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## Watson, Ian, (1985), Double Depression, Allen and Unwin, Sydney

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## BOOK REVIEW

Reviewed by Michael Harvey  
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Watson, Ian, (1985), *Double Depression*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney. Hc \$15.95  
Pb \$7.95 161 pages.

Sub-titled "Schooling, Unemployment and Family Life in the Eighties", this is an empirical study of how adolescents attempt to manage their personal career as they confront structured youth unemployment in Australia. The experiences of various categories of youth are revealed from in depth interviews. This rich ethnographic material is used to identify the cognitive maps which guide individual action. The substance of the interviews is not simply the spectre of limited opportunities in the labour market but of the consequences of this for identity, social relationships and social institutions in contemporary society. The focus of the enquiry becomes the survival strategies and modes of resistance which are used by youth in order to try and control their lives. Social class, gender and bureaucratic procedures in school and work organisations emerge as the barriers which confront youth. These factors render youth relatively powerless in their efforts to attain desirable work futures. "Victim blaming" perspectives of the causes of unemployment are evident. Watson despairs that youth only partially penetrate the "system blaming" causes of their circumstances and fail to adopt collective action with potential to initiate social and political change. The respondents are essentially pre-political in their understanding of the world.

*Double Depression* is a significant investigation of the social impact of unemployment. Since the onset of economic recession in the mid-seventies, too much attention has been given to unemployment from the perspective of the labour market. This study reveals the dilemmas of youth and the unsatisfactory choices which they have to make to protect their identity. Not all youth have the resources to escape from these brutalizing experiences. The book is a spin-off from an academic thesis. (It is unfortunate that the bibliographical details are not cited in the text) In the past too many researchers have not accepted responsibility for the dissemination of their findings. Watson is to be congratulated for taking the trouble to re-organise his research into a very readable book that is of use to a wide range of policy makers and practitioners, including teachers and teacher educators. Watson's efforts to make the book non-technical and to preserve the anonymity of the respondents yield insufficient information about the selection of the individuals and the geographical and chronological context of their experience. It seems that the

interviews were conducted during the early eighties using youth from a state capital city. A sample of seventy respondents was selected from schools and youth refuges. Interviews were conducted on a number of occasions during a two year period. *Double Depression* is based on case studies of a small sub-sample of these youth. Watson points out that the focus is the process whereby youth orient themselves to their social worlds rather than the extent to which the sub-sample is representative of youth. However, implicit in the selection of respondents is a typology of youth which requires greater elaboration. The chapters focus on youth in different circumstances; school stayers at government and prestigious independent schools, the long term unemployed, the transitory unemployed, youth from patriarchal families and families in crisis. The treatment of the survival strategies of a variety of types of youth is a major strength of the book. *Double Depression* makes an important contribution to identifying the needs of different categories of youth. There is a powerful message that youth programmes can only have an impact when targeted at the various ecological niches which youth inhabit.

A feature of the book is Watson's use of interview data to reveal the complexity of the various socially constructed perspectives of the respondents. By comparison with other recent ethnographic studies, large extracts of interviews have been provided for the reader. Many of these extracts have a longitudinal dimension. Each extract is accompanied by a critical analysis of segments which identify the respondent's meanings and methods of reasoning. Here, the reader is able to gain insight into Watson's derivation of researcher-imposed constructs from the empirical data. Comparison of self and others, especially those who are characterized by "unworthiness", seems to be a typical process. A significant finding is that many youth do not understand the circumstances and perspectives of other youth. Those who retain a commitment to schooling do not respect "deadheads" who have given up the serious search for work. The superordinate construct which emerges is the "ideology of individualism". Here success and failure are perceived by youth as an outcome of personal deficits or capacities. Few respondents were able to penetrate this ideology and adopt a structural world view. A related belief in the "naturalism" of the existing social structure precludes the possibility of social change. Most were aware of how a lack of regular and substantial income created dependency, self doubt and social impotence. Only a few had cognitive maps which enabled prolonged resistance to oppressive social circumstances. Watson suggests that the common youth perspective of "the self determining individual" is a myth. Youth who resist the bosses or patriarchal family life are shown to use self-defeating survival strategies which support individualism and naturalism. Overall, there is good use of interview data showing the paradoxes of managing one's future in oppressive social structures. Some individuals simply have inaccurate cognitive maps of how society works. Many are not perceived by others as they perceive themselves. The study contains important insights of how, toward the end of adolescence, perception of society serves as a foundation for the construction

of an emerging identity. The book consists of three sections. Part I "Responses to Youth Unemployment" demonstrates the universal aspiration of youth for economic independence and self-respect through the social aspects of work. Work is the basic anchor point of personal identity. Unemployed youth wish to lead normal lives and so spend some of their money to avoid ostracism and social isolation. Those who fall into poverty traps experience difficulty in keeping their sense of self-worth intact. Many retreat into what Watson calls a "privatized aimless existence". For some youth, family supports and the option of a delayed or forced return to higher education are additional resources that can be incorporated in survival strategies. Part II "The Peer Group and the Family" provides evidence of the potential of adolescent peer groups and youth refugees to support youth as they confront changing family circumstances. Attention is given to the pressures which girls experience when asserting their independence in families where life is oriented about the economic and social position of the father. The unequal power relationships between sexes also appear in social relationships among youth. Adolescent girls have varying degrees of awareness of how they can become independent of boys for transport and social contacts. Working class girls are accepting of their fate as targets of compensation by boys who are themselves losers in the competition for jobs. Part III "Class and Schooling" shows the irrelevance of schooling in preparing youth to manage their personal careers beyond school. Here there is support for the dismantling of what has become known as the "competitive academic curriculum" (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler and Dowsett, 1982, *Making the Difference*). *Double Depression* is a sober reminder to teachers and teacher educators of the debilitating effects of the tight labour market. It is already too late to help many working class youth. Review of the high school by expert committees of enquiry in most states and territories provides a critical moment in Australian education. Action is needed to reconsider the caring, humane school environment of the "adaptive high school" (*Schooling for 15 and 16 Year Olds*, Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1980). Watson's study demonstrates the need for youth to acquire survival skills while still at high school so that they can maintain greater control over their careers, even with the experience of unemployment.

## BOOK REVIEW

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Jaques, David, *Learning in Groups*, Croom Helm  
\$35.95 pp. xviii, 318

In the characteristic "open" situation of much British higher (tertiary) education the limitations of lectures are well appreciated and alternative modes of teaching widely used. This book, by a Senior Lecturer in Communication Skills at the Hatfield Polytechnic is about one major alternative. On p. 36 we read that

... Bligh (1972), surveying the research evidence on different forms of teaching, concluded that discussion methods are more effective than didactic methods (e.g. the lecture) for stimulating thought, for personal and social adjustment, and for changes of attitude, and were no worse than the lecture for effectively transmitting information.

There is so much information packed into this book that it is hard to know quite where to begin. Perhaps Chapter Three, *Research into Learning*, would be a good place. Here we meet students who either look towards success or else fear failure (in UK), use either surface level or deep level processing (in Sweden), and adopt holist, serialist or versatile strategies (in London). In the Liberal Arts College of Harvard students develop from Position 1 towards Position 9, where Position 1 is "there are right and wrong answers to everything"; by Position 3 "diversity and uncertainty are accepted"; by Position 5 "all knowledge and values are perceived as relativistic and contextual"; and Positions 6 to 9 "cover the gradual movement from feeling the need for a tentative commitment, trying it out, exploring its implications to finally experiencing commitment as a continually unfolding activity through which the personal lifestyle of the student is expressed." "However it is rare that a student reaches the stage of maturity implied by Position 9." One can't help wondering "What about staff?"

All that, plus discussion, takes a mere seven pages. The next chapter, 16 pages, covers concepts in communication from the most basic, through the Johari window and feedback to transactional analysis "a valuable explanatory framework for human interaction, one to which it is easy to relate and develop in everyday communication." There is a discussion (from USA) of the way that "focus . . . on 'what is' or 'what other people have said may help students in jumping academic hurdles but have little personal impact on them."