

2000

Aboriginal Students Perceptions Of The Effect Of Vocational Education And Training On Post School Experiences

Steven J. Florisson
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**ABORIGINAL STUDENTS PERCEPTIONS
OF THE EFFECT OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
AND TRAINING
ON POST SCHOOL EXPERIENCES.**

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[student number 0878829]

This research report is presented
as a component of the Edith Cowan University M-Ed program.

June, 2000

Supervisor: Dr John Williams

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
LIST OF TABLES	4
LIST OF FIGURES.....	5
DECLARATION	6
ABSTRACT	7
INTRODUCTION.....	9
SIGNIFICANCE	10
PURPOSE	11
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	12
GOALS	13
RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	14
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION	14
<i>ABORIGINAL STUDENTS AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION</i>	19
<i>RECENT CHANGES - VOCATIONAL EDUCATION</i>	20
WONGUTHA CHRISTIAN ABORIGINAL PARENT – DIRECTED SCHOOL.....	21
<i>WONGUTHA MISSION TRAINING FARM</i>	22
<i>CAPS</i>	23
<i>WONGUTHA CAPS</i>	24
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT EMPLOYMENT PROJECT (CDEP).....	25
LITERATURE REVIEW	26
<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	26
<i>VOCATIONAL EDUCATION</i>	26
<i>ABORIGINAL EDUCATION</i>	28
METHODOLOGY	29
METHODOLOGY LITERATURE REVIEW	32
SAMPLE.....	36
DATA COLLECTION.....	37
DATA ANALYSIS.....	40
<i>STAGE ONE</i>	40
<i>STAGE TWO</i>	41
VALIDITY, RELIABILITY AND RIGOUR.....	41
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	42
LIMITATIONS	43
STAGE ONE INTERVIEWS	44
POST SCHOOL CATEGORIES	47
<i>CDEP</i>	47
<i>EMPLOYED</i>	48
<i>PARENT</i>	48
<i>STUDY</i>	49
<i>PRISON</i>	49
<i>INCAPACITATED AND DECEASED</i>	50
LOCATION OF STAGE ONE PARTICIPANTS	50
CONCLUSIONS FROM STAGE ONE INTERVIEWS	60
STAGE TWO INTERVIEWS	64
<i>ORGANISING THE DATA</i>	64

DESCRIBING THE DATA	65
INTERPRETING THE DATA.....	66
SCHOOL EXPERIENCES	66
1. Participant responses to “Did you like or dislike the courses? Did you find the courses helpful or unhelpful? Were you bored or interested?”	66
2. Participant responses to “Did you learn skills or was it a waste of time?”	68
3. Participant responses to “Which were the best courses? Which were the worst courses?”	69
4. Participant responses to “If you could change something about that time, what would you change?”	72
POST SCHOOL EXPERIENCES	73
1. Participant responses to “Did what you learn at school have any effect on what you went into after leaving? Did you use anything you learned at school? Were there any skills that you could use?”	73
2. Participant responses to “Did you find leaving school very different to what you had expected? Had the school prepared you in any way for leaving?”	79
3. Participant responses to “What are the best things that have happened since you left school? What are the worst things that have happened since you left school?”	81
4. Participant responses to “If you could change something about the time since you left school, what would you change?”	83
CONCLUSION: STAGE TWO INTERVIEWS	86
CONCLUSION	88
Recommendations for Further Study	91
BIBLIOGRAPHY	92
APPENDIX ONE	98
Sample Letters.....	98
APPENDIX TWO	101
Stage One Interview Questions	
Stage Two - Semi Structured Interview Questions	102

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Location of Participants	Page 37
Table 2	Stage one interviews	Page 45
Table 3	Stage one interviews – Location of participants	Page 50
Table 4	Stage one interviews – CDEP by area type and location.	Page 52
Table 5	Stage one interviews – Employment by area type and location.	Page 55
Table 6	Stage one interviews – Unemployment by area type and location.	Page 57
Table 7	Post school situation compared with the 1996 census.	Page 61

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Post school situations.	Page 47
Figure 2	Location by area type	Page 51
Figure 3	Location by area	Page 51
Figure 4	CDEP by area type.	Page 53
Figure 5	CDEP by location.	Page 53
Figure 6	Employment by area type.	Page 56
Figure 7	Employment by location	Page 56
Figure 8	Unemployment by area type	Page 58
Figure 9	Unemployment by location	Page 58
Figure 10	Post school situations compared with 1996 census	Page 61
Figure 11	Specific skills used by participants	Page 77
Figure 12	Other skills participants used	Page 78

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief: incorporate without acknowledgement 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.

Steve Florisson

28 June 2000

July 2002 .

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the following persons who have assisted in this study:

Dr John Williams, CAPS Board Members, Jennifer Florisson, Wongutha CAPS Staff Members all assisted in different ways with this study, and without their help and encouragement, this study would have been impossible.

ABSTRACT

Over the past decade there have been dramatic and unprecedented changes in post compulsory education, with an increase of over 40% for year 12 retention rates to 76.6% in 1992 and huge expansion of year 11 and 12 vocational education and training programs. However, for Aboriginal post compulsory age students, the picture is very different. In 1993 the year 12 Aboriginal retention rate was only 24.48% or 982 students (Australia wide), and by 1996 only 10% of the indigenous 15 and older population had any post school qualification, compared to 35% of the total population. Only 34% of West Australian Indigenous 15 to 24 year olds were employed compared with 56% of the total population

Aboriginal students not participating in education have been the subject of many reports, reviews and studies, but few of these have looked at Aboriginal vocational education and training and even fewer at the Aboriginal students own perception of education.

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the experience of Aboriginal students who have been involved in secondary school vocational education and training programs at Wongutha Christian Aboriginal Parent – directed School (Wongutha CAPS) to ascertain particular experiences that affected the students in their post school situations. Apart from the value of sharing the experiences of Aboriginal

students, it is anticipated that the conclusions of this study will:

- help identify methods of training that have been effective for Aboriginal students,*
- help identify particular courses that more readily articulate into further training and employment,*
- help identify the specific needs of Aboriginal vocational education and training students,*
- help identify factors which have led to poor year 11 and 12 retention levels, and poor participation rates in employment,*
- assist educators in developing vocational education and training curriculum that is relevant to the needs of Aboriginal students, and deleting from vocational education and training programs material that is not relevant.*

This study provides educators with a student's "inside view" of vocational education and training experiences. The study involves post secondary Aboriginals who participated in secondary vocational education and training programs at Wongutha CAPS for a period of six months or longer at some time within the past nine years. The study utilises a phenomenological methodology with data collection by interview.

ABORIGINAL STUDENTS PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECT OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION ON POST SCHOOL EXPERIENCES.

INTRODUCTION

Wongutha CAPS is a non- government year 11 and 12 boarding school on farmland near Esperance. The school is owned and operated by an Aboriginal governing body, and the school offers vocational school based and Curriculum Council courses. Over the past nine years many Aboriginal students have been involved in vocational education and training courses at Wongutha CAPS. This study examines these ex- student's perceptions of their education and their perceptions of how vocational education and training experiences may have affected their post school situations.

The significance or importance of this study is outlined before the purpose, conceptual framework, goals and research questions are detailed. This report then seeks to provide a definition of Vocational Education, and provide a background to vocational education and training and the involvement of Aboriginal students. The literature review provides an overview of studies in three areas: Vocational Education, Aboriginal Education and Methodology. The methodology is outlined with reference to how the sample was selected, the data collected and analysed, and validity and reliability ensured. Ethics considerations and limitations of the study are then discussed.

The data collection involved two stages with the first stage being a short structured interview with 100 participants. The second stage involved twenty nine in depth, semi structured interviews which were audio taped and transcribed. The analysis includes the

organisation of the data, description of the data, and interpretation of the data. The conclusion addresses the research questions.

SIGNIFICANCE

The West Australian Government Task Force on Aboriginal Social Justice Report (1994, p365) made the point that “Aboriginal people have been and are still subject to significant educational disadvantage, and are the most poorly educated group in Australia.”

The final summary report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody report stated:

Despite some notable improvements in participation and outcomes, Aboriginal youth in particular remain poorly served by the various education systems in Australia. Low self esteem, diminished educational opportunities, and a consequential lack of employment prospects, are significant factors in the disproportionately high rate of Aboriginal imprisonment (Whimp, 1991, p369).

In 1993 Kim Beasley (Minister for Employment, Education and Training) established a National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and findings were released in 1994. These findings included the following information:

- the retention rate for year 12 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is 24.48%, or 982 students for all states,
- 23.6% of Aboriginal 15 to 24 year olds are employed,
- the median income of Aboriginal 15 to 24 year olds was \$4657.00 per annum.

The report also makes the following observation:

Vocational Education is particularly successful in raising the post school aspirations of young Aboriginal peoples. (1994, p 98)

This evidence indicates that to a large extent Australian education systems have failed Aboriginal students, particularly in the post compulsory area. With a retention rate of 24.48% for year 12, very few Aboriginal students are able to take advantage of the new changes that have swept through Vocational Education.

This study examines the school experiences of past vocational education and training students, and the effect of their vocational education and training experiences on post school situations. Most other studies of vocational education and training are quantitative, measuring and comparing numerical data from a variety of sources. While this study has generated some quantitative data, most of the data is qualitative, providing descriptions from the perspective of the Aboriginal student themselves. This perspective may help educators gain an understanding of why retention rates are so low (particularly in comparison with non Aboriginal students) and why so few Aboriginal 15 - 24 year olds are employed. This study has the potential to guide those who structure, deliver and organise vocational education and training curriculum. It is hoped that ultimately the benefits will flow on to the Aboriginal students themselves.

PURPOSE

This study examines the experiences of Aboriginal students in Vocational Education, and how these experiences have affected students in their post secondary school

situations. The purpose of the study is to examine the experiences of Aboriginal students in year 11 and 12 vocational education and training programs to ascertain particular experiences that affected the students in their post school situations. The study involved post secondary students who participated in secondary vocational education and training programs at Wongutha CAPS for a period of six months or longer at some time within the period 1991 to 1998. The conclusions of this study may assist educators in developing vocational education and training curriculum that is more relevant to the needs of Aboriginal students.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study utilises an inductive evaluation process within a phenomenological methodology (Patton, 1990). The findings, or theory are developed from the data, and the researcher attempts to make sense of the phenomenon being studied without imposing preconceived expectations or conditions on the phenomena. The researcher does not come to the phenomena with any “a priori” theory to be imposed on what is being studied, but as Sandelowski (1993, p 217) points out, theory may enter the project at different stages of the process. Sandelowski also shows that assuming a naive or atheoretical stance is in reality an impossibility. The researcher always brings some prior commitments, assumptions or orientations to the target phenomenon, and even a theoretical naivete is still a prior orientation. The important thing is to be able to recognise theory “in its many guises and disguises” (Sandelowski, 1993, p217) and to make the data central and theory peripheral.

In the proposed study the data will occupy a central position and any prior assumptions will be acknowledged.

GOALS

The objectives of the study are:

- 1. To develop a profile on Aboriginal men and women who participated in vocational education and training courses at Wongutha CAPS within the period 1991 to 1997;*
- 2. To describe the experiences of Aboriginal students in vocational education and training, and post school situations;*
- 3. To interpret the meanings held by Aboriginal students of their vocational education and training, and post school experiences;*
- 4. To extrapolate from this data the shared meanings of vocational education and training as experienced by Aboriginal students;*
- 5. To use this information to contribute to the body of knowledge on Aboriginal vocational education and training..*

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Questions are;

- 1. What have been the post school experiences of vocational education and training students?*
- 2. What are the students perceptions about their vocational education and training experience?*
- 3. What are the students perceptions about the effect of vocational education and training experiences on post school situations?*
- 4. What are the students perceptions about the value of their vocational education and training experiences, particularly as it affected their after school experiences?*

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

There has been much debate and confusion over the definition of “Vocational Education”, and some authors believe that there is little difference between “general” and “vocational” education. They state that education that leads directly to tertiary study is also vocational education because ultimately it will lead to a vocation (Fowler, 1996).

This study does not enter into the debate about the appropriateness or correctness of terminology, but seeks instead to develop accepted definitions of vocational education, vocational training and general education.

In “Australian Training Reform”, Keating (1995, p14) states that “vocational education and training (VET) is a term used internationally to describe education and training arrangements designed to prepare people for work or to improve the knowledge and skills of people already working.” Holland (1993 p 84) argues that a course can be characterized as vocational education in “terms of the relative emphasis of theoretical knowledge, practical application of that knowledge, and generic competencies.” A course that has a large component of theoretical knowledge, with little practical application, is likely to be more general than vocational education.

The American Vocational Association has defined vocational education as “education designed to develop skills, abilities, understandings, attitudes, work habits, and appreciations needed by workers to enter and make progress in employment on a useful and productive basis” (Thompson, 1973, p111) and Wellington (cited in Holt, 1987, p24) suggest that vocational education is the intersection between the concepts of training and education. Despite the great variety and changing nature of definitions of vocational education, it is generally accepted that vocational education is education for employment in a job that is not a profession, that is, work which does not require a tertiary degree qualification. It is also generally accepted that vocational training involves skills for a specific vocation, or specific skills, while vocational education involves more generic skills.

This study uses the term “Vocational Education” to refer to education for developing general skills, abilities, understandings, attitudes, and work habits for employment in work that does not require a tertiary qualification, “Vocational Training” to be specific occupational education for a specific career in work that does not require a tertiary qualification, and “Vocational Education and Training” (VET) to be a combination of Vocational Education and Vocational Training. It is “Vocational Education and Training” (VET) that is most common in Western Australian secondary schools, with a mix of subjects that include general vocational education, such as “Career and Industry Awareness”, and more specific vocational training, such as a certificate one or two in “Commercial Cookery” from the “Hospitality” national training package.

Vocational education and training is not a recent phenomena, as vocational education and training has really existed since parents taught their children the skills necessary for survival in the hunter gatherer society. Later crafts and trades relied on the father or mother to train sons and daughters and in the middle ages, Craft Guilds and apprenticeship systems developed. The Guilds controlled the trades and the training procedures and maintained standards and prices. There was some organised education such as that delivered by Benedictine Monks in monasteries but most people could only access training through the apprenticeship system.

The industrial revolution brought about the collapse of the guild based apprenticeship system and in time the public school movement became established, where school was not just available but also compulsory. Technical schools, mechanics institutes and engineering schools increased in number and provided practical education for the working classes. The end of the nineteenth century saw great debate in countries such

as the USA and England as to whether or not vocational education and training should form a part of the general school curriculum.

Australia in the 1980's saw major changes in the sort of opportunities available to school leavers (Keating, 1995). This situation was caused primarily by recessions in the 1980's and early 1990's. Reliance on exports of primary products (from agriculture and mining) in a market of falling commodity prices resulted in a severe balance of payments deficit because of reduced export earnings. Australia's secondary industries, supported by tariffs and directed mainly at the domestic market, could not compete and Australia was vulnerable. Prime Minister Keating's famous "banana republic" comments on 2UE radio station in 1986 set the scene for "the recession we had to have", and later in the same year Australia's credit rating was reduced, the stock market crashed in 1987 and unemployment grew to almost unprecedented levels.

This affected schools and students, as fewer jobs were available for school leavers and retention rates to year 12 increased significantly. There had been a steady increase in retention, particularly from the 1960's on, and retention to year 12 grew from 22.7% in 1968 to 30.67% in 1971, 32.9% in 1974, and 34.7% in 1979. However the events of the eighties saw a dramatic increase in retention to year 12 with 60.3% retention in 1989, and 77.1% in 1992. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001, p 11)

The Centenary Article for the Australian Bureau of Statistics, (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001) attributes this rapid upsurge in retention rates to the increased financial assistance available to parents as well as the decreased job prospects for school leavers. Non tertiary entrance courses were developed and vocational education and training expanded rapidly. Apprenticeships and traineeships that had previously required a year

10 pass, now favoured students who had a year 12 certificate and this also affected the retention rate. While staying on longer at school became the option for more year 11 and 12 students than ever before, many of these students were not able to achieve success with tertiary entrance courses and did not aspire to a university education.

There were also problems with the “training” sector as government and industry became aware of training’s poor image held by school leavers and employers. Full time certificate courses had low completion rates and poor links with employment. Many of the training courses were too narrow, were based on “time served” rather than competency standards, and courses had poor links to schools, higher education and employment. At this time the agenda for educational change appeared to move from the educators (who had been perceived to have failed, particularly in the area of preparing students for work) to the combination of business, unions and government, who recognised that, to restructure industry and broaden the export base in manufacturing industries, an efficient and appropriately skilled work force needed to be developed. This resulted in “training reform” as Government and industry realised that training needed to be broadly based with an emphasis on multi skilling, flexibility and adaptability.

The training agenda that had previously been driven by educators was not sensitive to the needs of industry, and a series of industry, business, government and union committees and reports addressed this perception. In 1991 the Finn report, concerned that post compulsory education deliver a more highly skilled and flexible work force, developed the concept of “pathways” and “key competencies”. The Mayer report in 1992 defined seven key competencies and in 1992 the Carmichael report led to the

establishment of the Australian Vocational Certificate Training System (AVCTS). Also in 1992 the Ministers of Vocational Education, Employment and Training (MOVEET) adopted six national goals for vocational education and training. The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and the National Training Board (NTB) were established. States and territories moved to change secondary school vocational education and training programs, to bring the programs into line with AVTS principles, to utilise outcomes based curriculum and assessment, and to establish credit transfers and recognition / transfer programs between schools and post school VET (Vocational Education and Training) programs (Keating, 1994).

ABORIGINAL STUDENTS AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

In the mid 70's intensive vocational education programs were introduced into the secondary school system as an alternative to mainstream for Aboriginal students. These secondary classes, known as "project classes" were intended to teach academic concepts through the use of practical activities, so that, for example, a student might learn units of lineal measurement by actually measuring lengths of wood that were then cut up to make a tool box. The classes were based around manual arts woodwork and metalwork sheds, and home economic areas, and many schools had their own purpose built sheds. The program was intended for older secondary students who did not have the academic background to achieve success with Secondary Education Authority courses. Initially the program worked well and students learnt abstract concepts through the use of concrete materials and practical exercises in an environment that was often more casual and "user friendly" for Aboriginal students. The classes were generally small and students were with one teacher for most of the time. The system began to fail when school staff put all older secondary Aboriginal students (regardless of ability) into the

project classes, or put discipline problem students into the classes. Aboriginal people quickly perceived that “black” children were taught in sheds while the “white” children had classrooms.

As vocational classes became a feature of most secondary schools, Aboriginal students were over represented in these classes (despite poor retention figures) as many Aboriginal students, for a variety of reasons, had difficulty in coping with tertiary entrance or academic courses. Vocational classes were poorly marketed (prestige and status comes only with tertiary entrance courses) and vocational classes have been perceived generally as “vegie” classes (A “vegie” or “vegetable” is derogatory slang used to describe brain damaged humans who can not think or function normally). Only more recently, with the greatly improved exposure, funding and facilities, have the perceptions begun to change.

RECENT CHANGES - VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

In 1997 the National Training Frameworks was established to improve quality assurance for training, and provide a portable system of national recognition of industry skill and training. The National Training Frameworks introduces a system of Registered Training Organisations, and National Training Packages with specific industry competencies for different industries. These competencies are the basis for Vocational Educational and Training qualifications which are issued against the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). Accreditation of training providers is a delegated process carried out by the State Training Authority, as the training packages for each industry are controlled by industry. Qualifications will conform to the AQF (Australian

Qualifications Framework) and denote the industry and specific AQF level of the qualification.

The trend is to move trainees, apprenticeships and specific industry training back into the secondary school system, particularly year 11 and 12, and funding such as “New Apprenticeships for School Students” is encouraging this progression. Schools offering VET (Vocational Education and Training) will either have to become registered providers, meeting ARF (Australian Recognition Framework) registration requirements, or form links with providers known as RTO’s (Registered Training Organisations). RTO’s would deliver the VET courses on behalf of the schools, or in conjunction with the schools where the schools deliver part or all of the training and the RTO issues the certificate or statement of attainment. These changes are intended to raise the standard of VET delivery, and provide much better articulation from schools into further training, with nationally recognised and portable accreditation for secondary school VET courses.

<p><u>WONGUTHA CHRISTIAN ABORIGINAL PARENT –</u> <u>DIRECTED SCHOOL</u></p>

Wongutha CAPS is a non-government year 11 & 12 vocational education and training school sited on a farm 27 kilometres from Esperance. The school has both boys and girls hostels and accepts students from all over Western Australia. The school was commenced in 1990 by the Christian Aboriginal Parent --directed School Inc. in facilities previously used by Wongutha Mission Training Farm.

WONGUTHA MISSION TRAINING FARM

Wongutha Mission Training Farm was established in 1954 by Rod Schenk on a 1000-acre bush block 24 kilometres North East of Esperance and 5 kilometres east of Gibson. The land was purchased freehold by Rod Schenk (son of Rodolphe Schenk who was the founder of Mt Margaret Mission, between Leonora and Laverton). Rod had grown up at Mt Margaret and then studied at an Agricultural College. He had a vision to establish an agricultural school for Aboriginal post secondary students in the Esperance area. This was in the early days of the discovery of the potential of the Esperance sandplain with the addition of super phosphate and trace elements. The land at Gibson was cleared, buildings established, and a course in agriculture for post-secondary students initiated. The agricultural boom occurred in the 1960's and Wongutha students were readily able to find work in the area. There were two workers hostels established for Aboriginal men at Esperance and Condingup, and ex Wongutha students were sought-after farm workers. The Wongutha curriculum also included training in Christian principles and leadership, and students travelled from all over Australia to attend the course. As the demand for farm workers declined Wongutha moved into pre-trade courses and continued with these courses into the late 1980's, when funding and staffing difficulties saw a decline in programs offered.

Many Aboriginal leaders emerged from Wongutha over the years and the program made a significant impact on Aboriginal Education, particularly in the sixties and seventies.

Wongutha Mission was operated by a governing Board made up mostly of local Esperance people, farmers, business people, church leaders and Aboriginal leaders. In 1990 this Board invited CAPS (Christian Aboriginal Parent- directed School inc) from Coolgardie to take over the training program. In October 1993, The Wongutha Board

deeded the land and all assets to the CAPS Board, and the Wongutha Board ceased to exist.

CAPS

The Christian Aboriginal Parent-directed School was formed in 1981 by concerned Aboriginal parents who felt that the government schools were failing Aboriginal students. This initial group were Aboriginal people who had grown up at Mt Margaret, or had some links with Mt Margaret. They felt that the standard of education that they had achieved was far better than what their own children and grandchildren were achieving, and they desired education sympathetic to the needs of Aboriginal students, Christian, and modelled on the Mt Margaret school. This group of Aboriginal people involved local non Aboriginal supporters and together they formed the founding governing Board who met during 1980. The school commenced in the St Anthony's Convent building in Coolgardie in February 1981 and catered for years one to ten. From its inception the school offered boarding accommodation for secondary students who traveled from the Northern Territory, Queensland, and all parts of Western Australia to attend the school. In 1980/81 the new Non Government school movement was just beginning to gather momentum and the move to establish the school was a brave move into relatively uncharted waters. It was a steep learning curve for the new Board members who sometimes had to learn from mistakes. Later, pre-school and year 11&12 courses were also offered and a second school was started at Kurrawang Community, between Kalgoorlie and Coolgardie. This school offered pre-primary to year seven. Over time the school gained recognition as playing an important role in Aboriginal Education in Western Australia. The CAPS Board took on the additional responsibility of the Wongutha program in 1990 and the whole property in 1993. The CAPS Board

established a new incorporated (linked) body to operate the two farms (Wongutha and the ALT (Aboriginal Land Trust) leased property at Neridup) and excised the school site from the Wongutha farm.

WONGUTHA CAPS

CAPS Board members perceived that there existed a gap in the educational market place for Aboriginal students. There didn't appear to be any post compulsory vocational programs for Aboriginal students. They described the program at Wongutha CAPS as vocationally oriented and pre-empted the new wave of VET courses in schools. In 1990 Wongutha CAPS catered for 12 male students and the popularity of the course grew quickly, with a girls hostel commencing in 1993 and the numbers growing. Today about 55 students attend the school and there is a substantial waiting list of students who would like to attend.

Wongutha CAPS has been validated as an RTO (Registered Training Organisation) and is able to deliver and assess AQF training packages within a specified scope. Wongutha courses are a mix of Curriculum Council courses, school-based courses and AQF modules. English (Literacy), Maths, (Numeracy), Bible, Computers, & Agriculture form the core subjects and students can choose vocational subjects from;

- Catering & Food Production
- Plant Operating (front end loader backhoe)
- Metal fabrications
- Wood fabrications (including furniture)
- Building
- Mechanics

- Panel beating & Spray painting
- Business administration

Wongutha CAPS is developing enterprise education projects (registered businesses) and it is planned to involve trainees and apprentices in these enterprises. Over the next five years, courses are planned in Aquaculture, Health, and Sport.

<h2><u>COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT EMPLOYMENT PROJECT</u></h2> <h3><u>(CDEP)</u></h3>

The CDEP program is a significant employment option for Indigenous students as they leave school. The Community Development Employment Projects Scheme was commenced in 1976 as a response to requests from remote indigenous communities for local employment opportunities. The scheme is funded through ATSIC (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) and is based on community development projects. Members of a community can exchange unemployment benefits for a combination of work and training in projects that help develop or maintain the community, and are managed by the community organisation. The scheme has been expanded to include rural and urban areas as well as remote communities. CDEP plays a major role in this study, because for many students CDEP is the only form of work available in their communities

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

It is accepted that an extensive literature review should not precede a phenomenological study (Patton, 1990) so that it does not direct the study from the start, or restrict the latitude of the research. Therefore this literature review does not aim to present an exhaustive review of studies in vocational education and training or Aboriginal Education. The purpose of this literature review on vocational education and training and Aboriginal Education is solely to show that no similar studies have been done and there is a need for this study as a gap exists in the knowledge.

A comprehensive literature search has revealed few studies of Aboriginal vocational education and training programs and fewer studies of vocational educational programs using phenomenological methodology. No studies which explore the experience of Aboriginal vocational education and training students were found, however there were studies which explored vocational education and training in cultures other than Aboriginal, and studies which explored Aboriginal education, but not specifically Aboriginal vocational education.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Secondary school vocational education and training research studies appear to fall into two broad categories:

- studies that explore the relevance of the vocational education and training programs to later work situations, and

- studies that seek perceptions about the programs from students, staff, parents and other stakeholders.

A number of American studies have investigated the relevance of vocational education and training programs to subsequent employment. Wonser (1995) examined student participation in occupationally related education and subsequent economic and social outcomes, and Braden (1996) studied the applicability of vocational education and training to industry employment. McKinney (1981) investigated the factors relating to job placement of former secondary vocational education and training students. Program relevance was also the focus of a Queensland study by Hopkins (1993), who compared the job quality of employed students who had enrolled in a secondary vocational education and training program in marketing and office skills, to those employed students who were not involved in vocational programs.

Studies that sought perceptions about vocational education and training programs included a study by Dixon (1993) looking at staff and student attitudes towards vocational education and training at a West Australian high school. This was also the purpose of Fowler, Dickie, and Blomberg, (1996), who surveyed eleven Australian schools across four states, to gain teacher and student perceptions of vocational education and training programs in the Christian School sector. An American study by Rojewski and Sheng (1993) compared the different perceptions of vocational education and training from African - American and white students, and also compared the different male and female perceptions of Vocational education. Two other American studies looked at teachers' perceptions of secondary vocational education and training

(Heaviside, 1994) and school board perceptions of vocational education and training programs (Hofstrand, 1991).

Another American study by Damico and Roth (1993) researched “general track” students and their perceptions of the school policies and practices, and the results of the study (that schools could significantly improve their graduation rates by directing student behaviour in positive ways, communicating high expectations and joint responsibility for learning) are very significant for schools.

ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

A study conducted by Christie (1984) called “The Classroom World of the Aboriginal Child” researched Aboriginal learning styles. A review commissioned by the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (Groome and Hamilton, 1995) surveyed Aboriginal students in 22 primary and secondary schools to gather a range of perspectives on the needs of Aboriginal adolescents. The study looked specifically at urban Aboriginal students between the ages of ten and fifteen years. The study focused on finding the blockages to Aboriginal students succeeding, and how these can be overcome. A study by McDonald, (1982) was also directed at urban Aboriginal students (in Perth), examining the Aboriginal parent and community perceptions of education, and aspirations for the education of their own children. A study by Nile (1990) was similar in that it also looked at Aboriginal student and community perceptions, in this study, of what identifies effective Aboriginal schools.

Ardler (1993) looked at the relationships between Aboriginal students, their communities and schools, and particularly outcomes related to employment. A study by

Smith, Nickolas, and Leung, (1986) looked at participation and equity issues for Aboriginal year 11 and 12 students in the Northern Territory. A study by Powell (1978) examined the Aboriginal experience of employment and unemployment in the Port Augusta area in order to develop training courses.

This literature review supports the need for the proposed study; there is a significant gap in the knowledge of Aboriginal Vocational Education. There are few studies of Aboriginal vocational education and training programs and fewer studies of vocational educational programs using phenomenological methodology. No studies which explore the experiences of Aboriginal vocational education and training students were found.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to describe and interpret the experiences of Aboriginal students in vocational education and training and post school situations. Qualitative researchers agree that an appropriate methodology for this type of research is phenomenology (Burns, 1994, and Patton, 1990). The purpose for the methodology literature review is solely to show that the methodology for this study has been used for similar studies (although the subject may be different), hence the methodology is appropriate for this study.

Speigelberg (cited in Cohen, 1987) wrote a history of the “phenomenological movement” using the word “movement” deliberately to show that it was not static, but a changing philosophy, and that has made it difficult to provide a description of phenomenology as it has changed so much over the years. Different philosophers have

changed, developed or extended the philosophy and some philosophers moved their positions several times within their own lifetimes. The term “phenomenology” was first used by Kant in 1764, Brentano (1838 / 1917) developed “descriptive psychology” which is closely related to “phenomenology”, Husserl (1859 / 1938), who was a student of Brentano, was and is regarded as the central figure in the phenomenology movement, Stumpf (1848 / 1936) was also a student of Brentano and is credited with “demonstrating the scientific rigour of phenomenology”. Heidegger (1889 / 1976) was a student of Husserl and the two men dominated the phenomenological movement in Germany before the Second World War. Later France became the philosophical home of the phenomenological movement involving Marcel, Satre and Merleau-Ponty. Others have extended or redefined the boundaries of phenomenology, both as a philosophy and a research methodology, in fields such as, study of society by Shutz, psychiatry by Jasper, study of life experiences by Van Kaam, Colaizi, Giorgii and others, studies in nursing, health, caring, education. (Baker, Wuest, and Stern, 1992; Chisholm, 1967; Cohen, 1987; Gurswitch, 1967; Heidegger, Translated 1963, cited in Prescott and Valle, 1978; Packer, 1985). Thus the philosophy has evolved since the time of Brentano to the present day, where, as a research methodology, it has very broad application over many disciplines.

The phenomenological philosophy basically states that there is no separate reality outside of that actually experienced by a human being, and that meaning is made from the “lived in” experience of human beings. The implication for the researcher is that to study reality, we must study human experience, and when we do this, we go firstly to the phenomena, not to any theories or presuppositions. The researcher is looking for the essence or structure of the lived in experience, the meaningful coherence of experience

as it is lived, and finds this by describing peoples perceptions of their experiences and giving structure to these experiences.

Heidegger developed Husserls phenomenology using the hermeneutic approach, which is a methodology for interpretation of written texts (such as the bible), and Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology became both the description and interpretation of the phenomena. Heidegger saw humans as existing hermeneutically, that is, existing to find meaning, and therefore a hermeneutic approach could be applied to the study of everyday experiences of life. When a hermeneutic methodology is used, the action is treated as though it has a semantic and textual structure (Packer, 1985).

Heidegger believed that to exist is to find meaning, and as such, humans exist hermeneutically, and a hermeneutic methodology is appropriate for the study of human experiences. Hermeneutic philosophy is the "study of interpretive understanding, or meaning, with special attention to context and original purpose". Hermeneutic researchers use qualitative methods to establish context and meaning for what people do (Packer, 1985; Patton, 1990; Short 1993).

Phenomenology provides the rich, detailed or thick descriptions of the phenomena, and hermeneutics provides an interpretation of the phenomena. Hermeneutics and phenomenology are both philosophies and research methodologies, a combination able to furnish a description and interpretation of the phenomena.

A phenomenological methodology is appropriate as a philosophical framework for this study as this methodology explores the essence and structure of the "lived in"

experiences of a phenomenon for a particular group of people in context. (Patton, 1990; Taylor and Bogdan, 1984; Aanstoos, 1984)

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Aboriginal vocational education and training students, that is, looking at the students own perceptions of their experiences as vocational education and training students, and how they perceive these experiences may have affected their post school experiences. The method that other researchers have used in investigating the lived in experiences of a group of people, is to use open ended, in depth interviews with an initial question to start the interview, and to record the participant as they share their experience. The interview material is then collated and analysed using a method such as that proposed by Colaizzi (1978), or to gather the material into themes for interpretation. This approach is appropriate for this study in order to make interpretations from the students experiences.

A phenomenological methodology is appropriate because other researchers have used a phenomenological methodology to study the lived in experiences of students (Antwi and Ziyati, 1993; Ford and Trevelly, 1994), and of a group of people (Beck, 1992; Coward, 1994; Kondora, 1993; Porter, 1994) . In each case the phenomenological methodology was appropriate for the research purpose, as in the case of this study.

METHODOLOGY LITERATURE REVIEW

To explore and describe the experiences of a particular group calls for a phenomenological approach to the study. The phenomenon in this case is the vocational education and training experiences of a student while in year 11 and 12 at school, and

also the post school experiences of the participant. This literature review will summarise other studies that have used a phenomenological approach in support of the use of this methodology for this study.

There are studies which explore the “lived in” experience of a particular group of students, including a study of the phenomenon of prejudice in American Universities by Ford and Trevellya (1994). This research uses a phenomenological approach to study the lived experience of nine African American students in American Universities. The researchers wished to capture the nature or essence of the experiences of the students, “to discover the fundamental structure of this experience and its’ meaning in their life world”. (Ford and Trevellya,1994, p5) A hermeneutic phenomenological methodology was used with Van Manen’s framework for analysis of data. A similar study by Antwi and Ziyati (1993) researched African students coping with their experiences in American Universities.

These studies required rich, thick description of experience, such as the description of the experience of what it is like to be a black student in a university context (Ford and Trevellya, 1994), and this necessitated a methodology that would enable the reduction of the descriptions (eighty pages in one study) to themes which would enable interpretation. They chose not to use a quantitative paradigm or positivistic approach which “fails to reflect the multi-dimensional nature of the African American experience” and offers only a “brief, interrupted, commuters view” (Ford and Trevellya,1994, p7). A phenomenological methodology was appropriate for both of these studies and enabled the researchers to deliver important findings.

An American study by Damico and Roth (1993) looked at “general track” students and their perceptions of the school policies and practices, and used structured interviews with 178 adolescents across six high schools. A variety of other information and documents were also collected to assist with triangulation. The purpose of the study was to provide “general track” (that is middle of the road, or average) students with a platform from which they could highlight those features of school and classroom climate, which they believed, helped or hindered their progress towards graduation.

The qualitative methodology component (although only briefly outlined in the research report) is appropriate for this type of research which included rich description, and the findings of the study, that schools could significantly improve their graduation rates by directing student behaviour in positive ways, communicating high expectations and joint responsibility for learning, have important implications for schools.

This study is of particular interest because it seeks to elicit student perceptions about their own schooling in common with the research question outlined in this paper.

A study by Mallet (1995) into the perceptions of design and technology teachers about utilisation of the design process is of interest because it also explores the perceptions of a group of people.

Other studies of phenomenon within a particular group are also relevant because, while the target groups are not students (or Aboriginal), the studies reveal the essence and structure of a phenomenon common to a particular group, from the perspective of those who experienced the phenomenon.

Coward (1994) studied the lived experience of self transcendence in five women with advanced breast cancer, Beck (1993) studied the lived experience of seven women with post partum depression, Porter (1994) studied the lived experience of seven older women who were all widows, Kondora (1993) studied the lived experience of five adult women who were the survivors of incest, Gullickson (1993) studied the lived experience of twelve elderly persons who were living with chronic illness, and First and Way (1995) studied the experiences of eight adult females involved in a parent education program.

All of these studies used a phenomenological framework for the research, two used Colaizzi's method of analysis, two used the method proposed by Diekelman, Allen and Tanner, one used Vam Manen's descriptions and the method of data analysis was not detailed for one study. In each study the use of the phenomenological methodology was appropriate because the researchers wished to explore the "lived in" experience common to a group of people. Use of the phenomenological methodology yielded the rich descriptions, shared meanings or themes, and interpretations for each study.

The studies outlined all utilised a phenomenological methodology to successfully reach conclusions concerning the structure and essence of the lived experience of the participants. A phenomenological methodology is also appropriate for this study as the purpose is to explore the structure and essence of the experiences of Aboriginal vocational education and training students.

SAMPLE

The sample for this study has been drawn from young Aboriginal men and women who were involved in vocational education and training courses at Wongutha CAPS for six months or more at any time within the period 1991 to 1998. The school rolls have been used to identify participants, who were interviewed using the structured interview questions. (Appendix 2)

A method of purposeful sampling described by Patton (1990) as “maximum variation sampling” has been used. Purposeful sampling is the deliberate selection of information rich cases which will be studied in depth. Maximum variation sampling aims at gathering a sample which will represent the full variation of diverse characteristics within the group to be studied. The strategy is to elicit and describe themes that cut across the participant variation to find common themes, core experiences and shared experiences. To carry out maximum variation sampling the researcher must first identify the diverse characteristics or criteria for constructing the sample. For this study the criteria falls into two main groups:

- Location, this was a balance across the three broad areas, of city, town, and community.
- Post school situations.

This was a balance across the different possible post school situations, such as “employed, unemployed, further training, apprenticeship etc”. It was expected that the range of possibilities will emerge as the study progresses.

Maximum variation sampling generally involves a larger sample size than other sampling strategies. Sandelowski (1995) and Morse (1995) state that the domain must be fully sampled to the point of saturation, or continual replication of data, or the collection of data until no new information is obtained. For this study data has been collected within each criteria until there is a continued replication of data.

Initially, part one of the study was to be conducted by phone interview, but the necessity for signed consent forms prior to the interview precluded this approach and participants were interviewed face to face for stage one. The target group proved to be very mobile and of the 172 possible participants, only 102 could be located. This necessitated travelling from Esperance to Kunnunurra and as far east as Cosmo Newberry to conduct interviews.

DATA COLLECTION

For part two of the study, participants were initially selected from the respondents to part one according to the sampling criteria of location (city, town, community), and post school situations, but it quickly became clear that fewer city students attended the school during the period in question (10% as compared to 48% rural and 42% community) and these students became difficult to locate. Consequently, of the 100 stage one structured interviews, 17 were “city”, 53 were from “towns” and 30 were from “communities”, and of the 29 in-depth interviews, 3 were “city”, 11 were from “towns” and 15 were from “communities”. This classification is based on where the participants were located at the time of the interview, rather than location at the time of schooling. Table one lists the location of the participants.

Table 1:
LOCATION OF PARTICIPANTS

	City	Town	Community	TOTAL
Stage one interviews	17	53	30	100
Stage two interviews	3	11	15	29

It also became clear that most of the participants had made a number of changes in post school situations and it was not possible to classify a participant as a singular “post school situation”. In order to record the data in a manageable form the post school time period was divided into blocks of six months, that being the first and second full halves of the calendar year. The post school situation recorded for the participant in any given six month period was the activity that they had spent most time involved in during that time. For most of the participants this was an accurate description of their activity, but for a few it was a compromise description. For instance a participant may have spent the first month unemployed, worked for four months on a stock camp and spent the last month on CDEP (Community Development Employment Projects). That participant would be recorded as employed on a stock camp for that six-month block.

It also became apparent that some participants had made so many changes that they found it difficult to recall exact dates, job types, and whether or not a job was CDEP, a training position or normal employment. By using a gridded sheet of paper and working back from the interview date, and forward from the leaving school date, and using significant dates such as birth dates for children, it was possible to describe a post school history that all participants were satisfied was accurate.

The data for part two was collected by semi-structured, in depth interviews on a one to one basis. The interviewer developed situations where the participant brought the interviewer into his or her own world or experience (Patton, 1990). The interviewer

captured what people say and do as a product of how they interpret the complexity of their world (Burns, 1994) and understands events, experiences and phenomena from the viewpoint or of the participants. As Patton (1990) pointed out the quality of the information is largely dependent on the skills of the interviewer, and the interviewer must create a climate of trust and rapport that enables the participant to fully and accurately share their experiences (Borg, and Gall, 1981).

The interviews were to develop naturally, in an unaffected and spontaneous manner, from a basic semi-structured questionnaire. The participants were encouraged to fully share their vocational education and training experiences, the types of courses they were involved in, the skills they felt they had acquired, their feelings about the course and the usefulness or otherwise of what they had learned, their post school experiences, any affect that the vocational educational experiences may have had on post school experiences.

The interviews varied from twenty minutes to an hour in duration, and were audio-taped and transcribed. The interviewer was provided with the semi-structured interview questions to ensure that the interviewer approached the interviews in the same way, and covered the basic topic areas.

From the first interview it became apparent that the data collected was not of the “thick, rich” type, but was more like an extended response to the interview questions.

Participants rarely moved away from the interview questions while describing their experiences. While the data collected makes it difficult to analyse the material in the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition, the data was nonetheless very useful in developing a response to the research questions.

There are probably several reasons why the data collected was meagre. To interview the participants the interviewer travelled over fifteen thousand kilometres and because of the distances involved and the short time allowed (about six weeks in total) there was not always the opportunity to set up a climate that would allow for the full and free sharing of experiences.

A typical example was an interview conducted at Looma. The interviewer had expected to locate this participant at Beagle Bay, but on arrival was advised that she had gone to One Arm Point. From there she had gone to Derby and then to Looma. The interviewer followed the trail and arrived at Looma, visited the office and community chairman, conducted some stage one interviews and eventually located the participant who was willing and interested in doing the interview. However she only had a short time available as she was going somewhere with her sister. The interviewer was due in another community the following day so could not postpone the visit, so the interview went ahead. It also seemed that this method of interviewing was foreign to the participants and possibly even culturally foreign. Despite extensively explaining the procedure, participants expected to hear a question, respond to the question and hear another question. When prompted to enlarge on a response most participants provided a monosyllabic answer or a small amount of information similar to what had already been given. Despite the “thinness” of the material, it was considered that the material would adequately provide an answer to the research questions.

DATA ANALYSIS

STAGE ONE

It is accepted that “some qualitative research results in quantification” (Best and Kahn, 1998, p239), as for example, when the occurrence of a particular behaviour is

quantified. The outcomes from the first stage interviews were primarily numerical, as a profile for the target group was established.

STAGE TWO

Data analysis for qualitative research essentially involves three steps;

- organising the data,
- describing the data,
- interpreting the data (Patton, 1990, and Best and Kahn, 1998).

This study utilised the following steps:

- *Transcribe and read all of the interview material,*
- *Identify and assemble theme clusters,*
- *Summarise and organise the data manually,*
- *Establish descriptions for each cluster,*
- *Develop conclusion statements from the descriptions.*

VALIDITY, RELIABILITY AND RIGOUR

Sandelowski (1986) suggests a framework of truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality to test the rigour of a qualitative inquiry. Sandelowski uses the work of Guba and Lincoln who suggest that *credibility*, rather than internal validity be used to test truth value, *fittingness* instead of external validity to test applicability, *audibility* rather than reliability to test consistency, and *confirmability* rather than objectivity to test neutrality.

Credibility in this study will be achieved by confirming the results with the participants, fittingness will be achieved by ensuring that all participants have experienced the phenomenon (Vocational Education) and are able to articulate the experience, auditability will be achieved by using accepted phenomenological procedures, and a clear decision trail, that any other researcher could follow. Confirmability will be achieved as credibility, fittingness, and auditability are established (Sandelowski, 1986; Rodgers and Cowles, 1993).

Triangulation in a study provides a way of maintaining rigour and Kimchi, Polivka, and Stevenson (1991) cite operational definitions of triangulation as Theory Triangulation, Data Triangulation, Methods Triangulation and Investigator Triangulation. Multiple Triangulation occurs when more than one type of triangulation is used in the analysis of the study.

Data triangulation in this study will occur as data is collected at different times (multiple interviews) and in different places.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Patton (1990) lists seven issues of ethics that will be addressed in the proposed study.

1. Promises and reciprocity..
2. Risk assessment.
3. Confidentiality.
4. Informed Consent.
5. Data access and ownership.

6. Interviewer mental health.

7. Advice.

Interviewers did not make promises or reciprocal “favours” to participants. The anonymity of the participants has been protected by using codes rather than names to identify data, and no participant has been referred to by name or in any way that could identify the individual. The original material will be destroyed within five years of interviews.

To gain informed consent the participant was advised of the whole study process, the nature of their involvement, the length of time interviews would take, and proposed use of the subsequent material. The participant was aware that he/she could withdraw at any time from the study.

The data is owned by the researchers and can only be accessed by researchers who have agreed in writing to all of the conditions and promises made to the participants. Only the researcher, and university supervising lecturer have had any access to the material. Because of the nature of the phenomenon being studied interviewer mental health has not been an issue and when advice was required the researcher involved the university supervising lecturer.

LIMITATIONS

It is understood that the sample will not be able to fully represent every variation that may occur across the group to be studied, as there could be a huge number of peripheral variations. The sample does represent the main variations.

The study was limited to Western Australia and to vocational education and training courses that are definitely accepted as “Vocational Education” according to the definitions contained within this study, and by educators generally. The study was limited to year 11 and 12 Aboriginal participation in Vocational programs at Wongutha CAPS.

While vocational education and training is becoming standardised to national goals and direction, each state situation is still unique, particularly as the participants vocational education and training experience may have occurred some years ago, before the full effect of the changes. It is not expected that the results will be transferable to other situations in other states.

STAGE ONE INTERVIEWS

Where possible past students were contacted by phone and then visited by the interviewer. Once the study was explained to the past student they all agreed to be involved. The interviewer produced and explained the consent form, which was signed by the participant. The interviewer then requested information about what the participant had done since leaving Wongutha CAPS. The sheet was divided into six months blocks, starting when the student left the school and finishing with the first six months of 1999. Many participants had difficulty in remembering the sequence of events, but using the pro-forma helped as the interviewer moved forward from the time they left and backwards from the last block.

It was necessary to use six month time blocks to gather data that could be quantitatively analysed but a difficulty arose when a participant had done more than one thing within

the block or something had overlapped. The interviewer used his discretion, entering for the block the major activity for the period, and noting other activities.

The pro-forma data was manually analysed and the survey of 100 past students who were involved in Wongutha vocational courses between 1992 and 1997 for a period greater than two terms produced the following results;

Table 2:
STAGE ONE INTERVIEWS

Post school situation	First six months after school	Last six months	Average over whole post school period
CDEP	38	45	41%
Employed	16	25	17.60%
Unemployed	12	13	13.75%
Parent	4	6	7.07%
Study	30	6	18.28%
Prison		3	1.24%
Incapacitated		1	0.20%
Deceased		1	0.57%
	100	100	100%

The first six months is the data from the first (six month) block after the participant left the school program. The last six months is the six month block preceding the collection of data, that is, the first six months of 1999. Stage one interviews included exactly one hundred participants so for the post school situation CDEP, 38% or 38 participants were involved in CDEP in the first six months after they left school, and 45% or 45 participants were involved in CDEP in the last six months.

The last column “average over the whole post school period” is the combined data from the whole period, from the time the participant left the school, up to the time the data

was collected. The way that this data is presented can be best demonstrated looking at an example.

Participant 45

Left school at the end of 1993.

Block 1 (1994)	- study
Block 2 (1994)	- study
Block 3 (1995)	- employed
Block 4 (1995)	- employed
Block 5 (1996)	- employed
Block 6 (1996)	- employed
Block 7 (1997)	- employed
Block 8 (1997)	- unemployed
Block 9 (1998)	- study
Block 10 (1998)	- unemployed
Block 11 (1999)	- CDEP

Participant 45’s post school average is represented as;

Employed	5 blocks = 45% (of the total post school period)
Study	3 blocks = 27% (of the total post school period)
Unemployed	2 blocks = 18% (of the total post school period)
CDEP	1 block = 9% (of the total post school period)

In Table 2, the last column “average over the whole post school period” is the combination of the post school averages for the 100 participants. The data from stage one interviews can be viewed in graph form.

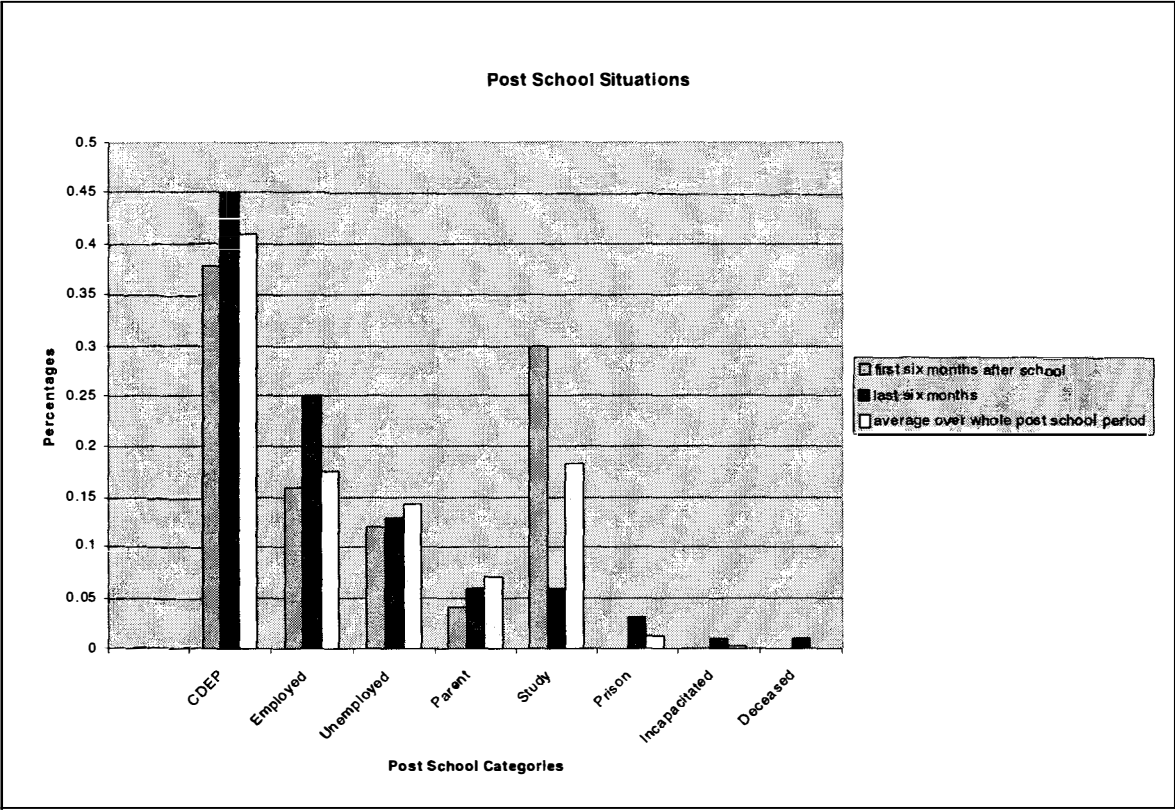


Figure 1: POST SCHOOL SITUATIONS

POST SCHOOL CATEGORIES

The post school categories of CDEP, employed, unemployed, parent, study, prison, incapacitated, deceased are defined as follows;

CDEP

Any participant who was involved in a CDEP project, or partially or wholly paid from CDEP funds. It is a common practice in many communities to pay a person for a CDEP role, but to “top up” or add to that persons income from another source. This is in recognition of the increased hours or responsibility that go with some positions. If a participant stated that he was being paid any CDEP income, they were included in the CDEP section.

EMPLOYED

This included participants who were employed on a casual, full time or part time basis, earning their income from that employment.

Participants were employed in the following areas:

- Painting company
- Upholstery shop
- Police and Citizens Youth Club
- Pre school teacher
- School or Kindy AIEW (7)
- Roadhouse - catering
- Supermarket (3)
- Shire work (2)
- Frail Aged Centre
- Administration
- Staff member – Arts exhibition
- Receptionist (3)
- Argyle Mines (5)
- School cleaner
- Granny Smith Mine (6)
- Glass and window company
- Police Aide
- Cattle Station (3)
- Music Band
- Murrin Murrin Mine (3)
- Perth City Mission
- Mining contractors (machine operator) 1 (truck driver) 1
- Plant Nursery
- Meat processing (boner)
- Summich vegetables
- Brick laying
- Timber mill
- Womens refuge

PARENT

A participant was defined as a parent if they were unable to work as they were an expectant mother, or if they were looking after their own children. Quite a few participants were full time mothers who were also involved in employment or study. If their income came from their employment, they were classified as employed, and if they were a full time student, they were classified as a student.

STUDY

Participants involved in study included trainees, and apprentices, as well as other students.

Participants were involved in the following study:

TAFE (12)

Secondary school (7)

Traineeships - engineering
- clerical administration
- storeman
- mining (6)
- agriculture
- metals fabrication
- receptionist
- hospitality

Apprenticeships - carpentry
- mechanic

Plastering pre-apprenticeship (Leederville TAFE)

Bachelor College

Clontarf (4)

Pundulmurra (2)

Kalgoorlie College (6)

Edith Cowan (2)

Wandering Mission (2)

Aust School of Hospitality and tourism

Alice Springs Centre for Appropriate Technology

Group Training (Kimberley)

A participant may have been involved in study at several different places over the post school period in the study, hence the number of different types of study.

PRISON

Several students spent part of the post school period in detention and this included one student who was on home detention.

INCAPACITATED AND DECEASED

One student was incapacitated and another was deceased after road accidents. In Table 1, the column “average over the whole post school period” for the categories incapacitated and deceased, is that participant’s percentage of the whole post school period that they have been in that condition.

LOCATION OF STAGE ONE PARTICIPANTS

Table 3:
STAGE ONE INTERVIEWS - LOCATION OF PARTICIPANTS

		CITY	COMMUNITY	TOWN
GOLDFIELDS	27	14	0	13
CENTRAL WEST	8	0	0	8
KIMBERLEY	54	0	30	24
PERTH	2	2	0	0
SOUTH WEST	9	1	0	8
Total	100	17	30	53
CITY	17			
COMMUNITY	30			
TOWN	53			
Total 100				

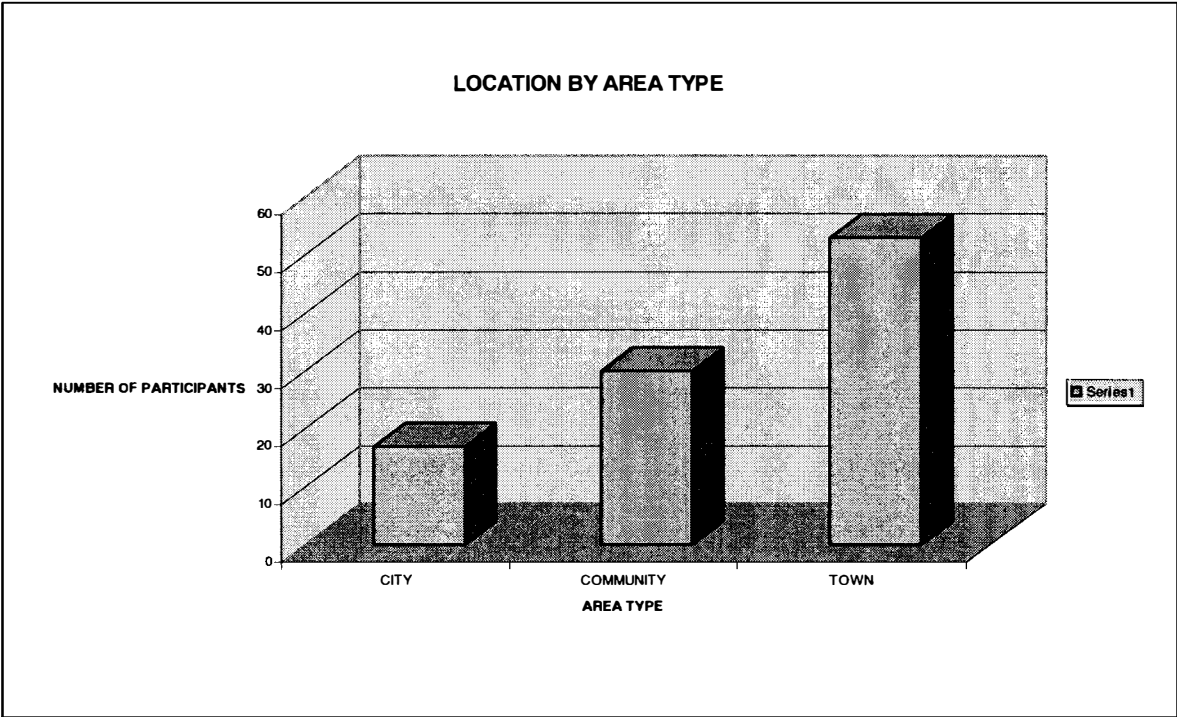


Figure 2: LOCATION BY AREA TYPE

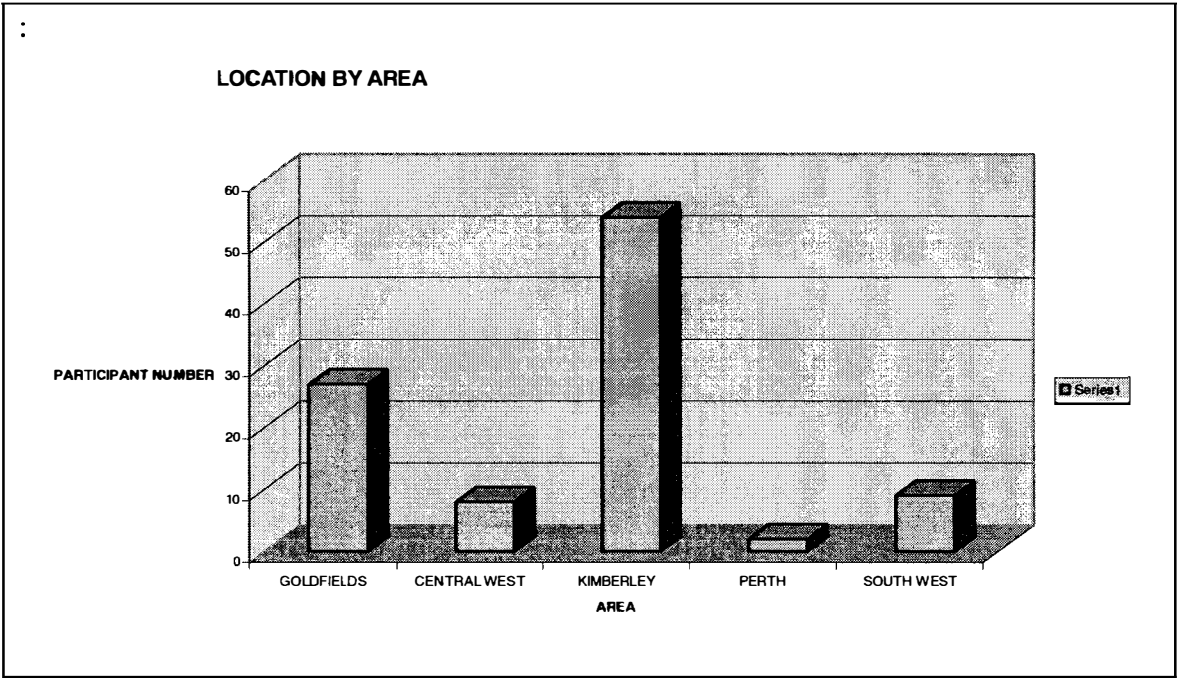


Figure 3: LOCATION BY AREA

Of the 100 participants, most came from the Kimberley (54), with 30 of those coming from communities in the Kimberley and 24 from towns. There are no cities in the Kimberley. Twenty seven participants came from the Goldfields and of these 14 came from Kalgoorlie / Boulder (city) and the rest came from towns in the Goldfields.

Although there are communities in the Goldfields, and some Wongutha CAPS students have come from these communities, no participants in stage one interviews were from Goldfield communities. Nine participants came from the South West and one of these came from a city (Bunbury) and the rest from towns. There are few if any communities in the South West. All of the 8 Central West participants came from towns, although there are communities in this area, but no cities.

It is of interest to compare some of the categories by area, particularly CDEP, Employment and unemployment.

Table 4: STAGE ONE INTERVIEWS
– CDEP BY AREA TYPE AND
LOCATION
 (AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF POST SCHOOL SITUATION)

CDEP BY AREA TYPE

	TOTAL	100%	49%+
CITY	11	0	4
COMMUNITY	27	16	20
TOWN	35	3	12

CDEP BY LOCATION

	TOTAL	49%+
GOLDFIELDS	18	4
CENTRAL WEST	6	1
KIMBERLEY	45	30
PERTH	1	0
SOUTH WEST	3	0

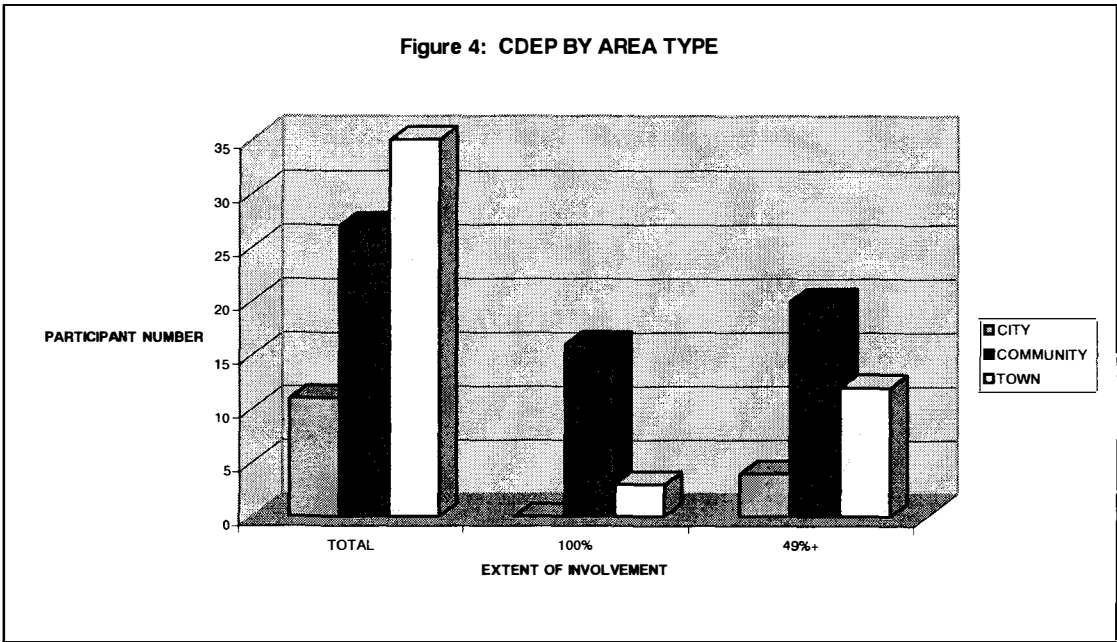


Figure 4: CDEP BY AREA TYPE

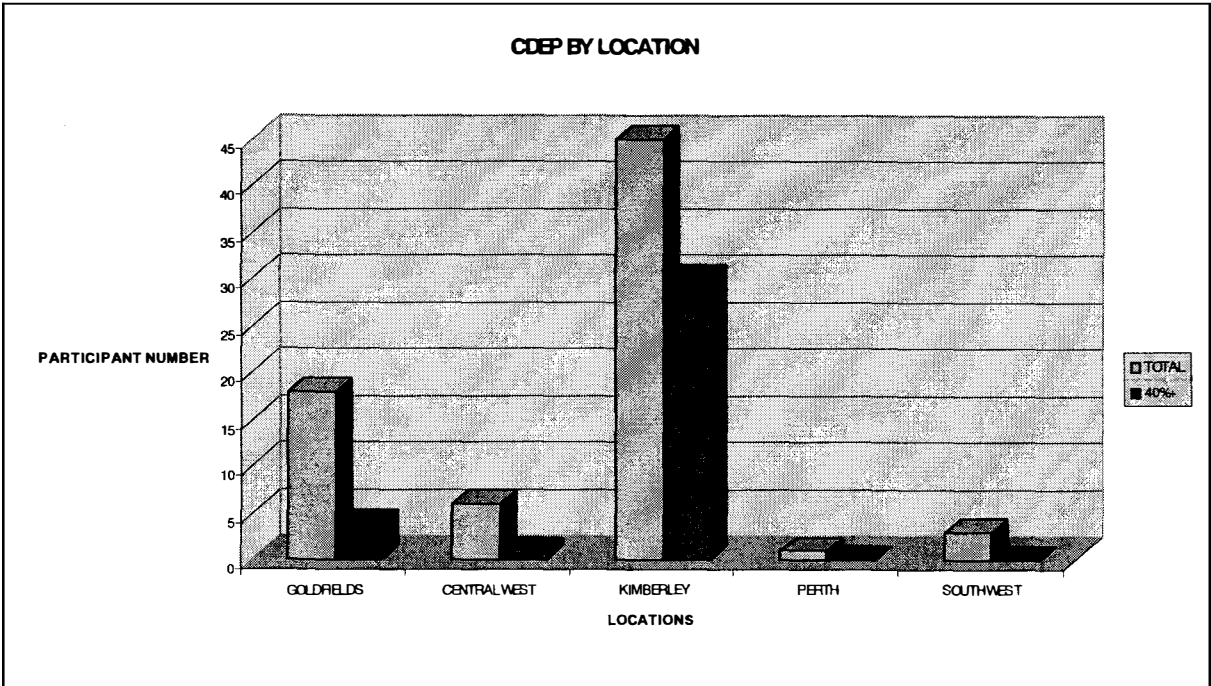


Figure 5: CDEP BY LOCATION

Of 100 participants 73 were involved at some time in their post school situation in CDEP. Eleven of these lived in the city (65% of city participants) and none of these 11 spent 100% of their post school situation in CDEP, and only 4 spent more than 49% of their time in CDEP. The situation is very different for participants who come from communities. Twenty seven (90%) of participants who came from communities were involved in CDEP programs, with 16 of these spending 100% of their post school situation in CDEP, and 20 spending more than 49% of their post school situation in CDEP. Thirty five participants who came from towns (or 66%) were involved in CDEP and only 3 of these spent 100% of their post school situation in CDEP, and 12 spent more than 49% of their post school situation in CDEP.

Of the 54 Kimberley participants, 45 (83%) were involved with CDEP and 30 (56%) were involved for more than 49% of their post school situation. Of the 27 participants from the Goldfields, 18 (67%) were involved in CDEP and 4 (15%) were involved for more than 49% of their post school time. . Of the 9 participants from the South West, 3 (33%) were involved in CDEP and none were involved for more than 49% of their post school time. 6 (75%) Central West participants were involved in CDEP with 1 (12%) involved for more than 49% of their post school time. The sample from Perth was very small with 1 of the 2 being involved in CDEP and for less than 49% of their post school time.

The highest CDEP involvement was for participants from the Kimberley with more half (30) of all the Kimberley participants being involved for more than 49% of their post school situations. Nineteen participants from the Kimberley spent 100% of their post school situations involved with CDEP. CDEP is the main source of employment in most

community situations so these high levels of participation for both the Kimberley and participants from communities are what were expected. In the Goldfields, while many of the participants (67%) were involved with CDEP at some stage of their post school situation, the extent of the involvement was not as great with only 15% being involved for more than 49% of post school situations. This situation is reflected in all of the areas except for the Kimberley. This is probably due to the fact that in other areas, and in towns and cities, there are a lot of post school alternatives to CDEP.

**Table 5: STAGE ONE INTERVIEWS
– EMPLOYMENT BY AREA TYPE
AND LOCATION**

EMPLOYMENT BY AREA TYPE

	TOTAL	100%	49%+
CITY	9	0	2
COMMUNITY	9	1	2
TOWN	24	4	7

EMPLOYMENT BY LOCATION

	TOTAL	49%+
GOLDFIELDS	14	2
CENTRAL WEST	2	1
KIMBERLEY	20	4
PERTH	1	1
SOUTH WEST	5	3

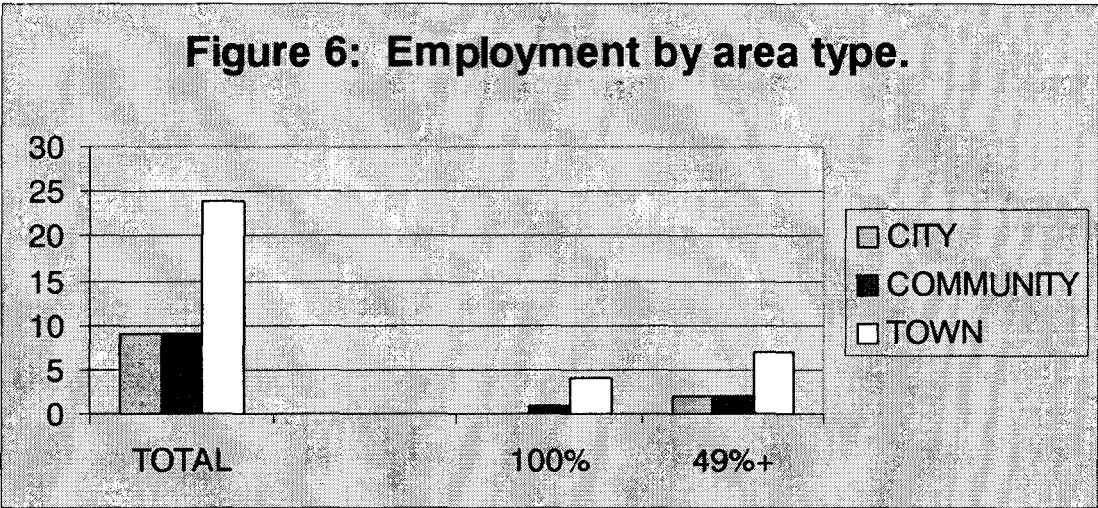


Figure 6: EMPLOYMENT BY AREA TYPE

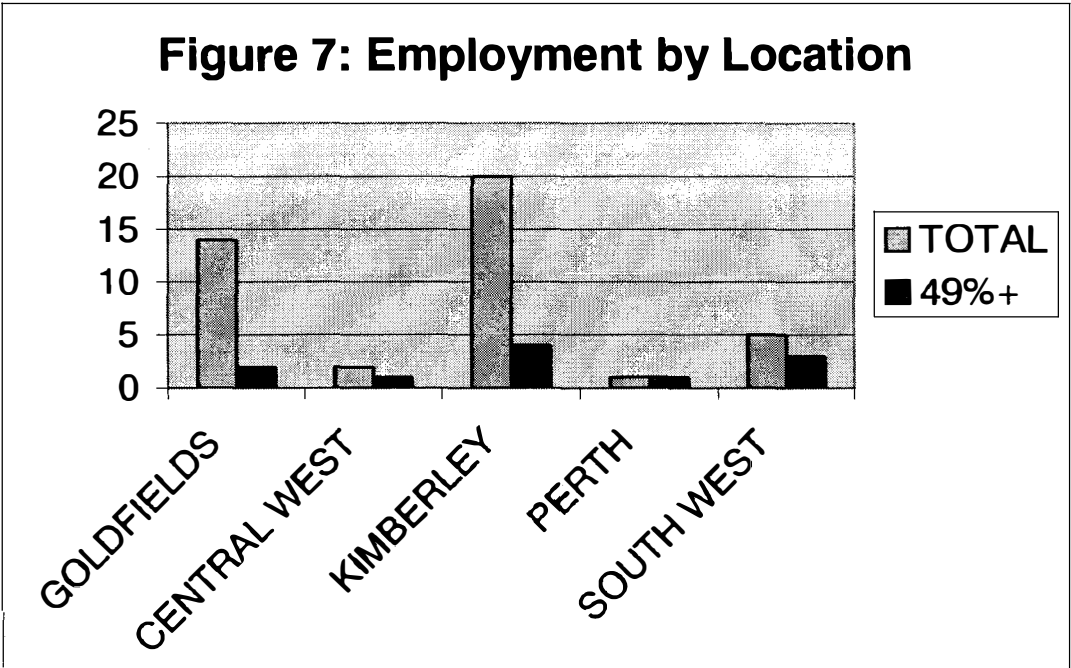


Figure 7: EMPLOYMENT BY LOCATION

When comparing employment against location and area type, percentages for communities (30%) and Kimberley (44%) are low because participants for these areas are involved with CDEP, which is recognised as employment by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Participation in employment is strongest in towns with 24 (45%) of

participants being involved at some time and 7 (13%) being involved for more than 49% of post school period. 4 (8%) of participants were employed for all (100%) of their post school period.

The Goldfields and South West as locations have the highest percentage of employment (52% and 55%) with the Central West being the lowest (25%). Only 3 participants spent 100% of their post school period employed, and these came from towns (4) and Communities (1). These came from the Kimberley (2), Central West (1), Goldfields (1), and South West (1). In the South West 55% of participants were employed and 33% of participants were employed for longer than 49% of their post school period with 11% (1 participant) employed for the full period.

**Table 6: STAGE ONE INTERVIEWS –
UNEMPLOYMENT BY AREA TYPE AND LOCATION**

UNEMPLOYMENT BY AREA TYPE

	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE	49%+
CITY	13	76%	4
COMMUNITY	3	10%	2
TOWN	20	38%	6

UNEMPLOYMENT BY LOCATION

	TOTAL	PERCENTAGES	49%+
GOLDFIELDS	20	74%	6
CENTRAL WEST	3	38%	0
KIMBERLEY	8	15%	5
PERTH	0	0	0
SOUTH WEST	5	56%	1

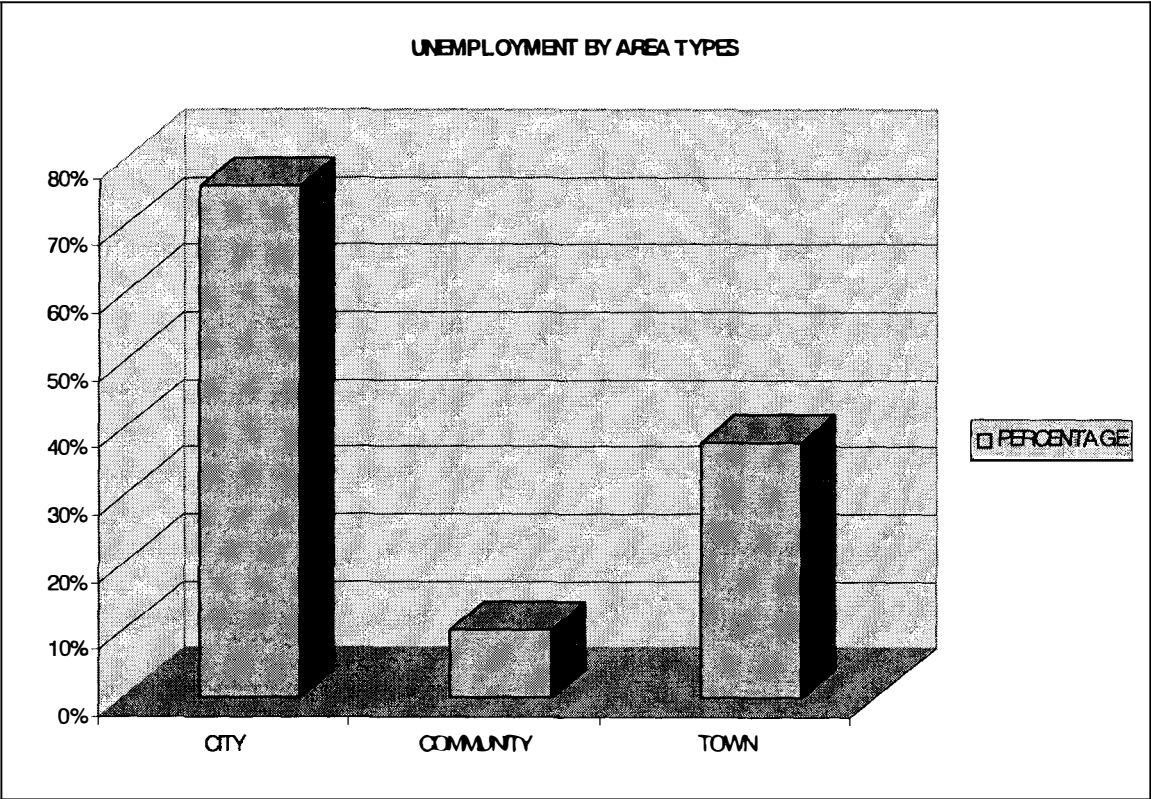


Figure 8: UNEMPLOYMENT BY AREA TYPE

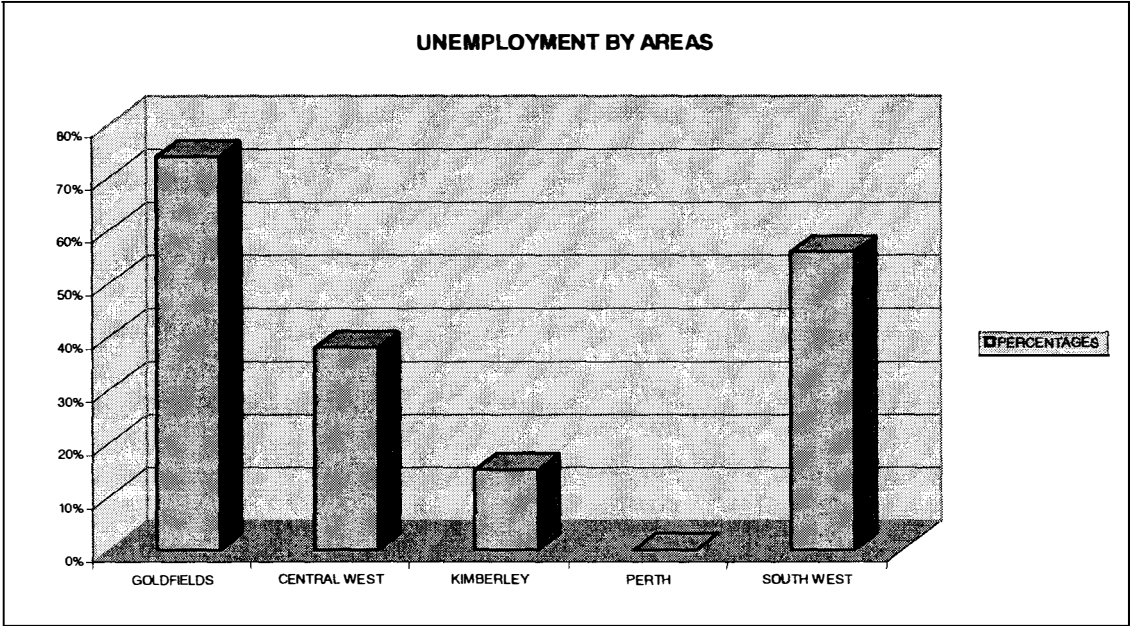


Figure 9: UNEMPLOYMENT BY LOCATION

Of the city participants, 13 or 76% have spent at least one six month block of their post school period unemployed, and 4 of the participants (24% of city participants) spent more than 49% of their post school period unemployed. This is in stark comparison with community participants, where only three, or 10% spent at least one six month block of their post school period unemployed. Of these only 2 (7%) were unemployed for more than 49% of their post school period. 20 (38%) participants who came from towns were unemployed for six months or more and 6 (11%) of these were unemployed for more than 49% of their post school period.

Unemployment is lowest in communities and fewer participants are unemployed for more than 49% of their post school situations. Unemployment is much higher in the cities and more city participants are unemployed for longer.

This same trend is continued when one looks at unemployment by areas with 15% of the Kimberley participants being unemployed for at least six months of their post school period, and only 5 (9%) of Kimberley participants being unemployed for more than 49% of their post school period. 74% of Goldfields participants are unemployed for at least six months of the post school period with 6 (22%) being unemployed for more than 49% of their post school period. 5 or 56% of South West participants were unemployed for at least six months with 1 participant being unemployed for more than 49% of the post school period. 3 or 38% of Central West participants were unemployed for at least six months and none of these were unemployed for more than 49% of their post school period. The number of participants from Perth was very small and none of these were unemployed.

This data would suggest that smaller centres of human population (communities etc) have lower unemployment and larger centres (cities) have higher unemployment for

participants involved in this study. This is consistent with data from the 1996 census for indigenous unemployed persons, which shows that “Indigenous persons living in the Perth ATSI region had the highest unemployment rate (28%)” (Census of Population and Housing, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, 2034.5, page 31) Other large population areas also had higher unemployment rates. Areas where there was a high participation rate in CDEP had the lowest unemployment rates, and these are generally low population areas such as communities.

CONCLUSIONS FROM STAGE ONE INTERVIEWS

Including CDEP, 84% of students made a transition from Wongutha CAPS to employment, or further training, and of those students, 76% are still involved in employment or training. CDEP is included because, for many ex-students it is the only form of employment available on communities, and these ex-students were actively involved in working on CDEP programs. Some Ex-students on communities chose not to be involved actively in CDEP programs and these are included in the unemployed. The Australian Bureau of Statistics classifies persons working on CDEP schemes as employed, although the 1996 census provides a breakdown of CDEP and other employed. Data from the 1996 census shows that in Western Australia, of 9619 fifteen to twenty four year olds, 3295 or 34% were employed and of these, 1058 or 11 % were CDEP employed.

**Table 7: POST SCHOOL
SITUATION COMPARED
WITH 1996 CENSUS**

	Wongutha CAPS: FIRST SIX MONTHS AFTER SCHOOL	Wongutha CAPS: CURRENTLY	Wongutha CAPS: AVERAGE - WHOLE POST SCHOOL PERIOD	CENSUS AVERAGE 1996 WA
CDEP	38%	45%	41%	11%
Employed	16%	25%	17.60%	23%
TOTAL	54%	70%	59%	34%

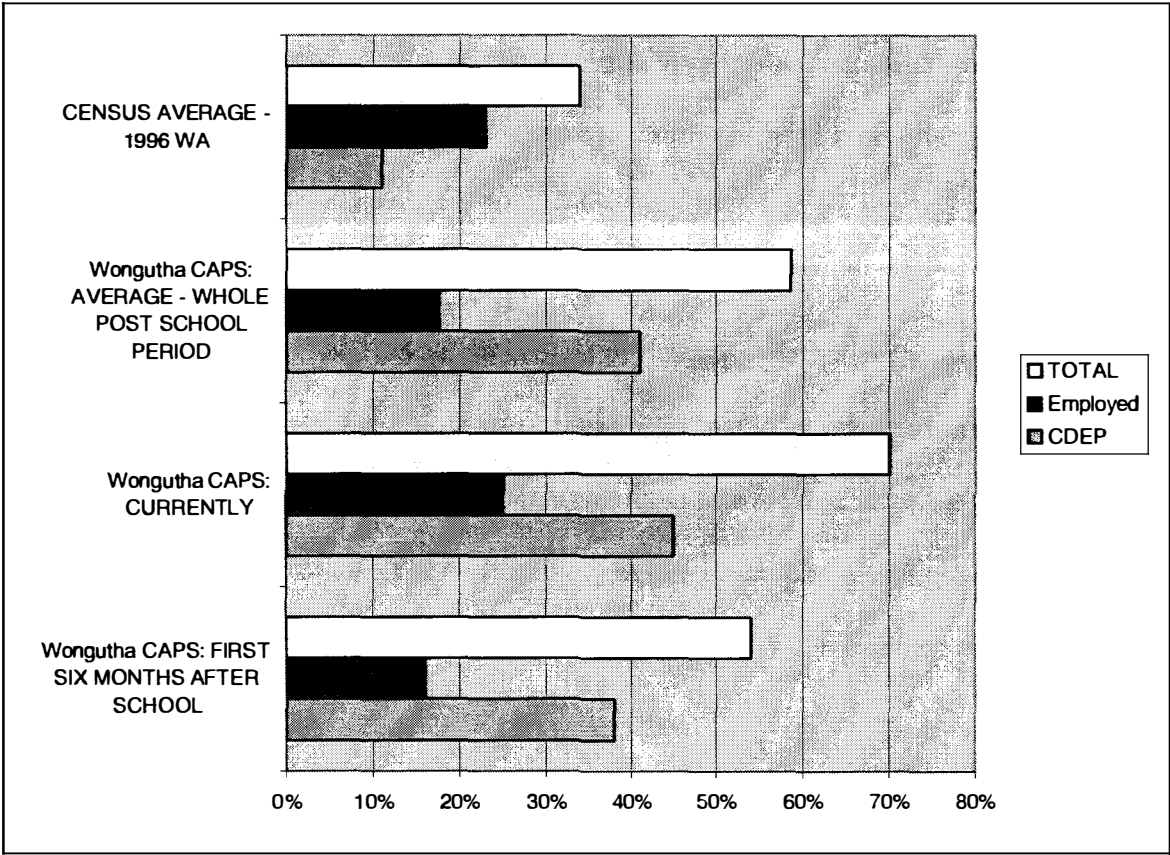


Figure 10: POST SCHOOL SITUATIONS COMPARED WITH 1996 CENSUS

In the first six months after leaving Wongutha 30% of participants were involved in further study and this ranged from upper secondary or TAFE type study to University

study. At the time of the interviews only 6% of the participants are involved in further study, and this is what would be expected. The group of participants have grown older and have moved from study to employment or some other situation. In the first six months after leaving Wongutha 4% of participants were parents and this increased to 6% at the conclusion of the study, although many participants had children in the intervening period, giving an average of 7.07%, which is as expected. Aboriginal society tends to share responsibility for looking after children with the broader family which means that participants who are mothers are able to be involved in CDEP, employment or study.

In the first six months after leaving Wongutha 12% of participants were unemployed, and at the conclusion of the study, 13% were unemployed with an average over the whole period of 13.75%. Data from the 1996 census shows an unemployment rate for 15 to 19 year old indigenous young people of 29%, and for 20 to 24 year old indigenous young people of 23%. The Australian Bureau of Statistics describes the unemployment rate as “the proportion of the labour force looking for work” so there is some basis for comparison between the 1996 census unemployment rate and the unemployment rate of the participants in this study. The unemployment rate of the participants is significantly lower than that of the 1996 census unemployment rate for the same aged indigenous young people.

In the first six months after leaving Wongutha 16% of participants were employed, and at the conclusion of the study, 25% were employed with an average over the whole period of 17.6%. A large number of the participants were involved in further study in the first six months after leaving Wongutha, and during the whole post school period there was a transfer from study to employment and CDEP. This can be seen from the

number of participants employed at the end of the study. The 1996 census employment rate for 15 – 24 year old indigenous young people is 23% which is higher than the average for the whole post school period for participants, but 2% lower than the number of participants employed at the end of the study. The average over the whole post school period is 5.4% lower than the 1996 census employment rate. This is because of the number of participants who were involved in CDEP programs.

In the first six months after leaving Wongutha 38% of participants were involved in CDEP programs, and at the conclusion of the study, 45% were CDEP employed with an average over the whole period of 41%. This compares with the 1996 census CDEP employment rate for 15 – 24 year old indigenous young people of 11%.

When the CDEP and employment rates for participants are combined as employment generally, in the first six months after leaving Wongutha 54% of participants were involved in employment /CDEP, and at the conclusion of the study, 70% were CDEP/ employed with an average over the whole period of 59%. This is significantly higher than the 1996 census CDEP/ employment rate for 15 – 24 year old indigenous young people of 34%.

Wongutha Caps ex students who were involved in the program for six months or longer, are almost twice as likely to be employed than their indigenous West Australian peers. It could be argued that students who chose to attend a post compulsory school and then remain for at least six months are probably as a group, predisposed to employment. While it is therefore difficult to argue that the post secondary vocational education and training involvement for these participants was a contributing factor in the higher rate

of employment, the fact remains that the difference between this group of fifteen to twenty four year olds and their indigenous peers is noteworthy. Had the employment results for this group of participants been the same as, or lower than their peers, one could have concluded that their post secondary vocational education and training had probably not contributed significantly to employment rates.

STAGE TWO INTERVIEWS

Twenty nine in depth interviews were audio taped and transcribed. The three steps of the analysis included

- organising the data,
- describing the data,
- interpreting the data

ORGANISING THE DATA

The data was transcribed and all of the material was read carefully by the researcher.

The thinness of the material and the manner in which participants restricted responses to questions resulted in data that could be manually summarised and organised under the general interview questions. Therefore the interview questions have become the theme clusters.

The data was organised under the following headings, which came from the semi-structured interview sheet.

- * School Experience
- * Did you enjoy or dislike the courses? Did you find them helpful or unhelpful? Were you bored or interested?

- * Did you learn skills or was it a waste of time?
- * Which were the best courses? Which were the worst courses?
- * If you could change something about that time , what would you change?

Post School Experience

- Did what you did at school (the Vocational Courses) have any effect on jobs training etc that you went into after leaving. Did you use anything you had learned at school? Were any skills that you could use?
- Did you find leaving school very different to what you expected? Had the school prepared you in any way for leaving school?
- What are the best things that have happened since you left school. What are the worst things that have happened since you left school?
- If you could change something about the time since you left school, what would you change?

DESCRIBING THE DATA

The data was summarised and the frequency of particular responses noted. This is not normal practice in a phenomenological study, but after discussion with the supervisor, it was agreed that ignoring the frequency of responses would inaccurately portray the results. The process of summarising involved some interviewer interpretation, and notes were made on the types of interpretations made and reasons for interpretations and summaries.

INTERPRETING THE DATA

Conclusion statements have been made at the end of each theme cluster, and overall conclusions follow at the end of the report.

SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

1. Participant responses to “Did you like or dislike the courses? Did you find the courses helpful or unhelpful? Were you bored or interested?”

Responses and frequency of responses to this question included the following:

- I liked the courses/ course was “all right” 29
- The courses were helpful. 16
- The courses were interesting 16
- Liked some and didn’t like others. / Some were interesting, some boring. 8
- I liked the practical courses 7
- Theory was boring/ unhelpful 4
- The courses were hands on, not just theory. 2
- Courses different to other schools. 2
- The courses were all about the same.
- Courses initially difficult but got better with time.
- Liked working in groups
- Liked the sports courses
- I liked/ was interested in ,
 - mechanics 4,
 - agriculture 3,
 - welding 3,
 - woodwork 2,
 - driving,
 - catering,
 - computer,
 - early childhood,

- I found **boring/ unhelpful**
 - mechanics 2,
 - catering 2,
 - computer 2,
 - metalwork 2,
 - English.

Examples of the responses include;

When I first went to Wongutha it was hard, because your starting, it's all new. The following year was good though. I wouldn't say it was boring, it was interesting. Practical work was the most interesting. Mechanics was probably the most boring. Yes, I learnt skills.

Liked some and didn't like others. Helpful, mechanics was anyway. Some were interesting, some boring. Metal work was boring, we didn't get to do any hands on work, and it was all theory. Mechanics and agriculture were interesting, because it was all hands on work. I learnt good mechanic skills, which is how I got this job.

Summary

All of the participants liked the course or found it “all right”. The first comments that participants made about their vocational education and training experience was positive. Most participants found the courses interesting and helpful.

Eight of the participants stated that they liked some subjects, found some interesting and didn't like other subjects, or found them boring. If there were to be any preconceived expectations for responses from the researcher, it was that the participants would find aspects of their course interesting or helpful, and other parts not interesting or unhelpful, so this was an expected response.

Participants then made negative comments about the theory component of their courses, and positive comments about the practical or “hands on” aspects of their courses. Seven participants mentioned that they liked the practical nature of the courses, and four stated that the theory was boring or unhelpful. This is significant because participants actually mentioned it, and also the number of participants that mentioned it. It was a lasting impression of their vocational education and training experiences. Other participants mentioned that the courses were different to the courses in other schools but these participants didn't enlarge on how they were different.

Other comments on participants experiences concluded that the courses were all about the same, and that the courses were initially difficult but got better with time. Another participant “liked working in groups” and one “liked the sports courses”.

While participants weren’t asked about specific subjects or courses, they nonetheless made comments on specific subjects. Mechanics was mentioned as a course they liked by seven participants and a course they didn’t like by two participants. This information is interesting because no subject was universally liked or disliked. The information would be significant if the research attempted to make a correlation between a particular participants likes, dislike, subject choice and specific post school experiences.

In summary, most participants made positive comments about their vocational education and training experience and found it interesting or helpful. Participants generally liked and found helpful the practical nature of the course and not the theory.

2. Participant responses to “Did you learn skills or was it a waste of time?”

Responses and frequency of responses to this question included;

I learnt skills 13

I didn’t really learn many skills. Waste of time. 2

I learnt skills in;

- agriculture (inc mowing, poultry, gardening) 5,
- welding 4,
- computer 4,
- concreting 1,
- mechanics 4,
- catering 1,
- English 2,
- Bible 1,
- Spray painting,
- Maths,
- woodwork,
- Learning for Living.

Examples of the responses include;

I liked all the courses. All interesting. Mechanics was the most interesting. I learnt lots of skills. Pulling a starter motor apart, cleaning it, putting it back together. How to put all your tools away properly.

Summary

Thirteen of the participants stated that they had learnt skills and this included statements like “I learnt lots of skills”. Two stated that they hadn’t learnt skills or it was a waste of time. Five of the participants stated that they had learnt skills in some aspect of agriculture, and four participants mentioned welding, four computer and four mechanics. Two mentioned English, and concreting, catering, bible, spray painting, maths, woodwork and learning for living were all mentioned once. Learning for living is a school based subject that looks at topics such as health, the law, politics etc.

In summary most of the participant responses indicated that participants had learnt skills.

3. Participant responses to “Which were the best courses? Which were the worst courses?”

The following responses to this question also included frequency of response;

Best courses

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| • Agriculture/gardening 8 | • English 1 |
| • Mechanics 6 | • Maths 1 |
| • Woodwork 6 | • Panel beating/ spray painting 1 |
| • Welding 4 | • Catering 1 |
| • Concreting 2 | • Bible 1 |
| • Outdoor work 2 | • Practical 1 |
| • Computer 2 | • Theory 1 |
| • Social studies / history 2 | |

Comments on specific subjects

The best courses were woodwork, because I like working with wood.

The best were agriculture, welding, all outdoor subjects

Worst courses

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Agriculture/ Poultry 4 | • Computers 1 |
| • Mechanics 4 | • Bible 1 |
| • Maths 3 | • Catering 1 |
| • English 2 | • Theory 1 |
| • Woodwork 1 | • Living in the hostel 1 |
| • Metalwork 1 | |

Comments on specific subjects

Woodwork. Because the measurements were hard to understand.

Maths, English, and Reading, I didn't really understand it.

The worst would have to be maths; I found it really hard. I hated doing maths, I never understood it.

The worst were mechanics, I never really understood it all. Mechanics, I never really understood it.

Agriculture was the worst; I found it really boring. I didn't really like theory work either.

Computers I really didn't like sitting in front of one for ages.

Examples of the responses include;

I liked it, and it helped me a lot. I found the courses very helpful. I found the courses very interesting. Computer was the most interesting. Yes, I did learnt skills. Early childhood and computer were the main ones.

I liked the courses. Helpful, but some classes were harder than others, like Maths.

Interested, especially welding. I learnt a lot of skills, which come in handy every time I apply for a job.

Summary

It is interesting that participants most frequently noted agriculture and mechanics as the best subjects, and also the worst subjects. These two subjects tended to polarise participants.

Agriculture and or gardening were mentioned eight times as the best subject, mechanics six times, Woodwork six times, Welding four times, concreting, outdoor work, computer, social studies and or history were all mentioned twice and English, maths, panel beating & spray painting, catering, bible, practical, and theory, were all mentioned once. It is interesting to note that in response to a question about best and worst courses, some participants indicated “outdoor work”, “practical” and “theory”.

For the worst courses agriculture / poultry and mechanics both scored four, maths three, English two and woodwork, metalwork, computers, Bible, catering and scored one. Although “theory” and “living in the hostel” are not subjects, they were also mentioned once each.

Participants listed subjects they felt were the worst subjects, twenty times and the subjects they felt were the best subjects thirty nine times. This supports the previous conclusion that students were generally positive about their vocational education and training course.

The comments on specific subjects fall into three types, “didn’t understand”, “boring” and “didn’t like theory”. The comment on computers could also be boredom. The four comments on “understanding a subject” are interesting for the classroom teacher. If a student doesn’t understand a particular subject, they obviously won’t like it.

In summary, participants listed almost twice as many subjects that they liked compared to subjects that they didn’t like, supporting the previous conclusion of generally positive participant feeling about vocational education. The two subjects listed as the least liked

were also listed as the most liked, and participants noted a direct link between subjects they didn't understand and didn't like.

4. Participant responses to “If you could change something about that time, what would you change?”

Responses and frequency of responses included;

No change 10

I wish I'd done Mechanics / more mechanics 2

I wish I had studied harder. 2

I wish I had done some other subjects 2

I would like to have done gardening and more agriculture type things. 2

I wish I hadn't of studied Agriculture, it was a waste of time.

I would have studied music.

I would have learnt more about the community.

I would of like to have done catering, so I could make my own food.

I'm not too sure.

I'd like to study more politics, maths, and computers. I'd like to learn about Law and peoples rights.

Summary

Ten of the participants indicated that they wouldn't change anything about that time (the period of time that they were involved in vocational education), and again this is an indication that the participants felt some level of satisfaction with their vocational education and training experience. Five participants mentioned the two subjects (agriculture and mechanics) that tended to polarise participants. Two participants indicated that they should have done more mechanics, two indicated that they should have done more agriculture and one indicated that they shouldn't have done agriculture as it “was a waste if time”.

In summary, when asked “If you could change something about the vocational education and training time”, ten participants indicated no change, and fourteen indicated that they would have studied different subjects or studied harder.

POST SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

1. Participant responses to “Did what you learn at school have any effect on what you went into after leaving? Did you use anything you learned at school? Were there any skills that you could use?”

Response and frequency of responses included;

I learnt skills which helped me/ helped me get a job. 28

I didn't use the skills I had learned 1

Participants specified the following areas;

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| • Agriculture 13 | • Bricklaying 1 |
| • Mechanics 8 | • Practical things 2 |
| • Welding / `Metalwork 6 | • Using tools 2 |
| • Computer 5 | • Confidence and self respect 2 |
| • Catering / Hospitality 5 | • Getting up early for work 2 |
| • Woodwork / building 4 | • Manners1 |
| • Fencing 3 | • Basketball 1 |
| • Using a chainsaw 2 | • Communication 1 |
| • Driving 2 | • Learning to sort things out 1 |
| • Maths 1 | • Preparing myself for a job 1 |
| • Painting 1 | • How to study 1 |
| • English / reading 2 | |

Examples of the responses include;

Agriculture was helpful; it's helped me get my job.. I learnt confidence to go out and get a job. .. I learnt good mechanic skills, which is how I got this job. . I found working in the gardens has helped me out now.

I mostly use the gardening and manners. I always use my gardening, computer, maths, and painting skills.

I've used my computing. I found it easier using computers knowing, because we'd been taught where all the buttons were. Computer skills

No. No, I've never really used anything I learnt at school. I've used some of the skills, but a lot of the ones I learnt at Wongutha I've never used.

Yes, I work for CDEP, we had to put an air-conditioner up in the roof, and we had to use wood, so I knew how to measure it and keep it level, all the things I learnt in Woodwork. I knew what I was doing so I did a good job. And other courses like Agriculture, that were good for me because I learnt a lot of things I always use. Like when we build a garden I knew fencing, and all those type of things. How to plant things. These where all skills I learnt at school. I'm always using things that I've learnt from school.

Yes, like using a chain saw. How to do fencing and welding. Those skills have helped me since I left Wongutha.

A lot of things have helped me. I went for this job, and they asked me if I could drive, and I said yes. They asked me where I learnt to drive. I said at Wongutha. Then they said, all right then, take all this rubbish to the dump. I always use things I learnt at school. I'm always using gardening, agriculture, and welding skills.

Yes, I'm always using my cooking at home and the computer. There weren't really any skills I've used otherwise.

With agriculture, I've planted a garden and taught my kids about it. I've used catering since I left school.

Yes. I do lots of welding, gardening, motor mechanics; they've all helped.

Yes. I know all the tools and how to use them. I did a bricklaying course with Mr Buckley, and that's helped me.

They have helped me a lot. I use maths. I used to work in a shop, and when I did stocktaking, it was a lot easier because I understood it all.

Yes. I work with builders in our community. All those skills I learnt at Wongutha. I'm always using the welding equipment and the leveller.

Yes, I've used lots of skills. Like mechanics. When my mother got a car I cleaned out her starter motor, and it went. We couldn't believe it. We also have a vegetable patch, which I look after.

Yes. The communications and learning to sort things out. I've used the cooking; I'm really good at that. I would have liked to learn how to do gardening.

Yes, it has helped me. I took the mechanics course, and because I had learnt a lot of it already, I got a job. I'm going to use my gardening skills next year. We are going to start a garden. My uncle will help me when he gets out of prison.

Yes, it's helped me. I use the woodwork. Like how to use all the tools properly. The woodwork helped when I renovated the house.

Yes, being able to get up early for work, and how to prepare myself for a job. It taught me self-respect. I've used my welding skills. A bit of mechanics. Some farming things like fencing, and how to hold sheep.

What I learnt was useful. When I started work I had to get up early, which I was used to. Yes everything was useful. I mainly use computers, and I've used mechanics a few times.

Yes, it helped me a lot. I'm studying at University, being at Wongutha taught me how to study. I use my catering skills a lot.

Yes, I use all the practical subjects. Like agriculture, mechanics, mainly hands on things.

Yes, I've used practically everything I learnt. Like cutting wood with the chain saw, and gardening.

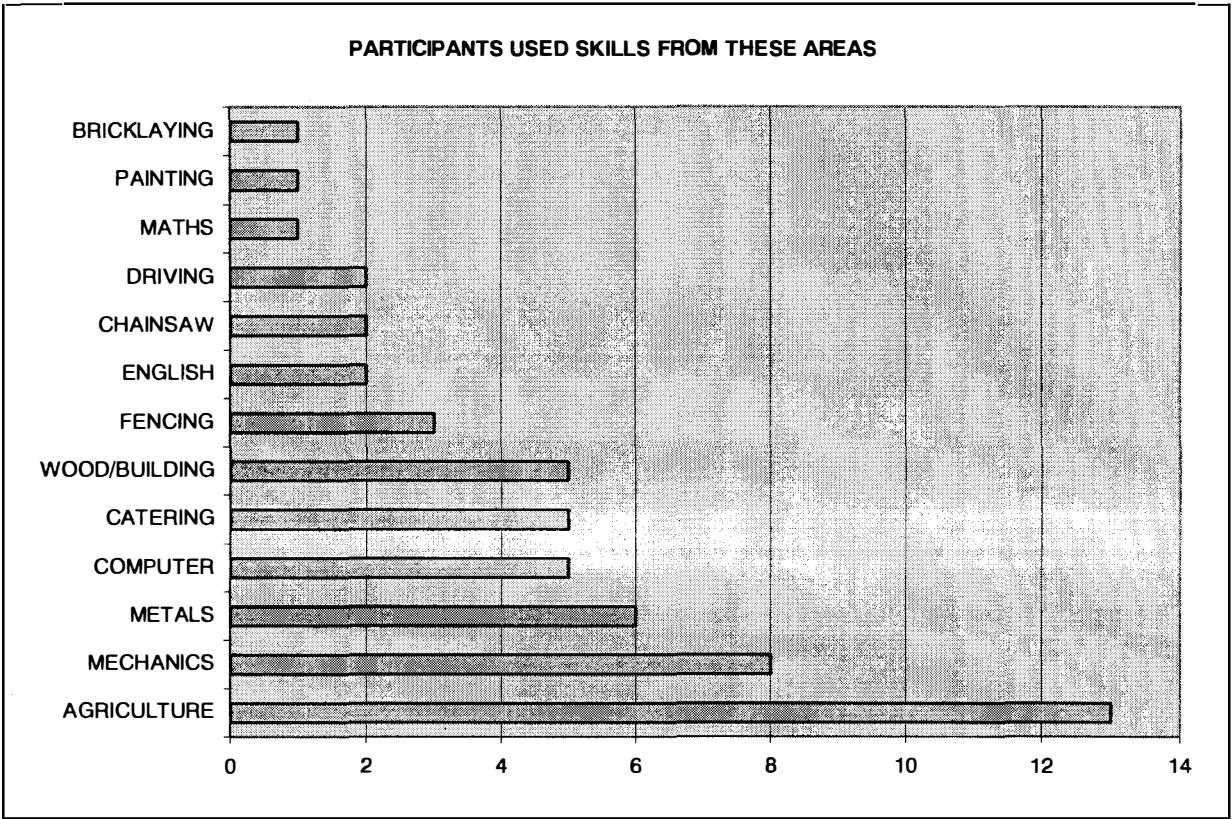


Figure 11: SPECIFIC SKILLS USED BY PARTICIPANTS

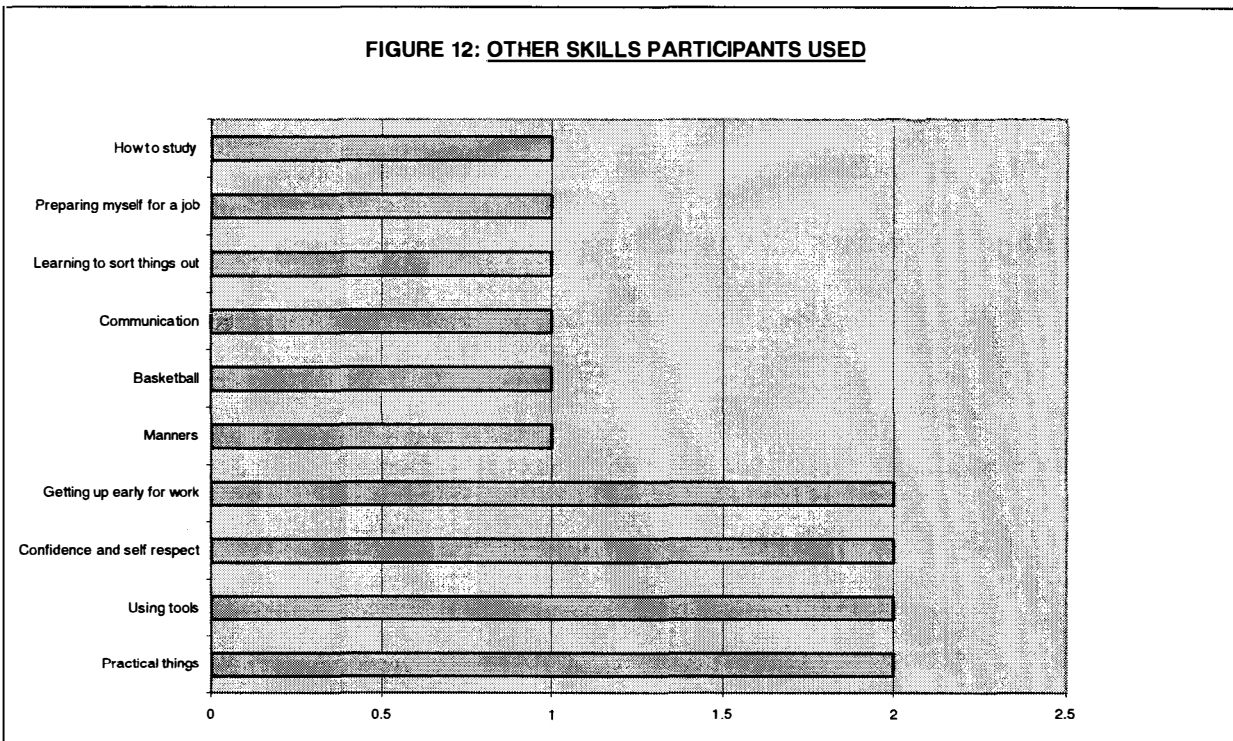


Figure 12: OTHER SKILLS USED BY PARTICIPANTS

Summary

Twenty eight participants indicated that they had learned skills which had helped in their post school situations, in jobs, getting jobs, or in their day to day lives. One response was negative, with the participant indicating that they hadn’t used the skills they had learned.

In detailing what skills they had learned, 13 participants indicated skills from agriculture, 8 from mechanics, 6 from welding and metals, 5 from computing, and 5 from catering and hospitality.

Apart from mentioning specific subjects, participants also detailed aspects of their vocational education and training which they felt had helped them in their post school situations, and these are not specifically taught skills. This includes “confidence and self respect”, “Getting up early”, “manners”, “learning to sort things out”, “preparing myself for a job” and “how to study”. All of these are a part of the hidden curriculum of

a school, that is, things which are not written down in any teaching program, but that the school still imparts to students. It is probably important for educators in VET (Vocational Education and Training) schools to be noting the aspects of the hidden curriculum that participants perceive has had an affect on their post school situations, as some of these aspects probably should be part of the specific school program.

In summary, nearly all of the participants perceived that their vocational education and training and training affected their post school situations, and could detail skills or other aspects of their course that assisted them in post school situations.

2. Participant responses to “Did you find leaving school very different to what you had expected? Had the school prepared you in any way for leaving?”

Responses and frequency of responses included;

Was leaving school different to what you expected?

- Yes 12
- No 11
- Yes and no 2

No

- I worked during the holidays, so I was used to it.
- Had worked after year 9.
- It wasn't easy being at school.

Yes

- I found it difficult / harder. 9
- I was really bored and had nothing to do.
- I had to fend for myself financially.
- It was alright though
- There were lots of expectations people put on me.
- Hard to find a job.
- I thought it would be better in some areas and worse in others. .

- It was bad leaving school, I would have liked to stay longer.
- I think it's bad leaving school, I would have liked to finish my subjects.
- You have to have everything on paper.
- There was lots of pressure. .
- I didn't have any qualifications, or confidence
- You go from a nice Christian school into this working world, and it's such a difference.
- You have to obey all the rules.

In some ways yes, and others no. after I left Wongutha I kept on schooling, which helped me gain employment, and guided me into the workplace

Had the school prepared you in any way for leaving?

- No 2
- Yes 6
- Yes and No / in some ways 3

Examples of the responses include;

Yes, I found it difficult. I was really bored and had nothing to do.

Yes, I was supported, but when I left school everyone thought I was old enough to look after myself. I had no money so I found it really hard. You have to fend for yourself and pay for everything on your own. No ones giving you money to pay bills or rent. In some ways the school prepared us.

No, I didn't find it any different to what I expected. With all the courses I studied, I think the school did prepare me.

Yes, I found it hard. You have to have everything on paper. But now I'm used to it. I don't think I was ready or old enough to work.

In some ways yes, and others no. after I left Wongutha I kept on schooling, which helped me gain employment, and guided me into the workplace. The school prepared me in somethings. They need to teach work ethics. You need to know how to look after yourself. I think it's very important, if your working or not you need to look after something and respect it. Whether it be yourself, your car, your wife.

Summary

Twelve of the participants stated that leaving school was different to what they expected and most of these found it harder or more difficult than they expected. This was because

of boredom, having to fend for themselves financially, expectations or pressure people placed on them, difficulty in finding employment, unprepared because subjects or courses were not completed, lack of confidence or security, and having to comply with rules. Eleven participants stated that leaving was not different to what they had expected. This was because they had worked (or had a period away from school) previously, or because they hadn't found school easy.

In summary, about half the participants found leaving school as they expected and half found it more difficult than they expected.

3. Participant responses to “What are the best things that have happened since you left school? What are the worst things that have happened since you left school?”

Responses and frequency of responses included;

Best

- getting a job and earning money.13
- having children 5
- Freedom/being your own boss/ making you own decisions 3
- working at an upholstery shop.
- Not having to go to school.
- People recognise the skills I learnt at school
- Being treated as an adult
- Being responsible
- Seeing something bigger and better
- Meeting people
- Completing school
- Playing in a football team
- Mining course
- Having a car
- Studying at University
- Working and doing a traineeship
- Getting a TAFE certificate
- Nothing good has happened 2

- **Worst**
- I miss my friends. I get really bored and that's not much fun.³
- No job / unemployed ³
- I wasn't ready to leave school / miss school ²
- Losing my licence
- Responsibility of children
- Having to get a job
- Failed an apprenticeship
- Working and being pregnant
- going to jail
- going to TAFE. I found it hard going back into a schooling environment.

Examples of the responses include;

The best thing that has happened to me since leaving school is working at an upholstery shop. The worst thing would have been going to TAFE. I found it hard going back into a schooling environment.

The best thing about leaving would be getting a job and earning money.

The best thing would be that you don't have to go to school. You get to see what happens in the world during the day, when you would normally be in school. Your not treated like a student, but an adult. I would have liked to do others courses. Like panel beating, and woodwork.

People recognise the skills I learnt at school. The worst thing is that I wasn't ready to leave school. I wasn't ready because I wanted to learn more, and get a better understanding of things. I'm happy with what I learnt at school and I wouldn't change anything.

I can't think of anything. Probably the freedom, and having money.

Summary

There were a broad variety of participant responses to this question. In response to “what are the best things that have happened to you since leaving school” ¹³ participants indicated “getting a job and earning money” and 5 participants indicated “having children”. Three participants indicated “freedom/being your own boss/ making your own decisions” and 2 indicated that nothing good had happened to them. There were 14 more different responses which provide an interesting perspective on the significant things that have happened to the participants since they left school. In

response to “what are the worst things that have happened to you since leaving school”, 3 participants indicated that they missed their friends and got bored, 2 participants indicated that the worst thing was not being able to get a job, and 2 indicated that they felt they weren’t ready to leave school and missed school. It is interesting that one participant stated that the worst thing was having to get a job, while other participants felt the worst thing was not being able to get a job.

In summary, most participants felt that the best thing that had happened to them since leaving school was getting work , earning an income and having children, while the worst was missing friends and school, getting bored and not being able to get work..

4. Participant responses to “If you could change something about the time since you left school, what would you change?”

Responses and frequency of responses included:

No Change 11

Yes Change 10

- Higher paying job
- Study more / go to university³
- Settle down in one place
- Get a job and a house
- Trained in a different field
- Stayed longer in some jobs
- Completed year 12
- Start all over again
- Wait longer before having children

Examples of the responses include;

I wouldn’t want to change anything, I’m happy with it all.

I don’t know what the best things would be. Nothing really good has happened to me since leaving. The worst thing would be is that I miss my friends. I get really bored and

that's not much fun. Yes, Wongutha has been helpful, I would like to study more.

Wongutha has taught me how to study

The best thing would be earning money, being treated like an adult, being responsible and having children. Nothing bad has really happened. I'm happy with all of it, I wouldn't change it.

The best thing would be getting a job, and having kids. The worst thing would be leaving my friends, and not being in the classroom. I'm really happy with all of it.

Becoming a worker would be the best thing, and having money. I wouldn't change anything.

The best thing is earning money. But I really miss school. I wouldn't change anything.

The best thing is meeting different people, and enjoying myself. I would like to study more, and go to university.

When I was working at the office I had my own money, I saved and bought a car. That would be the best thing. I wish I had of studied more.

The best things would be settling down, and having kids. The worst thing would have to be losing my license for drunk driving.

The best things is getting a part time job, and having my little boy. The worst thing would have to be getting up to my boy, just having that responsibility. I would have liked to stay at school, and finish all the subjects I started.

The best thing would be getting a job. It's a great learning experience. The worst thing would be being unemployed, but even that was good in a way because I needed a break from everything. I would have liked to of trained in a different field.

The best thing would have to be studying at university. The worst thing would be working and being pregnant. I would have like to have stayed with some of my jobs longer.

Working, and doing a traineeship is the best thing. I wish I had finished year 12.

The best things are having children, and getting a certificate from TAFE. I'd probably have waited a little bit longer before I started having children.

The best thing would be earning money. The worst thing would be going to jail. I'd really like to start all over again.

Summary

Of the participants that responded to this question, almost an equal number indicated that they would, or would not change something about their post school period. 11 indicated no change, and 10 indicated change. Of those that indicated change, three stated that they would have studied more or gone to university. Most of the responses were about work or study. One participant indicated that they would have settled in one place and another indicated that they would have waited longer before having children.

In summary, when asked “if you could change something about the time since you left school” almost an equal number indicated change, and no change, and most of the change statements were about study or work.

CONCLUSION: STAGE TWO INTERVIEWS

The research questions are;

1. What have been the post school experiences of vocational education and training students?

2. What are the students perceptions about their Vocational education and training experience?

3. What are the students perceptions about the effect of Vocational education and training experiences on post school situations?

1. What have been the post school experiences of vocational education and training students? (Develop a post school time line for each student)

Post school time lines were developed for each student, and it was found that in the first six months after leaving Wongutha 30% of participants were involved in further study, 4% of participants were parents, 12% of participants were unemployed, 16% of participants were employed, and 38% of participants were involved in CDEP programs.

In the last six month block of the post school period, 6% of participants were involved in further study, 6% of participants were parents, 13% of participants were unemployed, 25% of participants were employed, 45% of participants were involved in CDEP programs, 3% were in prison, 1% was permanently incapacitated and 1% was deceased.

2. What are the students perceptions about their vocational education and training experience?

Most participants made positive comments about their experience and found it interesting or helpful. Participants generally liked and found helpful the practical nature of the course and not the theory. Most of the participant responses indicated that participants had learnt skills.

Participants listed almost twice as many subjects that they liked compared to subjects that they didn't like, supporting a conclusion of generally positive participant perception about their vocational education. The two subjects listed as the least liked were also listed as the most liked, and participants noted a direct link between subjects they didn't understand and didn't like.

When asked If you could change something about the vocational education and training time, ten participants indicated no change, and fourteen indicated that they would have studied different subjects or studied harder.

3. What are the students perceptions about the effect of vocational education and training experiences on post school situations?

Nearly all of the participants perceived that their vocational education and training affected their post school situations, and could detail skills or other aspects of their course that assisted them in post school situations.

About half the participants found leaving school as they expected and half found it more difficult than they expected.

Most participants felt that the best thing that had happened to them since leaving school was getting work , earning an income and having children, while the worst was missing friends and school, getting bored and not being able to get work..

When asked “if you could change something about the time since you left school” almost an equal number indicated change, and no change, and most of the change statements were about study or work.

CONCLUSION

This study involves only Aboriginal vocational students from one school in one state of Australia, and results cannot be generalised outside of this context. However for those educators involved in the delivery of vocational education and training for Aboriginal students, this study provides findings of general interest. The findings also raise questions and identify areas where further study would benefit Vocational education.

Findings from the quantitative data indicate that students involved in the program were almost twice as likely to be employed as their West Australian Aboriginal peers. While this could be partly explained by the higher than usual CDEP involvement, or the predisposition of these students to employment, these findings are still significant. The objective of a vocational education and training program is to prepare students for vocations or a specific vocation. One of the few ways of measuring the success of the program is to measure the number of ex-students who have made the transition from the vocational education and training program into employment, and compare the result with the ex-students peer group statistics. At the time of the survey 70% of ex students involved in the survey were employed or on CDEP, compared with 34% of West Australian Aboriginal young people of the same age (1996 census). This result is significant because the difference between the two groups is so great.

Another way of measuring the success of a vocational program is to collect qualitative data from ex students and analyse the data utilising accepted methodology. This study utilised a phenomenological methodology and while the data did not conform to the phenomenological expectations, the results answered the research questions. The findings also provided some indication of the success of the vocational program.

The participants were generally positive (certainly more positive than negative) about their vocational education and training experience and the skills they had learned. The central issue in this study was whether or not skills learned in the vocational program had any affect on the post school situations of the participants. Did the things/skills that the participants learned in their vocational school program help them at all when they had left school, and most particularly, did these skills make the transition to the

workplace? A negative or even ambiguous response to this question would raise doubt about the value of the educational program. In the qualitative part of this study, most ex-students perceived that they had used skills in their post school situations that they had learned in the vocational education and training program and they could detail skills that they had used. Many of these were specific skills such as bricklaying, painting, maths, driving mechanics and fencing, and others were less specific and almost a part of the “hidden curriculum” of the school. These included skills such as “learning to sort things out”, “getting up early for work”, “preparing myself for a job” and “confidence and self respect”. The “hidden curriculum” in a program is the curriculum that is not specifically stated or written down, but is imparted to students as they are involved in the course. It is the “ethos” of the school or program rubbing off and being assumed by the students. This hidden curriculum is often as important as the stated curriculum as can be seen from the results of this study.

This study also looked at whether or not the participants found leaving school and the transition to work very different to what they had expected, and whether or not the school had prepared them for the transition to work. While this issue was peripheral to the main thrust of the study, it raised some interesting responses. The interviewer also noted that this question elicited the most passionate responses. Participants described how it felt to move from a cohesive supportive environment, to a situation where you were largely on your own and had to make decisions for yourself and provide for yourself. For many participants this was a lonely and fearful experience. Schools are now recognising the importance of assisting the transition from school to work and Wongutha CAPS employs a “transition to work mentor” to assist with the transition.

Recommendations for Further Study

Another method of measuring the success of a vocational program is to measure the number of ex students who made the transition from the specific vocational area that they studied to employment in that area, and compare the results with students who made the transition to another area. This could be the subject of further study.

Investigating the hidden curriculum implicit in most vocational education and training programs, and the effect of the hidden curriculum on post school situations could be the subject of further study

It would also be of interest to study the different ways schools are assisting the transition to work, and measuring the effectiveness of these programs.

It is possible that the “transition” experience may well have some long term effect on a students post school experiences and this could be the subject of further study.

Possibilities for further study include;

- study of the student transition from specific vocational education and training areas to employment in that area,
- the effect of the hidden curriculum on post school situations,
- the different transition to work programs and effectiveness of programs, and
- the long term effect of the transition experience on post school experiences.

While this study has resulted in some conclusions about the participants experience in the vocational program at Wongutha CAPS and post school experience, this study is also useful for exposing questions and areas of possible further study. It is hoped that this study makes some useful contribution to vocational education.

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APPENDIX ONE

Sample Letters

1. Sample letter to potential participant

S J FLORISSON

ESPERANCE

PHONE (work)

' (after hours)

' (fax)

Dear _____

My name is Steve Florisson and I am the principal at Wongutha CAPS school near Esperance. You may remember me from your time at the school. I have been teaching Aboriginal students for all of my teaching life, in the Pilbara, Kimberley, Goldfields and now at Esperance.

I am inviting you to be involved in a research project that will look at vocational education and training programs and what affect these may have had on your life after you finished school. I hope that the information that is gathered may help improve vocational education and training programs for Aboriginal students.

You were involved in a vocational education and training program at Wongutha CAPS in _____, and it is this program, and the things you were involved in after you left the program that I would like to discuss with you. If you are willing to be involved in the study, I will come to visit you and interview you about your experiences.

There is some more information about the study attached to this letter, and after you have had a chance to read the material, I will phone you to see if you want to be involved.

Yours Faithfully,

Steve Florisson
S J FLORISSON

ESPERANCE

PHONE (work)
(after hours)
(fax)

CONSENT LETTER ; VOCATIONAL EDUCATIONAL STUDY INTERVIEW

To Whom it May Concern,

I agree to participate in this study, and share my experiences by interview. I have not been promised anything to do this, and do it of my own free will.

I understand the following;

- I will participate in one or two interviews which will be up to an hour in length,
- the interviews will be taped, and later typed up,
- the interviewer will ask me a lot of questions about my time at Wongutha and what has happened to me since that time,
- my information will be coded by number and only the interviewer (Steve Florisson) will know that I have provided this information,
- the material will be analysed, but some of what I say may be quoted verbatim,
- the information will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and destroyed after five years,
- I can pull out of the study at any time, before the interview, during the interview, or after the interview,

All of the above has been read to me and explained. I understand the above and agree to participate in the study.

Signed _____ Date _____

Interviewer _____

S J FLORISSON

ESPERANCE

PHONE (work)
(after hours)
(fax)

CONSENT LETTER ; VOCATIONAL EDUCATIONAL STUDY INTERVIEW :1

To Whom it May Concern,

I agree to participate in this study, and share my experiences by interview. I have not been promised anything to do this, and do it of my own free will.

I understand the following;

- I will participate in one interview which will be up to ten minutes in length,
- the interview information will be recorded,
- the interviewer will ask me questions about what I have done since leaving Wongutha,
- my information will be coded by number and only the researcher will know that I have provided this information,
- the material will be stored and analysed, but some of what I say may be quoted verbatim,
- the information will be destroyed after five years,
- I can pull out of the study at any time, before the interview, during the interview, or after the interview,

All of the above has been read to me and explained. I understand the above and agree to participate in the study.

Signed _____ Date _____

Interviewer _____

APPENDIX TWO

Stage One Interview Questions

Student Name _____ Student Code _____

School _____ Age _____

Dates of attendance (vocational education and training classes)

To be filled in prior to interview.

You were involved in vocational education and training at _____ during _____ and I would like to ask you about that few questions about that time.

Structured Questions

What subjects did you study ?

How long were you at the school?

Can you tell me what have you done since then?
(jobs, further training, TAFE, CDEP unemployed, community work etc)

First year 1. _____

2. _____

Second year 1. _____

Stage Two - Semi Structured Interview Questions

Student Name _____ Student Code _____

School _____ Age _____

Dates of attendance (vocational education and training
classes) _____

To be filled in prior to interview.

You were involved in vocational education and training at _____ during _____ and I would like to talk to you about that time. I'm going to tape our talk because it will help me write it all down later. If at any time you wish to stop, or if you want to pull out of this study, then just tell me. When the study is written up all names will be removed so that no one who reads the material will know what you said.

1. What can you tell me about your vocational education and training courses at _____.

Did you enjoy or dislike the courses? Did you find them helpful or unhelpful? Were you bored or interested. Did you learn skills or was it a waste of time? Which were the best courses? Which were the worst courses? If you could change something about that time, what would you change?

2. When you left school you have told us that you _____. Is that right? Did what you did at school (the Vocational Courses) have any effect on jobs training etc that you went into after leaving. Did you use anything you had learned at school? Were any skills that you could use? Did you find leaving school very different to what you expected? Had the school prepared you in any way for leaving school? What are the best things that have happened since you left school. What are the worst things that have happened since you left school? If you could change something about the time since you left school, what would you change?

Interview procedure: Before the interview starts, talk about general things with the participant. Tell them a bit about yourself. Try to develop a climate of trust and rapport. Try to explain that in the interview we are interested in how the participant feels about these issues, their experiences, their understanding of it. There are no right or wrong answers.

The Questions above are a guide only. The interview should flow spontaneously and your discussion and questions should develop out of the on-going interview. Try to keep the interview on subject, if necessary by using some of the questions above.