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School to work transition experience of Year 12 school leavers

Valerie House
Edith Cowan University

Edith Cowan University

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SCHOOL TO WORK TRANSITION EXPERIENCE

OF

YEAR 12 SCHOOL LEAVERS

By Valerie House, Assoc. Art Teach., Grad. Cert. Ed

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of
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Abstract

As a consequence of increased retention rates in post compulsory schooling, educational systems have attempted to expand their curricular offerings. The aims of this study were twofold. The first was to examine a process of transition from school to work and the second considered the implications for improvement of the post compulsory school curriculum in facilitating transition.

A semi structured, open ended interview was developed to gain information about the transition experience of seven Year 12 students. Interviews, recorded by audio tape, and the coded transcripts were the major data source.

Results indicated that students coped well with the transition from school to work, enjoying the increased responsibilities and being treated as grown up by employers and parents. Part time work, school based work experience, and through Work Studies learning job search skills, self responsibility and self confidence were seen as of value.

This suggests post compulsory education should make learning relevant to students by linking work based learning with classroom education and creating educational pathways that prepare all students to navigate their way through the changing job market.

Declaration

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

incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or

contain any defamatory material.

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Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

CES   -   Commonwealth Employment Service

TAFE   -   Technical and Further Education

TEE   -   Tertiary Entrance Examination

UK   -   United Kingdom

USA   -   United States of America

WA   -   Western Australia

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

The background of the study, the purpose and the research problem are outlined in this chapter.

In Chapter 2 the review of literature is discussed as well as a rationale for the qualitative approach. Chapter 3 includes the outline of the methodology, a description of the conceptual framework and information about the number and selection of participants.

Each case is described in Chapter 4, including school background, grades awarded, the workplace, employer and family background.

In Chapter 5 the findings are discussed in light of the literature reviewed.

Conclusions are drawn in Chapter 6 and limitations to the study are outlined.

Background of the Study

As a teacher of Year 12 Work Studies I have concerns about post compulsory education. Retention rates have increased to at least 72%. Sixty-70% of school leavers are destined for Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and

university and approximately 20% into full time work in the form of employment, apprenticeships and traineeships (Russell, 1994, p.228).

Post compulsory education (Years 11 and 12), with the exception of the new vocational programs, is still primarily an attempt to prepare students, not to succeed at TAFE or university, but simply to gain entry into these institutions. Schools measure the success of their post compulsory programs by the number of successful TAFE and university applicants. There appears to be no significant contribution to the education of post compulsory students for direct entry into the work force. However with the suggestion that the employment demand for school leavers over the next five years is likely to decrease while the demand for TAFE and university graduates is likely to increase (National Board of Employment, Education and Training, 1995), this may become an even less important role of post compulsory education.

"Transition from school to work and the associated adult status conferred", according to Patton (1994, p.15), has always been a major process for young people. The purpose of this study is to examine this transition process. Students leave school with skills which may or may not assist them in their transition experience. Through the review of literature on research related to this field, it appears that young people who enter the work force are generally disillusioned by the way school prepares them for this transition.

Major policy themes have been emerging from inquiries including the need for a broader and more relevant curriculum across the post compulsory sector, the

need to reassert the importance of vocational training and an emphasis on competencies to be achieved by education and training. (Australian Education Council Review Committee, 1991, p. ix)

Carmichael (Employment and Skills Formation Council, 1992) reported on the need for students to be taught basic skills that are relevant to work. He suggested networks linking upper secondary schools, TAFE and private providers with work-based training through industry to allow flexibility in training delivery. Carmichael believed the introduction of a national Australian Vocational Certificate training system to combine work and training would improve levels of workers' skills in Australia and so make Australia more competitive internationally.

"Australian employers are clearly asking for students to be taught basic skills that are relevant to work, without being occupation or industry specific." (Employment and Skills Formation Council, 1992, p.10)

Employers have identified skills, such as well developed skills in listening and speaking, reading and writing, and following instructions, which they would like to see young people bringing with them to work (National Board of Employment, Education and Training, 1995, p.viii). There appears to be little Australian research, however, on how employers adapt and respond to youth as they make their transition from school to work.

The time frame of this research spans the final year at school and the first year of full time employment, therefore the researcher refers to participants as students or ex-students when discussing their transition experience. All students had been members of the researcher's Work Studies classes. Other participants in the study include parents and employers of the students in transition.

Through this study of youth in transition from school to work the researcher examined students' perceptions of the value of school in helping them in transition, the support of the family, and the employers' adaptations and responses to youth making this transition.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the transition experience of Year 12 students whom I had taught as they moved from full time school to full time employment.

The investigation was designed to make a contribution to planning post compulsory education programs. The relevance of this schooling could be enhanced with current information on the experiences of recent school to work "transients". The findings of this study will enable educators to make decisions regarding post compulsory education.

Statement of Research Problem

The increased apparent retention rate to Year 12 in Western Australia (WA) in the last decade, from 35% in 1981 to 72.8% in 1992 (Russell, 1994, p.228), "has meant the students remaining to Year 12 now represent a greater diversity of skills and intended post-school destinations." (Russell, 1994, p.229).

According to Wood (cited in Russell, 1994, p.229), estimates of Year 12 school leaver destinations for 1992 included 34% destined to enter TAFE, 32% university, 10% entering the labour market, 4% repeating Year 12, 4% to private providers, 3% to apprenticeships, 3% to independent colleges, 9% to other, including unemployed and 1% to traineeships.

As a consequence of increased retention rates, education systems have attempted to expand their curricular offerings. One of the most important initiatives in post compulsory education in Australia in the 1980s, according to Fraser and Kennedy (1990, p.26) was the Commonwealth Government's Transition Program. The program aimed to improve students' preparation for work and ease the transition of young people to employment through changes in schooling.

Although the transition program which was developed by the Commonwealth Government as a result of high rates of youth unemployment had many successes, a change in government in 1983 resulted in severely reduced funding and a change in the character of the program. Entitled the Transition

Program, it was originally set up to "improve students' preparations for work through changes in schooling or provision of post school remedial programs." (Fraser & Kennedy, 1990, p.26). Despite this there appears to be no research into changes in the students' adaptation to work. However, a number of parents of transition students reported that "improved home relationships seemed to accompany their children's experiences of success and satisfaction at school" (Fraser & Kennedy, 1990, p.34). This improved home relationship may have enhanced the employability of students, but there is no evidence to confirm or deny this.

In this study the researcher addressed the following questions to examine the experience of transition from school to work and consider the implications for improvement of the post compulsory school curriculum in helping facilitate transition.

1. What are the transition experiences of Year 12 school leavers as they enter full time paid employment?

2. What are the students' perceptions of the contribution of post compulsory education to the transition?

3. How is the student in transition supported by family?

4. How does the employer adapt and respond to new employees as they make the transition from school to work?

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

"[The USA] economy is being damaged, and more importantly, young lives are being damaged, by our collective failure to help young people to make a smoother transition from school to work" (William T. Grant Foundation, cited in Ryan & Imel, 1996, p.1). During this period, the individual is required to choose an occupation, to find and apply for jobs, to learn the norms and values of the new world of work, to learn the intricacies of a new job and to become successfully integrated into a new organisation. Education is under pressure to change its approach to preparing school leavers for the world of work. Although the school to work concept may not be the route for all youth, it has received support from policy makers, the work community and educators, many of whom have tried to make a connection between what occurs during education and the skills, knowledge and behaviour required in the workplace. Ryan and Imel (1996, p.1) state "The idea that students move from an educational situation to a work one is not new; what may be new is the idea that the transition from the 'schoolplace' to the workplace should serve as the cornerstone of all schooling beyond the elementary grades."

The Transitional Experience

Schlossberg (cited in McDaniels & Gysbers, 1992, p.53) defines transition "as a process of continuing and changing reactions over time – for better or for

worse – which are linked to the individual's continuous and changing appraisal of self-in-situation."

Defining the period during which the transition from school to work occurs is inevitably arbitrary. It could be described as the period from the last day at school until the first day of work. Alternatively, it could be defined as the time from when the individual first began to think seriously about getting a job, to when they decide they are happy and settled in their work.

In their study into transition from school to work, West and Newton (1983, p.19) defined the period "as stretching from six months prior to the date of leaving school, to 30 months after the date of leaving," whereas Gaskell (1995) saw the transition from school to work as conceived in the academic world as "the moment when a young person leaves school and enters into another world, the world of paid work." (1995, p.80) According to research on this transition, Gaskell added that there is no single moment in time when they leave school and no single moment when they begin paid work. Many workers attend educational programs on the job, and many students were involved in part time work while attending school.

Transition from school to work (or further training or educational institutions) is a period of major change in a young person's life. "The process of job testing as a form of settling on a career was not a crucial individual or social problem when jobs were plentiful. However, the significant changes in the structure and processes of the labour market, which began to be evidenced in the

early 1970s, caused an irreversible change in this transition process." (Patton, 1994, p.15).

Sharf (1992, p.203) linked transition with crisis, in a chapter headed "Adult Career Crises and Transitions". The transition from school to work is mentioned briefly as an expected transition, but Sharf's work focused on career crises or "disruptive situations (such as loss of job, transfer, or demotion) that are likely to cause considerable consternation for the individual." (Sharf, 1992, p.203). School to work transition according to Schlossberg (cited in Sharf, 1992, p.201) is an anticipated career event that will happen in the lifespan of most individuals. This normative transition tends to be anticipated, voluntary and without crises, according to Schlossberg (cited in Sharf, 1992, p.202). Sharf touched briefly on school to work transition which may give the reader an inaccurate message that it is an insignificant transition.

In contrast, "the transition from school to work or further study is probably the second major foreseeable upheaval in the lives of most individuals - the first being the transition from home to school." (Commonwealth Department of Education, 1976, p.9).

Van Maanen (cited in West & Newton, 1983, p.109) distinguished three stages of socialisation to work. The first is anticipatory socialisation or the degree to which an employee is prepared for entry into the workplace by learning from family, school, peers and cultural influences. When the research was conducted to establish these stages it was suggested that the majority of school leavers were ill

prepared for working life. The second stage in Van Maanen's study is the entry

stage which may be seen as "a reality shock" (West & Newton, 1983, p.110) as

they enter the workplace. The metamorphosis stage according to Van Maanen

(West & Newton, 1983, p.111), includes the changes the new employee goes

through in order to remain in that workplace and is achieved through approval by

employers and role modelling of other employees.

Post Compulsory Education

Post compulsory education refers to the upper secondary school years 11 and

12.

Various government policies sought to address the growing levels of

unemployment by encouraging students to remain at school during the post

compulsory years. The Finn Report (Australian Education Council Review

Committee, 1991) recommended raising the profile of career education, including

better co-ordination of its operation, greater involvement of business, and more

systems support for training and the appointment of appropriate career personnel

in schools. The Report set targets for participation and achievement of post

compulsory students and recommended the development of employment related

competencies essential for all young people to achieve in their preparation for

employment. The Employment and Skills Formation Council inquiry into

vocational training in Australia (Australian Education Council Review

Committee, 1992) commonly referred to as the Carmichael Report, proposed a

bridge between general education, vocational education and training with the

Australian Vocational Certificate, and Mayer (Australian Education Council

Review Committee, 1992) proposed what the competencies suggested by Finn

(Australian Education Council Review Committee, 1991) would actually look

like.

The employment and training policy of the Federal government of the mid-

1990s makes an explicit link between improved preparation for work and career

education and guidance. It is committed to "ensure that school programs

effectively prepare students for employment and job search, and encourage an

active role by schools in career planning and in placing graduates in employment

to ensure effective transition from school to work." (Dusseldorp Skills Forum,

1997, p.6). The Australian government is making a constructive push towards an

integrated comprehensive school to work transition program through

apprenticeships and traineeships for school leavers. Schools are now being given

the opportunity to run traineeships for students still in the school system.

As reported in the Canning Community newspaper, the South East

Metropolitan College of TAFE will run "a new jobs program designed to help

students make a successful transition from school to employment." (TAFE to

Stage Job Program, 1998). The program is part of a Federal government initiative

called Jobs Pathway Programs designed to help school students choose and plan a

career path. The region in WA served by this TAFE has a 51% Year 12

completion rate which is the lowest in Australia. The idea of the jobs program is

to encourage students to complete Year 12. Patten (1994, p.19) warned that

"advising teenagers to remain at school past the compulsory years in order to

secure advantage in the labour market needs to be tempered with the notion that it may not necessarily provide definite positions."

In the USA Hoyt (1993) recommended forming partnerships between industry and education. He cited examples of individual large businesses "adopting" participating elementary schools. Such partnerships are being formulated in WA where groups of industries located in one district form compacts with schools within the same district. Kwinana Industries Council have established such a compact "focussing on education and committed to fostering mutually beneficial long term relationships." (Kwinana Industries Council, 1996, p.1).

This idea is reiterated by Dusseldorp Skills Forum (1997, p.7) who suggested that the challenge is to make these links as strong as the links that currently exist between career education, guidance and the pathway to university or TAFE. To make and implement effective work and career decisions, Dusseldorp Skills Forum (1997, p.11) sees the need for students to gain direct experience outside the school, opportunities made possible by schools working in partnership with employers. Such partnerships are an essential part of vocational programs and these demonstrate a commitment to a particular vocational education area in Year 11 and 12 through the provision of structured work-based learning.

Students' Perspectives

A study of New South Wales' school leavers by Ainley and Sheret (1993)

indicated that Year 12 school leavers do not reflect favourably on how well the

last years of school had prepared them for their post-school life. A high

percentage felt school had prepared them well in independent thinking and

writing, and in spoken communication, but were dissatisfied with the provision of

information about getting a job, the different jobs available, and the world of

work.

"It seems that former students' judgements about the strengths of their

last years at school (ie Years 11 and 12), emphasise the development

of scholastic aptitudes and preparation for further study rather than an

orientation to work. Those judgements suggest that the orientation of

the final years of secondary school is still towards the traditional role

of preparation for university, despite the substantial changes in

participation." (Ainley & Sheret, 1993, p.21).

In 1991 the Australian Council for Educational Research conducted a study

entitled The labour market relevance of secondary schooling: Perspectives from

Year 12 school leavers who do not enrol in higher education (Australian Council

for Educational Research, 1991). Five hundred former secondary students from

across Australia were involved in the study. In the first group, 436 (76%)

responded to a mailed questionnaire. Eighty in the second group were from 12

case study schools in Victoria, South Australia and Queensland. The second group met in discussion groups or were involved in phone discussions.

Only 28% of the students surveyed considered the school subjects relevant to choosing their present job. In response to the question "In terms of getting and keeping a job, how well did your schooling in Year 12 provide you with the following?" (26 categories were offered). Students ranked competencies, rather than school subjects, as the four most important categories. Talk and work with others; confidence in abilities; work independently; and organisation and planning were closely followed by writing and, not so closely, reading. Mellor, reporting on the above research, stated "the significance of the importance of personal skills, and attributes to employment, now common in the competency literature, was clearly grasped by the respondents" (Mellor, 1994, p.38).

The discussion groups from the 12 case study schools enabled the researcher to gather qualitative data and use direct quotations in the research report to clarify responses to the questionnaire.

"You need to learn how to adapt to different types of people...you're relating to different people all the time...at work...you can get new bosses...you have to learn to adjust and not conflict." (Paul, advertising draftsperson). (Mellor, 1994, p.38).

In the questionnaire, respondents reported strong interest in career advice, job seeking skills and work experience (ranking them more important than

mathematics) but felt these were not well provided in their schools. In reply to the question, "Given what you know now, how could secondary schooling be improved?" respondents requested that "work transition programs be more frequent, more flexible, more integrated into general schooling and for them to be provided for all students." (Mellor, 1994, p.39).

Following a survey of the part time work attitudes, perceptions and opinions of Year 11 students in WA, Ralph (1994, p.74) recommended "that further research be carried out to investigate the level of confidence which students have in their personal abilities, their job search skills and in their workplace skills." According to Ralph, (1994, p.74), this information could be used in career education programming.

Bridging the Gap (South) Inc. (1996) conducted questionnaires among the 622 Year 9 and 10 students attending four WA High Schools in one school district in order to make recommendations for the School To Work Program aimed at helping school leavers in that transition. Employers from professional groups, retail, leisure industry and the trades were also contacted by visiting Rotary clubs and businesses local to Bridging the Gap (South) headquarters.

Work experience was seen by 54.7% of employers surveyed by Bridging the Gap (South) as something in which they would participate in their workplace. Ninety one percent of Year 9 and 10 students wanted to be involved in a work experience program while at school. Employers were fairly positive about becoming involved in educating young people for work with 69% saying they

would be willing to have students visit their workplace, but most preferred individual visits over group visits. Sixty percent of employers surveyed would consider employing school leavers.

The findings of Lewis and Ruchel (1993, p.5) raise questions concerning the value of work experience programs and identify discrepancies in the way students and employers recognise skills in the Australian workplace. Lewis and Ruchel (1993, p.7) recommended "greater emphasis be given to working with students to identify and communicate the full range of their skills in future (work experience) programs." Transferable skills examined in this study included communication, team work, organisational skills, problem solving, leadership and initiative. Students involved in this vocational work experience program felt "the experience enhanced their awareness of employer expectations and provided a chance to put into practise some of the skills learnt in formal study" (Lewis & Ruchel, 1993, p.5). One quarter of the former Year 12 students surveyed by The Australian Council for Educational Research (1991, p.17) wanted a greater emphasis on work experience in order to ease the transition to employment, and wanted it more often.

A qualitative study in the UK of personal development and the self in work experience found that work experience was seen by students as important in "clarifying and exploring their role in society: in terms of self and identity, and in assisting their status passage from adolescence to adulthood" (Waterhouse & Turner, 1996, p.33). According to the authors, work experience could even be acknowledged as an official core in providing opportunities for learning and

personal development in terms of self, testing of self against reality, and the transition to adulthood.

Herr and Cramer (1988, p.273) report that according to Mitchell (1977) "only 2.2% of the respondents (37,500 seventeen year olds) saw school or academic areas as activities that might be useful for a job", whereas in a study into "The Labour Market Relevance of Secondary Schooling" (Australian Council for Educational Research, 1991) 82% of respondents indicated that Year 12 was worth doing, suggesting a strong level of support for the value of completing secondary school. The study was designed to answer the question, among others, 'Is senior secondary schooling relevant to those who move straight from Year 12 to employment?' A nationally representative sample of 19 or 20 year olds who had completed Year 12 was surveyed by questionnaire. The second part of the study gathered data from discussion groups from case study schools in Victoria, Queensland and South Australia.

"Schooling will be relevant in labour market terms if it assists young people to obtain employment, to be productive and successful in their work, and to anticipate and respond to changing circumstances." (Australian Council for Educational Research, 1991, p.2). Respondents were questioned on whether they considered school was worthwhile in terms of getting and keeping a job and the development of personal skills and attitudes judged important to work. The results of the study may not reflect an accurate picture of youth employment in the late 1990s, as it was conducted in the late 1980s, a period of strong job growth. This study examined the ideas of only one set of participants in the labour market.

Work Studies

All ex-students in this WA research study had completed Work Studies as one of their Year 12 subjects. The Year 12 Work Studies course focuses on examining "issues in the world of work that affect groups of people within our society including particular minority groups and the wider community" (Curriculum Council, 1998, p.113). The course aims to provide students with the opportunity to develop an understanding of the changing world of work, acquire a capacity for social criticism, develop a consciousness of gender relationships and develop an awareness of societal values and attitudes towards paid and unpaid work roles within the changing nature of the world of work (Curriculum Council, 1998).

The Work Studies Syllabus (Curriculum Council, 1998) consists of six major learning areas, work environment, transitions and work, industrial relations, training and education, culture and work, and social criticism. Two interdependent areas which link into all six of the above are the study of groups and the development of transferable skills including decision making, communications, problem solving, leadership, team work and goal setting.

The innovative Work Studies program developed by Berent (1996) at the high school in the current study focused on these interdependent areas, building them into the six learning areas. To make learning fun was the philosophy behind the course at this school. The primary aim was to empower the students with decision making by permitting them to negotiate a substantial amount of the

course. No deadlines for completion of work, apart from the end of the school year, were set by the teacher, allowing the students to accept total responsibility for the completion and submission of their own work. Students as a group could set deadlines for group activities. Any assignment task could be resubmitted if a student chose to improve on the original work.

The development of oral communication skills was encouraged by giving students many opportunities to have their say in a formal or informal situation without fear of criticism by fellow students. Students joined in class discussions on an informal basis often seated in a circle, or presented a prepared topic as a formal oral assessment. Apart from assignments submitted in written format, students had the opportunity to write letters of application and thanks for work experience, and job applications to improve written communication skills.

Problem solving involved negotiating substantial amounts of the course and reaching group consensus. During negotiation sessions modelled on the traditional boardroom meeting, each student took a turn as chairperson, or leader, in conducting the meeting. Students were introduced to de Bono's (1992) six hats and used them as tools to make decisions. De Bono's six thinking hats method is a simple and practical way of overcoming difficulties when making decisions. It enables the group to handle the different aspects of thinking by separating emotions, feelings of helplessness and confusion into simple decision making steps. De Bono divides thinking into six different modes, each represented by a different coloured hat. For example the black hat represents checking and invites students to criticise an idea and check for weaknesses (de Bono, 1992).

Goal setting was practised throughout the course, sometimes on a short term basis "My goals for this period are...", or longer term, regarding goals for the year and career goals. Teamwork became an integral part of all activities and was closely linked to unpaid work at school and paid work outside school.

Areas of Improvement

The United States National Commission on Secondary Vocational Education contended that: "vocational education in the secondary school should be and generally is concerned with the development of the individual student in five areas:

1)   personal skills and attitudes;

2)   communication and computational skills;

3)   employability skills;

4)   broad and specific occupational skills and knowledge; and

5)   foundation for career planning and lifelong learning." (Herr & Cramer, 1988, p.295).

These five areas further emphasise the data collected in Lewis and Ruchel's (1993) research mentioned previously.

Following the report of the Finn Committee (Australian Education Council Review Committee, 1991) the Mayer Committee (1992) set about identifying the employer related 'key competencies' and establishing a framework to assess the competencies. The Mayer Committee concluded that there were seven Key

Competencies that all young people need to enable them to participate effectively in work organisation in Australia:

Collecting, analysing and organising information;

Communicating ideas and information;

Planning and organising activities;

Working with others and in teams;

Using mathematical ideas and techniques;

Solving Problems;

Using technology.

The Mayer Committee (1992) believed these competencies were so important they should be acquired by all young people in preparation for paid and unpaid employment.

Hoyt (1993, p.11) described "transition" components which should be developed early in life in the USA in order to prepare persons to be productive workers. He suggested along with "basic academic skills, productive work habits, a personally meaningful set of work values, general employability skills, career decision making skills, and a set of job seeking/finding/ getting/holding skills" must be part of the school curriculum. According to Hoyt (1993, p.2), changes in employer attitudes towards youth and the education system are necessary.

Although much of the literature reviewed recommends the development of school curricula based on competencies, Stevenson and McKavanagh (cited in

Patton, 1994, p.18) criticised the Australian government's approach to competencies. "Observable outcomes are emphasised to the exclusion of internal cognitive processes; and in compartmentalising knowledge additional higher-order cognitive skills necessary for integration may be ignored." Stevenson and McKavanagh, (cited in Patton, 1994, p.18) recommended that in order to be competent in current and future work settings "work force members will need propositional knowledge (eg: information, facts, principles, theories), specific-purpose procedures (eg: skills and techniques for specified goals), and higher order procedures (eg: abilities to acquire new skills; abilities to solve problems in new situations and accomplish unfamiliar goals; adaptability)." The ability to transfer skills in an ever changing work environment will be essential.

Davis (1988) used case studies in Australia and overseas to investigate what he called the EHW (education, households and work) factor. He maintained that "a tight correspondence or sharing of values between these institutions is both a condition for and a measure of the stability of school to work transition" (Davis, 1988, preface). He examined the relationship between education, households and work, measuring the success of school to work transition as gaining full time employment.

His case studies illustrated that "school to work transition is an educative process, as well as a labour market process, requiring for its greatest effectiveness the harmonious working together of educational, household and work institutions." (Davis, 1988, p.13). He suggested the family household gives the child support and knowledge required for the successful transition into work. This

process, according to Davis, is supplemented by the education sector, and the "institution of work represents not just an end in itself but a rite of passage to full adulthood and social acceptance." (1988, p.13).

Davis (1992, p.213) believes the presence of harmony between education, households and work cannot be assumed, but well planned and implemented strategies are needed to create a tight EHW factor.

Imal (1995) posed the question "Does it (school to work transition programs) place too much emphasis on preparing youth for occupations and not enough on becoming well-informed and contributing citizens?" This question may replace the question of old - are our post compulsory years too intent on university entrance? And yet, according to the Finn Report (Australian Education Council Review Committee, 1991) most school teachers today are accepting of the notion that preparation of young people for the world of work is one of the key purposes of schooling. There is an increased awareness and acceptance of the need for strong links between school and work, and that schools must equip all young people with knowledge, skills and understandings required by the world of work.

In Australia, Vocational education and training is undergoing profound change. More and more upper secondary students will be given opportunities to participate in the workforce as a recognisable part of their education. "Vocational education will be expanded in schools, giving students greater opportunities to experience the world of work." (Morgan Black International, 1996). In WA, according to Morgan Black International (1996) approximately 90 schools offer

vocational programs and 110 structured work based learning. These programs give students the opportunity to participate in the workforce as a recognised part of their education which backs up a recommendation of the Finn Report (Australian Education Council Review Committee, 1991, p.53): "the curriculum must allow for a range of learning styles, and in particular, for experiential learning. In the school this will require a stronger commitment to integrated and appropriately structured work experience."

Comparative Studies

Sweden's schools, according to Hellström (cited in Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 1997, p.34) remain responsible for any students not in full time work or education to the age of 18. Schools must offer a combination of study, guidance and work experience to enable youth to examine possibilities of transition into work or further education.

According to Kantor (1994), US employers are reluctant to hire young workers whereas "European countries seem to be considerably less resistant" (Kantor, 1994, p.447). As part of a plan to revitalise the American economy, President Clinton, reported by Kantor (1994, p.447), proposed the introduction of paid work combined with on-the-job training and classroom instruction for youth which have been dubbed "the forgotten half", the high school students who do not go on to college and, according to Kantor (1994, p.442), "whose life chances have been diminished by changes in the labour market."

Clinton's proposal to help young people bridge the gap between school and work is closely allied to the vocational programs established in Australian secondary schools. Linking the classroom more closely to the workplace makes school more attractive to students while improving their marketable skills in the workplace.

A school based strategy in the UK is to use transition teams, or self-managing teams of young people who investigate their own choices of post compulsory education employment; explore the issues and changes students will need to manage in their transition from school; and present information from their investigations to other students. These teams "enable young people to gain knowledge and understanding, develop key competencies, and to influence education and providers to respond better to their needs as empowered customers." (Introducing Transition Teams, cited in Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 1997, p.27). As the students work in teams to research further education opportunities, jobs available, organise work shadowing, report to the local media, and present findings to fellow students, their enterprise and team work skills are enhanced.

Summary

West and Newton (1983) used a quote from David Copperfield to introduce their study into transition from school to work:

'Your clothes will be looked after for you, too', said Mr

Murdstone, 'as you will not be able, yet awhile, to get them for

yourself. So you are now going off to London, David, with Mr

Quinion, to begin the world on your own account.'

'In short, you are provided for', observed his sister, 'and will

please do your duty.' Though I quite understood that the

purpose of this announcement was to get rid of me, I have no

distinct remembrance whether it pleased or frightened me. My

impression is, that I was in a state of confusion about it, and,

oscillating between the two points, touched neither. (Charles

Dickens, cited in West & Newton, 1983, p.1).

The ex-students in the present study did not feel as though they were being

'got rid of' as they were all living at home, but their feelings certainly oscillated

between fear and pleasure. West and Newton (1983) decided that:

"It would not be surprising if many school leavers experience a

state of confusion during their transition from school to work,

since within a relatively short period of time adolescents are

expected to discard the role of dependent school child and

assume the role of independent working adult. The consequent

complex and profound changes which occur in their lives

undoubtedly cause many to oscillate between feeling anxiety

and pleasure." (West & Newton, 1983, p.1).

Based on the literature review it becomes clear that post compulsory education does not sufficiently prepare young people for the transition into the workplace. Furthermore there is a limited amount of research investigating the school to work transition from the perspective of the student. The aim of the present study is to explore the changes in the lives of the student in transition and their subsequent feelings.

Rationale for the Qualitative Approach

There are several reasons for adopting a qualitative method for this investigation, the first being that qualitative data are 'attractive' (Miles & Huberman 1984, p.22): They are a source of well-grounded rich descriptions and explanations of processes occurring in local contexts. This is supported by Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.106) who state that "qualitative data can provide rich insight into human behaviour which cannot be understood without reference to the meanings and purposes attached to the human actors and their activities." Ex-students, their parents and employers were the "actors" in this study, as the ex-students made a transition from full time school to full time work. The holistic nature of qualitative research suits this "stage" as students are interviewed about their workplace, family and employer support, and parents and employers are interviewed about support they offered and changes they made to cope with the student in transition.

A second reason for adopting a qualitative approach is that words rather than numbers were a more effective method of gaining meaning in this situation.

According to Smith, (cited in Miles & Huberman, 1984, p.22) "qualitative findings have a certain undeniability that is often far more convincing than pages of numbers."

Thirdly, Eisner (cited in Burns, 1994, p.12) claimed that qualitative methods are concerned with processes rather than consequences, with organic wholeness rather than independent variables, and with meanings rather than behavioural statistics. Interests are directed towards context-bound conclusions that could lead to educational decisions and policies rather than 'scientific' generalisation which may be of little use in reality.

The notion that findings are created through the interaction of inquiries and social phenomena is often a more plausible description of the inquiry approach than is the notion that findings are discovered through objective observation "as they really are and as they really work." (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.107).

In Jacob's (1989, p.231) view when discussing educational research, the use of qualitative traditions is more likely to be expansive than limiting, offering diverse, alternative ways of looking at a topic, and offering new viewpoints, raising new questions, providing ways of answering these and suggesting new explanations.

Qualitative studies provide a better fit to most social phenomena than rationalistic methods. The main argument when using this approach is that when dealing with human enquiry it is impossible to eliminate interaction between the

inquirer and respondent, therefore Guba and Lincoln (1989, p.88) suggest that it be used as an instrument of enquiry. This is because human life cannot be reduced to objective facts so in order to explore events in human life it has to be done by recreating the experiences of others.

Because I was seeking to obtain people's views, opinions and attitudes, I used an interview format. Taylor and Bogdan (cited in Burns, 1994, p.279) suggests that the advantages of interviews include the provision of the informant's perspective rather than the researcher's; the informant has the opportunity to use language natural to them, rather than trying to understand and fit into the concepts of the study; and the informant has equal status with the researcher. Burns (1994, p.279) recommended an interview guide be developed for some parts of the study in which, without fixed wording or fixed ordering of questions, a direction is given to the interview so that the content focuses on the crucial issues of the study. This permits flexibility and a more valid response from the informant's perception of reality. However, comparability of information between informants is difficult to assess and response coding difficulties will arise.

Open ended questions which may be more motivating to respondents allow them to answer in a relatively unconstrained way. They also allow respondents to convey the fine shades of their attitude to their own satisfaction instead of forcing them to choose one of several statements that may all seem more or less unsatisfactory.

Judd, Smith and Kidder (1991, p.239) agree with Burns in that coding the responses to open ended questions is often difficult:

"They are frequently self-contradictory, incomprehensible, or
irrelevant, and a major proportion of them will usually defy all
efforts at meaningful categorisation. Open ended responses are
functions of the respondent's attitude, but also of their intensity,
knowledge about the issue, involvement, education, general verbal
fluency, communicative style, and other factors. To code such
responses meaningfully requires a major effort and is sometimes
simply impossible." (Judd, Smith & Kidder, 1991, p.239).

When reporting the data collected in interviews the narrative is used including direct quotations from interview statements. This illustrative data provides a sense of reality, describing exactly what the informant feels and perceives.

Chapter 3

METHOD

School to work transition takes place against a background of premises, interests and values concerning what it means to be a student or worker, and what constitutes worthwhile learning and activity. Relationships between worker and fellow employees, or employers, and the formal and informal network of parental and school support were examined as part of this study in considering the transition of Year 12 students to full time paid employment. For these reasons a qualitative approach was employed in this research.

In this chapter the method and instruments the researcher used are outlined, the conceptual framework described and details given on the number and selection of participants.

Participants

For the purpose of this study seven Year 12 students (2 females; 5 males) from a city senior high school, 6 parents and 5 employers were interviewed. It was not possible to obtain an equal representation of males and females because only three female students, one of whom was available for interview, had gained full time employment directly from school.

Students were recruited from Work Studies classes of a city senior high school. Participation was voluntary. To permit triangulation of data parents were

part of the interview process. With the students' permission employers were interviewed. Consent from all participants was obtained. (See Appendix 1)

All Work Studies students were contacted by telephone during the January school holidays and were chosen on the basis of accessibility and expressed willingness to co-operate. As a teacher of Work Studies in this school, I have developed a rapport with students and had no problems in co-opting volunteers. The sample of seven were to be engaged in full time paid employment within 6 months of completing Year 12.

Conceptual Framework

The study examines the transition experiences of Year 12 school leavers as they leave school and gain full time paid employment, the support of their families, and the adaptation and response of the employer (see Figure 1). Relating the transition experience to the school curriculum and how it can be changed to help facilitate transition is a part of this study.

As seen in the review of literature, most research seems to focus on the upper part of the conceptual model, the effect of the school curriculum on the student in transition. My research is taking a multi-dimensional approach looking at family and employer relationships with the transition experience of the school leaver, as seen in the lower part of the conceptual model.

The study was conducted in the qualitative research mode through semi-structured interviews of students in transition. The participants were encouraged to talk about their experiences in their own way. By discussing the reality of their experience more openly, important new insights were gained. In order to triangulate data gathered from the school leaver, parents have been interviewed regarding the support offered by the family. An open mind was kept by the researcher for emerging hypotheses and ideas.

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        │  EFFECT OF SCHOOL   │
        │     CURRICULUM      │
        └─────────────────────┘
                  ↓
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        │  SCHOOL LEAVER IN   │
        │ TRANSITION TO FULL  │
        │  TIME EMPLOYMENT    │
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│  SUPPORT  │  ← ←   → →      │ ADAPTATION   │
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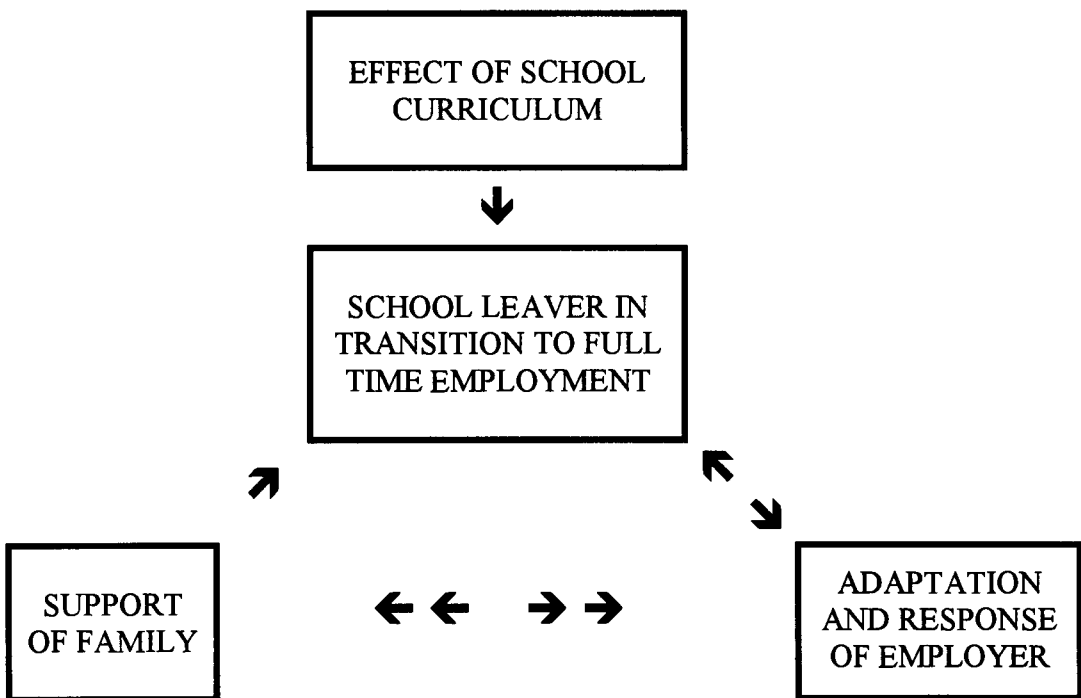
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework showing relationship among school curriculum, family support and employer response to school leavers in transition.

Instruments and Interview Technique

The instrument used in this research was a semi-structured, open ended interview designed to gather comprehensive data relevant to understanding the transition experience. (Refer to Appendix 2.)

The purpose of using an open-ended interview technique was to access a wide range of perspectives on the transition experience. The benefit of the approach was that the interview was natural, easy and conversational. It appeared that participants were open and honest, and that they provided a comprehensive, realistic view of the transition experience. Triangulation was effective in that parents confirmed student's answers to interview questions, although occasionally they had an elevated opinion of what their child was achieving in the workplace. Employers often answered with reference to all young workers rather than the specific employee.

While the semi-structured interview prompts formed the basis of the interview, wording and sequencing varied with different participants. This resulted in different responses, but it was considered more important to maintain the flow and enable the participant to feel in control of the discussion rather than being required to respond in a prescribed way.

All interviews were recorded by audio-tape and the coded transcripts were the major data source. The transcriber was able to retain the essence of the interview by including tone and mood in the transcripts.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to trial the procedures and questions to be asked. The original intention was that the pilot study participant was not to be part of the research but, because the procedures and interview questions were

unchanged for the main study, I have included the data collected. Parents were interviewed but the ex-student did not give me permission to interview the employer.

Notice of Intent

An outline of my research intention was given to each respondent. Confidentiality, the use of results, the recording of data, length of sessions, reassurance that there were no right or wrong answers, and the fact that the researcher's role was non-judgemental, were included. Permission to record interviews on audio tape was sought and given.

Data Collection

Data were collected by conducting personal interviews with the seven ex-students, six parents and five employers.

To initiate the interview the participants were contacted by telephone to explain the purpose of the study and their possible role in the research. They were then invited to participate and, upon acceptance, an interview time was arranged.

The participants were interviewed for approximately one hour and their responses recorded on tape. Except for one set of parents who were interviewed together, all interviews were conducted with one participant. I was concerned to establish rapport and trust with respondents. For this reason the interviews were

carried out in an environment chosen by the respondent such as their homes, their workplace, in cars outside their workplace and my office.

Following the review of literature it was clear that a number of areas should be addressed in obtaining data which would contribute to answers to the key questions. As a result I used a semi-structured interview format with no fixed wording or fixed order of questions. The use of interviewing as a technique was aimed to treat the respondents as individuals, to carefully analyse the situations and report through the eyes of the respondent with transcripts of related incidents to depict points. By representing the respondents as visible and vocal they were empowered to relate their version of events rather than the construction of knowledge being dependent on the researcher's point of view.

Ethical Considerations

All respondents were truthfully informed by letter about the research and their written consent obtained before collecting data. Participation was voluntary and the subjects always had the opportunity to withdraw from the study. To protect their privacy all respondents' identities have been concealed and they are referred to throughout the study by pseudonyms.

During data collection respondents were informed when a session was being recorded and they were given the right to cease recording at any time.

A typist assisted with transcribing the interviews and was advised of the confidential nature of the information.

Analysis

In order to establish categories a series of matrixes was created to gain an overview of the study. Using colours to represent each case, respondents' answers were plotted against interview questions. A second set of matrixes plotted responses under the research questions. These matrixes provided a simple summary of the entire study on which to focus during analysis.

A brief description was made of each case outlining student's place of employment and how the job was obtained, comments regarding employer, family background pertaining to the study, and where the interview took place.

The interview transcriptions were read and re-read to grasp themes, issues, topics and concepts for coding. A series of categories and sub-categories was devised according to the research questions. All coding was completed manually using colour as an instrument to handle the data. As the transcriptions were studied, ideas emerged. Notes and memos were made. This method permitted the inquirer to examine how these categories and sub-categories are linked and note emerging patterns.

Chapter 4

RESULTS: CASE DESCRIPTIONS

In this chapter each case is described to capture the personality of the student and outline their school background. The workplaces, employers and family background of each case is described.

Several ethnic groups are represented in this study. This was unintentional but does reflect the school population.

A summary of case descriptions is provided in Table 4.1. All personal names mentioned in this thesis are fictitious.

Ex-Student	Employment	Employer Interviewed	Parent Interviewed
Angelo	Clerical Assistant for import-export agency	Silvana: Office Manager and Accountant	Mother
Peter	Apprentice Mechanic	Suzanne: Co-owner of garage	Not available
Michael	Apprentice Mechanic	Not available	Father
Belinda	Clerical Assistant at Doctors' surgery	Rita: Practice Manager	Mother
John	Apprentice Mechanic	William: Service Manager	Not available
Mark	Fruit and Vegetable department in a supermarket	Han: Supermarket owner	Mother
Dajna	Assistant in Post Office/ Newsagency	Not available	Mother and Father

Table 4.1: Profile of Case Descriptions

The school attended by these students is located in a low socio-economic area of Perth, the metropolitan capital of WA. The enrolment of approximately 1,100 includes students of the following backgrounds: Anglo Australian, Southern European, (with a significant number from Croatia, Italy and Greece), South American, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Asian.

Retention rate to Year 12 is 73.5% which results in approximately 40% going to TAFE, 20% to university and 40% seeking employment including apprenticeships (Bridging The Gap, 1996).

At the end of Year 10 students choose six subjects to study in Year 11. Subjects offered include TEE and non-TEE subjects. For university entrance students are required to study at least four TEE subjects. English is the only compulsory subject in Year 11 and 12 and a C grade is required for graduation. All subjects offered at this school are accredited by the Curriculum Council and lead to the West Australian Certificate of Education being awarded at the successful completion of Year 12. Three of the seven students in this study met school graduation requirements. (See Table 4.2.)

As indicated in Table 4.2, Senior English is the level of English studied by all participants. Other common subjects include Work Studies and Modelling with Mathematics. Students were selected for this research from Work Studies classes. The fact that they all studied Maths was coincidental.

Name	Subjects Studied and Grades					
Angelo	Senior English	Work Studies	Modelling with Mathematics	Music	Industrial Workshop	Business Studies
	D	F	C	B	C	F
Peter	Senior English	Work Studies	Modelling with Mathematics	Law	Industrial Workshop	Furniture Woodwork
	D	D	F	D	C	D
Michael	Senior English	Work Studies	Modelling with Mathematics	Physical Education Studies	Industrial Workshop	Furniture Woodwork
	D	F	D	D	C	D
Belinda	Senior English	Work Studies	Modelling with Mathematics	Law	Independent Living	Word Processing
	B	A	A	B	A	A
John	Senior English	Work Studies	Modelling with Mathematics	Industrial Workshop	Independent Living	Business Studies
	B	C	B	B	C	C
Mark	Senior English	Work Studies	Modelling with Mathematics	Music	Industrial Workshop	Drama
	D	D	F	A	D	D
Dajna	Senior English	Work Studies	Modelling with Mathematics	Early Childhood Studies	Independent Living	Word Processing
	C	B	D	C	C	B

Table 4.2: Subjects studied by participants and grades awarded at completion of Year 12.

During Year 10 all students are placed for one week of work experience as part of compulsory Career Education. The success of this subject is indicated by the fact that the school has two Year 11 and two Year 12 Work Studies classes, approximately 25% of upper school students. Year 11 students are able to do four weeks' work experience but most opt for two for various reasons including missing too much school work and a failure to get organised on time. Year 12 students may do two weeks' work experience, generally opting for one for similar reasons. Two teachers were involved in teaching the course.

Angelo

Angelo, of Italian descent, thought he wanted to pursue a career in mechanics to support his part time work as a drummer in a local band. However a family friend invited him to try clerical work in his import-export agency. Angelo thought that was a girls' job and he didn't want to be a secretary. However, he tried it and liked it. A traineeship was set up with South Metropolitan Youth Link and Angelo commenced work five days after leaving school.

I had arranged to meet Angelo at school at the end of his working day. My intention was to interview him in my classroom but realised our cars were best not left unattended as evening approached. Angelo had already thought this through too, and arrived in a work vehicle instead of his new car! The interview was conducted in my car which was less ideal than my classroom where we would have both been more relaxed. For the talkative person I thought Angelo to be, he was not easy to "get talking" in the interview. At school he had started his final year with enthusiasm and energy which petered out to a fairly unproductive effort in Work Studies. At the end of Year 12, Angelo was awarded B for Music, C for Modelling with Mathematics and Industrial Workshop, D for Senior English, and F for Work Studies and Business Studies.

Angelo's job as a Junior involved completing the paperwork for importing and exporting goods. He had telephone duties, worked on the computer (mainly spreadsheets) and ran errands, picked up releases for cargo, measured up cargo and received cargo.

There was nothing about school which Angelo believed had helped him
make the transition to work, except socialising. In retrospect he felt he should
have studied computing.

He continued in his part time work as a drummer in a band without letting it
interfere with his full time position.

Angelo's employer

At the shipping office, Angelo was under the auspices of Silvana, the office
manager and accountant, who had never previously been involved in training a
school leaver. Silvana was very reluctant to talk with me because of her workload.
The initial appointment was rescheduled providing "it only takes 20 minutes..."
The company started with two people and was expanding rapidly. There was
potential for Angelo's advancement from the office junior to an operations
position and a sales position.

Although Angelo gained employment through his network, he was appointed
under the traineeship scheme through South Metro Youth Link with TAFE
providing some off-the-job training. Silvana expressed disappointment in the
training "It's just basically like learning out of a manual...he's just doing
worksheets." Silvana was proactive in contacting South Metro Youth Link in an
attempt to improve the training Angelo was getting. Silvana was also experiencing
some frustration with on-the-job training because she felt Angelo was lacking in
reading skills, thinking skills, initiative and energy. Silvana had worked in a lot of

offices in her time, and claimed this shipping office to be exceptionally busy. Angelo did not get caught up in the energy of the office which surprised her.

Silvana had regular contact with Angelo during the working week, but once a month organised a formal meeting to discuss his progress. She felt that Angelo thought he was doing really well, but she was not impressed with his progress. She did not want to "give him the false impression that he's doing great and fantastic, or…really burst his bubble" (Silvana). She expressed self-doubt at her ability to train school leavers and wondered if the firm would employ Angelo at the conclusion of the traineeship.

Angelo's parents

I interviewed Angelo's mother, Gloria, in the family home, six weeks later. She was impressed with Angelo's job prospects as he had his own computer now and the company had told him that when the traineeship finished five months later they would be employing him. As Angelo's school year was drawing to a close, she noticed a change in Angelo. "He was a horror. I came to the stage where I hated him. And then all of a sudden he got this job." (Gloria). She realises now his behaviour was caused by the stress of trying to find a job and not wanting to go on at school. Angelo started the job five days after completing Year 12.

Gloria saw "getting the job" as very positive for the family. She was more relaxed which impacted on the family. Angelo was more responsible and had regained the confidence she saw him losing.

The family had supported Angelo by offering encouragement in his job search and lending him money to purchase a car. Angelo had since paid that back, an example of his acceptance of responsibility.

Peter

Peter was passionate about cars. Throughout Years 11 and 12 he developed expertise in wiring cars with stereo sound systems. His bicycle was even wired up with a two speaker sound system. Peter, who was born in Portugal, gained a part time position through a friend as a driveway attendant at a garage where he hoped to gain an apprenticeship. The part time became full time as Peter left school. The garage changed hands and Peter thought that was the end of the apprenticeship opportunity, but at odd times when his driveway was free of customers, Peter displayed an interest in assisting the new owner mechanic. The new owners (husband and wife) offered him an apprenticeship three months later in spite of the fact that business was poor… "we were struggling".

At school, Peter's attendance and punctuality record was excellent, but he did little work resulting in poor school grades. If he had relied on a school report to get him to interview stage in a job application, he would have been unsuccessful. Peter was awarded a C grade for Industrial Workshop and D grades in all other subjects except Modelling with Mathematics, which he failed. Because of his poor school grades, Peter did not meet graduation requirements and was not offered a pre-apprenticeship at TAFE. He felt that work experience really helped him get to know a working environment. The only thing about school which

helped in the transition was learning responsibility in Work Studies classes and yet Peter had accepted no responsibility to complete work in the class. He agreed he had learned the lesson well, because he was totally responsible in the workplace.

Peter took a substantial pay cut in accepting the apprenticeship working with Ken in the garage instead of on the forecourt. His take home pay fell from $360 to $190. The employers pay $80 per week to the Motor Industry Training Association of WA for Peter's training. Peter had started full time work on the forecourt of the garage one week after finishing Year 12. The apprenticeship was offered five months later.

Peter described the work as a lot harder than school where you need to study. He had difficulty describing in what way it was harder, agreeing with me it was physically harder. He now got up much earlier than when going to school and returns home later. He likes working the long hours, "The more I work, the more I like it." (Peter).

His work involved "trying to find a problem in a car, and trying to cure it." (Peter). He also helped out serving petrol on the forecourt if the garage gets busy. He went to the Motor Industry Training Association for theory sessions once a week. The theory is easier than school work according to Peter.

I interviewed Peter in my car at his workplace.

Peter's employer

At the workplace, I spoke with Suzanne who did the bookwork for the garage. It was well into the interview before I established that she co-owned the business with her husband, the mechanic. They had intended to gain financially through a small government grant to train Peter for 12 months, but "12 months is a long time in a boy's life. He's wasted it as regards his apprenticeship, so he does a year and then his four year apprenticeship." Instead of accepting the training package the owners put him straight into an apprenticeship.

Peter's employers have had previous experience in Scotland training apprentices. "I'm quite used to boys coming in at this age from school as apprentices" (Suzanne). She is not aware of any stages they go through in transition from school to work. "They're either confident or they're not." (Suzanne).

Suzanne did not feel justified in commenting on what school could do to prepare students for transition to work. She didn't have first hand knowledge of the school system in WA "with not being in this country very long and not even served in these schools. I'm not even familiar with the sort of stuff they have here" (Suzanne). Commenting on Peter's skills, she said she was not sure if "he learnt them at school or in his own back shed."

Suzanne recognised Peter's interest and skills in "'electrics'...cause I think that's his niche...he's just very good at it already." Although his apprenticeship is in mechanics, she saw a need to do some parallel training in that specialty area.

Peter's Parents

In spite of the fact that Peter and his older brother support their invalid parents by buying the food and paying bills, the parents were keen for Peter to take the apprenticeship offer in spite of the pay cut. Peter pointed out that his parents speak only Portuguese and so thought there was no point in me talking to them. He declined the use of an interpreter. Peter's parents don't want him to spend his money. His father "sorta puts my money in the bank straight away. I don't really get to touch it much. He's trying to help me save up so I can fix my car and everything." (Peter).

Michael

Michael's close knit Croatian family encouraged him to get full time work. Michael, through Work Studies, had completed work experience at a garage owned by two brothers who, like Michael, were migrants from Croatia. Shortly after finishing Year 12 Michael met one of the brothers by chance and was invited to come and work at the garage as an apprentice. Michael accepted the offer, starting a three month trial period one week after leaving school and was well into his mechanics' apprenticeship when I interviewed him. Michael's interest in car racing was satisfied by the firm's involvement in drag car racing.

Like Peter, Michael's poor school grades would not have encouraged an employer to offer him a position. He gained a C grade in Industrial Studies, D grades in all other subjects except Work Studies, which he failed. He did not graduate.

Michael found the change to full time work from Year 12 a big change which took him a while to get used to. He commented on the hours being much longer and on the dress - wearing old clothes and safety boots. A similarity was having someone tell you what to do, like teachers at school.

He found servicing the cars quite easy but "I get the boss to help me…if I do something wrong, I always get him along to show me." (Michael). Michael also dealt directly with customers, and answered the phone. He managed the TAFE component of his apprenticeship very well "passing everything, averaging around 80-100%. So it's good." (Michael).

From the school perspective, Michael felt Work Studies "woulda helped me out heaps. Because that's the only course I really liked, 'cause that's one way of trying to get a job, make sure I get a good job, you know"…and it helped "teach you how to change from school to go to work…that's what really helped me out." Work Studies also helped me "doing phone calls, and organising it (work experience) all and communicating with people."

Michael's family "supported me very well. 100% all the way they supported me." (Michael). They encouraged him to accept full time work and assisted with transport by lending, then buying him a car.

I interviewed Michael and then his father in the family home.

Michael's employer

On three occasions Michael suggested his employers would be far too busy to talk to me about his work. Respecting his comments, I did not attempt to contact his employer.

Michael's parents

Michael's mother, the most vocal person in the family, spoke excellent English but was too busy baking to spend time with me. Although his father, Igor, spoke halting English and was not keen to speak with me, I was able to gain from him a little information related to my study. He felt it was important that Michael had finished Year 12 but couldn't say why. He saw Michael as "a quiet boy in school, he listens to family and everything." (Igor). He saw that Michael was lucky to have the job "I happy when you got that. Not like the other kids on the street and sort of thing. He lucky be working."

Michael's family helped finance his transport. Igor expressed pleasure in Michael's choice of friends "we got good friends. They come here. Never drinking kids."

Igor had visited Michael's workplace and spoken with the boss who he said "is very happy (with Michael)."

Changes to the family since Michael entered full time work included loss of room in the garage for another car, more tools in the shed and fewer chores done by Michael because he comes home so late.

Belinda

Belinda, of Italian descent, was an outgoing and highly organised Year 12 student. Her excellent school results included four A grades and two B grades at the end of Year 12. She actively sought out my assistance in compiling job applications and her resume. Through the Yellow Pages she targeted doctors' surgeries with her applications, and eight weeks after leaving school, was successful in gaining a position at a busy medical centre at the end of her street. Her energy and bubbly personality have been valued by her employers. Belinda visited me in my office at school for her interview. She used traditional job seeking skills – visiting CES, buying the newspaper and sending out unsolicited letters to gain her position.

Her work in the doctors' surgery involved getting files out, putting them away, filing letters, answering the phone, collecting the mail, ordering the lunches, clearing the dishes, and then any other jobs the doctors asked of her. She found the filing easy to do but the phone was occasionally a problem "'cause I'm only new. You get these people ringing up about things I've never heard of."

(Belinda). This problem, she said, will be alleviated with training involving learning medical terminology. She hoped to move out of filing and more into the receptionist position.

Belinda found the change to full time work quite easy to cope with because of the experience she had with part time employment in a clothing outlet.

In comparing work to school she agreed she needed to be more mature because "you're mixing with older people, not mucking around, sort of acting like idiots...the stupid things you used to do at school, laughing and all that sort of thing changed..." (Belinda). In order to avoid making mistakes, she felt she needed to listen more carefully than when at school.

Belinda said her parents were pretty supportive in getting on her back to get a job. Her parents also helped her purchase a car. This money is being paid back. She pays her own private health coverage and car insurance and license.

Belinda's employer

Belinda was the first Year 12 school leaver the centre had employed. Rita, the practice manager, was difficult to schedule for an interview because of her busy day. She was able to schedule a short time for me at the practice. Rita was impressed with Belinda's confidence. "Well she was very confident from Day One actually (laughs)...probably the exception to the rule (laughs)." I wondered if this confidence had proved a threat to other employees. "At times I'd say yes, at

times I'd say the general perception could be she's over-confident, ummm, but basically she knows her limits…and the others tend to be probably a little bit tolerant, because they know that's part of her personality." Rita described Belinda as having a good relationship with the staff and being able to work in a team situation.

Rita commented on Belinda's excellent communication skills but wasn't sure whether she'd learned them through her personality or through school. "She's been very successful…communicated well with the medical practitioners, with the staff, she's got good inter-personal skills…she was able to pick up the job fairly quickly." (Rita). Some of her skills could be attributed to her part time work according to Rita.

From a school perspective Rita saw the value of work experience in helping prepare young people for the change from "a sheltered environment (school) to an open environment (work)." (Rita). Parents, according to Rita, need to "treat children as individuals and work out where their strong points are and probably encourage them" but she felt some parents never think their children are ready for the workforce.

Belinda's parent

I interviewed Belinda's mother at home where she paid credit to her daughter's independence and thorough organisation which she felt was partly developed through part time work. She felt Belinda had coped very well with the

transition from school to work. She believed her employers were very happy with her, giving her a pay rise already and expecting her to one day run the busy surgery.

There was nothing about school which she was able to say had helped Belinda. She felt she had done it all herself.

There had been no major changes in the family because Belinda had moved into full time work, except she now did her own ironing and packed her own lunch. All other chores were done by Belinda's mother.

Belinda was paying her parents for her sister's car, but her mother said she would eventually get that money back.

John

In Year 12, John completed a work experience session at a large vehicle service centre and was invited to put in an application for an apprenticeship. He gained the position because "a lot of mechanics recommended me… and I had many references (for work experience) like stonemason, a panel beater, Police Force" and the service manager was "kinda impressed that I gave up my school holidays to do work experience." He began working for the service centre four weeks after leaving school.

John said he never found it hard to get jobs (part time) in the past, jobs just came his way. "Getting a job and all, it seemed really simple for me. I went on work experience there. You know, just be yourself. I was like I am you know, just inquisitive and everything, you know, seem really interested..." (John).

It was difficult trying to organise a time for an interview with John. The centre's service personnel were most supportive in joking John into making a time. He forgot the first time, but my second attempt was successful with a take-away lunch enjoyed overlooking Bibra Lake. John was reluctant to end this interview as he obviously enjoyed having someone to talk to about his achievements in work.

John tended to describe his job in negative terms. "I'm a first year apprentice motor mechanic. That's all very exciting but it sucks, basically...I mean it's good, you know. I'm really rapt that I got it, but it's really hard." My interpretation of the conversation I had with John was that really he liked his job and was looking forward to the added responsibilities in the second year of his apprenticeship, but liked to sound "cool".

He admitted the first year was "basically a cleaner where you clean floors, you know clean...drive cars around." This was confirmed by William, the service manager... "it's a bit of a slog, starting from the bottom...it's noisy, smelly, dirty work." John found the hours very long, 7:30am until after 6:00pm. He is supposed to finish at 4:30pm but cannot because his role is to clean up as the mechanics finish. He was paid overtime for his extra hours.

John felt the job involved lots more responsibilities than school "…so much responsibility. It makes you feel important. It's good." He felt valued as an employee especially being "given $1200 worth of tools" on his first day. These are being paid for by John over two years.

Similarities to school included homework (from TAFE) and getting growled at when you "stuff up". Work experience had been particularly valuable to John, because that was how he got his position. He believed the level of responsibility encouraged in the Work Studies class was also of good value. John's school results included three B grades and three C grades.

John's family

John lived with an older sister and his father who John suggested would be too busy to talk to me. John chose to take the interview questions and get his father to answer them, but lost the questions. He asked me to send him the questions again, but there has been no response to them. His sister who John says has trouble getting jobs, had supported him in typing job applications and his resumé, and his father, according to John, actively encouraged him in his work.

Before he got his job he went to work for two nights with his father "just to get the idea of…you know, just to get the feeling of like, actually working for your money. So just to introduce me to what it's gonna be like" (John). John especially valued the way his father listened to him talk about his day at work, and for making his lunch for him each night. John pays $30.00 a week board, and does

chores around the house, although he feels they have got more technical with his increased skill level. "I noticed that our shower was…blocked or something…I just got my screwdriver set out…and put it back together and saw it run proper."

John's employer

To get the employer perspective I spoke to the service manager, William, in the service centre. John's official employer was the Motor Industry Training Association with the service centre the host employer. William, who ran "the workshop and technical support and advises management of the need to change policy or procedures", has been involved in training many apprentices. He saw a contrast between the perception of the motor industry as "romantic…fast cars and flashy cars" in contrast to "the sense that it's noisy, smelly, dirty work and you start from the bottom…sweep the floor, empty the bins, and then slowly work your way up."

William, who tended to discuss apprentices in general rather than John, believes the right attitude is vital for success in this industry. He is instrumental in "counselling them (apprentices) in the correct attitude to have." He valued work experience, and felt that schools need to instil "a fierce drive to learn and as quickly as possible…and an even fiercer will to try and teach yourself" (William). Science and Maths at Year 11 and 12 level were subjects he saw as valuable in mechanics.

Home environment was important to young people, according to William, and parents needed to offer encouragement to their children and more guidance in career choice.

Mark

During Year 12 Mark, originally from England, had part time work at a local supermarket. He was a very social student who enjoyed his role on the Student Council and involvement with the school's music program. His school results, however, were quite poor. When I first made contact with Mark he had no full time work, but several weeks later I happened upon him in the local shopping centre. He had spent four months roof tiling immediately he left school and was then working full time in the fresh produce department of the supermarket where previously he had a part time position.

His job involved customer service and making sure the fruit and vegetable department was stocked. He believed he had "lots of opportunities behind him now" and if he does leave the job he has skills and qualifications to get another job in the same field. He had done no formal training to gain qualifications but developed interpersonal skills with customers.

To him school was a social event with time off after school to keep socialising with friends. In the transition to work, getting a job was a contrast "like running into a brick wall…it just hits you all at once." He commented on the

need to be "heaps more organised" and the stress of greater responsibility. Mark used the leadership skills he developed in the school council to "direct new staff."

The main difference from school was that there were "heaps more responsibilities" and "actually doing it (work)" because it has to be done rather than for assessment like at school. "I was very slack with my assignments...I don't think I was as dedicated as I am now." (Mark). He gained an A grade in Music, D grades in all other subjects except Modelling with Mathematics, which he failed. He did not graduate. He saw the wearing of a uniform for work and the regular hours as similarities with school.

Mark was the only ex-student who didn't have a driver's license. He used public transport to get around, or lifts with friends. His mother said they ran him around but Mark said "No, they leave that (transport) up to me, that's my responsibility." He paid $70.00 a week board (his mother said $40.00) and had washing done for him and meals cooked.

According to Mark, he got on very well with his employer believing he was respected but "I feel I've earned the respect really. I've worked well...I deserve it" (Mark). He found it difficult to get everything done at once... "like if the broccolis all go empty you have to do a broccoli, but then the lettuce might be empty as well, so you gotta do that, and then the onions, so it all just builds up...you don't have four arms." He has looked in other vegetable shops to see how they display their produce and takes pride in his displays... "you spend all the time making the display look perfect and then someone will come and just

ruin it straight away" but he considered it worthwhile when customers told him how nice his display looked.

Mark's parent

Mark had a twin sister and when his mother spoke with me about Mark's career path in the supermarket and her belief about his future (she expected he would eventually follow in his father's footsteps and become a Salvation Army Pastor), the twin sister came up frequently in the discussion. In Mark, his mother saw a very caring person who she describes as "a people person". Mark looked out for the down and out and "collects people". She expressed Mark's concern at racist comments made by customers about the Vietnamese employers and employees in the supermarket.

In his transition to work, Mark's mother felt he had adjusted better than she would have thought. With the tiling job he went "bull at a gate and tired himself out so quickly and it was all a bit too much for him"… but with the other job at the supermarket he "adapted well…I think he enjoyed the responsibility." (Mark's mother).

School had helped Mark develop in confidence, according to his mother and had given him the opportunity to accept responsibility through the Student Council.

Mark's mother's understanding of his role at work tended to lack reality. She believed Mark's position was "second in charge, manager of the supermarket." According to Mark his role was simply the stocking of the fruit and vegetable section. The owners were referred to as loving Mark and she believed they treated him as a family member. The owners were Vietnamese, not Chinese as she believed, and Mark was not doing a course in business management as she suggested.

I interviewed Mark's mother in my office at school, the venue she nominated.

Mark's employer

Han, the Vietnamese owner of the supermarket was reluctant to speak to me because of his time constraints, his negative feelings towards employing youth and the fact that he didn't think he would be able to help my research. Of all employers, he displayed the most understanding of what research was actually about. After three visits to the supermarket and several phone calls, I was able to find a moment of his time, and conducted the interview in the supermarket office. He tended to generalise about his employees rather than speak about Mark specifically.

Han had arrived in Australia 11 years previously wearing "United Nations shorts, shirt and thongs". He had since had his family join him and was able to purchase the supermarket three years ago. He was keen to employ young people

in this supermarket, but was disappointed by "the system". "I talked to most of the store people like us. We are scared about to employ the people... because they too much trouble, too much hassle... I blame the system, not the individual." Han was alluding to the fact that once you take on an employee, it is extremely difficult to get rid of them should they prove unsuitable. Another issue which bothered him was the wasted time in interviewing possible employees "we scared to advertise the job because we don't have time to interview 10, 20 people, but those people only come for get the record to show the CES that they are looking for work!"

An issue Han raised was the fear supermarket owners (and possibly many other employers) have of going to work on a Monday or especially after a long weekend... "I very scared when the long weekend come in because the following day there's always someone missing... always sick... tired... can't come to work because they enjoy too much the weekend... and they are half asleep and can't remember anything. Maybe you know, overdose or something, you know. Monday's nowhere. The brain is blank – nothing." To help school leavers cope with transition from school to work, Han believes parents should "control them".

He believed the school system in WA was very good. Han could not suggest ways to improve the school system.

Dajna

Dajna saw her two biggest problems in getting work were her spelling and her lack of confidence. She was from a home where Italian was spoken most of

the time and her spelling difficulty was attributed to English being her second language. She was very praiseworthy of her Work Studies classes for pushing her beyond her comfort zone, encouraging her to be involved in discussion and make oral presentations to the group. Dajna worked hard at school earning B grades in Work Studies and Word Processing, C grades in Senior English and Independent Living, and D grades in Modelling with Mathematics and Early Childhood Studies.

After leaving Year 12, Dajna worked hard to get full time work. At the CES she learned of a Youth Training Course which covered the first steps into work for youth. She attended several Skillshare courses and six weeks after leaving school gained part time employment at a post office/newsagency. She attended TAFE part time by choice, not as a requirement of her employment. Several weeks after I interviewed her, Dajna gained a full time position in an office in South Perth.

Dajna's job at the post office/newsagency involved putting magazines on display, sorting the cards and serving customers. She felt school and work were very different. "The school stuff doesn't really come into it." (Dajna). Because she was always standing Dajna got very sore feet but she soon got used to that.

One of her main difficulties was understanding customers "way of talking" when they were joking. "You've got to get used to figuring out if it's a joke or not." (Dajna). "No one can really prepare you (for work)... you've just got to get used to it." (Dajna). She felt the best thing she did at school was Work Studies because it helped build her confidence by making her speak in group discussions.

Dajna lived with her parents, grandmother and disabled brother. She felt that the patience she had developed in dealing with her family helped her cope with some of the difficulties she experienced with employers and customers. The owner's mother worked with Dajna each week. Dajna found she was often short tempered and tended to blame Dajna for her own errors. This was stressful for Dajna.

Dajna believed her parents had been very supportive. Really they wanted to see her in full time work, but saw part time as a stepping stone to achieve that goal. They had assisted her with transport with the loan of a car and later purchased a car for her birthday.

Dajna's parents

I interviewed Dajna, and then her parents in the family home. Dajna was a little guarded in what she said in case grandmother was listening. It was difficult to transcribe some parts of the interview with the parents because of their limited command of English, and the fact that both sometimes responded to the question at the one time.

Dajna's father was convinced that school did not do enough practical work to prepare students for work. Prospective employers had replied to Dajna's job applications in the negative because Dajna had no experience. "If you come outta school, where you getta experience if you don't get a job?" (Dajna's father). He

suggested more opportunities for longer work experience while at school to gain experience.

Dajna's employer

Dajna was not keen for me to make contact with the employer and I respected her wishes on this matter.

Because Dajna's appointment had been part time I did not intend to use her as part of the sample. Instead I interviewed her as my pilot study and as none of the interview questions were altered for the remainder of the study I have included her in my sample. The fact that she had part time work and TAFE, she still can be used in the sample as some respondents had part time TAFE as part of their traineeship or apprenticeship.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Overview

In this chapter the case descriptions in Chapter 4 will be analysed in terms of

the research questions. Each research question is discussed using the categories

which emerged from the transcriptions.

This chapter also serves to discuss the findings of the research in the light of

the literature consulted in Chapter 2. Links are made between the transition

process and teaching and learning in post compulsory schooling.

What are the transition experiences of Year 12 school leavers as they enter full time paid employment?

During the transition from school to work it was revealed that for many, their

lives had appeared to have undergone a significant change. Ex-students believed

they had acquired freedom and independence and were pleased to be meeting new

people. At home they were treated with more respect and in a more mature and

responsible manner.

> "...there is a feeling that beginning work is the beginning of
>
> adult life and independence, which involves freedom from the
>
> rules and restrictions of school, working life may appear to be a

new and glamorous change in status from school child to working adult. Many adolescents view their working life in happy contrast to their school lives feeling that they are more mature, independent and responsible." (West & Newton, 1983, p.150).

In this study, ex-students acknowledged that they felt more responsible and more mature. Parents too felt their child had matured and that increased responsibilities at work were being accepted by the new "worker". In contrasting school life to working life, Peter admitted he had "changed from something that I don't really like (school), to something that I love doing and I'm getting paid for it as well. So it's been pretty good. It's a really good feeling."

Students admitted that although being freed from the rules and restrictions of school mentioned above, they had entered into a new world of rules to which some struggled to adapt. Ginzberg et al, (cited in West & Newton, 1983) argued that the change from school to work life is so great and so "drastic that the school leaver suffers a period of 'foundering' whilst adapting to the new norms, values and practises of working life." (West & Newton, 1983, p.145).

Dajna certainly went through a "floundering" period as she adapted to requirements of her job in the newsagency and dealing with difficult customers and awkward supervisors. She felt that her experiences at home, learning patience with a grandmother had helped her cope with difficult customers and a more

elderly supervisor in the workplace... "you have to get used to their moods and stuff."

Categories which emerged from data collected in the interviews included physical changes with which I had to cope, skills I learned or needed to learn, feelings I had, dealing with hierarchy, and social changes I made.

Physical changes with which I had to cope

"You come home and you're just dead. Straight to sleep" was Angelo's response to a question on the change he experienced as he moved into full time work. "And it's a lot harder than school...physically harder...but you don't have to go home and study for two hours a night...you just go to work, do it, and then just go home" said Peter, who rarely did any study while at school.

The hours are much longer than school hours in all cases. Peter claimed he liked working long hours "The more I work the more I like it. Something I really like doing. I don't really take notice of the time when I'm working." Others commented on getting up earlier, or starting the same time as school but coming home much later. "I started getting sore feet" said Dajna and then reassured "but it's okay now. I just had to adjust because I'm always standing...all day...with half an hour to sit (small laugh)...whereas I sat all day for school."

Some ex-students commented on a change in diet. Mark, who works in the fruit and vegetable department of a supermarket, claims "I even eat my vegies

now! (laughs) I've worked out new recipes...I know how to cook vegies and everything." His mother commented on the huge meals he ate. In contrast Belinda has lost "4 kilos since I left school...my goodness I used to eat heaps. But not any more."

Dress at work was often contrasted with school dress..."like at school I used to wear trackie pants and all that and now it's like tie, pants, shirt...have to do your hair." (Angelo). In Belinda's case she ended up in a similar uniform to that worn at school. Uniforms were not enforced as they had been at school..."it's not a strict uniform, but I like to wear it 'cause it's just annoying when customers come up to you and they ask you 'Do you work at this shop?'" (Mark). Others wore T-shirts with a business logo, and safety boots were required by the apprentice mechanics.

Skills I learned or needed to learn

Skills ex-students learned included telephone skills, "you have to talk really polite" (Angelo); recording information from phone conversations; money handling skills; patience with customers; leadership skills, because "I've gotta direct new staff" (Mark); and organisational skills to fit all the tasks in when you're rushed. "You've gotta take orders from everyone and it has to be done straight away. Whereas school, you get told and you'd always have maybe a couple of days or a night or whatever to do it in. Working, it has to be done straight away" (Belinda).

Through Work Studies at school students practise telephone skills as they prepare for work experience. This limited practice could be extended to incorporate more phone calls including the recording of information from phone conversations. Organisational skills are practised across the school curriculum as students juggle the work load from all subjects, prioritising assignments in order of importance and getting the job done. Belinda's comment however, suggests the need to practise getting the work done straight away rather than having several days to do it.

Dealing with hierarchy

Dealing with hierarchy 'of authority' posed minor areas of concern in some workplaces. Having to take orders from several bosses (instead of one teacher), or dealing with moods of an elderly supervisor were two examples. Dajna was frustrated working with someone she perceived as "really old...she must be in her sixties, late sixties" who she felt tried to blame her for mistakes which were not her fault. When selling lotto tickets, customers often changed their mind leaving the seller holding an 'unsold' ticket. Dajna was often the brunt of this woman's anger because the customer had changed their mind. There was nothing about school which she felt had helped her cope with this. In Work Studies, Dajna had been taught a letter writing strategy to cope with anger but had not attempted to use it in this case. The strategy involves writing to the person who is making you angry, expressing all your feelings. The letter is never given to that person, but is amended and burnt helping the letter writer release their anger.

All ex-students had at least six teachers at school, or six "bosses" giving them instructions. However, because the teachers are in different rooms and timeslots the ex-student did not consider them as giving orders like several bosses in the same workplace. Subjects at school tend to be "compartmentalised" with very little linkage seen by the students.

Other employees, as well as employers, play a valuable role according to Dusseldorp Skills Forum (1996, p.29) as a source of work attitudes as well as developing workplace skills and knowledge. Their behaviour demonstrates to young employees teamwork and interpersonal skills.

Peter, who had one boss, described the relationship with his employer as more of a partnership. "I get along with him really well. He's a really good boss. He's a really nice person…If I accidentally stuff something up, he quickly comes along, helps me out, and he doesn't get angry with me or anything." Michael, like Peter, "gets along good" with his bosses. Both Michael and Peter had respect for their teachers at school and enjoyed a good relationship with them. This respect was more likely to have been instilled by family rather than through school. John, working in a large service centre, valued the buddy system where a more experienced apprentice or tradesperson is appointed buddy or mentor for a young apprentice. John believed he got on pretty well with everyone at work as he had done at school.

Feelings I had

Some ex-students admitted feelings of nervousness as they started their new jobs. According to Angelo's employer, he was so nervous he was physically ill, which led to much teasing by his work mates. Angelo did not admit to this. Some were nervous about doing something wrong, or "being shamed" when growled at by employers.

Carter (cited in West & Newton, 1983, p.95), reported on his qualitative study that adolescents worried about things like turning up at the wrong entrance or whether they would be able to do the work without making mistakes. All students in my study had previously been involved in school based work experience which alleviated the first worry mentioned in Carter's study by having several "practises" at going to new places for work. Several expressed concern at making mistakes at work, even expecting to get the sack.

Social changes I made

Social changes experienced included making new friends, often older than themselves, and seeing much less of school friends. Some were of the view they missed school friends, but others were quite happy to see less of them. One new employee found she suddenly had nothing to do in the evenings. "Like I wasn't used to watching TV 'cause I always had homework to do. I used to be on the phone, and I went to bed a bit earlier" (Belinda).

Ex-students made social changes within the workplace as well as outside the workplace in their spare time. As discussed in the literature review, the first stage of socialisation to work, according to Van Maanen (cited in West & Newton 1983, p.109) is the degree to which an employee is prepared for entry to the workforce from family, school, peers and cultural influences. In the current study Dajna was probably the least prepared because of her lack of skills and self-confidence. She had had no part time work to help build confidence and skills. Her sheltered home environment, where parents were the main decision makers, was not conducive to building self-confidence, whereas Work Studies at school had been. Once she completed Year 12 she attempted to address this shortfall by attending many government run courses. All other students except Michael had part time work which they valued for developing skills and confidence. Michael entered the workplace with confidence and some skills because he had completed two weeks' work experience at the mechanical workshop where he started his full time work. His personal interest in cars meant he had developed some knowledge of that work. Mark and Peter were employed because of part time work in the same company, and John because of work experience. Angelo appeared very confident but was nervous enough to be physically ill on his first day.

School is endeavouring to prepare students better for the transition to work with more opportunities for work experience and vocational programs which build industry specific skills.

The "reality shock" is the second stage in Van Maanen's study (West & Newton, 1983, p.110). John, at the service centre, certainly saw his job as very

glamorous at first, driving new cars, but when reality set in he realised it was mainly a cleaning job.

Van Maanen's (West & Newton, 1983, p.111) third stage is the metamorphosis stage or the way employees change to remain in the workplace. John needed to work with more energy to be successful according to his employer. Angelo, too, needed to work more energetically as well as lift his ability to think and improve his telephone manner.

In the smaller garage where Peter worked, Suzanne acknowledged a growth in self-esteem as the young employee became more confident. "I think they are either confident or they're not. I think working here in time does give them some confidence." Belinda appeared to be "very confident from Day One" according to her employer. She seemed exceptional in that she picked up tasks very quickly, communicated very well and had good interpersonal skills.

When West and Newton (1983) asked their sample of ex-students in full time work "All things considered, are you happier now than when you were at school?" Over two thirds of the sample said they were much happier. The ex-students in the present study all had an optimistic enthusiasm for their work, saying they either liked or loved their work. Peter was the only ex-student who compared school with work claiming he had changed from something he didn't really like (school) to something he loved (work). Even Dajna who was stressed because of a difficult supervisor, loved what she was doing.

Summary

It can be said that the students benefited from part time work or school based work experience as they made the transition to full time work. Previous experience helped build confidence, skills such as dealing with people and work specific skills.

Students did not appear to go through a common transition process. Some were nervous on their first day, some very confident. Several were physically tired because of the longer working day. Most related well to other employees and adapted to the work hierarchy. All agreed they had more responsibilities and were treated in a more mature manner.

The build up to whether they were going to actually get full time work seemed more stressful to them and their families than actually making the transition. Once they settled at work they all expressed positive enthusiasm for their jobs.

What are the students' perceptions of the contribution of post compulsory education to the transition?

Students found difficulty in deciding how school had helped them in their transition from school to work. Because the research was qualitative, lists of possible answers were not offered to prompt memories. Students had to think of responses. This contrasts with a study by The Australian Council for Educational Research (1991) Year 12 students who entered the workforce directly from school

were surveyed using a questionnaire offering a range of categories. Ex-students believed school had helped them in developing confidence, self esteem, the ability to work independently as well as job search skills. The ex-students were not surveyed until two years after leaving school, whereas in the current study, students were interviewed within six months of leaving school thus, improving insight into the "immediate" transition from school to work.

Categories relevant to this research question which emerged from the transcripts included *the influence of teachers, subjects, work experience* and *other factors such as the Student Council.* Ex-students did not have a lot to say about how their post compulsory education had contributed to transition from school to work. Parents and employers offered suggestions on how post compulsory education could change.

Influence of teachers

Only two individual teachers were commented on by the ex-students as having contributed to their transition. The Work Studies teacher was mentioned as being of assistance in compiling resumes and letters of application, and one teacher "wrote my school reference" said Belinda, one of two in this study who searched for work using conventional techniques such as visiting CES and sending unsolicited letters to possible employers.

School subjects

School subjects mentioned by students included Word Processing, Work Studies, Industrial Workshop, Computers and Music. Belinda, who went into the doctors' surgery as a clerical assistant felt that word processing helped her get the job…"they were pretty impressed that I had skills in word processing. Like we did audio and stuff…and I told them and that's what they wanted me to get into, down there as well."

Industrial Workshop was mentioned by John as a subject in which he should have done better (he was neck and neck for the prize), but it made no difference to his success at moving into full time employment. Involvement in music helped develop Angelo's confidence according to his mother, and therefore helped him make the transition from school to work. "Once he got into the music, started playing in front of these people he just matured…'cause (prior to that) he had no confidence whatsoever." Angelo, who is learning computer skills at TAFE said he "should have done computers at school."

The subject Work Studies was mentioned by several students. This may have been because of the nature of the subject and its relationship to the workplace, or the fact that the interviewer was previously their Work Studies teacher. Work Studies was perceived to have contributed to the transition process in many positive ways. Dajna didn't think anyone (teachers) could prepare you to go into the workforce, but "Work Studies I think is the best thing, 'cause like we got in a circle and started talking, even like I didn't like doing that, it got me used to

talking. I mean I was really shy at the beginning and I didn't want to get up and talk, specially when you have to do those talks...and that really freaked me out. I didn't want to get up but I did...it made me feel better about myself in a way, but I'm still nervous about getting up." In contrast, Belinda, employed in a doctors' surgery, had communication skills way beyond her years according to her employer... "I think it's based on an individual rather than a general rule...but within Year 11 and 12, I think communication skills are something that they probably need to focus a bit more on", a point clarified by National Board of Employment, Education and Training (1995) in a survey of employers in the Eastern States, "graduates from all sectors (school, TAFE and university) are considered to have poor communication skills, including written, spoken and interpersonal communication." (National Board of Employment, Education and Training, 1995, p.19).

I asked Michael to clarify that Work Studies actually helped him get a job. "Yes. Teach you how to change from school to go to work, you know? Have to change. Yes, just the change from school to work, that's what really helped me...and like communicating...and phone calls...organising it all."

John was critical of Work Studies in the way it encourages self-responsibility. He valued the way he had become responsible and felt the responsibility expected in Work Studies was exactly the same as responsibility expected in the workplace. However he contradicted himself in saying the teacher should have more responsibility and make the students do their work. Peter admitted that Work Studies taught him responsibility. He also acknowledged that

although he was totally responsible in the workplace he had displayed very little responsibility in handing assignments in at school. His school grades (mainly Ds) had no influence on his gaining full time work, and he agrees he would not have reached interview in a job search through normal channels. Peter's trade skills were recognised by his employer. Hence he was offered the apprenticeship. According to a study of youth market recruitment, school assessment was not seen by business and industry participants as useful in selecting applicants. Ninety five percent of employers interviewed did not use school grades in selection processes, instead using attitude, keenness and willingness to work, an interest in the area and experience in customer service (National Board of Employment, Education and Training, 1995).

Work experience

Employers and parents alike saw the value of school based work experience in preparing young people for the transition to work. Super (1957) regarded work experience as an asset in job seeking. He saw it as evidence of "knowing something of the ways of the world of work, of responsibility and dependability." (Super, 1957, p.110). Two students gained their full time positions as a result of having completed work experience in that business. Peter said "work experience helped me a lot. I knew what it was like to go into a working environment…apart from that I don't think school would have mattered with how I came up with the job." Peter's employer wasn't sure if Peter had learned his skills through school or "in his back shed."

Waterhouse and Turner (1996) recognised that work experience as part of transition education has been "exposed to a heavy dose of economic realism ...(some colleagues) are sceptical of the value of a week of work experience, particularly when set against the consequent loss of teaching time." (Waterhouse & Turner, 1996, p.33). They see that the "enduring rationale for work experience is found in the pupils' recognition of its importance in clarifying and exploring their role in society: in terms of self and identity, and in assisting their status passage from adolescence to adulthood." (Waterhouse & Turner, 1996, p.33).

For Super (1957), seeking clarification about self is a critical step in the transition process. "A well-formulated self-concept, which takes into account the realities of the working world, makes an easier transition from school to work, than does a hazy and unrealistic concept of self." (Super, 1957, p.111). Belinda certainly had a well formulated self-concept and made a very easy transition from school to work.

These comments are reinforced in the recommendations made by the Finn Report, "The curriculum must allow for a range of learning styles and, in particular, for experiential learning. In the schools sector this will require a stronger commitment to integrated and appropriately structured work experience." (Australian Education Council Review Committee, 1991, p.53).

In helping the students cope with the transition experience the school program could allow time for more work experience through which students practise life skills mentioned in the data as well as exposing them to possible

employment. Telephone skills, building confidence, written communication skills as well as job specific skills could be as well practised. Currently students are permitted two weeks' work experience in Year 12 but most chose to do only one because they felt missing school impacted on other subjects. Year 12 students were reluctant to complete work experience in their holidays.

Other factors

Apart from specific teachers and subjects students saw the value of socialising at school "that meant you got on well with other people." Angelo's mother particularly valued the school experience for developing confidence in her son and building his network of friends. Mark, who said he was very "slack with assignments" couldn't pinpoint anything about school except his role in the Student Council which helped him develop "a bit of leadership qualities." His mother however, described being at his high school "the best thing that ever happened to him." School helped him develop responsibility and confidence. She sees Mark as a "people person" and values school for all the friendships Mark developed.

Parents' and employers' perceptions

Several parents and employers, because of their ethnic background, were not familiar with the educational system in WA. Therefore they found it difficult to comment on the influence school had on the school leaver.

Dajna's father felt school did not help you find a job. He saw a need for more practical work in Year 11 and 12. Dajna had been unsuccessful in getting full time work because of her lack of experience, whereas Han believed our school system was a very good system with practical opportunities. He appreciated that most of his employees were "not doing good at school. None of them get good score or none of them go straight to university." This was possibly due to the location of the supermarket in a low socio economic area.

Year 11 and 12 were important years according to William, who strongly encouraged students to do Science and Maths if they intended to pursue a career in mechanics. Work experience was important as a means of seeing the potential of students who may apply for full time positions in his service centre.

When asked for suggestions on what schools could do to assist students move from school to work, one parent suggested asking ex-students to come back to talk to students about how they felt when they first went into the workforce.

Employers expect school leavers to have well developed skills in listening and speaking, reading and writing and following instructions. (National Board of Employment, Education and Training, 1995, p.viii). Silvana, who was involved in training a school leaver for the first time, was frustrated by the student's lack of initiative and the ability to think. "They don't seem to think for themselves...how do you teach someone to think for themselves?" she asked. Boesel and McFarland (cited in Ryan and Imel, 1996, p.1), note that "at the secondary level, the development of cognitive skills seems to be pivotal, because it prepares students

both for work and for post secondary education." They add that "strong cognitive skills also facilitate learning occupation-specific skills, and are the basis of life long learning." (Ryan & Imel, 1996, p.1).

Initially, Silvana accepted that the school leaver would "have to be spoon fed...'cause like they've never worked before, so bearing in mind, you have to widen their eyes to a few things." She would encourage schools to teach communication and listening skills "they're not tuned in to be able to listen to what's being said." Another concern she had was that "the kids are coming out of school and they're not reading." Silvana finds that "the initiative to read and search, the research of simple documents...is like opposite school. I don't think they read a lot because it must be on computers." Angelo was being assessed under the traineeship, and with training according to Silvana, he was improving "...now he's answering the phone, he's able to tune in a lot more to who's on the end of the phone. In the beginning it was shocking...they're not tuned in to what's being said."

William, who managed several apprentices at the service centre, reiterated these points suggesting the need to instil "a fierce will to learn." He claimed a 50/50 ratio in the ones who come and want to learn as much as possible as to the ones who sort of expect you to teach them as much as possible, and want to accept it at their pace."

The general consensus of employers and parents for post compulsory years was to tailor them to students' needs while continuing with important basics such

as communication skills and reading. Work experience and practical subjects should be encouraged. The Vocational Programs now making inroads to high schools is where this is happening. At the high school discussed in this research, students can now choose industry specific vocational programs such as Industrial Studies, Hospitality and Tourism or Clerical and Administration. Students benefit from improved skills in these industries as well as exposure to possible employers. The program includes Maths and English tailored to the industry, some Career Education, and practical subjects based on the industry. The students remain within the same class group for the year usually with only one or two teachers. Work experience, referred to as Structured Workplace Learning is a formal assessment of the student's work in an industry placement for the semester. Schools may complete this work placement in blocks of time, or one day per week. These programs had not been established at this high school when the subjects of this research started post compulsory schooling.

Employers indicated that students should complete Year 12 before seeking full time work. The literature suggests that to encourage students to remain at school during the post compulsory years, the profile of Career Education needs to be raised (Australian Council for Educational Research, 1991), and that programs be implemented which will "effectively prepare students for employment and job search" (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 1997, p.6).

How is the student in transition supported by family?

The perception of how the family supports (or in the case of employers how they should support) the student as they make the transition to full time work varied between the three groups in the study.

Students all believed they were supported by their family except Peter who was supporting his parents. "I've sort of had to support them, because ummm, they don't really work themselves or anything. It's sort of really hard to get by, 'cause it's really low wages and everything. It's really hard to get by, but somehow, I don't know how, but we get through it. Yeah." Peter and his brother "pitch in and pay for the food and the electricity and all that. Mainly the bills." In spite of the fact that Peter's wage dropped from $360 a week to $190 a week when he accepted the apprenticeship he said "When I told them I had the apprenticeship, they were really happy with me."

Support offered by family was categorised as *practical support* and *caring support*.

Practical support

Practical support included assistance with job search, purchases, meals and transport. From the practical aspect of family support transport assistance appeared of significant importance. Arranging lifts, borrowing and purchasing cars were solutions to the problem of getting to training programs or workplaces. Peter was the only student who had no assistance from his parents with transport

or car purchases and yet owned three in various stages of repair. His major concern with transport was what to do with the loss of his license which was looming on the horizon because of several speeding offences.

Other practical assistance was in the job search. John enjoyed lots of assistance from a sister who had had difficulty getting work "…like, I wrote the letter, she'd go through it, correct it, and then would type it out…and she just photocopied one of everything." She insisted on checking everything before it was posted and "we'd have these arguments about whether you'd type it out or write it out." Dajna felt her parents supported her in the job search by letting her go to Skillshare "because I told them it's going to be good for me if I do this."

Mark pays board (he said $70 per week, his mother said $40) "there's food cooked for me every time I go home, breakfast, washing, just the regular Mum things, you know (laughs)." John also pays board ($30). "He (Dad) cuts my lunch every night, so every morning all I do is just grab it and go." John expressed surprise at the unlunch like lunches, "everybody at work…bring in their little boxes and they have lasagne and sausages and everything in there, but I don't know. I tried that…but I couldn't eat it as a lunch, you know? It's like…it's not lunch food. Lunch food is you know, sandwiches and that sort of thing." John commented on the fact that his father bought him overalls, safety boots, a few tools and a lunchbox. He saw further parental support in the way his Dad took him to work "I went to work 'cause he was on nightshift. I went to work with him a couple of nights just to get the idea of…you know…just to get the feeling of like,

actually, working for your money. So just to introduce me to what it's going to be like."

Caring Support

Caring support included support in the form of advice, encouragement, listening and displaying interest. All students agreed that their parents supported them in a caring way in their transition from school to work by encouraging them in their job search, helping them make decisions on job choice and listening to them talk about their work. Belinda described her parents as "pretty supportive...they were on my back to get the job, look for a job and everything...and afterwards they were pretty rapt especially since it was just down the road." John was surprised at the interest his father displayed in his work. "Like last week I took a motor out, like fixed it up, put it back...I told my dad. He was absolutely amazed, you know...he wanted to know every detail about it."

Employers' perceptions

Employers saw the role of parents as critical in encouraging a positive work ethic when asked the question "What do you suggest parents could do to help Year 12 leavers cope with transition from school to work?" Mentioning a sister 14 years her junior, Silvana suggested "kids of today get it too easy at home." Parents should make them more independent. Suzanne supported this comment by saying "don't give them as much money...they have to go out and find part time work. I think the fact that they have to earn some money gives them a scope to go out

looking for work". Two students in this study gained full time work from part time positions in the same workplace.

Part time employment has become increasingly important for teenagers making transition to adulthood according to the Finn Report (Australian Education Council Review Committee, 1991, p.29) although it is not seen as an access to full time employment because generally it is not associated with long term career prospects, except in the wholesale/retail sector.

Silvana made comment about the social emphasis "I think kids today focus on social life and they've got no responsibilities." Han's comments reiterated this point, he was keen to see parents controlling their children. He expressed real concern at the way social life spills into work life. In his comments he referred generally to young people he employs, not specifically to Mark. "I very scared when the long weekend come in because the following day there's always someone missing...and some of them come to work and they are half asleep and sometimes can't remember anything. Maybe you know, overdose or something, you know...the brain is blank – nothing." Han attempts to reason with the staff "so if you want to go out enjoying the weekend, you have Saturday to enjoy, because Sunday you have to relax because you have to work Monday." He sees no improvement and feels that his attempts to "push them" leads to "not very good relationship". Payouts of sick leave not taken are made to employees at the end of the year, but again this incentive has made little difference to improving work ethics.

From the job choice perspective, employers agreed encouragement and interest were necessary, but some felt parents should have more input into career choice. William said "I do feel parents should have a bit more hand in guidance". He sees the career the young person is entering is for life whereas current predictions suggest youth will experience four or five major career changes in the life span. In a qualitative study interpreting young people's attitudes to work, Weir (1980) reports that parental and peer group pressure affects attitudes of young people involved in transition from school to work. Weir (1980) sees the success of a young person's transition dependent on his/her attitude to school and work. Young people in this study indicated a positive attitude to school and a strong desire to gain meaningful employment. This strong desire was backed by parental expectations that they would gain full time employment. Each was very satisfied with their current work role, although some had accepted what was offered even if it was not what they really wanted. Michael had applied for different types of apprenticeships and was advised by his family to take what came first.

Rita believed parents "should treat the children as individuals and work out where their strong points are and probably encourage them."

Parents' perceptions

Parents saw the way they supported their child as giving encouragement in the job search and providing practical help especially related to transport. Cars were often lent or bought to alleviate transport problems. All students, whether it

was expected by the parents or not, were paying them back. "I mean my dad didn't want me to, but I said no, I want to pay for my car. At least I can say it's my car – I paid for it…I didn't expect it to be given to me." (Belinda) And yet the same person almost seemed offended when I asked if she paid board. "No. Never. And I never will. That's just the way it is."

Some parents entered into an arrangement where board was paid, and most accepted less help with chores because of the lateness their child arrived home from work. Although John suggested his chores became more technical "because anything that seems to go wrong at work, then I'm on it straight away, so anything like that I fix…like I noticed that our shower was like…blocked or something…and usually you know, we'll just let Dad fix it…I just got out my screwdriver set and undid the whole thing…put it back together and saw (that) it ran proper."

Parent pressures

From comments made by the students it became evident that parents were keen to see their child in full time work, and it didn't really matter whether it was what the child wanted. Dajna's parents were keen for her to get full time work, but when a part time opportunity came along, saw it as a way to gain experience.

Belinda felt the pressure of her parents in spite of her very active job search with the purchase of newspapers, visits to Skillshare and 30 job applications. She interpreted the pressure as support. "My mum and dad, after about two months,

they were on my back to get the job, look for a job and everything, and then my dad told me to ring them when I hadn't heard from them and stuff, so yeah, they were pretty supportive."

There was little evidence of friction in families as students made the transition to work, although Angelo's mother said he was "sort of on edge. You couldn't really talk to him. He was just really, really worried about getting a job...we were always arguing...but once he got it he was fine...we couldn't believe the change in him." This was the only tension alluded to apart from John arguing with his sister about whether to type or write letters of application. Even the reduced contribution to chores because ex-students were coming home later than from school was not a source of tension.

How does the employer adapt and respond to employees as they make the transition from school to work?

Super (1957, p.102) contrasts the sympathetic and co-operative nature of the home to the competitive and often cutthroat nature of the workplace. Contrary to this, in the current study employers are perceived to be supportive and co-operative with fellow employees often involved in the training process. Even in Belinda's case where her overconfidence may have been seen as a threat to other employees this was not so. Instead fellow employees saw it as just Belinda's personality.

Employers adaptation and responses could be categorised into *training offered* and *support on a personal level.*

Training offered

Training was on-the-job in every case with some day release to attend training at TAFE or with other providers. Ex-students perceived that the employer provided training for the position, some at TAFE, or with other providers, and some on-the-job.

On-the-job training included induction programs for new employees, and breaking the training up into simple chunks so "she wasn't overwhelmed all at once with a lot of different things coming from a lot of different angles." (Rita, Doctors' surgery).

Support on a personal level

Peter commented on his employer not getting angry when "I accidentally stuff things up. He quickly comes along, helps me out and he doesn't get angry with me or anything. He's really good." Peter's employers offered him an apprenticeship in spite of the fact that the business was not doing very well. They wanted to give him the opportunity to train as a mechanic because "he was keen and he has the talent for what he's doing." (Suzanne).

John was relieved to discover that the vehicle service centre "allows about $5000 each person through the year for damages apprentices may cause." He

compared a system at the centre to detention at school. If you damage a vehicle during the week you are asked to come in and repair it during your own time on the weekend. John was pleased to hear of this system after his early mistakes when he thought he'd get the sack.

Dajna found making mistakes difficult to cope with in the newsagency. She was often accused wrongly of errors by a senior employee who had no patience with training employees. Her boss was far more tolerant of her simple mistakes and offered encouragement. Mellor's study (1994, p.38) reported a need to adapt to different types of people, a need to adjust and not conflict with them. Dajna was hurt and angered by the senior employee but refrained from any conflict. Dajna felt "practised" in coping with this employee because her grandmother lived with her family. Van Maanen, cited in West & Newton, 1983, p.109, would consider this as "anticipatory socialisation or the degree to which an employee is prepared for entry into the workplace by learning from family."

Parents' perceptions

Parents and employers were able to shed more light on how the ex-student was supported, although the parent tended to exaggerate the progress made by their ex-student. "He goes to TAFE. He does a computer course and a managerial course and he's topped it. He's got all As." This ex-student's employer described the TAFE course as a computing course and did not mention individual progress. Belinda's mother was keen to point out that Belinda had been given a pay rise already because they were so impressed with her, and that one of the doctors in

the practice said "We can see within two or three years you actually running the place." Although the practice manager was impressed with Belinda's quick learning and confidence, she did not imply that Belinda would be taking over her position.

Mark (and his mother) believed he was being trained to one day be manager of the supermarket and sees his work as having a career path. His mother also talked about Mark's training and claimed the owner was giving him training in management. The employer made no mention of career paths. Some computer training had been attempted but was made difficult by a shortage of time.

Employers' adaptations

In training a school leaver for the first time, Silvana started to doubt her own abilities at the shipping agency. She struggled to cope with having to explain things more than once to the school leaver. Through the traineeship she is expected to "assess him on everything...from the telephone manner right through..." Silvana has tailored the skills to suit her own situation "now he's answering the phone, he's able to tune in a bit more to who's on the end of the phone. In the beginning it was shocking."

In response to this self-doubt, Silvana contacts her traineeship provider frequently. The provider reminds her to "explain things first time round." Silvana does this but feels Angelo is not coming up to scratch. She continually reminds him of what's been said before. This issue is confirmed by National Board of

Employment, Education and Training (1995) "Employers found school leavers follow instructions well under close supervision. However they lack initiative to follow tasks through to completion and will want to be told to continue with a job rather than progress independently." (National Board of Employment, Education and Training, 1995, p.28). Although Silvana believes Angelo isn't performing as well as she would like, she believes "he thinks he's doing reasonably well." Silvana tended to be contradictory in her discussion and support she offered. She was prepared to "spoon-feed" Angelo at first, but then claimed she was "not going to mother him." This was stated after she'd explained that she'd asked the other staff to go easy on the practical jokes.

William at the vehicle service centre has developed a coaching program for young apprentices. Initially they are introduced to the whole team, and given a list of first year duties and expectations. Some out of hours social activity is encouraged to foster friendship and so help team building. William mentions a "downward spiral" when reality sets in and the apprentice realises the motor trade is not as romantic as at first perceived. "I've definitely had to take them under my wing for a couple of months at a time, just trying to coach them along."

Some employers appeared to almost look upon the new employee as family. Mark's mother felt the supermarket owner saw Mark "as a family member because he gets along so well with everybody." This was not evident in the interview with the employer, although in Peter's case, the owners of the small garage underwent some hardship to take him on as an apprentice. It was almost as though they saw him as family and wanted to offer the opportunity to him to learn

a trade. They had previous experience in training young mechanics. Suzanne felt Peter would get all the mechanical training in their workshop, and that TAFE should permit him to do extra training and specialise in "electrics", which is a completely different apprenticeship. "I wish there was something that he could take alongside," she said.

The students generally saw their employers in a very positive light, and employers were prepared to accept errors and encourage the young employees in the development of new skills. Employers were positive about educating young people for work according to Bridging The Gap (South) (1996), with 60% of employers surveyed saying they would be willing to employ school leavers. Only one employer expressed frustration at training a school leaver. This employer would agree with the literature which suggests changes in schooling should include "work transition programs (which are) more frequent, more flexible, more integrated into general schooling" (Mellor, 1994, p.39) and would be relevant in labour market terms if (they) assist young people to obtain employment, to be productive and successful in their work." (Australian Council for Educational Research, 1991, p.2).

Summary

This chapter summarises the results from the case study data collection. The cases provide examples of the Year 12 students' transition experiences as they moved into full time work. Implications for teaching and learning are also discussed.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

From a life span developmental perspective beginning work in the first full time job represents the acquisition by the young person of one of the major characteristics of adult status – the role of a worker....It seems as though this, as much as the passing of any chronological point, marks the real transition from adolescent to adult....In order to effectively operate in this new role the young worker must learn the values, norms and required behaviours which permit him or her to participate as a member of a work organisation (West & Newton, 1983, p.109).

As a result of the discussion in Chapter 5, conclusions regarding the transition experience of Year 12 students as they moved from full time school to full time work are drawn in this chapter.

Limitations to the study are outlined and suggestions made for further study.

This study set out to examine the transition experience of Year 12 students as they moved from full time school to full time work. Using semi structured interviews of students making the transition, their parents' and employers' data was gathered, transcribed and analysed for emerging categories. An insight was gained into the transition experience of the seven ex-students as they moved into full time work.

Families seemed to welcome the move to full time work with positive changes in the ex-student's attitude and moods at home, although some of these moods were because of the pressure of job searching. Parents tended to accept a reduction in chores done by the ex-student because of their longer working day.

Employers were generally positive about the ex-student, and responded with encouragement and understanding of their limited skills. Only one employer expressed frustration in training the new employee.

In the transition, the ex-students appeared to move through physical, emotional and social experiences. They seemed to cope well with the pressures associated with change, many alluding to part time work and school based work experience as helping in the adjustment. All commented on either feeling more mature or grown up, being treated as an adult (by family and employer), or being given lots of responsibilities.

Physical changes included working longer hours than while at school, using physical strength more, standing up all day instead of sitting, and even changing diet. Emotionally the ex-students were concerned with making mistakes, feeling nervous as they adapted to the new work situation, and learning to take instructions from several people instead of one teacher while at school. In a social sense they learned to mix with people of various ages in the workplace.

All of the ex-students agreed that they liked their work and valued the opportunity given them to work. They appeared to be establishing loyalty to their employer.

From the post compulsory schooling perspective, school based work experience and the subject Work Studies were seen by the ex-students as valuable for developing confidence and responsibility, and helping develop skills for the job search. Two students gained full time work from their school based work experience which illustrates the value of exposing the students to possible employers. Parents and employers expressed their belief in work experience as of value in post compulsory schooling, some suggesting there should be greater opportunity for all students to participate.

School results were of no importance in the acquisition of employment for the students who obtained their position through work experience, part time work or their family network. For the two girls who used conventional job search methods school grades had some bearing.

Parents and employers suggested post compulsory schooling was valuable and that students should complete Year 12. Suggestions they made on improving schooling was to instil a "will to learn", teaching students how to think, teaching listening skills, learning more practical skills, and the opportunity for students to be involved in many work experience sessions in post compulsory years. The latter two are being well catered for in vocational programs and traineeships which appeal to some students in Years 11 and 12, but not all.

Vocational programs are giving new emphasis to work based learning. The main strategic question here is whether this learning should be designed to prepare students for immediate employment or to develop general cognitive abilities. Currently they tend to prepare students for employment within the vocational field on which their program is based. Educationists need to retain a multi-faceted nature to such programs to permit job changing by participants. Providing the key competencies outlined by the Mayer Committee (1992) are incorporated into vocational programs, students will develop transferable skills.

The "will to learn" is of growing importance as change becomes more rapid in the workplace. Workers need to develop a practise of life long learning in order to keep abreast of change. Schools must be sure to encourage this "will to learn" in the preparation of their students for work.

School to work transition programs should seek to ensure students acquire the knowledge and skill necessary to change jobs and continue learning throughout their working lives. A successful transition to work, according to Dusseldorp Skills Forum (1997, p.12), was seen to be as much about broad, generic personal effectiveness skills – teamwork, communication, adaptability and flexibility, information and research skills – as it was about those specific skills involved in getting a job such as those that relate to applications, resumes and interviews.

The success of a move to full time work from full time school cannot be judged simply by attainment of that job. Young people do not usually stay in their

first full time job. School to work transition should therefore be seen as a process which occurs over a period of years, beginning with part time jobs during school, work experience and further schooling during employment. Schools can do much to influence expectations and attitudes to work and ease the way for young people as they make the transition to the world of work.

There is still a need for continuing the development of a school to work transition system that makes learning relevant to students, links work based experiences with classroom education, and creates educational pathways that prepare all students to navigate their way through both the job market and the post-secondary education and training system, as recommended in the Finn Report (Australian Education Council Review Committee, 1991).

Limitations of the Study

This study had a number of limitations due to the nature of the research. The study dealt with the transition of Year 12 students from full time school to full time work. Ex-students, their parents and some employers were interviewed. Many parents and employers, because of their ethnic background, were not familiar with the educational system in WA, therefore finding it difficult to comment on how they felt school had supported their child or employee in transition. Because several people interviewed spoke English as a second language, there were some difficulties experienced in the interpretation of the question by them, and the transcription of their answers.

The inquirer in this research was the Work Studies teacher of the ex-students. This may have resulted in some "contamination" of the field as ex-students may have felt a need to praise the inquirer's efforts as a teacher. Even the face to face contact may have prompted more conversation about that subject than any others. In the study, Work Studies was certainly referred to more than any other subject, but the very nature of that subject and its relationship to the world of work may have prompted this.

Apart from the difficulty in setting up interviews for this study, setting locations, making and keeping appointments, the collection of data involved a great deal of time. Once interviews were in progress, discussion with ex-students could only be described as worthwhile and pleasurable. In some cases ex-students offered reasons why the inquirer could not make contact with parents or employers which meant the inquiry into that ex-student was incomplete.

Knowledge based on human experience is not necessarily trustworthy, and the case study method, unlike statistical research, is unable to be replicated or rejected on testing of the null hypothesis. To increase validity the inquirer ensured the reporting and transcriptions were accurate. I developed a thorough understanding of the transition experience prior to investigating the situations among students at school by becoming acquainted with relevant literature. As a consequence, conclusions were drawn from a sound conceptual background.

All participants were ex-students of one senior high school. Their perceptions of how school helped or did not help them cope with transition from school to work can not be generalised to all schools.

Most findings from quantitative studies are intended to be generalised from the subjects sampled to a wider population. Design controls, sample size and assumptions of their equivalence are relied upon to legitimise their generalisations. Qualitative researchers rarely have access to conditions for generalisation, therefore they aim, according to LeCompte and Goetz (1982, p.34), to compare and translate findings rather than outright transference to groups not investigated.

Without generalisation the findings resulting from any given study would have meaning only in the particular situation and time in which they are found. But Guba and Lincoln ask, "Is it meaningful to search for generalisations?" They suggest that "to imagine that all human activity is completely determined by one human universal set of relationships simply does not square with our practical insights." (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p.94). Therefore this study, despite its limitations, offers useful general insights into the transition experiences of Year 12 school leavers.

Need for Further Research

West and Newton (1983, p.10) encourage further research into the transition from school to work. They see it as an area in which little research has been done

in their home country, Britain, and with changing social and economic conditions, there is a need for further study.

This study has looked at the transition experience of students moving from school to work, the support of family and employers. From the information gathered it is apparent that there is a need for further research in such areas as the job hunting methods used by ex-students, including the school's role and into the benefits of part time work in job searching. Although there have been various studies into work experience, I see a need to free up our post compulsory education to permit all students to participate in several work experience sessions. The employer's perspective on the value of work experience, as well as the value of work experience for university bound students are angles that may be addressed.

From the employer's perspective, the frustrations they face because of employees' weekend social habits, and apparent lack of loyalty, is an area that needs further investigation.

Follow up on the respondents in this study may produce data on job stability, and employment potential after apprenticeships and traineeships are completed. Furthermore schools need to track student leavers' destinations so they get feedback on what happens to their students.

The relationship between occupational choice and occupational attainment is still poorly understood. It is clear that many school leavers do not succeed in

securing jobs in the areas they aim for while still at school. Further research in this area is required.

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Appendix 1

EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY
FORM DISCLOSURE AND INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

EX-STUDENT

Dear _____

As a follow up to discussions I had with you regarding my research into the way young people manage the move from school to work, I would like to thank you for agreeing to be involved.

I am conducting the research as part of my Master of Education course at Edith Cowan University.

The following is a brief outline of how the research will be conducted, the possible benefits of the research and the confidential nature of the research.

Could you please sign the enclosed consent form and return it to me in the envelope provided.

Procedure:
I will interview you at a suitable time and place and invite you to discuss your work and the experiences you have had as you entered that employment. The interview will be recorded on audio tape.

With your permission, I will arrange to talk to our parent/parents and your employer. You are still a welcome participant, should you choose not to permit me to do this.

I assure you that there are no right or wrong answers to discussion questions.

I anticipate the interview will take at least 1 hour. You may choose to have the time split into two sessions.

Benefits:
It is anticipated you will find the opportunity to discuss your transition experience enjoyable and satisfying.

There will be opportunity for the researcher to feed back your ideas to industry management and school personnel. This may assist schools in preparation of students for entering the workforce.

Confidentiality:
It is important for you to know that all participants will remain anonymous and in the reports that I write your identity will remain confidential.

You are free to withdraw from the research at any stage without prejudice.

Any questions concerning this research can be directed to:

        Valerie House
        Telephone   xxxxxxxx (Home)
                     xxxxxxxx (Work)

I look forward to speaking to you shortly.

        Yours sincerely

        Valerie House

EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY
FORM DISCLOSURE AND INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

PARENT

Dear _____

As a follow up to discussions I had with you regarding my research into the way young people manage the move from school to work, I would like to thank you for agreeing to be involved.

I am conducting the research as part of my Master of Education course at Edith Cowan University.

The following is a brief outline of how the research will be conducted, the possible benefits of the research and the confidential nature of the research.

Could you please sign the enclosed consent form and return it to me in the envelope provided.

Procedure:

I will interview you at a suitable time and place and invite you to discuss the experiences you have had as _____ (insert name of ex-student) entered full time paid employment. The interview will be recorded on audio tape.

I assure you that there are no right or wrong answers to discussion questions.

I anticipate the interview will take approximately 1 hour.

Benefits:

There will be opportunity for the researcher to feed back your ideas to industry management and school personnel. This may assist schools in preparation of students for entering the workforce.

Confidentiality:

It is important for you to know that all participants will remain anonymous and in the reports that I write your identity will remain confidential.

You are free to withdraw from the research at any stage without prejudice.

Any questions concerning this research can be directed to

        Valerie House
        Telephone   xxxxxxxx (Home)
                    xxxxxxxx (School)

I look forward to speaking again with you shortly

      Yours sincerely,

      Val House.

EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY
FORM DISCLOSURE AND INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

EMPLOYER

Dear _____

As a follow up to discussions I had with you regarding my research into the way young people manage the move from school to work, I would like to thank you for agreeing to be involved.

I am conducting the research as part of my Master of Education course at Edith Cowan University.

The following is a brief outline of how the research will be conducted, the possible benefits of the research and the confidential nature of the research.

Could you please sign the enclosed consent form and return it to me in the envelope provided.

Procedure:

I will interview you at a suitable time and place and invite you to discuss the experiences you have had as _____ (insert name of ex-student) entered your employment. The interview will be recorded on audio tape.

I assure you that there are no right or wrong answers to discussion questions.

The audio tape will be transcribed and analysed.

I anticipate the interview will take approximately 1 hour.

Benefits:

There will be opportunity for the researcher to feed back your ideas to industry management and school personnel. This may assist schools in preparation of students for entering the workforce.

Confidentiality:

It is important for you to know that all participants will remain anonymous and in the reports that I write your identity will remain confidential.

You are free to withdraw from the research at any stage without prejudice.

Any questions concerning this research can be directed to

        Valerie House
        Telephone   xxxxxxxx (Home)
                    xxxxxxxx (School)

I look forward to speaking again with you shortly .

Yours sincerely,

Val House.

EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY
FORM DISCLOSURE AND INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

School to work transition experience of Year 12 school leavers.

I fully understand the details, purposes and processes of research into the school to work transition experience of year 12 school leavers and agree to participate in it. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time if necessary, and that the contents of the audio tapes will not be linked to individuals. I agree that the research data may be published provided I am not identified.

Participant's name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Semi Structured Interview Prompts

Conversation with Year 12 in transition

Conversation regarding workplace

- Can you tell me what your work involves?
- Why did you choose this kind of work?
- How did you get this work?
- How soon after leaving school did you get this work?
- Tell me about the transition you experienced as you moved from school to working life.
- How did you have to change when you moved from school to work life?
- What are the major differences between school and work life? What are the major similarities?
- Which differences have been most difficult for you to deal with? Why?
- With whom do you work most of the time? How do you get along with them?
- What do you find easy to do at work?
- What do you find difficult to do at work?
- Do you like this work?

Conversation regarding family

- How did your family support you as you made the transition front school to work?

Conversation regarding school

- Was there anything about school which helped you in transition from school to work?
- Is there anything you could suggest you should have done at school to help you with your transition?
- Consider network at school - Did school counsellor, youth education officer, peers, teachers prepare you for transition to work?

Conversation with employer of Year 12 in transition

- What problems do you encounter in adjusting to the Year 12 school leaver in your employment?
- How well prepared was X in being able to handle the transition from school to work?
- Are you aware of a transition process students experience as they enter full time work?
- In what ways do you support the Year 12 school leaver in their transition to work?
- What do you suggest schools could do to help Year 12 school leavers cope with transition from school to work?
- What do you suggest parents could do to help Year 12 school leavers cope with transition from school to work?

Conversation with parent of Year 12 in transition

- Your son/daughter has gone through a transition process from full time student to full time paid work. How do you feel your son/daughter coped with that transition?
- In what ways have school curriculum/personnel/experiences helped your son/daughter make the transition?
- How has the employer supported your son/daughter as they took up full time work?
- What adjustments did you have to make because your son/daughter finished school and took up full time work?
- What support did you give your son/daughter in their transition from school to work?
- In what ways do you support your son/daughter in their work?