia the policy context and the broader international emphasis within developed countries on employability may influence employers' expectations in recruiting staff. Hillage and Pollard (1998, p. 1) explain that employability involves having the capacity to initially gain, maintain and change employment. In Australia the Employability Skills Framework involves a range of skills and attributes that are considered necessary for employment (Australian Chamber of Commerce, 2002, p. 3-4). An outline of these revised skills and attributes is compared with the previous Mayer key competencies in Appendix A. Employers were actively involved in the consultation that led to the expansion of the previous generic skills. In an Australian study, it was found that employers ranked education below attitude, skills, experience and appearance in terms of importance within the selection process (Wooden & Harding, 1997). There is some evidence to support the position that qualifications are not always a priority with employers in the recruitment of new staff.

The concept of employability has also been critiqued in relation to its individual focus, absence of the work context and broader socio political dimensions. Some maintain that in Australia, in common with some other developed nations, the onus is on workers conforming to the demands of employers (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2003; Hillage & Pollard, 1998; E. Smith & Comyn, 2003, p. 19). Studies have reported on the requirement for personal responsibility in connection with employment among graduates (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2003, p. 2; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006, p. 310) The situation of those with a university education can also be applied to other workers. The lack of responsibility of employers in the development of skills has been noted despite the tradition of apprenticeship training in some workplaces (Darrah, 1997, p. 267; E. Smith & Comyn, 2003, p. 20). The concept of transferability is assumed at a national policy level in that workers need to have the skills and attributes on entering the workplace (National Industry Skills Committee, 2007, p. 1). However, the idea of the automatic transfer of skills across contexts has been questioned (Gick & Holyoak, 1983; Greeno, Collins, & Resnick, 1996). Direct application can depend on the match between aspects of the original setting in which the skills were acquired and the new location (Curtis, 2004a, p. 141-142). Some research also has suggested that the concept of employability does not consider the ways gender, social class or disability may interact with labour market opportunities (Morley, 2001, p. 132). Skills are socially constructed and are often rewarded on the basis of identity markers or educational pathways (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006, p. 310).

## ***Application for employment process***

I have examined the role of credentials in securing employment, the literature on successful interview presentation and the policy context which may impact on Australian employers' selection decisions. The ways in which young people experience the process of seeking employment seems to be missing. Some researchers have identified socioeconomic background as an explanation of the overall capacity of young people in the application process. These studies maintain that socioeconomic status can influence young people's belief systems resulting in varying capacities to express their interests and job or career aspirations (Blustein et al., 2002; M. T. Brown, Fukunaga, Umemoto, & Wicker, 1996). In connection with career services in developed countries there is an emphasis on university bound students rather than those seeking employment (Helms & Cook, 1999; M. S. Richardson, 1993). These studies suggest a connection between socioeconomic status and personal characteristics and the focus of careers services on students pursuing tertiary education.

Raffo (2006, p. 77) reported on seeking employment as a number of stages involving gathering careers advice, undertaking a comparative analysis of career opportunities, examination of data on the labour market and possible pathways, a review of the evidence, the development of an action plan and the development of generic application and interviewing skills. Other researchers have also described some aspects of the application process such as the preparation of a résumé, completion of application forms and the development of skills in interview techniques (Barber, Daly, Giannantonio, & Phillips, 1994; Knight & Aucoin, 1999). These studies outline some of the task components of applying for a job.

While the application for employment process may vary, all young people need to acquire know-how in relation to process in an employment oriented environment such as Australia. Know-how is defined as "knowledge of how to do something; facility or skill for a particular thing" or "expertise" (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 2001, p. 786; The Macquarie Dictionary, 1997, p. 1186). Know-how is a broad concept which incorporates some task, process components or a combination of both. In searching for jobs, the methods can be formal such as responding to advertisements in newspapers, internet or bulletin boards. A previous study identified the role of a

number of literacies in this process. These included the use of print, social and cultural literacies that young people may have (Reid Boyd & Weatherill, 2002).

Most of the previous research refers to separate components of the application process such as job search, completion of written application and interview performance. There is little discussion of the overall process. Employment literacy aims to develop a more integrated understanding of both securing and maintaining employment. A lack of understanding of the knowledge and know-how can disadvantage those who are unequally positioned in the job market on the basis of socioeconomics, race, gender or location. The inclusion of a range of literacies to the application process is largely absent from this literature. These include reading, writing, oral, mathematical, technological and social literacies. Technological literacy includes being able to source information presented via computers and mobile phones. Studies have commented on the need for interactive skills in these 'new' forms of technology (Gilster, 1997, p. 34; Leu, 2003). Saunders (2002) commented on the need for technological skills due to differing modes of employment as a result of labour market changes. In connection with social literacy, Lonsdale and Mc Curry (2004, p. 33) explain that it is similar to emotional intelligence or interpersonal understandings. It involves the ability to 'read' people and respond appropriately. This process involves understanding the 'rules' of behaviour that are appropriate to the context. The use of all literacies incorporates a need to understand the meaning systems that apply in a particular situation (Giroux, 1983; B. Green, 1988, p. 161-162).

### ***Workplace relationships***

The range of literacies that are used in the application for employment may also apply to the development of ongoing workplace relationships. Within employment literacy I am including the personal and social aspects of employment. The personal and social components incorporate a capacity to understand and negotiate a range of relationships within the workplace. Social literacy may assist in the navigation of workplace relationships. Learning workplace norms including relationships incorporates the interplay of the individual characteristics of the new recruit and the organisational mechanisms. Input from supervisors or managers, colleagues or mentors have been identified as assisting the new person to learn (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006, p. 502; Louis, Posner, & Powell, 1983; Posner & Powell, 1985). The approaches used in the workplace are also likely to be determined by the organisation's position on the

transferability /context dependent debate that I discussed in the critique of employability. In a VET study the teachers commented that employers had a 'wish list' of wanting employees "who have good interpersonal and team skills and who can add value from their first day at work" (Callan, 2003, p. 19). This study indicates that those who deliver VET consider that some employers support the transferability of interpersonal skills. There is also an inference that if new employees have the interpersonal skills, employers may not consider the need for training.

The approaches and strategies used within organisations can reflect their views of learning. In the organisational literature a distinction is made between organisational learning and the learning organisation. Organisational learning emphasises the individual and collective processes involved in learning. The learning organisation considers the methodological tools that identify, promote and evaluate the quality of the process (Easterby-Smith & Araujo, 1999, p. 2, 8). Organisational learning focuses on the individual or the group whereas the learning organisation emphasises the methods which are dependent on the organisational structure. The role of a supervisor as the facilitator of learning has been reported in the learning organisation literature (Heron, 1993; Hughes, 2002, p. 57; Senge, 1990).

Recent education and training literature refers to social aspects of learning as progressive compared with the regressive technical approach. Progressive approaches involve interactions with work colleagues and others outside the organisation such as customers. Regressive strategies include learning-by-doing or meeting the task demands of the job (Felstead et al., 2005; Stroud & Fairbrother, 2006, p. 460). Although the connection between interactions and learning has been established, the mechanisms involved are not understood (Collin & Valleala, 2005, p. 401-402; Etelapelto & Collin, 2004). The sociocultural view of learning has some common features with the learning through interaction. Both include the engagement with the social practices of the organisation in assisting learning (Billett, 2002a; Felstead et al., 2005, p. 362; Rogoff, 1995). This position adopts an embedded view of the negotiation of relationships while participating in the social practices. The sociocultural approach adopts a critical view of learning in that the history, political and cultural aspects are important aspects of learning and are location specific (Billett, 2002a, 2002b; Cole, 1998; Engestrom & Middleton, 1996). The need for mutual support, equal participation

and the role of a facilitator in developing trusting and democratic relationships are reported (Heron, 1993; Hughes, 2002; Robertson, 1996).

In the literature there are indications of differing perspectives on the ways people learn the interpersonal dimensions associated with the development and the maintenance of workplace relationships. Young peoples' input on strategies and an overall approach that they consider are effective could inform training organisations and workplace learning. There is also a lack of direct research evidence from training organisations and those who fund training programs on the efficacy of current practices and programs in relation to future employment. The response of employers to vocational education and training of young people and the possible impact of the employability policy changes would permit most of the key stakeholders' positions to be considered. I have investigated the literature in connection with seeking employment and the ways of facilitating the negotiation of relationships in the workplace. Employment literacy may also incorporate an awareness of the ways employment operates. The home and school settings are central in shaping young people's understandings in that regard.

### ***Role of family and school factors***

Socioeconomic position is a major contributor to patterns of experience across generations, material resources and opportunities for learning which have long term consequences for young people. Understandings of work begin in early childhood and parents can be a significant source of information (Levine & Hoffner, 2006, p. 647). Parents act as role models of success in employment (Bartholomae, Fox, & McKenry, 2004, p. 786; Hill & Duncan, 1987). Similarly, patterns of welfare dependency among parents have been found subsequently among their children (Bartholomae et al., 2004, p. 785; Corcoran, 1995; Hill & Duncan, 1987). A connection has been made between growing up in a household and neighbourhood in which employment is modelled and the likely development of disciplined habits which support regular work (Wilson, 1991, p. 10). These studies indicate intergenerational patterns of experience in terms of employment or unemployment which also has ramifications for the life chances of the next generation.

The level of material possessions such as housing can impact on children and young people in the short and long term which is also likely to affect their employment prospects. Studies have linked poor living conditions and overcrowding to children's

incapacity to function in that environment (Ackerman, Schoff, Levinson, Youngstrom, & Izard, 1999; Conger, Conger, & Elder, 1993; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). Income and housing have also been linked to future academic attainment (Ermisch & Francesconi, 2001; O'Brien & Jones, 1999). Severely disadvantaged groups such as Indigenous Australians are overrepresented in sub standard housing and Indigenous people in urban areas are much more likely to live in households that are overcrowded (Saggers, 2003, p. 221). Other material resources contribute to learning such as books, newspapers and computers and are associated with socioeconomic position (Bartholomae et al., 2004; Downey, 1995; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999; Roscigno, Tomaskovic-Devey, & Crowley, 2006). Disadvantaged children are also less likely to engage in extra curricular activities such as visiting museums, dance or music classes, than their more affluent peers (Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997; Roscigno et al., 2006).

The provision of opportunities for learning within the home is among the ways in which advantage is transmitted between generations (Conger, Conger, & Elder, 1997; Conger & Elder, 1994; Hanson, McLanahan, & Thomson, 1997; J. R. Smith, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1997). Affluent parents give priority to their children's health through the provision of healthy food whereas this is not always the case in poorer families for a variety of complex reasons (Becker & Thomes, 1986; Guo & Harris, 2000, p. 433). The role of knowledge in combination with material resources can be important in fostering learning. Studies demonstrated increased levels of awareness of development and the investment in activities that stimulate cognitive and social development by parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Parents with lower socioeconomic status considered child development as evolving naturally. There were also differences in the approaches of the parents to discipline. Middle class parents emphasised the use of reason and language in the execution of discipline while parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tended to use directives (Lareau, 2002 ; Roscigno et al., 2006). Research indicates that socioeconomic status can be a significant factor in shaping the experience of young people in their homes. The connection between parental knowledge in areas such as health, social and cognitive development may have ramifications in the education system.

The sociological literature in developed countries indicates that educational outcomes vary for young people based on socioeconomic background, (Germov, 2003, p. 238; Ishida, Muller, & Ridge, 1995). These differences have been consistent since the early

20<sup>th</sup> century (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Croxford & Raffe, 2005; Levy, 1966; T. Parsons, 1951; Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993). While changes in school participation have taken place in the United Kingdom there are indications that young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds are likely to be overrepresented in leaving school at the minimum age or following vocational rather than academic pathways (Furlong, 2005, p. 380). In investigating the situation in Australia, Foley (2007, p. 8) found that participation in VET was higher in lower socioeconomic areas than in high socioeconomic ones (12.7 per cent compared with 8.7 per cent).

Some studies have examined parental factors to explain the diversity of experience for young people. These include similarity in values and capacity to negotiate within school settings. Parents who have undertaken higher education often value learning and have similar aspirations for their children (Ermisch & Francesconi, 2001). The differing capacity of parents to negotiate with teachers on their children's behalf has been reported. Lareau (2000) found a greater acceptance of school decisions by poor parents even when they were dubious about the credibility of the teacher. In contrast, middle class parents related to teachers on equal terms assisted by more extensive vocabularies (Lareau, 2002, p. 771). Research in the United Kingdom and Australia has outlined the ongoing disconnection from schools for mothers from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Arnot, 2002; Connell, Ashendon, Kessler, & Dowsett, 1982; Reay, 1998).

Educational policy or school based practices have been identified as adversely impacting on disadvantaged groups such as young Indigenous people in Australia. Researchers have detailed the lack of recognition of bilingual and biliterate education within educational policy. There has been an emphasis on Standard Australian English despite evidence that students become proficient in a second language if they participate in a well designed program in the first language (Dooley, 2004, p. 67; Lo Bianco, 1999, 2000). The lack of cultural understanding of the teacher can result in Indigenous students being demeaned or demoralised (Luke & Freebody, 1997; Phillips, Lampert, & Healy, 2004, p. 119). The literature highlights the significance of socioeconomic status and experiences in the home which match or conflict with the school environment. In turn, the lack of shared understanding of the cultural dimensions of school policies and practices by parents and children may contribute to different outcomes for those from disadvantaged groups.

## ***Role of social networks and neighbourhoods***

Moving from the home I will consider the contribution of networks, neighbourhoods and social capital. These combine to account for variation in the sources of information, availability of work opportunities and modelling of employment. Drentea (1998, p. 322) found that the use of both formal and informal connections can be beneficial in searching for employment. Researchers reported on the links between family and friendship networks and securing employment in Europe, Canada, and the United States (J. Field, 2003, p. 51-52; Petersen, Saporta, & Seidel, 2000). American studies have also reported the use by employers of existing employees to recruit new staff (Fernandez, Castilla, & Moore, 2000; Fernandez & Weinberg, 1997). In some cases job information may only be available through personal networks (Aguilera, 2002, p. 854). Networks can provide varying types of support which can be significant in the area of employment. These include emotional, instrumental and information support. Emotional support fosters a sense of wellbeing. Instrumental support includes material or financial assistance while information can include details of job vacancies or application for employment process. It was found that young unemployed people were more likely to attract instrumental support rather than the other forms (Russell, 1999, p. 215-219). Research suggests a link between more diverse networks and greater sources of employment information. Young people who are unemployed are disadvantaged in the process.

Neighbourhoods can vary in their capacity to provide employment options for young people. American literature has focussed on the interplay of local and structural factors to explain the absence of legitimate employment options, the impact of the environment on families and the lack of modelling of work. Wilson (1997, p. 75) links global employment changes to the number of available jobs. The decline in mass production and the consequent reduction in lower skilled blue collar jobs impacted adversely on black workers. Sampson (2001, p. 4) commented that the concentration of the most disadvantaged and the migration out of middle and upper income families from the 1970s to 1990s informed Wilson's work. Wilson (1991, p. 10; 1997, p. 73) uses the phrase 'new urban poverty' to explain the situation in neighbourhoods in which the majority of adults are unemployed or have dropped out of the workforce completely. Other research used the term 'impoverishment' to explain the clustering of social problems such as public disorder, school dropout and the maltreatment of children with



concentrated poverty, family instability and residential turnover (Klebanov, Brooks-Gunn, & Duncan, 1994, p. 451). Wilson (1991, p. 9-10) refers to weak attachment to the labour force to provide reasons why certain groups are more susceptible to unemployment. He argues that the interactions between the economy and the individual's social environment explain this vulnerability. Attachment to the workforce therefore incorporates neighbourhood factors. Neighbourhoods that have few legal employment opportunities, inadequate job information networks and poor schools foster weak labour force attachment and the development of deviant or illegal activities to generate income (Wilson, 1993, p. 21).

In this situation the increased proportion of poor families and unemployed adults make it more difficult to maintain the social organisation associated with basic neighbourhood institutions (Wilson, 1997, p. 54). A jobless family is influenced by the behaviour, beliefs and social perceptions of the other disadvantaged families who are disproportionately concentrated within an area. Poor people who reside in neighbourhoods that support strong labour force attachment are in a different social context to those with similar education and occupational skills living in areas that reinforce weak labour force attachment. Those within an area of weak labour force attachment are therefore further constrained by the outlook and behaviour of many of the other jobless families within the area (Wilson, 1997, p. 72-73; 1993, p. 20-21).

The lack of modelling of work can be significant in the ways young people are socialised. For example, a young person who grows up within a family and neighbourhood where work is modelled is likely to acquire the organisational skills that support regular employment. This young person has significant advantages compared with another young person who has not had that experience in relation to understanding the requirements of paid work. Being employed provides parameters for the daily behaviour and the patterns of interactions that it imposes. It determines where you are going to be and what you are going to be doing there. In addition to the provision of the temporal and spatial regulation regular work requires the necessary planning of daily life associated living in an industrial economy (Wilson, 1991, p. 10; 1997, p. 73). The ghetto-like conditions described by the American literature also exists in some Australian suburbs in that people who live there are largely unemployed due to low skill levels, limited educational opportunities and longer distances from potential jobs (Gregory & Hunter, 1995, p. 33; Vinson, 2004). Wilson's (1991, 1997, 1993) work

demonstrates that home disadvantage can be compounded by networks and neighbourhood aspects.

### ***Social capital***

Social networks and neighbourhood factors are often included within broader discussions of social capital. Portes (1998, p. 4) defines social capital as the means by which social actors benefit from social networks. He maintains that social capital serves three main areas: sources of social control; family support; and the benefits accrued through extrafamilial networks (Portes, 1998, p. 6). Field (2003, p. 45) outlines the general benefits for those who have support in the areas of health, happiness, wealth, better school performance of children and less anti social behaviour compared to those without support. In relation to employment, access to job related information is associated with market advantage (Coleman, 1990). Social networks can be considered to be horizontal, in which members are connected within families or neighbourhoods, and vertical where people are connected across diverse social networks (J. Field, 2003, p. 65; Warr, 2005, p. 286). Horizontal or bonding ties with family and friends are maintained over time and ideally are intimate and supportive and contribute to a positive self identity. Vertical or bridging connections are often represented by functional relationships (Warr, 2005, p. 287).

Quantitative and qualitative studies suggest that socioeconomic background may contribute to different networks. People living in poor communities may be connected by bonding or horizontal ties but have less access to bridging or vertical connections (J. Field, 2003; Portes, 1998; Russell, 1999). There are at least two types of inequality associated with social capital. Firstly, people who are affluent and well educated are generally those with the most connections. Secondly, there are also qualitative differences in the level of resources within the networks (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995, p. 82). The opportunities for support are closely connected to socioeconomic position (Bush & Baum, 2001, p. 196; J. Field, 2003, p. 82). Bourdieu (1993, p. 143) outlines that there are two elements to social capital. These are social networks and the ways in which they are maintained through skills. The literature on networks, neighbourhoods and the links with social capital indicate that knowledge and connections are factors that assist in generating different outcomes for people. These include employment. I will now consider the contribution of the sociocultural view of learning.

## ***Literacy as a sociocultural practice***

The idea of transferable workplace skills as opposed to context specificity is central to the employment debate (Billett, 2002a, 2002b; Cole, 1998; Engestrom & Middleton, 1996; National Industry Skills Committee, 2007). The position taken determines the expectation at the point of selection and the ways in which workplace learning is facilitated. In practice there may be an interaction between both portability of skills and environment specific factors in explaining the ways young people acquire an understanding of workplace norms. The sociocultural perspective that I referred to in the discussion of workplace relationships has been more fully developed in the area of language. This position may illuminate the ways in which young people could acquire understanding of workplace environments and relationships. It may also move beyond the dichotomous position of generic skills versus context dependent skills. I will outline some of the major developments in literacy over the last thirty years.

Although there is no universal definition of literacy the meanings have changed from decoding messages to more complex and diverse understandings and skills (Lonsdale & Mc Curry, 2004, p. 5). At the official launch of the United Nations Literacy Decade 2003-2012 there was recognition of multiple diverse literacies that are learned in different ways (Shaeffer, 2003). Literacy within the developed world prior to the 1970s referred to programs that assisted adults in acquiring reading and writing skills (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 4). The focus of this training was on individuals gaining these skills. Within the broader area of language research, New Literacy Studies (NLS) is one of the major theoretical traditions that has challenged the individual skills view of literacy and has focussed on out-of-school settings. This field of study is situated at the crossroads where sociolinguistics and anthropological theories of language meet ethnographic and discourse analysis. The contributions of this tradition include its depiction of literacy as being situational, the existence of multiple literacies, and an analysis of local events within the broader cultural and political structures. NLS investigates literacy partly using the construct of discourses through revealing, understanding and addressing power relations (G. Hull & Schultz, 2001, p. 584-585). Researchers in this tradition make a connection between the micro aspects of literacy and the more macro analysis of discourse and power. Literacy therefore has to include the social, cultural, historical, economic and political contexts (G. Hull & Schultz, 2001, p. 586).

In parallel to NLS studies and sometimes overlapping them is the area of critical literacy. While the two fields seek to define literacy in relation to power and identity, critical literacy has a stronger emphasis on praxis: action based on reflection. Critical literacy draws on an explicit political agenda associated with Freire's work (G. Hull & Schultz, 2001, p. 588). Freire and Macedo (1987, p.35) stated that "reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world". Luke and Freebody (1997) maintain that the purpose of critical literacy is to achieve social change and cultural diversity. In 1996 a group of scholars from the USA, UK and Australia known as the New London Group developed the idea of multiliteracies. The aim of their work was to broaden the understanding of literacy to include the negotiation of a multiplicity of discourses that make up the context of our culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalised societies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 9).

A number of authors have further developed the idea of literacy as a sociocultural practice. An example of the sociocultural dimension is that a person who does not 'know' chemistry cannot read an advanced chemistry text in a meaningful way although he or she can decode the words. Meaningful reading therefore involves familiarity and participation with the social practices relevant to the text (Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 101). Lankshear and Noble (2003, p. 8) maintain that reading has traditionally been conceived in psychological terms whereas literacy challenges this individualistic idea and focusses on the strong links to social class or social group. Illiteracy is also associated with being poor or marginal. Literacy from this perspective is much more a sociological concept. A sociocultural approach maintains that language and literacy can only be understood when located within their social and cultural settings. This perspective gives priority to the social and cultural dimensions of literacy including the historical context (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 8-9)

## ***Discourses***

Gee and colleagues (1996, p. 10) emphasise the links between language and social groups drawing on the work of Foucault and Bourdieu through a discussion of discourses. They confirm that a set of related social practices constitutes a Discourse (with an upper case 'D'). Written or spoken language as discourse is identified by a lower case 'd'. A Discourse incorporates "ways of talking, listening, reading, writing, acting, interacting, believing, valuing, and using tools and objects in particular settings

and at specific times so as to display or to recognise a particular social identity” (Gee et al., 1996, p.10). Discourses are a way of being in the world which incorporates language, values, clothes and nonverbal behaviour such as gestures and body positions. They are “a sort of an identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a social role that others will recognise” (Gee, 1996, p. 127). Gee and colleagues (1996, p. 8) apply the idea of Discourse to a typical American law school which is connected to the larger Discourse of the law. Students and lecturers in the law school enact specific social identities within this environment and behave in ways which can be historically identified with being a lawyer (Gee et al., 1996, p. 8, 10).

Within the law school the traditional methods of instruction are the use of procedures such as writing briefs or engaging in legal argument. The procedures are not questioned so the instruction is ‘outside’ the procedures. One of the assumptions within this environment is that if students are not given explicit instructions on how to proceed they will teach themselves (Gee, 1996, p. 134). This assumption within the social practices of the law school may conflict with the other Discourses of some students in relation to the values held. For example, some families value cooperation rather than competition and some have difficulty in engaging with authority figures such as the law school lecturers. The conflict can have an impact on the individual’s performance in the new Discourse (Gee et al., 1996, p. 12). People learn the practices of the Discourse through being immersed in these practices or learning from the inside. In that way the learner takes on the perspectives, the worldview, and a set of core values in order to master an identity within the Discourse (Gee, 1996, p. 136; Gee et al., 1996, p. 13).

Gee (1996, p. 137) differentiates between primary and secondary Discourses. Primary in this sense refers to the family of origin or kinship group. Primary Discourses constitute our initial social identity and form the base from which we acquire or resist later Discourses. Secondary Discourses apply when we move into institutional environments such as schools, churches, bureaucracies and workplaces. They constitute the recognisability and meaningfulness of our more formal acts. The boundary between the primary and secondary Discourse is not fixed and is constantly being negotiated. Discourses are not mastered by overt instruction but through an apprenticeship process into the social practices and support from those who have already mastered the

Discourse (Gee, 1996, p. 139). Gee (1996, p. 162) uses the idea of a 'borderland discourse' to indicate the points where the primary and secondary Discourse conflict.

A number of Discourses operating within one setting can be applied to the workplace. For example, a distinction can be made between the Discourses on the factory floor and those which exist within the boardroom in relation to the language, the gestures, the beliefs/values and the way of dress that exists. Identities are also likely to differ in these two environments. An individual worker may have a range of roles such as a team member, union representative and shareholder and consequently engage with a number of Discourses. Participation in the number of Discourses involves having to engage in numerous literacies. This process involves communicating effectively orally and in writing in the various contexts (Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 102, 103).

In order to negotiate the varying and often conflicting Discourses in many work settings, workers need to be literate from a sociocultural perspective. Literacy from this point of view incorporates three interlocking dimensions: the operational; the cultural; and the critical which apply to the learning and practice environments. None of these dimensions have priority and all three need to be considered simultaneously. This means that it is counterproductive to focus on skills outside an 'authentic' context of social practice for people of all ages and within formal and informal learning settings (Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 104). The operational aspect emphasises the language aspects of literacy. It incorporates being competent with tools, procedures, and techniques associated with language proficiency. The ability to write and key in a range of contexts is also included (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 11).

The cultural dimension relates to being experienced in the particular meaning system (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 11). It therefore involves "understanding the texts in relation to the contexts – to appreciate their meaning; the meaning they need to carry to be appropriate; and what it is about given contexts of practice that makes for appropriateness or inappropriateness of particular ways of producing and accessing texts" (Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 104). The critical component requires an understanding that all social practices and therefore all literacies are socially constructed. Therefore there is a selective process in that some representations are included while others are excluded. Examples of such representations include values, rules and standards. Literacy involves being socialised in the social practices of any

social setting. In addition to facilitating participation in the existing literacy the critical dimension forms the basis for transforming and actively producing that literacy subject to an understanding of its social construction (Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 31). The advantage of this sociocultural perspective is that in addition to the 'how to' or functional knowledge in relation to literacy it provides an understanding of the context through the inclusion of power, culture and history (Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 31).

This discussion of Discourses has implications for the understanding of the workplace, the impact on workers and the training of workers to negotiate the varying contexts. In relation to the workplace there are a number of different socially constructed Discourses including tensions between them. This position contrasts with the individual skills or cognitive position which is associated with the psychometric tradition which maintains that literacy can be measured against benchmarks (Lonsdale & Mc Curry, 2004, p. 10). The functional-economic perspective is linked to the cognitive approach and considers literacy as practical, skills based and related to the achievement of narrow outcomes (Lonsdale & Mc Curry, 2004, p. 28; M. Watson, Nicholson, & Sharplin, 2001, p. 5).

### ***Theoretical understandings***

King (2005, p. 226) argues that Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital explains that the education system functions to reproduce social inequality in schools and academic institutions. Bourdieu found that middle class values such as physical mannerisms and the writing styles of the students were factors in the assessment process. Students from upper class backgrounds have a built in advantage as they have been socialised into the prevailing culture. They hold the code to interpret the cultural content of schooling (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 73). Similar interpretations can apply to the cultural dimensions of the workplace. I will focus on the institutionalised, the embodied forms and the transfer of cultural capital intergenerationally as these were pertinent to my study.

The acquisition of cultural capital is a means of attaining a higher status than one's economic position would allow (King, 2005, p. 224). Bourdieu (1986, p. 243) refers to three forms of cultural capital: institutionalised as manifested by academic qualifications; embodied in the form of dispositions of the body and the mind; and objectified as represented by the possession of cultural goods. Cultural capital includes the combination of habitus, field and capital (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 101). Habitus determines the way people see the world and links those individuals to their position in the field or broader network. In that way the individuals acquire the practices and tastes

associated with their class position (King, 2005, p. 222-223). Habitus is also a structuring mechanism through which people develop cultural and social capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 18). Bourdieu discussed the acquisition of institutionalised cultural capital in the education system through academic qualifications (Dumais, 2002, p. 46). Skills, attributes or experiences that provide advantage could be considered to be similar to academic qualifications.

Bourdieu (1990, p. 70) discussed the visibility of embodied cultural capital in “ways of standing, speaking [and] walking”. These aspects of the body connect individuals to their position in the field including the socioeconomic dimension (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 101; King, 2005, p. 222-223). The ways people use their bodies can be an important indicator of status and power (King, 2005, p. 223). But the use of the body can also represent subordinate standing. The bowed deportment of the Kabyle women was a marker of their inferior position in their tribal society (Bourdieu, 1977).

Bourdieu (1986, 244-245) also explained the “domestic transmission of cultural capital” to highlight the ways in which parental advantage benefit their children. Cultural capital functions as symbolic capital in that it is recognised as individual competence rather than parental investment. Becker (1964) reported on the development of ability or talent as a result of the commitment of time or effort by parents. Young people from advantaged backgrounds are therefore considered to be proficient in their own right rather than parental input being taken into account. This discussion of cultural capital may add a theoretical understanding of workplace skills, attributes and appearance. While these can be considered as neutral and universal young people from upper socioeconomic backgrounds more readily understand the cultural dimensions of work settings assisted by parental input and investment.

## ***Summary***

I have examined three dimensions that may contribute to employment literacy. These include applying for employment, the development of workplace relationships and the role of the home, school and neighbourhood in understanding workplace functioning. I have identified the absence in the literature of young people’s experience in these areas. Research which includes young people would address the current deficit. In the Introduction chapter the original need for research was identified by a community organisation which sought to provide training for young people to ensure that they were



what they considered to be “job ready”. There are some indications from an Australian study that those who delivered VET considered that employers expect new employees to have the relationship negotiation skills when they join the work setting. This is also inferred from some of the criticisms of generic skills associated with the concept of employability.

Research on the perspectives of young people undertaking employment related education or training, the trainers, funding body representatives and employers would enable the positions of the key stakeholders to be jointly considered. The role of the sociocultural approach may also move the polarised debate on the nature of skills required in the workplace to ways of facilitating learning that may be meaningful for young people. Bourdieu’s (1973, 1984, 1986, 1993) discussion of cultural capital may provide an understanding of the ways the workplace reproduces the dominant culture through institutionalised and embodied forms of cultural capital and its transfer between generations.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

My aim in undertaking this research was to develop a model of employment literacy. In this process I investigated the perspectives of young people undertaking employment related education/training, educators/trainers, employers and funding body representatives. I examined the different understandings of the elements that made up employment literacy. I particularly wanted to incorporate the range of meanings across and between the four groups of participants. I used a partial ethnographic framework in that I spent time undertaking fieldwork and observation in order to gain an appreciation of the operation of a non-government organisation as a provider of a range of training programs. My rationale for choosing these methods was that I wished to understand the experience of the young participants and the organisational context. On reflection this approach provided a reference point which enabled me to consider the different approaches to training that operated in the settings in which I recruited the study participants.

Researchers have reported on the need for compromise when undertaking research with marginalised or disenfranchised groups (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 202; Pyett, 2001, p. 109). I had to adapt the methods used in the data collection process due to the recruitment of study participants from six different locations. Initially I set about undertaking an ethnographic study. However that was premised on being able to recruit the young study participants within HCSG. Many of those undertaking work related training at HCSG exceeded the upper age limit of thirty years of age. I had set this maximum age as my focus was on young people. I therefore adopted a partial ethnographic approach at HCSG combined with in-depth individual interviews as the main methods of data collection across the four study groups. I will outline the research journey including the ethnographic approaches of fieldwork and participant observation, the sample selection, accessing the participants, ethical considerations, undertaking a pilot study, in depth interviewing and the analysis of the data.

### ***Ethnography***

I used some ethnographic techniques within HCSG as a means of examining some of the training practices in a non-government organisation. Rigour is demonstrated in qualitative research, including ethnography, through the researcher reporting an audit trail of the research process including the analytical decisions made (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 39; Stevens & Doerr, 1997). Historically, ethnography was a method

which originated in cultural anthropology and has been associated with the study of non-western cultures by westerners (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 155-156). It can be defined as the art and science of describing a group or culture. This description can range from a small tribal group or a classroom at a university (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 153). In addition to educational settings ethnography has been used in nursing, industrial, cultural and women's studies settings and many other environments (Berg, 2001, p. 134-135; Tedlock, 2000, p. 470). Other research maintains that ethnography aims to describe an aspect of the socio-cultural understanding or practices of a group (Siraj-Blachford & Siraj-Blachford, 2001b, p.193). The core of ethnography is "to understand another way of life from the native point of view" (Spradley, 1979, p. 3).

There is no standard interpretation of ethnography. It can be understood as a research process or a product. Rather than one method it incorporates a range of methodologies or methods (Savage, 2000, p.1401; Siraj-Blachford & Siraj-Blachford, 2001b, p. 193). Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p. 1) also refer to ethnography as incorporating a set of methods in which the ethnographer overtly or covertly participates "in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, what is said, asking questions - in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research". The detailed data produced by ethnographic methods has been described as painting "in the fine grained reality " (Siraj-Blachford & Siraj-Blachford, 2001b, p.194). It aims to explain the meaning systems people use to inform their actions. Ethnography can also represent the ways people see the world (Fetterman, 1998; Grills, 1998; Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p.13; Siraj-Blachford & Siraj-Blachford, 2001a, p. 194; Tedlock, 2000, p. 470). It therefore focusses on discovering the cultural frameworks and examining their structure and content which forms the basis for analysing particular social phenomena. In summary, ethnography searches out the meaning systems and emotions that make up a culture and the ways in which these systems are translated into actions in everyday life (Spradley, 1980, p. 5).

In keeping with ethnographic principles, I spent one day each week for an initial period of eight months at Enterprise House, one of HCSG's five administrative sites, The amount of time spent in the field varies but most ethnographers stay for a period of one year (Bernard, 1995; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 167). However, in many instances the period of one year includes the learning of a language. At Enterprise House a range of employment related programs were delivered which were funded by local, State and Commonwealth governments. Some programs had been operating for some time while

others were funded for a specified time such as two years. I gained an understanding of the operation of the site as a separate entity and as part of the larger organisation. I used fieldwork and participant observation in order to gain access to both young people and the organisation.

Fieldwork forms the basis and is the most important part of an ethnographic study (Delamont, 2004; Grills, 1998; Marvasti, 2004). A crucial feature is the immersion of the researcher in the setting in order to experience reality as the participants do (Hine, 2000; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). During the initial period I sought to build relationships with staff members who either assisted or coordinated the programs that were offered. In the early days I spent some time in the tearoom as this was often a good location to engage in conversation with the other users of this space. They included young people undertaking training, the trainers and some of the programs' clients. I participated in the regular staff meetings within Enterprise House. I was also included in meetings which involved the staff from across the other administrative sites, such as the development of the organisation's strategic plan. The strategic plan incorporated future direction for the organisation. During the fieldwork phase I was also able to collect relevant documentary material such as Annual Reports which provided details of the history of the organisation including the different programs offered over time.

The recording of experiences and observations but also interpretations of events have been noted as an important aspect of the experience of fieldwork (Emerson, 2004; Marvasti, 2004; Robson, 2002, p. 187). I generally recorded my field notes at the end of the day that I spent at Enterprise House but during the day I made some brief notes in my diary to remind me of specific insights or questions. The fieldwork allowed me to develop an understanding of the programs in which young people were engaged. The Personal Support Programme (PSP) and Work Options had been ongoing programs. The PSP is a national pre-employment programme that assists people with non-vocational barriers such as drug and alcohol or domestic violence issues (Australian Government, 2008). The Work Options program was primarily an opportunity for participants to engage in work activity in the horticulture area. Those who participated were people with mental health and other health issues and those included in Work for the Dole programs. In many instances the participants were receiving income support payments.

Researchers have referred to the coercive policies associated with mutual obligation of the previous federal Australian government for people who are receiving income support

payments such as Work for the Dole. Rather than a focus on increasing employment opportunities for young people it is claimed that such programs as Work for the Dole have more to do with control and surveillance (Jamrozik, 2005, p. 175; Sutherland, 2002, p. 43). With the exception of two young Indigenous men who undertook the training almost full time, most participated on a part time basis. As the horticulture work activity took place at different locations each day, the participants were transported to the work site by one or two of the supervisors depending on the volume of work. The tasks mainly involved mowing the grass, trimming the edges, fertilising and planting trees as required. The training literature makes distinctions between what is structured and unstructured and what is accredited and unaccredited. Unstructured training involves training situations in which the content is not specified and there is no predetermined plan (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003, p. 43). Accredited refers to the training being nationally recognised (Cully, 2005). The training delivered by HCSG was both unstructured and unaccredited. The training or education at the other locations in which I recruited participants was both structured and accredited.

I observed that the composition of the Work Options group varied each working day. This contrasted with the other training/education settings from which I recruited young participants. In the other settings the training/education group members were consistent which may be conducive to the building of relationships and fostering an environment where group members could learn from each other. The potential for informal learning from peers was discussed by some of the young participants from the other organisations and also by the funding representatives.

During informal conversations with the two young Indigenous men who undertook the Work Options program, one spoke of having to write a diary so that he could undertake accredited training at TAFE. The completion of the diary, which included details of the horticultural tasks undertaken, was considered necessary as he had not completed Year 10 level education. The diary was also discussed by the supervisor and the manager at the staff meetings. I became aware of the different perspectives of the young person, and the TAFE in relation to written literacy. I was also able to consider whether this approach was organisation specific or more widely adopted in the other education and training settings. This example showed the benefits of using a combination of ethnography and in-depth interviewing to examine practices in different locations. Researchers reported on the benefits of triangulation using a combination of methods to

develop a more complex picture of the phenomenon being studied (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 41; Patton, 2002).

### ***Participant observation***

As a participant observer I was able to see first-hand some of the training within HCSG from the perspective of the participants. Participant observation is an important aspect of ethnography (Delamont, 2004; Fetterman, 1998; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). The initial step in participant observation is locating a social situation which incorporates a place, actors and activities (Spradley, 1980, p. 39). A distinction can be made between formal and informal observation. An informal approach allows the observer discretion in what is gathered and recorded. However, the observer is required to perform the difficult tasks of synthesising and organising the data (Robson, 2002, p. 31).

In the course of undertaking the fieldwork I undertook formal and informal observation within HCSG. Formal observation imposes a considerable amount of structure in what is to be observed (Robson, 2002, p. 31). The formal observations included a training session with trainees from the Personal Opportunities Program (POP). This was a program which was organised as the need arose and was jointly organised by HCSG and Midland Brick, an industry partner organisation. I observed a session which related to workplace communication and was delivered by a middle aged female from another non-government organisation contracted to provide certain aspects of the training. Three Indigenous men, a social work student who on that occasion coordinated the program and myself were involved. Two of the Indigenous participants confirmed that their mothers had been removed from their family and the other stated that that he had lived with his grandmother who had died when he was eleven years old. Two also stated that they had left home at an early age. One referred to the difficulties that he had experienced in coping as a twenty one year old father with two children. He added that he no longer had contact with his children or previous partner. Although I was aware from the literature of the issues for Indigenous people, I was moved by the many losses experienced by these young men in relation to parents, children and home environments. It also raised for me the levels of personal and system adjustment that young Indigenous people have to make in order to participate in employment settings.

I noticed the different norms in connection with personal information provided by the Indigenous men and the non-Indigenous participants in this session. The Indigenous participants were open regarding the difficulties that they had experienced growing up.

I had not anticipated that the participants would have been so forthcoming in discussing the details of their family relationships. Peel (2003, p. 12) made the point that those who are disadvantaged have to tell their stories on demand, for example in connection with unemployment payments. In that process they do not have the same choices in relation to privacy that other Australians enjoy. The idea of choice may not have been shared by the Indigenous participants due to their different lived experiences.

One of the informal sessions that I observed was a conversation in the tearoom between a participant of the same POP and a young person from the Work Options program. The training had been provided by the same organisation as the one detailed in the formal observation but the presenter was different. The participant confirmed that “it had been good” because he had learned to communicate in an adult to adult way rather than a child to adult. He explained that approach involved using ‘I’ messages. He added that he was going to use this way of talking within the industry partner organisation as one of the managers had “talked down” to him and although he didn’t want to get “off side” with the manager he wanted an adult to adult relationship. The POP participant was excited about the knowledge he had gained and the ways he could use the understanding that he had acquired. This interaction made me realise the importance of understanding the meanings associated with oral communication. Lankshear and Knobel (2003, p. 11) refer to the need to understand the cultural or meaning system associated with all literacies. It also reinforced that workers sometimes have to ‘manage’ poor communication from those in positions of responsibility. These observations made me more aware of the potential challenges that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds may experience in work environments due to some of the differences between the home and work contexts.

### ***Sample selection***

The initial Australian Research Council proposal indicated that the study sample would consist of a selected group of participants, with a maximum number of fifty in at least three different socioeconomic status areas in Western Australia. These were to include; young people undertaking education/training, those who operated these programs, selected employers in each area, and representatives of funding bodies. The young people were to consist of: males, females, Indigenous people, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD), and participants from one regional area in Western Australia. They were to be aged between sixteen and thirty years of age. The

providers of training were to include a mix of government and community agencies. HCSG and the DET WA agreed to assist in the selection of appropriate agencies from which to access participants.

### ***Accessing participants***

The process of gaining access to the participants is crucial to the research (Feldman, Bell, & Berger, 2003). In some instances this process can be quite direct but some researchers refer to this aspect as not being straightforward (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Shaffir & Stebbins, 1991). My own experience reflected the significance of key informants in the settings, as outlined by previous research. The contribution of these key informants included the introduction of the researcher to other informants and provision of explanations of some of the context issues (Fetterman, 1998, p. 33; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 173; Marvasti, 2004). Both key informants had management roles within HCSG and Fairbridge WA Inc. The input from the DET WA representative, the other industry partner, was also a source of information and potential contacts which was valuable. I started with the recruitment of the young people. My key informant at HCSG introduced me to potential participants who fitted the age criterion within the setting and later provided the names of supervisors and three young women who had clerical/administrative roles at other locations within the organisation. I approached the supervisors and spoke to the young people either in small groups or individually. I outlined my study and explained the requirement of participating in two interviews of approximately forty five minutes duration. Seven agreed to participate (four males and three females).

On the advice of the DET WA representative, I contacted the training manager Fairbridge WA Inc, a RTO that delivers nationally accredited training in one of the outer metropolitan areas south of Perth. I met with the manager and described my study including the interview requirements for potential participants. He indicated that he was willing to participate. He agreed that those undertaking conservation and land management training; building industry apprenticeships; and Work for the Dole participants could be approached. During a subsequent meeting I provided an overview of the study to the participants of the three areas. I gave the young people who wished to be involved the options of letting me know immediately after the session or advising the manager. Seven young people agreed to take part on that occasion (five males and two females). I built a working relationship with the manager over time. Subsequently



we discussed the involvement of another group of trainees that were to undertake conservation and land management training. I followed a similar process in the recruitment of young informants. Eight agreed to be involved (four males and four females).

In the course of my fieldwork at HCSG, I became aware of a vocational education program that was provided through Swan City Youth as an outreach TAFE option. This in practice meant that the teacher delivered an education program at a local youth centre. This was an example of opportunistic sampling. Opportunistic sampling is the awareness of a new site for potential participants after the beginning of the fieldwork (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 48). I employed similar recruitment approaches in this setting to those outlined previously. Seven students indicated their willingness to be part of my study (five males and two females).

With the assistance from the DET representative, I approached a TAFE college in Albany in the south west of Western Australia in order to recruit a group of young people from a regional area. I liaised with the coordinator of vocational education section in connection with suitable times to speak to the students. I visited the setting on two occasions. Initially I provided details of the study and conditions of involvement. Six young people agreed to be interviewed (four males and two females). I also approached another non-government organisation in the suburb of Parkerville in the eastern metropolitan area of Perth that provided an alternative school program. This program provided another schooling option for students who could not continue in the usual school environment due to disciplinary issues. Unfortunately, with the exception of one young man, most were under the age of sixteen which was outside the age range for which I had ethics approval. The sixteen year old male agreed to be interviewed.

I became aware that the groups of young people I accessed did not include any from CALD backgrounds. Despite contacting migrant and refugee agencies I was unable initially to access any young people from CALD backgrounds who were undertaking work related training. Subsequently I approached a TAFE setting that had a group of overseas students who were completing diploma level education. Six participants registered their interest in being included (two males and four females). I initially interviewed six overseas students from South East Asian countries as representing people from CALD backgrounds. They were undertaking diploma level training at a metropolitan TAFE college in one of the northern suburbs of Perth. Following the

initial interviews I made the decision not to include them. Their work histories combined with their higher level of training meant that they more closely fitted the skilled migrant category. They could not be readily compared to the other groups of young people in my study. One of the limitations of my study was that young people from CALD settings were not represented. An overview of the locations, numbers, age range and Indigenous backgrounds of the young people is included in Table 1.

**Table 1 Profile of young people**

<i>Setting</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Male/Female</i>	<i>Age Range (years)</i>	<i>Indigenous</i>
HCSG	7	4 males 3 females	22-30	1 male
Fairbridge	15	9 males 6 female	17-27	2 males 1 female
Swan City Youth	7	5 males 2 females	16-18	none
Parkerville	1	1 male	16	none
Regional TAFE	6	4 males 2 females	16-17	none
Metropolitan TAFE	6	2 males 4 females	19-31	none
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>25 males 17 females</b>	<b>16-31</b>	<b>4</b>

The training or education programs in which the young people participated are detailed in Table 2.

**Table 2 Profile of young people's education/training programs**

<i>Setting</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Male/Female</i>	<i>Training Program</i>
HCSG	7	3 males	Work Options
		1 male	Work for the Dole
		3 females	Certificate III Business Administration
Fairbridge	15	6 males	Certificate II CALM
		5 females	Certificate II CALM
		1 male	Certificate III CALM
		1 male	Apprentice Carpenter
		1 male	Certificate III Business Administration
		1 female	Work for the Dole
Swan City Youth	7	5 males	Certificate II CGEA and GATE
		2 females	Certificate II CGEA and GATE
Parkerville	1	1 male	Certificate II CGEA
Regional TAFE	6	2 males	Certificate I CGEA
		1 female	Certificate I CGEA
		2 males	Certificate III CGEA
		1 female	Certificate III CGEA
Metropolitan TAFE	6	2 males	Diploma Community Services
		4 females	Diploma Community Services
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>25 males</b>	
		<b>17 females</b>	

A brief description of the accredited education/ training programs undertaken by the young participants is included in Appendix B. These included Certificate III in Business Administration, Certificates II and III in Conservation and Land Management, an apprenticeship in Carpentry, Certificates II and III in General Education for Adults, Certificate I in Gaining Access to Training and Employment and a Diploma in Community Services.

In the process of accessing the study participants I dealt with each of the groups separately. With the trainers/educators I contacted the two key informants. In both instances I provided a brief outline of the study to a regular meeting of the supervisors and explained that participation involved an interview of approximately one hour's duration. Six participants stated their wish to be involved (four males and two females). I contacted the educators from the alternative school and the outreach TAFE program directly and they agreed to be interviewed. Table 3 documents the location, gender and age range of the trainers/educators.

**Table 3 Profile of trainers/educators**

<i>Setting</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Male/Female</i>	<i>Age Range (years)</i>
HCSG	3	2 males 1 female	30-40
Fairbridge	3	2 males 1 female	20-50
Swan City Youth	1	1 female	40-50
Parkerville	2	2 females	20-30
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4 males</b> <b>5 females</b>	<b>20-50</b>

I discussed accessing a range of employer representatives with the HCSG manager. I approached each employer representative and discussed the project with each of the suggested individuals. All those I contacted agreed to be interviewed. Details of the type of organisations and the ages and gender of the employer participants are outlined in Table 4.

**Table 4 Profile of employers**

<i>Business</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Male/Female</i>	<i>Age Range (years)</i>
Employer	2	2 females	50-60
Organisation			
Family Business	4	3 males 1 female	30-50
Local	1	1 female	50-60
Government			
Hardware	1	1 male	30-40
Industry			
Building	1	1 female	30-40
Industry			
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4 males</b> <b>5 females</b>	<b>30-60</b>

The DET representative provided introductions to five employees (two males and three females) within the department varying specialist areas. The areas included curriculum development, retention and transition, career development and these were employed at varying management levels. The manager at HCSG used his contacts with federal government departments but there seemed to be a reluctance to be involved. Three representatives (two males and one female) of a federal government department agreed to take part subject to the three being interviewed together. I agreed to a group interview. I would have preferred to have included more representatives of federal government agencies as those interviewed were from the same department. Each participant was a manager of one or more employment related programs. The numbers and the state/ federal split are documented in Table 5.

**Table 5 Profile of funding representatives**

<i>Business</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Male/Female</i>	<i>Age Range (years)</i>
State	5	2 males	40-60
Organisation		3 females	
Federal	3	2 males	30-60
		1 female	
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4 males</b>	<b>30-60</b>
		<b>4 females</b>	

### ***Ethical considerations***

Prior to undertaking the study I applied for ethics clearance to undertake this research through Edith Cowan University. Within the application I identified that I would protect the confidentiality of the study participants through the adoption of pseudonyms. Stuart (2001, p. 38) refers to the practice of including pseudonyms as a means of maintaining anonymity and confidentiality of those involved in research. The initial application included young people eighteen years and above. As the process of recruiting young study participants proved more difficult than initially anticipated I submitted a further application to include participants between the ages of sixteen and eighteen years. The application included written parental permission for the involvement of this group of young people. The written consent of a parent or legal guardian is required for minors' participation in research (National Health and Medical Research Council, 1999; Neuman, 1997). I sought parental permission for the participants aged between sixteen and eighteen years. This was organised through the supervisor in the organisations through which I recruited the participants. Stuart (2001, p. 36) refers to the anomaly in that National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) recognises that although young people aged sixteen years have the maturity to participate in research the guidelines do not allow them to make the decision on their own volition (National Health and Medical Research Council, 1999).

Prior to taking part in the interviews I provided each participant with an oral and written explanation of the study. The written explanation included the participant's consent to being involved. A small number of the young people who identified that they had difficulty with reading asked me to read the written information. I read the information

and asked if the participant had any questions in those cases. I explained that the interview was approximately forty five minutes in length for the young people and one hour for the other participants. With the young informants I added that I was interested in the individual's experience or views rather than a right or wrong answer. I also sought permission to tape record the interview to which all the participants agreed.

Some of the participants were visibly upset and cried as they described challenging home situations, some of which had been ongoing where there had been abuse and/or neglect. I was aware of support services from my previous employment as a social worker. In those instances I checked if they were linked to community services or whether it was an option they wished to pursue. Some stated that were not interested in this form of support and others were already engaged with psychological services. The need for sensitivity has been identified in researching 'vulnerable' groups (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 222; Moore & Miller, 1999).

### ***Pilot study***

I carried out a small scale replica and a rehearsal of the main study. Pilot studies are concerned with either the administrative or organisational problems related to the whole study and the participants. They can be used to examine the methods and help identify any inadequacies prior to commencing the main data collection phase (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 256). My purpose was to assess the appropriateness of the questions and the process of engaging the young people. I liaised with the manager of the Personal Support Program (PSP) at HCSG in order to access three participants and I had established a relationship with two young Indigenous men from the Work Options program. I contacted the three potential PSP participants by telephone and provided a brief overview of the study. I discussed the location of the interviews and whether there was a need for me to provide transport. I was aware that the coordinator provided transport in some cases. Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005, p. 222) commented on the need for the setting to be comfortable for the participant. The three opted to come to Enterprise House and declined the offer of transport. They were familiar with the location as they attended interviews on a regular basis as part of the PSP. I contacted each one the day prior to the interview to confirm the arrangements. None of the three attended. I re-contacted the three on the advice of the programme manager and one declined to be involved while the other two stated that they wished to participate and I arranged a subsequent suitable date and time. On the second occasion neither of the two

attended from the PSP although I had checked on the preceding day on the arrangements. This experience reinforced the concept that the potential participants were part of a hard-to-reach group, a point I will discuss further in the next section. Previous studies explained that the pressing economic needs of some disadvantaged populations limits their participation in research (Anderson & Hatton, 2000; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005).

Following a discussion with the manager of HCSG's Enterprise House and the two young people involved I undertook the interviews with the young Indigenous men at that site which was their preferred option. Both appeared comfortable in the interview situation and engaged in the process. They raised the issue of the shame they experienced in connection with their written literacy at school. One explained that the completion of a diary served to reinforce the embarrassment he experienced in the school system. Most of the areas of questioning were readily understood apart from one in connection with 'rules' as applied to a work or training setting. I had used the term to elicit what was implied rather than overtly stated. One of the interviewees looked puzzled and I explained it as the expectations of the supervisor or manager. I transcribed the interviews and re examined the transcripts in the light of the areas of questioning. I changed the workplace 'rules' to expectations. The process of assessment of the language was ongoing through the interviewing phase with the young people.

### ***In-depth interviews***

I used in-depth interviewing as the main data collection method. I undertook ninety two interviews: sixty six with young people; nine with trainers/educators; nine involving employers; and eight representatives of funding bodies. I interviewed the young people on two occasions while the other three groups in the study participated in a single interview. A distinction is made in the literature between in-depth, semi-structured and standardised interviews as different interviewing approaches (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Elliott, 2005, p. 18). I combined aspects of the semi-structured interview in that I had a set of prepared questions in Appendix C. The purposes of these questions included a checklist of the areas to be covered and as a guide to the direction of the discussion in some instances. Within the discussion I sought clarification and followed up with the young participants to ensure that I had a clear understanding of that individual's position.



Qualitative researchers have differentiated between naturalistic and constructivist interview approaches (Elliott, 2005, p. 18; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). In conducting the interviews my thinking was guided by the constructivist framework. Previous findings maintained that this perspective seeks to elicit the ways people make sense of their lives which is achieved in the interactions between the researcher and the participant (Elliott, 2005, p. 19; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Harris, 2003). As I sought to bring together the understanding of employment literacy of young people, those who trained them, employers and funding bodies the interpretations of the participants was paramount. The role of subjective meanings and the interpretation of those meanings as a result of interviewing has been reported by previous research (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 655; Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 67).

A good interview has been compared to a conversation in that it is a two-way process in which the participant does most of the talking (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 55). The facilitation process is a factor in the level of safety that interviewees experience and their consequent contribution. The researcher seeks to join with the participants in gaining an understanding of their experience. Previous research has outlined the challenges of undertaking studies with 'vulnerable' populations. Although 'vulnerable' groups are socially constructed, the term includes those with reduced autonomy due to psychological or status factors or those who experience economic or educational disadvantage. They are often hard-to-reach due to their marginal position, lack of opportunities to voice their concerns and their scepticism in being involved in research. (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 203; Moore & Miller, 1999; Silva, 1995; Stone, 2003). Many of the young people whom I interviewed were marginalised due to economic disadvantage, poor school experience and a high level of conflict in their home settings. Previous studies have reported on the use of in-depth interviewing as a research method in examining the experience of 'vulnerable' populations (R. Campbell, 2002; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 205).

As the goal of in-depth interviewing is understanding the position of the participant the establishment of rapport is important in the engagement of the participant (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 655). Studies that focussed on vulnerable populations refer particularly to the importance of building rapport (Booth, 1999; Reinharz & Chase, 2002). I began the interviews with young people by introducing myself, asking if the first name I was given was their preferred option. I used their preference. I varied the ordering of the subsequent areas of questioning within the interviews and sought to allow the questions

to follow on from what the participant was saying. Robson (2002, p. 270) commented on varying the ordering of questions and Rice and Ezzy (1999, p.59) point to areas of questioning being linked to the participant's comments.

Previous studies refer to the differences in the use of language between researchers and participants in connection with areas of questioning (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 58). I would have appreciated further information on occasions but elaboration proved difficult for some of the young informants. I was conscious of balancing the probing with possible perceptions of pressure for the young people. On those occasions where the young people demonstrated impatience I accepted the information that they provided. I incorporated my value of client self determination into the research process in that I was conscious of verbal or nonverbal signs of pressure.

### ***Second interviews***

I undertook twenty four second interviews with the young people which represented 66 per cent of the initial forty two interviewed. In most cases the fact that participants had left the program accounted for the difference in the numbers in the initial and second interviews. One of the limitations of the study was that those who failed to complete the education/training programs were under represented in the second interviews. Although I did discuss the option of approaching those involved the organisations had not retained their contact details. The time period between the two interviews varied between four months and one year. The variation in the timing of the second interviews reflected the difference in the length of the education /training, organisational aspects of the training setting and the need in some instances to conduct the interviews prior to the completion of the program. The organisational aspects involved the resignation of one of the trainers and the recruitment of a replacement at the Fairbridge. My purpose was to examine the effects of the education/training on the young people's understanding of employment contexts and gaining employment.

Many of those who participated in the two interviews were more at ease on the second occasion. Previous studies have referred to the benefits of multiple interviews in building stronger bonds between the researcher and the informants (Reinharz, 1992, p. 36-37). In some instances the time spent in the education or training environment may have contributed to increased levels of confidence and broader understandings of the world of work.

## ***Data analysis***

Ezzy (2002, p. 73) referred to analysing qualitative data as an interpretative task constructed through social processes. Warr (2004, p. 579) made the point that the researcher's own cultural and social embeddedness is reflected in the interpretation of the data as in other aspects of the research process. The research process was influenced by my recent understanding of the operation of workplaces during the data collection phase, previous employment as an interviewer and as a parent of adult children relatively new to the workplace. An awareness of the literature and a structural theoretical framework contributed to my approaches. I brought my own direct experience of the overt and implied norms that operated in the training organisations and within a university since commencing the project. Previous work experience in the human resource area in London including selection interviewing provided me with an awareness of the role of language and presentation in that environment. My adult children, both university students at the time in their early twenties, talked on occasions about their part time work in a hardware store and a bakery. Their discussions involved the challenges of 'reading' their peers, customers, supervisors and the negotiation involved. On occasions we talked about possible strategies that they could use. I was therefore aware that understanding new workplaces was not always a straight forward process for someone who had an established work record or young people with resources, compared with the young study participants.

Reading and understanding the sociocultural perspective of literacy resonated with aspects of my own experience as a migrant where workplace understandings did not always transfer across cultures. A sociological and social work background provided a structural framework and a broader lens in which to examine the social practices and the differing experiences of the groups within my study. My experience, the literature and a structural perspective therefore influenced the ways I analysed the information that I had gathered in the interviews, informal conversations and field notes.

An initial analysis was conducted to reduce, organise and interpret the raw data such as the transcripts, notes from interviews and the field notes (Sarantakos, 1998). Authors reported that there are a number of different software packages including NVivo that are available to qualitative researchers to assist in the data analysis (Kelle, 2004; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 274). I used NVivo to manage the interview data. This software has tools for recording and linking ideas including coding (Richards, 2000, p. 4). Coding involves assigning a code to material that is relevant to a particular issue

(Ezzy, 2002, p. 123). I retained the transcripts for each of the four groups in the study as separate projects within NVivo. I followed a combination of inductive and deductive processes in the development of the coding system. I was influenced by the young peoples and trainers' discussions of the interconnection between the home environment, the direct experiences with the fieldwork and the workplace prior to undertaking the coding. Ezzy (2002, p. 10) discussed the acknowledgement of hunches and the simultaneous use of induction and deduction processes. The software package was new to me and initially the categories or nodes I developed proved to be too narrow. I later developed tree nodes or hierarchical categories to represent broader areas of the participants' discussion within the data (Richards, 2000, p. 68). An example of a tree node was applying for jobs. Within the tree node I included aspects of the application process such as family discussions of job options, the application process and interviews. I used the same nodes in coding each transcript. Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005, p. 275) maintain that the main tasks are to attach codes to the data and retrieving the sections so that it can be examined together. Subsequently the nodes individually or combined formed the basis for the analysis chapters.

Wolcott (2001) comments on the researcher's past experience and intuition in the interpretation of the data process. This allowed me to consider the data from the perspectives of the different groups within the study. I could critically examine the impact of broader structural aspects such as power and control. The themes, ideas and concepts were regularly refined and summarised through comparisons and contrasts across and between the study groups.

### ***Limitations***

The limitations of the study included the absence of suitable CALD participants and the inability to complete second interviews with young people who left the programs prior to their completion. I had assumed that the organisations would have maintained contact details of those that left so that I could have approached them directly. That was not the case which reinforced the need to clarify the situation particularly with hard to reach populations such as the young people in my study. The CALD participants that I interviewed had undertaken a higher level of training and could not be compared with the other young people included in my study. On reflection a more ethnographic study would have provided an increased understanding of the lived experience of

disadvantaged young people but was not practical in view of the need to access young participants from a number of settings.

## ***Summary***

I have outlined the methods, the pragmatic decisions I made in undertaking the research and my approach in analysing the data. The use of some ethnographic approaches within HCSG such as fieldwork and observation provided a basis from which I was able to examine the education/training practices across the locations. In that context I was also exposed to direct indications that the role of the home setting may be important in shaping the experience of some Indigenous people and other young people in the workplace. My use of in-depth interviewing was the main method in which I examined the understandings of employment literacy across the four study groups within the study. The training practices were a reflection of the broader political environment which I will discuss in the next chapter which provides the context at federal, state and local levels for my study.

## **Chapter Four: Employment, Training and Education**

### **Contexts**

In this chapter I will outline the policy contexts at a federal and state level for my research and provide a description of three community organisations in which I recruited study participants. Within the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) (now Education, Employment and Workplace Relations), I will trace the developments of generic skills from the late 1990s in Australia and include a comparison with other developed countries. These policy initiatives including the key role of employers inform my examination of employment literacy. In relation to the community organisations I will focus on the organisational structure, values, funding sources and the training/educational programs provided. I will demonstrate that the issue of funding was significant for the three community organisations. Although their strategies varied in the ways they matched the provision of services and financial management, there were ramifications for the provision of training and the broader issue of equity.

### ***Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (now Education, Employment and Workplace Relations)***

The Australian post school education and training systems consists of two sectors: vocational education and training and higher education. State and territory governments have regulatory responsibility for education and training and primary responsibility for the funding of the vocational education and training sector (DEST Outcome 2). Previously the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) provided support for the vocational education and training sector at a national level. However the responsibilities of this authority were transferred to the federal Department of Education Science and Training in July 2005. A new Ministerial Council on Vocational Education has been included. These changes were to facilitate “more appropriate governance, accountability and operational arrangements ... and reinvigorate the leadership role of industry” (Department of Education Science and Training, 2005, p.1).

More directly relating to my study DEST (now DEEWR) was involved in policy decisions in the development of skills and attributes that were required to gain employment and evidence of these skills. I will outline the policy developments that

resulted in the introduction of employability skills and include comparisons and contrasts with other developed countries.

### ***Employability skills***

Although the focus on generic skills began in the 1980s initially in the area of education, a number of industry led initiatives have taken place in the area of employment since 1999. A chronology of the main policy key initiatives from 1985 to 2002 is included in key developments in generic skills in Australia in Appendix D (Australian National Training Authority, 2003, p. 3). In both education and employment the need to contribute to Australia's international competitiveness has been a continuous theme. In 1992 the concept of generic transferable skills was developed in the form of seven key competencies that were considered essential in preparing young people for employment (Australian Education Council, 1992, p. 7). These included: communication; use of mathematical concepts; working in a team; problem solving; planning; information management; and the use of technology. The Mayer Committee differentiated between the level of competency required to undertake the activity, manage the tasks and evaluate and revise the responsibilities if required (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry & Business Council of Australia, 2002, p. 22). These levels indicated the varying requirements based on the classification of the job.

Australian industry has taken a leading role in the further development of employability skills. In 1999 the Australian Industry Group commissioned a study into the training needs of Australian industries. The study incorporated the views of three hundred and fifty organisations from the manufacturing, construction and information technology sectors (Australian National Training Authority, 2003, p.3-4). The issue of Australia's international competitiveness was a driver of change. More specifically, at an individual business level the capacity to cut costs, increase adaption opportunities, develop new products and the identification of new markets were highlighted (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry & Business Council of Australia, 2002, p. 1, 2). In 2002 the Employability Skills Framework, validated through Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) was developed (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry & Business Council of Australia, 2002, p.12). A summary of the employability skills outlined in the Employability Skills Framework is compared with the Mayer key competencies in Appendix A. Employability skills were defined as:

skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions. Employability skills are referred to as generic skills, capabilities or key competencies (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry & Business Council of Australia, 2002, p.3)

A set of attributes was also included. Employers claimed that these non-skill based behaviours were as important as employability and the other technical aspects of jobs (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry & Business Council of Australia, 2002, p. 36). The document points to the recognition of the varying skill demands required by those occupying entry level positions and existing employees (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry & Business Council of Australia, 2002, p. 37). However, the previous recognition of different levels of competency based on the classification of the job included in the Meyer key competencies was not factored in on this occasion. This means that employers have complete discretion on the definition of the levels of skill required for the work role and that of the potential employees. The inclusion of attributes also serves to broaden the requirements at a personal level. It also expands the reasons that people can 'legitimately' be rejected for employment.

In 2004 the Department of Education and Science (DEST) and ANTA contracted Allen Consulting Group and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) to undertake a project to support the recognition and recording of employability skills. The rationale for the recognition and recording of employability skills was the transferability of these skills between employment settings over one's working life and the necessity for everyone to have these skills. The settings which contribute to the development of employability skills include paid employment, voluntary work, self employment and educational settings (Department of Education Science and Training, 2004, p. 1-2).

A skills portfolio model was adopted as an outcome of the project. The format of the portfolio was not prescribed. The individual has the responsibility for compiling the portfolio including recording the evidence of skills. The individual is also required to seek "verification of their skills from third parties. ...from an employer or from people they engage with in non-work activities" (Department of Education Science and Training, 2004, p. 45). The role of employers is to use the portfolios in considering



applications for employment and within interview situations (Department of Education Science and Training, 2004, p. 46). The position of education and training providers is to assist students as owners of a portfolio (Department of Education Science and Training, 2004, p. 47). The promotion and adoption of the skills portfolio approach was considered as a state and territory responsibility (Department of Education Science and Training, 2004, p. 48).

These developments increase the level of information available to employers which can be a basis of comparison between potential employees in the selection process. The skills portfolio is similar to the current practice of answering selection criteria for professional positions in which an applicant is required to demonstrate evidence of skills. I have assisted people in this process and the idea of reframing their work experience in terms of skills can be difficult due to lack of familiarity of thinking in that manner. Young disadvantaged people are likely to find this process very challenging. The role of employers in the development of employability skills is missing even though they have traditionally contributed to the moulding of novice workers especially in the case of apprenticeships (E. Smith & Comyn, 2003, p. 20). I will now investigate the situation in relation to generic skills in other developed countries.

### ***International developments in relation to generic skills***

Generic skills sets exist in many first world countries such as the United States, England and Canada. I will briefly examine the changes that have occurred in these countries since the mid 1990s. The intervening period to the present has been a period of activity in connection with generic skills in these three countries (Curtis, 2004b, p. 22). In 1991, the United States Secretary Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) documented the workplace competencies, skills and attributes that school leavers were required to enter the workforce (Australian National Training Authority, 2003, p. 7). SCANS developed what it defined as work know-how which included three foundation skills: basic skills including literacy; numeracy and communication; thinking skills involving decision making; and problem solving; and personal qualities of responsibility; self-esteem and integrity. A combination of skills and attributes were included. Five performance levels were detailed based on the classification of the job. These were preparatory, work-ready, intermediate, advanced, and specialist. The preparatory level was considered suitable for unskilled work while the specialist level applied to an experienced employee in a specialised position (Curtis, 2004b, p. 23).

There was an expectation that schools would incorporate the skills and attributes with formal assessments at grades eight and twelve (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1991, p. 17).

The set of workplace competencies and foundation skills continues to be used in SCANS 2000 programs. A related project in the United States developed a set of assessment tools known as the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS). A range of tests, project based tasks and worksite ratings contribute to a portfolio to assess workplace competencies. Although a number of agencies at the federal, state and local levels are involved in certification approaches there is no overall system (Curtis, 2004b, p. 23). In a further initiative in 2000 the then Vice President established the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workforce Commission. There was a strong emphasis on information technology which was considered to be important for America's competitiveness. It defined 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy around technological competence. It also emphasised teamwork, communication and introduced the idea of lifelong learning (21st Century Workforce Commission, 2000) This could be considered as an extension of SCANS basic skills (Curtis, 2004b, p. 25).

In England the key skills are similar to the Mayer key competencies in Australia. These comprise: communication, numeracy or the application of numbers, the use of information technology, working with others, improving own learning and performance and problem solving. Each skill is identified at five levels which reflect the classification of the job. The five levels include: foundation; craft; technician/supervisor; higher technician/junior manager; and professional/managerial (Australian National Training Authority, 2003, p. 6). A national qualification comprised three of the key skills of communication, the use of numbers and information technology. The assessment includes an internal portfolio of tasks or work experience and an external test of each three skill dimensions (Curtis, 2004b, p. 26). The three wider areas included in the key skills of working with others, improving own learning and performance and problem solving are not part of a national qualification. Portfolio evidence is accepted which can include a report on verbal presentation from the learner (D. Turner, 2002, p. 5). Curtis (2004b, p. 26) made the point that the key skills do not include personal attributes despite pressure from the Confederation of British industry for their inclusion. A criticism of the assessment includes that the skills qualification is

narrowly defined and adds little to the assessment information provided by school reports (Curtis, 2004b, p. 27).

In 1992 Canada developed the Employability Skills Profile (ESP) which included skills and attributes on three dimensions. These included academic, personal, and teamwork. A total of twenty six specific skills were included. ESP was aimed at new entrants to the workplace and was adopted in curricula planning in all provinces in Canada (Curtis, 2004b, p. 27). Human Resources Development Canada initiated the Essential Skills Research Project (ESRP) with the aim of enhancing the skill level of jobs that required the completion of secondary school with an emphasis on reading, writing and numeracy. Two assessment strategies were developed to complement the ESRP. The Test of Workplace Essential Skills included an assessment of literacy and numeracy some of which was customised for specific industries. The second strategy was the construction of a portfolio which incorporated a profile of the individual's essential skills (Curtis, 2004b, p. 28).

The role of the Conference Board of Canada, the peak industry body, was evident in the development of a more extensive range of skills and attributes necessary for employment (Australian National Training Authority, 2003, p. 7). The revised Employability 2000+ retained the same structure of three domains: fundamental, personal management and teamwork skills. There were also some important differences between the 1992 ESP and the latest version. These include the listing of fifty six skills and attributes compared with the original twenty six. The 2000+ placed a greater emphasis on the skills and attitudes required to progress in a work setting. The assessment process is based around the Employability Skills Toolkit which contains a suite of tools to build portfolios of evidence of skills (Curtis, 2004b, p. 29).

There are similarities and differences in these frameworks across the United States, England, Canada and Australia. Some maintain that Australia and England adopted a conservative approach in the definition of generic skills in the early 1990s, whereas the United States and Canada were less traditional in that both included attributes (Curtis, 2004b, p. 34). The demonstration of skills through portfolio evidence is a strategy used in the four developed countries. There may be qualitative differences in what is meant by this form of verification. As an example, in the wider key skills in England, verbal presentation was acceptable whereas the portfolio evidence of employability skills in

Australia is in written format (Department of Education Science and Training, 2004, p. 45; D. Turner, 2002, p. 5). Troper and Smith (1997) refer to the issue of validity as a good portfolio may represent a person with well developed generic skills but it also reflects a person who is capable of putting together a persuasive document which is a separate skill.

There are a number of parallels between the recent developments in employability skills in Australia and Canada. In both cases the role of industry has been significant in the inclusion of a greater range of employability skills (Australian National Training Authority, 2003, p. 4, 7). These two contrast with the experience in England in that the approach from industry to include attributes has been resisted (Curtis, 2004b, p. 27). The frameworks in both Australia and Canada have an extensive range of skills and attributes compared with England and the United States. This can increase the discretion of employers in employment selection decisions. Both Canada and Australia currently do not differentiate the skill levels based on the classification of the job which is the case in England and the United States (Australian National Training Authority, 2003, p. 6; Curtis, 2004b, p. 23).

Researchers question the concept of generic skills in connection with transferability between the context in which the skill is developed and the new setting (Gick & Holyoak, 1983; Greeno et al., 1996). A number of common elements between the original setting and the new environment can be factors that impact on transfer (Curtis, 2004a, p. 141-142). The question of transferability is therefore not automatic. Overall the United States, England, Canada and Australia have developed frameworks which emphasise generic skills in the last ten to fifteen years. However, Canada and Australia share a common emphasis in seeking to assess the applicant potential for progression within the organisation (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry & Business Council of Australia, 2002, p. 3; Curtis, 2004b, p. 29). It is possible that the Canadian model was used in the process of development of the Australian approach. It adopts a highly individual focus in that the contribution of workplace aspects such as peers or possible training is not included. Jamrozik (2005, p. 20-21) comments that a trend in social policy in Australia is the commitment to the individual, which is guided by neoclassical economic and is commonly referred to as economic rationalism. I will now consider the policy mechanisms at a state level.

## ***Department of Education and Training (Western Australia)***

DET WA delivers public schooling and vocational education in over seven hundred schools and supports ten autonomous colleges of technical and further education. In the 2006/2007 financial year the department accounted for 26 per cent of the state's budget of \$15.2 billion making it the largest public sector employer in Western Australia. The number of staff employed equates to thirty thousand full time positions. The department's mission according to its literature is to provide world class education and training that meets the needs of individuals, the community and the economy in Western Australia. In order to achieve its mission it seeks to develop and support flexible approaches to learning that improve standards and participation in appropriate programs. It also plans to develop skilled workers in both established and emerging industries. In relation to the learning environments, it aims to provide safety and support for the physical, emotional and behavioural needs of students. These objectives are to be achieved through effective management and strong governance (Department of Education and Training WA, 2007, p. 1,7,).

My interest was on the aspect of training. DET manages the State vocational education and training (VET) sector-which includes the planning, funding and monitoring of services. Publicly funded, VET includes the administration of the Vocational Education and Training Act 1996, the State Training Board, the Training Accreditation Council, the TAFE colleges and registered training organisations (RTOs). The department works with the Minister in setting the strategic direction for the Vocational Education and Training Act 1996. The State Training Board which comprises nine members has an advisory role on the supply of and demands for skills, particularly in relation to the industries that are experiencing shortages. The main function of the board is to prepare the State Training Profile that determines priorities for the allocation of funding of training. The profile forms the basis for the allocation of Commonwealth funding to Western Australia. The Training Accreditation Council administers the registration of training providers, the accreditation of courses and the recognition of skills and qualifications. It advises the State Training Board on recognition arrangements. The ten TAFEWA colleges offer vocational education, apprenticeship/traineeship and entry and bridging courses which lead to mainstream courses. In addition, commercialised training and short courses, adult community education and education for full fee paying international students are included at some locations. The RTOs and the private training

providers are funded under competitive tendering arrangements (Department of Education and Training WA, 2007, p. 15). User Choice is a national policy that regulates funding to RTOs in order to deliver apprenticeship/traineeship training. In order to qualify for User Choice funding the RTO needs to be registered with the Training Accreditation Council (Department of Education and Training., 2008, p. 1).

The National Skills Framework is industry driven determines the training model and consists of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF), National Training Packages and the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). The AQTF has responsibility for the delivery of VET using two sets of national standards: those for RTOs and the State and territory that monitors the RTOs. The AQF is a single model for all qualifications (Department of Education and Training WA, 2007, p. 15). In the financial year 2006/2007 those undertaking apprenticeships and traineeships accounted for 28.8 per cent of those undertaking VET, with 54.7 per cent being twenty four years or under (Department of Education and Training WA, 2007, p. 15).

Employer satisfaction was identified as an indicator of the extent to which the DET WA meets the needs of industry. An annual State Student Satisfaction Survey has been used as a measure of meeting student needs. NCVET conducts national surveys to determine employer satisfaction with the VET system. In 2005 a NCVET telephone survey of Western Australian employers found that 83.8 per cent indicated that they were satisfied that the vocational educational and training qualification provided the necessary skills for the job (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2005). Student satisfaction provides an indication of the extent to which the courses fulfilled student expectations. 86.7 per cent of the students who completed the survey at TAFEWA in 2006 indicated that they were satisfied with the course overall. Levels of satisfaction have reported to have increased from 83 per cent in 2002 (Department of Education and Training WA, 2007, p. 34). DET WA provided funding to the non government organisations in which I recruited participants. These included HCSG, Fairbridge WA and Parkerville Children and Youth Care which I will now describe.

### ***Hills Community Support Group Inc***

HCSG is a community organisation, with charity status, located in the eastern metropolitan region of Perth, Western Australia (Hills Community Support Group Inc., 2008, p. 1). HCSG initially generated the idea of researching into what they called “job

readiness". I will include an overview of the organisational structure including its promise and values, the sources of funding, the partnership arrangements and the programs in one of the sites at which I was based while undertaking the research. HCSG is an umbrella organisation that delivers services from a number of sites. Its administrative sites are based in the suburbs of Mundaring, Midland, Middle Swan, Maida Vale and Koongamia in the eastern suburbs of Perth. In addition services are delivered from fifteen other locations (Hills Community Support Group Inc., 2008, p. 1-2, 6) A board of management, which is elected annually, provides the overall strategic direction. The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for the management of the group with the fifteen Program Managers having accountability for individual services. Three additional management positions are accountable for finance/information technology, human resources and organisational development and are located within the Corporate Support section (Hills Community Support Group Inc., 2008, p. 4-5).

HCSG is situated within the City of Swan, which is the largest local government area within metropolitan Perth. It encompasses the boundary between the coastal plain and the Darling escarpment which includes agricultural lands, national parks and growing urban areas. The major industries include retailing, manufacturing, business services, agriculture and construction. The Swan Valley, a viticulture area of table grape and fine wine production, is also located in the area. Midland is the major commercial and administrative centre, situated sixteen kilometres north of the Perth central business district (City of Swan., 2003, p. 3). The total population according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 was 93,279 with 2.8 per cent identifying themselves as being Indigenous in 2001 (City of Swan., 2008, p. 1). This was higher than the Perth suburban average of 1.5 per cent (City of Swan., 2003, p. 8).

According to HCSG's literature, the organisation's promise or mission is to identify opportunities to develop services, implement initiatives and provide quality services. These objectives are to be achieved through conscious involvement within the overall aim of enhancing community well being. The organisation states its purpose as the provision of services to consumers of the highest quality at the lowest sustainable cost. The core values identified by the organisation include trust, dignity, respect and integrity as part of a quality service delivered within a person-centred framework. Trust includes reliability, accountability and the promotion of mutual agreement. Dignity is achieved through recognition of the individual's right to privacy and confidentiality and

access to the complaints mechanism. Respect is demonstrated through listening, responding and recognition of individual choices in connection with lifestyle, culture and beliefs. Integrity is shown through honesty and authenticity in the provision of information and delivery of services (Hills Community Support Group Inc., 2008, p. 1-2).

A range of services are delivered across four main service areas. These are aged care, disabilities, youth with complex issues and carers. Three hundred and eighty five staff are employed which includes full time and part time staff which is the equivalent to one hundred and sixty five full time positions. In connection with funding the organisation has secured contracts for the financial year 2007/08 of over \$8 million. State government departments including health, child protection, education and training and disability account for over \$6 million of the current funding. The remainder comprises Commonwealth and local government contracts. HCSG refers to the need for income generation to supplement funding shortfalls and strategic property development from which the services are delivered (Hills Community Support Group Inc., 2008, p. 3, 5, 6,10)

In addition to seeking funding opportunities, HCSG has pursued a model of working in partnership with business and local, state and federal levels of government. One alliance comprising HCSG, State government and Midland Brick contributed to the development of broad based initiatives in order to extend and develop support services. One such project was the building of a second respite centre in 2001. A separate successful industry partnership has also been maintained between HCSG and Midland Brick (Hills Community Support Group Inc., 2005, p. 5). HCSG's industry partnership with Midland Brick has been recognised for its success and obtained state and federal awards. Most recently it was joint winner of the 2005 Microsoft/Work Ventures Ltd for longevity in the Prime Minister's Community Partnership Award (Hills Community Support Group Inc, 2006, p. 7). HCSG has also developed a partnership with Biz-lynx Technology which provides expertise and information that enhance the development of the technological and communication systems across the service delivery sites (Hills Community Support Group Inc., 2008, p. 8).

Midland Brick has also collaborated with HCSG in the provision of work experience opportunities in some instances. During the period of my fieldwork I observed some of



the training sessions for groups undertaking a Joint Solutions program involving Midland Brick and HCSG. The roles undertaken by HCSG included the recruitment of the participants and the organisation of some of the training. The training emphasis was on some of the personal aspects such as workplace communication and money management. The training that I observed was contracted to another community agency that undertook the facilitation of the sessions. Midland Brick provided the work experience component initially on a part time basis building up a two week period on a full time basis. On successful completion of the work experience those involved in the program were offered full time employment at Midland Brick. The participants of the two programs that I observed consisted mainly, but not exclusively, of young Indigenous men. All those who were undertaking this training had previously been unemployed for periods in excess of one year.

During my fieldwork the main programs that were at Enterprise House (a HCSG's site located initially on a Midland Brick property) were: Personal Support Program; Youth Services; Aboriginal Day Centre; Intervention and Diversion project; and Work Options. The Personal Support program provides support to people who are unemployed due to non-work barriers such as addiction issues. Youth Services supports young people both in a youth centre setting and as an outreach program. Within the youth centre the emphasis is on group activities while individual assistance is available through the outreach service (Hills Community Support Group Inc, 2005a, p. 4-5). The Intervention and Diversion project was a two year project involving the strengthening of community networks at a local level with the objective of reducing criminal pathways for young people. A community development approach was used involving collaboration between community organisations, business and local, state and federal levels of government. The Aboriginal Day Centre provides opportunities for older Aboriginal people to come together as a group in a day centre setting to address their personal, social, health and wellbeing issues (Hills Community Support Group Inc, 2005a, p. 9). The Work Options program offered part time work activity opportunities for the participants who were unemployed or had health issues. As I indicated within the Methodology chapter the funding of this program was an ongoing organisational challenge. One strategy that was adopted was the securing of private gardening maintenance contracts (Hills Community Support Group Inc, 2005b, p. 11). Subsequently the Work Options program was transferred to Workpower Incorporated including the participants and the staff that delivered the service.

The issue of funding provided me with first hand experience of examining funding from an agency perspective. The Intervention and Diversion project was funded for a two year period through the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department (Hills Community Support Group Inc, 2005b, p. 9). An application for the subsequent round of funding was submitted but rejected. Other sources of state funding were also sought but were also rejected. It is likely that some of the initiatives that were developed in the Intervention and Diversion project may not be maintained thus demonstrating the sometimes short term focus of governments in the allocation of funding. The adequacy of funding was also an issue at Fairbridge WA Inc.

### ***Fairbridge WA Inc***

In contrast to HCSG, Fairbridge WA Inc was a registered training organisation (RTO) which provided nationally accredited training. It is a major community youth organisation with charitable status, it is also unique in Australia in that it owns the heritage town of Fairbridge Village (Fairbridge WA Inc., 2008c, p. 2). It is located six kilometres north of Pinjarra town, approximately an hour's drive south of Perth (Fairbridge WA Inc., 2008e). I will present its vision, values, a brief overview of its tourist activities, industry partnership arrangements and the training programs that are provided. Fairbridge Village was established by Kingsley Fairbridge in 1912. His vision was that it would be a place where young people could grow within themselves, within society and with the earth. The organisation continues to operate at three levels: on the ground working with disaffected young people; at a community level; and at a strategic or policy level. The managers work with over one hundred and eighty five youth organisations in Western Australia supporting them in their work. They are also members of regional, state and federal government committees and boards that aim to increase the scope and quality of youth services in Western Australia (Fairbridge WA Inc., 2004, p. 2; 2007, p. 6-7, 16). The organisational values include ensuring that all activities support Kingsley Fairbridge's original vision, the demonstration of respect and the nurturing of new ideas through open discussion, the adding of value to all work, being open and honest in resolving conflicts and speaking well of each other in public (Fairbridge WA Inc., 2004, p. 3).

The ways in which the organisation supports its work with young people includes the provision of accommodation and the development of the village as a major tourism site. The accommodation consists of twenty five English style cottages that are located in a

large bush area. This tourism site offers historical tours, events, a coffee shop and art gallery. The historical tour has been developed to include a guided bus tour and either morning tea or lunch. Fairbridge hosts a range of events each year. These include a three day festival, an alpaca show, a youth concert and a global festival for peace. The coffee shop and art gallery is a combined facility that includes individual and local artworks (Fairbridge WA Inc., 2007, p. 37; 2008a, p. 1; 2008b, p. 1; 2008d, p. 8)

Like HCSG, Fairbridge has maintained an ongoing formal partnership with industry, Alcoa World Alumina Australia. This partnership has existed for over a decade but their relationship has extended for a forty year period. The Chief Executive Officer referred to the community benefits of the industry partnership when he accepted the Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Business Partnerships in 2005. The partnership was awarded the Large Business Award for Western Australia. Some of the tangible benefits of the partnership included the funding of the initial Conservation and Land Management trainee program by Alcoa World Alumina Australia and the provision of hands-on work experience as a component of the training (Fairbridge WA Inc., 2006, p. 1).

The issue of balancing the service provision with available funding has also been significant for Fairbridge WA Inc. In the financial year 2006/2007 the Chief Executive Officer referred to the need to balance social responsibility with financial governance. The level of revenue generated by income raising activities did not meet the expected returns. A decision was made to tailor the number of programs in the recreation areas to the level of funding rather than being subsidised by the organisation. The CEO also referred to staff reductions of approximately four full time positions through not replacing people who left the organisation or not renewing contracts due to the reduction in the levels of training (Fairbridge WA Inc., 2007, p. 13-14). From an annual operating budget of \$2 million Fairbridge WA Inc receives approximately \$150,000 funding from state government agencies. The shortfall from income generating activities was also a factor in the reduction of training and staff numbers (Fairbridge WA Inc., 2008d, p. 9). In 2008 the training programs available to young people are also available to the general population (Fairbridge WA Inc., 2008d, p. 7). I was aware of funding issues in both HCSG and Fairbridge when undertaking the research. As I stated in the Methodology chapter the resignation of training staff meant that training had to be postponed and the challenge of attracting suitably qualified

people was discussed at Fairbridge WA Inc. While the approaches in dealing with funding shortages varied between Fairbridge WA Inc and HCSG the issue was significant for the two organisations.

As an RTO the organisation delivers accredited training in the following areas: Conservation & Land Management; Outdoor Recreation; Business Administration; and Construction. While completing these programs the young people are paid the National Training Award wage. In addition Fairbridge WA Inc participates in the Work for the Dole Program (Fairbridge WA Inc., 2004, p. 25, 29). The young people who participated in my study were generally undertaking conservation and land management training. In 2007 a Certificate II in general construction was added (Fairbridge WA Inc., 2008d, p. 7). Fairbridge Village is located within an endangered woodland community and work has continued to conserve this area. Most of the work has been completed. The young people participate in this work as part of their conservation and land management training (Fairbridge WA Inc., 2007, p. 9). I also approached Parkerville Children and Youth Care in order to recruit study participants.

### ***Parkerville Children and Youth Care***

Parkerville Children and Youth Care is a community organisation under the auspices of the Anglican Church. In this organisation I was involved with one education/training program that is offered which was not the case at either with HCSG or Fairbridge WA Inc. I will briefly describe the work of the agency including its values. The organisation has been a provider of care and protection for children and young people since 1903 (Parkerville Children and Youth Care., 2008c, p. 1). The focus is on children who have experienced multiple forms of abuse and display a number of trauma-related behaviours. However, a range of services for children, young people and families are offered. There is an emphasis on the individual outcomes for the users of the services through the use of care plans with the overall aim of making a positive difference to that person's life. According to the organisation's literature as an Anglican Church agency, its values include caring, hope, respect and integrity. Caring is evidenced by ensuring that children and young people experience care. Staff are provided with support within a team environment. Hope is demonstrated through instilling a belief in change among the clients and the capacity to make a difference among workers. Respect involves the recognition and acceptance of difference. Integrity is achieved through ensuring clients are informed and involved. Staff maintain

integrity through a commitment to ethical standards (Parkerville Children and Youth Care., 2008d, p. 1-2). The organisation is direct in stating that it could not achieve the outcomes it does without individual and corporate support. Options are provided in the agency's website for donating to specific programs (Parkerville Children and Youth Care., 2008a, p. 1-2).

The Education, Employment and Training (EET) program caters for young people between the ages of fourteen and sixteen years who risk school failure. The aim is to prepare them for employment. EET is registered as an Alternative Education provider through the DET for young people of compulsory school age. On average, twenty to twenty five young people participate in the program each year. The participants include those who have been excluded from school, had multiple suspensions or those who regularly truant from school. EET was established in 1984 and according to the organisation has a reputation within the community as being an effective means by which disenfranchised young people can gain employment. The emphasis is on those involved gaining an understanding of the demands and the rewards associated with work (Parkerville Children and Youth Care., 2008b, p. 1)

The program, which is six to twelve months in duration, includes a combination of support, education and practical skills components. The participants enrol in Certificate General Education Adults Certificate II which is a nationally recognised educational qualification and is delivered by a qualified teacher. In relation to work, the participants work alongside tradesmen. In that way safe working practices, an appropriate standard of work and workplace communication are modelled. Through observation and hands-on experience the young people can get to understand and engage in the work activities in a supported environment. The program includes a work experience component which is provided by local businesses (Parkerville Children and Youth Care., 2008b, p. 1-2).

As already indicated the three community organisations identified that adequate funding was an issue that they had to consider in addition to their core business. Two identified the role of industry partners. These partnership relationships were acknowledged by the federal government through the presentation of awards. The strategies to manage funding included income generating activities, the acquisition of property and donations. Jamrozik (2005, p. 120-121) commented in connection with privatisation

that when the focus is on income generating activities, little attention can be provided to equity issues. The issue of funding impacts on the availability of job related training in the community sector. This in turn has ramifications for young people. There is a mirroring process for young people who are disadvantaged. Those who lack resources are likely to live in poor accommodation. The poverty in the home can be reflected in the neighbourhood. The unpredictability can also be reflected in provision of education and training services. These issues have some relevance for the organisations in this study.

## **Summary**

I have described the federal and state organisational structures which frame the training of young people in Australia and Western Australia. Within the outline of DEST I included the development of the Employability Skills Framework which incorporates a suite of skills and attributes that are required to gain employment. While not unique among developed countries, Australia has adopted an approach that increases the requirements in relation to skills and attributes at a policy level for those seeking employment. By implication this policy increases the grounds by which young people can be rejected for work. I described the three community organisations. Whilst they varied in relation to the education/training programs they delivered, a common theme was the balancing the provision of services with financial responsibility. In some instances that included the transfer of services or the reduction of levels of training available. This unpredictability can impact on young people that are disadvantaged economically and educationally.

## Chapter Five: Home and School Environment

The process of gaining employment incorporates the use of economic, social and cultural capital and the family is central in the transmission of these forms of capital to the next generation. The home and school proved to be key factors in the preparedness of young people for training and work. Many reported that they lived in female-headed households that relied on welfare payments. Intergenerational unemployment and precarious employment were pivotal for two reasons. Firstly, some of the young people commented on the reduced material possessions available within their homes. Secondly, the absence of modelling of work was significant in the young participants gaining an understanding of the requirements of regular employment and the practices within the home that facilitate it. I will therefore examine poverty, the absence of learning opportunities within the home, health and school experience. In my analysis I will demonstrate the discrepancies between the social practices that young people reported in their homes and those that were taken for granted by the employer representatives. I will highlight the contrast between the young people's experience with some examples of the assistance provided or advocated by the employer representatives in connection with their own children. These will illustrate at a theoretical level the relevance of Bourdieu's (1984, p. 101; 1986, p. 244-245) concepts of habitus, cultural and symbolic capital in the explanation of the transfer of advantage between generations.

Furlong and Carmel (2007, p. 6) emphasised the role of the various forms of capital in securing employment. The role of families in the transmission of advantage intergenerational through the use of different forms of capital including financial, human, cultural and social is well documented (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995; Sullivan, 2001). My emphasis is on cultural capital which is linked to the other forms of capital. Bourdieu (1973, p. 80) referred to the significance of "linguistic and cultural competence" in relation to education, but in my study these aspects were also significant in employment.

Environmental factors including the family also impact on young people who are disadvantaged at a number of levels. At the individual level, American authors have reported on the link between the ecological context of young people who grow up in poor households and the sense of self belief. Herr (1996b, p. 6-7) uses the simile of the

social context being a coffee percolator in “which the flow of information ... is filtered by cultural, socioeconomic and racial factors”. A poor person is not simply a rich person without money; the context is significant in determining the individual’s belief of his/her capacity to influence life decisions such as gaining work. In his studies of ghetto situations, Wilson (1991, p. 760) referred to the impact of “concentration effects”. These included the connection between long term unemployment within the family and impoverished neighbourhoods and a diminished sense of self belief for the young person growing up in that environment. Poor self belief influences the perception of what is possible and also the range of potential strategies. Long term unemployment is therefore limiting at an individual, family and neighbourhood levels.

Young people need to understand and engage with cultural factors including the language in schools and workplaces in order to be accepted in these environments. This process involves participation in differing Discourses within each setting. As discussed previously, Gee, Hull, and Lankshear (1996, p. 10) argued that a set of social practices constitutes a Discourse. It is also a way of being that incorporates language, clothing and nonverbal behaviour. The primary Discourse is developed within the family of origin or kinship group which defines our social identity in that setting. It also determined the basis on which we acquire or resist subsequent Discourses. Secondary Discourses operate when we move to institutional environments such as schools and workplaces (Gee, 1996, p. 137). Gee (1996, p. 162) used the concept of a borderland Discourse to reflect the situation where the primary and the secondary Discourses conflict. In order to join in a range of Discourses young people have to understand simultaneously the language, the meaning system and the critical or social construction that applies to the setting (Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 104). The transition to the workplace includes new learning for all adolescents but this process involves additional levels of challenge for those that are poor.

### ***Poverty and the world of work***

The young people interviewed were overrepresented in female-headed households where the source of income was welfare payments. The impact of intergenerational unemployment and the consequent absence of modelling of working for young people were discussed by those who provided training, employers and the representatives of funding bodies in my study. Research studies outlined the significance of parents as role models for their children in relation to success within employment (Bartholomae et



al., 2004, p. 786; Hill & Duncan, 1987). The connection between growing up in a household and neighbourhood in which work is modelled and the likely development of disciplined habits associated with regular employment was reported (Wilson, 1991, p. 10). These studies refer to the role of parents in modelling employment and the development of an understanding in the next generation of the requirements of employment and the social practices within the home that facilitate the necessary discipline required by regular employment. In that way employment is included in the home Discourses.

Research has identified the significance of parental education both in relation to the values that are transmitted to children and young people and their future academic achievements. Parents who have undertaken higher education transmit the value of learning and those who have succeeded in their own careers foster high aspirations for their children (Ermisch & Francesconi, 2001; Mortimer, Lorence, & Kumka, 1986). Studies have reported a correlation between maternal education and higher test scores of young people due to genetic factors and an improved home environment (Eamon, 2002; Guo & Harris, 2000; Plomin, 1989, p. 186). Similarly research has linked receipt of welfare by parents to their children's subsequent welfare participation (Bartholomae et al., 2004, p. 785; Corcoran, 1995). These studies lend support to intergenerational patterns of experience in connection with education and income which are significant in shaping the life chances of young people.

The process of growing up on welfare and the consequent lack of material resources equated to living in poverty. Studies have reported on the relationship between living in poverty and negative outcomes for young people in the longer term (Guo & Harris, 2000, p. 431). These include dropping out of school, low academic attainment, poor physical and mental health, delinquent behaviour and unemployment in adolescence and early adulthood (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994; Haveman & Wolfe, 1994; Korenman, Miller, & Sjaastad, 1995). Relevant to my study, the connection between poverty and later adjustment problems including within the workplace has been documented (Bynner, Joshi, & Tsatsa, 2000; Caspi, Wright, Moffitt, & Silva, 1998). Studies have therefore established a relationship between the experience of living in poverty and the reduced capacity to operate effectively as an individual in relation to poor health and at institutional levels such as within schools and work settings.

Housing as a reflection of household income, has ramifications for children's wellbeing and subsequent development. Severely disadvantaged groups such as Indigenous Australians are overrepresented in sub standard housing. Studies have detailed the negative impact of poor living conditions and overcrowding on children's capacity to function (Ackerman et al., 1999; Conger et al., 1993; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). In the longer term income and housing have been associated with children's academic attainment (Ermisch & Francesconi, 2001; O'Brien & Jones, 1999). Indigenous people in urban areas are much more likely to live in households that are overcrowded than other Australians (Saggers, 2003, p. 221)

Two of the young people spoke directly and indirectly in relation to the poverty they experienced within their homes. Those who openly discussed the lack of financial resources were among the younger age group of those interviewed although many stated during the interviews that they lived in female-headed welfare dependent households. A possible explanation for others not discussing the issue was that the older participants may have felt embarrassed. Two of the young people spoke directly of intergenerational unemployment. Shane, who was sixteen years old at the time of the initial interview, referred to the lack of employment as an activity among his siblings:

*None of them work. They are all on youth allowance. One is seventeen, one is eighteen and the rest are in their twenties. I think it's wrong; I reckon they should try and get a job. I think they should get [themselves] together and move out. I'm trying to get myself together and move out and I'm only sixteen. They should already have this stuff happening. They should look for it, doesn't come to them.*

Five of the adult family members in Shane's family, three of whom were in their twenties, were unemployed and in receipt of welfare benefits. I gained the impression from the comment "they should get [themselves] together" that he was referring to long term unemployment. Later in the interview Shane stated that his father was also unemployed and his mother did not work outside the family home:

*My dad doesn't work, he has got emphysema. ... Mum looks after the house.*

Shane referred to unemployment across two generations in that none of the adults were in paid employment. The association of intergenerational unemployment and welfare dependency and poverty has been reported in previous studies (Bartholomae et al., 2004; Corcoran, 1995). Theresa, a young Indigenous woman, said that her father who had previously worked for one of the trade unions was unemployed at the time of the initial interview. She explained:

*... he's not working there anymore ... because he loses the plot at work and they fire him and stuff.*

She referred to her father's similar pattern of irregular employment during the second interview:

*He stopped drugs for a while so that he could get a job; like the drug tests and stuff. Came back, of course what's he doing again ... yeah.*

Theresa referred to her father's inability to maintain regular employment due to his behaviour in the workplace. She spoke of his substance use as a contributory factor. Theresa's mother was at the time caring for young children. Both Shane and Theresa's households were identified by the lack of regular work. No one of working age in Shane's household was employed, while in Theresa's family her father had a precarious pattern of working and her mother's boyfriend was serving a prison sentence. Both lacked parents as role models of regular employment. Studies identified this factor as being important for young people (Bartholomae et al., 2004; Hill & Duncan, 1987).

The lack of a role model who was employed at a parental level was also discussed by two of the trainers/educators interviewed. Clive, a manager in a community organisation that delivered a range of employment related programs, commented on the modelling of work in relation to time demands it required:

*Yeah I think that a lot of us are fortunate that we have had parents, and at times both parents working and always being exposed to that where the parents go to work at eight a clock in the morning and come home at five. ... I think that's the routine. If you see it on a regular basis that becomes normal for you. I mean if you're not exposed to that it can be quite alien.*

Clive intimated the need for household organisation that supported regular employment. The requirement for the discipline associated with consistent employment concurred with Wilson's (1991, p. 10) position that linked the modelling of work at a household level to the development of disciplined habits among young people. Chloe, who was responsible for the management of an alternative education program for young people who could not operate within the normal school system, spoke in relation to the experience of a young person who was the only member of the household who was employed:

*... he may be the only person in his family that is getting up and going to work and he honestly does not understand. He thinks if he did three days last week that's really good.*

Both Clive and Chloe referred to the lack of understanding of the requirements of the workplace hours in relation to the hours and the need to attend five days due to lack of exposure to the world of work within their families of origin. Their views were in line with previous studies which made the connection between parental role modelling and young peoples' success in employment (Bartholomae et al., 2004; Hill & Duncan, 1987). Clive went on to outline the challenges for young people in having to negotiate two worlds; one at home and the other in training or workplace settings:

*I think it is difficult for them to live in two worlds at times. They have the family like all of us they can't really leave behind but knowing that they want to make a change. I think that is something we do underestimate on what they have to go through psychologically to be able to deal with the two worlds. Not only the Aboriginal community.*

Clive demonstrated empathy for the experience of young people who grew up in families where employment was not modelled. He also implied at one level the discrepancy that exists for young people such as Shane and Theresa between the home Discourses and those that exist within training or work settings. Gee (1996, p. 137) argues that home Discourses form the basis by which institutional Discourses such as the workplace are acquired. He refers to the idea of a borderland Discourse to indicate the conflict between the primary and secondary Discourses (Gee, 1996, p. 162). The lack of understanding of the requirements of full time work highlight the increased level

of learning that young disadvantaged have to acquire in order to participate in employment and training. At a theoretical level Clive's position is an example of the gap that exists for young disadvantaged people relative to their more advantaged peers in developing the "linguistic and cultural competence" in order to operate in work contexts (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 80).

Funding representatives also commented on the link between intergenerational unemployment and the consequent absence of models of work for young people. Ryan, a representative of a federal government department said:

*We talk about the intergenerational unemployment issue nowadays, where people are growing up in families where no one works or hasn't worked for a long period of time. So there are no models of getting up in the morning and going to work. ... They just don't have a model to follow.*

Ryan focussed on the organisational skills that regular employment engenders. Elizabeth, who had a managerial position in the State government also emphasised the impact on young people of the parental lack of engagement in the labour market:

*Sometimes it's a culture of not being engaged in the labour market so there isn't a culture of a work ethic in the house. So we might have several generations of not working and we all know that the greatest influence at the end of the day on youngsters is their parents.*

The funding representatives referred to the relationship between unemployment across two or more generations and the non existence of working as an activity that young people can replicate. They referred to the lack of parental role models which previous research identified as an important for employment success (Bartholomae et al., 2004, p. 786; Hill & Duncan, 1987). Their discussions also included the organisational activities within the home that assist regular employment.

Similar to the trainers and funding bodies' representatives, one of the employer representatives also commented on the significance of a role model of employment. Lydia, who held a managerial position in local government, said:

*There are no role models and I think this is a real issue because they haven't been exposed to what it means to actually have to get up in the morning [and] go to work.*

Lydia stated the importance of a parental role in modelling regular attendance at work. The relationship between regular work and the resulting development of practices within the home detailed by trainers, funding bodies and employer representatives concurred with previous research. Wilson (1991, p. 10) pointed to the likely presence of the disciplined practices in a household where employment was modelled. The lack of modelling and some young people's lack of understanding of the requirements of full time work was also the subject of the informal discussions in the training settings. Although not directly discussed, the absence of work within the home meant that young people such as Theresa and Shane were not exposed to the informal learning of the ways employment operates that are part of the usual home Discourses for young people whose parents are in regular employment.

There was a connection between long term unemployment or insecure employment and living in overcrowded houses. Shane and Theresa drew attention to the lack of personal space within their homes. Shane, spoke of living in a household which consisted of seven people over the age of sixteen and two children. In an understated way he commented:

*Altogether there's eight of us, my two brothers, my sister my other sister and her two kids and mum and dad. It's a little bit crowded.*

The eight did not include Shane. He reported his household as one in which three generations lived; his parents, his siblings and his sisters' children. The word 'crowded' suggested a lack of space at a psychic, emotional and physical level within Shane's home. During the second interview Shane confirmed that "three more people have moved into our house" and he went on to say that the family members had little influence:

*Because there are so many people in the house we get left out of everything and all the other people that have moved in are taking over.*

Shane drew attention to the difficulty of negotiating with other members of the household in which approximately twelve people including children lived, a view supported by previous studies that detailed the link between the incapacity for children to function and overcrowded home settings (Ackerman et al., 1999; Conger et al., 1993; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). Within the initial interview, Theresa said that four children and one young person lived in her mother's female-headed household. Three of the children were under the age of six years and the young person was a teenager. Theresa also explained that her mother's partner was in prison as he had "sexually assaulted one of my friends". She described the situation at her mother's house:

*... and the little kids are a five year old, a four year old, and a four month old. He has another son that lives with his Mum. ... Mum's like close to the kids at home and looking after them and stuff. It's still a pretty big job by herself. ... Since he went to jail she's a lot more [involved in and] concentrating on her kids again; trying to make up for it.*

Theresa inferred that caring for the children had not always been a priority for her mother. Theresa described the atmosphere within this house as being "like ... havoc [due to] the little kids running around". She explained that although she was living at her father's house at the time she moved between households. Previous research also refer to the probability of Indigenous people living in overcrowded homes compared to other Australians (Saggers, 2003, p. 221). Theresa also mentioned that she "couldn't concentrate" due to the level of the emotional upheaval. Both Shane and Theresa describe households in which there was no space for them due to the numbers of people within the household for Shane or the demands of three young children in Theresa's case. Both commented on the connection between the lack of physical and emotional space which contributed to an absence of psychic space.

Shane and Theresa referred to the connection between unemployment and overcrowded living conditions. In addition to the number of people in the two households there were significant emotional issues such as sexual abuse, multiple losses for the children and Theresa's mother and little capability to relate at an interpersonal level in Shane's case. The training, funding and employer representatives reinforced the connection between long term unemployment and the consequent lack of opportunity within the home to inculcate in young people understandings of the cultural dimensions of work. Young

people are then ill equipped to deal with the decisions and the process of seeking employment.

### ***Absence of learning opportunities***

The experience of living in overcrowded households was compounded by the practices within the home as a result of living from day-to-day. There was a lack of exposure to learning opportunities that promoted the development of skills associated with regular employment. These included planning and organisational skills and ways of relating at an interpersonal level. The young participants also reported on the general lack of family support which was undermining their sense of self belief. Their experience contrasted with that outlined by employers in relation to their own children. Employer representatives provided examples of the ways that they were proactive in fostering skills and advocated parental input into young people's engagement in part-time employment thereby maximising the opportunities for full time employment. Although these incidents do not provide a rounded picture of the home experiences of the employers' children they do indicate the centrality of working within these home contexts.

Studies have linked the lack of learning opportunities within the home, associated with poverty, as one of the factors through which disadvantage is transmitted to children (Conger et al., 1997; Conger & Elder, 1994; Hanson et al., 1997; J. R. Smith et al., 1997). Areas of learning can include health, the provision of educational resources and conflict resolution approaches. The availability of nutritious food for children and young people in the home is an important component of health. Research findings have linked poverty to the failure to provide sustaining food and more affluent parents were found to give priority to their children's health (Becker & Thomes, 1986; Guo & Harris, 2000, p. 433). The availability of material resources such as books, newspapers and computers contribute to children's learning and is associated with socioeconomic position (Bartholomae et al., 2004; Downey, 1995; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999; Roscigno et al., 2006). Similarly there was fewer extra curricular activities such as visiting museums, dance or music classes for disadvantaged children (Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997; Roscigno et al., 2006).

Reduced conflict and parental knowledge, associated with economic standing, contribute to the fostering of skill development within the home. Research findings have linked financial pressures to levels of family conflict (Conger et al., 1993, 1997;



Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, Yeung, & Smith, 1998). In addition a connection between unemployment and higher levels of conflict was reported (Conger & Elder, 1994). Parents from higher socioeconomic groups have greater levels of knowledge of children's development and they invest time and money in organised activities in order to develop children's cognitive and social skills. Those with lower socioeconomic status consider child development as evolving naturally. There are also differences in the ways discipline is executed. Middle class parents emphasised language and the use of reason while parents who are disadvantaged tended to use directives (Lareau, 2002 ; Roscigno et al., 2006). Studies emphasised the efforts of parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds in the development of skills through the provision of resources, extra curricular activities and use of language which are not always available to disadvantaged children and young people. These skills, which are often associated with a sense of self belief, are subsequently valued in school and work settings.

American literature focussed on the ways long term unemployment failed to set parameters for daily behaviour in the home, an issue which was also discussed by each of the trainers, employers and funding body representatives. Regular attendance at work facilitates the temporal and spatial regulation of daily life within an industrial economy (Wilson, 1991, p. 10; 1997, p. 73). Wilson (1993, p. 21) used the term "weak labor force attachment" to refer to the interplay of family and neighbourhood factors which compound the difficulties for young people. The neighbourhood often fails to provide adequate job information networks and poor schools reinforce the lack of connection to the legitimate labour market. The neighbourhood in this situation mirrors the family situation. The ghetto-like conditions described by the American literature also exists in some Australian suburbs in that people who live there are largely unemployed due to low skill levels, limited educational opportunities and longer distances from potential jobs (Gregory & Hunter, 1995, p. 33; Vinson, 2004).

The capacity of parents to negotiate is also included in the literature on parenting styles. A number of studies have focussed on the links between parenting styles and young people's psychosocial development and school success (Baumrind, 1991; Garg, Levin, Urajnik, & Kauppi, 2005; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992). Rigid or inflexible and permissive parenting which included a failure to set rules has been linked to poorer academic outcomes (Garg et al., 2005; Steinberg et al., 1994; Steinberg et al., 1992). Permissive

parenting also incorporated an inability to support children and young people or may be actively rejecting (Garg et al., 2005). Authoritative parents have been linked to higher levels of capability for children. Parents that used this approach set rules, explain the reasons for the rules and were open to discussion (Garg et al., 2005; Glasgow, Dornbusch, Trover, Steinberg, & Ritter, 1997; Jones, Forehand, & Beach, 2000). However, Garg and colleagues (2005, p. 659) reported that most studies are based on European American families and may not represent the ethnic variations of parenting behaviour that influence adolescent competence.

The modelling of working and associated social practices within the home were key issues in fostering an understanding and development of the organisational skills that support working for young people. The absence of these skills and the persistence of family issues were also barriers to the young people interviewed in connection with envisioning future employment and the seeking of employment. This will be discussed in subsequent chapters. Shane and Theresa referred to a lack of money within their households. Theresa linked the absence of money in both her parents' houses to an inability to plan. The planning may be short term in the case of daily routines or longer term in relation to areas such as financial management which may be tailored to pay cycles. Theresa spoke of her father's lack of planning skills in managing money within the household even when he was employed:

*He spends all his money. I don't know where. I haven't seen anything from it. Like he gets a thousand dollars a week or more, spends all his money, then he's broke. Then he gets all ... he asks my nana for money, she's only a pensioner.*

She inferred that there was insufficient money to cover the day-to-day needs within her home due to her father's inability to plan financially. Theresa was living with her father at her grandparent's house at the time of the initial interview and had lived with him on previous occasions so she was describing an ongoing pattern of behaviours. She earlier referred to him "losing the plot" which had resulted in a precarious pattern of working. Within the second interview, Theresa stated that her father had substance abuse issues which affected his money management and self discipline within the workplace. I will discuss this further within the next section on health. During this interview Theresa referred to difficulties of both her parents in managing money. In her father's case she spoke again of the assistance provided by her grandmother:

*My nana keeps giving him money for like not even stuff he needs, like cigarettes or something. She gives him twenty dollars for cigarettes and he complains that he has no fuel.*

This example highlighted the ongoing pattern of Theresa's grandmother supporting her father financially and his reported inability to prioritise ways of spending money on necessities such as fuel and other items such as cigarettes. She detailed the assistance that her mother was receiving from a welfare agency including money management skills. She also confirmed that her mother was paying her partner's credit card debts as he was in prison at the time:

*But they're going to try and sort her out financially and stuff, like give her food vouchers and how to budget. ... she goes up to prison and visits a couple of times a week and that's fuel money and she's paying his bankcards which I only just recently found out.*

Over the two interviews she commented on both her parents' incapacity to manage money which impacted on the availability of food within both households. At the time of the second interview Theresa was living with her mother. She talked about the lack of suitable food that she could take for lunch while undertaking training:

*... because mum usually buys the food more for the little kids' lunches, like lollies and stuff. And that's not really good for me out here because it's lollies. I need something filling that's going to keep me going all day.*

Theresa also spoke about her mother's lack of understanding of what constitutes nutritious food. Previous research findings also detailed a similar connection between poverty and the lack of sustaining food in the household and greater emphasis on children's health including nutrition in higher socioeconomic groups (Becker & Thomes, 1986; Guo & Harris, 2000, p. 433). While Shane did not overtly discuss the impact of the family's dependency on welfare or their financial situation he did refer to a part time job that he had held which enabled him to achieve "what I needed to do". When I asked if he could elaborate he said:

*It got me money to help Mum get milk and all that. It got me money to spend at skate parks and go to places [that] I really want to go to.*

In connection with the part time work, Shane demonstrated a capacity to plan the ways in which he used the extra money that he earned; he spent some on assisting with the household provisions and some engaging in leisure activities. Shane also seemed to accept the practice of contributing to the household budget.

Two of the employers discussed the importance of planning skills and goal setting as part of that process. Amy, who was a manager in an employer organisation, commented on the importance of goal setting for disadvantaged young people:

*It's only by getting forward [and] by building ... setting a goal that's realistic, achieving that goal, building some confidence from that and going on to the next one. Again it's like going on a bus ride, if you don't know what your destination is how are you going to know when you get there?*

Amy included the capacity to review the goal and set a subsequent target. Sean, the owner of lawn mower sales and servicing organisation, also spoke of the absence of goal setting among the young people that he had interviewed:

*I really think we're seeing a lot of kids coming through that don't have any skills in goal setting. If you don't set goals where are you heading as a person? In business you must set goals, you must do a budget and do your marketing to know where you're heading. An elite sports person has goals, very successful people set goals. I don't see a lot of kids coming through these days with goal setting skills.*

It was assumed by the employers that young people understood the purpose, principles and the process of goal setting which would not have been the situation for many of the young people that I interviewed. However, in her own family situation, Amy described the ways in which she facilitated the organisation of her son's job search process. Amy described her supervision of her son's efforts in wanting him "on a nine to five schedule [and seeing] a program for the day" in connection with his initial search for employment. She gave clear instructions on the tasks, goals and the time line which she

oversaw. Amy's contribution to her son's skills development concurred with previous research that linked parents' higher socioeconomic status and the development of children's skills (Lareau, 2002 ; Roscigno et al., 2006). Her coaching also illustrated the ways in which cultural capital is transmitted intergenerationally (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 244). Amy's efforts in the development of her son's organisational skills including goal setting were examples of symbolic capital. Symbolic capital is significant in that it was likely to be recognised at an institutional level as the young person's competence rather than his mother's involvement (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 244-245). Amy's son's was likely to be considered as proficient in the process of applying for jobs by potential employers. Both Amy's and Sean's views also demonstrated the impact of habitus, field and the connection with language as cultural capital. Habitus is the dominant feature that shapes the way people see the world and is linked to their broader class or field position (King, 2005, p. 222-223). The notion of goal setting and the associated language is part of the way of operating for many people from middle class backgrounds and is also associated with professional employment. Disadvantaged young people who do not use the relevant language or cultural capital, which is obvious to the employer, can be readily excluded within a selection interview, for example.

Shane and Theresa also spoke of the lack of support within their families. In particular, Theresa and Shane outlined the ways in which they were not validated in their home settings. They commented on the ways family members communicated including a lack of respect and in Shane's situation an inability to solve problems. Theresa detailed the negative messages that she received from her parents:

*... they always put me down. They never encouraged me, always said you can't do this you can't do that.*

Theresa later explained that she could not negotiate with her mother as "she'd just probably yell at me ... [and] ... probably think yeah well whatever, I don't care". Theresa referred to the lack of affirmation by her mother but also her incapacity to listen. Her mother's refusal to discuss issues was in keeping with research findings that linked socioeconomic position and the approaches used by parents. Those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were associated with the a communication style that was more directive rather than a process of negotiation associated with middle class parents' strategies (Lareau, 2002 ; Roscigno et al., 2006). Shane spoke of his interactions with

his siblings in connection with work opportunities and their lack of support for his efforts:

*Every time I tell my family [about] a job, except my mum and dad they say mean stuff about me so I don't bother saying stuff.*

Shane referred to his plan of detaching from the disapproval of his siblings. The experience of being alone and lacking support was a shared theme for Theresa and Shane which contrasted with the experience reported by Amy in the support of her son in school and potential work related decisions. When I asked Shane to explain further what the “mean stuff” involved he commented:

*I had work experience at a pet shop. They were saying that's a crap job. Working at a pet shop [is] not good and all that. They were saying you should get something better. I just ignore it because they haven't got a job at all. I'm trying and that's why I don't tell anyone.*

He spoke of the tension between pursuing work experience which he believed to be worthwhile and being excluded by his siblings. He then described a family in which there was ongoing conflict and an inability to solve problems:

*Basically I had no support from my family because they were always fighting [about my brother] getting in fights and all that. So I had to do it all by myself.*

It was evident from Shane's discussion of his home setting that from his perspective there was an inability to consider individual needs. Contributory factors may have included the level of unemployment and overcrowding. As already indicated, Shane's household consisted of five adult family members excluding his parents who were unemployed. Previous research referred to the connection between parental conflict and reduced income and linked unemployment more broadly to higher levels of conflict (Conger et al., 1993, 1997; Conger & Elder, 1994). There was little evidence of understanding by the family members of the factors that contributed to the household conflict. Although the issue of Shane's brother “getting in fights” appeared to be significant, there was an absence of discussions of possible strategies that he could have adopted to alleviate the sources of the conflict. While Shane's parents seemingly

wanted to change things in the household, they also appeared to have little understanding of the process aspects of negotiation of personal and group relationships which compounded the difficulties for the family. Shane went on to outline the ways in which the family members related as a group:

*I can talk to my mum and dad about it. They try and do something about it. The way I see it some of my brothers and sisters just overrule my family. There's nothing mum can really do about it. My older brother and sister don't really listen to my mum.*

The taken for granted rules of communication of listening, clarifying, and inclusion of all the group members in the discussions did not apply in Shane's household. Instead the discussions seemed to be dominated by the same two family members on many occasions which prevented the majority of the family group, including Shane's mother, to contributing. It was likely that this pattern became established due to lack of safety for the non dominant family members and in turn served to reinforce their lack of entitlement to be heard or contribute to the family decision making. 'Yelling' as a form of communication was reported to have been used in both Theresa's and Shane's family. The responses suggest that the meaning attached to the yelling varied. It was used by Theresa's mother when she disapproved of her daughter's actions or when she did not want to listen. The phrase "I don't care" reinforced the idea of Theresa's mother's detachment as a parent. The modelling of poor communication patterns in Shane's family would not have fostered an understanding of the ways to communicate generally. For Shane it was a 'normal' part of interacting and he was unable to discriminate the significance of the setting and tone of voice. He stated that the owner of the pet shop where he was undertaking work experience told him:

*"Keep your voice quiet. No swearing". Before, I used to yell and swear.*

Shane was able to take on board that the "yelling and swearing" was inappropriate when the pet shop owner gave explicit instructions on his expectation in connection with the language to be used. It is also an illustration of the significance of oral literacy and particularly the interplay of language and cultural dimensions. In addition to the language, previous literature pointed to a need to include the meaning system that is culturally appropriate to the setting (Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 104). This example also

highlighted the connection between language and cultural capital including habitus which is also obvious to those with cultural capital such as employers. Bourdieu (1977, p. 85-87) refers to the embodied nature of habitus which includes “a tone of voice, a style of speech”. More specifically previous findings made a connection between higher socioeconomic status and the capacity to tailor the use of language to the context (Threadgold, 2007). Inappropriate tone and use of language was immediately apparent in this instance. This was a further example of the ways absence of appropriate language as cultural capital discriminates against young disadvantaged people.

There was general recognition that family support was an advantage for young people by two of the employer representatives. They were not homogenous in their response to those who lacked that support. Colin demonstrated a level of empathy for young people in this situation whereas Sharron emphasised the importance of family support. Colin, who was the owner of hardware retail outlets, commented on the capacity of some young people who lacked support at home to incorporate information from other sources:

*Exactly if you've got a dysfunctional family and the kids are not relating to [the parents] they're bugged. Then they become street wise. Street wise is not a bad thing, someone like [me] can identify. They can be a bit prickly often, these kids have a lot more happening than kids from a good home environment.*

Colin's personal and his sons' experiences of having “followed like me, they left school very early” while not unique within the employer group may have been contributory factors to his more empathetic view of young people. Colin's idea of being “street wise” seemed to suggest the possibility of other sources of information and learning environments which were absent in the home setting. He also believed that challenging home settings impacted on the disposition of some young people rather than this being an inherent characteristic of the individuals. Overall Colin implied a sense of young peoples' agency. Sharron, who had a management role in an employer organisation, described a situation in which a young man on work experience was removed from the family home due to violence against him by his mother's partner. Despite the difficulties in his home, she commented that “he was here everyday at eight thirty.” However in general terms, she linked family support to regular attendance and conscientiousness at work:



*There is the exception to the rule. That kid was terrific. ... Kids [that] have got good family support, they are more inclined to stay in the job and come to work everyday with a good attitude towards their work and do their work.*

Whilst Sharron's comments on the surface focussed on family support I believe it was also a comment in relation to socioeconomic status generally and Bourdieu's (1986, p. 245) concepts of cultural and symbolic capital. Sharron went on to say that parents had to provide transport for young people to enable them to undertake part time work in fast food outlets:

*Mum and dad are going to be there to pick them up at ten o'clock at night.*

It was taken for granted that the parents had their own transport which was not the reality that young people reported in my study. The link between economic capacity and having transport was implied by previous research which reported that poorer households provided fewer material resources which can include transport (Downey, 1995; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999; Roscigno et al., 2006). Some of the employer representatives considered young people having previously undertaken part time employment as a positive factor when recruiting for full time employment. It was also an example of cultural capital which middle class parents facilitate through the provision of transport. Becker (1964) linked ability to the investment of time and effort in acquiring cultural capital. Bourdieu (1986, p. 244-245) commented on "the domestic transmission of cultural capital" where the cultural capital functions as symbolic capital. The undertaking of part time work is considered as a measure of the individual's competence rather than the efforts of parents who aid the process. Having transport functions as symbolic capital in that it allowed some young people to participate in part time employment that finished late. Similarly, absence of transport can preclude young people whose family do not have transport. In turn, having part time employment was considered a positive individual achievement by some of the employers when they sought full time employees. This could potentially disadvantage those who didn't have that experience. It is also an example of the link between economic and cultural capital which confers added advantages for young people from higher socioeconomic backgrounds.

I have highlighted the discrepancy between the reported home settings of some of the young participants and the taken for granted expectations of employers in relation to skills and support within the home. The importance of verbal literacy which is readily apparent in the workplace and as a component of employment literacy was demonstrated. The lack of validation of some of the young people was also an issue raised. The home environments therefore impacted on their sense of self belief and in the development of skills including the interpersonal dimensions. These findings demonstrated the increased learning that young disadvantaged people have to acquire in order to adjust to the norms associated with workplace settings. Their experience contrasted with the reported examples of assistance that some of the employers provided to their children thus emphasising the role of habitus, cultural and symbolic capital. In addition to the absence of opportunities for learning in the home, poor mental health was an issue for some of the young people.

### ***Health***

A number of young people included in my study reported on either their parent's health or their own mental health. Parental health issues reportedly either impacted on their capacity to undertake employment or on their parenting role. For the young people mental health issues, learning difficulties or substance use contributed to poor school performance or incapacity to pursue the training. In some cases a combination of these factors added to the challenges they experienced in the school, training or work environments. HCSG provided work related programs specifically for people with mental or other health issues which also included young people. Previous research documented a correlation between poverty and adverse outcomes for young people including poor mental and physical health (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Duncan et al., 1994; Haveman & Wolfe, 1994; Korenman et al., 1995).

The health standing of parents was also an issue that young people discussed. Research has identified that the mental and physical health of parents is a main pathway through which economic deprivation is transferred intergenerationally (Conger et al., 1997; Conger & Elder, 1994; Guo & Harris, 2000; Hanson et al., 1997; J. R. Smith et al., 1997). The literature has also detailed a link between lifestyle decisions which supports health and socioeconomic status. Poor families are less likely to engage in health promoting activities such as physical fitness compared with their middle class counterparts (Guo & Harris, 2000; Saggars, 2003, p. 221). They also often have

unhealthy lifestyles which can include smoking, consumption of alcohol at dangerous levels and illegal drug use (Guo & Harris, 2000, p. 433). In connection with the home environment, studies have indicated that parents who use substances monitor homework less and set fewer parameters in relation to the ways adolescents spend their time (Bryant, Schulenberg, O'Malley, Bachman, & Johnston, 2003; Coombs & Paulson, 1988). The link between poverty and smoking has been identified around the world as has the connection between poverty and ill health (Marmot & Wilkinson, 1999; Saggars, 2003, p. 221).

The explanations of young people's engagement in substance use during adolescence identified factors related to the family, the drug itself including access and personal biography (Nuno-Gutierrez, Rodriguez-Cerda, & Alvarez-Nemegyei, 2006, p. 649-650; Petraitis, Flay, & Miller, 1995). Some of the family issues included parent-young person conflict (Klein, Forehand, Armistead, & Long, 1997; Nuno-Gutierrez et al., 2006). Studies have reported the significance of friendship networks that engage in substance use indicating a selection and socialisation process by young people (Bryant et al., 2003; Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992; Schulenberg et al., 1999). Other investigations point to the connection between drug use and dropping out of school (Bryant et al., 2003; Bryant & Zimmerman, 2002).

Three of the young people stated that they were from suffering from depression at the time of the interviews or had done so in the past. Martin spoke of a combination of depression and dyslexia which necessitated considerable time away from work. Joan linked her depression to an extended period of substance abuse while Theresa spoke about the sexual abuse of one of her friends by her mother's partner as a contributing factor. Martin had difficulty coping with the training and at the time of the second interview was employed at Fairbridge. Between the two interviews he had been on sick leave for an extended period. In the first interview he said:

*I'm still going to see a psychologist now and I'm on medication not so much for depression. The tablets that I take help me with the chemical imbalance in my head. So I take the medication.*

Martin explained his learning difficulty as "I'm dyslexic. I couldn't read and write" which contributed to being bullied at school. Within the second interview he stated that he had "to go to hospital and stuff like that" in the intervening period and was seeing a

psychiatrist every six weeks at that time. In the initial interview, Theresa said that the sexual abuse of one of her friends by her mother's partner had been significant. She said that she had been prescribed anti depressant drugs and was also receiving psychological help:

*I started getting depressed over time [and] then school joined into it. Then I was getting more depressed. Then I ended up seeing a psychologist that comes ... once a fortnight to talk to me.*

Theresa's situation was similar to that reported by previous research which linked poverty and poor mental health (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Duncan et al., 1994; Haveman & Wolfe, 1994; Korenman et al., 1995). During the second interview Theresa commented "I'm not on antidepressants anymore" and she also was no longer seeing the psychologist. Joan also stated she had previously been on anti depressant medication "because of smoking the marijuana".

Joan and Stephen described either their past or present experience with problem substance use. Joan said that she been "in a bubble that I couldn't get out of for a few years". She commented that the pressure placed on her to conform to her parents' expectations due to her academic ability was the initial reason for starting to use marijuana:

*It always felt that because I was an A straight student my parents wanted me to strive for the highest and never what I wanted to do. So that was why I had a lot of pressure and pretty much gave up and thought it was too hard when it wasn't really. When you're a teenager everything is too hard.*

Joan was the exception within the group of young people in my study in that she spoke of having enjoyed school until the beginning of Year Eleven. She stated that she then became disillusioned with it and one of her friends from a fast food outlet where they both worked part time said "would you like to come and have a cone with me one day". Joan explained that she started using marijuana regularly, subsequently left home and became part of a household in which marijuana use dominated. She also commented that during that time her "ex boyfriend controlled everything in my life; I wasn't allowed to go out". The role of Joan's friend in her decisions in relation to the regular

marijuana use concurred with studies on the significance of drug using friendship networks in the initial engagement in substance use (Bryant et al., 2003; Hawkins et al., 1992; Schulenberg et al., 1999). Her experience was also in line with previous literature which related drug use to dropping out of school (Bryant et al., 2003; Bryant & Zimmerman, 2002).

Stephen, who had completed Work for the Dole on two occasions, one of which was undertaken within the community organisation, spoke of substance use over time. He commented in the initial interview that the substance use was a way of dealing with ongoing conflict with his mother who had been a single parent:

*It didn't help that I was using a lot of drugs at the time. Dope and speed. After the years of my mum it was easier to take all that and shut all the other stuff out.*

A major source of confrontation was his mother's expectation of his contribution to running the household when she started work as a teacher's assistant at the time he went to high school. In the period between the two interviews Stephen went to New South Wales with the aim of re-establishing a relationship with his father who had remarried and had another family. He said that after a brief period his father "was not trying anymore so I stopped trying [and] things went downhill from there". He returned to Western Australia and said that he resumed his substance use:

*... because I was still really down about what happened with dad. After that it was a couple of months before I started using speed and then I got back into heavy use.*

At the time of the second interview Stephen said that he was dealing with drug withdrawal and undertaking counselling to assist with drug abuse and associated issues. He talked about the loss of having "no relationship with any of my family". I was conscious of his emotional pain in both interviews although the process of withdrawal was possibly a factor in his emotional state during the second interview. The ongoing conflict with his mother was likely to have contributed to the initial substance abuse which is supported by previous research findings linking initial substance use to family conflict (Klein et al., 1997; Nuno-Gutierrez et al., 2006). The failure to reconnect with

his father and the loss of family connection was also possibly one of the reasons for resumption of his use of illicit drugs.

As already outlined in the earlier section relating to poverty, Theresa spoke about her father's drug use and his consequent precarious employment. She also talked about her mother's alcohol use. Theresa said that one impact of the alcohol use for her was her mother's lack of involvement in her school work:

*Mum was always drinking; she buys a carton every day. ... When I was living with her, her boyfriend was there, I would show her my school work or something but she wasn't really interested.*

The connection between lack of interest in children's school work and parents' substance use was also outlined in previous research findings (Bryant et al., 2003; Coombs & Paulson, 1988). Charles, who was undertaking a carpentry apprenticeship, discussed his mother's alcohol abuse in both interviews. He said that he resented being in the environment when his mother was drinking alcohol and having transport enabled him to leave home at those times:

*It was mainly that she had a fair bit of drink. It wasn't all the time, maybe once or twice a week. But when she was drinking I couldn't handle it; it bloody annoyed me too much. I felt like I always wanted to go so [when] I went back out there I made sure that I had a car and that. So if she did drink I can go to a friend's for a while or something.*

He also spoke of having a car as being meaningful both in terms of getting away from his mother's alcohol use but also in connection to his independence. This was also an example of the agency demonstrated by some of the young participants in dealing with challenging home circumstances.

I have shown that the interplay of mental health and learning difficulties had a significant impact on Martin. Problematic substance use was associated with Joan dropping out of school and Stephen's inability to maintain employment while at a parental level the capacity to parent was impeded. However there were also illustrations

of young people's agency in either positive change in Joan's case or the 'management' of his mother's alcohol use by Charles.

### ***School experience***

Lack of parental involvement, learning difficulties, and bullying impacted on the some young people's school experience. Unequal educational outcomes for disadvantaged young people and their parents is a central concern in the sociology of education in developed countries (Germov, 2003, p. 238; Ishida et al., 1995). Studies have linked the ongoing link between socioeconomic status and educational outcomes since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Croxford & Raffe, 2005; Levy, 1966; T. Parsons, 1951; Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993). Furlong (2005, p. 380) demonstrated while there had been recent changes in school participation rates in Britain those from lower working class families continue to leave school at the minimum age or follow vocational rather than academic routes. Connell's (1977) seminal Australian work highlighted the significance of the father's income in determining children's educational outcomes. The higher the income the better the child performed.

Previous studies have examined the relationships between parents and schools. Lareau (2000) reported that poor parents accept school decisions even if they were dubious of the trustworthiness of the professional. The ability to match the language of the teachers was identified as a contributory factor. Middle class parents due to higher levels of education often have a larger vocabulary and are able to negotiate on equal terms whereas poor parents consider teachers as socially superior (Lareau, 2002 , p. 771). Other authors have detailed similar persistent disconnection with schools as hostile settings for mothers from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Arnot, 2002, p. 351; Connell et al., 1982; Reay, 1998).

A number of the young people identified that they had learning difficulties. These included Asperger's Syndrome and dyslexia. Two commented that they could not read or write. Recent research explained that the category of learning difficulties within schools in Australia refers to students who experience academic and school related problems. They are a diverse group that demonstrates low achievement for a number of reasons (Graham & Bailey, 2007, p. 386). Those with learning difficulties have overwhelming problems with reading (Louden et al., 2000). Students with learning difficulties often leave school early, feel alienated, experience long term unemployment

and are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system (Council of the Australian Resource Educators Association, 2000; J. Watson & Boman, 2005, p. 43-44)

Cognitive deficits can interfere with the acquisition of basic reading, writing and mathematical skills thereby increasing the possibility of leaving school early and limiting employment opportunities (Caspi et al., 1998, p. 427). Poor reading skills can be a barrier to the employment search and application process. Also, lack of these skills are associated with low pay, unskilled work and unemployment (Caspi et al., 1998; Maughan, Gray, & Rutter, 1985). Some less able children and young people find school humiliating and stressful and reject what it has to offer (Caspi et al., 1998, p. 427).

Young people identified involvement in bullying either directly or indirectly. Authors have explained bullying as a pattern of aggressive behaviour which is unprovoked towards another person who has less status or power (Delfabbro et al., 2006, p. 72; Rigby, 1997, 2000). Studies have found that boys were more prone to be bullied than girls and they more likely to be perpetrators and engage in a greater range of bullying behaviours including physical aggression, threats and name calling (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996; Delfabbro et al., 2006; Olewus, 1993; Rigby, 2000). There have been incidents of teacher bullying (Delfabbro et al., 2006, p. 73). Studies have reported a possible connection between social isolation and being bullied (Delfabbro et al., 2006, p. 72; Rigby, Cox, & Black, 1997). Differences in appearance including being small have also been shown as reasons for being bullied (Erling & Hwang, 2004; Frisen, Jonsson, & Persson, 2007, p. 750). Some of the more significant problems associated with bullying are anxiety and depression in which those affected internalise the distress (Davison & Demaray, 2007, p. 384; Delfabbro et al., 2006). Support from teachers and peers was found to moderate the distress resulting from bullying and ameliorate the adverse health outcomes (Davison & Demaray, 2007, p. 399-400; Rigby, 2000, p. 57).

Three of the young men in my study spoke about of being bullied at school; two by peers and one by a teacher. Shane explained that aggression was directed towards him due to supporting his brother:

*... my brother kept getting picked on and I kept sticking up for him and I started getting bashed all the time. I kept getting in trouble. Some of the teachers kept*



*accusing me for everything; always on my back all the time. If I couldn't finish my work they'd give me after school detention, made me finish it there. They gave me no space for myself. That's basically it.*

Shane expressed frustration which may have been due to his brother's more direct involvement. He also alluded to the lack of support from the teachers. Research detailed the moderating effects of teacher and school peer support which was reportedly absent in Shane's and his brother's situation (Davison & Demaray, 2007, p. 399-400). Martin commented on being personally bullied. He referred to his appearance and his dyslexia as contributory factors.

*The kids used to bully me that much that I never used to want to go to school. ... I'm not skinny now but back when I was in high school I was really, really skinny and I was really small. So I got picked on an awful lot because of my size and I'm dyslexic. I couldn't read and write. They used to punch me and stuff like that. I had a really tough time.*

Martin's comment on his size as a causal factor in being bullied was supported by previous research which linked differences in appearance to being a victim of bullying (Erling & Hwang, 2004, p. 750; Frisen et al., 2007). He also spoke of the having "no friends [because at] ... high school 'they were getting advanced' and I wasn't". Isolation was also a possible factor associated with being bullied in previous studies (Delfabbro et al., 2006, p. 72; Rigby et al., 1997). The bullying reported by Martin may be among the reasons for his ongoing issues with depression detailed in the previous health section. Studies have identified depression as one of the more debilitating issues of young people who experienced bullying and internalised the distress (Davison & Demaray, 2007, p. 384; Delfabbro et al., 2006; Rigby, 2000, p. 58). Sam, a young Indigenous man in his early twenties, who was undertaking a carpentry apprenticeship, had been receiving assistance with the TAFE component of that training. HCSG provided oral and written literacy support to enable Sam to undertake the assignments. He said that when he was a high school student in a regional area of Western Australia and "the principal hit me so Mum moved back up here". Sam's experience was in line with research that reported on teacher bullying (Delfabbro et al., 2006, p. 73).

Sam and Jack discussed having to attend remedial classes due to learning difficulties. Sam presented a balanced view in recognising that "not going to class" was a factor that

impacted on his school performance. He however explained that he disliked the timing of the sessions prior to the normal school starting times:

*Like you have to go to a class before you start school and yeah I didn't like it.*

The process of having to attend the education support class prior to start of the school reinforced the differences between him and his peers. Studies also identified the removal of students as described by Sam was stigmatising (Lipsky & Gartner, 1989; Slavin & Madden, 1989). Sam added that he was “embarrassed going to class ... [not] confident with myself”. Jack had been undertaking an alternative education program and commented that he had been diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome between the two interviews. He also recounted his experience in education support system:

*I was in the class with all the ‘slows’ you could put it. They taught me nothing; because the work they gave me I had already done in primary school. So I kept missing heaps and heaps of time off school. It says in my report that I did do Year 10, but then says messed up due to too many absences. I only went half a year.*

Later in the interview Jack said “I can’t spell properly, I can’t write neatly and I can’t read fast or anything like that”. Jack did not successfully complete the program and was unemployed at the time of the second interview having had a number of very short term jobs. He had problems with alcohol use and juvenile justice issues. His position was similar to those reported in other studies that detail adverse outcomes for young people with learning difficulties including leaving school early, unemployment and involvement with the juvenile justice system (Council of the Australian Resource Educators Association, 2000; J. Watson & Boman, 2005, p. 43-44).

Both Theresa and Shane commented on their difficulties with engagement with teachers in the school system compared with those that operated in vocational education and training (VET) environments. They also included the differences in the relationships with the teachers/trainers in the two settings. In connection with the training context Theresa said:

*... [ ] is very nice, I can understand the way she teaches. Some teachers I could not understand. She talks to us as a group, not like when I was at school I*

*felt like the teacher was talking, just saying what they knew. [They] were not concentrating on the kids' learning levels.*

At one level Theresa was referring to her inability to understand the language at school. The previous literature on Discourses refers to the need to integrate the language and meaning at the same time. A Discourse incorporates “ways of talking, listening, reading, writing, acting, interacting ...” (Gee et al., 1996). In order to participate in a Discourse the individual has to understand the meaning system that is appropriate to the environment (Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 104). Although not stated, Theresa may also be implying a lack of understanding of the meaning system. Theresa also included the absence of a relationship with teachers. At a more macro level Theresa’s comments reflect the unequal outcomes for those that are disadvantaged within schools (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Croxford & Raffe, 2005; Levy, 1966; T. Parsons, 1951; Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993). Shane also included the improved relationship with the TAFE teacher compared with his school situation. The combination of the teacher relationship and his peers had been important:

*... because I'm doing TAFE here, I'm around people that I know real well. They don't tease you and give you shit about your spelling, they help you out. Whereas at school you don't know hardly anyone and you don't get along with the teachers like I get along with [ ]. It makes you real confident to do it here. I can actually answer a question, put my hand up and try for a question, I won't get laughed at or anything.*

Shane also referred to the language of the school but focussed more on the role of his peers. Shane’s difficulty in this area meant that he was teased. Shane also referred to his lack of relationship with both his teachers and his peers.

There was an absence of parental involvement in relation to significant school decisions or at parent/teacher meetings. Luke said that he had Asperger’s Syndrome and couldn’t read or write. He described his early primary school experience:

*I was in [ ] Primary school right up to Year 4 and Mum found an autistic school in [ ] and she transferred me over there. I did Year 5 there and the*

*school closed down. ... Then I went to [another] primary school but I was too old and they stuck me into Year 7.*

The school decision seemed to be based on age appropriateness rather than other considerations such as Luke's learning difficulty or the fact that there was a two school year difference in the year level in which he was placed. There seemed to have been no negotiation between his parents and the school about the decision. This was in line with previous research in that parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds unquestioningly accept school decisions (Lareau, 2000). Theresa also commented on her mother's absence from the usual school occasions:

*She never went to parent teacher nights. I had to beg her to come to my Year 7 graduation. She didn't want to be involved in the kids at that stage.*

Theresa linked her mother's non attendance to her lack of involvement with her children at that stage. The lack of connection between mothers from disadvantaged backgrounds and schools has been included in a number of studies (Arnot, 2002; Connell et al., 1982; Reay, 1998).

## **Summary**

I have presented the home and school and experience of some of the young people in my study which impacted on their capacity for learning and seeking employment. Factors such as intergenerational unemployment and poverty contributed to environments in which young people as individuals were not validated. Mental health, problematic substance use and learning difficulties also compounded the difficulties in the school settings. This was contrasted with the reported home experience of the employers' own children where working was central. However there were also examples of young people's agency in which they sought change or resisted problematic parental behaviour. All adolescents new to the workplace have to incorporate new learning but those that are disadvantaged face increased levels of learning in order to participate in employment.

## Chapter Six: Literacies

There is no universal definition of being literate. However the understanding has changed from simply decoding messages to the use of more diverse skills (Lonsdale & Mc Curry, 2004, p. 5). Reading, writing, oral, mathematical, technological and social literacies are associated with competency in the workplace. Employment literacy also incorporates competency in these literacies. I will examine reading and writing literacies from the perspectives of young people, Indigenous participants and employers. Within my discussions of reading and writing literacies oral literacy was incorporated. I will also include the role of the training environment/workplace, technological and social literacies. The differences between the functional or individual skills and the sociocultural views of literacies were evident in my study (Castleton, 1998, p. 26; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 10; Searle, 2001, p. 25). The sociocultural position maintains that being proficient in literacies incorporates not just the language component but also the cultural and critical dimensions (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 11; Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 104). Some of the young people identified that the meaning or cultural aspects presented challenges for them but support and direct strategies in the training or workplace facilitated their learning. The employers, while not homogenous were overrepresented in the functional view of literacies.

Prior to the 1970s the concept of literacy referred to programs that assisted adults to acquire reading and writing skills within non-formal educational settings (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 7). A number of developments have challenged the previous individual skills perspective. These include New Literacy Studies (NLS), the New London Group (NLG) and the evolution of critical literacy. The NLS argued for the significance of context and the presence of multiple literacies (G. Hull & Schultz, 2001, p. 584-585). In 1996 the NLG also focussed on multiliteracies which reflected the increasing diversity of a globalised world (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 9). Critical literacy, which focussed on praxis or action based on reflection, is associated with Freire's work which reflects an explicit political dimension (G. Hull & Schultz, 2001, p. 588).

As already indicated in studies of language and the social sciences a sociocultural perspective has been gaining popularity (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 10). Literacy

from this view includes context factors such as language, meanings and the meanings that are represented in the setting. Some meanings may be excluded (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Lankshear et al., 2000). Gee and colleagues (1996, p. 10) emphasised the link between language and social groups through a discussion on discourses. A set of related practices constitutes a Discourse. A workplace is likely to include a number of different Discourses in which the implied rules of language and behaviour vary. In order to successfully negotiate the Discourses the worker needs to engage in the language and meanings appropriate to each one (Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 102, 103).

In contrast to the sociocultural or situational perspective the transferability of skills or functional view also be applied to literacies. This position considers literacies as generic and measureable (Castleton, 1998, p. 26; Searle, 2001). Lonsdale and Mc Curry (2004, p. 14) point out that an economics based model associated with productivity adopts the functional position in that literacies are portable. Research has made a connection between socioeconomic position and the development of traditional literacies such as reading and writing.

In particular the acquisition of context information within the home is considered a contributory factor. Hirsch (1987, p. xiii) explained context information or cultural knowledge “as the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world”. Researchers identify that young children need to absorb a body of “core” knowledge which is not made explicit that forms the basis for higher order reading and writing (B. Green, 1988, p. 161; Hirsch, 1996, p. xviii). Those who lack the context understandings find reading and learning challenging and are often left behind permanently (Hirsch, 1987, p. 27-28). Children from literate homes can more readily gain the cultural understandings than those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Cultural knowledge was the determining factor which explained the differences in reading levels between successful American fifth graders and those who were not competent (Hirsch, 1987, p. 27, 114). The early advantage and subsequent pattern in relation to cultural understanding is strongly linked to socioeconomic considerations. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter most of the young people in my study reported a poor school experience. Different understandings of literacies at a school and national policy levels contributed to their situations.

## ***Reading and writing literacies from young people's perspectives***

At a federal policy level in Australia the Employability Skills Framework, included as Appendix A, maintains the need for communication skills “that contribute to productive and harmonious relationships between employees and customers”. Also required are learning skills “that contribute to the ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes” (Australian National Training Authority, 2003, p. 5). Within my study the employers generally reported that they made an assessment of the level of reading and writing levels based on an individual interview and the completion of an application form. In one case the selection involved a group process which involved a number of potential applicants.

Socioeconomic position is significant in relation to reading and writing literacies between generations and the capacity of parents to negotiate on behalf of their children. The link between poverty and low levels of literacy intergenerationally is documented (Dooley, 2004, p. 65; Lo Bianco, 2000). The benchmark system for reading within schools has also shifted the blame from socioeconomic factors and policy issues to individual deficits (Comber, 1997; Luke, Lingard, Green, & Comber, 1999; Thomson, 2001). Studies have reported differences in the relationships between middle class and working class parents and the school: for middle class parents the association is represented by interdependence; whereas for working class parents the two areas are independent. Consequently, middle class parents are managers and partners in their children's education which is not the case for working class parents (Ball & Vincent, 2001; Lareau, 1987, p. 82; 2000; Popkewitz, 2002).

Among those who identified that they had difficulty with reading and writing were young people who disclosed that they had learning difficulties. As expected there was considerable overlap in relation to reading and writing and the experience of some of these young people in the school and work settings. Within the education literature risk of school failure is identified with economic and cultural deprivation which includes poverty, membership of a marginalised group, learning difficulties and behavioural disorders (Crane et al., 1996; Davis & MCCaul, 1997). More specifically, learning difficulties are often associated with leaving school early, long term unemployment and involvement in the juvenile justice system (Council of the Australian Resource

Educators Association, 2000; J. Watson & Boman, 2005, p. 43-44). Poor school and longer term outcomes have been linked to learning disorders. Those with learning disorders within schools are a diverse group with academic or school related issues (Graham & Bailey, 2007, p. 386). Students with learning difficulties have problems largely with reading (Louden et al., 2000). These difficulties apply to many of the other school subjects. Other research associates learning difficulties with various aspects of communication which inhibits their ability to succeed at school (Paul, 2001, p. 387-388).

As already indicated in chapter five, the young people who indicated that they could not read had difficulties in school and work settings. Dean, who was undertaking the Work Options program and received a disability payment, stated that he had difficulty with the language component of reading. During the initial interview he said that he was undertaking the program on a part time basis in order to retain the disability payment. He spoke of the difficulties he had encountered during his time at school:

*When I was five years they found out. They said in pre-primary or preschool [ ] has a learning problem. I don't know how they worked that out but I've had to go to support classes all through my life.*

Throughout his schooling he confirmed that he had attended remedial classes. In connection with work, Dean confirmed that he had undertaken “a lot of voluntary work” with an expectation of getting part time work. He outlined his efforts in seeking a part time cleaning job at a local shopping centre:

*I went down and asked them for a cleaning job and they said no ... because I couldn't read. I said you have to just teach me what chemicals to use. They said no, too much [of a] liability.*

Although Dean had adopted strategies in connection with undertaking the task aspects of his work role he was not accepted for the cleaning position. He demonstrated an ability to think laterally in connection with the ways in which he met the requirements of his current work activity despite his inability to read. He went on to describe the strategies that he adopted in order to differentiate the fuel for the two lawnmowers used in the current program:



*Yeah. I know what oils to use now, because you just memorise what the container is, but you can't read it, you get the same container every time like we always do oil and that. And the petrol tanks are always big and small ones. ... You have the big ones for the four stroke and the small ones for the two stroke [lawnmowers].*

Dean identified that the size of the container was a way of distinguishing the appropriate fuels for the lawnmowers. This approach was satisfactory as long as the size of the containers remained consistent but if there was any change his strategy would have been ineffective. As a result of the discussion I became aware of the significant limitations that the inability to read places on an individual's capacity to negotiate many areas of everyday life, such as shopping, when you cannot read the packaging. Dean's rejection for the cleaning position is likely to indicate that the employer accepted the functional view of literacy. This perspective categorises employees as either having or not having the skill (Castleton, 1998, p. 26).

Dean's discussion highlight the importance of understanding the meaning systems in oral literacy (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 11; Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 104). When I talked about his relationship with the supervisors compared with the other young people on the training course Dean said "no I talk to the supervisor as I talk to them, it's the same they're just people". Dean did not take into account the need to be discerning in the ways of communicating and the content of the communication with the supervisor compared with other trainees. He was unable to 'read' the training context in terms of hierarchy. The cultural dimension can include not only an awareness of the accepted norms of a one-to-one interview process but also the meaning system within the training environment.

Luke who also stated that he could not read and write discussed difficulties in negotiating in the workplace. He demonstrated the link between lack of cultural understanding and reduced capacity to negotiate, consequently increasing the likelihood of being exploited in a work setting. In addition, the difficulties with interpersonal aspects of the interview process and the absence of understandings of workplace relationships that he demonstrated during our discussion would also be apparent in an employment selection interview. These difficulties would have compromised the possibility of Luke gaining employment. Luke did not complete the training which

prevented him from undertaking a second interview. Previous studies have linked learning difficulties to adverse outcomes for young people including long term unemployment (Council of the Australian Resource Educators Association, 2000; J. Watson & Boman, 2005).

Luke and Dean's experiences raised the issue of the capacity for the parents to negotiate the needs of their children with learning difficulties in the school system. Although Dean's difficulties were identified in preschool I sensed that his parents accepted his inability to read and write. Dean said during the second interview "my grandfather, he was the same as me, he couldn't learn to read or write but he had a job, he was working". Dean's mother attended a forum at HCSG where Dean undertook the work activity. The discussion was arranged to facilitate the development of the organisation's strategic plan and the inclusion of a range of stakeholders. Her role in that forum was as a consumer representative and I also participated in the process. She did speak about Dean's difficulties but it seemed that she accepted the views of teachers that Dean could not read and write and would not be able to. A contributory factor to the acceptance and a lack of questioning may have been that her father had similar difficulties. The role of parents in the negotiation on behalf of their children and the role of class has been the subject of research. Studies have reported on the different relationship between working class and middle class parents. Middle class parents have an interdependent association with the school whereas those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds accept school decisions as the teacher is considered expert (Ball & Vincent, 2001; Lareau, 1987, p. 82; 2002, p. 771; Popkewitz, 2002).

Jack, who was a sixteen years old undertaking an alternative school program, identified that he had learning difficulties. In contrast to Dean and Luke I had the impression that he was trying to say what he perceived I wanted to hear and he presented as being more confident. There were a number of discrepancies in some areas that Jack spoke about in both interviews. In the initial interview he stated that he should have gone to another school and "should have been in mainstream" classes. On the other hand later in that interview he commented on his difficulties in the areas of reading and writing:

*Sometimes I get stuck doing things, I can't spell properly, I can't write neatly and I can't read fast or anything like that.*

He was not aware of the need to present a coherent story thus failing to appreciate the conventions associated with the interview process. He demonstrated that he was not aware of the cultural or meaning aspects of the interview process (Lankshear, 2000, p. 104; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 11). He also referred to difficulties that he encountered in workplaces. He mentioned that he had held three jobs for periods of between one and three months in which he reported that he had left on each occasion. He commented on the requirements of one of the positions as “making the gates, putting together, measuring up and going out and fitting them”. He went on to say that he resigned from that job due to:

*The boss just got a bit mean and kept making me sweep the floors and that's not what I wanted to do so I left.*

He stated that he had been in this job for “a period of two months” and didn’t have another job to move to when he resigned. A possible explanation was that there may have been an expectation of the most junior person sweeping the floor as part of the tasks to be undertaken. Jack may have had difficulty in understanding that part of the meaning systems. This may also have been implied rather than overtly stated. He may also have not been aware of the critical aspect in that he didn’t automatically sweep the floor so he was told to it. The absence of an understanding of the combination of the meaning and critical systems disadvantage young people such as Jack (Lankshear, 2000, p. 104; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 11). There were some common experiences for the young Indigenous participants such as attending remedial classes.

### ***Reading and writing literacy from an Indigenous perspective***

Educational policy within Australia and practices at a school level can adversely impact on the school experience of Indigenous children and young people. Dooley (2004, p. 67) reported the failure of educational policy to recognise the particular difficulties associated with bilingual and biliterate education. Other literature refers to the racist views and practices for Indigenous children and their parents due to their minority status and the power imbalance between parents and teachers (Adams, 1998, p. 9; Department of Employment Education and Training, 1989, p. 2; Dockett, Mason, & Perry, 2006, p. 142). There is an emphasis on Standard Australian English despite research evidence that challenges this position (Lo Bianco, 1999, 2000).

The practices in schools can also demean Indigenous children. These include the removal of students from classrooms for alternative programs thus stigmatising the students (Lipsky & Gartner, 1989; Slavin & Madden, 1989). This practice can include attending remedial classes. Phelps (2005, p. 1), drawing on American research studies maintains that there has been a shift in the area of adolescent literacy from a cognitive instruction approach to one that incorporates an appreciation of the sociocultural factors that shape the literacy practices of an increasingly diverse student population. Interventions for adolescents however are still primarily based on the cognitive model of the past. Poor literacy teaching contributes to negative attitudes towards schooling which has a direct bearing on poor standards of literacy among Indigenous Australians (Dunn, 2001, p. 678).

Two of the young Indigenous people described their challenges relating to VET. In one case the difficulty was connected with the completion of assignment components associated with apprenticeship training and the other related to the accessing of information from a state government department. Sam, who was an apprentice carpenter, outlined the challenges he encountered within the school system and also at TAFE. He was receiving assistance from a community organisation to enable him to cope with the TAFE studies component of his apprenticeship training. The assistance involved further explanation of the assignments which incorporated reading and writing. In connection with the sociocultural model of literacy the aid provided included not only the language but also the cultural and critical aspects. Sam had been receiving a range of general support services from the organisation for a period of “probably a good four or five years”. Sam commented that he began to encounter difficulties on the transition from primary to high school. He said:

*... all through from primary school and that was fine but it was just when I got to high school.*

Sam said that “like not going to class or nothing” contributed to the difficulties. So he demonstrated that he recognised that the non attendance added to the problems. He also explained that because he attended remedial classes within the educational support unit. Previous studies refer to the removal of students from classrooms as stigmatising the students (Lipsky & Gartner, 1989; Slavin & Madden, 1989). Some of the literature reported that although an Indigenous child may use the same language as the teacher

there can be a lack of shared cultural understanding. In many cases the outcome for the child or the young person is that she/he is demeaned and demoralised (Luke & Freebody, 1997; Phillips et al., 2004, p. 119). As the interview progressed Sam said that he had moved to Perth from one of the outer suburbs when he was in primary school:

*I was in educational support there and the principal hit me so mum moved back up here. ... Oh he's one of them blokes that just thought we were dumb and [wouldn't] tell [you anything] ...stuff like that.*

Sam referred to the physical abuse and racism by the school principal. This case also supports the research that indicates that for some Indigenous parents there are the issues of power imbalances between teachers and these parents (Dockett et al., 2006, p. 142). At a more macro level this situation is representative of the experience of many Indigenous children and young people due to their minority status in the predominantly white education with its racist views and practices (Adams, 1998, p. 9; Department of Employment Education and Training, 1989, p. 2). Sam reported that he found the reading and writing areas challenging:

*Like back then, my maths was fine and like a few other things was fine. I just had a little bit of trouble with reading and writing and spelling and that.*

Sam articulated the link between language difficulties and confidence which I observed with some of other study participants. Factors that contributed to the lack of self confidence included the labelling associated with attending remedial classes. Sam also referred to “getting picked on” due to his difficulties with reading and writing. Sam referred to the ameliorating effects of meeting his partner and said that seeking the assistance of the community organisation had contributed to him building increased confidence:

*And I only got my confidence when I started seeing [ ] and getting help with [ ] and all of that kind of stuff.*

As already indicated, Sam had been receiving support for a period of approximately five years; sometimes on an ongoing basis and at other times intermittently. He

demonstrated a capacity to reflect on the difficulties that he had and acknowledge the areas where he could have taken more responsibility, such as the non attendance at school. He was able to draw attention to the broader issues of the labelling process and the physical abuse and racism to which he was subjected. In addition, the relationship between lack of school success and socioeconomic related dimensions such as poverty and membership of a marginalised group is highlighted (Crane et al., 1996; Davis & MCCaul, 1997).

Theresa highlighted the challenges she had in accessing information from a State government department. She was seeking information in relation to prerequisites, possible locations, starting dates and the application process for her current training. This information seeking example highlights the need to understand the combination of the language and an awareness of the cultural and critical context of a bureaucracy. Theresa stated that her counsellor made the contact and provided the relevant information:

*... if I want to do something like get into Certificate II. She'd ring up Conservation and Land Management and ask how we can do that and stuff. I never thought of that, she comes up with pretty good clear answers that I can actually understand.*

Theresa also drew attention to her lack of skills in dealing with a bureaucratic setting, and the appropriate language to use in order to gain the relevant information in a format that was meaningful for her. Hirsch (1996, p. xviii) maintains that cultural understanding or context knowledge is absorbed early in childhood but is not made explicit. Children who lack this understanding of context are often disadvantaged over the life cycle (Hirsch, 1987, p. 27-28). The phrase "I never thought of that" in this instance indicated that Theresa had not believed that she could have negotiated that particular context. Her comment "answers that I can actually understand" suggested the mismatch between the language component required to access information from a bureaucratic setting and the language of her primary Discourse. She was referring to a lack of knowledge of the Discourses associated with a bureaucracy. Theresa relied on the knowledge of the counsellor which conforms to previous research in connection with the relationship between working class parents and teachers but could be applied to

other professionals and young people (Ball & Vincent, 2001; Lareau, 1987, p. 82; 2000; Popkewitz, 2002). I will now consider employers' views.

### ***Reading and writing literacies from employers' perspectives***

Whilst the employers were not homogenous in their approach to the levels of literacy required, most took a functional view of literacy. Research has referred to increased literacy demands within the workplace. Work is increasingly being 'textualised' in that it relies on written procedures, charting and recording information which excludes those with limited reading and writing. At the same time workplace practices are becoming more standardised (Jackson, 2000, p. 15-16; Waterhouse & Vironga, 2004, p. 12).

Previous research reported on the need for supervision for novice workers in the development of employability skills generally. In particular, the need for clear standards to be set in connection with performance of the tasks was identified. The provision of support was highlighted as it was found that young people new to the workplace can become discouraged in situations in which they were not nurtured (E. Smith & Comyn, 2003, p. 51).

The employers varied in the ways they understood the development of literacy that applied to their workplaces. There was a link between their attitude to young people and their evaluation of literacy levels, including the decision whether or not to employ a young person. Four employers outlined their requirements in connection with reading skills. Two referred to the need for young people to have the ability to read safety signs and one included the importance of being able to relay messages. Colette, an employer representative within a general engineering environment, explained her position:

*They need to be aware of the dangers with things, able to read signs. So they do have to have a basic level of literacy. They need to be able to also communicate ... not only on the level of relaying information about a job, they also sometimes have to be able to answer the phone for whatever reason.*

Katherine, who worked in human resources in a construction environment, also commented on the need for adequate reading skills to deal with safety procedures. She said:

*A certain level of English verbal and written comprehension [is required] to be able to understand ... safety procedures, those safety signs and things like that.*

Colette's and Katherine's position are supported by previous findings that work relies on written procedures even though the procedures may be more standardised such as safety signs (Jackson, 2000, p. 15-16; Waterhouse & Vironga, 2004, p. 12). Sean, who was the owner of a shop that sold and serviced lawnmowers and other equipment, referred to the need for a level of technical comprehension. He also included the ability to follow a set of procedures due to the "variation ...and the technical nature of the equipment" which he maintained has increased over time. Sean commented on reading skills which included comprehension and the need to be able to follow sequential steps of a technical manual for a chainsaw, for example:

*But it can be quite technical in its content. ... They need to be able to read through and follow the steps. So I need to know to read from the top of the page to go from step 1 to 10. I need to be able to comprehend what I'm reading as well. ... We've kids coming through that can do basic reading and writing but when it comes to giving them a workshop manual their comprehension is pretty poor.*

I asked Sean what would be the position of a young person who struggled with the "comprehension" as I was aware that many of the young people who I had interviewed would have found it a challenge:

*We just don't employ them. ... I don't see as a small employer my job is to get around it.*

Sean was clear that a young person would have to have the reading skills to follow a technical manual on joining the organisation. These three employers used a functional framework in that reading was a generic portable skill in which it was possible to differentiate between having or not having the skill (Castleton, 1998, p. 26; Searle, 2001, p. 25). There was lack of recognition that a young person could acquire the comprehension as a result of being exposed to the social practices within that work environment (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 13). Sean's comment could be considered judgemental:



*... a seventeen year old who stares at his feet and grunts isn't going to do for us. That's not the corporate image that we want to portray to our clientele when they come in.*

There was a lack of congruity for me between Sean's description of "the corporate image" and the "clientele" and the reality of a small shop that repaired and sold lawn mowers and garden equipment. Sean later said "I want people earning bucks that's what we're here for" which reinforced his position that young people needed to come with the technical skills associated with 'reading' a chainsaw manual. His views concurred with the economics driven model based on the functional view and associated with productivity (Lonsdale & Mc Curry, 2004, p. 14).

However there was variation in the way employers responded to workers not having reading literacy. Ken, the owner of a furniture retail and manufacturing business, detailed his efforts in engaging the wife of one of his existing employees who was a teacher. Her role was to teach one of the existing workers basic reading and writing so that he could work as a truck driver:

*Anyway I put [the truck driver] on a nine month's training course with her and now he can read and write up to a certain standard. But he can read and that's good for him because I knew that he could never be a truck driver if he couldn't look [at the directory]. So he was impeded in what he could do. He now can do his life's ambition and that's what the key is.*

In this situation the interest in being a truck driver was initiated by the employee rather than the employer. Within the training provided there was a combination of the language component and the cultural dimension in that the focus was on reading a street directory. This instance highlighted the need for strategies that people who use street directories know but those who have not had that exposure are unaware. Part of the training would have been making explicit the purpose of the street directory thus emphasising the combination of language and cultural component (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 11; Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 30).

Three employers identified that the completion of an application form for employment was their method of assessment of the adequacy of standard of written English. Colette explained:

*When they fill in their application form that is a good indicator too, of their level.*

She pointed out that the standard of written English was not a significant issue in her workplace. Collette emphasised the need for accuracy in taking telephone messages:

*I think it is something even if the writing is messy you work around that, and if their spelling is not there you work around that. It's not a big issue but I can understand how it would be in another workplace, here it's not. ... They need a certain level of literacy skills. We're not worried about spelling necessarily so the word 'axle' may have all different variations but at least they can write it down that they have repaired an axle. ... [There] is a need to give ... information accurately or write a note. We have boards where they can leave a note if there is someone out of the office for whatever reason.*

Katherine also explained the need for potential applicants for employment to complete an application form in person:

*We ask people to actually fill out the employment application form while they are sitting there. So we can at least assess if it is written in such a way that it is about Yr 7 or 8 English level.*

Travis, who was employed in a management role in a national hardware organisation, also commented on the practice of getting those who make an application to complete the form in person.

*We get them to hand write it, we prefer them to hand write their forms. We don't have a lot of literacy requirements in the writing form within our business. Even for myself there is very little writing on my desk, it is all computer generated. ... I am not one of the best spellers myself but I can read and write quite comfortably. That's how we determine it, the application form.*

The emphasis for Travis was on oral rather than written communication as it was a sales environment. Drawing on my own experience in the area of human resources I maintain that the completion of application form also includes an awareness of the dates of previous employment, schooling and referees including contact details. Therefore the young person has to be familiar with the interview Discourse and the ways of communicating in writing within that context (Gee, 1996, p. 137; Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 102-103). Sharron, who was the manager of an employer organisation, spoke of the poor standard of written communication of one of the young people that she had employed. Sharron commented that the young woman in question had completed high school and had been accepted to study sports science at university the following year:

*[Her] writing is atrocious, atrocious.*

When I asked whether Sharron was commenting on the content or the actual writing she replied:

*The actual physical writing is atrocious and the spelling is still bad. [ ] [the other employee, her] spelling isn't too bad. The [employee who completed Year 12] is unbelievable and she's about 20/21 years old. They come out at the end of year 12 and they have got a good TEE result, their spelling is awful and their writing is unreal because they do it all on a computer. ... They can't take phone messages like that and I can't read them, excuse me what is this, a two a five or an eight? It's terrible. The writing skills are just atrocious, just atrocious you know. Their language skills aren't good.*

I believe that Sharron was making a point that although the young female employee had completed her high school education and had been accepted at university she could not write as well as the other employee who had not completed school. There was a subtext of university entrance not equating to being able to 'write' effectively. The emotive language seemed to be representative of Sharron's frustration but she did not seem to give explicit feedback on her requirements. Another aspect that was evident here was the reference to the employee's "writing skills [as being] atrocious" rather than the accuracy of the callers' contact numbers. Previous research reported that poor supervisory skills can be a barrier to the development of employability skills generally. This study also identified the need for the setting of appropriate standards in connection

with the tasks. Also, young people became discouraged in situations where there was a lack of support (E. Smith & Comyn, 2003, p. 51). The lack of workplace support was not universal in my study.

### ***Role of the training environment/workplace***

The young people who discussed reading, writing and verbal literacies spoke about the support and direct assistance they had received in the training or work environments. Delpit (1988, p. 283) refers to the ways in which the implied meanings are transmitted among those who are familiar with a particular culture or group. Someone new to the culture needs to have the implicit codes and the rules made explicit. Studies with diverse student populations refer to the support and scaffolding process in order to make explicit the covert meanings (Delpit, 1988, p. 282-283; 1995, p. 147; Gee, 1989).

Studies have focussed on the ways organisations can foster learning through a social view of learning. Strategies include shared problem solving, workplace knowledge and the rationale for undertaking the tasks (Billett, 2001b). Research on learning organisations, communities of practice and socially situated competence emphasise that knowledge of the social practices and consequently literacies are acquired through collective processes within the workplace (Billett, 2001b; Lave, 1990; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Sefton, Waterhouse, & Cooney, 1995; Senge, 1991; Vironga, Waterhouse, & Sefton, 1998).

Two of the young people commented on the ways in which the workplace or the training environment assisted in facilitating competency. Emily described her challenges with oral communication primarily, but also referred to difficulties with written communication skills and the role of the supervisor in providing the necessary assistance. She had completed business administration training in addition to being employed as a receptionist. However, she had initially joined the community organisation in a Work for the Dole program. She described her difficulties particularly with spoken and written English, mainly in the early stages of the training:

*When I first started I could not say anything right. Every time I'd stop and say I said that wrong and I said that wrong too. The supervisor then said you are noticing it yourself so it does ease off, but then she picks on something else. I couldn't write thank you as two words for the life of me and I tried so hard.*

Emily added that the supervisor had been explicit in pointing out her use of “double negatives” within her oral communication and she demonstrated a capacity to incorporate the feedback. She also referred to having problems with written English. The difficulties that Emily outlined were related to the three interrelated dimensions of literacy: the operational aspect or the language component; the meaning system; and the meanings that were represented in the context (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 15-16). She also included the explicit feedback provided by the supervisor which is line with findings in connection with the scaffolding process provided to make the implied understandings explicit (Delpit, 1988, p. 282-283; 1995, p. 147; Gee, 1989). Emily spoke of her increased confidence in communicating with another person or in a group which was not the case initially:

*I never used to be able to speak, say right now speaking to you [when] I first worked here, I'd be sitting here all nervous, my hands all sweaty and that kind of thing. I could never sit in meetings, people would ask me what my name was and I would mutter. So I have more confidence to say what I want to say type of thing now.*

Although Emily did not refer to it directly, I believe that familiarity with the meeting process and the rules enabled her to have more confidence in participating in meetings. Her experience supports the concept of a meeting Discourse which includes ways of talking, listening and interacting in that particular setting (Gee et al., 1996, p. 10). This example also confirms that the social practices are learned from the inside through the learner being exposed to those practices and support from those who had mastered the Discourse (Gee, 1996, p. 136, 139; Gee et al., 1996, p. 13). Emily went on to outline the benefits of her training in highlighting the nonverbal aspects of communication:

*I didn't realise that you can offend someone by not answering them or by your facial expressions. I didn't know those things. The textbooks have pointed that out to me. So the way you nodded your head when you talked, if you had sat there and not nodded your head how would I know that you had heard me? ... That has to do with the full communication thing. I could be saying something and you could be nodding your head, but it doesn't mean that you are understanding what I'm saying. Then it's the paraphrasing back to them to make sure [if] this information is right, that kind of thing.*

Emily outlined the benefits of understanding the nonverbal aspects of communication and the paraphrasing to ensure shared understanding of which she was not previously aware. The shared interpretation of information was significant in her work setting which provides services to a client group consisting of people with disabilities and those who are aged. Emily summarised her learning in her comment “I would say that was a lot to do with it, more interpersonal skills”. Her experience demonstrated the interplay of training in provision of information and the social practices within the work context and the explicit feedback provided by the supervisor. The importance of acceptance of her by her colleagues was also implied within her comments.

Shane, who was undertaking vocational education within an outreach setting, spoke of his increased confidence in connection with reading and writing which contrasted with descriptions of his school experience in the initial interview:

*Since I've been here I have been writing heaps of stories about myself and heaps of songs. I've been reading heaps of books that [the teacher] has given me. I've watched heaps of videos and written about them. I wasn't allowed to do that at school. That was called wasting time.*

He also drew attention to the range of media which was used by the teacher and the students which contrasted with his school experience. During the second interview Shane explained:

*My writing and spelling has improved since I've been doing this but I never used to sit down and write heaps. I used to get real nervous of spelling. But since I started here I can sit down and write heaps. I'm doing a project on "Give youth a chance". I have done four pages already and my spelling is all good, I got it all checked and it's all good.*

He also outlined that he had been given strategies in dealing with his difficulties with spelling which was different to his experience at school:

*I look in the dictionary ... if I couldn't spell at school I used to get someone else to do it for me. But now I have learned how to do it.*

Shane drew attention to his lack of awareness of the use of a dictionary which was similar to the earlier example of the truck driver needing to know how to use a street directory. Previous research findings refer to the lack of exposure of children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to cultural understandings in their home environments which impacts on their reading and writing literacies (Hirsch, 1987, p. 27-28). The use of aids such a dictionary could be included. It is also worth noting that Shane had accepted the label of not being able to spell at school and got someone else to do it. Shane also referred to a lack of confidence in accessing information in relation to potential employment:

*I wasn't able to ring up people and apply for a job because I was nervous. I never knew where to go to get a job either, I used to go to the shops and ask. I'm nervous when I talk on the phone, I'd rather talk face-to-face. Since I've been doing this [education] I have been taught to talk on the phone and not to be nervous.*

Shane spoke of the need for help in accessing information by telephone. The accessing of employment information can be considered as a Discourse which requires the young person to engage in the relevant language and meanings (Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 102, 103).

*Well basically what I have been doing [was] to ring up people and talk to them about jobs-like if you want to apply for a job. They teach you all of that so that you don't get nervous. They help you to get jobs and we go to [Job Network provider] and go through there and get jobs and all that.*

Shane referred to the importance of aspects of the job search process being made explicit. Previous studies also comment on the direct assistance required in making implied meanings overt for those who are not familiar with the meanings (Delpit, 1988, p. 282-283; 1995, p. 147; Gee, 1989). He also detailed the connection between acceptance and the development of confidence within the education program:

*Yeah, I reckon it's just that you get more confidence here because you're around ... because I'm doing TAFE here I'm around people that I know real well. They don't tease you and give you shit about your spelling, they help you out.*

*Whereas at school you don't know hardly anyone and you don't get along with the teachers like I get along with [ ]. It makes me real confident to do it here. I can actually answer a question, put my hand up and try for a question, I won't get laughed at or anything.*

Shane commented that the process of being accepted within the education group contributed to his relationship with his peers and the teacher. These relationships were significant in the building of confidence. He contrasted the current situation with the lack of connection at peer and teacher levels at school. He also referred to the shame associated with lack of reading and writing literacies within the school system and the role of relationships in fostering the confidence to answer questions.

The experiences of Emily and Shane challenge the individual skills view of reading, writing and oral literacies. In particular they referred to the development of confidence as an initial step to engaging mainly in oral and written literacies. They also included ongoing feedback and the use of strategies, such as looking up a dictionary, in developing competence. Overall they emphasised the role of the relationships within the training or educational settings in facilitating their engagement with the social practices and consequently the literacies within these settings. Their experiences are supported by research findings that workplace structures can foster learning which includes literacies through collective strategies and processes which can foster shared problem solving, workplace knowledge and the rationale for undertaking the tasks (Billett, 2001b; Lave, 1990; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Sefton et al., 1995; Senge, 1991; Vironga et al., 1998). I will now consider technological literacy.

### ***Technological literacy***

Within discussions of technological literacy in my study there was an emphasis on digital literacy. Gilster (1997, p. 33) defines digital literacy as “the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computers”. Some of the young participants used computers as part of their work roles in administration and associated training but this was not the case for others. Some who regularly used computers referred to the exposure to software programs as a result of training while others spoke of the difficulties of not having a home computer. The trainers generally emphasised the competence of young people in this area. Gilster (1997, p. 34) points out that the internet combines older media but in



addition creates content that is interactive and demanding. There is now a digital divide between those who are literate and those who are not. Those who are not digitally literate will be disadvantaged socially and economically. Digital literacy is important in connection with educational policy. The focus of schools is on traditional literacies so students who are disadvantaged do not have access to forms of practice which are relevant to everyday life (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 21)

Changes in the conventions of writing have been altered by the text-users with a mobile phone and on occasions mobile phone users can be seen simultaneously tapping out SMS texts to friends in distant places while having a conversation with those present. In such texts, spelling conventions are disregarded. Shorthand codes and symbols are used for new purposes to reduce key strokes and symbols have new purpose and meaning (Waterhouse & Vironga, 2004, p. 16). Leu (2003) refers to the need for new literacies due to the transactional nature of the relationships between information and communication technologies (ICT). Researchers have reported on the need to critique the internet and other information and communication technologies (Gilster, 1997, p. 87; Leu, 2003; Sutherland-Smith, 2002, p. 663; Waterhouse & Vironga, 2004, p. 16).

The business administration training was provided by an online method for some of the young people. This mode of delivery presented no difficulty for the three women involved as they used computers on a daily basis as part of their work. Margaret outlined her learning from the training as gaining familiarity with specific software programs:

*... it was a matter for me of simply putting down what I already knew on paper. What I did learn were two new programs: Access and the data entry program. I can't remember for the life of me what it's called. I'll have to go on to the computer to get that one. It's basically a way of formatting data. So there's a whole big lot of it and you can go and find this little bit. Those were the things that I learnt.*

Emily who had undertaken similar training and worked in a reception role in the same organisation, commented on the lack of digital literacy provided by the school environment:

*A computer I think is the major one. Every job needs a computer these days. If you don't know computers you're not going to get a job unless you're washing cars or something like that. Just when I started Work for the Dole I knew nothing and I thought why do I know nothing?*

Emily also inferred that she did not have a computer at home. Emily and two other young people interviewed spoke of the difficulties of lack of digital literacy including practical difficulties of applying for jobs where on line applications are required. Emily's observations are supported by Lankshear and Knobel (2006, p. 30) who reported that schools are dominated by traditional literacies and use computers to produce text and textual representations. Therefore, exposure to 'new' literacies can be limited to the areas outside of school. Learners such as young disadvantaged people who do not have this opportunity at home may not have access to forms of practice that apply to everyday life (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 30).

Two other young people described the difficulties they had with the two major supermarket chains and the use of an online application as part of the selection process. Theresa outlined the challenges of not having computer access in relation to the preparation a résumé and the job application process. She commented on aspects that would have assisted her:

*Access to a computer to do a proper résumé but I didn't know how to get access to a computer. ...To apply for [ ] and [ ] you have to have the internet and I didn't have that.*

Jack explained that the follow up process for an online application was difficult for him.

*It's now an online application which I have done but they just don't get back to you.*

Theresa and Jack referred the challenges of not having a computer at home which is supported by previous research (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 30). Neither were aware of ways of accessing a computer such as through a local library or an internet cafe. These instances also focus attention on the lack of knowledge or assistance from the

family and the influence of socioeconomic factors. Hirsch (1987, p. 114) links the development of cultural understandings to increased literacy levels within the home environment.

While the trainers/educators were not uniform in their responses to the issue of digital literacy a number emphasised young people's competence in this area. Contributory factors included the trainers' own level of ease using computers and their age. They were generally middle aged. Four, including a female middle aged teacher who delivered a vocational education program, at an outreach environment, spoke of the confidence of young people relative to her, Colin commented:

*... but nowadays kids are confident with that stuff straight away. I'm probably the most nervous around that stuff ... they pick it up very quickly too.*

Christopher also commented on the competence of young people:

*... most kids of today would know how to use computers ... I'm one of those one finger typists.*

Clive focussed on the generational shift of young people now embracing the use of computers which contrasted with the reticence of the previous generation:

*I don't think they have the fear of learning, the fear of getting involved as much as what the older generation seem to have when it comes to computers and things.*

Georgina again spoke of the confidence of the young people but she did qualify her statement indicating that they were not aware of specific computer related applications:

*They are fired up with technology, they may not know specific programs but generally they are quite computer literate, extremely literate with mobile technology, mobile phones, iPods whatever else.*

Familiarity with computers did not always mean a capacity to evaluate the appropriateness of the information. Lesley, who was a teacher in her early twenties within an alternative education program, presented this view:

*Their experience is quite limited with computers like they don't really know how to use the internet as a research tool.*

Lesley emphasised the lack of critical literacy in connection with the internet use and the inability of the young people to use writing conventions that are associated with a range of contexts.

*... the kids have come into that language [through] the text messaging and internet language and they've now started writing and communicating in the same way. It's like no one's ever told them that it's wrong. ... Like even writing 'I went 2', like with the number two. To me and you know I'm quite young, it just makes no sense to me why they've got to that point.*

She referred to the inability of the young people to match the writing and the setting. Lesley's position on the need for cultural aspects of digital literacy in assimilating, evaluating and reintegrating the information from the internet is supported by previous studies (Gilster, 1997, p. 87; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 11; Leu, 2003; Sutherland-Smith, 2002, p. 663; Waterhouse & Vironga, 2004, p. 16). The young people discussed their lack of exposure to computers at school and within their homes. In some instances there was a lack of knowledge of where to gain access to computers. The educators/trainers in their discussions reflected their experience of using computers as part of their work roles which varied among the group.

### **Social literacy**

A small number of the young people interviewed described the management of their own or others' emotions. While the employers did not discuss social literacy directly some spoke of need for young people to demonstrate empathy which was not necessarily reciprocal in the workplace. Lonsdale and Mc Curry (2004, p. 33) maintain that social literacy is similar to what has been called emotional intelligence (EI) or interpersonal understandings. Literacy in this sense means the ability to 'read' people and to respond appropriately in a given situation. Skills such as empathy and the

capacity to work with people from a range of backgrounds are associated with social literacy. Goleman (1995, p. 317) explains emotional intelligence as “the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in our selves and in our relationships”. There has been debate as to whether emotional intelligence is a skill or an aptitude or a combination of both (Goleman, 1995; J. D. Mayer & Salovey, 1997; R. Roberts, Zeidner, & Matthews, 2001).

Goleman (1995, 1998) demonstrated that empathy was at the heart of emotional intelligence as it represents the “social radar” through which an individual senses others’ feelings and perspectives and takes an interest in their concerns. Rogers (1980, p. 137) whose work has been influential in therapeutic literature and practice, defines empathy as “being with and understanding the other”. Holt and Jones (2005, p. 18) also report on the importance of empathy and self awareness in connection with emotional intelligence at an organizational level. These authors point out that empathy and commitment start with self awareness. Self awareness is necessary in the understanding and appreciation of diverse views while being attuned to the organizational culture. Being empathic contributes to the exerting of influence through handling the emotions of other people while attuning one’s own reactions to interactions that facilitate the desired outcome. Self awareness also involves an ability to reflect on personal and interpersonal levels.

Emotions are intertwined with performance and role or both and they tend to interfere with task achievement. Strategies that have been identified in the regulation of emotions are buffering and personal engagement. Buffering is a means of controlling the undesirable emotions or segregating the emotions that interfere with the task at hand (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Lam & Kirby, 2002, p. 140). Emotional involvement in the task results in high performance (Kahn, 1990). Goleman (1997, p. 90) refers to this position as one in which “emotions are ... energised and aligned with the task”. Those with developed emotional intelligence are able to identify and control their own and others emotions. They are also less likely to be paralysed by fear or anxiety which impacts adversely on performance at an individual level or as part of a team.

Two of the young people outlined their strategies in managing their own emotions. Peter described his process of developing confidence in his ability to perform a work

role. He explained his own need to overcome anxiety particularly in the early stages of his working life through engaging in positive self talk:

*... confidence in your own ability and don't be scared that the job is really hard when it's not. I remember for myself I got nervous ...but I told myself I can do this and I kept telling myself I can do this. When you are in a job you have to listen and understand what the bosses are telling you. You have to show that you're listening. Then they think he can go for it. He listens well. The confidence, the listening and the looking at the boss and all that sort of thing ...*

Peter demonstrated a capacity to reframe his anxiety through the use of constructive affirmations. This was an example of buffering or controlling the undesirable emotion of anxiety (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Lam & Kirby, 2002, p. 140). He also showed that he had an understanding of the perception of competence in the workplace by those who were in a supervisory position through listening, the demonstration of effective nonverbal skills and confidence. Peter also spoke of his ability to assist other people in managing their emotions through a discussion of the issues. He may have been drawing on previous work experience as a supervisor or his training role:

*... the jobs can get frustrating and they pull me or whoever aside and have a yarn or have a talk "why are you getting frustrated or upset?". You'd be more helpful to that person. Some people have got problems and things pop up. ... Yes it is talking, sitting down with the person instead of letting them go under their own steam. I find that really helps. I'd pull them aside and say "John or whatever the name was, you were a bit uncomfortable back there. Why didn't you come and tell me?" I'd talk to him.*

Peter referred to the process of engaging with the person in connection with the feelings of frustration or sadness. He also showed empathy for the other person in sensing the feelings and demonstrating concern (Goleman, 1995, 1998). Peter also included the need to incorporate the work role in that [if] "the job was the priority of the moment if you were installing a big pipe or a pump" he would have had the discussion later. He also demonstrated the capacity to manage other peoples' emotions in addition to fulfilling the task component. The combination of managing one's own and others people's feelings supports Holt and Jones' (2005, p. 18) finding that empathy

contributes to the handling of other peoples' emotions while being aware of one's own reactions. Joan also described a situation in which she contained her anger when one of the other female course participants hit her. She described the circumstances and her reaction:

*... she came up and punched me in the face for no reason other than the fact she thinks I'm cute. I have to deal with her and because of my last relationship I had a lot of anger issues. I stood back from the situation and thought she's not worth it, for the simple fact that I want a career out of this. I'm not going to punch her back in the face and lose everything that I have got at the moment. ... I've had that sense of control too. I've controlled my anger and walked away from the situation ... with a smile.*

Joan explained that she had been pleased with her way of handling the situation which contrasted with the way she would have previously responded. There was evidence of an evaluation of the costs of physical retaliation and the benefits of the training. Joan was then in a position to assertively respond:

*I felt great when I didn't do anything back [to the other young woman on the training course]. I just asked her why she did it [and said] I don't particularly deserve that and you should show me more respect. [I also said] next time you do that I'll be taking [further] action, talking to the boss and you'll be losing your position.*

This example was an indication firstly of Joan's self awareness. Previous research has reported on the significance of self awareness at an organisational level as part of emotional intelligence (Holt & Jones, 2005, p. 18). Secondly it was an example of buffering. Buffering can be a way of managing the emotions that interferes with the task or decision (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Lam & Kirby, 2002, p. 140). The possible ramification of hitting back was a means of controlling Joan's anger.

Whilst social literacy or emotional intelligence was not overtly discussed the employers referred to the ways young people developed the ability to work with people from a range of backgrounds. Although the employer responses varied, a common feature was their view that young people joining the organisation need to be socially literate but that

did not always extend to those at other levels in the organisation. Lydia, who worked in a management role in local government, talked of the role of collective wisdom:

*[There has to be a recognition] in that learning in a work situation that you don't know it all. Whilst your other colleagues might not know it all, it's that collective wisdom. Have an opinion but listen to others' opinions as well.*

Lydia referred to the need for young people to develop a capacity to work with a range of people which includes a demonstration of empathy. Lydia's position is in line with previous research in connection with social literacy (Lonsdale & Mc Curry, 2004, p. 33). In a similar way, Goleman (1995, 1998) refers to the importance of emotional intelligence including sensitivity to the feelings and perspectives of others while Rogers (1980) focuses on "understanding the other" (p. 137). The sub text in Lydia's comments was that young people need to listen which they can be reluctant to do. She added "one of the traits of young people [is] that they know everything, my three young people know a lot more than I do". "My" three young people referred to her adult children. Amy, a representative of an employer organisation, talked of the requirement for young people to get out of their "comfort zone". In her sixties she explained the need for young people to foster relationships with older people within the workplace. She outlined her position:

*To go in and have to deal with people my age, other ages and they are more likely to be interviewed when they go for the job by someone older. So it is difficult, so another part of getting out of their comfort zone which I always try to drum in, is going out of your way to mix with older people [and] to have conversations with older people. So that you feel more at ease with them and the tension between the two is perhaps a bit less.*

Amy's reference was not only to people who were older in an organisation but also those who were in more senior positions in the case of someone who was likely to be part of a selection interview. The responsibility for the demonstration of empathy lay with the young person new to the organisation rather than the existing staff, including those in positions of responsibility. Amy's position implied that the existing staff did not have to initiate displays of empathy. These examples drew on a functional interpretation of social literacy (Castleton, 1998, p. 26). Lonsdale and Mc Curry (2004,



p. 14) refer to an economics model of literacy which maintains functional understandings of literacy and emphasises productivity. The functional perspective fails to take account of the role of the work setting. In contrast Ken, while not referring to literacies specifically, mentioned the importance of a supervisory structure in furniture manufacturing within “the factory end where you have a lot of people that do not have skills”. He was discussing the development of workplace skills generally in his own work setting and he said:

*The key is having management look after those people. Don't neglect the staff because that's what this company is about.*

Ken referred to the role of supervision in assisting young people to acquire workplace skills which include literacies. Waterhouse and Vironga (2004, p. 20-21) confirm that interpersonal skills are acquired and developed through engagement with others. Hull (1997, p. 25) reports that workers “carry out certain tasks that involve literacy in collaboration with each other with one person supplying one kind of knowledge and others different proficiencies”.

## **Summary**

I discussed reading and writing literacies from the positions of young people, Indigenous participants and employers. The young participants who identified that they could not read or write and some with learning disorders were the most disadvantaged in relation to employment options. The employers, although not unanimous, generally accepted the functional view that reading, writing and social literacies were transferable from the school environment. Although not discussed directly, the visibility of written literacy in the completion of application forms may have influenced the selection process. The idea of the portability of skills reduces the need for training. This position is supported by the economics driven model of literacy which emphasises generic skills and focuses primarily on productivity (Lonsdale & Mc Curry, 2004, p. 14).

The young people referred to support, explicit feedback or aids within either the training or the workplace environments. These aspects contributed to their understandings of the meanings which were appropriate to the work context or assisted in the accessing of information. In relation to technological literacy some of the young participants had access to computers as part of their work while others who did not spoke of the

difficulties of not having a computer. The latter also lacked the cultural knowledge of the ways of gaining computer access. A sociocultural view of literacies has potential in the training of young disadvantaged people as the young participants clearly identified the need for organisational support and forums where the implied meanings associated with the workplace can be made explicit. Similar issues emerged in the development of workplace relationships which I will outline in the following chapter.

## **Chapter Seven: Workplace Culture and Relationships**

The ability to negotiate a range of workplace relationships is a dimension of employment literacy. I will demonstrate that the young people developed workplace relationships through engagement with the social practices within organisational settings. Their experience was an embedded view of the development of these relationships. They highlighted the role of organisational structures that assisted them. These included support, particularly at the beginning of employment or training. There was a discrepancy between this position and that of most of the employers, who considered workplace relationship skills as generic and transferable from other institutional settings such as schools. This view minimised or negated the level of organisational support required to understand workplace relationship and work as a group. I will demonstrate these two differing positions in a discussion of socialisation approaches, working together and the connection between organisational practices and culture.

In connection with learning which includes the capacity to develop working relationships, Easterby-Smith and Araujo (1999) make a distinction between the literature on organisational learning and the learning organisation. Organisational learning studies have emphasised the individual and collective processes involved in learning. Researchers in this area seek to understand the “nature and the processes of learning” (Easterby-Smith & Araujo, 1999, p. 8). Learning organisation literature examines “the methodological tools which can help to identify, promote and evaluate the quality of the learning processes” (Easterby-Smith & Araujo, 1999, p. 2). Within organisational learning research, studies have differentiated between technical and social approaches to learning. The technical strand considers learning as processing, interpreting and responding to sources of information (Easterby-Smith & Araujo, 1999; Stacey, 2003, p. 325). The social learning perspective emphasises the ways in which people make sense of the work practices (Weick, 1995). Organisational learning focuses on the individuals or the group while the learning organisation focuses on the tools which in turn are dependent on the organisational structure.

A sociocultural perspective maintains the significance of environmental factors whereby learning is acquired through engagement with social practices that are offered to the individual within the workplace. It also emphasises the social construction of

knowledge in that the meaning is context dependent (Billett, 2001a; J. S. Brown & Duguid, 1991, p. 47; Engestrom & Middleton, 1996). Those who subscribe to this perspective maintain that the learning comprises understanding the history and culture of the setting (Billett, 2002b, p. 459; Cole, 1998; Scribner, 1997).

Much of the federal policy documentation fails to include the role of the work environment in the development of the skills and attributes required by employers. It is implied that educational and training institutions instead have that role, despite a lack of definition or overall parameters of the requirements. There is a lack of responsibility at an organisational level to develop these skills despite the traditional role of employers in the moulding of novice workers such as apprentices (Darrah, 1997; E. Smith & Comyn, 2003, p. 20). There is also no framework for the definition and assessment of employability skills for educators (Stasz, 1998, p. 189). In a study that examined the value of generic skills and the ways in which they were facilitated within the TAFE system, students, teachers and senior managers were interviewed or surveyed. Teachers reported that employers had a “wish list” of wanting employees “who have good interpersonal and team skills and who can add value from their first day at work” (Callan, 2003, p. 19). This lack of clarity around employers’ desired skills increases the opportunity for individual interpretation of team work as part of employability skills overall. The dominance of employers at a federal policy level is part of their increased role not only in Australia but in many of the developed countries (Trier, 2001).

### ***Socialisation approaches***

Discussions on socialisation incorporate the ways in which new employees gain an initial understanding of the workplace including the negotiation of relationships in that environment. Recent literature explains the socialisation process as the adaption of the newcomer from being an outsider to an effective insider. The negative outcomes of failure to socialise in terms of behaviour and attitude of a new employee were noted (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006, p. 492-493; Wanous, 1992; Wanous & Colella, 1989). The strategies used by the existing insiders have included the provision of information, feedback, support and role models (Major, Kozlowski, Chao, & Gardner, 1995; Morrison, 2002). Newcomers have identified the input from a supervisor or manager, colleagues, and a mentor in ‘learning the ropes’ (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006, p. 502; Louis et al., 1983; Posner & Powell, 1985). Within this section

I will consider supervision and mentoring as workplace strategies that were described in my study.

Winston and Creamer (1997, p. 42) refer to supervision as “a management function intended to promote the achievement of institutional goals and enhance the personal and professional capabilities of staff”. A key factor is that supervision is an institutional mechanism in which there is a linking of organisational goals and the development of employees. Researchers have reported on the role of the supervisor in creating and modelling a trusting relationship among those supervised. In that way it is expected that individuals will act in ways which represent the interests of the group (R. C. Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Robinson, 1996). The role of the leader or the supervisor can be significant in that if that individual is supportive and is not defensive in response to questions or challenges a safe environment is created. Conversely, if the leader is authoritarian or acts in punitive ways, team members are unlikely to discuss errors which may involve personal risks (Edmonson, 1999).

The direct approaches used by supervisors of students in the helping professions on organisational placements can shed light on the ways in which a supervisor combines support at a personal level and facilitates learning. Research reported on the engagement of the student in authentic tasks and by gradually increasing the difficulty of the task and the autonomy of the learner the newcomer becomes capable of participating in the community's activities (Le Maistre, Boudreau, & Pare, 2006, p. 345). The importance of support, trust, sensitivity to the individual needs through open communication and provision of feedback was documented (Le Maistre et al., 2006, p. 346; Tull, 2006, p. 466; Winston & Creamer, 1997).

Within the supervisor/student relationship the means of learning include the observation of the supervisor in his/her interactions with other organisational members. Delpit (1988, p. 283) refers to meaning systems and explained that those who are familiar with a particular culture or group transmit information implicitly. If you are new to that culture the implicit codes break down and the rules need to be made explicit. Young people in my study identified the value of explicit information. In facilitating the meaning, supervisors showed a willingness to share power. Studies have differentiated between power over and power with. Power over stresses competition and domination while power with infers that control is shared. There tends to be greater level of trust in

situations where power is more equal (Bishop, 2002; Fine, 2003, p. 340; Starhawk, 1987).

Mentoring can also be a strategy that assists young people to develop an understanding of workplace relationships and culture. However, researchers in the United States and Britain refer to the lack of shared understanding of the exact meaning of the term (Hall, 2003, p. 3; A. Roberts, 2000). Roberts (2000) in examining the literature between 1978 and 1999, refers to the dominant role of the mentor. Gulam and Zulfiqar (1998) reported on the close connection between mentoring and business and the reproduction of the organisational interests to the detriment of those being mentored. In an examination of mentoring of new staff in a range of workplaces, Garvey (1999) referred to the mentoring reflecting the dominant organisational culture, structure and management style which was individualistic in focus and overemphasised productivity. In my experience as a social worker, mentoring can be effective when the person being mentored can identify his/her needs and the mentee has the capacity to negotiate a collaborative relationship. It can also be a source of providing information. This may not be effective if the meaning systems are not understood which applied to some of the young study participants. More importantly, the accountability for learning can rest with the individuals in the mentoring process and consequently there can be a lack of direct organisational responsibility.

Three of the young people spoke of the significance of the training or work environment in supporting them as individuals. These discussions were important in that they represented young people who had difficulty in the negotiation of relationships in previous study or work environments. Two of these young people referred to being accepted by their peers initially but also commented on the supervisor/manager's way of working or the process of engagement. Prior to undertaking training Alice had tried a number of jobs and study options which were not satisfactory. She outlined her initial feelings of nervousness and uncertainty and the gradual change to the building of trust with the other trainees:

*I felt nervous and a little bit awkward when I first came in. I was really shy and I wasn't sure what to do. After a while they have got used to me and now they accept me like a workmate, as a friend. I like to help them. Basically I've*

*learned that they are more trustworthy than I first thought. After a while I learned a bit more about them and I gained a bit of trust in them.*

Alice referred to her need to be able to trust her peers. Researchers have explained trust as identifying a capacity that others will act in ways which represent the interests of the group (R. C. Mayer et al., 1995; Robinson, 1996). Within the second interview Alice referred to the support of the supervisor who assisted her:

*I know that [the supervisor] has helped us out a lot. If it wasn't for her a lot of the Certificate IIs and IIIs wouldn't have been able to function out of here. ... Not having someone on your back, [not] having to meet all the huge deadlines. We had tasks to do but it was like, don't over stress yourself.*

Within the first interview, Alice reported that the pressure of meeting deadlines was an issue in her previous employment. She commented that “people did tell me to hurry up... in the kitchen hand job, time was really important”. Alice referred to the supervisor’s ability at Fairbridge to consider her need for “a bit of time to think”. While the change of role from the kitchen hand may have been a factor, she also commented on the supervisor’s capacity to build a working relationship with the young people through an understanding of their individual needs. The supervisor’s support of Alice’s individual difference in combination with the legitimate peripheral participation in assisting her to reframe deadlines is supported by other findings (Le Maistre et al., 2006, p. 345-346). Alice contrasted her experience of acceptance in the training setting with previous work settings in which she felt isolated. She described the training environment as a circuit breaker due to her feeling accepted in the setting:

*In a way it actually gives me a break. I actually feel part of the team. In my other jobs I felt isolated, like I was on my own and I didn't fit in. Here I fit in and I can work.*

During the second interview Alice said that on joining the program she “wasn’t sure how they were going to accept me”. At that time she had progressed to higher level training. The importance to her of the other trainees was in line with previous studies in which newcomers identified the role of peers (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006; Louis et al., 1983; Posner & Powell, 1985). Alice also commented that she

subsequently adopted an accepting approach on the occasions that she had supervisory responsibility for those undertaking a lower level of training:

*I am not an aggressive person so I'm quite laid back. If there is a task to be done I can show them what needs to be done but I'm not going to jump on their back if they do something wrong. If it's against safety I will go on about their safety but if it's not going to endanger them ...*

In her dealings with other young people Alice was accepting of them as individuals and aware that mistakes may occur. She also referred to her approach of being explicit in demonstrating the task. Delpit (1988, p. 283) reported that making the practices explicit can facilitate understanding. Alice's strategies and way of thinking in relation to problem solving was in line with that which had been previously modelled by her supervisor. Emily also spoke of being accepted. She commented that her "personal problems" did impact on her work on occasions but did not want to discuss the nature of those problems. She had joined the community organisation initially as part of a Work for the Dole program so she was previously unemployed:

*Here it's awesome. Everyone talks, no one is out to get anyone or anything. All the other workplaces it was always bickering and things like that. The atmosphere was not a comfortable atmosphere to be around and stuff like that. Whereas here I feel really comfortable, if someone down the street offered me \$200 more I wouldn't go because the atmosphere here is just better than what I would get anywhere else.*

Emily's reference to the "comfortable atmosphere" referred to the role of her peers in the provision of support which conforms to previous findings (Major et al., 1995; Morrison, 2002). Within the second interview Emily mentioned that observation of the supervisor assisted her:

*Watching the way [the supervisor] was, showed [me] what I should be like. Not that you want to be the exact person.*

Emily referred directly to the modelling of the supervisor's behaviour which concurs with previous findings on the ways of making explicit what is implied. As discussed in



relation to literacies, Emily's supervisor was explicit in her feedback in relation to the use of "double negatives" when she spoke. In both Alice's and Emily's situations the role of demonstrating the task or behaviour was highlighted. Shane spoke of being accepted by the owner of a pet shop in which he did work experience. He commented on the ways in which the owner initially engaged with him and provided information:

*He was real nice. He talked to me all the time. ... For example, about fish, [he'd] tell me all this stuff. I didn't know one thing about it. ... He showed me the kind of wood [used] in the fish stands. I didn't know anything about it.*

The owner demonstrated his support of Shane through initiating a working relationship with him. This was significant as Shane commented on the lack of encouragement within his home and school settings. Previous research highlighted the importance of support in facilitating learning (Le Maistre et al., 2006, p. 346). Both Emily and Shane referred to demonstration as a method that assisted them. The modelling in both instances also served to make explicit appropriate behaviour for Emily and the ways of building a relationship in Shane's case. It was in line with findings that the implicit rules have to be made overt for people new to the culture (Delpit, 1988, p. 283). These three young people referred to the benefits of the workplace or training environment in providing support and understanding on the basis of aspects of personality such as shyness in Alice's case or previous difficulties with relating interpersonally in other institutional settings. The modelling of acceptance at an organisational level provided an environment in which these young people could commence the negotiation of peer and supervisory relationships. Subsequently, when Alice had a more senior role she demonstrated a capacity to incorporate the acceptance of other young people when they joined the training program. These examples demonstrate the role of modelling in making clear workplace expectations or ways to build relationships.

Three of the funding representatives outlined the need to acquire an understanding of the workplace culture: its uniqueness; the ways of behaving; and the support required by those who are disadvantaged. Two who had experience in dealing directly with disadvantaged groups spoke of the challenges for young people in that situation. Lara, who worked in a State policy setting, commented on the need for understanding of workplace culture and the associated practices:

*I guess that a work environment has a particular culture. The culture of a work environment is different to the culture of our social settings. Each work environment has a different way that it operates so it's actually becoming consciously aware of [it].*

Lara referred to the need for a newcomer to a workplace to become conscious of the norms of that particular setting. The context specificity of each work setting is supported by previous findings (Billett, 2001a; J. S. Brown & Duguid, 1991; Engstrom & Middleton, 1996). Elizabeth, who held a managerial position within the state government, spoke of the need for an awareness of the diverse ways of behaving within the workplace, including the capacity to act in a range of ways. She explained:

*... they don't have a repertoire of behaviour that is appropriate for a work environment. ... Many of the young people that I have worked with in labour market programs didn't know that there was a repertoire. They only had that one way of behaving.*

Elizabeth referred to the position of young disadvantaged people not being aware that their behaviour was not appropriate to the workplace. The lack of understanding of the implied rules was supported by Delpit's (1988, p. 283) finding that inferred meanings needed to be made explicit for children from diverse cultural backgrounds in mainstream schools. Carla, who had a specialist literacy role within the state government, mentioned the need for support within training or work settings. In that way, young people can acquire the behaviours and presentation associated with the culture:

*The things that seem to work is where there is a supportive environment; where the person has started to pick up those skills, so the pre apprenticeship training model works quite well with highly disadvantaged young people. Some of them drop out and some are attracted to an employer at the end of the period but very often that supportive environment where they can start to absorb the culture and the knowledge they need, the way to look, the way to behave, and the way to talk is the most useful.*

Carla emphasised the environmental factors that supported learning. She also referred to the absorption of the culture, a point supported by other findings on the sociocultural perspective (Billett, 2002b; Cole, 1998; Scribner, 1997). Elizabeth and Carla inferred that some young people need to absorb the meaning systems within a workplace.

In common with the young people some of the trainers/educators also emphasised the need for supervisors to be accepting of the individual differences of young people that undertook training or education. Some focussed on the development of organisational norms while others emphasised the building of the relationship. However they were qualitatively different. Jill, who was a supervisor in the community agency, focussed on the role of the trainer in challenging unacceptable opinions while maintaining respect for the person:

*So the best thing is to accept people the way they are and even if someone has a vastly different opinion to yours and even it's unethical you might voice your opinion but you have to accept it. I think when you accept people the way they are it makes your job a lot easier and your tolerance of that person a lot easier.*

Jill's emphasis was on the balance between respect for the individual and raising awareness of organisational norms. Her position was in line with previous findings on the role of support and feedback from a supervisor (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006, p. 502; Louis et al., 1983; Posner & Powell, 1985). Leanne, a teacher in an alternative school program, also spoke of the need for a relationship in which there was understanding of the individual young person:

*I think it's important to have some sort of relationship with the trainee. It doesn't need to be a really close relationship but you need to have some sort of insight into them as a person.*

Leanne's focus was on the understanding of the individual. Rita, who had a supervisory role within the RTO, also spoke of the development of a personal relationship:

*I build a friendship with them and trust and they feel they can sort of tell me anything... I help them out where I can and give them advice and that sort of thing. I think the important thing is to get to know them as a person.*

Rita referred to a personal relationship in which she engaged with the young people and created an environment of trust. Her view of the relationship was the need to support the young people and understand their individual differences and this was in keeping with previous findings (Le Maistre et al., 2006, p. 346). Rita also referred to aspects of an open relationship as identified by previous studies in the building of trust and the provision of feedback (Tull, 2006, p. 466; Winston & Creamer, 1997). Rita also referred to the particular issues associated with being disadvantaged:

*It can be harder for those that are disadvantaged. Each person is different and how they deal with it. Some bring their problems to work and [do] not have a good day. Others can cope with it fine. It is getting to know each individual ... So it's understanding them each individually. ... A lot of time they are treated like everyone should be the same. ... Everyone is different and I handle my trainees different ways because they are all different. You can't sort of treat them all the same. A lot of the time they don't get that understanding.*

The three trainers spoke of the need for acceptance of the young people as individuals. However the meaning attached varied: for Jill it was the appreciation of individual differences while reinforcing acceptable opinions; Leanne emphasised understanding the individual; while Rita focussed on a relationship which also facilitated trust. Rita demonstrated empathy with the reality of their home settings which impacted on their capacity to perform in the training setting. She also referred to the issues and the responses of the young people being individual when in institutional settings they are often considered as a group.

The employers were divided in the ways they considered young people acquire the understanding and negotiation of workplace interpersonal relationships. This included an understanding of the culture and practices. Amy, who was a representative of an employer organisation, spoke of the transferability of relationship skills from the school context:

*A lot of employers expect people that have just left school to be au fait with what is required. They can take a bit of extra time in nurturing them, maybe pairing them with a mentor in the workplace. That's always, as long as there is compatibility between them that can work quite well. ... Again it would help if*

*the employer was aware and did support the young person with a mentor. Someone that they could relate to.*

She also referred to the expectation of transferability of these skills from the school setting. Most of the young people that I interviewed had poor peer and teacher relationships so the expectation was not realistic. Amy also referred to the possible role of a mentor within the workplace. It was also implied that the mentor would have the dominant role which concurs with previous findings on some mentoring models in which the power and control rests with the mentor (A. Roberts, 2000). Amy's view focussed on the organisational needs rather than those of the person being mentored. Gulam and Zulfiqar (1998) reported similar findings on the connection between business and mentoring and the reproduction of organisational interests. Amy's suggested strategies imply no direct organisational responsibility for the development of workplace relationships. Ken, who was the owner of a furniture manufacturing including retail outlets, concentrated his discussions on the staff that were employed within the warehouse. He spoke of the supervision that a new young person receives:

*What we do here is when a new person comes he joins the team. ... Each of the guys that [are] above him is called a team leader. So we have four or five team leaders. This is the bottom rung of our ladder. That team leader has another person maybe a new person under him and his job is to really look after that person and teach him everything that the team leader knows.*

Ken referred to the one-to-one supervision that a young person received on joining the warehouse. He also detailed the daily meetings that were held in which each person could have input:

*Everyone at the meeting [each morning] has a right to say if they are unhappy with anything, the quality of something going out or something has happened. They may all speak up and the person who is the youngest or the latest has the same rights as the Managing Director of the company to put his viewpoint in. He is shown that his viewpoint is valid. Then it is up to the team leaders to make sure that the changes that are required are implemented correctly and documented.*

I attended one of the daily meetings as an observer, the discussions centred on the solving of problems and the recognition of the efforts of particular workers. Within the discussion of complaints or difficulties the focus was on solutions rather than blaming the individual. A range of people spoke. Previous research points to the role of the leader in fostering an open environment in which errors can be openly discussed (Edmonson, 1999). Ken referred to the need for recognition of the differences in education levels and consequently the requirement for training:

*Now if you have been well educated and go into an office they'll chuck you in and expect you to be able to operate a computer and type up what is required. These people have been left by our society and have not had that benefit so what you have to do is to train them.*

Although not referred to directly Ken implied the need for the workplace culture and rules to be made explicit in direct supervision. His position conforms to Delpit's (1988, p. 283) findings on the need to make the cultural aspects unambiguous for children who are not familiar with the norms of mainstream school culture.

### ***Working together***

The idea of working as part of a team is influenced by workplace changes as a result of globalisation, workers' location in the hierarchical structure and the practices at an organisational level. Studies have commented on the replacement of Fordism or the mass production models by autonomous production methods (Appelbaum & Batt, 1994; Berggren, 1992; Vallas, 1999). The influence of the quality movement can be a factor that has contributed to the development of the 'lean' production system. These changes have allegedly eliminated the hierarchies and redistributed the tasks to the front line employees (Berggren, 1992; Hackman & Wageman, 1995; Kenney & Florida, 1993; Vallas, 2003).

Some studies have referred to 'knowledge work' that has facilitated the design, production and marketing of a product on time for a niche market (Drucker, 1993; Frank & Cook, 1995; Gee, 2000, p. 414; Imparato & Harari, 1994). These changes are considered by some as representing an era of increased worker independence (Adler, 1992; Heckscher, 1994; Kern & Schumann, 1992). Other research however reports the dominance of managerial influence (Barker, 1999; Berggren, 1992; Graham, 1995).

Levels of autonomy can be linked to workers' location within the organisational structure with 'knowledge workers' often having greater discretion compared to those that are located towards the bottom of organisations.

Recent literature also maintains that regressive training strategies tend to be over represented among production workers in Britain which was not the case for 'knowledge workers' (Stroud & Fairbrother, 2006, p. 475-476). Regressive practices include learning-by-doing which enabled workers to meet the task demands or the technical aspects of the job. Progressive strategies, in contrast, involved a process of interaction with work colleagues and dialogue with others outside the organisation including customers (Felstead et al., 2005; Stroud & Fairbrother, 2006, p. 460, 475). Studies reported that learning through interactions was more effective than formal training courses within the building industry and in academic settings (Boud & Middleton, 2003; Garrick, 1998). Other literature referred to a community of practice to explain the ways in which people learn through mutual engagement in an activity (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The practices involved a set of frameworks, ideas, reflection and stories the community share (Felstead et al., 2005, p. 363; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 29). Learning through interaction and communities of practice adopt a social view of learning.

The sociocultural view shares some aspects of learning through interaction in that it includes peers and engagement with the social practices (Billett, 2002a; Felstead et al., 2005, p. 362; Rogoff, 1995). Within the sociocultural perspective the significance of building trusting relationships has been noted which could be considered as part of a supervisory role (Boud & Miller, 1996; Heron, 1993; Hughes, 2002; Robertson, 1996). The learning organisation studies report on the role of supervisors as the facilitators of learning (Heron, 1993; Hughes, 2002, p. 57; Senge, 1990). The adoption of a coaching approach so that team members can learn from their mistakes has been emphasised (L. Field & Ford, 1995, p. 86,88). Researchers highlight the shift from the usual coercive and authoritarian supervisory role to a more facilitative and personal relationship which may present problems for some supervisors due to the structural constraints of the role and the normal expectations of workers as being competent (Boud & Middleton, 2003, p. 194; Hughes, 2002, p. 58, 64).

Although researchers have identified that interactions with a range of people or communities within the workplace assist learning, the mechanisms involved are not understood (Collin & Valleala, 2005, p. 401-402; Etelapelto & Collin, 2004). While the work community has been recognised as an important learning environment, the focus has been on the technical aspects. The exact role of the interactive strategies have not been developed by researchers (Collin & Valleala, 2005, p. 402). I will demonstrate that the supervisors within Fairbridge sought to promote democratic relationships and modelling ways of interacting enabling the young people to absorb the negotiation of relationships with peers and the supervisors. This in turn enabled the young people to adopt similar strategies when they had planning/supervisory responsibility.

I have focussed on the young people who were undertaking training within Fairbridge. The training practices in this setting involved the young people working together to perform some of the tasks which was not the case in the other training or education environments. The training involved a group process which enabled the participants to learn from each other. Those who spoke of relationships with peers or supervisors were drawing on their experience in previous work environments or had spent some time at Fairbridge. Four of the young people recounted their experience of working with peers. Joan, during the first interview, drew on her previous experience of working for a fast food outlet. She discussed peer relationships and incorporated the idea of balancing the demands of a workplace relationship with the maintenance of personal relationships. She spoke of the need to be accepting of a range of people as peers:

*The good and the bad, learning to deal with people that you didn't necessarily like. Also working with people that you did like and having to keep it as a work based thing. One of my best mates I met at ... [but] we had to keep the friend thing down to a minimum at work. We were allowed to be friends ...but we were not allowed to forget the customers or muck around. It gives you a sense of control and independence too.*

Joan described the difference between friendship and a workplace relationship in that there has to be an acceptance that a young person had to work with people that she/he would not choose as friends. She also outlined the process of renegotiation of a friendship within a work setting through the incorporation of the needs of the job. Joan



went on to talk about the aspects that assisted her in maintaining the relationships with peers:

*I think you need to know people's personalities. You need to get to know everyone on an individual basis; their wants and needs because everyone's are different. To work alongside people you need to know that.*

Joan emphasised the need to understand the individuals in order to work together. Peter, who had almost completed his training which incorporated an organisation and supervisory role on occasions, explained the ways he assisted other trainees. He had been in the training setting for a period of two years and he spoke of the process of supporting another young person who was experiencing difficulty by “having a yarn or have a talk [and asking] why are you getting frustrated or upset”. His approach was in line with previous research on the development of trusting relationships as part of a supervisory role (Heron, 1993; Hughes, 2002; Robertson, 1996). In the second interview, Charles, Peter's younger brother, spoke of his experience of working collaboratively with other apprentices. He had been at Fairbridge over three years. He commented on working as part of a group of apprentices:

*It's pretty straight forward, there's nothing really to it, working in a team doesn't stand out like [we] have to work together. It's just normal work that has to be done, work that can't be done with one person. ... I'd come up with a suggestion, ... if it sounded good we'll do it that way but if someone has a better suggestion[in that] it might be easier, they'd explain their way, I'd explain mine and then we'd see which way is easier.*

Charles outlined the ways the apprentices negotiated the ways of working in that they put forward options and made a decision on the basis of the strategy that was most straight forward. The problem solving involved engagement with the ways of working for apprentice carpenters thereby emphasising the role of the social practices (Billett, 2002a; Rogoff, 1995). This example also drew on the negotiation and dialogue with peers (Felstead et al., 2005, p. 475; Stroud & Fairbrother, 2006). In response to my question about working with people he didn't know, he elaborated on his approach:

*Yeah, if I didn't know someone I'd show them the [way] I think it should be done but I wouldn't want to give the impression that I want to force them to do it my way. But if I'm working with someone I know they already know the way I work.*

Charles again demonstrated an understanding of the need to involve other workers in the discussion of a particular approach but also made the point that when you work together continuously you are aware of each other's way of working. He also demonstrated an understanding of the need for equality within the peer relationships which is supported by other studies (Heron, 1993; Hughes, 2002; Robertson, 1996). Alice also spoke of dealing with problems as a group:

*If we have a problem amongst each other we try and solve it out with each other. But if we can't we'll go to the supervisor here or [within the industry partner]. We'll explain the difficulty and the issues and we can usually sort those out lots of times.*

Alice's strategy of dealing with a problem through negotiation conformed to previous findings on learning through interaction with colleagues (Felstead et al., 2005, p. 362). The training manager at Fairbridge often referred to the impact of the difficulties of their home setting on the capacity of the young people to attend or focus on the training. One of the young people stated that the acceptance of individual differences among the training peers proved to be challenging. Theresa, a young Indigenous woman, spoke of the diversity within the group and her difficulties:

*Oh yes, I'm a bit short tempered because this boy who was working with us [ ] this year. He's got a problem, like he doesn't stop talking and he doesn't sit still. He just talks your ears off and there's another one [ ] he just mucks around. We're all different individuals.*

Four of the young people described how they negotiated with supervisors. Two focussed their discussions on their increased capacity to deal with them, one referred to the individual differences of supervisors and one detailed the process aspects. Charles said that his relationship with the supervisor had changed over the period of his apprenticeship and he believed that with the benefit of having acquired more experience he can challenge the supervisor if necessary:

*... at first when I was working here it was a bit different. I didn't know too much about carpentry, I was just starting [and] when they were around I'd get a bit nervous in case I'd stuff up. Now, sometimes I show them how to do things ... if they don't do it the way I showed I'd say "isn't it supposed to be like this?"*

He referred to increased confidence as a result of acquiring more knowledge of carpentry. He also inferred the importance of social practices in developing learning (Billett, 2002a; Rogoff, 1995). Charles also included his direct approach in demonstrating what he meant. As indicated in Delpit's (1988, p. 283) research in the previous section this strategy is a way of making meaning explicit. Matthew, who at the time of the second interview had almost completed his training, also talked about his changed relationship with his supervisor. He had previously completed a boilermaker apprenticeship, and outlined his strategies:

*Before at my other job, my apprenticeship, I was a bit timid towards foremen and supervisors. I'd get all nervous when they'd come round and look over my shoulder, but now I've learned to make it so that they're not even there when I'm working. I try to pretend that they are not there. I'd still show them that [I'm] paying attention, but when you're in your area, doing your thing you have to concentrate. I have learned to deal with that.*

Matthew also referred to his changed relationship with supervisors in terms of feeling less anxious when they were in his area of work. He also made an indirect reference to the surveillance which can be part of the traditional supervisory role (Hughes, 2002, p. 194).

Joan spoke of the individual differences of supervisors. She also referred to a capacity to 'read' the interplay of varying contexts including her previous and current training settings:

*Oh it's completely different, depending on the supervisor. Some supervisors can have fun as well: they can be just as crude and rude. It also depends on the circumstances that you are in, because if you are in a public place then you have to watch what you say because it can destroy your business's name. But if you*

*are in a place where there is no public then you don't have to watch what you say. ... Out here we have to keep it down a bit because there are a lot of older people around here and I've got respect for my elders and they don't need to hear things like that. The same [applies] to kids as well.*

Peter also referred to the process of communicating with a supervisor compared with that which he used with peers. He also spoke of the need to consider the content in order to maintain credibility:

*Sharper, knowing what I am going to be saying straight away. If I'm talking with the operators we can joke around... When I'm talking to the supervisor you're conscious of the supervisor not in a bad way. You wouldn't want to let your boss know that you are stuffing up a job which you know you are not.*

Peter drew attention to the different ways of communicating with a supervisor compared with those used with peers. His changed way of interacting with the supervisor showed that he was aware of the different meaning systems and Discourses in the workplace. His engagement at that level demonstrated an understanding of the cultural aspects of literacy in that setting (B. Green, 1988, p. 160-162). He also added the importance of nonverbal behaviour when communicating and avoiding his own tendency to talk too quickly:

*You always make sure that you look the person in the eye when you're talking. Hands are a language in themselves too. I do a lot of talking with my hands. Always make sure that you are talking right not trying to slam a hundred words down his mouth in a second. I think I talk a bit too fast, so I've been told.*

Peter also detailed his capacity to challenge supervisors when he believed that their behaviour was inappropriate:

*There has been times when I have walked back five, six or eight hours later and said you [were unfair] ... with me yesterday I was only trying to find out, I have the right. I have said that wasn't right. He has generally come up with an apology or if not you go to the next step.*

Peter drew attention to his right to challenge and also the impact of going back at a later stage to deal with an issue. Most of the people who spoke on the development of relationships demonstrated their ability to negotiate with their peers through developing an understanding of individual differences and engagement in problem solving over time. The role of direct approaches such as demonstration had been important as part of the negotiation with peers or supervisors. They also referred to their capacity to consult with supervisors. Two of these young people showed a capacity to challenge a supervisor.

Two of the Fairbridge trainers were clear that they worked directly with the young people. There was a sense of joining with the young people in engaging in the range of tasks providing an opportunity for informal learning. Mark and Rita spoke of modelling the way of working or “leading by example”. Mark referred to its directness in connection with learning and a way of gaining trust:

*So I have always led by example, and that way if you lead by example it doesn't matter what age you are, straight away you get the respect of whoever you are training and they can see damn well that you can do everything that you're talking about. You're not just saying “do this, and do that”. They know damn well if I say “do this, do that” I can turn around and do it straight away. So that's a big thing too as I say it gets their confidence. What I did find too is the trust of the kids is very important. You've got to get their trust and there's only one way of getting their trust that's by bloody time and then working it out for themselves that you are doing the right thing by them. So once you have got their trust it comes easy after that.*

Mark highlighted that working directly with the young people was a way of gaining their trust. The need to engender trust in the process of coaching or facilitating learning has been documented by previous findings (Boud & Middleton, 2003, p. 194; Hughes, 2002, p. 64). Although not overtly stated there are also the interactions between the trainer and the group of young people and exposure to ways of thinking (Felstead et al., 2005, p. 362; Stroud & Fairbrother, 2006, p. 475). Mark also highlighted the congruence between what he said and the actions he took which demonstrated consistency. That may not have been the case for some young people within their home environment. Through working closely with the young people the supervisor was likely

to have demonstrated the 'rules' of communicating in that environment. He went on to describe his modelling of the different ways of interacting with supervisory staff and those more senior to him at an organisational level:

*They'll see me interacting with the bosses ... and they can see the difference between the ways I interact with someone else who is a team leader, who is on the same level, but then you have the difference of someone who is higher up in the management side of things. So there is a different way of interacting with people.*

Mark emphasised the differences in the Discourses used in relating to his peers and those at management levels. He implied the application of Green's (1988, p. 160-162) meaning systems and the ways they are selectively presented within the workplace. Rita also referred to working directly with the trainees:

*The way I do it is that I am a supervisor and they follow my directions. But we work more as a team together, because I do the work as well. Like I won't make them do anything I wouldn't do myself. ... But I lead by example. I know other supervisors are more "you do this, you do this".*

Like Mark, Rita referred to the interdependence between herself and the young people undertaking training. Her perspective of working together was in line with research on the embedded nature of the learning within the social practices of a training setting (Billett, 2002a; Rogoff, 1995). Rita was clear in relation to her supervisory responsibility. The two supervisors emphasised working closely with the young people within the training setting. In that way they developed their trust and modelled ways of relating while performing the tasks. The valuing of democratic relationships was in turn practised by the young people when they were in positions which incorporated planning or supervisory responsibility. Similarly, modelling was a strategy used by the supervisors which the young people used in facilitating learning.

One of the funding representatives, who had experience in employment programs, also detailed the lack of cultural knowledge of young disadvantaged people in connection with working together as a group. Elizabeth explained:

*Whereas when they were with their peers, this is the only way I can really explain it in a group of twelve youngsters and they were all being paid the same amount to work on the labour market program to put the walk trails in and to work with the CALM officers. We would try to get them to work as a team and they would learn those skills by osmosis. I found it worked in many cases, not in all.*

Elizabeth's experience is supported by studies on engagement of the social practices included within the sociocultural perspective of learning (Billett, 2002a; Rogoff, 1995). She also referred to the ways in which some of the members of a group who had more developed skills modelled ways of behaving including the ways to relate interpersonally:

*You need more than 50 per cent of the kids with good skills. They know how to turn up on time, they know how to dress appropriately, they know how to speak ... even look you directly in the eye [and] they had reasonable literacy and numeracy skills, not particularly high level but they could get by.*

The role of modelling of the implied rules in ways of communicating is also described by previous research findings (Delpit, 1988, p. 282-283). Elizabeth implied the use of a direct approach in fostering learning within disadvantaged groups which was supported by some of the young people and the trainers in my study.

The employers used the language of team when discussing the ways in which young people work with others. Most maintained or inferred that workplace relationship skills were transferable from the school/family environments and were generic. The need for workplace structures that assisted young people to develop workplace relationships was therefore negated. However, one commented on the role of one-to-one supervision in fostering an understanding of workplace norms which includes interpersonal relationships. I will provide an example of the context specific understanding of the meaning attached to working as part of a team. Amy defined a team as a group in which there was mutual dependence between the members in order to achieve an outcome:

*... being involved in an exercise where you are dependent on others and they are dependent on you; so you pull together to achieve the best result. ... So productivity is very important. Productivity is not necessarily working harder but working smarter. ... It's where, not the individual ...is paramount, it's about building a cohesive exercise where everyone has a role to play and where you support each other. It's all about a certain discipline.*

Within this definition Amy also emphasised the outcome in relation to productivity which can be considered as achieving higher outcomes with less resources. The emphasis conformed to previous studies on the impact of the quality movement in increasing efficiencies (Berggren, 1992; Hackman & Wageman, 1995; Kenney & Florida, 1993; Vallas, 2003). The focus on productivity was in line with federal policy understandings of “productive working relationships” (Australian National Training Authority, 2003, p. 5). The contribution of a supervisor or team leader or any structures that facilitate learning was not included. A lack of organisational responsibility in the development of workplace skills is implied (Darrah, 1997; E. Smith & Comyn, 2003, p. 20).

Lydia, who operated in a local government setting, also spoke of the elements of working in a team:

*... you can't necessarily go your own way, you have to take into account the organisation that you are working for, again the context stuff. So [you need to consider] what sorts of things are they trying to achieve, what is your part of the organisation trying to achieve and also what's your role?*

Lydia's emphasis was on understanding the structure, the section or area of work and the individual work role. Although both Amy and Lydia referred to shared responsibility the emphasis varied. Amy's understanding related to productivity or measurable outcomes. Lydia inferred that the workers were more autonomous and the knowledge of the structure may have been in order to facilitate negotiation with a section or others within the organisation. Contributory factors may have been that Lydia was the manager of a section of community development workers so the work roles differed from those described by Amy. These examples support the sociocultural



perspective in that understanding of team is based on the history and culture of the setting (Billett, 2002b, p. 459; Cole, 1998; Engestrom & Middleton, 1996).

Colette, who was the joint owner of a small general engineering organisation, explained working together as collaborating with co-workers:

*A guy that has a team work approach to me will notice that the chap next to him is under the hammer. He could be roughing out; that means preparing it for a final cut or he could be helping by saying "do you want me to do this little bit while you do that or I know that such and such has got the micrometer I'll go and get that for you". Or seeing a customer arrive with a job and no one in the vicinity is free to help [the person] get it off the truck. So they will use their initiative to go and do that. ... But a guy that is working [in] a team is aware of those things, He is not just looking at his job as an entity, he is looking at the bigger picture.*

Colette included an awareness of the work demands of the other workers which included the provision of assistance to enable a co-worker to meet a deadline or assist a customer in getting a piece of equipment into the workshop. It was also assumed that the employee could 'read' those requirements. As indicated in previous studies it was implied that the meaning systems of the environment was understood (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 11; Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 104).

Colin, who was the owner of retail outlets, was clear that the engagement of the customer was the main concern for him:

*You identify with the person straight up and if you're busy [you say] "I'll be with you in a minute or I'll be over there in a second". You put whatever you're doing down and get to it. Kids don't do that, they tend to be silent until spoken to or searched out and things like that. That's one of the biggest things.*

Young people need to be aware of the emphasis of the supervisor or manager and it is particular to a given work setting. This instance reinforces the sociocultural position in that an understanding of the history and culture of the setting is crucial and is location specific (Billett, 2001a; 2002b, p. 459; Cole, 1998; Engestrom & Middleton, 1996).

Katherine, who was a manager in a human resource area, commented on the transferability of interpersonal skills to the workplace from school:

*I think that just comes through life experiences where people come in contact with different people, in different forums and in different relationships. It is learnt. You can see out in the workforce where you've got kids coming straight from school. They haven't acquired those particular skills of how to talk to adults within a work team.*

Katherine referred to the individual's responsibility to relate to peers at an interpersonal level. The lack of employer responsibility in the development of workplace skills has been reported by previous research (Darrah, 1997, p. 20; E. Smith & Comyn, 2003). Katherine talked about the ability to relate to a supervisor:

*They certainly know how to talk to teachers and they may practise those same skills when they're learning to develop a working relationship with their supervisor. Over time with experience they will learn as to whether that is a suitable model that they had taken from their school environment to the work environment.*

Katherine also implied that it was the responsibility of schools to develop the necessary skills. However, research indicated that there is no framework within education for the definition or assessment of workplace relationships as part of employability skills overall (Stasz, 1998, p. 189). Ken took a different approach and elaborated on the benefits of supervision for workers in setting the parameters:

*Kindness is not a weakness, it is strength. For these people you must give them clear directions, [they] need to know what [are] the parameters of what they are doing and make sure that they fully understand what they are doing. Then they can grow because they know what the rules were. That's why we have a team leader looking after someone new.*

Ken referred to the importance of the supervisor in the provision of clear directions which was also mentioned by the young people and the training representatives as ways of assisting learning. The responsibility of the supervisor as the facilitator in that

process has been included in previous studies (Heron, 1993; Hughes, 2002, p. 57; Senge, 1990). Ken also referred to the understanding of the implied rules. Previous studies have reported that ways of talking and interacting were included as part of understanding the rules (Delpit, 1988, p. 282-283). Ken explained his rationale for the one-to-one supervision:

*As you see we have one-to-one, if I had one manager to look after everyone and everyone else was classified as a worker, that manager could not mentally look after twenty staff. What would happen is you'd have the very conscientious three or four ... the next six would be good and the other ten would fall by the wayside. They would then have this man shouting at them all the time "why isn't this done, why isn't that done?" ... I've seen it so many times. It would be better if that company had said to that manager "pick five guys and they're team leaders". Under those five guys have five players, each team leader has to report what they think of their person. If one of them says "I've got a lousy one or he doesn't work hard", he's immediately taken from him and given to another team leader because personalities in life come into lots of things.*

Ken was clear that the supervisor was responsible for ensuring that the employees worked effectively. He also referred to the role of personality in the supervisory/employee relationships but emphasised the need for the supervisor to be accepting of the worker and the need for organisational responsibility if that was not the case. Previous findings have referred to the change of relationship for some supervisors from the traditional coercive role to a more facilitative personal relationship in assisting workers' learning (Hughes, 2002, p. 58).

Four of the employers emphasised the transferability of team skills from participation in organised sport to work settings. Lydia emphasised the transfer of negotiation and conflict resolution skills:

*Team work skills [can be acquired] through playing sport; being part of a team. Usually in sports you might have to help with the umpiring or these sorts of things and you learn a bit about conflict resolution and negotiation. You might have been involved in a particular project at school where you had to deliver on*

*an outcome. So what sorts of things did you learn through that about working with other people?*

Although Lydia mentioned team sport in the first instance she also referred to one's school experience which involved collaboration with other students. She also implied a capacity to reflect on the process of working with other people. Amy referred to the importance of a part time job and community involvement but made specific reference to organised sport:

*Employers will also look at, if someone hasn't had a part time job or something but if they have been very involved in another activity. It could be a community activity, community support or it could be more particularly sport. If they can see that this person has been a member and built their way up within this team situation. Again this gives the message that alright they have had to turn up for training, they have had to be disciplined in that respect otherwise they would not remain a member of the team. Team work can be in all aspects of life.*

Similar to Amy, Sean detailed the value of regular attendance and participation associated with involvement in sport. Sean made reference to the significance of the outcome:

*I think it is developed through sport especially team sport, I guess in other sports as well. If you don't put in the training whether you're doing athletics or football or whatever, if you don't put in the hard yards at training, you turn up to your event you're not going to perform. So you learn that you get a reward [for the training].*

Sharron also mentioned the role of sport in the achievement of goals but her emphasis was on winning:

*So we always knew that the kids who work within a team and especially if they achieved some goals and had some victories. You'd see kids who joined a team and never played and never achieved anything. After three years they are in the grand final winning team these kids have gone to wow; it does so much for their*

*confidence and their self esteem to have that. That's the thing that disadvantaged kids too usually miss out on that. They don't get that.*

Sean and Sharron stated that they were or had been directly involved in sport. Sean commented on his personal interest "because I'm involved on such a high level with my sport and have been all my life, it is important and I look at it with all the employees". Sharron explained that "our kids were very successful and my husband coached them in different ones". Their positive view of organised sport and their participation links congruence between habitus and actions undertaken (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 468). Habitus is also a structuring mechanism through which cultural and social capital is developed (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 18). These employers discussed the significance of organised sport in developing individual skills or personal attributes such as confidence in young people. The facilitation role occupied by parents in transporting, and coaching are examples of their contribution to the transfer of cultural capital to their children through the investment of time and effort. These skills and attributes function as symbolic capital in that in institutional settings the individual competence is considered rather than the parental efforts (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 244-245).

### ***Link between employers' perspectives and organisational culture***

Within my study the organisational practices described by the employers were coherent with the values they expressed in connection with the employees. Denison (1996, p. 624) explains culture as "the deep structure of organisations, which is rooted in the values, beliefs and assumptions held by organizational members". Research has reported on the multilayered nature of organisational culture from the overt examples such as structures and rituals to the underlying values and their manifestations (Denison, 1996, p. 627; Lundberg, 1982; Schein, 1985; 1990, p. 112; 1992). Culture is perpetuated through socialisation of new members, but the process does not have uniform effects due to the individuals' responses and actions (Schein, 1990, p. 116).

A model articulated by Denison incorporates four cultural traits of mission, consistency, adaptability and involvement which have been linked to organisational effectiveness (Denison & Mishra, 1995). I focussed only on the involvement and consistency aspects as I was interested in employers' values of human capital. Organisations that value involvement seek to empower workers through practices that promote worker' input

into work practices and organisational goals (Denison, Haaland, & Goelzer, 2003, p. 208; Lawler, 1996; Spreitzer, 1995). Consistency refers to a set of core values which promotes negotiation between workers and management to reach agreement on diverse points of view (Block, 1991). The human relations model which overlaps with some aspects of the involvement and the consistency areas emphasises the link between industry structure and community characteristics. The non financial benefits such as stocks of skills, knowledge and health are incorporated (Becker, 1993; Stafford, Duncan, Dane, Winter, & Kaye, 1999). Studies from this perspective made a connection between the organisational structure and the focus on a cooperative team which includes openness, trust and commitment (McCartt & Rohrbaugh, 1995; Schepers & Van den Berg, 2007).

Cameron and Quinn (1999) developed a Competing Values Framework to examine organisational culture which incorporated stability versus flexibility. Organisations that focus more on constancy favour top-down control approaches and the application of formal rules (Schepers & Van den Berg, 2007, p. 410). Denison and colleagues (2003, p. 209) reported on the need for balance between stability and flexibility and that organisations that employ a top-down focus find it difficult to embrace the empowerment of workers or foster bottom-up approaches. In examining the employer employee relationships more generally researchers have detailed two differing exchange relationships: an economic; and a social exchange. Within the economic exchange the employer's obligation to the employee is largely defined in monetary terms (Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Hite, 1995; Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Tripoli, 1997).

Studies have examined the values of the founders of family businesses as being a factor that differentiate them from other organisations. The family member's values and motivation can be powerful cultural drivers (Denison, Lief, & Ward, 2004). Barney (1986) pointed to the competitive advantage achieved as a result of cultural uniqueness. Other studies include aspects such as independence, meeting challenges, the capacity to pass the founder's legacy to the next generation or building a business. The motivation can be based on these intrinsic factors aspects rather than purely the extrinsic factors such as personal income (Kuratko, Hornsby, & Naffziger, 1997; Stafford et al., 1999).

Employers were divided on their views of the contribution of the employees to the organisation and the link with organisational culture. Amy and Sharron referred to the

hierarchical relationship between employers and employees while Colin and Ken who were owners of family businesses spoke of the interdependence of the two groups. Amy spoke of the relationship being one of exchange:

*Ok work is basically about exchange. It's an exchange of your labour in return for remuneration and there should be fairness on both sides. An employee is entitled to expect a safe fair work place where the terms and conditions of employment are clearly set down and you understand what is expected of you. As an employee it is expected that during the working hours you'll give it your best shot.*

Amy described a minimum of employee expectations in terms of safety and fairness. Although it was not explicitly stated, it was inferred that power rested with the employer. Amy referred to the importance of formal rules in the conditions of employment being “set down” which I assumed was in writing. A previous finding on organisational culture reported on the connection between top-down approaches and the application of formal rules (Schepers & Van den Berg, 2007, p. 410). The relationship between the employer and employees conformed to the economic exchange relationship. Studies have reported on the dominance of monetary considerations within this position (Tsui et al., 1995; Tsui et al., 1997). Sharron was more direct in expressing that the employer was in a position of control:

*They forget that I'm the boss, I'm the boss. This is my business, I'm paying their wages, [and] who do they think they are? They do forget who the boss is and they do forget that at the end of the day this is his business, he's paying the wages and it's his neck that's on the line for this job not yours. So you know, don't get too cocky, because they can be inclined to be sometimes, not always. ... but still at the end of it I am still the boss. But hey I'm the one [that] has outlaid; I've got my house mortgaged and everything else and if things go wrong my neck is on the chopping block.*

Sharron's position was clearly the top-down approach. Her justification was that the employer contributed the capital. She had a similar perspective to Amy in relation to the dominance of economic considerations. This position concurred with a previous study in reporting an inverse relationship between top-down approaches and the ability

to employ bottom-up strategies to empower workers (Denison et al., 2003). Amy demonstrated an association between the employer/employee relationship based on exchange and her value of individualism. She went on to explain:

*From where I see it, it depends very much on the attitude of the young person on how much understanding is given. ... So life is only limited by the individual; it doesn't matter where you've come from. I firmly believe that if you can develop the right attitude, first of all we are damn lucky we live in Australia and have all the advantages and have all the support networks that we have here and use [them] wisely.*

For Amy there was congruence between individual responsibility and work being an exchange between the employer and the employee. This verifies Denison's (1996) connection between values and organisational culture. In relation to workplace structures Amy suggested "maybe pairing them with a mentor in the workplace" as a way of learning workplace practices and relationships. So there was a lack of commitment to direct organisational responsibility for the development of those skills. Colin and Ken, who were both family business owners, had a different view and spoke of the importance of the employees. Colin who owned retail outlets said:

*The people are your business, absolutely and anybody who doesn't realise that is a fool. That would apply to a lot of businesses not only retail. Your business is only as good as your staff.*

Colin referred to the interdependence of all members of an organisation. Ken also commented on value of staff:

*The human resource is the most valuable thing any company can have. ... one of the reasons that we have survived and survived well is because we have a philosophy that the people are more important than anything.*

The views of the two owners of family businesses conformed to previous studies that have reported the importance of the founder's values which can contrast with other organisations (Barney, 1986; Denison et al., 2004). Both stated the significance of building human capital and the empowerment of workers which previous research



maintained was linked to the concept of involvement (Denison et al., 2003; Lawler, 1996; Spreitzer, 1995). Both also promoted openness and a cooperative team approach which was also linked to a human relations model outlined in previous research (McCartt & Rohrbaugh, 1995; Schepers & Van den Berg, 2007; Stafford et al., 1999). Colin spoke of his strategy of rewarding a young person based on his/her performance rather than the length of time in the position. He explained if “he’s a go getter and he masters things very quickly he can work his way up the chain in a skip”. As outlined in the previous two sections Ken described one-to-one supervision that applied within the warehouse section of the organisation. These instances demonstrated a connection between the practices of rewarding performance on merit and the provision of supervision and their stated values of the importance of the human resource. .

### ***Summary***

Some of the young people identified the role of organisational structures that supported and accepted them initially. They were then able to absorb and participate in the social practices including relationships. In addition, the initial acceptance they experienced was extended to other young people who subsequently joined the training programs at Fairbridge. A culture of acceptance of individual differences was established. They also acknowledged the assistance of direct strategies of modelling and demonstration as means of assisting their learning. They were then able to incorporate these in working collaboratively with peers and supervisors. The training practices at Fairbridge have implications for training more broadly in the navigation of relationships as part of employment literacy. The training involved a group of young people with whom the trainers worked closely. They modelled acceptance of individual differences while being clear on their supervisory role. A safe environment was more likely to be created. The group format also promoted informal learning among the members. Although not always directly stated, the need to understand the meaning attached to practices, including workplace relationships was also implied by the training representatives and some of the funding participants.

The employers made little reference to implied workplace practices. While they were not unanimous, they generally maintained that the negotiation of workplace relationships involved generic transferable skills. Indirect workplace structures such as mentoring were advocated. However, one employer spoke of one-to-one supervision in his organisation as a way of facilitating understanding of the workplace norms including

relationships. Some employers commented on the connection between organised sport and the development of team skills. They referred to the development of confidence which was supported by Bourdieu's (1986, p. 245) notion of symbolic capital in that dispositions of middle class young people were considered as competencies rather than a reflection of their parents' input. There was a connection between the practices within some of the organisations and the values outlined by those employers. Those who had considered the contribution of employees focussed on structures that either rewarded or supported the development of workers through the provision of supervision. The employers who emphasised individual responsibility maintained transferability of skills including relationships.

## Chapter Eight: Identifying and Applying for Jobs

Employment literacy, above all, includes a capacity to engage in the process of securing employment. Raffo (2006, p. 77) outlines the stages involved as gathering careers advice, undertaking a comparative analysis of career opportunities, examination of data on the labour market and possible pathways, a review of the evidence and the development of an action plan and the development of generic application and interviewing skills. These stages are not universal. Seeking employment is sometimes presented as an individual responsibility, however, I argue that in my study that the role of the family was important in the identification of potential jobs, job search and the interview components. I highlight the varying parental contributions which were based on their knowledge and understanding of workplace requirements, drawing on Bourdieu's (1984, p. 101; 1986, p. 244-245; 1990, p. 70; 1993) concepts of cultural and social capital. In relation to cultural capital my focus will be on two aspects. Firstly, I draw attention to the ways some parents facilitate the transfer of cultural capital across generations. Secondly, embodied cultural capital explains the significance of appearance, mannerisms and speech which are readily observable in interview situations. These aspects of personal presentation link applicants to their position in the field including their socioeconomic standing (Bourdieu, 1977; 1986, p. 244-245; 1990, p. 70; King, 2005, p. 222-223). The intersection of social and cultural forms of capital demonstrates the importance of socioeconomic position and the ways in which advantage is transmitted.

The sociological literature emphasises the additional challenges young people face with the increased complexity and uncertainty in the transition to work and the broader restructuring of the labour market. Studies have referred to the notion of precariousness which incorporates low pay employment and income insecurity (I. Campbell, 1997, p. 11; White & Wyn, 2008). Australia has one of the highest rates of part time employment within the OECD and young people in Australia and the United Kingdom are overrepresented in insecure forms of employment (Furlong & Kelly, 2005; Vosko, 2007). In developed countries researchers have linked credentials to gaining employment (Esping-Andersen, 1996, p.258; Furlong & Carmel, 2007, p. 19; Jamrozik, 2005, p. 220; Raffo & Reeves, 2000, p. 148; White & Wyn, 2008, p. 143). The need for qualifications and the lack of full time jobs is also reflected in school retention rates (White & Wyn, 2008, p. 179). Some studies maintain that the link between credentials

and employment cannot be applied to VET qualifications as they are often undertaken at various ages (Keating et al., 2005; Ryan, 2002). The growing 'deinstitutionalisation' of the life course has resulted in a proliferation of routes from school to work (Bynner, Ferri, & Shepherd, 1997; Irwin, 1995; Marginson, 1997; Wyn & White, 1997).

Researchers are divided on the relative importance of individual agency compared with social structures such as class, gender or location to explain the impact of the changes on young people. Some advocate the need for individual strategies by young people (Beck, 1992; Du Bois-Reymond, 1998; Giddens, 1991). Other authors, while accepting the volatility of the employment context, point to the dominance of social structures such as class, gender and location (Furlong & Carmel, 2007, p. 35; White & Wyn, 2008, p. 173). Willis (1977, p. 99), in his seminal study of young men's schooling and entry into the workplace, commented that the concept of choice in relation to work "is confusing and mystifying to pose the entry of disaffected working class boys into work as a matter of particular job choice - this is, in essence a very middle class construct".

In addition to cultural capital, social capital was important in the three stages of seeking employment but particularly in the job search aspect. Portes (1998, p. 4) explains social capital as the means by which social actors benefit from social networks. A distinction is made in the literature between horizontal ties, where people are connected within families and neighbourhoods and vertical networks which are represented by a greater range of loose contacts (J. Field, 2003, p. 65; Warr, 2005, p. 286). Fernández-Kelly (1995) refers to multiplexity which is similar to vertical networks in that networks are diverse. A number of studies have suggested that people in poor communities are likely to have horizontal or bridging ties rather than vertical or bonding relationships (J. Field, 2003; Portes, 1998; Russell, 1999). The link between the individual's level of social capital and his/her position within the social hierarchy has been widely reported (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 249; Bush & Baum, 2001, p. 196; J. Field, 2003, p. 82). I will now examine the first stage in the process of securing employment.

### ***Identifying potential jobs***

While the process of deciding on a career or a job for a young person is sometimes presented as an individual decision, the family and broader social and political environment are also important. The young people described the input of their families in identifying possible jobs. This involved the process of imagining what is possible.

The psychological literature points to considering potential jobs as comprising a number of stages. Researchers have detailed the movement from an early fantasy stage to a tentative phase and later to final decisions (Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad, & Herma, 1951; Kniveton, 2004, p. 47; Super, 1990). Whiston and Keller (2004, p. 527) noted the importance of developing a vocational identity in which the young person explores the link between the self and the world of work in order to have a clear sense of his/her own career interests and goals.

A number of studies have reported the influence of the family on the career development process for young people (Kniveton, 2004; Penick & Jepsen, 1992; Small & McClean, 2002; Whiston & Keller, 2004). Parents' own occupational standing, socioeconomic status and family relationships have been identified as being significant (Lindstrom, Doren, Metheny, Johnson, & Zane, 2007, p. 349; Whiston & Keller, 2004). In studies of parents with young people with learning disabilities those parents that were employed provided a model of working and were more likely to expose their children to a variety of career options (Lindstrom, Benz, & Doren, 2004; Morningstar, 1997). Parents' lower socioeconomic status is associated with less involvement with their children's career development. In particular, poverty, unemployment and lack of exposure to education limited parents' capacity to assist their children in the transition from school to work (Blustein et al., 2002, p. 320; Fouad & Brown, 2000; Kozol, 1991; Lindstrom et al., 2007; Wilson, 1997).

Studies have focussed on the ways in which family relationships and the provision of instrumental assistance assists or inhibits young people in identifying potential employment (Lindstrom et al., 2007, p. 349; Newman, 2004). Parents' capacity to balance support with autonomy as the young person matures has been explored (Bell, Allen, Hauser, & O'Connor, 1996; S. Turner & Lapan, 2002; Whiston & Keller, 2004, P. 535). Structural disadvantage such as poor housing have been associated with relationship difficulties, conflict and emotional distance in families (Kozol, 1991; Lerner, 1991; Wilson, 1997). The role of direct assistance by parents in career exploration, information and planning was noted (Blustein et al., 2002; Herr, 1996b, p. 7; Lindstrom et al., 2007; Young & Friesen, 1992). Young people from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds often lack parental input and are alone in the job exploration process (Blustein et al., 2002; Lerner, 1991). The significance of financial, educational and relationship resources contribute to the difficulties in the exploration

phase and emphasise the enveloping nature of social class in the transition to work for some young people (Blustein, Juntunen, & Worthington, 2000; M. T. Brown et al., 1996).

Socioeconomic status can also impact at a personal level on a young person's sense of self. Young people can express their interests, values and abilities or their self concept differently within work settings. Those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to be following their interests and aspirations than those that are disadvantaged (Blustein et al., 2002, p. 320; M. T. Brown et al., 1996). Herr (1996b, p. 7) noted the differences in belief systems with those who are poor often attributing an external locus of control whereas those from higher socioeconomic groups believe in their own internal capacity to influence life decisions. At an institutional level, researchers have noted that career development services have focussed on middle class young people and neglected the poor or working class (Helms & Cook, 1999; M. S. Richardson, 1993).

Within my study I focussed initially on family discussions as a means of ascertaining the levels of reported parental involvement in the identification of jobs. Most of the young participants stated that they had not had such discussions. Alice and Theresa commented on the lack of dialogue on potential jobs as reflecting the absence of parental support. Alice commented that her father had died "midway through high school ... In Yr 12 my mother remarried". She added:

*Things didn't go well ... I moved out of home and lived out of home for a couple of years but that didn't work. So I finally moved back with my mum and established a relationship with her again.*

Alice spoke about the absence of a relationship with her mother during the time she lived away from home. In this period she described having enrolled in vocational education courses in hospitality, arts, laboratory work and horticulture but had not completed any due to the non submission of the assignment component in each case. She commented that she had not discussed job options with her mother prior to leaving home due to her mother's lack of involvement:

*No, not really, not big long chats, sort of. My mum and I we talk sort of, but we are not close in a talking manner. You know what I mean. ... I felt that she had her own life and I had mine.*

Alice implied that her mother did not initiate discussion which would have assisted her to identify her interests in future employment or strategies that she might have adopted. She indicated that she was not close to her mother and she was also likely to be experiencing loss due to her father's death. She later stated that her mother had "worked in waitressing and office work". In addition to the absence of an encouraging relationship, it may be that Alice's mother did not believe that she had the necessary skills or understanding to provide advice to her daughter in connection with possible job options. Theresa, a young Indigenous woman, said that it was a conscious decision not to discuss work options with her parents:

*I didn't because they always put me down. They never encouraged me; always said you can't do this, you can't do that. That's another reason why, just to prove her wrong.*

Theresa also referred to the lack of support from her mother. In relation to her father she commented "he's too involved in pot; he used to get angry when he didn't have any". Later in the interview, Theresa stated that her mother had her first child at seventeen and was now thirty four years of age. At the time of the initial interview Theresa reported that there were three children under the age of six living with her mother. The lack of experience of paid work and education of Theresa's mother was consistent with previous findings on poor communities and the diminished capacity of these parents to assist their young people (Blustein et al., 2002, p. 320; Fouad & Brown, 2000; Kozol, 1991; Lindstrom et al., 2007; Wilson, 1997). Theresa went on to explain that her mother wanted her to join the Army which she did not want to do. In relation to her mother she said:

*She reckoned as soon as you turn sixteen I'm sending you off in the Army. You can't do that. She got the forms. ... It was like I'm not doing it – sorry.*

Her mother's comment of "I'm sending you into the Army" implied that there had been no discussion with Theresa. Previous studies emphasised the need to take into account the young person's autonomy (Bell et al., 1996; S. Turner & Lapan, 2002; Whiston & Keller, 2004, p. 535). Both Alice and Theresa commented that there was no extended family that could assist them. Although Theresa's grandparents provided practical assistance she said that they could not assist in relation to job options or strategies:

*No, I just thought I'm going to look for work. ... I've always wanted a job. I'm always reading the papers. They're like, you're too young, you can't get a job yet.*

Like many young people in a similar position, Theresa implied the lack of knowledge resources within her broader family network. Previous studies identified the role of family in the provision of career information and planning strategies as part of job exploration (Blustein et al., 2002, p. 320; Herr, 1996b; Lindstrom et al., 2007; Young & Friesen, 1992). Although Theresa was motivated to obtain employment she was not familiar with an application process. Alice's and Theresa's situations reflected the research findings that maintain that young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds often lack parental assistance and consequently are alone in the exploration of potential job options (Blustein et al., 2002, p. 320; Lerner, 1991).

Belinda described a discussion between her mother and her doctor:

*Yeah I talked to Mum ages ago. She was speaking to her doctor when she went to the doctor and she said I wanted to work with children and he reckoned [that] the best thing was to get like an apprenticeship type thing and go and work there.*

This was an example of Belinda's mother seeking the advice of a professional despite potential jobs being normally outside the doctor's area of expertise. Previous research points to the practice of some people from lower socioeconomic groups adopting the decision of an educated person thus using an external locus of control (Herr, 1996b, p. 7). I was interested in whether Belinda wanted to pursue work with children and asked her for her views on possible jobs, to which she replied:



*I'd like to be an actress as well but Mum said I would be better working with children.*

Belinda's idea of becoming an actress could be considered as not being realistic. Previous literature referred to the identification of jobs as a staged process over time from an early fantasy stage to a tentative one and then a decision (Ginzberg et al., 1951; Kniveton, 2004; Super, 1990). The experience of these three young people highlighted the lack of parental knowledge and consequently their capacity to assist the young people in imagining jobs and therefore examining possible job options at a later stage. These examples also support previous research on notion of choice of job as being a middle class construct and not relevant to the experience of working class young people (Willis, 1977, p. 99).

Elizabeth, one of the funding representatives who worked in a managerial role in the career development area within the State government, referred to the shift of personal responsibility in accessing information and undertaking the necessary negotiation in order to gain employment:

*... so it's about empowering people to navigate that labour market with the skills they need. To be honest, particularly with the changes to industrial relations those are navigation, confidence, being able to access information, and being able to negotiate as working people in the community. They are all skills we want people to have. Obviously people are going to have them at varying levels. We are trying to build that culture so that people can do that for themselves.*

The assumption is that individual workers have the skills and resources to access information, distil it for its relevance to an individual's own particular situation and undertake the necessary negotiation with employers. It is assumed at a policy level that young people have the ability, the necessary resources to gain information and participate in an interview.

Two of the employers spoke about the assistance that they provided to their sons. Amy, who worked for an employer organisation, spoke of the planning that she put in place to enable her son to select and apply for a bank officer position. He was eighteen/nineteen years of age and had completed his Tertiary Entry Examination (TEE) which is

undertaken at the end of high school and a year's full time vocational study at TAFE at the time. His TEE score was below that which was acceptable for university entrance at the time:

*When he left school his TEE wasn't good enough. ... He knew what he wanted to do. He'd go to TAFE and do an Associate Diploma of Accounting. ... Before he got the job, my requirement was, and this probably made a difference because I have that knowledge and these poor kids don't. Ok, I will look after you but I want you on a nine to five schedule. I want you out looking for jobs, researching jobs. I want you up, showered and dressed before I leave for work of a morning. I want to see a program for the day, after five o'clock that's your time. Weekends are your time [and] in return I'll cover all your expenses and give you pocket money.*

In keeping with other research findings Amy modelled the process of working which was found to be important for young people with disabilities but can be applied more generally (Lindstrom et al., 2004; Morningstar, 1997). Amy also detailed the planning that she implemented in the form of the supervision of her son's daily program. Colin, who was the owner of retail outlets talked about the opportunities that he provided for his sons to earn pocket money and the skills to communicate with a range of people:

*I also have another philosophy. As kids they have always worked with me, come out with me at a young age and do a few hours [that's] how they make pocket money. They have all learned well how to communicate I guess. The difference in them, sometimes you're in situations where you've got a group of people; they've got their kids and I've got my kids. Well my kids are sitting at the table yakking away; the adults are around talking to them and you watch the other kids and they're not [communicating]. ... That's what I'm talking about. They are confident with adults, they know they are equal to a task or whatever.*

In a similar fashion Colin detailed the opportunities that he afforded his sons in working with him and providing them with pocket money. He also commented on the confidence of his sons. Studies have linked a sense of self to an increased capacity to express their interests and abilities in a work context (Blustein et al., 2002, p. 320; M. T. Brown et al., 1996). Both Amy and Colin provided information, know-how or experience for their sons to explore career possibilities (Blustein et al., 2002, p. 320;

Herr, 1996b, p. 7; Lindstrom et al., 2007; Young & Friesen, 1992). However, their means differed. In Amy's case it involved facilitation of the exploration process whereas Colin provided direct experience of working in a retail setting and social interaction opportunities. The planning, communication skills and confidence mentioned by Amy and Colin would have advantaged their sons in the employment selection process and throughout their careers. These employer excerpts also demonstrated the intergenerational transfer of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 245-246). The link between economic, cultural and social capital was apparent within these discussions. Bourdieu (1986, p. 245-246) referred to the investment by middle class parents in their children's abilities or attributes, or symbolic capital which is recognised as individual competence within institutions such as workplaces rather than the parental involvement. In addition to the communication skills and confidence, it was also likely that Colin's sons may have derived other benefits from his father's social networks or social capital (Portes, 1998, p. 4). Knowledge networks are significant in securing employment. The provision of financial support for their sons in both instances verified the ways in which economic and cultural capital intersect, conferring cumulative advantage on young people from higher socioeconomic backgrounds.

### ***Networks and job search***

The significance of networks and knowledge also applied to the job search component. Researchers in Europe, Canada and the United States reported on the connection between family and friendship networks and securing employment (J. Field, 2003, p. 51-52; Petersen et al., 2000). American studies have referred to the use of existing employees' networks by employers in the recruitment of staff. The job seekers who are referred by existing employees are more likely to be employed (Fernandez et al., 2000; Fernandez & Weinberg, 1997). In some instances the job information is only available through personal networks and consequently not accessible to those outside that group (Aguilera, 2002, p. 854). Drentea (1998, p. 322) noted the role of informal and formal networks in seeking employment thus drawing attention to the benefits of more diverse sources of information and assistance. Research identified different types of support which has ramifications for seeking employment. These included emotional, instrumental and information support. Instrumental support involves material or financial assistance whereas information can include details of job vacancies or the application process. It was found that young unemployed people were more likely to attract instrumental rather than the other forms of support (Russell, 1999, p. 215-219).

The level of resources within the networks is an important component in connection with market advantage (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Portes, 1998). The nature of the resources can contribute to different outcomes for young people. In some instances research findings have focussed on parental input in relation to the strategies to be used in job searching. These include family support, and assistance in the form of information and planning approaches (Blustein et al., 2002; Lindstrom et al., 2007; Young & Friesen, 1992). Other studies emphasised the more instrumental role of parents in assisting young people by accompanying them to access job information on traineeships and apprenticeships at employment services (E. Smith, 2003, p. 12; Way, 1996). Studies found that lack of knowledge such as employer expectations was a barrier for inner city young black people due to high levels of unemployment within the group (Aguilera, 2002, p. 854-855; Fernández-Kelly, 1995). The use of personal contacts are often used by disadvantaged groups rather than more formal application methods and this approach has been linked to lower income positions (G. P. Green, Tigges, & Diaz, 1999; McDonald & Elder, 2006; S. Smith, 2000).

Two of the young people commented on the importance of family or associated networks in connection with possible employment. Emily confirmed that she had gained employment through family or through their networks:

*That is how I got in the workforce ... from the family. Working with my dad's dad or working with my dad's boss's son or something like that. It was always through that way. It wasn't actually that I had done [it] myself. It was always someone showing me how to do something.*

Emily spoke of the assistance provided by her immediate, extended family and their networks. She also emphasised the contribution of the people within the network rather than her own efforts. Peter, who lived with his mother at the time of the initial interview, stated that his uncles had suggested that he leave school and join them doing plastering:

*My uncles are big time plasterers down in Bunbury and that. They used to say you can leave school and come down here and work with me. Or you can come and work with my dad. They used to give me that urge to leave and go. ... Yeah,*

*my uncle has been a plasterer for 32 years. My dad has his own ... business, he ... builds houses and concrete slabs.*

Both Peter and Emily referred mainly to their families as a way of gaining employment. They inferred the role of social capital through mainly family connections thus supporting previous research on the link between social capital and job search (J. Field, 2003, p. 51-52). The social capital literature differentiates between horizontal ties where people are connected through family rather than vertical networks which incorporates a greater range of connections (J. Field, 2003, p. 65; Warr, 2005, p. 286).

In contrast, Theresa identified the absence of contacts that could assist her in gaining employment:

*If I knew someone who could get me a job ... if I knew someone who [owned] a company or something. Mum doesn't know anyone [in that position].*

Her reference to “someone who owned a company” demonstrated her understanding of the connection between economic resources or influence and the capacity to secure employment. Previous findings have also verified the link between assets and economic success (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Portes, 1998).

Two of the trainer participants also spoke of the significance of networks in connection with gaining employment. Clive, who at the time of the interview had a management responsibility for delivery of a range of unaccredited training programs, spoke of the benefit of family members in providing information in relation to possible employment:

*It goes back to what we said before, if there were family members who knew someone who had a son and they were getting busy and they wanted someone to come and work for them; that would be their first port of call to try and find ... a trainee or an apprentice.*

Clive spoke of the advance job information that can be available through family members. His position concurred with research that reported on job related information being only available through personal contacts (Aguilera, 2002, p. 854). Although not mentioned overtly he also included the ways in which organisations use social capital in

the recruitment of new employees, which was also noted in previous studies (Fernandez et al., 2000; Fernandez & Weinberg, 1997). He implied the significance of resources including information among groups, which was also included in previous studies (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Portes, 1998). Clive also spoke about the role of informal networks:

*A lot of that was done very informally ... everybody knew what everyone else was doing, maybe that was my country upbringing. (laughs) ... I do think we underestimate the informal networks. It was a huge thing, especially when you are unemployed. You just don't have those. The only networks that you have are the ones you don't want.*

He also commented on the lack of job availability information within the peer group of unemployed people. This view is supported by Russell's (1999, p. 215-219) finding that young unemployed were more likely to attract material rather than informational forms of support. Mark, who delivered training at Fairbridge spoke of the lack of Indigenous craftsmen as a group:

*There isn't too much of a network. You don't see too many Aboriginal painters, [not many] of them at all. So straight away if a young bloke rocks up and says how about any builder's labourers? What experience have you got? I haven't got any. It's pretty hard for them to get a leg in ... no matter what it is in the building trade because they have no experience. Again it gets around to teaching the young blokes [about] rocking up on time. That's all new to them. So the network is very hard, it's not like my network. Being a white fella I've got friends all around the place who are all tradesmen. Already I have my son lined up to be a plumber because my network is different. My network of workers is huge; their's isn't.*

Mark's comments could be considered racist in that he assumed only white networks existed but his view is also supported by the much lower number of skilled Indigenous workers. He referred to the intergenerational benefits accrued through being part of a craft network. These included an apprenticeship in his son's case which is consistent with findings that noted the assistance of family and friends in accessing suitable work (J. Field, 2003; Petersen et al., 2000). Mark also inferred that the knowledge of

employers' expectations can be transferred to the next generation which may not be known by other young people applying for work in the building industry. American studies have documented the barriers to employment experienced by young black people in inner city areas who are not aware of employers' requirements (Aguilera, 2002; Fernández-Kelly, 1995). This lack of knowledge could also apply to other disadvantaged young people such as a number who participated in my study.

The importance of understanding the language requirements of particular work settings was discussed by one of the funding representatives. Lara, who worked in curriculum development in the state government, drew attention to the importance of the particular Discourse associated with the job application process. She was referring specifically to public service positions where there is a need to address selection criteria:

*You may not be familiar with the type of language required and what the expectations are, those kinds of things. You are disadvantaging yourself immediately because you need help and guidance in that. A lot of people find someone in their environment that will be able to give them those suggestions or ideas to help them on the path.*

Lara pointed out the need for the person applying for a job to understand and participate in the appropriate language at the application writing and at an interview levels. She also drew attention to the implied rules that are present in that context. She went on to talk about the assistance someone may require with the selection process, despite having considerable work experience and skills:

*You know in the end I'd say that people who are very highly skilled and capable often need someone else to support them in that process. Because what you are actually doing is having to, as I said before, articulate as to what you can and can't do. Kind of being honest with yourself and having this awareness to reflect on what you've done. What does it mean if I have been able to do this? That means that I've got these skills. The process itself, unless you get familiar with how the process works, it's a huge thing. Even when you know how the process works it's a lot of hard work.*

Whilst it can be argued that the demands of a public service application may exceed those required for an entry level position, the ability to reframe work or educational experience in terms of skills or attributes does apply. At a personal level I have assisted people in the writing of job applications for positions at professional levels and the transfer of experience into skills can be difficult for people who may not have recently participated in the process. Lara's observations and my own experience are supported by previous studies on the role of literacies including the meaning systems (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 11; Reid Boyd & Weatherill, 2002).

Amy and Colin, both employers, outlined their efforts in assisting their sons in the job search process or in securing employment. Amy proceeded to outline her direction in terms of suitable areas of work and the ways of proceeding with an application at the time:

*He went on from there: he said "where do you think I should work" and I said "why don't you look at a bank, bank officer looks good on a résumé and you should be qualified ...enough for that". [He answered] "what'll I do?" (laugh). I'd paid for all these years at school. I said "ring up all the banks and find out if they have application forms and ask them to send it out and when you do ask who would be the person responsible so that you have got a name so that when you send the application in you can address someone by name". That shows you have gone that extra mile.*

It was clear that Amy's son, in spite of completing high school and an Associate Diploma of Accounting which involved a year's study at TAFE, was not aware of possible future employment options or the application process. This example emphasised the role of parental knowledge on the process of identifying potential jobs and the application process. Amy's guidance and instrumental assistance was supported by previous studies that reported on the efforts of parents in supporting their children on the transition process from school (E. Smith, 2003, p. 12; Way, 1996). In connection with the letters of application Amy reported on her directions to her son:

*he said "will you write the letter". I stated "no way. I'll sit down with you and we'll talk about what an employer would be looking for". So we did that ... and I'd run through mock interviews with him. I'd say "now tell me about*



*yourself', he'd say they are not going to ask me that and I'd say "I don't care tell me about yourself". We'd do an interview every day when I went home. ... Then they rang the following Monday and they asked him in for an interview so he rang me afterwards and he said "you'll never guess what the first question was". I said [ ] "tell me about yourself". So he got the job and did very well.*

Amy was clear in facilitating her son's learning in having the discussion on the requirements of employers which would also have assisted him in the interviews. She was persistent in the practising of interview questions. Whilst I considered that Amy, as she described it, was directive in her approach she had an understanding of the ways in which employment operated including the application and interview process.

Colin stated that he would not employ his sons within his business on leaving school and he outlined his rationale:

*They all followed like me; they left school very early. But I wouldn't hire them, I don't believe in that, which has caused a few arguments. They have not been abandoned either; I've got them jobs, helped them through and all that. My deal there is ... you get out there and work for other people and in my case when you appreciate what's here for you and you're mature enough, willing enough and committed to it then you come back and work for me. So far it has had good results. They've come back and appreciated what they've got.*

Colin confirmed that his older son was at the time of the interview "managing a couple of my stores". Similar to the identification of jobs, Amy assisted her son with strategies to be used in approaching potential employers and undertook mock interviews with him. Amy's efforts conform to the ways cultural capital is transmitted between generations through parental commitment of time and effort (Becker, 1964; Bourdieu, 1986, p. 245-246). The written and interpersonal skills that Amy's son no doubt demonstrated was a manifestation of symbolic capital in that his competence would have been recognised in the workplace rather than his mother's contribution. This is a further example of the domestic transmission of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 244). Colin's efforts in getting his sons jobs and his approach to the development of his sons' interpersonal skills outlined previously supports the link between economic, cultural and social capital. Amy's and Colin's efforts on behalf of their sons also showed the connection

between habitus or the way people see the world, their actions and the link to their socioeconomic position (King, 2005, p. 222-223).

### ***The interview process***

I will now examine the experiences of young people in interview situations and the employer perspectives on the factors that influence the process. The selection interview can be considered as a Discourse which includes appropriate presentation, language and nonverbal behaviour (Gee, 1996, p. 127; Gee et al., 1996, p. 10). In order to participate in the Discourse the young interviewee needs to understand the meaning system and that those that are represented are selective (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 11; Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 104). As already indicated in the two previous sections studies have detailed the instrumental help provided by parents to young people to assist them in gaining employment. These studies point to a hands on approach to the practice of interview techniques (E. Smith, 2003; Way, 1996).

Researchers have reported that the interview is the most widely used selection approach (Dipboye, 1992; Elder, Kacmar, & Ferris, 1989; Simola, Taggar, & Smith, 2007). Some studies refer to benefits of the standardisation of the process including the questions and the ways responses are evaluated (Campion, Palmer, & Campion, 1997; Simola et al., 2007). There is lack of evidence of the benefits of interview panels compared with individual interviews (Campion et al., 1997). In most cases in my study the employers reported that individual interviews were used, with one exception where the interview process involved a group interview. The group selection process involved a number of young people and a panel of interviewers.

Psychological theories have been important in the explanation of the dynamics of the selection process. Factors identified include attractiveness, likeability and expertise (Delli & Vera, 2003; Dipboye, 1992). Other studies have examined nonverbal components such as personality traits, demographics and clothing (Forsythe et al., 1985; C. K. Parsons & Liden, 1984; Parton et al., 2002). The importance of verbal messages has also been noted (Parton et al., 2002; Ugbah & Evuleocha, 1992). Interview impressions including appearance have been found to be an improved predictor of selection of applicants for employment, rather than credentials (Kinicki et al., 1990; Littrell & Holm-Peterson, 1980).

Four of the young people described their experience of interviews. Two spoke of their discomfort while two others reported that they coped well in interview situations. Neil, who was undertaking part time work activity for people with a range of disabilities within the non government agency, spoke of his difficulties. In the initial interview he stated that he suffered from obsessive compulsive disorder. He said that interviews were challenging due to “meeting new people ... knowing what to do”. The mental health issues may have also been a factor in Neil’s situation. Alice also described interviews as “nerve racking” but she demonstrated an ability to reflect on the process and detail strategies that she would have adopted in future interview situations. There was a common issue with Neil in connection with suitable language to use but Alice also referred to context appropriateness. She did however recognise that the skills could be acquired:

*Knowing what to say. They ask you big questions. If I say this will I get it wrong and I might not get the job. Learning interviews themselves, going through mock interviews, learning the questions and what to say and that would have helped me.*

Alice showed a capacity to reflect on her experience of interview situations and consider future strategies. She inferred an interview Discourse with a set of social practices and appropriate language (Gee, 1996, p. 127; Gee et al., 1996, p. 10). Alice went on to describe her approach to deal with future interviews:

*I'd look at what I'm actually applying for, make up a huge amount of questions, of what they are going to ask about the job. ... Then I guess [I'd] get someone to do a mock interview on me and see if I can actually practice on getting it done.*

Alice demonstrated that she now understood the interview process and could use mock interviews as a way of improving her interview performance in the future. In the second interview Alice was able to reflect on her experience of applying for a number of jobs for which she was not successful:

*When I first started looking for jobs, the way I went about it may be a bit hard [and that's] why I didn't get a lot of jobs: confidence factors came into it. When*

*you're looking day in day out for jobs ... so many people knock you back it brings you down and you start to lose self esteem and that. ... It's a really hard process.*

As already indicated in connection with identification of jobs, Alice reported that she left home for a period of two years on completion of high school. Alice's situation of having no family input supports previous findings of some young people having to make job related decisions on their own (Blustein et al., 2002; Lerner, 1991).

Emily commented on the experience of working class young people in that they are overrepresented among the students who leave school at Year 10. She spoke about how some schools neglect to inform young people on the ways of approaching interviews in connection with the language and the content:

*In the interviewing process, at school you don't do any of those things. So how do you know what to take to a job interview and all that kind of thing. That should all be in Year 10. The majority of students leave at Yr 10. How do I do this and stuff like this? Because a lot of job interviews that I went for I didn't have the right information. I didn't know how to go about it, how to speak to them or anything. They look at you like you're really not the person for this job because you sound like you don't know what you're on about. That doesn't make you feel too good either.*

Emily was aware that she needed to know about the ways of behaving within an interview situation. Her inclusion of the significance of appropriate language was in line with previous studies (Parton et al., 2002; Ugbah & Evuleocha, 1992). She also implied that she was unable to participate within the interview Discourse in connection with language and rules. Previous research noted the importance of meaning systems within Discourses and their selective representations within an institutional setting such as a workplace (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 11; Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 104). While Neil, Alice (initially) and Emily found the interview experience challenging, that perspective was not unanimous. Two of the other participants commented on their familiarity and ease with the interview process. Peter elaborated on the technical aspect of specific interviews:

*Places like [mining companies] give you an interview and scenarios like a busted pipe or a leaking valve and [they want to know] how you are going to go about it. They want to know how you are going to react to something that is going all over the place, what are you going to do? You tell all your procedures and what you are going to do. You tell them exactly what they want to hear. That's what I did.*

Peter showed that he was familiar with the interview approach adopted by areas of the mining sector in connection with the type of questions posed. His position verified previous research in connection with familiarity with the practices in order to participate in a particular Discourse (Gee et al., 1996). Like Peter, Stephanie said that she liked interviews:

*I don't mind them, I like talking to people so it's no hassle to me. I can just walk up to anyone in the shopping centre and have a conversation. I suppose working in bars does that too. ... When you're sitting face-to-face with them then it's all about selling yourself really at the end of the day. I think a lot of the time it's not really the best person for the job. It's whether you can sell yourself into that position in the best way possible*

Stephanie emphasised the relevance of “selling yourself” which was in line with earlier research that reported interview impressions to be an improved predictor of success compared with credentials (Kinicki et al., 1990). Both Peter and Stephanie had held a number of jobs and while not the only factor, greater familiarity with the interview process may have contributed to their reported ease in interview situations.

Within the employer discussions, presentation was a dominant theme. Colette, an employer representative and joint owner of an engineering business, stated that while technical competence has been emphasised in the past, personal attributes are now paramount:

*It's looking for that person, as you know that gives you the eye contact that is relaxed without being too relaxed, that can talk in an interview. Because all those things we are going to see out in the workshop where they are going to*

*interact. Whereas in the early days we were probably looking for a guy who was a very good tradesman and that was the criterion. If he seemed a nice bloke that was a bonus. Whereas now we are looking for the bloke that is going to fit in with the group that we've got. [Someone] that is going to fit in to the culture that we are trying to develop in the workshop.*

Collette explained that she had sought to change the 'macho' culture of a hierarchy of craftsmen to one in which there was acceptance that all staff treated each others as equals. She emphasised the importance of verbal and nonverbal behaviour such as eye contact and being at ease in the situation. Her requirements were supported by studies that maintain the importance of appearance and verbal skills (Littrell & Holm-Peterson, 1980; Parton et al., 2002; Ugbah & Evuleocha, 1992). Lydia, who held a managerial position, was even more specific about how candidates should perform in interviews:

*Ok it is very much that they are putting themselves forward and they present at a counter, their voice and their manner so that they do appear to be at least a little bit confident. I can understand them being reserved, but being prepared to give an opinion. Being able to back up what they have said with some experience and examples and those sorts of things and being prepared to listen to other peoples' point of view. It would also be the appropriate behaviour for the place they are in.*

Lydia's emphasis was on verbal and nonverbal behaviour and the ways of behaving. This conformed to previous research in connection with participation in a particular Discourse (Gee, 1996, p. 127). Sharron, who was employed in a management role within an employer organisation, spoke of the need for an appropriate attitude which she maintained was identifiable during the course of an interview. She said that she had undertaken an informal survey within the employer group on their expectations of new employees:

*I'll tell you what the most important thing is. The most important thing is attitude. [It was] number one. Everyone single member of our employers that I spoke to, attitude was number one.*

She elaborated:

*If I think I've got someone that is going to say "I don't know" and if they say in the interview that's it; (laughs) they don't go any further. All employers say "we don't have time", you are busy doing your job and making sure that there is work and there is a pay cheque at the end for your employees. So you don't have time to worry about people who "I don't know". So they don't get the job. That comes out in the interview. It's in their attitude and you pick it up very, very quickly.*

Sharron's reaction was strong in that she raised her voice and became more emphatic. I considered that there could be a number of underlying reasons for the response of "I don't know" which could be explored. When I conveyed that to her she replied:

*I'm talking about ... you can tell when someone says "I don't know" that they don't want to know. They don't want to put themselves out to know. ... It all comes down to attitude. You know, you see in everyday life there are people who, it's an awful way of putting it, they sit like this (shoulders hunched forward and eyes downcast), ... most of them are smokers and when they walk they walk like this (similar pose) and their whole world is like this don't ask me to [do] anything outside my little comfort zone. I don't want to know. Then you see the other people who are out there. That's attitude. ... all you have to do is ask a couple of questions and the way they answer it, the way their body language is and you think no, because I know what I want.*

Sharron seemed to be making a link between an attitude of indifference and physical presentation, associated with lack of confidence with hunched shoulders and not maintaining eye contact. It was almost as though she made a selection decision on the basis of the physical presentation and the questioning supported that result. Previous research maintains the importance of appearance in interview decision making (Littrell & Holm-Peterson, 1980). Sean who was the owner of a lawn mowing retail and servicing business, also spoke of the importance of presentation and language in what could be considered a derogatory way:

*Being able to talk confidently and clearly. ... Having a seventeen year old who stares at his feet and grunts isn't going to do for us.*

Both Sharron and Sean implied that young people did not conform to the traditional notions of confidence in terms of the way they either presented or their lack of definite responses. Previous studies have reported on the significance of appearance and the language within the interview process (Littrell & Holm-Peterson, 1980; Parton et al., 2002; Ugbah & Evuleocha, 1992).

Lydia and Sean also referred to the importance of mannerisms such as handshakes as part of social etiquette. Lydia spoke of the need to know the correct way to shake hands:

*Knowing how to shake hands because it is something that is expected, but a lot of kids don't and a lot of adults don't. You get your wet fish or your bone crusher. (laughs). Things like that are business/social etiquette.*

Sean also commented on handshakes:

*I'm amazed every young person that I shake hands with doesn't know how to give a hand shake. ... he's got the limp hand that's sort of sweaty. These basic courtesies don't seem to be there. It goes back to what I was saying if you've got a seventeen year old kid who walks around home going ugh to mum and dad. They are missing out on having that etiquette training at school.*

The importance of handshakes and their appropriateness as assessed by the interviewer can be included in impression management, which research has linked to interview success (Kinicki et al., 1990). The prominence of physical appearance, speech and handshakes within interview contexts was supported by Bourdieu's (1984, 1990) discussions of embodied cultural capital. He referred to its inclusion in ways of "standing, speaking [and] walking" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 70). The ways people use their bodies connects them to their position within the field which includes socioeconomic standing (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 101; King, 2005, p. 222-223). He also referred to the stooped appearance of the Kabyle women which was an indicator of their inferior



status within their group (Bourdieu, 1977). The body is an important signifier in relation to social interactions generally which expresses status and power. If actors do not act 'naturally' they are likely to be considered insincere or not trustworthy (King, 2005, p. 223).

The appropriateness of appearance, speech and mannerisms are readily apparent in an interview situation and they can be signifiers of class position. Previous studies within education, reported that the teacher who has the most cultural capital in that environment tended to reward the students that possess it (Bourdieu, 1984; Di Maggio & Useem, 1978). Children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are in turn more comfortable in the school environment and easily communicate with teachers while those of lower socioeconomic status lack the cultural capital to easily participate (De Graaf, De Graaf, & Kraaykamp, 2000; Dumais, 2002). The same situation can be applied to interview situations.

## **Summary**

I have demonstrated the reported differing levels of input provided by parents to young people which was based on their knowledge and know-how in the three stages of seeking employment. Socioeconomic position was a strong influence in the parents' contributions. The employers as parents facilitated the experience of working, organisational and interpersonal skills that have direct application to entry and success in the workplace, which was not the case for the parents of the young study participants. These experiences and skills were examples of cultural capital which would have benefited the employers' children. In contrast, the idea of choice of job is alien to some young working class people. It is likely that view would be shared by the parents of the young study participants. These two divergent perspectives support the connections between socioeconomic position, the habitus or worldview and practices.

In relation to selection interviews, some employer representatives emphasised examples of embodied cultural capital such as appearance, speech and mannerisms, including handshakes. For these employers young people who conformed to these middle class norms were considered acceptable, while those who did not were disadvantaged in some interview situations. As I have shown in the previous chapter in relation to workplace, some of the young people acquired the capacity to participate in the interview Discourses over time through exposure to the practices. I will discuss job readiness and employability in the following chapter.

## Chapter Nine: Job Readiness and Employability

In this chapter I will demonstrate the different understandings of job readiness across the groups in my study. The lack of clarity associated with job readiness was initially raised by HCSG as a provider of employment training for young people. The idea of job readiness or work readiness has recently also been used by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the National Industry Skills Committee (NISC) (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2007; National Industry Skills Committee, 2007). The NISC has advisory responsibility for national vocational and technical education (National Industry Skills Committee, 2007). The concept is largely absent from the academic literature but some of the elements are included within the broader discussions of employability. I used the phrase job readiness exclusively in my discussions with the young people who participated in the study. The basis of my decision was that job ready was more easily understood than employability and while I was interested in their awareness of the concept, their understanding of the meanings was more significant. I will show that the concept of job readiness was not meaningful to many of the young people in my study due to its lack of clarity and application to their experience. I will also examine interpretations of the concept for the trainers, employer and funding representatives in order to assess the level of discrepancy and commonality at local, state and federal levels. In the process I will investigate the understandings of job readiness for the young study participants, the role of part time work as part of the preparation for full time work and the workplace aspects that contribute to awareness of job readiness.

In the literature at a federal policy level, concern was expressed for the at risk category of young people for their lack of engagement in study or employment (National Industry Skills Committee, 2007, p. 1). Furlong and Carmel (2007, p. 42-43) make the point that the term youth unemployment has disappeared and been replaced by the expression Not in Education Employment and Training (NEET) in Britain. Categories such as at risk and NEET include a heterogeneous group of young people which make comparisons difficult but often encourage commentators to make generalisations on the basis of characteristics or experiences of one sub-group. I will argue that the evidence from young people together with the absence of shared understandings of what constitutes job readiness from trainers, employers and funding bodies creates an impetus to examine other options of preparing young people for employment. I will

advocate for a model of employment literacy which incorporates the findings from my study.

As previously discussed in chapter four, the ACCI has had a pivotal role in the development of Australian national policy in connection with employability and later job readiness. In June 2007, the ACCI identified the need for “a secondary school system that actively contributes to the provision of job ready school leavers” in order to meet the current and future needs of industry in Australia (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2007, p. 1). Although the concept of job readiness was not defined, the paper specified the requirement for students “to gain a good general education with emphasis on literacy and numeracy and some development of employability skills” (, p. 1). There is again a lack of definition of what constitutes “a good general education [and] some development of employability skills”. The decision therefore rests with individual employers.

The NISC report commented on evidence from employer groups that young people were not work ready. In connection with adolescents generally the document reported “a skills deficiency in young people: many of them lack the practical, employability skills and attitudes towards work required when they first enter the workplace” (National Industry Skills Committee, 2007, p. 1). There is no reference to employers’ responsibility. Although the situation of at risk adolescents was identified, most of the policy recommendations did not suggest any measures that had the capacity to change their current experience. However, a recent OECD study of youth transitions reported the requirement to combat school failure through early and sustained intervention in order to minimise the cumulative disadvantages that often followed (Quintini, Martin, & Martin, 2007).

There is considerable overlap between the national policy documentation on job readiness and employability literature. A common thread is that young people must have the skills and attributes that employers want when they enter the workplace. Some of the participants such as the employers and some of the funding representatives used the concepts interchangeably. However the focus of the employability discourse within developed countries has been on the personal responsibility for the skills and attributes that are needed in order to gain and retain employment. Hillage and Pollard (1998, p.

l) include initially gaining, maintaining and securing new employment. Broader understandings of the concept included:

... the knowledge, skills and aptitude [workers] possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work (Hillage & Pollard, 1998, p. 2)

Researchers in the Netherlands reported that the meaning of employability has become “a meta-characteristic of workers’ market value” which incorporates attitudes, skills and knowledge (Sanders & de Grip, 2004, p. 75). This reflects the situation in Australia with the inclusion of The Employability Skills Framework which involved a suite of skills and attributes developed in 2002 by the Commonwealth government (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry & Business Council of Australia, 2002, p. 3-4). At a policy level, developed countries including Australia have embraced the focus on individual responsibility interpretation in which workers are required to conform to the changing demands of employers (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2003; Hillage & Pollard, 1998; E. Smith & Comyn, 2003, p. 19). This has resulted in individual graduates taking responsibility for their own employment in an increasingly competitive environment (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2003, p. 2; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006, p. 310). Individual responsibility also applies to all other job seekers.

There is an assumption that workers have the skills and attributes on joining the workforce (National Industry Skills Committee, 2007, p. 1). Broader socio political factors including inequality, the social construction of skills and a structure for the development of skills and attributes are not included. The concept of employability overlooks the ways in which “gender, social class and disability interact with labour market opportunities” (Morley, 2001, p. 132). Skills are socially constructed and rewarded differently on the basis of workers’ identity markers and educational pathways (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006, p. 310). A recent Australian study reported that often there is not a clear definition of what constitutes a particular skill. Employers also include personal attributes such as commitment which reflect the ways in which the business is managed rather than relating to the job tasks (S. Richardson & Teese, 2008, p. 11). The education system is considered to have responsibility for ensuring that adolescents are job or work ready (National Industry Skills Committee, 2007, p. 6).

However, there is no framework for the definition or assessment of the required skills or attributes (Stasz, 1998, p. 189).

As discussed in chapter six, researchers have referred to the emphasis of functional literacy or the individual skills view of literacy in discussions of the relationship between literacy and work (Castleton, 2002, p. 558; Holland, 1998; G. Hull & Grubb, 1999). The claims of inadequate literacy are usually levelled against workers while it was assumed that supervisors and managers have the necessary skills to meet the challenges of the current workplace (Castleton, 2002, p. 558-559). The connection between inadequate literacy and poor economic performance was reported in a number of developed countries such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia (Carnevale, Gainer, & Meltzer, 1990; Holland, 1998; G. Hull & Grubb, 1999; Wagner, 1998). In contrast to a functional view of literacy, the sociocultural view of literacy maintains that literacy is acquired through engagement in the social practices within a work setting. Australian studies have focussed on the social view of learning. People learn skills informally on the job through the advice and informal instruction of fellow workers. The informal ways of learning enhance the range of workers' skills more than formal instruction provided by accredited courses (S. Richardson, 2004; S. Richardson & Teese, 2008, p. 19).

### ***Understanding the concept of job readiness***

In reply to my questions on job readiness the young people varied in their responses. Many demonstrated little understanding of the idea of job readiness or what it might mean. As discussed in chapter five, many of the young participants lived in poor female-headed households that relied on welfare payments as a source of income. Recent research reported that knowledge of work begins in early childhood and the sources of information included parents, friends and the mass media (Levine & Hoffner, 2006, p. 647). The role of schooling and part time work also contributed to the knowledge of work that young people gained in the family (Jablin, 2000; Vondracek & Porfeli, 2003). Students who had undertaken part time work reported that they gained a high level of information from this source (Levine & Hoffner, 2006, p. 661). Studies found that parents were more significant, relative to friends, school or the mass media. This was particularly the case when parents discussed their work (Jablin, 2000; Levine & Hoffner, 2006, p. 661). However, those opportunities were limited for the young participants in my study.

Willis' (1977, p. 106) influential British work referred to the transition to employment for young people as having different meaning based on socioeconomic background. He commented on the process for working class adolescents as having been more informal and unofficial and consequently "makes the passage into a certain kind of work more uneventful and problem free than for other groups" (Willis, 1977, p. 106). He also made the point that manual work had an aura of the real world for those who had an unsatisfactory school experience. For them it represented the "difference between pen pushing and grafting" (Willis, 1977, p. 103). He questioned the reality of choice of job as being universal. Hull and Stern (2002, p. 34) referred to the influence of globalisation in that the unskilled employment which was available in 1977 may not be the case thirty years later.

However, the training environments varied in terms of the availability of potential job opportunities and the nature of the qualifications being sought. Within Fairbridge there were strong links with an industry partner that is a major producer of aluminium and related products. Some of the young people undertook work experience in that organisation as part of the course requirement. This training could be considered more 'technical' so there was a greater range of job options in areas such as nurseries, local government and State governments which was not the situation for those that completed vocational education or non accredited training. Alyssa and Belinda were representative of the young people for whom job readiness was not meaningful. However, in Alyssa's situation, not being familiar with the concept did not equate to a lack of strategies in connection with gaining future employment. Belinda was neither familiar with the concept nor aware of what was required in order to gain employment. Alyssa commented in connection with the concept of job readiness:

*Wouldn't have a clue it's ... useless.*

Belinda outlined her interpretation within the second interview:

*Like ready for a job.*

A common feature of Alyssa's and Belinda's responses was that the concept of job readiness was not significant for them and their replies were consistent over both interviews. In most cases there was a lack of understanding of the concept and what it

entailed in practical terms. However, Alyssa was not aware of the concept but had a goal in relation to future employment:

*... [working] with the horses. ... It's my favourite thing and then I'll get a [veterinary] traineeship and then I'm done.*

Alyssa's response conforms to earlier research that considered gaining employment as a straight forward process for some working class young people (Willis, 1977, p. 106). These two examples emphasised the role of cultural or meaning systems in examining young people's understanding of the concept of job readiness (Lankshear, 2000, p. 30; Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 104). In Belinda's situation she was not familiar with the notion nor the processes involved in job-readiness. Alyssa was in a similar position in relation to the concept. She was aware though of possible strategies in connection with future employment which was linked to her existing part time work.

### ***Pre-employment and part time work***

Part time work was considered by some of the study participants to be an important preparation for full time employment. In the literature the connection between part time work and the development of workplace understandings has been controversial (Vondracek & Porfeli, 2003). Some studies reported that young workers were mainly employed in industries that include retail and fast food where there was little opportunity for the transferability of skills from the part time roles to future employment (F. Green & Montgomery, 1998; Levine & Hoffner, 2006, p. 650; Loughlin & Barling, 1999, 2001). The reported benefits of part time employment were attitudes such as personal responsibility and interpersonal skills (Levine & Hoffner, 2006; Loughlin & Barling, 2001).

Research has referred to the rise globally of non standard jobs and insecure forms of employment such as contract, part time or temporary categories of employment (I. Campbell, 1997; Furlong & Kelly, 2005; Loughlin & Barling, 2001, p. 549; Mac Donald & Marsh, 2005). These can include irregular hours. Studies have focussed on the instrumental assistance provided by parents to adolescents making the transition to work (E. Smith, 2003, p. 12; Way, 1996). The assistance included undertaking the driving to employment services (E. Smith, 2003, p. 12). Similar parental assistance can be required for young people who finish part time work late. However, this may not be an option for some families such as some of those in my study without transport or

where parents were not available. In providing a theoretical explanation, Bourdieu's (1990, p. 70) ideas of the visibility of embodied cultural capital can also be relevant to seeking part time employment in that ways of "standing, speaking [and] walking" reveal a person's social position. He also refers to the ways in which middle class parents contribute to the subsequent advantage that their children enjoy by the "domestic transmission of cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 244-245). In the workplace these young people are considered competent.

As already stated in the previous section Alyssa had planned that her part time employment would lead to full time training. She commented on her enjoyment of the work:

*... I'm doing what I feel like because you have fun. You have fun out there. [It's not] sitting at a desk or using machinery. You're using your hands and getting dirty.*

She referred to the practical aspect of working with horses in "using your hands and getting dirty" which contrasted with her view of school in that she stated that she could "not stand being in a school environment". Work therefore represented the "difference between pen pushing and grafting" (Willis, 1977, p. 103).

Theresa, a young Indigenous woman, spoke of her desire to gain part time work to fit in with the training she was undertaking. She commented on job readiness as seeking employment:

*To me it means to be ready to look for a job. Starting to go to places to ask if they have vacancies [and] looking in the papers.*

She went to outline her experience in submitting a completed application form for a part time job at a fast food outlet:

*I applied for a job there and he laughed at me and goes "are you serious?" I said yeah ... and walked off. ... I had a look at those people that work there ...they wear all the makeup and stuff. I'm not kind of like that.*

Theresa reported on her disappointment at the action of the employee in that she repeated he "just laughed at me. It's kind of stuck in my head". She also commented



on not conforming to the norm of wearing makeup in that setting. Bourdieu (1990, p. 70) referred to the overt nature of embodied cultural capital which could include the wearing of makeup as a aspect of appearance in a fast food environment.

Three of the employers discussed the importance of part time work to a young person's job readiness. Amy and Sharron, both representatives of employer organisations, emphasised the importance of young people having had a part time job when considering them for full time work. Travis commented on the increasing number of parents who were seeking part time work on behalf of their children. Amy focussed on the link between having part time work and regular attendance from an employer's perspective:

*The first thing an employer will look at in general, they'll turn to see if they have had a part time job. Because a part time job tells them a number of things, that ... the young person has had enough nous to get out and get themselves a job, which isn't always the case. Sometimes, it's parents that have got them the job or parents have known someone or whatever, but it doesn't matter. That they have turned up on time, they look at the period of time that they have had it.*

Although there was recognition by Amy of the role of parents in securing part time jobs it was still considered as an individual's achievement. Amy's view supports Bourdieu's (1986, p. 244-245) idea of the transmission of cultural capital in that success or failure in employment is due to the young person's competence rather than the efforts of the parents. Sharron also spoke of the importance of part time work in her own selection process. She also referred to the fact that fast food outlets interview parents:

*Everyone I have ever employed has done some part time work. Kids that have worked in retail or in places like MacDonal'd's are really good. ... They interview mum and dad, or mum or dad. I don't know if all [ ] do it but I know they do it here so I assume it's what they do across the whole franchise.*

Sharron emphasised the significance of part time work for her. Previous research reported that the contribution of part time work was in the area of personal characteristics including attitude (Levine & Hoffner, 2006; Loughlin & Barling, 2001) Sharron emphasised the role of attitude in connection with job readiness. She referred to the practice of a local fast food outlet interviewing parents in order to assess their willingness to pick the young people "up at ten o'clock at night" when they finish work.

Travis, who worked as a manager of a national hardware chain, stated that the number of parents making applications on behalf of adolescents had increased over a period of five years:

*... since I've been a manager it has grown. It was only very small four or five years ago but now every third or fourth application is coming from a mother or a father; [it's] not the child actually saying I want to work. It's the mother and father saying it would be good for you to go to work to learn some values, you know what I mean.*

While not stated by Travis, the value placed on part time work by employers may be a contributory factor to increased parental efforts. Previous research reported on increased parental input in terms of driving adolescents to provider organisations in order to gain information on potential apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities (E. Smith, 2003, p. 12). Similar efforts by parents can be required in relation to part time work. Parental involvement in job seeking or the provision of transport was not an option for many of the young people that I interviewed. Two of the employers were clear that although they understood the efforts of parents in the process, having a part time job provided an advantage for the young person in terms of full time work. These examples highlight the significance of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 244-245). I will now focus on workplace related aspects

### ***Workplace related aspects and job readiness***

As I have already indicated in chapter seven, participation in workplace practices assisted the young people gain the required understanding of workplace relationships and norms. The sociocultural view of organisational learning emphasises engagement with the practices and other people in the setting in facilitating learning (Billett, 2002a; Felstead et al., 2005, p. 362; Rogoff, 1995). This approach includes the critical tradition of learning in that the history, political and cultural aspects are included which is location specific (Billett, 2001a, 2002b; Cole, 1998; Engestrom & Middleton, 1996). A supervisor can assist through the provision of a scaffolding process and a support system (Delpit, 1995, p. 147; Gee, 1989). I have demonstrated the role of social literacy or emotional intelligence within chapter six. A key component of social literacy is empathy through which an individual can sense another's feelings or take an interest in his/her concerns (Goleman, 1995, 1998).

A cultural understanding of workplaces also incorporates an awareness of an organisation's hierarchical structure. The organisational literature emphasised the need to develop vertical and horizontal relationships within the workplace and has reported the benefits for employees of developing contacts and networks with those in more senior positions (Boxman, De Graff, & Flap, 1991; Burt, 1992). The role of political behaviour and impression management in contributing to worker performance was reported (Garavan, Morley, Gunnigle, & Collins, 2001, p. 54; Greenhaus & Callanan, 1994).

Clothing is important in the demonstration of the cultural component of workplace Discourses. Gee (1996, p. 127) explained the link between "an appropriate costume ... [and] ...a social role that others will recognise". Studies identified that while clothing had been subject to extensive attention in popular writing it had received limited attention in the organisational literature. Broader societal and organisational factors shape the type of clothing, the homogeneity and the conspicuousness of employees' dress (Rafaeli, Dutton, Harquail, & Mackie-Lewis, 1997, p. 10-11; Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993). More recent literature reported on the return to more formal dress codes within the workplace (Zielinski, 2005, p. 27). A factor that may be important at an organisational level was the connection between more formal dress and being professional (Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993, p. 37). Studies have indicated the negotiation process for women between societal expectations of being feminine and the organisational demands of being 'business like' (Rafaeli et al., 1997, p. 12; Sheppard, 1992). The knowledge involved in matching the dress to the work role and the organisational hierarchy was found to be significant. It was also integral to the way employees made sense of organisational reality (Rafaeli et al., 1997, p. 36; Weick, 1995).

Two of the employers commented on the inappropriateness of some of the young people's appearance and dress. They tended to focus on individual characteristics such as cleanliness rather than poverty as an explanation. Warr (2005, p. 288) reported that poverty tended to be considered unusual in the general population despite its continued presence. In explaining poverty an emphasis is placed on individual characteristics such as laziness rather than the sociostructural factors (Waxman, 1983, p. 74). Link and Phelan (2001, p. 367) explained that stigma existed "when elements of labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination occur together in a power situation that allows them".

Three of the young people included appearance and clothing as a significant component of job readiness. All three were either currently working or had been employed in administrative/clerical settings thus demonstrating the link between the areas of discussion and their particular work context. Margaret, who was undertaking training in business administration and worked as a receptionist, talked about the significance of wearing clothing appropriate to the setting:

*It also comes down to your wardrobe. If your wardrobe is not sufficient for administration work then you're not job ready. Maybe if you were a labourer before that you've got the shorts, the jeans and the hard yakka boots. You don't have the pants or the tailored skirt or the little shirts and blouses to go into administration.*

Margaret's view of the need to adhere to the dress code associated with the work role was in line with previous studies (Rafaeli et al., 1997, p. 36; Weick, 1995). She also implied a workplace emphasis on the more formal aspect of clothing which research also identified (Zielinski, 2005, p. 27). Emily, who was also employed as a receptionist and completed Business Administration training, referred to the importance of appearance as a broader discussion of appropriateness:

*... an example would be that you can't rock up in thongs and shorts and that sort of thing. You have to look the part, the part of being appropriate.*

Like Margaret, Emily referred to the importance of dress within an office environment thus conforming to previous findings of the links between clothing, the work role and organisational structure (Rafaeli et al., 1997, p. 36; Weick, 1995). Stephen had undertaken Work for the Dole on two occasions and also spoke of the significance of appearance including clothing. Within the second interview, he elaborated:

*Job ready, you need to look presentable, you definitely need to look presentable. Hair tidy, which mine is never at the moment [and] decent clothes.*

Margaret, Emily and Stephen demonstrated the role of appropriate dress in enabling young people to participate in employment related Discourses within office environments. Previous research concurred with these views in identifying an "appropriate costume" as a component of taking part in particular Discourses (Gee, 1996, p. 127).

Sharron was referring to the personal hygiene some of my study participants who were undertaking a vocational education program at a youth centre:

*In these kids it's just personal hygiene. Getting them to clean their teeth every day, wash every day and have clean clothes. That's one of [the] biggest hurdles you know. People don't want a kid who turns up every day smelling like they haven't had a bath for a month nor done their hair for God knows how long. No one else wants to work with them either. ... One, they have to learn to keep themselves clean and tidy everyday, which is a huge hurdle for a lot of them.*

Sharron did not seem to consider the possible impact of poverty on the appearance of some of the young people. Sean, who was the owner of a lawn mower retail and servicing outlet, also spoke of the inappropriateness of the appearance and presentation of some young people who presented to employers with a:

*... dole form so they can say they went for a job interview. They're going to turn up in a pair of thongs, reeking of cigarettes and they want you to fill out the form. They don't turn up to interviews.*

Both Sharron's and Sean's comments could be considered judgemental. Both seemed to suggest that laziness contributed to the young people's 'inappropriate' appearance. This suggestion is in line with previous research which seeks to explain poverty in terms of individual characteristics rather than sociostructural factors (Waxman, 1983, p. 74).

Three of the young people focussed on the employment context and presented more detailed understandings of job readiness. Joan, who was completing conservation and land management training at the initial interview and had previously worked at a fast food outlet for approximately two years, explained her understanding:

*Whether or not you were enthusiastic [about the job], whether you have transport to get there, whether you looked into everything and whether you have, what's the word, researched the job. ... [That] shows that you are job ready [by] the fact that you have taken the time. The fact that you have prepared everything so that if they asked you could come in that night no worries [you] can do it.*

She included the organisational aspect of preparing for work generally such as having transport in addition to information on the specific work role. At the time of the second interview Joan was one of a small number undertaking higher level training. On that occasion she included having “got your qualifications” as being part of job readiness. Matthew, who at the time of the second interview had completed his training, explained job readiness as having the skills required for the job:

*Pretty much it's saying whether you are confident to do that job and you've got the skills to do it. If you don't have the skills to do the job then you are obviously not going to be confident about doing that job. Job readiness is saying that you can go out there and do the job with minimal supervision in that amount of time.*

Matthew linked having the necessary skills to feeling confident in his capacity to do the job. He had previously completed a boilermaker apprenticeship but wanted a change of occupation. He also referred to his “qualifications ... a whole list of modules that can tell the employer that I'm job ready”. Megan, who was a sixteen year old completing vocational education in a regional area, also spoke of job readiness as involving “training programs and qualifications”. In addition to her studies, Megan also worked in a national food outlet and she explained the significance of customer service in that environment:

*When you work with people, you have to [be conscious] of customer service; all the time from when you walk in the door to when you leave. ... Because so many customers have nothing better to do than make complaints and then you do get big talks. I had a few when I first started. It's just little things that you can't even remember. If you don't always smile you get a big talk. ... Being reliable, I think I have called in sick twice in the ten months and they know that and I always go in when they call me in. That's something I learned very quickly 'kiss arse' if you have to at first to get in their good books. My supervisor and I could sit there and have a good chat about anything and she's in her thirties. Try your hardest to be a good employee.*

Megan demonstrated an ability to understand the organisational culture of customer service. The cultural dimension associated with the sociocultural view of organisational learning was also identified in previous studies (Billett, 2001a, 2002b; Cole, 1998;

Engestrom & Middleton, 1996). Megan referred to the role of the supervisor in pointing out the expectation of smiling. Her strategies of developing a friendly relationship with the supervisor and creating a good impression is in line with previous studies in relation to vertical relationships and impression management (Boxman et al., 1991; Burt, 1992). This example demonstrated the interplay of Megan's personal characteristics of awareness and a capacity to embrace the views of the supervisor and the directness of the supervisor in pointing out the implied behavioural expectations.

The training representatives, as expected, presented job readiness as a composite of factors relating to the workplace context. In some cases there was reference to the organisational aspects within the home that assist the process of working. Clive, who was a manager of the community organisation that provided a range of employment related programs, spoke of the need for an understanding of workplace requirements:

*... a lot of it comes to understanding what the employer requires. ... So a lot of it comes down to the comprehension of what is being asked of you, whether you have an understanding and a lot of that comes to your background as well. What support you've had, what other family members have been through the same situation. You've learned from being exposed to it as much as from family members or other contacts, whether they are neighbours or whatever.*

Clive referred to the importance of workplace literacy. He implied that young people need to know the meaning systems and the selectivity of those meanings that often applies in work settings. His view concurred with the Discourse literature in that literacy includes the language, cultural and critical dimensions (Lankshear, 2000, p. 30; Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 104). He also referred to the modelling of employment by other family or broader network members and included the interplay of family and workplace context aspects. Chloe, who had an administrative role in an alternative school program, spoke of the relevance of social skills in combination with acting in accordance with the implied rules:

*Like I said, a lot of our young people don't know to shake someone's hand or how to act in those sorts of social situations or to know if you've got nothing to do, grab a broom and sweep the floor. Never be idle. Just those simple things, a lot of people and young people just take for granted because they've seen it*

*with their own parents, or it's just the way they were brought up. Our young people have totally missed out on some of that basic stuff.*

Lesley, who was a teacher within the same program as Chloe, also included the implicit rules, the tasks that support working and the interpersonal negotiation with a supervisor:

*Ok, job ready to me means knowing the simple things, like getting out of bed every day to go to work, ringing an employer to let them know that you're sick [and] taking your lunch to work or knowing where to get food. Knowing that it's not acceptable to leave work early without a reasonable excuse or without clearing it with your boss [so] knowing those things that you have to do when you're at work...*

Chloe and Lesley also emphasised the need to adhere to the norms of the particular context and oral literacy. Similar to Clive, they also inferred that young people need to understand the cultural and critical aspects of work Discourses (Lankshear, 2000; Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 104). Clive and Chloe referred to the lack of exposure of some young people in their home settings to the world of work. The importance of parental information on employment for young people was also reported by previous studies (Jablin, 2000; Levine & Hoffner, 2006, p. 661). Within chapter five, I demonstrated the connection between the absence of modelling of work in the home and some young participants acquiring understandings of work Discourses. Rita, who was one of the training staff at Fairbridge, talked of regular attendance and personal motivation as important aspects of job readiness:

*It's especially turning up every day and taking the good with the bad, because not every day is going to be good, having patience and perseverance. They can sort of chuck a sad and go this is no good and not turn up. But having the enthusiasm that you want to do it and putting in the effort sort of thing. ... They aren't really ready so they are not motivated and they don't care if they turn up sort of thing. You can usually pick it straight away.*

Rita explained lack of regular attendance as a feature of not being ready to undertake the training. Chloe also drew attention to regular attendance as one of the demands of employment:



*... They don't have some of those basic understandings about employment. For example, that you must attend every day. The rewards as well as the demands in that you know, the rewards are that you get paid and if you work particularly well you might go up in the job and earn more money and all that sort of stuff. But also the demands, that on a cold wet morning you've got to get up and go to work.*

Regular attendance is one of the social practices associated with the training and workplace contexts (Billett, 2002a; Felstead et al., 2005, p. 362; Rogoff, 1995). Although not overtly stated, Chloe may be referring to the absence of a model of regular work within the home which can be a barrier for young people, as discussed in chapter five. The ongoing home issues linked to poverty may also have contributed to poor attendance. Rita referred to the significance of the training environment in facilitating change for some of the young people enabling them to become competent workers:

*A lot of my guys come from disadvantaged backgrounds and that sort of thing. It is definitely important for them to be able to succeed later down the track. A lot of them move onto apprenticeships not necessarily in this field but have gone on to boilermaking. ... with the connections they have with [the industry partner] they are doing really well because they have worked twelve months or two years here and they know what it's like to be in the workforce and to be accountable.*

Rita referred to the learning that took place for some of the young people in gaining an understanding of organisational norms over time. Her position was supported by previous studies which connect learning to engagement in the social practices (Billett, 2002a; Felstead et al., 2005; Rogoff, 1995). She also inferred that disadvantaged young people acquire workplace understandings through a support and scaffolding system from those who have acquired the Discourses which was in line with previous sociocultural studies (Delpit, 1995, p. 147; Gee, 1989). Rita demonstrated understanding for the role of disadvantage and empathy for young people's capacity to incorporate new learning over time. Previous research in connection with social literacy reported on the importance of empathy in seeking to understand others' feelings (Goleman, 1995, 1998). The training and education representatives discussed job

readiness in terms of an understanding of the workplace context. They talked about the need to understand the norms, implied rules and language including the meaning and critical components. Within their discussions they included the home context and its impact for disadvantaged young people. Their discussion did not focus on skills or attributes.

Generally the employers used the concept of job readiness and employability interchangeably. Most emphasised skills and attributes that were included in the Employability Skills Framework. The employers varied in their responses to the aspects that constituted job readiness. Some discussed skills, others attributes or a combination of both. Two of the employers who were operating in retail areas emphasised communication skills. Charles, the owner of hardware stores, said:

*... for them to be turned out retail ready, for me, is communication skills.*

Sean also spoke of the importance of being able to communicate:

*We're looking for good communication skills, that's the number one priority. ... Being able to talk confidently and clearly and being able to read and write to a certain level is also important.*

In addition to verbal communication Sean also included reading and writing. Lydia who had a management position in local government focussed on reading and writing and presentation:

*It's very much those sorts of things in addition to the basic reading and writing. Those sort of skills and verbal and interpersonal skills, those are critical, just how to present themselves when they first come into a work situation.*

While Sean and Lydia talked of communication skills the significance of appearance was inferred. Previous research reported on the ways social class and disability interact to account for differing understandings of the understood norms which can impact on employability (Morley, 2001, p. 132). Specifically in connection with appearance, Bourdieu (1990, p. 70) refers to the ways cultural capital can be overt in “ways of standing, speaking [and] walking”. Colette, who was the joint owner of a small engineering organisation also included written skills but also included other dimensions:

*They need a certain level of literacy skills. We're not worried about spelling necessarily so the word 'axle' may have all different variations but at least they can write it down. ... being able to turn up on time, being ready to start on time. ... Equally and probably more important is that they can work together as a team and we push that more than anything to be able to work cohesively. The other thing ...they need to have a good work ethic.*

Colette included a composite of skills which included written literacy, teamwork and a good work ethic. I asked her to elaborate further on her understanding of what constituted "a good work ethic" and she replied:

*... to me a work ethic is someone who believes in being punctual, arriving on time, believes in putting in the best effort that they can put in, ... to living up to the values that the company has got. To me that comes into work ethic to watching out for their fellow workers. That to me encompasses the whole thing, but not only that, having pride in their work, that every job that goes out of the workshop is to our standard. Because that's our reputation.*

The concept of work ethic included skills, work performance and attributes. Colette referred to the workers' capacity to read the required standard of the finished product. Sharron also spoke of a work ethic as part of attitude and provided her understanding:

*The most important thing is attitude. ... Different jobs require a different type of attitude. The attitude mainly is I suppose you could really call it more work ethic, the kids really want to come to work, and work. They don't see coming to work as just a means to get a pay cheque at the end of the job and filling in the hours between the time they arrive and the time they go.*

Sharron referred to the need for the worker to be productive. Amy, who was also employed by the employer organisation talked about the workplace relationship, as an exchange process in which workers perform the tasks in exchange for wages:

*Ok work is basically about exchange, it's an exchange of your labour in return for remuneration and there should be fairness on both sides.*

She seemed to be referring to a very traditional view of workplace relationships provided by fair exchange. She also referred to employers' requirement for enthusiasm:

*... often they will take people that display eagerness, an understanding of the type of job that they are applying for.*

When I asked Amy what eagerness meant to her she elaborated:

*Someone that was, for whatever reason, wanting to be self sustaining or whatever is really keen to get in and have an opportunity to make money. There's nothing wrong with making money because that leads to being self sustaining.*

Amy implied that employers sometimes seek similarity in values of 'making money' in potential employees. The likelihood of someone who did not hold similar values in that situation would be that he/she would not be employed. King (2005, p. 222-223) reported on habitus as a determining factor for the ways the people see the world which link them to their position in the field which includes their class position. This discussion supported Amy's view that employers can select future employees on the basis of their values which can be linked to their class location. The emphasis of most of the employers in recruiting staff was to select people that already conformed to the interview norms and had similar values.

The employers were not unanimous Ken, who was the owner of a furniture manufacturing and retail outlet, maintained that employers have a responsibility to employ a number of disadvantaged people:

*The best form of retraining is to get them into the workplace, get them to receive a pay packet every week, get them their pride and ... their confidence back.*

Ken advocated that all employers should recruit a percentage of disadvantaged people so that they can acquire the necessary understanding and workplace skills. Although not directly Ken referred to the learning that takes place through engagement with the work practices, which concurs with previous research (Billett, 2002a; Felstead et al., 2005, p. 362; Rogoff, 1995). While the employer views were not homogenous, they mainly spoke of job readiness as having the skills and attributes or a combination of both that were included in the Employability Skills Framework. The responsibility for

identification with the organisational values described by Colette and Amy rested with the employee

The funding representatives' responses were dependent on their work role and their location within a state or federal setting. Ryan who had a management role in a federal agency spoke in terms of "labour market-readiness". He explained that when someone registers as being unemployed they are referred to the Job Network, organisations that are contracted to provide employment services. The intention is to "test their labour market readiness on day one". He elaborated further:

*Certainly that's one of the first things that they'll look at. What skills they have, where they are in terms of their ability to work, what additional training and support they might need.*

His focus was primarily on skills but he also mentioned employers' emphasis on attitude. He went on to comment that despite low unemployment employer expectations have remained the same:

*Certainly with unemployment being so low at the moment they've got to adjust their expectations, my suspicion and I don't have so much recent experience on this, my suspicion is that some employers don't adjust their expectations.*

Ryan had worked within the same organisation for a number of years and accepted that the systems worked for people that were unemployed. Carla, who had a teaching and learning role within a State government organisation, took a sociocultural perspective of the way people acquire workplace employability skills:

*The apprenticeship model is the way most of us learn things in all these communication, literacy and social practices. I suspect that all the things that you have under employability skills is, we learn from people who are prepared to give us feedback, people who are willing to say "don't do it that way" and people who are willing to share what they do.*

Carla's perspective of learning through engaging in the social practices including the informal processes was supported by previous findings on the sociocultural perspective (Billett, 2002a; Felstead et al., 2005; Rogoff, 1995). In connection with job readiness or employability she said:

*I think it's too complex an issue to try to put labels on people as being job ready or employable or whatever. There are some areas where somebody ... obviously isn't job ready. Someone needs a qualification ... in an industry and they don't have it. Or where there is a large mismatch between the language skills they have and the ones they will employ in an industry. ... A lot of the stuff in the early employability work, like the Business Council of Australia, a lot of it is about you be like me.*

Carla's view was that the concepts of job readiness or employability can be used in ways which are discriminatory. Previous literature reported that employability fails to take account of the ways social class and disability interact with labour market opportunities (Morley, 2001, p. 132). Elizabeth, who had a management position within a state government organisation, talked about the importance of "employability skills of knowing how the labour market works and how you can access it". Her interpretation of the workings of the labour market included "ways of earning an income, not necessarily applying for a job... building ... confidence". She seemed to be implying understandings of personal strategies and organisational requirements. She went on to explain that the emphasis at a policy level was on the skills shortage rather than developing understanding:

*The funding is not about employability skills in the sector. Funding is about skill shortages [and] industry needs with the notion that those employability skills are embedded in the competencies. ... the skillful lecturer will impart them as part of the learning. The money isn't there for employment literacy.*

Elizabeth spoke of the approach at a federal level on skill shortages rather than people understanding broader employment literacy. Derrick, who was a director within the state government organisation, commented on the meaning of job readiness or employability:

*...its meeting a basic set of criteria which employers need for people to be useful in the workplace. Productive is probably a better word. That ranges from personal and educational issues. Personal involves I can get to work on time and I am reliable so there is a whole thing to do with attendance, preparation and appropriate work gear. [There is also] basic communication,*

*interact with the customers and don't upset or punch people, all sorts of stuff. So that's where you have the education requirements, basic literacy and numeracy that's required for them to function in the workplace.*

Derrick included a combination of organisational skills within the home, communication skills and literacies. He went on to talk further about the importance of context in people mastering oral literacy:

*... if you're a grader driver you need to be able to read the grader driver manual. My view would be that kids are remarkably good at that if they are classed as almost illiterate when it comes to a specific task. When they understand that they have to do it they'll actually do it.*

It may be that through the engagement with the social practices the grader driver understands the meanings attached to the role. This would support the sociocultural view of learning which considers the social practices and the interactions that facilitate learning (Billett, 2002a; Felstead et al., 2005; Rogoff, 1995). Derrick also referred to disadvantaged young people as “multi agency”, which he explained:

*That means that they have multiple problems, at home, personal [and] health. It's a kind way of saying multiple issues. ... My view is that the goal of schooling for these kids is to get them a job. It's not to get them an education.*

In connection with the Employability Skills Framework Derrick said “I'm not aware of those, is there such a document?” He went on to comment in connection with the content:

*My uninformed impression is that it is much too middle class for want of better words. The nitty gritty realities of why kids aren't employable is much more about their lives, their worlds and the barriers not about programs top down or policies.*

There was a difference between the responses of the funding representatives within the state and federal bureaucracies. The federal representative referred to skills in ways that conformed to those included in the Employability Skills Framework. Skills seemed to be considered as an objective measure of performance rather than a social construction. Previous research reports on the role of educational pathways and workers' identity on the perception of skills (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006, p. 310). Some of the state

representatives referred to the emphasis at a federal level on the needs of industry including skill shortages. Those who had direct experience of working with young people in employment programs demonstrated a greater level of understanding of the lived experience of disadvantaged young people. One of the funding representatives commented that the Employability Skills Framework was not relevant to the experience of disadvantaged young people even though he was not aware of the existence of such a document.

## **Summary**

The concept of job readiness was either not understood or not relevant to the experience of many of the young people interviewed. The employers and the federal funding representatives generally used the concept of job readiness and employability interchangeably. They also included skills and attributes as defined within the Employability Skills Framework as indicators of job readiness. Although the trainers discussed work related dimensions, some emphasised the ways in which the home setting intersects with work context for disadvantaged young people. They generally did not focus on skills or attributes. Job readiness involved an understanding of workplace norms and interpersonal relationships but they also inferred the organisational aspects within the home that facilitate working. Some of the state funding representatives also referred to lack of relevance of the concepts of job readiness or employability to young people such as many of those that I interviewed. These findings demonstrate the gap that exists between federal policy and the practices at a state and training organisation level.

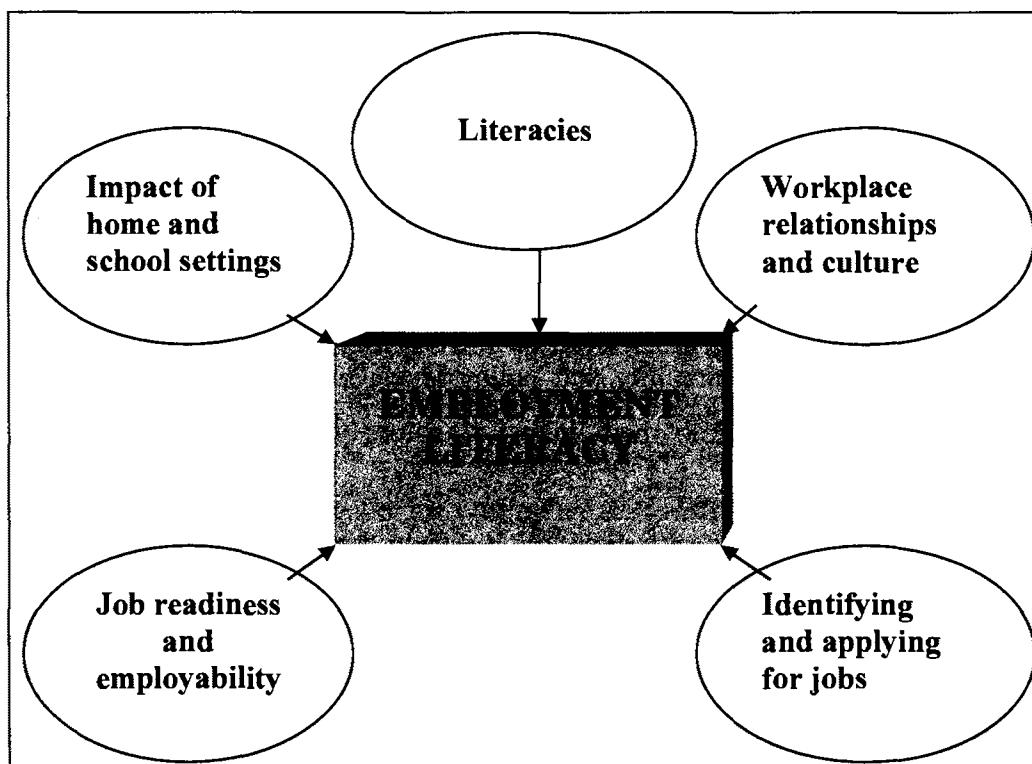
The experience of the young study participants and those reported by the state funding representatives raise questions about the value of job readiness as it is currently used. On the basis of my research I propose a model of employment literacy which can be taught. It would include a number of employment related dimensions including the impact of the home setting. I will outline the model in the next chapter.



## Chapter Ten: A Model of Employment Literacy

This research aimed to explore the meanings of employment literacy among young people undertaking education/training, those who delivered the education/training, representatives of funding bodies and employers. As the preceding chapters demonstrate, the components of employment literacy draw upon the impact of the home and school settings, literacies, identifying and applying for jobs, workplace relationships and culture, and job readiness and employability. In this chapter I bring together these components in a model of employment literacy (Figure 1). I will discuss each dimension of the model separately starting with the impact of the home and school settings. In this process I will highlight the discrepancy between the social practices outlined by some of the young study participants and consequently the Discourses in the home and those that operated in the workplace. These discrepancies were reflected in all the other components of the model. My focus will be on the cultural understandings of work such as the norms and implied rules. I will include also Bourdieu's (1984, 1986, 1990) concept of cultural capital which explains the reproduction of the dominant culture within homes, schools and workplaces and conclude with my recommendations.

**Figure 1 Model of employment literacy**



The concept of employment literacy as a composite of factors is not included within the academic literature, although some of the above individual components are discussed. However, health literacy and to a lesser extent financial literacy, involving a number of dimensions has been examined. Studies in Australia, Canada and the United States have referred to health literacy but the concept has been embraced at a broader policy level within the Canadian literature. In an Australian study, Keleher and Hagger (2007, p. 24) explained health literacy as “a range of skills and knowledge about health and health care, including finding, interpreting and communicating health information, seeking of appropriate care and making critical decisions”. The World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1997 explained health literacy as representing “the cognitive and social skills which determine the motivation and ability of individuals to gain access to, understand and use information in ways which promote good health” (Nutbeam, 1998, p. 357). Both definitions incorporate the accessing and understanding of information although the WHO’s focus is on a rights-based approach and is less clear on the means to be used, while the first definition implies participation in health settings (Keleher & Hagger, 2007, p. 24).

In discussing financial literacy, Schagen and Lines (1996, p. 91) included an understanding of the concepts relevant to money management and a working knowledge of financial institutions as aspects of a financially literate person. Both these areas of literacy focus on the capacity to access and understand information for a variety of sources and participate in Discourses appropriate to the settings. There may be qualitative differences in the nature and level of negotiation between health and financial settings. The idea of a literacy which integrates a number of dimensions involving the accessing and understanding of a range of information and the participation in a range of Discourses can also be applied to employment. Strategies at the individual, institutional, community and policy levels in connection with health literacy can also be applied to employment literacy (Institute of Medicine (US), 2001).

In reporting their findings on health literacy, Rootman and Ronson (2005, p. 66) referred to the importance of literacies, which incorporated computer and media literacies. The idea of a number of literacies is important in relation to the accessing and evaluation of health information. Canadian researchers also referred to the organisational responsibility in ensuring that the users of services from low socioeconomic backgrounds understood the written instructions in relation to

medications (Rootman & Ronson, 2005, p. 67). This could be considered as advocating a position in which the service providers incorporate social literacy within their practice or a capacity to empathise with those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Although not overt in connection with the meanings attached to health literacy, some authors referred to functional or individual skills understanding of literacies (Keleher & Hagger, 2007, p. 26; Nutbeam, 2000, p.263). In this concluding chapter I will be taking a sociocultural view of literacies and the ways of acquiring workplace related Discourses which will also include the relevance of a structural framework focusing on the cultural aspects of the workplace.

### ***Impact of the home and school settings***

In my study, the home settings of the young people were major contributors to their experiences of school, training and work. Many of those interviewed lived in female-headed households where the source of income was welfare payments. Research indicates that the consequences of growing up on welfare included dropping out of school, poor mental and physical health, delinquent behaviour and unemployment (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Duncan et al., 1994; Haveman & Wolfe, 1994; Korenman et al., 1995). Previous studies found a pattern of welfare dependency across two generations (Bartholomae et al., 2004, p. 785; Corcoran, 1995). Parents can be role models of success in employment (Bartholomae et al., 2004, p. 786; Hill & Duncan, 1987). A link was also reported between the lack of modelling of employment and young people acquiring the necessary disciplined habits associated with regular employment (Wilson, 1991, p. 10; 1997, p. 73). These studies highlight the similarity in generational patterns of experience in connection with employment or unemployment which have ramifications for the life chances of the young people. The interplay of unemployment at a familial level can be mirrored at a neighbourhood level. Studies have described the ghetto-like conditions within some Australian neighbourhoods. In these suburbs there are high levels of unemployment, few educational opportunities and greater distances from potential jobs (Gregory & Hunter, 1995, p. 33; Vinson, 2004).

The young participants reported on the lack of learning opportunities in the development of planning skills and ways of relating interpersonally within the home. The absence of learning opportunities associated with poverty is one of the ways through which disadvantage was transmitted to subsequent generations (Conger et al., 1997; Conger & Elder, 1994; Hanson et al., 1997; J. R. Smith et al., 1997). The

experience of the young people contrasted with the ways in which employers interviewed sought to develop their own children's skills. The contribution of the employers as parents to the fostering of their children's skills was in line with previous research that linked parents' higher socioeconomic status to skill development (Lareau, 2002 ; Roscigno et al., 2006). The direct coaching provided by parents was also a demonstration of symbolic capital which is considered as competence at an institutional level rather than parental input (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 244-245).

Most of the young people interviewed reported having had poor school experiences. A number identified that they had learning difficulties contributed to their challenges. Recent research explained that the category of learning difficulties within schools in Australia referred to students who experience academic and school related problems. They are therefore a diverse group that demonstrates low achievement for a range of reasons (Graham & Bailey, 2007, p. 386). The young participants reported a lack of explanation by teachers of what was required within the in-class tasks or assignments, disagreements with teachers resulting in some of them having to leave school and take other educational options, and the irrelevance of the curriculum. In general, the difficulties outlined emerged once they reached high school. However, for some, particularly those with self reported learning difficulties or mental health issues, there had been ongoing challenges within the school system. Some referred to their parents' inability to advocate on their behalf on school related issues such as bullying or decisions being made on the appropriate year level on transfer from one school to another. In order to successfully negotiate the Discourses within the school system, students and parents need to be literate at a sociocultural level which incorporates being simultaneously proficient in the language, meaning and critical component of the literacy/literacies (Lankshear, 2000, p. 104; Lankshear et al., 2000, p.30).

The position of young working class people and their parents has been well documented within the sociology of education since the 1960s (Germov, 2003, p. 238; Ishida et al., 1995). Studies have demonstrated the connection between socioeconomic status and educational attainment since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Croxford & Raffe, 2005; Levy, 1966; T. Parsons, 1951; Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993). Connell's (1977) seminal series of Australian studies found that children's school success related to their fathers' occupation: the higher the income level the better the child performed. Furlong (2005, p. 380) reported that while there had been recent changes in school

participation rates in Britain, those from lower working class families continued to leave school at the minimum age or followed vocational rather than academic routes. In Australia, Foley (2007, p. 8) found higher levels of VET participation in lower socioeconomic areas (12.7 per cent) compared with those in high socioeconomic areas (8.7 per cent). Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital assists in understanding at a theoretical level that education operates to reproduce the dominant culture. Those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have to acquire "the social and cultural skills of subtlety, nuance, taste and manner which some children acquire 'naturally' from their own cultural milieu" (Whitty, 1985, p. 67).

### ***Literacies***

Some of the young people who identified that they had learning disorders discussed difficulties with reading, writing and social literacies and their experience in remedial classes at school. They described situations in which they had not understood the meaning systems that were relevant to the context. A sociocultural view of literacy combines the language, meaning and context dimensions (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 15-16). A small number of young people who stated that they could not read or write spoke of ongoing difficulties in securing any employment or being exploited in the workplace. Some research reports that while jobs are being deskilled the literacy demands are being raised (Black, 2002). Some of the young people including the Indigenous participants referred to their lack of motivation and non attendance at school due to having to attend remedial classes. Research reports on the stigmatising of adolescents due to their removal from their peers (Lipsky & Gartner, 1989; Slavin & Madden, 1989).

The young participants spoke of direct strategies such as explicit feedback and modelling of the correct approach in oral and written literacies as assisting their learning in the training setting or the workplace. They emphasised that the overt feedback was effective when combined with a supportive relationship. Previous research supports the position that someone new to a particular setting needs to have the implied understandings made explicit (Delpit, 1988, p. 283).

While the employers were not unanimous in their views, some discussed the need for levels of reading and writing which would enable the young person to read and understand safety procedures. Previous studies reported on the increasing reliance on

written procedures in the workplace which can exclude those with limited reading and writing (Jackson, 2000, p. 15-16; Waterhouse & Vironga, 2004, p. 12). Some of the employers commented that they assessed written literacy through the completion of an application for employment form. The employers generally took a functional view of literacy. This perspective supports the individual skills view which is associated with the psychometric tradition in that literacies can be measured against benchmarks and they are generic and portable (Castleton, 1998, p. 26; Lonsdale & Mc Curry, 2004, p. 10).

In relation to technological literacy some of the young people referred to the difficulties of not having access to a computer in connection with online applications for employment or to prepare a résumé. In some cases there was a lack of awareness of community resources such as organisations that assist with the preparation of a résumé or accessing the internet through a local library or internet café. Hirsch (1987, p. 114) linked level of cultural understanding to more developed levels of literacy within the home context. Lankshear and Knobel (2006, p. 30) reported that disadvantaged young people may not have exposure to 'new' literacies within their home settings. While the trainers'/educators' views were not homogenous, they generally emphasised the competence of young people in the use computers.

Some of the young people discussed their strategies for managing their own and other peoples' emotions. Researchers have commented on social literacy as being similar to emotional intelligence or interpersonal understandings (Goleman, 1995, 1997; Lonsdale & Mc Curry, 2004, p. 33). Whilst the employers did not discuss social literacy overtly, some did mention that young people need to be able to relate to other workers including those who were older. There seemed to be an emphasis on the young person having social literacy but less on existing workers also demonstrating empathy for the young person's situation.

### ***Workplace relationships and culture***

Some of the young people identified the need to be accepted at an organisational level in order to commence learning, including the negotiation of workplace relationships. This position was supported by some of the training and funding representatives. Previous research reported on the strategies used to enable a newcomer to adapt from being an outsider to an insider. The strategies included provision of information,

feedback, support and role models (Major et al., 1995; Morrison, 2002). New employees identified input from a supervisor, colleagues or a mentor as assisting them to adapt to the workplace (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006; Louis et al., 1983; Posner & Powell, 1985). The employers generally held the view the negotiation of relationships at work were transferable from school. Some advocated mentoring as a way of assisting young people. Researchers referred to the lack of shared understanding of the term (Hall, 2003; A. Roberts, 2000). It has been noted that the dominant role of the mentor and organisational interests are to the detriment of the mentee in some mentoring relationships (Gulam & Zulfqar, 1998; Hall, 2003, p. 3; A. Roberts, 2000). In my experience of mentoring in social work settings there is often a lack of direct organisational responsibility in mentoring situations.

The idea of working together or team work was discussed by the young people, trainers and the employers. The young study participants discussed direct learning strategies such as the modelling by a supervisor or demonstration of ways of working. Some of the trainers emphasised joining with the young people on the completion of the tasks. Studies have referred to the importance of informal learning in adding to the stock of workers' skills compared with formal instruction (S. Richardson, 2004; S. Richardson & Teese, 2008, p. 19). Other research in education settings with children from diverse backgrounds refer to the role of a teacher in provision of scaffolding and support. These approaches serve to make the implied understandings explicit (Delpit, 1988, p. 282-283; 1995, p. 147). The employers generally talked of working as part of a team in terms of outcomes. The organisational literature maintains that there are different understandings of working within a team. Some studies refer to a post Fordist model with flatter structures which has eliminated hierarchies and redistributed the tasks to front line employees (Berggren, 1992; Hackman & Wageman, 1995; Kenney & Florida, 1993; Vallas, 2003). Other literature focuses on a sociocultural view or engagement with the social practices which assists learning (Billett, 2002a; Felstead et al., 2005; Rogoff, 1995). The sociocultural position emphasises the process dimensions rather than purely the outcomes.

In the organisational literature a distinction is made between organisational learning and the learning organisation. Organisational learning includes the individual and collective processes involved in learning while the learning organisation considers the methodological tools involved in learning (Easterby-Smith & Araujo, 1999, p. 2,8.).

The employer representatives were divided on the value of employees as part of the organisational culture. Some referred to a top-down approach in which the decision making rested with the employer in which economic decisions dominated. Previous studies also detailed this connection (Schepers & Van den Berg, 2007, p. 410; Tsui et al., 1995; Tsui et al., 1997). Others emphasised the contribution of human capital which included the empowerment of workers (Denison et al., 2003; Lawler, 1996; Spreitzer, 1995).

### ***Identifying and applying for jobs***

Employment literacy involves the process of identifying and applying for jobs. I examined the initial identification of jobs, the job search process and interviews. Most of the young people interviewed confirmed that they had not had discussions with their parents on identifying possible job options. In contrast, some of the employers discussed ways of assisting their sons through involvement in the family business or participation in other areas to identify possible options. The literature reported on the influence of the family on career development process of young people (Kniveton, 2004; Penick & Jepsen, 1992; Small & McClean, 2002; Whiston & Keller, 2004). Occupational and socioeconomic status have been identified as being significant to the career development of young people (Lindstrom et al., 2007; Whiston & Keller, 2004). Studies reported less parental involvement from parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Blustein et al., 2002; Fouad & Brown, 2000; Lindstrom et al., 2007). Parents who were employed modelled employment and were likely to expose their children to a greater range of options (Lindstrom et al., 2004; Morningstar, 1997). Willis (1977, p. 99) commented that the concept of choice is not universal and was not relevant to the experience of working class young men. Although written many years ago this remains relevant for some Australian young people. Much of the literature on career selection has focussed on young people who were economically and educationally advantaged rather than those who were work bound (Herr, 1996a).

Some of the young people were aware of the connection between family networks and future employment either from experience or identification that such connections would have assisted them. Similarly, some of the trainers also spoke of the contribution of networks to gaining employment generally and the absence of these for some of the young people undertaking training. The trainers referred to the importance of sporting



networks such as the “local footy club” or relationships with other tradesmen in connection with their own children’s future employment. The employers referred to either the direct coaching of their sons in connection with the application process or having “got them jobs”. There was recognition of the significance of social capital across the study groups. The young people referred to family connections, some trainers included tradesmen networks while the employers discussed more diverse networks with greater levels of knowledge. Research demonstrates that social capital is often associated with structural advantage in that greater diversity and resources within networks is linked to affluence and greater levels of education (Bush & Baum, 2001, p. 196; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995, p. 82).

The assistance provided by the trainers and employers to their children was a demonstration of the intersection of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 222-223; King, 2005). In connection with cultural capital the parental input was an example of intergenerational transfer and the reproduction of the dominant culture through the connection between habitus and field. These parents’ efforts reflect the potential advantage for the children in the form of symbolic capital or demonstration of individual proficiency in employment related settings rather than the contribution of parents (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 244-245). There were differences in the job aspirations for their sons between the two groups. The trainers spoke of a skilled job while the employers referred to self employment or an Army officer as potential jobs for their sons. This variation highlights the role of cultural capital in reproducing the dominant culture through its links with habitus and field. Habitus determines peoples’ worldview and links them to their broader position within the field. People act in ways that fit with their class position (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 101; King, 2005-223). This includes their children’s future employment.

The experience of the young people of interview situations varied. Some commented that “meeting new people ... [and] knowing what to do” were challenging while others stated that they were comfortable in interview situations. Those that reported being relaxed in interviews had established employment records and a familiarity with the process. In other words they were familiar or comfortable with oral language and nonverbal behaviour which is appropriate (Gee, 1996, p. 127; Gee et al., 1996, p. 10). Participation in an interview process can be understood as a Discourse which requires

familiarity with the meaning system and those that are represented in that setting (Lankshear, 2000, p. 31; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 11).

While the employers were diverse in what they identified as successful interview performance, emphasis was placed on verbal and nonverbal behaviour. Research identified the role of verbal messages within the employment selection process (Parton et al., 2002; Ugbah & Evuleocha, 1992). The presentation of young people was dominant in the employer discussions. They discussed eye contact, body language and handshakes. Appearance and clothing were found to be important in interview outcomes (Parton et al., 2002; Ugbah & Evuleocha, 1992). The employers' emphasis on appearance, mannerisms and language were examples of embodied cultural capital which are overt in interview situations. The use of the body such as standing, speaking and walking can represent status or lower standing associated with class position (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990; King, 2005, p. 223 ). Research in education settings report that the teacher with the most cultural capital tends to reward students that possess it (Bourdieu, 1984; Di Maggio & Useem, 1978). Similar to education, interview situations are presented as neutral in that the questions may be the same for all applicants but young people from upper class backgrounds have advantages as they have been socialised in the dominant culture (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 73; Van Krieken et al., 2000, p. 144-145).

### ***Job readiness and employability***

The concept of job or work readiness been used by the ACCI and informs the national policy context in Australia in which the issue of employment is located. Internationally in developed countries, the notion of job readiness is incorporated within discussions around employability. Some of the young people in my study discussed more developed understandings of job readiness. However, many stated that they had not heard of the concept of job readiness and were not aware of its meanings in practical terms. Several lived in female-headed welfare dependent households. Consequently they were not exposed to the information or modelling of employment. Previous research refers to the knowledge of work beginning in early childhood with parents being important sources of information and modelling (Jablin, 2000; Levine & Hoffner, 2006, p. 661; Wilson, 1991, p. 10; 1997, p. 73). The lack of understanding of the concept of job readiness was not synonymous with unawareness of job options or possible strategies in all instances.

Some of the employers commented on part time employment as preparation for full time positions and the involvement of parents in providing transport so that young people can undertake the irregular hours. Some studies have maintained that the areas such as fast food and retail which predominantly offer part time work options provide little opportunity for transferability of skills (F. Green & Montgomery, 1998; Levine & Hoffner, 2006, p. 650; Loughlin & Barling, 1999, 2001). Research has reported on the instrumental assistance provided by parents in making the transition to employment or training (E. Smith, 2003, p. 12; Way, 1996). This often involved driving adolescents to employment services (E. Smith, 2003, p. 12). Similar provision of transport by parents can be required in order to facilitate part time work in fast food outlets. However, this option was not available to many of the young people in the study due to lack of transport and parents not being available. It is also a demonstration of the domestic transmission of cultural capital through the investment of time and effort by parents which results in the young people being able to work irregular hours (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 244-245).

The training/education representatives emphasised the need to understand the meaning systems, the norms and the implied rules of the workplace. Their perspectives were supported by the literature on workplace Discourses and particularly the meaning and critical components (Lankshear, 2000, p. 104; Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 31). Some referred to the role of the home setting and the additional learning that those who are disadvantaged in that area have to acquire. The need for organisational support and scaffolding within the training environment was in line with previous sociocultural studies (Delpit, 1995, p. 147; Gee, 1989). The discussions of the trainers/educators did not focus on workplace skills or attributes.

The funding representatives were divided on the basis of their positions and location within state or federal agencies. Those from the federal setting talked in terms of “labour market readiness” and assessment of workplace skills which concurred with the Employability Skills Framework. The state representatives at middle management referred to the dominance of the needs of employers in connection with skill shortages or with selection processes that recruited staff that were similar to employers. At senior state level the need for young people to be productive on entering the workplace highlighted the Employability Skills Framework as being “much too middle class” for disadvantaged young people. Some of the state representatives had direct experience of

working with disadvantaged young people and showed an understanding of their lived experience.

Generally, the employers used the idea of job readiness and employability interchangeably. Most focussed on skills and attributes or a combination of both as outlined in the Employability Skills Framework. Some of the employers' discussions, which could include skills and attributes such as "a good work ethic", they were clear on the expectations. However, the expectation needed to be balanced by a desire to understand the perspective of the young people or provide concrete examples of acceptable behaviour. Although not stated, the emphasis on the transferability of skills and attributes could be considered as a justification to minimise the need for training at an organisational level.

The idea of job readiness was not meaningful for many of the young people. Those who did demonstrate more developed understandings of the concept were informed by the experience of being employed. The trainers did not focus on particular workplace skills, and the funding representatives varied depending on their location either within state or federal bureaucracies. The employers generally used understandings which conformed to the Employability Skills Framework. The different understandings of job readiness and employability were evidence of the gap between federal policy and the practice that exists at state and community levels.

### ***Summary and recommendations***

As the above discussion shows, I am suggesting a model of employment literacy comprising five dimensions: the impact of the home and school settings; literacies; identifying and applying for jobs; workplace relationships and culture; and job readiness and employability. For many of the young people in this study their home and school environments did not equip them with a sense of self belief or the competence they needed to be able to seek employment or participate in the workplace. Unlike many middle class young people, most of my participants were not assisted by their parents or extended family in developing understandings of the world of work or the processes of identifying or searching for potential jobs. These factors can be combined with workplace contexts in which skills and attributes were generally considered transferable, thus minimising the need for training or supervision at an organisational level.

These disadvantages have significant impact on the future mobility of these young people, but it is clear from my research that many of the understandings and abilities can be taught. Those young people who were fortunate enough to encounter skilled and accepting trainers or employers came to understand and negotiate the Discourses appropriate to the workplaces. I am therefore recommending changes in relation to schools, vocational education, vocational training at practice and policy levels, and workplaces. In all of these contexts the importance of social literacy or empathy in which the feelings and perspectives of others are considered is significant for all (Goleman, 1995, 1998). At an educational policy level within schools, the emphasis on Standard Australian English could be re-examined in the light of international research which maintains that student proficiency is associated with well developed programs in the first language (Dooley, 2004, p. 67; Lo Bianco, 1999, 2000). This could contribute to improved educational outcomes for young Indigenous Australians. There should be greater emphasis on job options advice and pathways for young people who are pursuing VET or are work bound. This could redress the present career focus on young people who plan to undertake university studies (Helms & Cook, 1999; M. S. Richardson, 1993). The number of young people undertaking VET options is likely to increase due to the raising of the school leaving age to the year adolescents turn 17 years effective from 2008 in Western Australia (Carpenter, 2004, p. 2).

In connection with vocational education and training I would support more attention being given to the identification of potential jobs and the preparation of young people for application for employment process. This may include more group discussion and assistance at an individual level. The importance of interactions, appearance and mannerisms as part of interview techniques could be discussed. The inclusion of mock interviews could increase learning in addition to making explicit some of the cultural and critical components meanings which are relevant (Lankshear, 2000, p. 104; Lankshear et al., 2000, p. 31). At a policy level the incorporation of a work experience component in vocational education would serve as an introduction to the workplace for some young people.

The practices within the vocational training organisations included in my study varied due to the nature of the training and the levels of funding. The young people identified that group format in which the members were consistent was beneficial to their learning. The training objectives associated with accredited and structured training at Fairbridge

were clearly defined and were conducive to capitalising on peer and informal learning. Within Hills Community Support Group the focus was on work activity with the groups being more diverse and varying on a daily basis. The training was unstructured and non accredited. The change in the composition of the group each day presented additional negotiation challenges for the smaller numbers of young people undertaking this program. As I outlined in chapter four, the funding of this program was an ongoing issue for HCSG until it was transferred to Workpower Incorporated, another community organisation. In relation to funding of vocational training I advocate that opportunities for learning be given priority.

In relation to workplaces, the young people identified that being accepted and the provision of explicit feedback were significant. I would support a framework of supervision which incorporated organisational responsibility as an effective way for young people to gain the understandings and the capacity to navigate work Discourses. At a federal policy level I advocate for greater commitment to young disadvantaged people's learning and the process aspects that facilitate it.

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## Appendix A: Employability Skills compared with Mayer Key Competencies

**Box 3: Summary of ACCI/BCA employability skills compared with Mayer key competencies**

Employability skills		Mayer key competencies
Communication skills	that contribute to productive and harmonious relations between employees and customers	Communicating ideas and information Using mathematical ideas and techniques
Teamwork skills	that contribute to productive working relationships and outcomes	Working with others and in teams
Problem-solving skills	that contribute to productive outcomes	Solving problems
Initiative and enterprise skills	that contribute to innovative outcomes	
Planning and organising skills	that contribute to long-term and short-term strategic planning	Planning and organising activities Collecting, analysing and organising information
Self-management skills	that contribute to employee satisfaction and growth	
Learning skills	that contribute to ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes	
Technology skills	that contribute to effective execution of tasks	Using technology
<b>Personal attributes</b>		
Loyalty	Personal presentation	
Commitment	Common sense	
Honesty and integrity	Positive self-esteem	
Enthusiasm	Sense of humour	
Reliability	Ability to deal with pressure	
Balanced attitude to work and home life	Adaptability	
Motivation		

(National Centre for Vocational Education Research 2003, p.5)

## **Appendix B: Outline of Qualifications**

### ***Certificate III in Business Administration***

This one semester qualification develops skills in customer service, computing, accounts and the record keeping used in a range of administrative tasks in an office environment. It also involves the use of spreadsheets and databases. Possible jobs for someone with this qualification include customer services, accounts or administrative support

### ***Certificates II and III in Conservation and Land Management (CALM)***

Certificate II provides entry level training. The areas of study include native plant recognition propagation, fencing and path construction, weeds, map reading and interpretation, machinery, chemical use and safety. It therefore provides practical skills that enable students to apply for employment under supervision within environmental workplaces. A work placement is also included (Department of Education and Training WA., 2008, p. 128). The workplace component within the RTO was provided by a local industry partner. Some of the young people that were included in my study had completed Certificate I in Conservation and Land Management within another organisation. Others were recruited directly into the training. The Certificate III builds on the subjects covered in Certificate II but in addition includes areas of specialisation (Challenger TAFE., 2006, p. 1-2).

### ***Apprenticeship in Carpentry***

An apprenticeship provides an opportunity to learn a trade while working full time. It is a structured program in that part of the training is provided on the job and the other part requires attendance at a TAFE WA college (Challenger TAFE., 2008).

### ***Certificate II and III in General Education for Adults (CGEA)***

This one semester course provides skill development in reading, writing, oral communication and computing in order to prepare for employment or further training. People who may be interested in this course may have left school early (Challenger TAFE., 2006). The Certificate III builds on the areas of skill outlined for Certificate II and is a bridging program for further TAFE studies. It is also one semester in duration

(Challenger TAFE., 2007a, p. 1). This education was delivered face-to –face in the regional setting but as an outreach program at the youth centre.

### ***Certificate I in Gaining Access to Training and Employment (GATE)***

The young people at the youth centre were undertaking this course jointly with CGEA. There are three streams including a Youth Program for young people who have not completed Year 10 and provides equivalency for a range of TAFE industry programs. The core components are similar to the outlined for CGEA but the electives included work experience (Challenger TAFE., 2007b). Some of the younger participants that I interviewed identified the direct involvement in the workplace provided in by the work experience assisted their learning.

### ***Diploma of Community Services***

The focus of this one year program is on the community services sector. The areas of skill include administration, finance, service provision, policy, assessment community education, case management. A supervised work placement is included as part of the qualification. Someone with this qualification could be considered for a community worker role and with suitable experience a coordinating role in a community services organisation.

## **Appendix C: Young Participants' Areas of Questioning**

### ***Demographic Data***

1. Age, sex, ethnicity, training program, educational level (year level attained on leaving school)

### ***Motivation for doing current /recent training***

2. What were the reasons for doing the present training? (Prompt what does he/she hope to get out of it and what changes are likely as a result of doing it)
3. What work related activity /activities have you been involved in before you started this training? (Prompt paid work, unemployment and periods of time involved and work/unemployment history)

### ***Family experience***

4. Did your family history impact on your school performance or work record? (Prompt family separation, abuse, addiction or health issues)

### ***School experience***

5. What was your experience of the academic aspects of your schooling? (Prompt how did you cope with the assignments, deadlines and different subject areas)
6. Tell me how you dealt with the relationships within the school environment? (Prompt those involving other students, teachers and others in authority)
7. Did you have a part-time work while at school? (Prompt type of work, amount of time and learning)

### ***Role of family/friends in shaping your employment knowledge***

8. What sort of jobs have members of your family held? How long have these jobs lasted? (Prompt what things did they talk about as being important in keeping these jobs or what was your sense of what was important?)
9. Were there any discussions with your immediate or extended family around your employment options? (Prompt what was discussed – your interests, accessing information, contacts, jobs, employers or approaches to applying for jobs)



10. Did you discuss work with your friends? (Prompt support for you, type of work, information relating to particular jobs/employers, strategies for getting work)
11. What was helpful or could have helped you in either thinking about suitable employment or applying for work? (Prompt thinking about your interests, accessing information or applying for work)

### ***Knowledge of the workplace***

12. Are the ways people relate to each other at work different from those that people use outside work? What is your experience? (Prompt are different words or ideas used?)
13. Do people talk the same ways to their workmates as they do to their supervisor or manager? What are some of the differences that you noticed at work or during the training? (Prompt nonverbal behaviour, remaining seated, eye contact or words)
14. From your experience in this training or in previous work how do you get to know what is expected at work? (Prompt how do you get to know what's acceptable? Who decides on what's acceptable? What happens if you do not follow them? Is there any ways of changing them?)

### ***Experience of applying for work***

15. Tell me about the job applications that you have done? What was involved? (Prompt finding out information, meeting with the employer or writing an application/letter of application)
16. What would have helped in the previous applications or would help you in the future in applying for work?

### ***Job readiness***

17. What do you think when you hear the words job readiness? (Prompt what does it mean for you? Where have you heard those words? Who said them? How was it presented to you?)

18. How do you think you would know when you were job ready? (Prompt confidence in applying for a job, particular skills, definite knowledge. How would you order these in relation to priority? )

## Appendix D: Developments in Generic Skills 1985-2002

### Box 2: Key developments in generic skills in Australia

#### Early initiatives

1985 Karmel Committee	The Committee chaired by Peter Karmel looks into the quality of education in Australia (Quality of Education Review Committee 1985). It highlights the importance of an internationally competitive labour force and stresses that outcomes of education should contribute to Australia's competitiveness. The Committee recommends that students in primary and secondary schooling be prepared for both education and employment through attaining skills such as accessing information, communication and working in groups.
1991 Finn Review	A review of young people's post-compulsory education and training in Australia by Finn (Australian Education Council Review Committee 1991) recognises the importance of young people developing key competencies. Due to changing technology and changing economic circumstances, the training system must emphasise both the acquisition of specific technical skills for the job and flexibility. This requires strong grounding in generic and transferable skills.
1992 Mayer Committee	At Finn's recommendation, the Mayer Committee (Australian Education Council, Mayer Committee 1992) develops a set of key competencies essential to preparing young people for employment. Seven competencies result from extensive consultation with the various education sectors and the business community.

#### Industry-led initiatives

1999 Australian Industry Group	The Australian Industry Group commissions a report (Allen Consulting Group 1999) that draws attention to the importance of both 'hard' (notably information technology) skills and 'soft' skills (for example problem-solving, team skills, willingness to be adaptable) which need to be developed prior to recruitment.
2002 ACCI/BCA	The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Business Council of Australia (BCA) undertake a study of employers' views on generic skills. They produce an expanded list of skills as the basis for employability, which includes the various stages of working life. The report acknowledges that combinations of these skills lead to high job-related performance and their integration in real life should not be overlooked in how they are developed and assessed.

#### Joint initiatives

2002- National Policy Development	The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) takes up the issue of employability skills development through the VET sector, including pilot testing various approaches to improving the identification of these skills in training packages. This is in response to consultations and research that indicate success in the teaching and learning of these skills depends on them being made more explicit. In July ANTA begins to co-ordinate a collaborative cross-sectoral approach to employability skills as defined by Australian industry, to be appraised in 2004.
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(National Centre for Vocational Education Research 2003, p.3)