

Raising the higher school leaving age in Western Australia: A governmental analysis of power and practice

David Hodgson

**Bachelor of Social Work (*University of South Australia*), Master of
Sociology (*Murdoch University*), Graduate Certificate in Research
Management (*Southern Cross University*)**

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

David Hodgson

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Abstract

This thesis reports on a study into the Western Australian state government policy to raise the compulsory school leaving age (RSLA). In 2006, the compulsory school leaving age in Western Australia was increased from age 15 to 16 years, and again in 2008 from age 16 to 17 years, where it has remained since. This thesis is informed by Michel Foucault's theory of governmentality and has adapted the governmentality literature into framework that supports a research methodology. Within this orientation, the research is guided by the question:

- What are the discourses, rationalities, technologies and ethics of the Raised School Leaving Age policy in Western Australia?

Fourteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with authorities charged with managing and coordinating young people's participation. As well, 184 policy documents and other 'grey materials' were analysed. Two key conclusions are drawn. First, RSLA entails a narrow and reductionist ontology, and, consequently, its theory and practice of the problem of attrition and early school leaving is diminished. Second, it is rooted in a deficit view of young people producing contradictory practices that expect young people to be self-reliant, entrepreneurial and independent, even though they are construed as being at-risk, inept and damaged. The result is a policy myopia that sidelines critical debate about the context of schools themselves as being complicit in the problem of early school leaving and student disengagement. It also turns youth

unemployment and underemployment into a problem of the individual who is seen to have failed to manage their participation, and thus RSLA ignores the role of wider economic forces in producing a difficult labour market experience for many young people. This thesis provides an account of the thinking and practices of RSLA insofar as it is conceptualised as an expression of modern governing over young people's lives.

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Presentations and publications

From time to time during my candidature, I presented the development of this study at seminars and conferences. Small portions of this thesis have been published and/or presented in the following forms:

Hodgson, D. (2007). *Analysing policy within a governmental framework*. Seminar presentation, Edith Cowan University, Bunbury, WA, August 1.

Hodgson, D. (2007). *Governmental rationality and education policy: Raising the Higher School Leaving Age in Western Australia*. Seminar presentation, Murdoch University, WA, September 21.

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Hodgson, D. (2009). *What is governmentality?* Paper presented at The Centre for Sustainable Regional Futures 2nd Roundtable Conference: Locally Grown. Edith Cowan University, October 1.

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Dedication

For Andrea, Xavier and Sienna

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Definitions

RSLA	<i>Raising the School Leaving Age and Raised School Leaving Age.</i> I use this in a broad sense that refers to the sum total of this change to compulsory education. This includes the legislation, the policy, and the various practices associated with implementing the policy. The acronym 'RSLA' is used in a general way to refer to the object of this research.
DET	Department of Education and Training (Western Australia). This was later changed to the Department of Education.
TAFE/TAFEWA	Technical and Further Education/Technical and Further Education Western Australia.
NEET	Policy concept that is short for 'Not in Education Employment or Training.' It is a signifier used in practice to refer to young people who are seen to be not participating in school, employment, or work in accordance with the requirements of compulsory education.
Young Person/Youth	I use the term 'young person' to refer to people aged 15 to 17 years, as this is the age bracket group that RSLA is concerned with. This is used in preference to the terms teenager or adolescent or student. Sometimes I refer to students if it means someone who is still in school, but given that the policy may apply to young people who are ostensibly not presently students in the full sense of the term, young person is used instead. Where the term 'youth' is used it refers to the field of youth practice or youth studies/research.
State vs. state	State with a capital 'S' refers to a geographical territory, as in the State of Western Australia. It also refers to an elected State Government, as in State Government of Western Australia; whereas state with a lowercase 's' refers more broadly to all the mechanisms and institutions concerned with government and rule over a specified territory and its inhabitants.

Governance vs governing

While the word governance is sometimes used in the governmentality literature as a noun, it is more commonly used in the administration and management literature to describe principles of management and administration, especially of organisations and institutions. I use the word governing in the Foucauldian governmentality sense, not governance in the administration management sense.

Knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.

Michael Foucault (1998a, p. 380).

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCING THE STUDY

While some writers have been willing to suggest that the discourses around current educational goals may be progressive, in that they recognise individual difference and perhaps offer young people the opportunity to develop self-realisation, it is also important to acknowledge the extent to which other agendas of power are at work within these discourses. Instead of education being framed as a social investment for the 'common good', current educational policies are framed to emphasise education as an investment in the self. (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001, pp. 33-34)

Introduction

On May 29, 2002, the then Western Australian Minister for Education and Training, Alan Carpenter MLA, made the following statement in parliament:

As I have said over and over again, in my view retention rates in Western Australia, particularly non-metropolitan Western Australia, are terribly low. Some of the lower socioeconomic areas have retention rates of less than 50 per cent for boys, and in some schools the rates are as low as 40 per cent. I believe that it is time for us in Western Australia to start talking seriously about the structural problems that exist between the education system and the technical and further education system. I believe also that as a community we should consider raising the compulsory leaving age from school. It is totally unacceptable in 2002 that so many young people are allowed to drift out of the school system at the age of 15. The age should be raised to at least 16, and preferably 17. I as education minister have a personal view that the leaving age for school students should be at least 16, and we should consider increasing it to 17, just as Queensland and South Australia are doing. (Carpenter, 2002, p. 150)

On November 18, 2005, the *Acts Amendment (Higher School Leaving Age and Related Provisions) Bill 2005* that entailed provisions to raise the school leaving age was given Royal Assent, and the Western Australian school system began what has been referred to as the “most important change to education in 40 years” (Department of Education and Training, 2007).

This thesis reports on a study into the *Raising the Higher School Leaving Age* policy (RSLA) in Western Australia. The study draws from Foucault's concept of governmentality (Dean, 1999; Foucault, 1991a), to frame a governmental analysis of the early development and implementation of the policy. In doing so, the research seeks to address the question:

- What are the discourses, rationalities, technologies and ethics of the RSLA policy in Western Australia?

By way of introduction, this chapter provides a general overview of the object of investigation—the policy to raise the school leaving age. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the basic contents of the policy and sketch the educational context within which the policy is situated. Furthermore, this chapter briefly introduces the key theoretical and methodological scaffolding of this inquiry—governmentality. In this chapter, I specify the aims of this study and the questions that guide it before concluding with an overview of this thesis.

Background to this research

What brings me to this study? A research journey

Although I trained as a social worker in the 1990s, my interest in doing research into educational issues was kindled when, in 2004 and 2005, as part of a Masters research study (Hodgson, 2006), I conducted critical ethnographic research (Harvey, 1990; Thomas, 1993) into boys' early school leaving. In that study, I interviewed at length five boys who had recently left, or were in the process of

leaving school. Three of the boys were aged 14, and two aged 15. At the time I conducted that research, the minimum school leaving age in Western Australia was age 15, even though back then, as now, an early school leaver was defined as one who does not complete the highest level of school, which in Australia, is Year 12 (ABS, 2001). Typically, Year 12 is the year when the student turns 17.

In my Masters research I listened to stories of early leaving school. By hearing these stories I was able to identify and theorise some of the institutional antecedents to early school leaving. I concluded back then that “schools (as cultural and institutional practices) co-construct the often painful, lengthy and contradictory processes and experiences of early school leaving”, and that “early school leaving therefore needs to be seen as an institutional and not merely a personal or individual phenomenon” (Hodgson, 2006, p. vi; see also Hodgson, 2007). This conclusion resonated with many other writers such as Manni and Kalb (2003) who stated that early school leaving is complex and entails a decision “influenced by factors that are at work for a long period of time” (p. 22). If this is the case, what could be done about it?

This interest probably in education and early school leaving also stems from my own school experience and my immediate post-school experience of attempting some vocational study and occupying a series of part-time, unskilled jobs during the late 1980s and early 1990s when Australia fell into a recession and the youth labour market contracted sharply (Teese, 2004; Teese & Polesel, 2003). Reading the literature for this thesis on school, youth labour market, unemployment and underemployment, I can see myself as one of those statistics in the various charts and tables, one of those numbers on the page. In today’s terms, I would

have been classed as 'at-risk', 'not engaged' and 'experiencing a difficult transition'. But back then, these were concepts that I had never heard of. It is perhaps no surprise then that school, and policies about school interest me.

As I began to write my Master's thesis on early school leaving, the Western Australian State government was conducting public forums throughout Western Australia with the purpose of establishing "what needs to be done to ensure that raising the school leaving age occurs in conjunction with the right combinations of school, higher education, training and work to provide all 17 year olds with worthwhile qualifications for the future" (Carpenter, 2004, p. 19), and to establish how such changes should be implemented. These forums were part of a State-wide consultation process examining the question of the minimum school leaving age, and how Western Australia might go about increasing the school leaving age by two years, from age 15 to 17. Thus, the proposed policy aimed to tackle early school leaving via a legislated increase in the school leaving age.

It was serendipitous, then, that the genesis of a major policy reform should be occurring precisely at the time of my Masters study when I was hearing the stories of *despair*, *anger* and *sadness* from the boys who had left school, and who could be reasonably described as having fled a hostile school culture (Smyth & Hattam, 2002). While I was interviewing these boys, and given that some of them had left school at age 14, I wondered what their lives would be like if it was legally compulsory to remain in school until the end of the year they turned age 17? What kinds of interventions would be deployed to ensure they met this legal requirement? How would this work? At the time I did not pursue these questions, as I was investigating stories of early school leaving, not policies to

improve retention and increase the overall length of participation in compulsory education. Nonetheless, when I commenced this PhD it seemed an appropriate line of questioning to follow. Given that the implementation of the policy to raise the school leaving age was taking shape as I began my PhD candidature, the opportunity to examine the emergence of a significant reform in the Western Australian education system was fortuitous. It was for these reasons that I settled on this question. After all, a reform with such far reaching significance must have embedded within it certain 'truths' about school, young people, work, and so on. I wondered early on what these truths might be, and how they translated into practice? A reform such as this must entail the creation and deployment of specific mechanisms and technologies of power. I also wondered what these might be?

Raising the school leaving age in Western Australia

The proposal to raise the school leaving age in Western Australia was hatched over several years (Reynolds, 2006). The policy agenda began to take shape at least as early as 2002, and was backed by various reports and pieces of research published in the 1990s that highlighted the cost of non-completion to year 12 to Australia's economy (an estimated \$2.6 billion) and the Adelaide Declaration of 1999, which set out national goals for education in the 21st Century (Reynolds, 2006). These goals are aimed not only at enhancing the employment prospects

of young people, but at providing opportunities for personal growth and encouraging values of active citizenship (MCEECDYA, 2014).¹

The changes in the Western Australian school leaving age policy were in line with reports like the Adelaide Declaration and RSLA drew its strategic legitimacy from these kinds of documents (Reynolds, 2006). For example, section 3.6 of the Adelaide Declaration asserts that all students should complete Year 12 or equivalent (MCEECDYA, 2014). Understandably, strategies to ensure compliance with this imperative are directed towards those students who deviate from this prescription; that is, those who are seen as being 'at risk' of not attending full-time work, school, or training, particularly between the ages of 15-17. Debates about the Western Australian proposal soon followed. I turn now to outline these debates in the course of explaining the development of RSLA.

A brief historical sketch of RSLA

There were several political arguments and developments that shaped the RSLA policy agenda. Early in the process of this research, I drew on public domain documents such as newspaper coverage, ministerial press releases, government reports, and Hansard records, and in doing so, was able to reveal both the story and the ostensible reasoning behind the policy.² These documents also begin to reveal the kinds of rationalities that fed into policy discourses. That is, what was said and thought about school, young people, and compulsory education was initially sketched out during the policy consultation phase.

¹ Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs.

² These documents will be examined later in this thesis in tandem with interview data collected from practitioners employed to implement the policy in the first few years of its operation.

The early debate

Since 1966 Western Australia's school leaving age had been age 15 and this was similar to other States and Territories in Australia (Carpenter, 2004). In March 2002, the Queensland State Government released a discussion paper flagging the possibility of making years 11 and 12 in Queensland compulsory (Hewitt, 2002a). No such plans were proposed in Western Australia at the time, because the then WA Education and Training Minister, Alan Carpenter, reportedly did not share the Queensland position, arguing instead that "it would be more fruitful to work towards creating an education system where young adults stay in that system by choice rather than compulsion" (Hewitt, 2002a, p. 9). According to Hewitt (2002a), Carpenter initially had doubts as to the effectiveness of making attendance to age 17 compulsory, drawing support from WA Secondary Schools Executive Glen Diggins, saying that such a move would be costly and "impractical" (Hewitt, 2002a, p. 9). Despite this initial reticence to increase the compulsory school leaving age, the policy problem was clearly identified: Western Australia's retention rates were below the national average—72 per cent compared with 75.4 per cent (Hewitt, 2002a). As a consequence, public interest in this debate grew.

By May 2002, barely two months after Carpenter signalled his reticence to an increase in compulsory education, a shift had occurred in his policy position. Carpenter indicated that raising the school leaving age *would* be an election issue, and that it *would* be compulsory for students to remain in school, at first until age 16 and then age 17. He was reported as saying "it is very poor, almost

criminal, that in the 21st century we allow kids to leave school at 15 to fend for themselves” (Carpenter quoted in Calverley, 2002).

At the same time, potential problems with an increase in compulsory education were being identified and reported in the Western Australian press. These ‘problems’ included the potential for classes in high school with 18-year-old students (that is, adults), and a net increase in the numbers of students in the upper school years (that is, Years 11 and 12) that would put pressure on existing school resources and infrastructure (Hewitt, 2002b). Additional concerns centred on the policy implementation, in which it was argued that *compelling* young people to remain in an education system would be unworkable, however well-intentioned such a move might be (The West Australian, 2002). However, the Western Australian State Government response contended that schools *would* be able to adjust to the increase in student numbers and *could* adapt to the need to treat 16 and 17 year olds more like adults (Hewitt, 2002b).

By 2003, the policy agenda had more or less settled and was now beyond question. The increase in the school leaving age was seen to be inevitable, with an increase at first to age 16 by 2006, and then to age 17 by 2008. The expectations of compulsory education would mean that students would be legally required to remain in full-time school, approved training, employment, or an approved combination of these until the end of the year they turn 17 (Carpenter, 2004). Only the fine details needed to be worked out subject to a community consultation process, which began in earnest in 2004.

The community consultation process produced two key policy documents: a consultation paper and a subsequent report. The consultation paper (Carpenter, 2004) and the resulting report on the consultation process (Department of Education and Training, 2005a) were significant steps in the policy process, as they outlined the thinking, arguments and rationalities that formed the policy debate, and in doing so, these documents set the parameters within which such a discussion could take place. In fact, as will be discussed later in the thesis, these documents are emblematic of the way the policy was ultimately put into practice.

The consultation paper that outlined the rationale and purpose of the policy change was titled *Creating the future for our young people: Raising the school leaving age* (Carpenter, 2004). In this document, it explains that the compulsory school leaving age in Western Australia was age 12 at the turn of the 20th century, raised to age 14 in 1928 and finally increased to age 15 in 1966, where it had remained since (Carpenter, 2004). Beyond these introductory facts, my analysis of the consultation paper (Carpenter, 2004) reveals that the move to raise the school leaving age to 17 is underpinned by a number of particular arguments, and these are claimed to be sufficient justification or “powerful reasons for the State Government to take action now” (Carpenter, 2004, p. 11).

These arguments can be summarised in four ways:

1. *Globalisation*, in which it is stated that without an increase in school leaving age, Western Australia would not be globally economically competitive.
2. *Risk*, in which it is stated that students who leave school age 15 are at risk of ongoing and potentially life-long economic and social disadvantage.

3. *Comparative data*, in which it is stated that Western Australia's retention and participation rates fall short when compared to national and international trends.
4. *National economic well-being*, in which it is stated that longer levels of educational participation will reap higher levels of overall social and economic prosperity.

The consultation process itself was never intended to debate *if* the school leaving age should be raised because this question had already been settled, but *how* to best implement the decision. As Carpenter was reported saying in March 2004:

It is not a question of if it will happen...it is going to happen but we need to make it happen in a way that is going to get the best results for everyone. (Carpenter quoted in Pennells, 2004)

And again:

What I want to do is have in place this agenda with a momentum, which means it will be unstoppable, whether or not we win government and whether or not I am the minister. (Carpenter quoted in Wilson-Clark, 2004)

Public forums were held around Western Australia and numerous submissions and surveys gauging public opinion and seeking input from stakeholders were undertaken (Department of Education and Training, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d, 2004e, 2004f, 2004g, 2004h, 2004i, 2004j, 2004k). On July 22, 2005, the results of the consultation process were published. Titled *Creating the future for our young people: Raising the school leaving age community consultation report* (Department of Education and Training, 2005a) the report stated that the objectives of the consultation were to learn:

What needs to be done to ensure that raising the school leaving age occurs in conjunction with the right combinations of school, higher education, training and work to provide all 17 year olds with

worthwhile qualifications for the future, and how these changes should be implemented. (Department of Education and Training, 2005a, p. 4)

According to the report, there was widespread support for raising the school leaving age (Department of Education and Training, 2005a). The results of the consultation, coupled with the various rationalities first outlined in the *Creating the Future* consultation paper (Carpenter, 2004) culminated with the penultimate decision to “introduce legislation that will raise the school leaving age to 16 in 2006 and 17 in 2008” (Department of Education and Training, 2005a, p. 2).

On August 23, 2005, legislation was introduced into State Parliament stipulating that students will be required to remain in education until they turn 16 in 2006 and finally 17 in 2008. The legislation was subsequently passed on November 18, 2005. In keeping with the political tone surrounding this move, the then WA Premier Dr Geoff Gallop was reported as saying that this was a significant reform and that “fifteen is simply too young to stop learning” (Gallop quoted in *The West Australian*, 2005, p. 10).

The policy in practice

All public policy involves a degree of social *intervention*, and as such policy manifests itself in social practices (Marston & McDonald, 2006). Raising the school leaving age in WA is no exception. Thus, beyond the passing of legislation, a practical problem emerges: how can the policy aims be achieved by ensuring that *all* students remain in school until the year they turn 17? The policy has to ‘make sense’ amidst a polity riddled with conceptual ambiguity and symbolic

vacuity (Miller, 2002). Some form of administration is necessary (Althuas, Bridgman, & Davis, 2007). Tools and plans are needed, and an account of what the problem is must be given, even fabricated if need be (Bacchi, 2009).

How was the policy implemented?

In the course of the development of the RSLA, a set of procedures were published that outlined the intervention processes that would be deployed towards young people who strayed from the desired pathway of full participation in education or work until they turn 17. The *Raising the School Leaving Age Procedures* (Department of Education and Training, 2005b) outlines the methods for implementing the policy. For example, in ensuring that by “1 January 2008, young people will be required to remain in education, training or approved employment until the year in which they turn 17” (Department of Education and Training, 2005b, p. 1) the policy procedural document specifies the monitoring, documenting, reporting, supervising and surveillance procedures and responsibilities of numerous stakeholders, including, parents, schools, students, employers, community groups, and DET staff. The policy procedures apply to students who step outside the normal expected pathways.³ The approved pathways are encapsulated in this way:

The preferred option for 16⁴ year olds is full-time attendance at school. However, for those students for who [sic] school is not an option, a number of alternative learning pathways are allowed. (Department of Education and Training, 2005b)

³ That is, uninterrupted education until age 17.

⁴ This was later increased to age 17.

These pathways are:

- a course of study provided by a university established in Australia;
- a training program accredited under the *Vocational Education And Training Act 1996* (this includes TAFEWA colleges and private registered training organisations);
- an apprenticeship or traineeship;
- approved employment;
- an approved (gazetted) course with a community based organization;
- a combination of any of the above including school (Department of Education and Training, 2005b, p. 2).

If it turns out that a student leaves or intends to leave high school before the end of the year they turn 17 (that is, before they complete Year 12), then they are expected to commit to any or a combination of the above training/work environments. This commitment must be approved and signed off by DET.

Where a student leaves school before the age of 17 or is deemed at risk of leaving school before age 17, they may be assessed and case-managed by a DET employed Participation Coordinator (Department of Education and Training, 2005b), whose job it is to guide them back into full-time education or work, and ratify and monitor such arrangements.⁵

The processes of managing student conduct, and the tools and documents that are used to guide these practices provide a window into the forms and functions of the policy implementation. The DET procedural documents that stipulate the responsibilities of various people are chiefly concerned with monitoring, reporting and procedures of documentation (Department of Education and Training, 2005b). Fundamentally, as will be shown, these procedures are ones of tracking and recording students' behaviour, and they involve assessments and

⁵ The term used to describe this contract obligation was called a 'Notice of Arrangements'.

judgements about a student's conduct and performance. Students—not schools, teaching, or educational systems—are ultimately situated within the gaze of RSLA. A policy framing such as this stands in contrast to my earlier findings about why it is that some young people leave school early, when school systems and cultures are implicated in students' decisions to leave (Hodgson, 2007). As this thesis demonstrates, a narrowly psychological and deficit view about young people as being at risk is the overriding explanatory framework underpinning the RSLA rationality.

In summary, the *Raising the School Leaving Age* policy defines the target group as those students at risk of leaving school before the end of the year they turn 17. This 'target group' is legally required to participate in alternative forms of education and/or employment, and in order to ensure this compliance is met, will be subjected to case management, tracking, coordination, monitoring, recording, and support and planning until such time as they satisfy the requirements.

The policy problem

Given all that has been discussed so far, it would be stating the obvious to suggest that a lot hinges on successful schooling. A lot is also being *foisted* upon schools. As Basica and Hargreaves (2000) state:

Schools are expected to save children from poverty and destitution; to rebuild nationhood in the aftermath of war; to develop universal literacy as a platform for economic survival; to create skilled workers even when little skilled employment beckons them; to develop

tolerance amongst children in nations where adults are divided by religious and ethnic conflict; to cultivate democratic sentiments in societies that bear the scars of totalitarianism; to keep developed nations economically competitive and help developing ones become so – essentially, to make restitution for all the sins of the present generation by how educators prepare the generations of the future. (p. 18)

The decline in school retention and the subsequent public alarm it creates dovetails neatly with broader concerns about the challenges, risks and complexities of globalisation (Kellner, 2002). Education cannot be divorced from this cultural *zeitgeist* (Besley, 2003; Best & Kellner, 2003; Devine, 1999; McLaren, 1995). Furthermore, the protracted economic crises afflicting the world means that work and lasting economic security is increasingly difficult, and for some people, unattainable (Aronowitz & DiFazio, 2010). Financial downturn hits young people the hardest (Misbah Tanveer, Enrico, & Marcello, 2012) and those who have not completed Year 12 or equivalent are said to be the most marginalised in the labour market and the most at risk of on-going lifelong economic disadvantage (Robinson, Long, & Lamb, 2011). Inevitably then, there is great pressure on schools as increasingly scrutinised social institutions to respond to the pressures and demands of contemporary society—schools become a form of *social insurance* against these ills.

School as a moral enterprise

It was something of a paradox that the importance of retention in school was being elevated at the very same time as retention rates in Australia were on the decline (Lamb, 1998; Smyth, McInerney, & Hattam, 2003). Raising the school

leaving age aimed to respond to this problem as a matter of formal policy. The vision statement of the RSLA *Strategic Framework* reads:

To ensure all 15-17 year olds in Western Australia are meaningfully engaged in education, training or employment by 2009. (Participation Directorate, 2006, p. 5)

The problem of declining retention may well be dealt with through such instrumental policy prescriptions, but it invariably contains a *moral* overtone too. In setting out the instrumental aims and goals of RSLA, in the same breath it paves the way for *constructing* new categories of people and prescribing standards of *correct* behaviour (Dean, 1999; Korteweg, 2006; Marston & McDonald, 2006). Rationalities about people and problems and what should be done are of course key to RSLA, but herein lay a more practical and ethical policy problem. In RSLA, the analysis of the problem is centred on the individual who is responsible for their destiny. Those who fail to meet at least a minimum educational standard are deemed 'at-risk'. In RSLA, a distinct ethic emerges that sets out the parameters for proper conduct of ones behaviour, attitude and disposition towards learning and participating in school. Thus, while the reform is concerned with a net increase in the requirements to attend school, in practice it is also a reform concerned with young people themselves.

Policy reform

As mentioned, the decision to raise the minimum higher school leaving age has been referred to by DET as the biggest educational reform in Western Australia in 40 years (Department of Education and Training, 2007). Reforms herald

change, and the RSLA reform sits within a broader context of educational reforms that have been occurring in Australia since the early 1980s (Meredyth, 1998). These reforms include a move towards privatisation, closer linking of education to the labour market, tightening up of the vocational education sector to emphasise industry-ready competencies, national benchmarks and standardisation, and a greater philosophical emphasis on rational choice on the part of the educational consumer (Meredyth, 1998).

Reforms are also hotbeds of contestation and contradiction (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000) and changes to schools and education systems are likely to generate public interest and sometimes controversy (Caldwell, 2009; Donnelly, 2012). Yet, while the political rhetoric of modern governments generally emphasises deregulation and the espousal of free market principles, hand in hand with these values come new forms of *regulation* and increased scrutiny and accountability (Donnelly & Paterson, 2012; Meredyth, 1998). What appears to be a political ideology of small decentralised government and free individual choice tends instead to be reinscribed into new forms of regulation and control (Meredyth, 1998).

At some level, complex layers of governing machinery is understandable. Governing involves a *realpolitik* and it necessitates novel and inventive ways of organising and managing people's conduct (Dean, 1999). However, this process of constant inventiveness means ongoing and continual attempts to respond to the shifting grounds of the problem being governed (Jamrozik, 2001). This inventiveness may include different and competing perspectives on what the nature of the policy problem is, what (if anything) should be done about it, and

how, why and for what purpose (McClelland, 2006). Questions concerning who benefits and who loses often dominate such debates (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000; Dwyer & Wyn, 2001).

In a context of debate and contestation and complexity, the actual practice of policy implementation often defaults to what may appear to be an excessively standardised and regulated system unable to adapt to specific contexts and situations (Donnelly & Paterson, 2012; O'Malley, 2009). Policy reforms involve attempts to try to define and control a context that is inherently complex and fluid by imposing general principles on highly contextually specific situations (Bailey, 2000; Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000; Meredyth, 1998; Percy-Smith & Weil, 2002). These contexts often escape the logic of technocratic control, requiring instead levels of information, resources and political will that fall well short of what is needed to complete the task (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000).

The point being made here is that reforms and the introduction of new policies are essentially *problematizing* activities—they attempt to respond to existing problems, however such problems may be conceived—while at the same time they invariably generate new problems, requiring new solutions (Rose, 1999b; Rose & Miller, 1992). Educational reforms are never really far from the broader context of enduring social, economic, political and environmental problems more generally, problems that never seem to go away and tend to morph and change into new and even more complex problems (Batie, 2008; Farley, 2007). This is the condition of the risk society (Beck, 1992) and governments and all kinds of social and other institutions must constantly attempt to re-invent ideas on how to best deal with the seemingly intractable and fragmented nature of

wicked problems, which are quintessential hallmarks of modern society (Fenger & Bekkers, 2012).

To deal with the increasing complexities of social and political problems, a political ideology that places great emphasis on *active self-reliance and citizenship* is frequently situated as an important ideological framework (Rose, 1999b). Many reforms, RSLA included, are nestled within the broad aims of achieving “active citizenship” (Cieslik & Pollock, 2002, p. 5). This political ideology is loosely characterised by the slogan a “hand up not hand out” (Cieslik & Pollock, 2002, p. 5). Within such an ideology much emphasis is placed on the behaviour and conduct of individual people, rather than wholesale structural changes in the fabric of social, economic and political organisation, which is characterised as a juggernaut of progress within which we too must all adapt (Rose, 1999b). As will be shown, RSLA is in keeping with this ethos of individual self-reliance.

Marking out the domain of policy and practice

The proposal to increase the school leaving age extends beyond any single school—it is a significant managerial enterprise and entails an extension of the governing arm into the lives of many young people throughout WA. In 2005-2006, when the first phase of the changes began, there were 771 public schools and 303 private schools in Western Australia totalling 370,000 students (Department of Education and Training, 2006, p. 10). Of course, not all these students find their way directly into the RSLA policy interventions. However, linked into the strategic and operational process of RSLA are numerous other

stakeholders: related government departments, external social services, private education providers, vocational training providers, employers, parents, and of course, students. Across such a wide social network of disparate groups, the ‘wicked problem’ (Fenger & Bekkers, 2012) is immediately evident: how to manage not only the practical, technical, logistical and financial aspects of policy change, but also how to manage what people think, do and say—the reasoning, discourses, and particular vernaculars and lexicons that give policy its intellectual coherence, shape and form.

Theoretically, this is a problem concerning the “conduct of conduct” (Foucault cited in Dean, 2006, p. 20). Exactly how to implement, justify and mobilise a wide-scale reform becomes a major challenge for any form of government, given the potential difficulties noted above. More importantly, what *is* RSLA? What does it say about young people and school? How shall it be described and examined? These are the background questions and concerns that helped shape my study.

I contend that RSLA can be theoretically understood as a form of governing that can be characterised by what Foucault calls the “art of government” (Foucault, 1991a, p. 92) and governmentality (Dean, 1999; Foucault, 1991a, 2007; Gordon, 1991). It is by situating the RSLA as a form of governing that this study begins to take shape, and this has helped me to start to think about the sorts of questions and problems raised above. Situating RSLA as a form of governing leads to the key organising idea that gives theoretical guidance to this study: governmentality.

The significance of this study: Researching policy

According to Dryzek (2002), “policy analysis involves creating, compiling, and applying evidence, argument, and interpretation in scrutinizing, evaluating, and improving the process and content of public policy” (p. 32). There are many approaches to the analysis of policy, including comparative and evaluative approaches (Mabbett & Bolderson, 1999), neo-Marxist and critical approaches (Parsons, 1995, pp. 145-150), cost benefit and positivist evaluative approaches (Dunn, 2004), institutional and cyclical approaches (Bridgman & Davis, 2004), and deliberative and participative approaches (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003).

For Dryzek (2002), this broad range of approaches to researching policy sits between two poles: the technocratic and the critical. However, Dryzek (2002) notes several problems with technocratic approaches that dominate the policy analysis landscape. He says that the technocratic approaches are based in means-ends instrumental rationality and fail to capture “the subtle influences such as material forces, discourses and ideologies that act so as to condition the content of the policy” (p. 32). Likewise, Marston (2000) argues that “positivist policy analysis does not provide evidence about the social processes that produce and privilege certain forms of knowledge” (p. 350). Thus, Dryzek (2002) argues in favour of a post-positivist approach to policy analysis that is grounded in the realities, limitations and *realpolitik* of policy work. According to Dryzek, policy research along these lines is especially important because the more complex the problem and the more recalcitrant it is to interventions, the greater the variety of “frames” that need to be brought to bear on the analysis (Dryzek, 2002).

Compulsory education is one such complex problem that is recalcitrant to interventions (Smyth & Hattam, 2002) and that is why my starting point is to conduct policy research broadly in tune with Dryzek's plea for a 'critical policy analysis' (Dryzek, 2002). Why is compulsory education best seen as a complex problem? The answer to this is because there is no known or agreed upon solution to problems like early school leaving (NCVER, 1999).⁶ For example, this was highlighted in a report by the Western Australian Auditor General (Auditor General Western Australia, 2009) who stated that "school attendance is steadily declining" and "DET's attendance policy and strategies are not based on a good understanding of the major causes for why students do not go to school" (p. 6).

The purpose of this research is to understand RSLA in its finer details. This is not strictly an evaluating study, nor is it utilitarian in the sense of providing a lock-step set of conclusions and recommendations indented for incremental reform. I have approached the study of RSLA policy through a philosophical and sociological lens rather than a narrowly instrumental one, and I applied a governmental analysis by drawing on governmentality theory (Dean, 1999, 2006; Foucault, 1991a) and critical realism (Benton, 1998; Bhaskar, 1998; Brown, 2007; Danermark, Ekström, Jokobsen, & Karlsson, 2002; Houston, 2001; Joseph, 2004; Outhwaite, 1998; Sims-Schouten et al., 2007) to the study of RSLA. These ideas will be elaborated and applied throughout this thesis.

⁶ National Centre for Vocational Education Research.

Policy as government, and government as practice

As mentioned, my approach has sought to situate policy research that was neither strictly evaluative or overly reductionist of the policy, but my theory of power, society and state is central to this inquiry and must be declared and elaborated. In the same way that some research studies draw heavily from particular theoretical concepts and traditions—for example, a Marxist approach to the study of the relationships between capitalism and schooling (Bowles & Gintis, 1976), or an approach that situates gender and education at the centre of the study (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998)—this study has a particular orientation that has a particular theoretical pedigree. As Marston (2010) explains, “research questions are inherently bound up with the theoretical paradigm being used” and the “theoretical model being used orientates the researcher in a certain way, privileging some features of the social order while minimising others” (p. 88). Governmentality will be discussed in full in chapter three, but for now, I briefly introduce this as a way of indicating the significance and direction of this study.⁷

A brief introduction to the framing of this research

The path that led to my research on RSLA within a governmentality perspective happened when I came upon an edited book on social policy research: *Analyzing social policy: A governmental approach* (Marston & McDonald, 2006).⁸ The volume contained a range of policy studies that used Foucault’s notion of ‘governmentality’ as a framework for doing policy research. This approach

⁷ Further details of the theoretical and methodological concepts are contained in appendices two to six. These are placed as appendices for the reader’s interest and they contain my reflections and commentary on how these concepts were developed and applied in this research.

⁸ I would like to acknowledge my colleague Lynelle Watts who introduced me to this book.

demonstrated ways of examining RSLA by illuminating *how* the policy practices operate—practically, discursively, and as techniques of governing conduct. After all, this is what RSLA appeared to be largely about—a form of government of young people’s behaviour. Furthermore, given the issues about educational reform noted above, the ‘problem’ of this study has led me towards an investigation of the conditions of this aspect of government. Such conditions are often considered so common sense that they tend to remain largely beyond examination (Dean, 1994). RSLA is but one example of an expression of a common sense mentality: who in their right mind would not want young people to have *more* education when education is such a lauded commodity? But how does such a view become commonly accepted? What discourses and ideas feed and sustain such a view?

What appeared useful about a governmental approach to policy research is that it directs attention to aspects of the policy normally unexamined, focussing my inquiry on language, thought, and practice. Marston and McDonald (2006) illustrate this approach to policy research as follows:

A number of authors in the field have recognised the need for policy research that unravels the complex character of the relationship of linking State and non-State forms of governance using Foucault’s concepts of ‘governmentality’ as a starting point (p. 1)...For Foucault, government as ‘governmentality’ incorporates not only the actions and structures of the State, but also the complex ways in which selves and populations are managed, directed, ordered and administered, for example, in families, in schools, in communities, in workplaces. (p. 2)

Such an approach has been useful for exploring RSLA because it brought to light the practices and rationalities of government in a methodical way.

Here is how Marston and McDonald explain this approach:

In analysing various domains or fields of social policy, governmentality directs us to explore the moral codes in operation; the language used, the attributes of participants marked as ethically significant. Further, such an analytics attends to the technologies of self that are deployed and the various ways and means by which participants both transform themselves and are transformed, as a consequence of the development and application of specific social policies. These micro questions can be framed against a backdrop of competing welfare and political rationalities, ranging from neoliberal interventions that seek to 'govern at a distance' to more coercive and authoritarian forms of government that bind obligations to individuals in the name of freedom and self-reliance. (Marston & McDonald, 2006, p. 4)

Using governmentality to guide my research proved to be a fruitful way for opening these lines of inquiry—it helped me to think about questions I had not considered, and framed objects of study I would not ordinarily have looked at. It directed me to see government as “pervasive, complex and heterogeneous” in that “it intrudes into all aspects of life but also that it should not be seen as emanating from a single controlling centre – such as that of the state” (Dean & Hindess, 1998, p. 2). Under this theory, government is seen as a complex interplay combining state and non-state entities *and* self-government (Dean, 1999).

Aims and research questions

From a research point of view, a governmental approach has been an important way of directing my focus not only towards the policy thinking and discourses, but to the actual *practices* of policy work (Foucault, 1991c). Practices concern what actually happens in the RSLA context and includes the tangible and

observable things that people do and say. These practices, by and large, comprise examples of the administration and implementation of RSLA (Department of Education and Training, 2005b). Thus, the aim is to examine RSLA in terms of language and thought as well as identify its material contexts and effects.

In following this theory of governmentality this research is essentially a critical policy analysis of the Western Australian *Raising the Higher School Leaving Age* policy (Graham, 2011; Marston, 2004) informed by governmentality theory (Dean, 2006; Edwards, 2002; Gordon, 1991). As such, the study examines and describes *how* the policy was first implemented by investigating the particular sites where the policy becomes a form of practice; that is, at the points in time and place where a student who is categorised as an early school leaver, or deemed to be at risk of not staying in school until age 17, is subjected to the strategies of the policy. The study also takes into account the kinds of rationalities, or 'mentalities' (Lemke, 2001; Rose & Miller, 1992), underpinning the discourses circulating around the politics and practices of raising the school leaving age.

Research questions

Marston and McDonald, (2006) suggest that governmental policy analysis implies a focus on some particular kinds of research questions. The kinds of broad research questions they pose include:

'How are welfare subjects constituted in programs of social policy? How do policy actors govern and how do they govern themselves?' and 'What

processes, procedures and practices are employed to facilitate the conduct of conduct?' 'What forms of resistance and refusal are constituted in policy practices?'. (Marston & McDonald, 2006, p. 4)

This begs some similar questions about RSLA: Why did the policy arise in the first place? How? For what purpose? And how does such a policy fundamentally alter (or not) how education and young people are thought about? What is the policy rationality? What discourses are circulated and how do they connect with practice? What is the policy's moral code?

These kinds of questions aim to identify the ways that practices of government can be seen at the same time as practices of the self. For example, at first glance it does appear that the moral expectation placed on young people is for them to willingly commit to normatively defined and socially sanctioned standards of education, and this is tied to expectations of responsible citizenship.

Furthermore, governmentality theory suggests that, rather than people simply being governed and controlled via some repressive external and visible form of power (for example, a sovereign or some instrument of brute force), power, and hence government, operates through a person's subjectivity in subtle ways (Rose, 1999a). That is to say, people are governed from within, and *participate* in self-governing (Dean, 1999). Could the introduction of RSLA constitute a shift in how people think about themselves and how people conduct themselves? It would surely provide ways for how education authorities think about school and young people; but what would this look like?

Foucault's use of the term governmentality demonstrates that there is a complex relationship between self-practices and governing practices (Foucault, 1991a).

Governmentality theory also posits that constructs of people, how they think about themselves and each other, and the forms of knowledge used to think about social and personal problems, are not stable, not internally consistent, not fixed, planned or consciously orchestrated. Rather, they are subject to contingencies, shifts and ruptures, forms of resistance and reconstruction (Kendall & Wickham, 1999). With due regards to the RSLA, I am therefore interested in the ways that the practices of government could be seen as intersecting with practices of the self. I am interested in the rationalities (the mentalities of the policy) and the technologies (the practices of the policy) (Rose & Miller, 1992). That is to say, my research has a dual focus on the thinking and practices of the policy. But how could this be examined? What questions could be posed to elicit some kind of insight into both the *thinking* and the *doing* of the policy? I wanted to examine the discourses and practices of the policy in order to understand them as expressions of power. So, the overarching question is:

- What are the discourses, rationalities, technologies and ethics of the Raised School Leaving Age policy in Western Australia?

This is essentially a question about the power and rationality of RSLA. But what *kind* of research question is this? This is not a gap spotting question, as referred to by Alvesson and Sandberg (2013). Gap spotting questions are common approaches to formulating research questions, in which the researcher scans the literature for gaps, and constructs a research question accordingly. However, Alvesson and Sandberg (2013) contend that gap spotting questions have a tendency towards producing uninteresting and only marginally significant theories and results because they are fundamentally incremental. The research

question above is not the result of gap spotting. Nor is it evaluative, comparative, or normative for that matter (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013). Instead, this question is a form of problematising, not so much of the theory I am using, but of the RSLA policy itself. It is a *descriptive* question that seeks to “generate knowledge about what characterizes a phenomenon, such as its substance (for example, what it is), function (for example, what it does) and rationale (for example, why it has certain qualities)” (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013, p. 15).

This question is pitched to focus a description of the policy as an example of political power and practice. Furthermore, the inquiry looks deeper into the theory of governmental power by including analysis of RSLA in light of related theoretical concepts: ‘conduct of conduct’, ‘pastoral power’, ‘biopower’, and ‘discipline’. These are also derived from the governmentality literature. Questions concerning these concepts assisted in a *description* of the contents of the RSLA policy—its discourses, rationalities, technologies, and ethics—as well as a criticism of RSLA. The research question and the theory behind it are intended to provide a way into conceptualising and analysing RSLA as a form of power and practice in the lives of young people.

These concepts and the associated lines of inquiry point the analysis towards examples of the practices that can be understood and explained by appealing to the theoretical themes within the governmentality literature. Each of these concepts aims to identify, foreground, and analyse a distinct, but related dimension of the policy. This means that each of these concepts directs the analysis towards specific instances of the policy (for example, what are the

policy ethics?).⁹ In doing so, I aim to cut RSLA in different ways, and create a map of the power and practices operating in the policy context. The research question posed seeks to identify the mechanisms in play that link governmental practices with self-practices, or more precisely, the way that government may be seen as the ‘conduct of conduct’ (Gillies, 2008). Answers to the research question ultimately led to four main arguments or conclusions. Each of these arguments will be developed in later chapters. They are:

1. RSLA is driven by an explicit focus on developing and styling young people’s ethical self as a neoliberal citizen-subject.
2. RSLA is underpinned by a preoccupation with risk and young people, and sees disengagement as a danger to young people themselves and society more broadly.
3. The practices of RSLA are examples of the way that the roles and functions of families are being subsumed and taken over by state and non-state entities.
4. RSLA embodies a distinct concern about global and local economic uncertainties and expresses a moral concern for young people to become work-ready.

Conclusion

In 2005, legislation was passed in WA to increase the minimum school leaving age from 15, to 16 in 2006 and 17 in 2008. This was touted by DET as a significant reform to the WA school system, and the implementation of the policy involves a vast network of programs, people and institutions. Centred among this reform is the concern raised that WA has poorer than desired levels of retention and participation, with many students leaving before completing year

⁹ A full conceptual elaboration of these concepts, the theory that informs them and their translation into the research design will follow in later chapters. Also, please refer to Appendix four for a synopsis on how I used Dean’s (1999) book on governmentality to form the beginning ideas in this study, and develop the research question and aims.

12. This is seen as a problematic scenario, and it is argued in government and other literature that leaving before successful completion of year 12 poses a range of long term risks to the leaver, such as structural patterns of socio-economic disadvantage, which stymie the capacity for national economic competitiveness and growth (Carpenter, 2004; Lahey, 2003; Smyth & Hattam, 2004; Spierings, 2000, 2002, 2003).

This thesis reports on research into the RSLA policy. Using governmentality as a theoretical concept, the inquiry was orientated towards the practices associated with implementing the policy, of directing and categorising certain groups of young people, of shaping their preferences, of the discourses and rationalities about school leaving, education, and work, and the techniques of power imbued within the policy domain.

The purpose of a governmental approach to policy analysis is to try and illuminate the micro practices of power and the various rationalities that underpin such practices (Dean, 1999). These are the rationalities that become the “taken for granted assumptions within government and embedded within the institutions and practices of governing” (Edwards, 2002, p. 356). Given this assertion, an inquiry into this policy is worthwhile as a means of examining in a critical manner much of what is presently seen as standard and unquestionable practice.

Overview of the thesis

Chapter 1 – introducing the study

In this chapter I explain the object of this inquiry—the RSLA policy—and outlined the rationale for conducting research on RSLA within the governmental tradition of policy research. The aims and questions that guide the study are explained and the significance of this research stated.

Chapter 2 – compulsory education and early school leaving

Chapter two provides an overview of the history of compulsory education in Australia and the United Kingdom. Particular attention is paid to the content of the debates in the post-World War II era about increasing the school leaving age from age 14 to 15 years. This will provide a point of reference that will be explained in later chapters. Chapter two also reviews the research on the two main ‘problems’ that outwardly RSLA seeks to address: early school leaving and transition from school-to-work. Again, this will provide a point of reference for examining RSLA against this body of literature.

Chapter 3 – a descriptive account of RSLA

Chapter three seeks to describe the RSLA in terms of its objectives, key organising concepts, and arguments. In doing so, chapter three discusses RSLA’s retention and participation objectives, and identifies, describes and critically examines its conceptual basis—namely that of engagement, disengagement and NEET. Finally, chapter three critically examines RSLA’s overtly stated intention

to enact a form of risk management, insofar as RSLA seeks to address the risks early school leaving and educational disengagement poses to young people and society at large.

Chapter 4 – theoretical orientation

Having outlined the background, context and major organising features of RSLA, chapter four proceeds to develop the theoretical and conceptual framework of this study. Chapter four explains the meaning of governmentality and how it is applied to this research by identifying and explaining seven key governmental concepts used in the framing and analysis of the data. Thus, the conceptual framework in chapter four examines the following:

1. Conduct of conduct
2. Pastoral power
3. Biopower
4. Discipline
5. Rationalities
6. Technologies
7. Ethics

These are presented as conceptual tools that are used to develop codes for the discussion and analysis of the RSLA data collected.

Chapter 5 – the theory in the methodology

Having outlined the theoretical and conceptual framework in chapter four, chapter five explains the methodological approaches used in this research. It digs deeper into several assumptions made about reality and knowledge and outlines the rules governing the research. The research ontology and

epistemology are identified and discussed. Drawing on and extending the basis of governmentality theory, I identify a mix of constructivist and critical realist concepts and ideas that assisted in developing my methodology. Canvassing these ideas is important insofar as making clear the kinds of assumptions and ideas used in this research.

Chapter 6 – methods

Chapter six outlines the specific methods, concepts and procedures used in collecting, organising, and analysing the data. Data was collected by way of face-to-face interviews and also included a range of policy documents and other 'grey materials'. The procedures used to sample, collect and analyse the data are explained.

Chapter 7 – technologies and ethics of the RSLA neoliberal enterprise

Chapter seven is the first of four data chapters that present the conclusions and arguments of the data analysis. This chapter draws on the concepts of technologies and ethics to argue and show the ways that RSLA works to produce a certain neoliberal ethic among young people.

Chapter 8 – rationalities about risk society, young people and RSLA

The data presentation and analysis continues in chapter eight with a focus on the RSLA rationality. The key political rationality in RSLA is risk. In this chapter, I

explain and describe the formation of risk in RSLA and examine its consequences in practice.

Chapter 9 – disciplining the conduct of young people

While the ethic of RSLA draws its inspiration from neoliberalism, and its rationality is built on an actuarial paradigm of risk management, its strategies of practice are conceptualised in chapter nine as disciplining practices. Such practices are concerned with the conduct of young people. They are pastoral and panoptic and based on knowing as much as possible the whereabouts and conduct of young people. Furthermore, this chapter explains that RSLA adopts disciplining and socialisation functions that resemble the kinds of functions typically enacted by the family institution.

Chapter 10 – economic uncertainty and school-to-work transitions

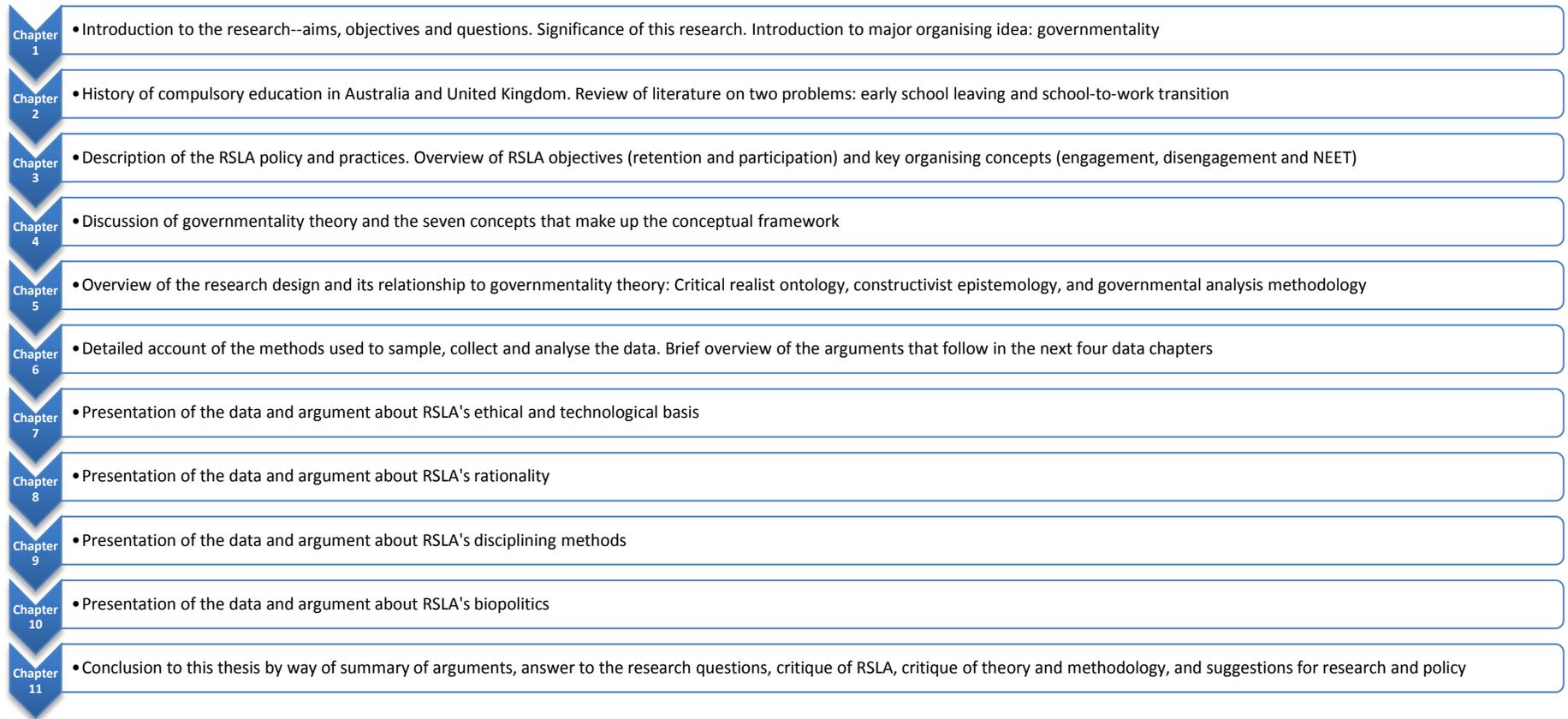
Chapter 10 concludes the data analysis and discussion with a focus on the biopolitical side of RSLA. Here, it is explained that RSLA comprises a weak form of economic nationalism insofar as an increase in compulsory education is touted as not only good for individual young people, but good for Western Australia's society and economy more broadly. Furthermore, this chapter explains that within this biopolitical argument, a strong distinction is made between completers and non-completers in such a way that a category of dangerous person (the non-completer or at-risk young person) is drawn into sharp relief as an object for concern and intervention. The changes in the socio-economic context of the late 20th century and early 21st century account for

much of the RSLA arguments that an increase in compulsory education is 'good for everyone'.

Chapter 11 - conclusion

Finally, chapter 11 concludes this thesis with a brief summary of the main findings and a critical analysis of the arguments of this thesis against the research questions. This chapter also includes a discussion about the strengths and limitations of this research, and outlines some suggestions and directions for a program of future research. I conclude with a value-rational (Flyvbjerg, 2001) 'speculation' on where we are heading with compulsory education, and question the desirability of such a direction. Figure one, over the page, presents an overview of the thesis.

Figure 1: A map of the thesis



CHAPTER 2 – COMPULSORY EDUCATION AND EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

So if you look back before the raise the school leaving age strategy, you know, the participation and so on, really the only thing that used to happen was the kids would do an exit survey and they'd have some vague idea about what they were going to do in the future and then six months down the track somebody would ring them up and see what they did. So there's really not that management of movement, you know, what kids are actually up to and where they're moving to. (Interview #11)

Three decades ago, the majority of teenagers in Australia left school before the completion of Year 12...changes in the youth labour market mean that the pathway from school to work was not so clearly defined by the late 1990s. There are concerns that a proportion of young people, especially those who do not complete secondary school, are now at risk of experiencing a transition characterised by long periods of unemployment, interspersed with short periods of employment in low skilled, part time, or casual jobs. (Marks & McMillan, 2001, p. 6)

Introduction

The 2006 and 2008 changes to the Western Australia school leaving age took place within a context of social, political, and economically derived perceptions about education generally, and the length of compulsory education specifically.

What is meant by compulsory education—its purposes and forms—is historically specific and thus arbitrary and given to change and reformation.

Legislation such as RSLA is essentially a form of an argument about education and young people. Such an argument is rooted in assumptions about work, society, and young people.

In order to understand RSLA it is important to describe both the context and the RSLA policy itself. This is the task of this chapter and the next. To situate RSLA in

the broader socio-political context it arises from, I consider the broader antecedents and contemporary forces that have conditioned and shaped its form. The following dimensions to this context are salient to this research: a history of compulsory education; the problem of early school leaving; and, the problem of transitioning from school to work and further education.

To achieve the aims of this chapter, I begin by looking back at the history of compulsory education. This provides a window into the changes in compulsory education in the post-World War II period. Not unlike the present policy circumstance, previous attempts at reforming the school leaving age were shaped and contextualised by the conditions of the time. In exploring the literature on compulsory education in the post-war period in the United Kingdom and Australia, I look at the issues concerning raising the compulsory school leaving age from 14 to 15 years as they were debated back then. In doing so, I give some historical context to the discussions and debates about compulsory education and the history from which it arises. Why have I drawn on literature from the United Kingdom as well as Australia? The reasons for this are that both Australia and the United Kingdom were raising their school leaving age to 15 at roughly the same time, and the Australian school system is similar in many respects to the United Kingdom. This discussion will function to establish a point of reference that will be picked up again in later chapters. Caution is exercised in how far this comparison can be stretched, and I do not intend to presume that universal claims on a limited set of sources can be made, nor do I intend to make ahistorical moral judgements about which history is correct or right. The point is to establish the context of RSLA to avoid situating RSLA in a

vacuum, and in doing so, I aim to problematise RSLA—to unsettle its veneer of being timeless.

Next, I review the empirical literature on early school leaving. The research literature on early school leaving is examined in terms of its explanatory power; that is to say, the theoretical explanations behind early school leaving are identified and grouped into categories. This is important because this will also provide a point of reference later in this thesis insofar as I use this literature in part to work out what theoretical assumptions RSLA holds about early school leaving.

Finally, I look at a related policy ‘problem’ that RSLA seeks to address, namely transition. Here I review the evidence about transition in the context of youth employment and unemployment. The purpose of this is to provide further context to the nature of the problem that RSLA attempts to intervene in. I begin by discussing the history of compulsory education in Australia and the United Kingdom.

Compulsory education in historical perspective

The present-day Western Australian policy approach to compulsory education is similar to that in all Australian states and territories in that the focus is on full-time participation until the end of the year that the student turns age 17. The Northern Territory Government has a ‘learn or earn’ policy for 15-17 year olds (Northern Territory Government, 2011), while the Queensland Government has

a compulsory school age up to age 16 and a compulsory participation phase between 16 and 17, or when the student gains a Senior Certificate or equivalent (Department of Education and Training Queensland, 2011). In South Australia, although the compulsory school leaving age is 16, young people aged between 16 and 17 are legally required to participate in a full-time 'approved learning program' that may include school, university, work, apprenticeship, other training or a combination of these (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2011). In Victoria the compulsory school leaving age was increased to 17 on January 1, 2010 (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2011). In New South Wales the compulsory school leaving age is 15; however, a young person must commit to full-time study, work or approved training until age 17 (New South Wales Government, 2009). In Tasmania the school leaving age is 16, but from age 16 – 17 young people must commit to an approved full-time education and training program (Department of Education, 2011b). In the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), the compulsory school leaving age was raised from 15 to 17 in January 2010. Young people must complete Year 10 and can then commit to a full-time approved education or training program until the end of the year they turn 17 (Department of Education, 2011a). These recent changes to the compulsory school leaving age in Australia are part of the history of mass education in Australia.

Compulsory and mass education systems in Australia date back to the late 19th century (Morey, 1945) and their development in Australia is broadly in keeping with other industrialised nations around the world and their respective histories, especially in the United Kingdom. Societies with industrialised

economies have tended to develop more elaborate systems of compulsory education than those with agricultural economies (Kandel, 1951, p. 12). This was partly due to urbanisation, which made it easier to organise a centralised system of education, but also due to the new demands placed on workers in an industrial economy requiring the attainment of common skills (Kandel, 1951).

Another important reason that made compulsory education possible and desirable was the increased standard of living of families and declining birth rates (Kandel, 1951). These factors meant that parents were more able to afford to educate their children, and more concerned for their educational welfare; the latter of which was also fed by an emerging philosophical view of people as more universally entitled to social, economic and intellectual fulfilment, and basic human rights such as the right to an education (Kandel, 1951).

At the close of the World War II, Australia was in the process of considering raising the compulsory school leaving age to from age 14 to 15 (Morey, 1945)¹⁰. History shows the varying range of ages set for compulsory schooling. Table one, following, sourced from Morey (1945), outlines the development of compulsory education in Australia up to 1945:

¹⁰ In 1945, the school leaving age in Australia was 14, except for New South Wales, which was already 15 (Morey, 1945).

Table 1: Early timeline of compulsory education in Australia

Place	Date	Leaving Age	Later Developments
England	1876	12	14 in 1918
Western Australia	1871	14	
Victoria	1872	15	{ 13 in 1899 14 in 1910
South Australia	1875	13	14 in 1915
New South Wales	1880	14	15 in 1943
Tasmania	1885	13	14 in 1912
Queensland	1910	12	14 in 1912

Source: (Morey, 1945, p. 4).

What this table shows, for example, is that the school leaving age in Victoria was set at 15 in 1872, lowered to 13 in 1899, and raised again to 14 in 1910. As Morey (1945) explains, the actual age for leaving school is arbitrary and is based on conventions and assumptions about the purposes and goals of education, which are given to shift and change. Morey (1945) does make it clear that compulsory education has always been utilitarian. For example, the utilitarian aims in 1945 linked the *telos* of education to technological advancement and changes in the nature and demands of work in the emerging post-war era. A basic education that could reasonably be achieved by age 12 or 13 was seen as insufficient to meet the challenges of post-war Australia; more time in school was therefore judged as necessary (Morey, 1945).

In explaining the background to compulsory education, Morey (1945) includes an analysis of all Australian jurisdictions and includes a variety of perspectives about compulsory education. The general view at the time was that Australia's

foray on the world stage required students to increase their skills and attributes (Morey, 1945). What this reveals is an underlying economic rationality insofar as education was thought to be pivotal to nation building and civic participation.

Investment in education is, therefore, seen as an investment in the nation. As

Morey explains:

Such an investment will bring great benefits to the country, in the shape of well-educated and cultured citizens...Many a child, a future citizen and voter, leaves school with only a hazy idea of the rights, responsibilities and duties of citizenship. (1945, p. 8)

At the same time, Morey (1945) explores the question of increasing the school leaving age by considering students' point of view on the matter. Rather than drawing on children's perspectives directly, Morey (1945) draws on the educational and behavioural psychology of the time to paint a caricature of the young adolescent as awkward, socially clumsy, and brimming with 'attitude'. Parents, she argues, are poorly equipped to deal with their adolescent children; whereas more time in school can provide for "a stable environment in which to find his [sic] feet as a young adult" (Morey, 1945, p. 14). This view has not been lost, and as shown later, it is key to RSLA.

Morey's paper then explores the costs to increasing the school leaving age, and she argues that there needs to be substantial reform to the teacher/student ratio (limiting class sizes to 30 students, at least), improvements in buildings and infrastructure, and "a complete revision of the school curriculum" (Morey, 1945, p. 29). Here, Morey is clear that changes must be made to the "school atmosphere" (Morey, 1945, p. 29), as well as to the curriculum itself. In scoping

the proposals to increase the school leaving age, the critical gaze is, in fact, on the school itself. This is a point of difference from RSLA.

School and critical engagement with the world

For Morey (1945), the purpose of increasing the school leaving age is resolutely to provide a *critical* form of education so that students can participate not only in work, but in politics, society, and life itself. This argument is quite a departure from RSLA, worth quoting at length:

In the years from 14 to 16 much can be done to widen the experiences of the child, so that he [sic] will leave school with a knowledge of his [sic] obligations to the community, and also with sufficient training to enable him [sic] to form sound judgements on the major problems of politics. He [sic] should be able to read the daily newspapers with discrimination and an understanding of the different types of newspapers which cater for different readers. He [sic] should understand something about 'advertisement appeal' and the way some advertisements aim at exploiting the weaknesses of human nature. (Morey, 1945, p. 33)

Further, Morey writes:

...we push them [adolescents] out into an ugly, competitive and industrial world without having done anything to arouse their appreciation of the beautiful in art, music, dress, architecture, or even the beauties of nature...From his [sic] earliest school days, he [sic] will have been undergoing such experiences – in the last two years they can be widened and strengthened, until by 16 he [sic] will be able to discriminate between good books and trash; he [sic] will know something of music, art, drama. He [sic] will know where to go, and what to look for to satisfy the thirst for the beautiful which his [sic] schooling has aroused. (Morey, 1945, p. 34)

A similar tone can be detected in debates about compulsory education in the United Kingdom some 20 years later. The Schools Council (1965) paper that

examined the question of an additional compulsory year in the United Kingdom gives attention to the needs of students and explores what a reorganised curriculum might look like as a consequence. Much attention is devoted to philosophical questions concerning the purposes of education and the social and psychological characteristics of secondary students. Students are characterised as 'emergent' adults, preparing to enter the transition into an adult world (Schools Council Welsh Committee, 1967).

In addition to a focus on economic matters and nation building, education in Morey's (1945) and the Schools Council Welsh Committee (1967) conception is strongly humanist, aiming to equip students to understand their place in the world and be thoughtful about the choices and decisions they make in their lives. It is based in a developmental and rationally responsible notion of adolescence, a view that Besley (2009) notes has long been a normative humanist and Enlightenment perspective about young people (pp. 48-49). To this end, an additional year of schooling is argued on the grounds that skills in critical thinking, judgement, and the powers of reason and so on, are more likely to be developed when students have reached a certain degree of adolescent maturity (Morey, 1945). An additional year of school is viewed as a requirement to build these critical faculties, by capitalising on the developmental stage of 14-15 year olds (Morey, 1945). Consequently, and like Morey (1945), The Schools Council (1965) appealed for a curriculum that educates students to act in a world with understanding and vision beyond their own experiences and beyond their own needs. The Schools Council quotes the 'Newsom Report' in saying that:

In a contracting world, where all men are neighbours but by no mean necessarily friends, everybody needs an education of the imagination and the will to enlarge the area of his concern and acceptance of responsibility. (The Newsom Report cited in The Schools Council, 1965, p. 11)

The Schools Council (1965) thereby proposed a 'holistic' curriculum that equips students with "a sound basis for development [in] the study of Man, [sic] and of human society, needs and purposes" (1965, p. 12).

Some 20 years and the space between one side of the world and the other spans these important discussion papers, yet a similarly coherent perspective about education, young people, and the world at large unites them. As will be shown, there are significant differences between these arguments and RSLA in 21st century Western Australia.

Changes to schools in light of an increase in school leaving age

One of the main differences between the debate in the post-war era and RSLA is the degree to which there is any kind of focus on the school itself. For example, Morey's paper and others (Kandel, 1951; Morey, 1945; The Schools Council, 1965) sketched out the kinds of *institutional changes* an increase in school requires. In working out what needs to happen to schools to deal with an extra year, Morey (1945) outlines in detail the changes in curriculum that need to be developed. Morey argues that "in providing courses for the children who will be compelled to stay at school for an additional year or two nothing less than a *completely new approach* will prove satisfactory" (Morey, 1945, p. 42, emphasis added).

Similar arguments underlying an increase in compulsory education can also be found two decades after Morey's paper. In 1966 in Wales, a conference was held to discuss likely issues that may arise from the planned increase in the school leaving age to 16 set down for 1970 (Schools Council Welsh Committee, 1967). The utilitarian and economic aims were, of course, still a major frame in these debates.¹¹ However, a second reason for increasing the school leaving age was related to the value of education for its own sake, as a moral good in and of itself.

One of the concerns expressed by the Schools Council Welsh Committee was that increasing the school leaving age may have the effect of exacerbating some students negative attitudes towards school and thus learning itself, and this should be avoided as much as possible (Schools Council Welsh Committee, 1967). Like the case in Morey (1945), the actual structure and culture of how schools operate was seen as the problem in this situation. Rigid forms of school organisation and authoritarian teaching modes were seen as in need of critical examination, should the school leaving age be increased:

It seems quite obvious we shall fail if we cannot arrange the school programme so that young people get *some* pleasure from going to school. Certainly we shall have failed if they look upon the idea with horror. (Schools Council Welsh Committee, 1967, p. 4, original italics)

To address this concern, The Schools Council Welsh Committee scoped two key features of schooling that they argue required focussed scrutiny: the curriculum and school organisation (Schools Council Welsh Committee, 1967). The focus of their discussion then includes commentary and numerous examples of

¹¹ The underlying rationale for an increase in the Welsh context, as expressed by teachers, was for students to "pass examinations in order to get a better job" (Schools Council Welsh Committee, 1967, p. 1).

experiments and plans that various headmasters had trialled in order to address these issues of the school itself. What is striking about their commentary is that the gaze is fundamentally on the school, not the student, and the purpose of schooling is to engage students around their interests and needs, as well as prepare them for *citizenship*, not just employment. In some cases, examples of efforts to improve relationships between teachers and students are given:

(1) Supervising teachers assume the guise of leaders rather than authorities and this gives children a new and objective view of the teacher when he [sic] returns to the classroom.

(2) The absence of school discipline and instruction means that a teacher is able to see a child as he [sic] really is, and uninhibited conversation with a small group makes for a clearer understanding of a boy's [sic] thoughts and interests, often demonstrating the spontaneous achievements of which he [sic] is capable...

(4) Children treat staff leaders with friendly politeness and tend to reflect values learnt whilst living together and give expression to them within the orbit of school life. (Headmaster Mr Geraint Williams, cited in Schools Council Welsh Committee, 1967, p. 10)

School as a form of moral instruction

While education may well have been about preparing young people for work and citizenship, it was then—and continues to be—about instilling moral and cultural values (Seaborne, 1970). Consequently, part of the arguments underpinning the history of compulsory education were based in “moral and humanitarian reasons” (Seaborne, 1970, p. 10; see also Kandel, 1951). In providing moral instruction, school was intended to act as a structured form of protection against child exploitation from the burgeoning factories brought about by industrialisation (Kandel, 1951; Seaborne, 1970). Schools were also

designed as disciplining institutions, turning a “horde of young savages” (Seaborne, 1970, p. 12) into calmer and “more civilised people”.

Instilling ritualistic habits of routine in schools was designed as a way to discipline students in order to produce useful personal attributes for functioning in the work places that they would eventually inhabit (Kandel, 1951). This is a legacy of a long tradition of the purposes of compulsory education in 17th and 18th century Europe that had also included religious instruction and building state loyalty into its purposes (Kandel, 1951). These purposes were to ensure “the training of enlightened citizens who would have a voice in the government of their country” (Kandel, 1951, p. 12); the latter of which was considered by George Washington as crucial to the development of the new republic of the United States as well (Kandel, 1951). Education in this conceptualisation is about *nation building*.

Similar themes can be found in other sources. In anticipation of raising the school leaving age in 1970 in Scotland,¹² a detailed paper published by the Scottish Education Department (1966) explored the issues that the education sector needed to understand and grapple with. The foreword by the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Rt. Hon. William Ross M.P., noted that further schooling is primarily about preparing students for work and further education, but it should also equip “them for their responsibilities as citizens, encourages them to develop satisfactory leisure time activities and provides them with a firm basis of values on which they can found their future social and personal relationships”

¹² The compulsory school leaving age in Scotland was raised to 16 on September 1, 1972 (HM Inspectors of Schools, 1976).

(cited in Scottish Education Department, 1966, pp. 3-4). Following this line, the paper then outlines some ideas for the development of 'social and moral education' with a particular focus on 'social studies' and the moral and political basis to social and civic participation. It also sets out a framework for the education and development of leisure activities that includes everything from sport, to drama, music, clubs and with a strong focus on 'the arts'. The paper emphasises the importance of generalist vocational education that prepares students for an array of jobs and careers that they may be employed in upon leaving school (Scottish Education Department, 1966).

Such themes in this literature are common elsewhere. For example, Seaborne (1970) also notes that in the 100-year history of compulsory education, an important argument behind the various policy developments and changes is its link to citizenship, and by citizenship, it refers to being a political actor. At the same time though, the purposes of compulsory education have long been equated with an investment in a nation's most important resource: people (Kandel, 1951). In this sense, education is argued to be a most crucial investment in a nation's prosperity and future, and as Kandel (1951) explains, this argument was accepted and widely promulgated in Western nations in the immediate post-World War II period.

Summary

The historical literature on compulsory education discussed here provides a point of comparison between the immediate post-World War II period and 21st century Australia that will be picked up again and explored later. It is apparent

that in the post-World War II period, there were at least three distinct themes of discussion framing the debate about increasing the school leaving age. First, an increase in compulsory education from age 14 to 15 was argued on instrumental grounds regarding employment. It was contended that students needed an extra year of school to further prepare them for life in the emerging post-war economies and the advances in technology that were shaping and reshaping the nature of work. Second, more time in school was argued as a pre-requisite to citizenship in the form of developing the critical thinking, civic, and political attitudes of students. Finally, the debates centred very strongly on how to reorganise the school itself: curriculum, teaching—and developmental knowledge of students, who were seen as emerging young adults, even at the age of 15—were central to the discussion on what should be done to tackle an extra year of school.

At the same time, it is worth noting that the humanist and civic ideals built into this discourse—despite their stated intentions of inclusivity—served to make possible and visible a certain ideal type of student and citizen at the same time that it rendered others marginal and problematic. The gendered language used in the post-World War II literature clearly centred boys and young men as the objects of school reform and future employment and citizenship. Early 20th century education in Australia was deeply optimistic and utopian (McLeod & Wright, 2012). Yet, McLeod (2012) notes that the education policy discourse in Australia during the inter-war years privileged cosmopolitanism and internationalism, but its consequential effects placed Aboriginal peoples as problematically localist and familial.

Outwardly, the policy changes discussed above were about adding an additional year to compulsory education. In RSLA, the situation is a little different. Completion to the end of Year 12 or equivalent has long been an aspirational if not legislative goal. In Australia since the late 1980s, leaving school before completion of Year 12 or equivalent has increasingly been defined as a form of early school leaving. That is why RSLA legislates what has already been an expected aspirational target. In doing so, RSLA seeks to address early school leaving as defined by leaving school before completing Year 12. Thus, it is leaving school 'early' that is one problem that RSLA seeks to address. As will be shown, in a similar way that previous discourses about education made possible certain truths, subjectivities and points of focus and intervention, so too does RSLA. Here the problematic is the early school leaver.

The policy problem 1: Early school leaving

If a policy on compulsory education could worry, what would it worry about? Arguably, in the case of RSLA the principle worry is disengagement and early school leaving. It is not just a set of 'facts' about early school leaving that is the problem though, it is what early school leaving *means* in a given context. In RSLA as elsewhere, early school leaving signifies a concern with the individual leaver and their welfare, and a concern for the community at large including the economic costs of early school leaving (Spierings, 2000). It is a view expressed in Carpenter's consultation report on raising the school leaving age (Carpenter, 2004). It states that "of those who leave early, up to a third are unemployed in the following year and continue to have difficulties over the next six years" (p. 2).

Likewise, the Business Council of Australia (Lahey, 2003) argues that early school leaving leads to not only a financial cost for the individual (in terms of reduced earning potential across a life-time), but is also implicated in wider social and economic costs in terms of reduced productivity and consumption. Insofar as RSLA is a policy response to early school leaving, what exactly does the research tell us about why people leave school early? In reviewing the literature below I aim to locate the explanatory framework about early school leaving in RSLA.

Why do some young people leave school early?

RSLA is a response to early school leaving, but the reasons that people leave school early are varied, multi-dimensional and complex (NCVER, 1999).

Generally speaking, early school leavers are more likely to be male, from low socio-economic backgrounds, from government schools, from English speaking backgrounds, have poor school achievements, and from rural areas (Lamb, Dwyer, & Wyn, 2000). Conversely, students most likely to complete Year 12 and go on to university are those who attend independent schools, live in urban areas, are from non-English speaking backgrounds, are from higher socio-economic backgrounds, perform well in school, have parents from higher status occupations with high educational attainment, and are female (Long, Carpenter, & Hayden, 1999). The section below categorises the research literature on early school leaving in five ways:

1. Individual explanations
2. Sociological explanations
3. Institutional explanations

4. Multi-dimensional explanations
5. The changing nature of families

Individual explanations

Individual explanations of early school leaving locate the explanatory factor for early school leaving within the student themselves. In the extreme form, this is conceptualised as an inherent failing of the young person, and the language used to frame this often pathologises some aspect of the young person. For example, Lichter and colleagues (Lichter, Rapien, & Siebert, 1962) study of 'drop-outs' in the United States explained that early school leaving is caused by ego failure and maladjustment of the young person; a theme also used in more recent literature on working with 'at-risk' youth (McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 2004). Some of this individualised focus has painted early school leavers in less than flattering terms:

The dropout is no longer a boon to the national economy. He is clumsily dysfunctional in the computer-precise, machine-orientated, communication saturated society. His muscles are a drug [sic] on the market; his truncated education makes him inadequate to qualify for available jobs; he is in no position to bargain for himself and has little chance to develop himself within an expanding socio-economic universe. (Cervantes, 1965, p. 196)

More recent research has continued a focus on individual and psychological explanations of early school leaving, but without the negative hyperbole. A longitudinal study by Duchesne and colleagues (Duchesne, Vitaro, Larose, & Tremblay, 2008) of 1,817 Canadian children looked at the effect of anxiety on high school completion. They surveyed teachers and parents every year about children's levels of anxiety and correlated these results with students' educational status at age 20. Controlling for variables such as gender, family and

academic achievement, they found that although varying degrees and 'kinds' of anxiety may be 'normal' and common amongst young children, high and chronic anxiety in early childhood is a predictive factor in non-completion and poor school performance (Duchesne et al., 2008).

Other research looks at individual characteristics and their relationship to early school leaving. A longitudinal study in Finland using the Finnish educational data-sets examined the relationship between early school leaving and cynicism towards school,¹³ exhaustion and feelings of inadequacy (Bask & Salmela-Aro, 2013). They found that—after moderating for socio-economic factors—cynicism towards school was a major predictive factor in early school leaving (Bask & Salmela-Aro, 2013). Another longitudinal study looked at the association between regular cannabis use and early school leaving (Lynskey, Coffey, Degenhardt, Carlin, & Patton, 2003). They found positive associations between regular cannabis use at age 15 and early school leaving, attributing a non-conventional lifestyle as an explanatory factor to early school leaving (Lynskey et al., 2003).

It is not so much the empirical studies themselves that have influenced 'common sense' views about early school leaving as rooted in the mind and conduct of the individual, but the seductiveness of psychology and a fixation on minds and bodies that comprise an explanatory paradigm for human behaviour (Besley, 2009; Rose, 2001, 2003). In RSLA, self-esteem (or rather lack of) is the key focal point in this paradigm. The pursuit of self-esteem dominates and is pervasive in

¹³ Cynicism was defined by the authors as a lack of motivation and a sense of wanting to give up on school.

many areas of society (Crocker & Park, 2004), and as will be shown in later chapters, is deeply ingrained in RSLA. However, as noted by Garrison (1987), this view was already under attack even in the 1980s for its psychological reductionism and blinkeredness because it fails to account for social and institutional factors in explaining early school leaving. Hence, other research along these lines has opened up scope for different explanations and influencing factors.

Sociological explanations

Sociological research acts as counterpoint to an individualistic approach to understanding early school leaving. Many of these sociologically focussed studies are longitudinal studies from nationally representative data-sets and incorporate a range of social factors into the analysis. For example, a study by Astone and McLanahan (1994) looked at the relationship between residential mobility and early school leaving. The authors sampled 10,434 cases from a nationally representative sample of 1000 United States high schools. They found that non-intact (that is, single parent households) were significantly more mobile than intact families and that this mobility accounted for 18% of the total 'stock' of disadvantage for single parent families and 27% for step families (Astone & McLanahan, 1994). In the case of the latter, it is not a matter of diminished socio-economic status that affected early school leaving, but the disruption of familial and social ties that has as much influence on a child's education as compared to living in a single parent disadvantaged family (Astone & McLanahan, 1994).

Hence, it is low levels of social capital and disadvantage generally that are salient factors in explaining early school leaving. A statistical analysis of nationally representative longitudinal data in the United States found that high social capital contributes greatly to improved school participation and achievement, but only for “traditionally advantaged sections of the population” (McNeal, 1999, p. 134). Families with some form of stratified disadvantage were not able to leverage the behavioural (that is, staying in school) benefits of their social capital networks and resources, suggesting that economic and cultural disadvantage were forces at work in early school leaving (McNeal, 1999).

Sociological research in Australia has reached similar conclusions. A statistical analysis of the Youth in Transition Surveys of 1961 and 1970 examined decisions to leave school during the late 1970s and early 1980s (Le & Miller, 2004). The results from this study found that decisions to leave school are primarily influenced by the type of school, the student’s ability, and family background. In fact, these background factors were more influential than the labour market situation in shaping young people’s decisions for staying in or leaving school (Le & Miller, 2004). In short, there are several background context factors at work in shaping patterns of early school leaving.

Critical educational researchers have explored in more detail various social forces that significantly impact on the educational experiences and opportunities of some groups of young people and their families. For example, Connell (2007) explains that although parents of working class background value and indeed hold high expectations of school for their children, their sometimes own negative experiences of school coupled with the increased complexity in post-school

pathways combine to curtail their ability to advise their child's decision-making around school. Consequently, working class families are increasingly "likely to depend *more* on the schools to get everything right for their children" (Connell, 2007, p. 238, original italics). This poses something of a problem given Smyth and McInerney's (2014) assertion that people from low socio-economic backgrounds are often *under-supported* in their aspirations and efforts at school. Ross and Leathwood (2013) note that early school leaving "becomes a marker for social exclusion, a means of maintaining inequities in societies in which social divisions and extremes of wealth and poverty have become more marked..." (p. 415). From this perspective, schools and educational systems effectively reproduce structural disadvantage as they become increasingly and negatively reformed by, and attached to, global market forces (Smyth, 2012).

Institutional explanations

Other research has looked at the context of the school itself in explaining early school leaving (Hodgson, 2007; Smyth & Hattam, 2002, 2004; Smyth et al., 2000; Smyth et al., 2003). For example, research by Razer et al (2013) demonstrates how schools can effect and embed patterns of student inclusion or exclusion according to the frameworks of thought circulating among the school staff. These kinds of institutional focussed studies are often qualitative case studies around a specific school or group of students. The results of these studies often share a straightforward conclusion. A study by Hosie summarises well the overall tenor of this literature as expressed in the title of her paper: *I hated everything about school* (Hosie, 2007). Hosie conducted semi-structured interviews with 93 young women in the United Kingdom who fell pregnant during Year 10 of high school.

She wanted to explore their educational experiences prior to pregnancy and found that for many young women, their experience of school was one of bullying and aggressive belittling teaching (Hosie, 2007), a finding also reported in my own study into early school leaving (Hodgson, 2007).

Other research that looks at the context of the school itself was conducted by Patterson, Hale and Stessman (2008). They conducted a case-study methodology of a single high school in the United States using multiple qualitative data collection methods and involving 68 stakeholders. They found that several cultural contradictions in the context of the school itself accounted for high rates of early school leaving. These contradictions included (Patterson et al., 2008):

- A gap between espoused values and actual practice
- Inability to adapt practice to incorporate cultural diversity
- Non-engaging and non-caring pedagogy
- Deficit thinking about students, especially towards those in minority cultural groups
- High bureaucratic school culture, with top-down non-inclusive decision-making

In a similar vein, researchers Lee and Breen (2007) undertook a qualitative grounded theory study with 12 male students in Western Australia. They found that as well as explicit forms of social exclusion, such as being asked to leave school, some students experienced implicit exclusion in the forms of bullying, gossip, lack of access to opportunities, and a general overall impression of not feeling included and connected to their school community (Lee & Breen, 2007).

In short, this literature identifies 'push factors' in schools themselves as the explanatory factor in early school leaving.

Multi-dimensional explanations

Other studies have incorporated a range of perspectives and variables together and can best be seen as having a multi-dimensional focus to them. For example, Traag and van der Velden (2011) conducted a statistical analysis of representative longitudinal data in the Netherlands. They found that the combination of low cognitive and motivational skills among students, when combined with low family social and cultural capital, contribute to early school leaving.

Turning to another example, in a meta-review of the literature (including grey materials), Osterman (2000) looked at belongingness and the role of schools in influencing students' natural psychological need to feel like they are part of a community (that is, the school). Osterman (2000) found that although schools have the ability to significantly influence a sense of belonging in a school community, the overall culture and structure of the schools reviewed in their study worked against the aims of belonging to the detriment of school performance, and student retention and persistence.

Further research by Heck and Mahoe (2006) examined the link between sociological factors and school context. They conducted a statistical analysis of nationally representative data in the United States, analysing the interaction between student background factors (for example, class, ethnicity) and school institutional factors such as curriculum, school structure and organisation. They found that early school leaving is the result of an interaction between these

different factors and that schools *can*, with some effort, moderate the effects of these background factors:

Our results imply that efforts to increase persistence rates for high school students will have to attack different individual (e.g. family poverty, early educational experiences, school transition, course-taking patterns, and career and postsecondary aspirations) and structural-institutional (e.g. school structural redesign, curricular and instructional processes, attendance and safety) fronts *simultaneously*. (Heck & Mahoe, 2006, pp. 440-441, emphasis added)

In stating this, they base their analysis and recommendations on a critique of the individual deficit approach to research and intervention. I quote their criticism at length here, because it is a telling example of the problems of RSLA that will be discussed in later chapters in this thesis:

In the past, researchers have favoured a type of psychological risk model to explain student withdrawal, where most of the blame for dropping out is associated with students (e.g., absenteeism, discipline problems, poor achievement, and retention) and their family situations (e.g., parents education, language skills, socioeconomic status [SES], family structure, mobility, and recent immigration) as opposed to the school. (Heck & Mahoe, 2006, p. 420)

An aspect of the above quote points to families as a determining factor in early school leaving. This view needs to be canvassed, because, as will be shown later in this thesis, certain views about families are circulated in RSLA policy and practice. In this sense, it is not just that the context of families are held up as an explanatory factor in early school leaving, but such views also give legitimacy for educational systems to adopt some of the care and control functions normally reserved for the family institution.

The changing nature of families

The relationship between schools and families is complex. However, sometimes negative perceptions about families did indeed influence the practices in RSLA. These perceptions are not unique to RSLA. For example, Zinsmeister (1996) pondered upon the public school system in the United States in the 1990s, and in doing so, his insights provide clues into what is happening within RSLA today. For Zinsmeister, the rise of single parent families is the demographic turn that introduces a significant risk factor into the educational outcomes of United States children, and this turn has seeped into political and public discourse. He argues that schools themselves have stepped in where families have stepped off:

The trend in public education has been to convert schools into full-service social-service agencies, where children get their meals, their doctoring, their social and racial integration, their after-hours babysitting, their driving instruction, their indoctrination in multicultural thinking, their drug treatment, their moral training, and their condoms. (Zinsmeister, 1996, p. 43)

According to Zinsmeister, this form of 'over-reach' is undesirable because it has two problematic effects. First, it layers into and *on top of* the traditional curriculum a host of extra-curriculum responsibilities and thus burdens schools to now teach things like personal grooming, hygiene, and bicycle safety (Zinsmeister, 1996, p. 43). More importantly, for Zinsmeister, it creates a situation whereby "it becomes easier than ever for parents to drift away" (Zinsmeister, 1996, p. 44).

To what extent does Zinsmeister's point have any basis or relevance to RSLA? Empirical research demonstrates the conditioning effect families have on policy

discourses, rationalities and practices. A review of 30 years of United States demographic and other data by Popenoe (1993) from 1960-1990 concludes that the American family institution *is* declining because it is gradually being stripped of many of its functions. Popenoe cites declining birth rates, increasing divorce, and a fundamental change in roles and tasks in families as evidence of what he terms family decline.

This demographic change is said to inevitably contain a flow-on effect on children, and this has been examined elsewhere. For example, in a review of international literature on family relationship breakdown, Coleman and Glenn (2010) conclude that relationship breakdown has a significant negative short-term impact on children, including (for a significant minority) longer-term disadvantage and negative impacts on their education. These longer-term impacts include poorer academic achievement, behavioural problems, health and mental health problems, substance abuse and overall socio-economic disadvantage—perhaps not coincidentally, the very foci of RSLA contained in its epistemology of the problems of compulsory education and its argument for change floated back in 2004 (Carpenter, 2004).

As a further international example, population data from Norway is examined by Steele and colleagues (Steele, Sigle-Rushton, & Kravdal, 2009) when they look at “family disruption and children’s educational outcomes” (p. 553). By disruptions they mean either divorce or parental death. They conclude that such disruptions are broadly equivalent and that they have the most impact at the point of transitioning from lower to upper secondary school, a critical transition point concerning disengagement and ‘at-risk’ in the RSLA lexicon too. In their final

analysis they conclude “children who experience a parental disruption are still 6 – 13 percentage points less likely to make the transition from lower secondary school and to complete secondary education” (Steele et al., 2009, p. 568). But given that disruptions of the kinds examined by Steele et al., have arguably always been a feature of family life and school, why should it be of such concern now?

Part of the answer to this question lies in perceptions about the extent and cultural significance of family change and decline discussed by Popenoe (1993) above, and part of it concerns the moral panics at the state of education that have circulated since the 1980s.¹⁴ A more specific answer concerns other background social changes associated with modernisation, industrialisation and globalisation and the *increasing* education attainment gap between intact and divorced families (Evans, Kelley, & Wanner, 2001). For example, research by Evans and colleagues (Evans et al., 2001) examined nationally representative Australian data sets to look at the influence of divorce on educational attainment from the 1920s-1990. They found that back in the 1920s, the gap between intact and divorced families on children’s educational attainment was actually very small. In later periods such as the period approaching 1990, the gap is *significant*. In fact, they find that “Children whose parents get divorced get, on average, about seven-tenths of a year less education than those from intact families...” (Evans et al., 2001, p. 285). To put this into perspective, this education loss effect is:

¹⁴ A good example of this is the report titled *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education., 1983).

...about the same size as: (1) the disadvantage of coming from a family where both parents completed only 9 or 10 years of education compared to a family where both parents completed secondary school; or (2) the disadvantage of coming from a family where the father is a skilled worker compared to one where the father is a manager or administrator; or (3) the disadvantage of coming from a six-child family compared to being an only child. (Evans et al., 2001, p. 285)

The result from all this is that children from divorced families are thought to have a reduced chance of completing secondary school and a statistically reduced chance of completing university (Evans et al., 2001). Divorce, according to Evans et al., (2001), negatively impacts on the economic, social, cultural and parenting capital in the family that is important for successful education experiences. The reason this has such an impact now as compared to earlier in the 20th century is because the social context is much more precarious and many of the family, kinship and socialising functions normally held in the family have gradually been displaced by institutions:

The transition from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft*...has hived off many tasks from the family...cognitive socialization of the young has substantially been relocated from the family to the school. (Evans et al., 2001, pp. 289-290, original italics)

The context that Evans et al., (2001) alludes to is part of the broader condition of a risk society (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990), and this means that young people are managed against these risks, both in terms of school-based activities, as well as non-school hours risk prevention programs for youth (Roth & Brooks-gunn, 2003).

This fairly negative portrait of the changing context of family and society on young people's lives ignores the significant involvement and support that

families do provide to young people during their schooling and post-school journeys (Wyn, Lantz, & Harris, 2012). Yet, as will be shown, a maligned view of families as contributing to failed school and problematic linear transitions filtered its way into the RSLA rationality and practices.

Summary

This literature has been reviewed in order to sort the research on early school leaving into five explanatory frameworks and to provide a way of working out where RSLA draws its theoretical logic from. It is clear that there are a variety of research explanations of early school leaving, drawing on different frames and levels of analysis. The explanations point to the complex nature of early school leaving, and the fact that no simple solution will prove adequate. Despite this—as will be shown—RSLA defaults to a distinctly psychological worldview of the problem and how it should be tackled. However, RSLA is not simply about early school leaving; it is also about managing young people’s journeys into post-school education, and especially employment.

The policy problem 2: School-to-work transition

Leaving school early is turned into a problem for intervention when it is considered in light of other factors, most notably what it means for a young person’s ability (or perceived lack thereof) to leave school and enter further education or employment. The significance of early school leaving is shaped by the post-school context, and RSLA attends to this as well. Even so, many official

notions of transition are largely decontextualised, glossing over the complexities and shifting contours of young people's experiences and identities (Down & Smyth, 2012; Furlong, Woodman, & Wyn, 2011).

Transition is a concept that basically refers to the movement from ending school to entering either stable work or post school education, and leaving home and partnering with another person (Bagnall 2005, cited in Stokes & Wyn, 2007).

Despite the popularity of the concept 'transition' in education and policy circles (RSLA included), it is a problematic concept for a number of reasons (Stokes & Wyn, 2007; Wyn, Lantz, & Harris, 2012; Wyn & Woodman, 2006). First, it assumes that transition is a developmental process of moving from adolescence to adulthood, but in doing so, fails to recognise that many young people are increasingly saddled with adult responsibilities early in their lives. Such a view also fails to take into account the social, economic, political and cultural context of young people, marginalising their subjectivities and experiences along the way (Wyn & Woodman, 2006). Second, it is assumed that transition is a linear and one-directional deterministic process of going from school to secure employment, when in fact, many people tend to move in and out of employment and in and out of education for a good deal of their lives (Stokes & Wyn, 2007). Finally, criteria for 'successful' transition are set against normative and universal standards, which may have little to do with the actual experiences of many young people (Stokes & Wyn, 2007). It is important, then, to consider transition in light of the context that young people experience, and consider their subjective views and identities in any notion of transition (Stokes & Wyn, 2007). In fact, Wyn and Woodman (2006) argue that the concept of transition should

actually be jettisoned in favour of the notion of generation, because generation is more sociologically based taking into account the specific socio-economic and cultural context of young people's lives (Wyn & Woodman, 2006). Even so, as will be shown, RSLA adopted a normative and deterministic view about transition, and in doing so, legitimated concerns about those at-risk of not 'moving forward' from school to further education and employment.

Post-school contexts and the meaning of early school leaving

It is the case that the condition of the post-school labour market and further education will influence the currency and importance held about successful completion of school. For example, while the profiles of the early school leaver are similar in Australia and the United States (Lamb & Rumberger, 1999), differences emerge in the context of the kinds of post-school pathways and opportunities available to young people. This means that in Australia, Year 10 early school leaving has historically been of a higher proportion than early school leaving in the United States, with most early school leaving in the United States taking place in Years 11 and 12. This is because in Australia there are more post-school training opportunities than in the United States, such as apprenticeships and traineeships (Lamb & Rumberger, 1999). Leaving school at the end of Year 10 (aged 15) has been socially acceptable in Australia because of the ready availability of these post-school opportunities. Second, a higher proportion of United States early school leavers will eventually return to complete their equivalent high school qualification, whereas in Australia, most early school leavers do not return to complete high school. Both Australian and

United States early school leavers have difficulties in the labour market, but this is far more significant in the United States (Lamb & Rumberger, 1999).

As such, the emphasis on the significance of securing a completed high school qualification to Year 12 equivalency has historically been less important in Australia compared with the United States (Lamb & Rumberger, 1999). Even though this may be the case, the consistent view now is that non-completers, wherever they are, find it harder to access and effectively participate in the labour market upon leaving school (Hillman, 2005; Lamb, 1998; Lamb et al., 2000; Lamb & McKenzie, 2001). If this difficulty is prolonged in any way, it is likely to have a more profound impact on difficulties in the labour market over a longer period (Lamb et al., 2000).

Thus, the policy message in Australia today, including RSLA, is that focussed attention on improving the rates of completion *and* providing for meaningful post-school education and employment pathways are necessary to address the long-term difficulties that early school leavers invariably face in the labour market (Lamb et al., 2000; Lamb & McKenzie, 2001). Consequently, this is why RSLA is not just about keeping young people in schools—it is also about managing pathways to post-school education, training and work opportunities.

Unstructured transition and youth employment and unemployment

Gaining full-time work early is said to be a critical factor in a successful school-to-work transition (Marks, Hillman, & Beavis, 2003). In fact, it is more significant in the short term than completion of Year 12 or gaining post-secondary

qualifications (Marks et al., 2003). However, the paradox is that students who do complete Year 12 or equivalent are usually able to access full-time employment early on compared with those who do not complete Year 12, who spend longer in their attempts to find full-time work (Fullarton, Walker, Ainley, & Hillman, 2003). A combination of completing Year 12 or equivalent *and* obtaining full-time work quickly is pitched as an ideal scenario. This fact is, of course, a major policy goal for RSLA because it takes into account the changes that have taken place to the youth labour market.

For example, the period during the 1980s and 1990s is often bracketed as the period during which problems in the youth labour market began (Lamb et al., 2000). It was at this time that the predictable experience of a neat and uncomplicated transition from school to secure lasting employment ended for good (Sweet, 1998) and this is a widely accepted view. From World War II to the 1970s (the period of the long boom and relatively full employment) transition from school to work was, by and large, a structured and predictable experience (Sweet, 1998). A leaving age of age 15 made sense within this context. From the mid-1980s to early 1990s, things began to change as transition became less certain and predictable.

Yet, for most young people (about two-thirds) the journey from school to work has historically been relatively straightforward (Lamb & McKenzie, 2001), despite the fact that Lamb and McKenzie (2001) identify nearly 500 “different patterns of activity in the transition from school” (p. 23). For some young people though, transition is a complicated and often an unstructured experience compounded by the collapse of the youth labour market in the 1980s and the

expansion of post-school further education and training (Furlong et al., 2011). For example, the number of full-time jobs held by teenagers in Australia in the mid-1980s was 424,000, but by the mid-1990s, that number had more than halved to 205,000 (Sweet, 1998). The percentage of teenagers with full-time jobs was 32 per cent in the mid-1980s, down to 20 per cent in the early 1990s, and down to 17 per cent by 1996 (Wooden, 1998). The actual cost of paying for young unskilled labour increased due to increases in the age of people entering the labour market. This meant that unskilled young people had to compete for jobs against skilled adults (Wooden, 1998). At the same time, the percentage of teenagers in neither education nor work increased. In short, full-time teenage employment declined, while part-time jobs and unemployment increased (Lamb et al., 2000; Sweet, 1998; Wooden, 1998).

More recently, the employment prospects of young people have deteriorated further as a result of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) (Robinson & Lamb, 2009). In any financial downturn, young people are hit hardest and the effects can last for years (Marelli & Choudhry, 2012). Data from Robinson and Lamb (2009) indicate that the jump in youth unemployment from May 2008 (12.2 per cent) to May 2009 (18.5 per cent) was the largest increase in two decades. These are seen to have long-term effects for certain groups of people, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those not fully engaged in school or other training (Robinson et al., 2011). These effects include prolonged periods of unemployment, casualisation and labour market polarisation (Robinson & Lamb, 2009; Wooden, 1998).

There is a difference in how this change to the labour market has affected males and females. More males are unemployed, although, there are far more females in part-time work than males (Robinson & Lamb, 2009). That is, males still tend to dominate access to full-time work (Robinson & Lamb, 2009). Furthermore, there has been an increase in the total number of young people not engaged in any work, education or training (Robinson & Lamb, 2009). Early school leavers and those not engaged or fully participating in school find it hardest to access stable full-time post-school employment (Robinson & Lamb, 2009) and early school leavers or those deemed at risk of early school leaving are key target groups slated for remedial intervention under RSLA.

While it is not uncommon for many young people to spend at least a month not in work or study, extended periods of time outside work or study, or cycles of coming in and out of work and study, can lead to prolonged difficulties in attaining secure employment (Hillman, 2005) and hence the probabilities of ongoing disadvantage are amplified. It is widely thought also that successful transition, in the normative sense, presents particular difficulties for students who are disadvantaged or without the credentials and social and cultural capital needed to achieve stable employment or further education after completing school (Trainor, 2008; Vorhies, Davis, Frounfelker, & Kaiser, 2012). This is why much of the focus of RSLA is not just about addressing early school leaving through attempts at improving student engagement, but about orchestrating a program of skills development to enable young people to gain employment.

Conclusion

Compulsory education has a history in Australia that pre-dates Federation. In the post-World War II era, debates about increasing the compulsory leaving age from 14-15 were shaped and conditioned by the context of the time. This is entirely understandable and RSLA is no exception. What is different here though is the nature of that context, the discourses and rationalities that arise from it, and the methods and forms of intervention that they designate and permit.

In the RSLA context, there are two broad policy problems that underpin the motivations for an increase in compulsory education: early school leaving (including a discourse about family decline); and, problems associated with transition from school-to-work. Taken together, these constitute an argument that is ingrained into RSLA as a justification for reforming the school leaving age. Yet, it is not just the nature of these problems identified here, but what they are taken to *mean* and *imply*.

In simple terms, what these problems mean and are taken to imply is that Western Australia has a social, economic, and moral problem that must be fixed. The worsening conditions of the youth labour market and the spectre of economic downturn is a call to urgent action. Perceptions of young people languishing about doing nothing are writ large into the RSLA discourse. Consequently, as will be shown, categories of risky groups are constructed and drawn into existence. RSLA exhibits a clearly articulated sense of what it is attempting to achieve and has a coherent account of the groups of young people that fall into its gaze and interventions. The task of the next chapter is to unpack

and describe the RSLA policy, and lay bare its aims, objectives, and conceptual apparatus.

CHAPTER 3 – A DESCRIPTIVE ACCOUNT OF RSLA

Public policy is ultimately about achieving objectives. It is a means to an end. Policy is a course of action by government designed to attain certain results. (Althuas et al., 2007, p. 8)

There is an unexamined assumption embedded in legal-rational policy about its own legitimacy. Most of us accept its premises and assumptions (as Virtuous). It is so virtuous that imagining a different sort of rationale for conducting the public's business is difficult. (Miller, 2002, p. 9)

Introduction

Early school leaving and non-participation in either work or education are the ostensible targets of the RSLA and this falls out of the broader concerns being raised about the rates of retention in Australia, and what this signifies (Smyth & Hattam, 2001, 2002, 2004). Hence, retaining students in schools continues to be a major policy focus today. More recently, understanding in the variances in retention and participation drawn from advances in demographic and other research data has allowed policy makers and practitioners to focus their interventions on *specific social groups*, rather than the more broad brush analysis adopted in publications and discussion papers from 1945-1970. Statistical data on retention and participation (and a more abstracted moral view about engagement) has refined policy development to invent a more specific concept of what the problem is and who constitutes it. That is why disengagement and NEET¹⁵ are important concepts in the policy lexicon.

¹⁵ NEET is short for Not in Education Employment or Training. This concept, its use and its limitations is discussed later in this chapter.

This chapter continues the discussion about the context and nature of RSLA by drawing down further on the problem of early school leaving and examining its associated concepts of 'retention' and 'participation'. These are key RSLA overarching aims and objectives. Important policy concepts—'engagement' 'disengagement' and 'NEET'—are explained because they provide the conceptual apparatus that informs the RSLA objectives.

Outwardly, RSLA is a policy designed to improve rates of retention and participation in school targeting 15-17 year olds. However, underneath this is a core idea that is prevalent in many discourses about schooling, young people, and transitions into the labour market and adulthood: *risk* (Mosen-Lowe, Vidovich, & Chapman, 2011). This is the reason for the policy—the rationale that gives its political legitimacy. Young people, so it is argued, are vulnerable and at risk of failing at school. They are at risk of failing in the workforce, and subsequently, failing in life. This risk is thought to be a serious blot on the social and economic future of Western Australia and beyond. Hence, two more years of compulsory education is seen as a justifiable large-scale intervention that has a definite moral basis to it.

In concluding this chapter, I give an outline of the key rationales, or arguments about risk, that give RSLA its political palatability. As will be seen in later chapters, this view of risk is deeply integrated with views about young people and the invention and deployment of discourses, rationalities and inventive tools in how to best manage them.

The RSLA policy *objectives*: Retention and participation

The retention objective

What does retention mean, and why is it an important policy objective for RSLA?

Retention, sometimes called the apparent retention rate, refers to the “percentage of a given cohort who continue to a particular Year level, and is thus a measure of the holding power of the school system” (Ainley, 1998, p. 53).

Apparent retention rates do not take into account “students who repeat a year, who are enrolled on a part-time basis or who transfer between states or sectors” (Fullarton et al., 2003). Despite these conceptual limitations, apparent retention rates do offer opportunities to observe trends and make comparisons between regions, schools, and other demographic variables (Ainley, 1998). As such, and somewhat inevitably, some groups of students and their communities and schools are characterised as being more ‘at-risk’ than others; more of a problem to be studied and intervened with (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001).

This level of population analysis informed the RSLA policy development in Western Australia. Western Australian apparent retention rates for full-time students from years 7/8 through to year 12 completion were 50.3 per cent in 1986, up to a peak of 72.6 per cent in 2004, and down slightly to 71.8 per cent in 2006 (ABS, 2006). This trend is similar to national trends, although Western Australian apparent retention rates are lower than the national average—71.8 per cent in 2006 compared with 74.7 per cent (ABS, 2006).

The apparent retention situation for full-time students from Year 10 to Year 12 is similar. In 1986, the apparent retention rate for full-time students in Western Australia from Year 10 to Year 12 was 51.6 per cent, up to a peak of 72.4 per cent in 2004, and down to 71.4 per cent in 2006 (ABS, 2006). This was lower than the national average: 51.9 per cent in 1986 up to 76.1 per cent in 2006 (ABS, 2006), a trend that did not go unnoticed in the early RSLA arguments for an increase of two more years.

There are, of course, differences between different social groups. In 2010, only 47 per cent of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australia completed Years 7/8 through to Year 12 (ABS, 2010). Female Year 12 completion rates are higher than males, but more males are fully engaged in education, work and training than females (Robinson et al., 2011). Western Australian apparent retention rates for boys are lower than girls. In 2006 the apparent retention rate for full-time male students was 66.2 per cent compared with the female rate of 77.6 per cent (ABS, 2006). This is consistent with national trends. For example, in 2006, the national apparent retention rate for full-time male students was 69.0 per cent compared with 80.6 per cent for full-time female students (ABS, 2006).

There are disparities between government and non-government schools too. In Western Australia, the 2006 apparent retention rate for full-time students from Year 10 to Year 12 in government schools was 66.0 per cent, compared with 80.1 per cent for non-government schools (ABS, 2006). When all students are included, the Western Australian apparent retention rates from Year 10 to Year 12 show a recent decline. For example, the 1999 Western Australian apparent

retention rate was 75 per cent, up to a peak of 76.9 per cent, and down to 72.7 per cent in 2006 – the lowest of all states and territories (ABS, 2006). This kind of data indicates that Western Australia performs poorly when compared with the rest of Australia, and it was this kind of data that backed calls for legislative change to the school leaving age in Western Australia (Carpenter, 2004).

The participation objective

While retention in schools is obviously a policy concern, participation too has taken on significance with its related focus on engagement, and its corollary, disengagement. Participation refers to the “percentage of an age group engaged in *full-time schooling*” (Ainley, 1998, p. 56, emphasis added). Participation rates for Western Australian 15-year-olds were 95.1 per cent in 2006 (ABS, 2006). This is a slight increase from 93.2 per cent in 2005, and above the national average of 94.5 per cent (ABS, 2006). For 16-year-olds, participation rates were 80.7 per cent in 2006, just up from 77.9 per cent in 2005 (ABS, 2006). However, this is *lower* than the national average of 84.1 per cent (ABS, 2006). For 17-year-olds, the participation rate in Western Australia drops significantly. In 2006 it was 40.8 per cent, down slightly from 41.9 per cent in 2005, and significantly lower than the 2006 national average of 63.4 per cent (ABS, 2006). The trend is similar for 18-year-olds: 3.9 per cent in 2005, 3.6 per cent in 2006, and clearly lower than the 2006 national average of 13.7 per cent (ABS, 2006).

In short, while there have been increases in participation rates in Western Australia in general (for example, the 1991 participation rate for 15-year-olds was 88.0 per cent, while in 2006 it was 95.1 per cent), the overall Western

Australian participation rates are lower than the national average (ABS, 2006). Again, this data is used to bolster calls for increased participation under RSLA, where full-time participation is the standard objective measure (Carpenter, 2004).

Quantifying RSLA targets and outcomes

In seeking to address these retention and participation figures, the Participation Directorate situated within the Department of Education and Training produced a strategic framework in 2006¹⁶ that specified the main compulsory education policy goals and targets (Participation Directorate, 2006). Much of the strategic framework involved the development of structural arrangements needed to set up a new participation unit within DET, but some aspects of it explicitly stated the main targets for participation. These include a vision that “all 15-17 year olds in Western Australia are meaningfully engaged in education, training and/or employment by 2010” (Participation Directorate, 2006, p. 5). More precisely, the initial target was a “98 per cent (%) Participation Rate for all 15-17 year olds in WA by 2009” (Participation Directorate, 2006, p. 10).

While such targets are of course ambitious, there is evidence of some improvements and gains made. The 2012 Department of Education Annual Report (Department of Education, 2012) notes that there has been improvement in the apparent retention rate from 2007 to 2011, as indicated in Table two, following:

¹⁶ This was subsequently updated in 2008.

Table 2: Apparent retention rates (percentages) of public school students Year 8 to Year 12 2007 to 2011¹⁷

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Target in 2011-12 Budget Papers
61.0	65.6	66.0	70.3	70.9	71

(Source: Department of Education, 2012, p. 56).

Likewise, the participation rate shows an improvement from 2007 to 2011, as shown in Table three:

Table 3: Participation rates (percentages) of persons aged 15 to 17 years engaged in some form of education 2007 to 2011¹⁸

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Target in 2011-12 Budget Papers
88.7	90.4	92.0	91.7	91.4	92

(Source: Department of Education, 2012, p. 55).

On the face of it, RSLA has led to a net improvement, especially in participation, albeit slightly below targets set out in Budget Papers, and still below the original aim of 98 per cent of 15 to 17 year olds participating fully by 2009.

¹⁷ Apparent retention rates are defined by the Department of Education as “the number of full-time students in Year 12 in a given calendar year as a percentage of the number of full-time students who enrolled in Year 8 four years earlier” (Department of Education, 2012, p. 56).

¹⁸ Participation rates are defined by the Department of Education as “the number of students of a particular age engaged in some form of education as a percentage of the estimated resident population of people of that age” (Department of Education, 2012, p. 55).

Participation is the main policy ambition as RSLA concerns 15 to 17 year olds and legislates that alternatives to school such as approved training or employment are included (Department of Education and Training, 2005a). To participate is synonymous with engagement, and hence engagement and disengagement are important components of the policy lexicon.

The RSLA policy *concepts*: Engagement, disengagement and NEET

While retention and participation are phenomenon that can be quantified by drawing on various data-sets, notions of engagement and disengagement are more abstract and subjective, and this moves the policy rhetoric beyond discussions about quantifiable data and into judgements about behaviour and attitude.

Engagement and disengagement

Engagement means full, active, and responsible participation in school, work or training (Atweh, Bland, Carrington, & Cavanagh, 2007). Engagement means taking responsibility for ones actions, setting goals, and being responsible.

Disengagement is the quintessential alarm bell. It is the thing to be avoided, because a disengaged student is seen to be most at risk. The MCEETYA¹⁹ *Ministerial Subcommittee on Young People's Transitions* equates young people's risk in terms of "disconnection" (MCEETYA, 2001). Like disengagement, disconnection means not being adequately connected to school, family and

¹⁹ Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development.

community activities. For example, the then Western Australian Minister for Education Hon Mark McGowan MLA equates risk with not participating in education (McGowan, 2007) and DET states that a student is at educational risk when they appear to be unable to meet learning outcomes, are under-performing in school, are behind their peers in standards, and are disengaged from school (Department of Education and Training, 2001). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2005) sees the risk associated with young people, education and work in terms of being “not fully engaged” (ABS, 2005, p. 2). Fully engaged is the ideal scenario and fully engaged means to be in full-time education, or full-time work or part time education plus part time work that equates to a full-time commitment. Hence, anything less than a full-time commitment is seen to be a concern.

In all these examples the practical responses to disengagement under RSLA involve assessment, monitoring and intervention at an individual level inasmuch as it involves broader policy and program responsibilities of government, school and non-government sectors to provide pathways, policies, programs and services aimed at attaining higher levels of engagement and participation in education, training and work. Hence, although RSLA has an objective to address early school leaving, participation and retention, its argument as to *why* this is important is tied into an actuarial paradigm of risk management, which is linked to attempts to foster a more independent and entrepreneurial outlook in young people (Peters, 2005). A short-hand signifier is adopted that captures all these concerns into one single acronym: NEET. In the following section I explain this concept, its history and provide a critique of the NEET concept. I do this because

despite the significant currency NEET has in RSLA, it is actually a problematic policy concept riddled with weaknesses and contradictions.

NEETs

NEET is short for Not in Education, Employment or Training (Furlong, 2006; Lunsing, 2007; Roberts, 2011). It is an acronym used in RSLA to identify those students who should fall within the ambit of the RSLA intervention. It is also a policy response that is key to government approaches trying to ensure that young people make smooth transitions from school to work (Finlay, Sheridan, McKay, & Nudzor, 2010). In many ways this marks a shift away from a concern about youth unemployment to NEET, because NEET is a more encompassing term, merging together different groups of people (Furlong, 2006). In performing this operation, a state problem (youth unemployment) is conveniently turned into a “problem for the individual” (Thompson, 2011b, p. 19).

NEET is not a Western Australian invention: its origins arose out of the establishment of the UK Social Exclusion Unit in 1997 (MacDonald, 2011; Yates & Payne, 2006). Since then, it has been well established as a policy concept in the United Kingdom’s educational settings and it is used with a particular focus on compulsory education and transitions from school to post-school work, education and training (MacDonald, 2011). Consequently, a range of research has been conducted on NEETs and the NEET concept itself, mostly in the United Kingdom (Barham, Walling, Clancy, Hicks, & Conn, 2009; Bynner & Parsons, 2002; Finlay et al., 2010; Furlong, 2006; Roberts, 2011; Russell, 2013; Simmons,

2008; Simmons & Thompson, 2011; Yates, Harris, Sabates, & Staff, 2011; Yates & Payne, 2006) and also in Japan, where the concept has taken hold in education and youth employment circles as well (Genda, 2007; Lunsing, 2007).

If *not* being engaged is the problem, what is does it mean to be engaged?

According to McMahon and Portelli (2004), engagement is usually framed as an instrumental act associated with techniques of prescription and stipulation. This is certainly the case with RSLA that prescribes what engagement should look like. McMahon and Portelli argue that this prescription of engagement is often done in apolitical ways, even though engagement is intrinsically a political enunciation, and McMahon and Portelli identify at least three discourses of engagement:

1. Conservative notions of engagement, whereby engagement is seen in a deficit light as a factor of “behavioural traits and/or observable psychological dispositions” (p. 62).
2. Liberal notions of engagement, which are student centred and focuses on what the student can achieve, and contribute to their learning and functioning in educational settings.
3. Democratic notions of engagement, which draw on Freireian and critical pedagogies, and aims for students to have power within their educational experience by active participation and democratic involvement with educational systems and educators.

As discussed in chapter seven, the RSLA engagement discourse is arguably conservative, focussing on the psychology of the individual and their behaviours. This discourse means that programs and proposals to employ psychologists in

schools to handle things like attendance, disengagement and retention seem commonplace and obvious in their necessity.²⁰

The NEET problem

One of the main concerns held by governments about NEETs is that as a consequence of the collapse in labour market opportunities for young people, the number of NEETs are said to be rising (Author unknown, 2011). Even with increased credentials many young people will continue to remain NEET, especially in times of economic downturn and recession (Author unknown, 2010, 2011). This situation is partly due to the labour market restructuring away from manufacturing towards services, meaning that some traditional occupational opportunities (particularly for boys) have altered what kinds of work opportunities are available (Barham et al., 2009). It has also meant a change in the traditional expectations of the kinds of credentials and identities that are needed to succeed in a service dominated economy (Barham et al., 2009).

Furthermore, the consequences of being NEET are seen to be part of a protracted journey into long-term disadvantage. A longitudinal study of the 1970 British Birth Cohort data by Bynner and Parsons (2002) found that NEET status acted to compound a history of already existing educational problems thus “reducing prospects of employment or acquiring human capital through education and training even further” (Bynner & Parsons, 2002, p. 302). They say that NEET is a “staging post on the downward path to the bottom of the labour

²⁰ For example, one of Western Australia’s responses to dealing with poor school attendance is to employ more school psychologists (Department of Education and Training, 2009).

market and social exclusion” (p. 302) bringing with it a host of psychological and other problems (Bynner & Parsons, 2002). At the same time, research by Duckworth and Schoon (2012) found that factors such as school engagement were protective even in times of severe economic difficulties. Their research found that young people who were engaged in school both socially and academically were able to avoid becoming NEET.

The RSLA response to NEET is similar to the UK

The response to the NEET situation in Western Australia is strikingly similar to that of the United Kingdom. In Western Australia, engagement programs featured as a significant approach to dealing with young people identified as NEET, or at risk of becoming NEET. These included a range of off-site education, confidence building and basic skills development programs aimed at things like literacy, vocational skills, improving communication, teamwork and social functioning. These are also known as alternative education programs (Wilson, Stemp, & McGinty, 2011), many of which were outsourced to non-government organisations to provide. Such an approach is widely subscribed to and includes pastoral care, mentoring and guidance for young people moving into a world of social and economic upheaval concurrently with the breakdown of traditional social structures and bonds that would normally be protective (Abrams, 2009). Here is how the E2E²¹ program introduced in England in 2001 is described:

E2E is designed for 16-18 year-olds unable to progress into further education and employment due to a lack of qualifications or “barriers to learning” such as poor basic skills, low motivation or behaviour problems. The programme attempts to re-engage participants and

²¹ E2E stands for Education 2 Employment.

increase employability through a work-based curriculum comprising personal and social development, basic skills and workplace learning. (Simmons & Thompson, 2011, p. 448)

The E2E program concept is similar in many regards to the kinds of engagement programs used in RSLA. However, engagement programs that emphasise employability skills and attitude contain a number of weaknesses (Thompson, 2011b). Most importantly is that these programs contain an inbuilt form of ‘othering’ that constructs participants of such programs as educational failures who cannot master conceptual knowledge-based education, and are thus relegated to low-end temporal employment prospects (Thompson, 2011b). Programs like these may have high public and political support, but they tend to also have low expectations (Thompson, 2011b). This is especially likely when such programs are conducted off-site and away from the mainstream delivery, and, instead of focussing on knowledge-based curriculum, have a discursive and practical tendency towards life-skills and employability skills (Simmons & Thompson, 2011; Thompson, 2011b). Yet, this is at odds with research that finds that the socio-economic context of NEET is multi-dimensional, and that focussing on single risk factors like being NEET within a deficit focussed (Valencia, 1997) framework is misguided (Duckworth & Schoon, 2012).

There are other problems with E2E noted by Simmons and Thompson (2011) and Yates and Payne (2006) as well. For example, Simmons and Thompson concluded that the “learning culture of the E2E programmes...was significantly influenced by prevailing discourses on NEET young people” (Simmons & Thompson, 2011, p. 449) and these discourses contained a significant deficit view about young people’s failings and weaknesses while at the same time

remaining blinkered to some of the structural problems in society and economy that give rise to the NEET situation in the first place. Furthermore, Simmons and Thompson found that—coincidentally not unlike the RSLA situation—the E2E programs were segregated from the mainstream and that the practitioners working with NEETs in their study adopted personal interventions with NEETs that “focussed largely on personal relationships and emphasised care and nurture in managing the learning of young people who displayed difficult and challenging behaviour” (Simmons & Thompson, 2011, p. 449).

Criticisms and problems of the NEET concept

Despite the currency of NEET amongst practitioners in RSLA, there are several criticisms with the term itself that have been noted in the literature (Furlong, 2006; Thompson, 2011a, 2011b; Yates et al., 2011; Yates & Payne, 2006). As a policy concept, the term NEET is problematic (Furlong, 2006; Yates & Payne, 2006). In RSLA it is used to point to deficits in young people; that is to say, NEET is narrow and focuses on what the young person is *not* doing (Thompson, 2011a; Yates & Payne, 2006). Furthermore, it is conceptually weak because NEET could actually be describing a normal stage or situation in a person’s life, or it could point to a situation whereby a person is simply “being churned between a series of low quality jobs rather than spending periods out of work” (Furlong, 2006, p. 566). On top of this, NEET poses practical problems when it is used to set targets because resources will invariably flow to those with relatively simple re-engagement needs. Meanwhile, more complex cases go unattended (Yates & Payne, 2006).

NEET is also criticised on the grounds that it is a homogenising concept

(MacDonald, 2011) because:

...the term assumes, or at least endorses, the belief that all young people who are at a given time not in education, working or receiving training could be thought of as a homogenous group facing similar difficulties and risks and susceptible to identical forms of professional help or intervention. (Finlay et al., 2010, pp. 853-854)

The problem here is that even though NEET is synonymous with social exclusion in a structural sense, (Thompson, 2011a) the intervention focus is uniformly about the individual student and thus it construes them as the problem (Giroux, 2009; MacDonald, 2011)—a strong theme in my analysis of RSLA too. As Thompson says, individualised interventions are “inadequate to understand this group and frame policy” (Thompson, 2011a, p. 785). An individualised construct of NEET is therefore a weak construct as it is based in an “epistemological fallacy” (Thompson, 2011a, p. 787) that is blind to labour market problems, and structural and cultural factors such as the distribution of patterns of social and cultural capital that strongly shape early school leaving and act as strong predictors of NEET (Bynner & Parsons, 2002).²² These include a failure to address through policy measures some of the known predictors of NEET, such as lack of family social and cultural capital, and it also fails to adequately respond to the insecure and chaotic nature of transitions (MacDonald, 2011) because the interventions will come unstuck when there is simply an inadequate scope of employment opportunities for many young people (Yates & Payne, 2006).

²² See also chapter two review of literature on early school leaving.

Other factors that influence a student becoming NEET are to do with problems with their occupational aspirations (Yates et al., 2011). Drawing on data from the 1970 British Cohort study, Yates and colleagues found that problems with occupational aspirations could also be a predictive factor in whether or not someone becomes NEET. They found that young people who had uncertain occupational aspirations²³ or misaligned occupational aspirations²⁴ were considerably more likely to become NEET (Yates et al., 2011). This problem with occupational aspirations noted here is made significantly worse by low socio-economic status for boys, but not so much for girls. According to Yates et al, NEET girls are far more likely to become teenage mothers than non-NEET girls—up to 300 per cent in some cases (Yates et al., 2011) and occupational aspirations are deferred. What this demonstrates is that there are factors at work in the context of young people’s lives that may lead them to exhibit dispositions and circumstances of being ‘NEET’, yet the way that NEET is used in RSLA is largely at the level of the psychology and functioning of the individual young person and their family (Hodgson, 2011). Why this reductionism happens can be explained in part by the theoretical deployment of risk within RSLA.

The RSLA policy *argument*: Risk management

While the RSLA policy objectives aim for a net improvement in retention and participation rates, underpinning these objectives is an argument about the need for managing risky young people. This is the *why* of the policy, and the why is

²³ Uncertain occupational aspirations are when young people simply do not know what they want to do.

²⁴ Misaligned occupational aspirations are when young people have high aspirations of what they want to do, but low academic achievement or low ambitions for post-school study.

fundamentally preoccupied with ideas about risk, and how this risk can and ought to be dealt with.

Theories of risk

In analysing the place of risk in RSLA, it is important to examine the way that risk is understood theoretically. There are three theories of risk relevant to this study: cultural and constructivist theories; realist and objectivist theories; and, governmental theories.²⁵

Cultural and constructivist theories

Douglas's (1986, 1994) anthropological work on risk argues that risk is basically a *construct* derived from cultural and political contexts. That is to say, there is no separating any understanding of risk from the context that envelopes and produces it. It is helpful to identify risk in RSLA chiefly as a construction, because such constructions are so clearly apparent. What forms the basis of things like 'at-risk-youth' is largely given to the determinations and assessments of practitioners working with young people. As will be shown in later chapters, an intuition or gut feeling is used to make such determinations. Yet, these are largely accepted as facts because they are based in professional knowledge. As Douglas (1994) explains, lay disagreements with expert views about risk are often viewed by experts as a sign of incompetence on the part of lay people, when really they should be seen as alternative cultural readings or responses to risk (Lupton, 1999).

²⁵ For a comprehensive review of risk theories see Lupton (1999).

Realist and objectivist theories

The largely dominant cognitive science perspective of risk—readily at home in the fields of psychology, medicine, engineering, accounting, and insurance—draws heavily on a realist and objectivist ontology (Lupton, 1999). Under this view, risks are seen as real objective facts and things that exist in the world that can be identified, quantified and managed. In RSLA, risk is treated as a real thing that exists in the world and is assumed to be identifiable and manageable via interventions with young people. Criticisms of this line of thinking point to the failure in practice of well-resourced institutions to effectively manage the mounting social, political, economic, environmental and security risks that beset governments everyday (Beck, 1992, 2003; Douglas, 1986, 1994). Criticisms also arise in the failure to adequately build simple cause and effect models of risk (Beck, 1992; Douglas, 1994) meaning that a complex problem like early school leaving and disengagement escapes the logic of technical-rational models of risk management. This is because within the complexity of modernity, cause and effect notions of risk cease to be workable or even possible (Beck, 1992) precisely because hazards are non-localised, long-term, and irreducibly complex (Lupton, 1999). Such is the case for RSLA—early school leaving is irreducibly complex and cannot be dealt with through simple or singular measures.

Governmental theories

Although it may be the case that risk is an invention, and strategies to manage it often falter because models of risk management cannot cope with the complexity they seek to control, programs of intervention still prevail over groups of people

designated as 'risky' and slated for attention. A governmental perspective theorises the way that risk becomes a form of *knowledge* and *practice* (Lupton, 1999). The existence of risk as a form of knowledge and practice makes possible various subtle and not so subtle governing practices over individuals and populations deemed at risk or risky (Ewald, 1991; Lupton, 1999; Turner, 1997). In RSLA, the identification of young people at risk marks them out for scrutiny and intervention, as the following section attests.

Risk in the RSLA consultation literature

The idea of risk finds its early expression in the RSLA consultation paper (Carpenter, 2004). The word 'risk' appears no fewer than 14 times in the document and this is a central argument for increasing the school leaving age. The conceptualisation of risk sits broadly and specifically around particular groups of people. First, it is argued that the socio-economic context has changed to such an extent that young people (and adults for that matter) now require increasingly broad skills and attributes of a high and sophisticated nature, to enable them to compete in the new global economic order (Carpenter, 2004).

Second, Western Australia is compared unfavourably with other Australian States and with other Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. For example, in the RSLA consultation paper it is explained that South Australia, Queensland and Tasmania are increasing their school leaving ages, and therefore Western Australia needs to fall in line if it is to remain nationally competitive (Carpenter, 2004). To fail to act is to risk falling behind. Data is included in the paper to show how Western Australia's retention

rates compare to other States. Western Australia's retention rates and school leaving ages are compared with Denmark, Germany and Belgium. For example, ABS data (cited in Carpenter, 2004, pp. 9-10) shows Western Australia's typically low participation and completion to Year 12 rates when compared with other jurisdictions, particularly Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales and Tasmania.

OECD data from 2001 (cited in Carpenter, 2004, p.11) shows Australia's relatively low levels of upper school enrolment and relatively high percentage of young people aged 15-19 not in full-time work or education. Western Australia's then minimum school leaving age of 15 years is contrasted with Denmark (16 years) Germany (18 years) and Belgium (18 years). The percentage of young people aged 15-19 and not in full-time education and not in full-time work also is contrasted: Australia (19.4 per cent) Denmark (9.8 per cent), Germany (11.3 per cent), and Belgium (11.5 per cent). The message is that Western Australia has one of the worst records in Australia, and Australia generally has a poor record when compared with other OECD countries. The conclusion is that Western Australia falls well behind national and global standards and again, to fail to act is to risk falling behind in the international stakes.

Third, it is explained in the RSLA consultation paper that early school leaving in Australia constitutes an overall annual cost of \$2.6 billion (National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, 1999, cited in Carpenter, 2004, p. 7). In addition, it is argued that early school leaving contributes to increased crime, loss of earnings, unemployment, exacerbation of income inequality, and undermining of "social cohesion" (Carpenter, 2004, p. 8). Strongly implied is the view that early

school leaving leads to a reduced capacity for citizenship, with citizenship argued to be dependent on “literacy, maturity and preparation for work and further study” (Carpenter, 2004, p. 8).

In addition to these broad concerns about Western Australia’s social and economic wellbeing, the consultation paper includes a more specific concept of risk levelled at a certain *category of person*. Who is at risk and what is the basis of this risk? It is early school leavers broadly who are deemed at risk, but more precisely it refers to people from disadvantaged backgrounds, rural and remote students, Indigenous students, and students with social, emotional and family problems (Carpenter, 2004, p. 5). It was noted in the consultation document that young people in rural and regional areas were deemed most at risk and this group would comprise the “young people that we need to concentrate particular effort” (Carpenter, 2004, p. 5).

The actual ‘kinds’ of risk that are said to beset some young people are spelt out and include “unemployment and social disadvantage...long periods out of work, and, when they do get jobs, these will probably be low-paid and low-skilled, often casual and part time” and “current and future social dislocation, alienation and long-term economic dysfunction” (Carpenter, 2004, p. 2). The consultation document continues with its elaboration of the consequences of risk to entail:

- being unemployed longer and more often;
- earning smaller lifetime (including retirement) incomes;
- being in low-skilled jobs, where opportunities for on-the-job training are lacking;
- missing out on challenging and interesting employment;
- relying more on government assistance;

- never re-entering full-time study, and;
- having a reduced sense of well-being and self-confidence. (Carpenter, 2004, p. 7)

In addition, the paper explained that the consequences of risk include “significant personal costs for many of these people (including the risk of alienation, lack of self-esteem, homelessness, drug abuse, crime and, in too many cases, suicide)” (Carpenter, 2004, p. 7).

Given all of this, leaving school early or not completing the educational equivalent of Year 12 is clearly not to be taken lightly. An intervention is therefore needed. What is it that this group of ‘at-risk-youth’ need? Accordingly it is argued that they “require the intervention of government, voluntary and community agencies” (Carpenter, 2004, p. 7). Specifically, this involves specialist services such as “career guidance and personal support to help them move successfully through their 12 years of education and training and into the workforce” (Carpenter, 2004, p. 15). Teachers, it is argued, need to be “aware of the issues and concerns of students ‘at risk’ and are equipped to respond to their needs” (Carpenter, 2004, p. 16). Overall, it is explained that there needs to be “a coordinated approach to ensure that a cohesive and comprehensive service is offered to all 15-19 year olds and their parents or guardians” (Carpenter, 2004, p. 15).

Risk and a preoccupation with the future

Clearly, part of the accepted rationality of RSLA is a view about risk, and this is a key argument used to justify educational reform. In RSLA, these risks are based on prediction of what *is* but more importantly how this will transpire into what

will *be*. This future orientation was central to its power. Risks may be real in terms of clear existing problems, and also unreal in terms of imagined causal outcomes. As Beck explains:

The centre of risk consciousness lies not in the present, but *in the future*. In the risk society, the past loses the power to determine the present. Its place is taken by the future, thus, something non-existent, inventive, fictive as the 'cause' of current experience and action. We become active today in order to prevent, alleviate or take precautions against the problems and crises of tomorrow and the day after tomorrow – or not to do so. (1992, p. 34, original italics)

Risk in the context Western Australia's poor record of retention and participation in school is defined as a political problem, which requires political intervention *and* pre-emption and thus necessitates "a *reorganization of power and authority*" (Beck, 1992, p. 24, original italics).

Risk and interventionism

As discussed, while there may be different ways to theorise risk, there are also different practices and strategies in the art of risk management. This means that risk is not just an abstracted theoretical idea, but a practice. Dean (1997, 1999, cited in Lupton, 1999) identifies three types of risk strategy: insurantal, epidemiological, and case management/clinical. Insurantal risk strategies are concerned to quantify and collectivise potential risks so that they may be insured against capital loss. Epidemiological risk strategies are similar, only that the focus is on disease prevention, rather than compensating for capital loss. Epidemiological strategies target 'lifestyle risk factors', rather than 'contextual risk factors' and this is "used to exhort individuals to engage in self-regulation" (Lupton, 1999, p. 97). Case management and clinical strategies include "clinical

practice with individuals deemed to be threatening or disruptive in some way to the social order” involving “qualitative assessment of risk for individuals and groups who are deemed to be ‘at risk’” (Lupton, 1999, p. 97).

In RSLA, all forms of strategy are apparent, but the most conspicuous example of a risk management strategy with young people is a case management and clinical strategy. This is despite the way that the risk is pitched as a collective problem concerning everyone. Ewald (1991) makes the point that although risk is often framed as a collective problem insofar as it is a *potential* future event, the methods of insurance or managing risk serve to individualise this collective risk potential down to an individual person in the here and now (Ewald, 1991). The formation of risk into practice is discussed in further detail in chapter eight.

Conclusion

RSLA is concerned to address Western Australia’s poor record of retention and participation in school, via a measure to legislate an increase in compulsory education. In doing so, it seeks to improve in an objective and quantifiable manner retention and participation to a standard of Year 12 or equivalent. Built into the RSLA lexicon are ideas about disengagement and NEET. These are organising concepts that make the problem to be worked on visible and governable. Furthermore, it is clear that RSLA operates on an actuarial risk paradigm, and seeks to manage population risks through interventions with some young people. This is part of the strategy towards addressing early school leaving, and improving participation and retention rates.

What is curious about this from a research point of view is how seamless it all appears, how natural and beyond question it has become. A particular rationality about young people and education has entered the contemporary political consciousness in ways that make it appear to be as though it has always been this way. But what exactly is this? Importantly, what are the forms of power that are sanctioned into existence and rendered into practice on the conduct of young people who are classed as educational risks to themselves and others? To address these kinds of questions—and the research question proper—chapter four explains the theoretical and conceptual tools that guided the inquiry and analysis of RSLA in Western Australia.

CHAPTER 4 – THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

There are two main senses in which Foucault uses the notion of governmentality. One is as a framing within which to analyse the practices through which governing in general takes place. Here, in particular, there is a focus on the shift from sovereign power invested in the monarch to the disciplinary power invested in nation States and their management of the economy and populations through practices of health, education, housing, punishment, etc. The second sense of governmentality is specific to the practices within advanced liberal democratic States...Here it is argued that governing is concerned less with disciplining the population than in enabling individuals to develop capacities to look after themselves. Power is exercised in this way, but it is productive and enabling as well as constraining. In this second sense, governmentality can be simply seen as one form of power historically replacing another, with a movement away from people having power exercised over them to a situation in which they actively regulate their own conduct. (Edwards, 2002, p. 356)

Introduction

The previous two chapters have explained the context and contents of RSLA. The policy problem of early school leaving, participation and transition was identified along with RSLA objectives and core concepts. In this chapter I explain the theoretical framework of this research into RSLA, namely governmentality, and the related concepts I have used to underscore my analysis.

The quote above by Edwards (2002) explains how governmentality is a perspective from which an analysis of governing can be situated, as well as a description of the formation of specific governing practices in liberal economies. I have followed this dual meaning in this study—governmentality is both a theoretical perspective as well as a description of how power works in governing people's conduct.

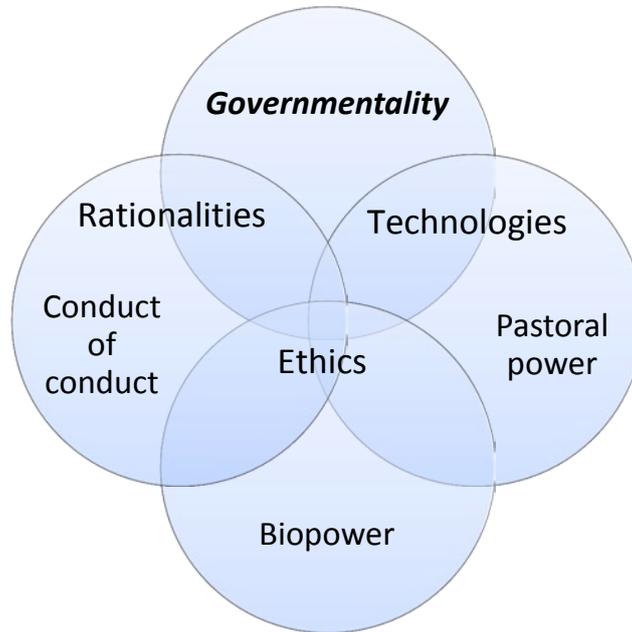
This chapter has two aims. First, it aims to explain the concept governmentality by drawing from Foucault and more recent governmentality writers (for example, Dean, 1999, 2002, 2006; Gordon, 1991; Lemke, 2001; Miller & Rose, 1993; Rabinow & Rose, 2003a, 2003b; Rose, 1996, 1999a; Rose & Miller, 1992). The purpose of this is to explain the meaning of governmentality, the historical and contemporary conditions that gave rise to this form of social and political power, and to give some examples of governmental practices at work. The aim here is to explain governmentality as *forms of practices*.

Second, the chapter aims to refine these ideas and highlight some specific examples of governing power that are used as orientating ideas in the study of RSLA. These make up the theoretical scaffolding for the research question. To achieve these aims, I have organised the chapter as follows:

1. An explanation of the history and contemporary meanings of governmentality, including a discussion of recent innovations in governmentality studies.
2. Explanation of the conceptual framework used to guide the analytical process and draw conclusions about RSLA.

This conceptual framework is depicted in Figure two over the page:

Figure 2: Governmentality conceptual framework



These concepts are best seen as a set of inter-related and overlapping ideas that comprise the basis of how governmentality theory is developed and applied in this research. In setting out these ideas, I include some limited commentary on the findings of the study, and well as some footnotes with reflections and observations about how the theory is applied to this research. This commentary is used primarily to illustrate the concept, but also to start to introduce the theoretical arguments that will be developed in later chapters. The discussion of governmentality theory is also extended in chapter five on methodology, where a description of the analytical codes and brief examples from the data are discussed in the course of outlining my methods. The reader is also directed to *Appendix two 'Synopsis on Neoliberalism'*, *Appendix three 'Synopsis on Power'*, and *Appendix four 'Synopsis on the Theoretical Inception of this Study'* for further details and reflections on Foucault's governmentality theory and its application

to this study. This material is placed in appendices to give space to this chapter to focus on the *key* components of the theoretical framework as it is directly applicable to the research design. I turn now to introduce the reader to the concept of governmentality and assess its place in applied research.

The history and contemporary meanings of governmentality

What is governmentality?

The governmentality research literature is extensive and interdisciplinary. Governmentality has been used to theoretically underscore research studies in regards to the governance of cyberspace (Baddeley, 1997), welfare reform (Korteweg, 2006), sustainability (Luke, 1995), law (Hunt & Wickham, 1994), crime prevention (Lee & Herborn, 2003), psychological knowledge and practices (Hook, 2004a, 2004b), youth studies (Besley, 2009) risk and public health (Petersen, 1997), and medical sociology (Turner, 1997). With regards to the field of education, governmentality has been used to study post-compulsory education (Kamp, 2005; Montgomery, 2004), lifelong learning (Edwards, 2002), the nexus between education and the state in Nordic countries (Osmo & Risto, 1998), education policy in South Africa (Tikly, 2003), participation in education (Masschelein & Quaghebeur, 2005), pre-school education in Queensland,

Australia (Ailwood, 2004), and in social policy studies generally (Marston & McDonald, 2006).²⁶

At the same time, there are criticisms of the governmentality perspective as noted by Wilkins (2012), in that governmental approaches may tend towards producing reductionist and totalising analyses of neoliberalism, and in doing so empty the power of specific and contextualised critical examinations of institutional context and practice, while sidelining “the capacity of historical agents to resist and contest the interpellative demands of different governmentalities” (Wilkins, 2012, p. 166). Hence, in this study I have been mindful in trying where possible to constrain the governmentality perspective and related arguments to the specific historical and practice context of RSLA. In particular, this has meant attempting to untangle the edifice of RSLA by focussing on the thinking and practices of its endorsement and implementation in Western Australia.

What does governmentality mean, and what might it reveal about RSLA? In simple terms, governmentality refers to:

The proliferation of a whole range of apparatuses pertaining to government and a complex body of knowledges and ‘know-how’ about government, the means of its exercise and the nature of those over whom it was to be exercised. (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 174)

Governmentality was originally developed by French historian and philosopher, Michel Foucault (Foucault, 2007). To understand this idea, it is useful to begin

²⁶ See for example Korteweg (2006) who examined the practices of the policy development and implementation using ethnographic methods, including interviews with clients, caseworkers and trainers, and observations and sitting in on meetings with welfare reliant clients and their caseworkers (Korteweg, 2006). In short, the governmentality perspective is being developed and applied in education and policy studies internationally.

with a definition of *governing* along governmental lines. Unlike many commonplace understandings of governing that equate it with parties, legislation, and policy, for Dean and Hindess, governing is more complex and should be:

...approached, rather, as an inventive, strategic, technical and artful set of 'assemblages' fashioned from diverse elements, put together in novel and specific ways, and rationalised in relation to specific governmental objectives and goals. These assemblages comprise a whole host of mundane and humble practices, techniques and forms of practical knowledge which are often overlooked in analyses that concentrate on either political institutions or political thought. These might include: forms of practical know-how, from managerial doctrines of 'total quality management' to recipe books for 'entrepreneurial government'; intellectual tools, such as the flow-chart, the map, and the architectural or engineering plan; calculative technologies, from the budget and the statistical table to sophisticated forms of the audit and cost accounting; modes of evaluating human, natural and financial resources, in terms of entities such as risk, profit, probability and danger; ways of knowing, training and regulating various agents, from those in positions of authority, such as politicians and bureaucrats, to those whose own self-government is thought to pose problems for the exercise of authority, such as the gay community, Aboriginal populations or even the long-term unemployed. (1998, p. 8)

Such a definition immediately calls into question any notion that governing is just the result of an institutional mechanism of the state—it situates the idea of governing more broadly as a form of *social practice* concerned with the conduct of conduct (Dean, 1998; Peters, Marshall, & Fitzsimons, 2000, pp. 114-115).

Furthermore, Rose (2000) makes the point that advanced liberal democracies, as he terms them, are undergoing an explosion in the breadth and depth of governmental controlling and enabling functions that are “designed in” (p. 325) to things like notions of citizenship, formation of identity, prudentialism, and the methods and circuits of security. Thinking about RSLA as a form of governmentality is intended as a way of examining its controlling and enabling functions in all its finer details.

Foucault and governmentality

Foucault's introduction of the term governmentality was, in part, an attempt to sketch a new way of thinking about political power.²⁷ In particular, Foucault's aim was to:

attempt to understand the characteristics of liberalism as a mentality of government that started from the presupposition that society existed external to the state, and constrained itself by limiting the scope of legitimate political power, subjecting it to a range of constraints, and constantly requiring it to justify itself. (Rabinow & Rose, 2003a, p. 5)

Foucault considered that many theories of power, most notably those concerned with sovereign powers, were unable to fully comprehend power in modern societies, and by modern, he meant beginning with the social, political and economic changes that emerged out of Europe two centuries ago (Johnson, 1993; Rose & Miller, 1992).

Foucault's publication entitled *Governmentality*, (Foucault, 1991a) was originally presented as a lecture at the College de France on February 1, 1978 (Peters, 2007). A revised version of the publication appears in *Security, Territory, Population* (Foucault, 2007). Here, Foucault (2007) notes that at about the time of the 16th century, a series of political literature appeared in Europe that was more than the usual political doctrines providing advice to the sovereign on how to manage and keep sovereignty. It was a literature that was concerned with exploring the problem of government far more broadly to include the

²⁷ It should be no surprise that a key idea running through the threads of the discussion about governmentality is power. Power can be understood in many ways—structurally, psychologically, sociologically, and so on—and power is an important theme in Foucault's other works (1973, 1975; 1977; 1978; 1984; 1988b; Sarup, 1993). Foucault's observation of this form of political and social power has been picked up and interpreted by many writers. As such, the concept of governmentality has been refined over time and applied in countless different ways, making it both an adaptive but difficult concept to use in research.

government of people, lands, and resources (Peters, 2007, p. 166). This literature was concerned with the government of the self, of children, the pastoral, the best methods of the government of the state, and the conditions by which government of self and others becomes legitimate (Foucault, 2007).

From sovereignty to disciplinary society

What is the place of state and sovereignty in Foucault's governmentality? The state is still important to the neoliberal governmental project. It is realist in the sense that it involves the combined elements of Nietzsche's (1978, p. 49) view of the state, which is to deal with the problems of population, and Weber's theory of the state, which outlines the conditions for legitimate authority over a specified territory (Weber, 1964). However, state can also be seen as 'anti-realist' as there is no clear centre or programmed operation based on identifiable cause and effect (Rose & Miller, 1992).²⁸

The state exists within a discursive field that delimits its emergence and it operates upon a system of thought that legitimates and specifies systems of action, in what Foucault calls the "tricky adjustment between political power wielded over legal subjects and pastoral power wielded over live individuals" (Foucault, 1988c, p.67).²⁹ This is what Peters (1996) refers to as the "paradox of the neoliberal state" (p. 81). Although the neoliberal state appears to be one that is minimal and limited, its power is contained in methods of governing that are

²⁸ For example, it was difficult to trace a compelling logic behind RSLA that links participation with improved education.

²⁹ This means that the articulation of RSLA is built out of a vast array of methods of consolidating and using knowledge about young people, even if this knowledge is narrowly and negatively conceptualised; it marks out the intellectual borders that designate the kinds of practices that are permitted, some authoritarian and some concerned at eliciting freedom.

dispersed through all the intricacies of the social body, and even into the psyche of the human subject and their 'soul' (Rose, 1996, 1999a).

Governing within state apparatuses involves a set of 'ordinary' practices that are diffused throughout the social body.³⁰ The regularity and seemingly mundane nature of this power means that it blends into the background of daily life, and this is what actually amplifies its power of governing. Hence, as Foucault explains, sovereignty and discipline do not disappear so much as they now exist in a triangular relationship with government. This he calls "sovereignty-discipline-government, which has as its primary target the population and its essential mechanism the apparatuses of security" (Foucault, 1991a, p. 102).

Foucault explains:

Population, then, appears as the end and instrument of government rather than as the sovereign's strength: it is the subject of needs and aspirations, but also the object of government manipulation; vis-a-vis government, [population] is both aware of what it wants and unaware of what is being done to it. (Foucault, 2007, p. 105)

The place of sovereignty is of course retained in terms of its juridical functions (Foucault, 2007). The role of disciplinary power is retained also, for this becomes a mechanism through which population management can be achieved:

...discipline was never more important or more valued than when the attempt was made to manage the population: managing the population does not mean just managing the collective mass of phenomena, or managing them at the level of their overall results; managing the

³⁰ See for example Donzelot's (1979) commentary on the policing role social workers have undertaken with families. Participation Coordinators also thought about their practice in rather ordinary, mundane and common sense terms.

population means managing it at depth, in all its fine points and details. (Foucault, 2007, p. 107)³¹

To manage a population effectively means to sharpen and extend sovereign and disciplinary powers:

...we should not see things as the replacement of a society of sovereignty by a society of discipline, and then a society of discipline by a society, say, of government. In fact we have a triangle: sovereignty, discipline, and governmental management, which has population as its main target and apparatuses of security as its essential mechanism. (Foucault, 2007, pp. 107-108)

Education is an example of a strategic means of linking the individual to state power. In this way, the education and civilisation of the population serves important state needs for social organisation and control, including the inculcation of the correct values, standards, dispositions, attitudes and acceptable forms of conduct.

In this context, an awareness of dependency on the state is heightened at the same time as the state seeks to remove or limit dependency on it. This presents somewhat of a problem:

When we say to people: "You can't go on consuming indefinitely." And when the authorities declare "You no longer have a right to that," or "You will no longer be covered for such operations," or "You will have to pay a proportion of the hospital cost," and even "It wouldn't be any use extending your life by three months, so we are going to let you die," then the individual wonders about the nature of his relationship with the state and begins to feel his dependence on an institution whose

³¹ The disciplines concerned here include psychology, health promotion, and criminal justice. My own discipline of social work is implicated here as well.

decision-making powers he had hitherto only dimly perceived.
(Foucault, 1988e, p. 163)³²

The sovereign is no longer just an executioner. This marks a shift in power that involves the taking of life and letting live, to one of making life and letting die.³³ The emergence of this new form of power began in the 18th century; it did not replace disciplinary power, but linked with it. Disciplinary power is a ‘make life’ power directed at the body, where the body is seen as a form of conduct towards life—power trains it, surveils it, monitors, regulates, teaches, and, if necessary, punishes (Foucault, 1977, 1980).

Governmental power and the art of government

For Foucault, governing in the sense outlined above is not about drawing distinctions between lines of power in the Machiavellian tradition—distinctions between people, positions, strategies, territory, and so on, and with a focus on sovereign power—but about *connecting these things together* (Foucault, 1991a, pp. 87-91). Government is best seen as containing many faces and is situated *internal* to society. It includes the government of parents over children, teachers over students, priests over congregations, inasmuch as it is concerned with sovereign or state centred power (Foucault, 2007).

The “art of government” (Foucault, 1991a, p. 92), Foucault claims, was concerned with the question of how to articulate the economy and society more broadly into political practice. Here, the economy is seen as the proper and

³² This is a good example of the way that state power can sometimes be sitting in the background, something of a ‘silent shadow’, intimately connected with people’s lives, even their deaths.

³³ A question here concerns the productive, enabling and ethical aspects of RSLA. What does RSLA produce? What does it enable? What are its moral grounds around health, wealth, and happiness?

judicial management of families, land, and other goods; in short, the proper management of human and other capital (Foucault, 2007). Thus, the groundwork of this idea of economic government—and the government of ‘things’, not merely of territory and its inhabitants—took hold in 18th century Europe. “Things”, according to Foucault (2007), include people and their relationships to objects and phenomena. Objects might include other people and money, for example. Phenomena might include climate, accidents, illness, customs and social norms that have an intervening and influencing effect on people. Therefore, governing and power now takes as its object the detailed minutia of society and its inner workings as sites for the deployment of strategies and tactics of power (Dean, 1999, 2006).

To illustrate this idea, Foucault gives the example of what it would mean to govern a ship comparing it to the techniques used in governing of a family. Here, he notes that the essential characteristic of the art of government is working out how to govern *relations between things*:

What is it to govern a ship? It involves, of course, being responsible for the sailors, but also taking care of the vessel and the cargo; governing a ship also involves taking winds, reefs, storms, and bad weather into account. What characterizes government of a ship is the practice of establishing relations between the sailors, the vessel, which must be safeguarded, the cargo, which must be brought to port, and their relations with all those eventualities like winds, reefs, storms and so on. It is the same for a household. Governing a family is not fundamentally directed toward the aim of safeguarding the family property, but essentially means having the individuals who compose it, their wealth and prosperity, as the objective, the target; it means considering the things one can do, such as alliances with other families. (Foucault, 2007, p. 97)

The art of government, therefore, is to establish the “right disposition of things that one arranges so as to lead them to a suitable end” (La Perriere cited in Foucault, 2007, p. 98). A comparison can be made to the arrangements of things necessary to lead to a suitable end of increased school retention, participation and engagement in compulsory education. What is required of this end that extends beyond the passing of legislation and the adoption of rules and laws? The objectives of government are much more than just ensuring compliance with law because they aim to achieve a ‘suitable end’ using other more subtle and sophisticated means, such as strategies and tactics (Dean, 1998, 1999). This marks an important observation: “the ends of government cannot be effectively achieved by means of law” (Foucault, 2007, p. 99). So, how can government occur without simply relying on the rule of law? Without the rule of law (or indeed, rule by force) government turns to “knowledge of things” (Foucault, 2007, p. 100) and knowledge of the practices required to achieve the right disposition of these things. This is why knowledge and information about people is so critical to any attempts to govern them (Hook, 2004a).

For example, even though RSLA is an act of law, an act of state power, the objectives of RSLA cannot be achieved through law alone: it requires knowledge of a raft of things concerning young people, such as attendance, participation, theories and models of how to elicit from young people willingness to actively engage in the legal requirements of two more years of school. In studying how compulsory education policy works, attention ought to be paid to the forms of knowledge, methods and practices, and mentalities that make problems amenable to a dispersed network of tactics and strategies of power—and this

means paying attention to how actors within the RSLA policy field govern themselves and others.

My approach to researching RSLA guided by the theory outlined above takes as its object the *specific practices of policy implementation* as a form of “conduct of conduct” (Foucault cited in Dean, 2006, p. 20). From this analytical perspective, government is concerned with “mobilizing those concerned to help themselves—in the many senses of that phrase” (Edwards, 2002, p. 353). As will be shown in later chapters, young people’s conduct is couched within an expectation that they become entrepreneurial lifelong learners and consumers (Edwards, 2002, p. 356). These themes are writ large in the RSLA rationality and discourse, but they also inform and condition the kinds of practices and interventions deployed towards some young people too. These strategic practices are infused with taken for granted assumptions that are embedded within the institutions and practices of governing (Foucault, 1988a). There are, then, a range of assumptions that sit within the practices and forms of knowledge associated with the strategies for raising the school leaving age.

Concept summary

To summarise, I explain governmentality as entailing four meanings. The first refers to the mentalities of government. Lemke explains:

The concept of governmentality demonstrates Foucault’s working hypothesis on the reciprocal constitution of power techniques and forms of knowledge. The semantic linking of governing (‘gouverner’) and modes of thought (‘mentalité’) indicates that it is not possible to study the technologies of power without an analysis of the political rationality underpinning them. (Lemke, 2001, p. 191)

These mentalities or political rationalities are the heterogeneous ontological, epistemological and moralistic taken-for-granted ‘truths’ utilised in any strategy of power, such as in RSLA (Rose & Miller, 1992). These ‘truths’ about young people are dispersed throughout the social context. In other words, RSLA includes the production and adoption of specific forms of knowledge about young people and school and the diffusion of this ‘truth’ within the consciousness and cultural norms of populations. Examples here may include ‘truth’ discourses about school, disengagement, ‘youth-at-risk’, and so on. These mentalities are rarely open for questioning and examination and materialise in “*regimes of practices*” (Dean, 1999, p. 18, original italics).

Second, governmentality refers to the emergence of forms of power required to manage two major complexities associated with modernity—economy and population (Dean, 1999). Mass and compulsory education are part of modernity (O’Keeffe, 2003) and spaces where practices aimed at inculcating moral values with young people in schools are part of a strategy of social education and responsiblism (Besley, 2002). These are pitched as benign and positive expressions of power, as dealing with economy and population involves strategic and practical attempts to ensure the health, wealth and happiness of *populations* (Rabinow & Rose, 2003b). Sovereign power, with all its constraining and limiting tendencies, is re-articulated in ways that *enables* and *fosters* the potentialities of the individual towards managing and realising his or her own health, wealth, and happiness (Dean, 1999). Compulsory education is arguably a strategy for population and social welfare, but as a form of mass practice it requires the expression of novel and adaptive forms of political power.

Third, governmentality includes the creation of various “*apparatuses of security*” (Dean, 1999, p. 20, original italics). These apparatuses (*dispositif*) include a heterogeneous network or assemblage of “discourses, institutions, architectural arrangements, policy decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophic, moral and philanthropic propositions” (Foucault cited in Rabinow & Rose, 2003a, pp. 10-11). These are components of material culture as Bailey (2013) explains:

Micro-dispositifs, such as individual prisons, asylums, social enterprises...are thus conceived as material-discursive articulations of power, that is, they are material conduits through which ‘invisible’ channels of power find traction – they constitute the material expression of power relations. (p. 812)

An apparatus forms out of the problems of government and out of the crises and problems facing government (Rabinow & Rose, 2003a). These problems may be financial, environmental, or health problems, and in turn, these are dealt with by things such as police, methods of surveillance and intelligence, as well as structures put in place for dealing with health and social welfare (Bailey, 2013; Hook, 2004a). The establishment of legislation and the development of the Participation Directorate and its strategic framework (Participation Directorate, 2006) is an example of a micro-dispositif, an apparatus to handle and deal with the problems of early school leaving. Things like education policies have no objective logic or meaning, no immanence or permanence (Bailey, 2013). These apparatuses are not strictly sovereign or oppressive powers, but rather, have as their focus enabling health and prosperity.

Finally, governmentality refers to the “governmentalization of the state” (Dean, 1999, p. 20), which can be seen as the long process by which “the exercise of sovereignty comes to be articulated through the regulation of populations and individuals and the psychological, biological, sociological and economic processes that constitute them” (Dean, 1999, p. 210). In RSLA many attempts to ‘enable’ young people to see themselves as engaged learners, and self-reliant citizens are put into action. In other words, sovereign power is reconfigured in ways in which young people are regulated *from within* (Dean, 1998). Thus, this perspective avoids reifying state power by merely reducing it to a number of oppressive dominating functions (Dean, 1999). The institutions of the state have a range of enabling and productive capacities too, and attention in this research is directed to the practices that attempt to create, enable, and produce governable subjects.

Conceptual tools

Building and refining a theoretical framework

So far, governmentality has been explained as a particular form of power. In this section the discussion is refined further to focus on the key theoretical concepts chosen to guide the research into RSLA. The governmentality literature contains a raft of very general and abstract terminology and concepts that tend to cluster around any discussions of Foucault’s use of governmentality. Some examples of this include: rationality, discourse, technologies, techniques, ethics, power, biopower, neoliberalism, subject, state, practices, apparatus, strategy, *techne*,

ethos, episteme, and knowledge. Also included are various phrases such as “governing at a distance”, “governing from within”, “technologies of the self”, “mentalities of rule”, “government of the living”, “regimes of practices”, “apparatuses of security”, “governmentalization of the state”, and “art of government”.

The breadth and slipperiness of these concepts and tropes made it somewhat difficult to establish a methodology that could guide the analysis of the RSLA data collected for this study.³⁴ Referring back to the opening quote by Edwards (2002, p. 356) at the beginning of this chapter, the theoretical framework here addresses the idea that governmentality is a perspective and a description of governing practices. The concepts ‘rationality’, ‘technologies’, ‘ethics’ ‘conduct of conduct’, ‘pastoral power’, ‘discipline’ and ‘biopower’ refer to different types of governing *practices* as well as embodying theoretical power about how these practices constitute a form of political discourse and practice about young people, school, and compulsory education. The framework outlined in this section is used in the data analysis and discussion in chapters seven to 10. The section that follows should be seen as a theoretical and conceptual framework that underpins the research design.

³⁴ In looking to the literature, I did not find an explicitly detailed governmentality research methodology, so in this research, I developed my own. In developing this framework, I began by highlighting some particular recurring terminology in the governmentality literature as a means of trying to find some conceptual focus that could be applied to the study of RSLA in Western Australia. Such concepts provide direction for this inquiry by allowing me to ask some particular questions about RSLA, and I established a theoretical framework used to guide the research design and analytical process.

Conduct of conduct

Foucault's use of the term governmentality "sought to draw attention to a certain way of thinking and acting embodied in all those attempts to govern the wealth, health and happiness of populations" (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 174). Foucault described governing as "'conduire des conduites' or 'the conduct of conduct'" (Simons & Masschelein, 2006, p. 419), which refers to the practices of self-government of one's thought and action (Foucault, 2007). In this sense, the word conduct is used in a number of ways. Conduct refers to the practice of guidance *and* the action/behaviour being guided (Dean, 1998, 1999). So, translated, 'conduct of conduct' means the 'guidance of action/behaviour' (Dean, 1999). The strategies and the means by which the guidance of action/behaviour occurs are pluralistic and broad, as Dean explains:

Government is any more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seek to shape conduct by working through our desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs, for definite but shifting ends and with a diverse set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects and outcomes. (1999, p. 11, original italics)

The ensuing analysis of RSLA is directed at all these features—the calculations, rationalities, shaping strategies and technologies (Dean, 1999). These are heterogeneous methods of governing, and the objects of governing are likewise, heterogeneous, forming interactions between "government, authority and politics...[with] identity, self and person" (Dean, 1999, p. 13). The policy strategies of compulsory education for all concerned—students, parents, teachers, employers—aim to achieve a situation whereby people actively

manage the conduct of themselves and others in order to realise the goals of greater participation and engagement in education.

This practice of governing young people ought not to be done in an autocratic way, for this would interfere with other educational values and goals of empowerment, democracy and participation (Gillies, 2008). The RSLA policy *telos* here is that students manage their own conduct in a 'free' and 'unfettered' way by adopting the ethos of education and participation right down to the way one thinks about oneself. It is, therefore, a form of power that has 'disappeared from view' (Foucault, 1978). In this research, using the concept 'conduct of conduct' helps to avoid an analysis that only focuses on overt coercive deployments of power, and instead has directed my attention toward the more subtle attempts to manage and control one's behaviour and the behaviour of others (Dean, 1999).

Pastoral power

The pastoral can be understood by comparing it with its historical and metaphorical antecedent—the shepherd (Foucault, 1988d). In this formulation, the shepherd exercises *power* over the *flock*—not lands or territories—and through this exercise of power guides or leads the flock towards typically definite but normative ends (Foucault, 1988d). This is the distinction between pastoral power and sovereign power. In the pastoral, the role of the shepherd is to ensure that the flock is drawn together as a group, is watched over, is protected and nurtured and kept safe—the shepherd *knows* the flock (Foucault,

1988d). For example, the physician could be seen as a shepherd of his/her patients, and the teacher as a shepherd of her/his students (Foucault, 2007).

In modern complex societies, governing power is dispersed among a network in the population; it is not centred in the 'King'. While the King is concerned with sovereignty over 'the many' (that is, the Kingdom as a whole), the shepherd can reasonably be concerned with 'the one'—that is, a sick person, or a single student (Foucault, 1988d). Hence, pastoral power/care is an individualising power that is concerned with "the lives of individuals" (Foucault, 1988d, p. 67) and the role of the pastoral is "to constantly ensure, sustain, and improve the lives of each and every one" (Foucault, 1988d, p. 67).

Knowledge and ethics are crucial to pastoral power (Foucault, 2007). In the Christian tradition, the shepherd must watch over the conduct and welfare of the flock. How does this happen? First, the shepherd must be able to give an account of all the actions of the flock, and categorise them in moral terms—good/evil, compliant/deviant (Foucault, 1988d). This is why knowledge and morality are so important to power. As will be shown later, this form of categorising and ascription of moral judgement about young people's conduct is an everyday practice in RSLA. Second, the flock must obey the shepherd not merely because it is a legal expectation, but because submission to the will of the shepherd is demanded as a *moral expectation* (Foucault, 1988d). One must obey the shepherd's will because it is right—it is a virtue. The practical modern expression of these aims is achieved through "self-examination and the guidance of conscience" (Foucault, 1988d, p. 69). The aim of pastoral power is to elicit an awareness of oneself as vulnerable to death, and salvageable through

submission to truth and obedience (Foucault, 1988d). A sense of self-awareness is borne out of the practices of coming to expose the self for all to see in the form of a confession, such as the kinds of confessions that transpire during counselling (Besley, 2005), and this self-awareness is an exposed self that can be pieced together through careful and diligent self-practices (Foucault, 1988d). Third, it is not enough for the shepherd to know the flock in broad and general terms, but to be able to individualise this knowledge right down to a particular subject, including their conduct, and expose and surface their hidden desires, motives, and thoughts (Foucault, 1988d).

The concept 'pastoral power' assisted in focussing the analysis towards the various policy implementation practices that resembled shepherding. As will be discussed in later chapters, a conspicuous example of pastoral power in RSLA is the Participation Coordinator, whose duty is to know, understand, and lead disengaged students along the path of engaged learning and personal development. Students who stray from the fold were identified and brought back into line via an array of techniques and practical methods. When looking at the everyday functions of Participation Coordinators and others concerned with the guidance of young people, questions about the form and function of this type of governing power are identified and described in this research. Understanding this is important because it will contribute to the overall conceptualisation of the policy as a form of governing, and provides a window into the ways in which pastoral power is not about salvation into the next life (as the original religious forms of pastoral were) but about salvation *in this life* (Caughlan, 2005). Pastoral

power in RSLA is about salvation through participation and engagement in education.

Biopower

In the final lecture of his 1976 lecture series (published in *Society Must be Defended*), Foucault outlined the concept of biopower, or biopolitics (Foucault, 2003). Biopolitics is explained by Dean (1999) to be “concerning the administration of life, particularly as it appears at the level of populations...it is concerned with matters of life and death, with birth and propagation, with health and illness, both physical and mental, and with the processes that sustain or retard the optimization of the life of a population” (Dean, 1999, p. 99).

Rabinow and Rose explain this idea further:

Across the twentieth century, the management of collective life and health became a key objective of governmentalized states, with identifiable configurations of truth, power and subjectivity underpinning the rationalities of welfare and security as well as those of health and hygiene. (Rabinow & Rose, 2003b, p. 14)

Part of the problem facing the state is to ensure as best as possible the health, wealth, and happiness of population (Foucault, 1991a, p. 105). The aspirations for health, wealth and happiness have become infinite and yet the capacity for the state to meet these demands is, unsurprisingly, finite (Foucault, 1988e, p. 163). Biopower is a form of power concerned with the biological politics of human populations—birth, death, illness, the need for food, security, reproduction, and sanitation (Foucault, 1988e; Foucault, 2003). The political problems that arise by the emergence of the human species as a *population* and their biological needs are turned into forms of knowledge (Foucault, 2003). For

example, the invention of statistics within the disciplines of demography, public health, education, environmental design, management, and sociology—to name a few—are able to quantify and give shape to the various problems experienced and generated by particular *population groups* (Foucault, 2003). How these problems are thought about and understood is shaped by social analyses and statistical forecasts of how it is thought that a population is trending, what problems may occur, what problems require knowing and intervening in (Foucault, 2003, p. 246).

Governing means managing and intervening in the *permanent* problems posed by population. Intervention strategies are not so much geared towards punishment of the individual body, but instead to “regularize” (Foucault, 2003, p. 247) the population, insofar as population is seen as a biological species with particular security and life sustaining needs. The use of power tends away from being an instrument of death, torture and repression, and is focussed instead on being an instrument of life. The question is: what can power do to ‘make life’? (Foucault, 2003).

Using the concept of biopower helps to ask questions about RSLA policy as a strategy not simply about education, but about social health and welfare more broadly. What is clear in RSLA is that employability is actually the biopolitical *raison d’être*, because employability is instrumentality linked to being a flexible worker and lifelong learner—the latter of which are requisite conditions for success in global capitalism (Moore, 2009) and thus are strategies for population well-being. Within this *biopolitics of employability* it is not just a baseline of skills and qualifications that comprise the political dream, but the production of

certain *attitudes* and *dispositions*. As well as possessing a standard set of skills and credentials, the modern day worker/learner is expected to be reflective, self-regulatory, communicative, and at ease with endless self-improvement (Moore, 2009). These themes also make up the contents of RSLA.

Discipline

While the biopolitical functions of the state are important to an art of governmental practice, there are other forms of power that complement and extend state power. The economic and social changes of the 18th century involved attempts towards *erasing spaces of darkness* and working towards a condition whereby people are rendered always visible, knowable, and subject to an individualising gaze (Foucault, 1980a). As Foucault states:

I would say Bentham was the compliment to Rousseau. What in fact was the Rousseauist dream that motivated many of the revolutionaries? It was the dream of a transparent society, visible and legible in each of its parts, the dream of there no longer existing any zones of darkness, zones established by the privileges of royal power or the prerogatives of some corporation, zones of disorder. (Foucault, 1980a, p. 152)

Visibility allows norms and expectations of proper conduct to be written onto the body and inscribed into the soul (Rose, 1996), and in such a panoptic context, individuals act as though they are under moral scrutiny—they submit to the gaze and all that is demanded by it (Foucault, 1977).

The practices of discipline are not simply to punish wrong-doings through corporal or capital means, but to shape the thoughts, souls, minds, and will of the individual at the level of their subjectivity (Foucault, 1977). As people are

submitted to permanent inspection (the gaze), Foucault (1977) contends that they too become the bearer of the gaze in the form of self-inspection and the governor of their behaviour (conduct). Keeping young people visible and accounted for are part of the aims of RSLA. In such an arrangement, there is no one person or designated authority that controls the machinery of power—this would be to reduce power to a model of the Monarchy, which Foucault (1980a) claims Bentham sought to circumvent as a model of political power. Under this panoptic model, *everyone* is potentially caught in the machinery of power, including those working with young people to keep them in school. Hence, as Foucault (1980a) states, the operation of modern forms of power are far more complicated and involved than simply reducing it to “a set of laws or a state apparatus” (p. 158). In an interview with Jean-Pierre Barou, Foucault makes a striking point about labour as a technology of discipline:

Barou: When you use the term ‘labour’ in your books, it’s seldom in relation to productive labour.

Foucault: That’s because I happened to be dealing with people situated outside the circuits of productive labour: the insane, prisoners, and now children. For them labour, insofar as they have to perform it, has a value which is chiefly disciplinary.

Barou: Labour as a form of *dressage*! Isn’t it always that?

Foucault: Certainly! There is always present this triple function of labour: the productive function, the symbolic function and the function of *dressage*, or discipline. (Foucault, 1980a, p.161).

In RSLA, labour and participation in educative functions are disciplinary actions.

Participation and engagement in the context of RSLA policy have productive functions, but there is also the symbolic aspect of participation in that it is

representative of *progress*. Moreover, participation in RSLA entails the disciplinary functions that socialise and discipline young people into the world of work and life in general.³⁵ This may be achieved by establishing a set of correct normative criteria, such as engagement in school and learning, and surveiling and regulating young people's conduct towards this end.

How do the norms and routines of RSLA policy constitute in practice? What *are* the norms and routines of RSLA policy? Arguably there are a range of normalising functions within RSLA couched in the discourse of participation and empowerment—these give the veneer of democratisation, but they are in fact “increasingly rationalized efforts to normalize and control individual and collective action” (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998, p. 337). In this study of RSLA, the focus is to conceptualise disciplinary power and practice in terms of their regulation functions.

Rationalities

Rationality here is understood to refer to a common sense form of knowledge on how to deal with problems between the individual and the state, contained in an expression of thought or political *justification* (Dean, 1994). It is used here in the plural sense as ‘rationalities’ in acknowledgement that in the domain of political problems, multiple and sometimes quite different rationalities may be in circulation; some mutually reinforcing, some offering conflicting accounts of the same phenomena, some may be liberalist in character and some despotic (Dean, 2006).

³⁵ This was a point made in the RSLA consultation paper (Carpenter, 2004).

Political rationalities are not always of the ideologies of the ruling elite, but instead constitute the ethos, the taken-for-granted common sense ideals, and the often unquestioned, but fragile, forms of knowing and speaking that render particular problems governable (Dean, 1994). Here is Dean's definition of rationality:

Political rationality may be defined as the relatively systematic, explicit, discursive, problematisation and codification of the art or practice of government, as a way of rendering the objects of government in a language that makes them governable. (Dean, 1994, p. 187)

To put it in a simple schematic, political rationality renders problems intelligible, which then makes them governable, which then incites particular forms of governing practices, which are themselves forms of rationality, produced and reproduced in the administrative and intellectual technologies of governing (Dean, 1994).

While the meaning of the concept rationalities points to a broad strategy of thinking, discourse and practice, in this study of RSLA I take my lead from Rose and Miller's (1992) three elements of rationality as follows:

1. Political rationalities are *moralistic*, indicating proper goals, correct functions, roles and responsibilities of political actors and populations (Rose & Miller, 1992). A moralistic proposition is a statement towards desired ends or goals, or claims about problems. For example, Carpenter's assertion back in 2002 that "it is totally unacceptable...that so many young people are allowed to drift out of the school system at the age of 15" (Carpenter, 2002, p. 150) or a Department of Education and Training brochure aimed at parents and students exhorting the poetic claim that "it is not OK to stay away" from school. Such propositions act to enunciate the proper function and task of particular responsibilities—including that of relevant authorities—within the remit of RSLA. For example, students

have a responsibility to go to school, parents have responsibilities to ensure their children go to school, DET staff have responsibilities and legislative authority to monitor, intervene and discipline students who are not fully engaged in education, training, or work.

2. Political rationalities are *epistemological*, orientating thought and action towards the objects of government. The result of this epistemological orientation is that an account of the objects to be governed is given (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 179). This account sets out the focal points for political interventions. A good example of this is the characterisation of the object of concern underpinning the RSLA (Carpenter, 2004). The following description is taken from the RSLA consultation paper. It portrays in a rudimentary sense the epistemological orientation ingrained in the RSLA rationality by describing the policy problem as comprising:
 - young people from **'disadvantaged'** family backgrounds characterised by unemployment, welfare dependence, parental absence or instability, violence, lack of a tradition of education or training and other endemic social and economic problems;
 - students from **rural and remote areas** (particularly those served by district high schools), where further education and training may not be readily available or is not taken up for a variety of reasons, such as the cost of travel and accommodation, distance from an education or training institution, lack of transport or a reluctance to move beyond the local community;
 - **Indigenous youth**, who may require a style of education that goes well beyond the provision of mainstream education and training, and;
 - young people who are **alienated from their families** and from institution-based education or training, with their associated authority structures and regulations. (Carpenter, 2004, p. 5, emphasis added)
3. Political rationalities contain a particular *idiom*. An idiom in this sense is "a kind of intellectual machinery or apparatus for rendering reality thinkable in such a way that it is amenable to political deliberation" (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 179). These can include the kinds of knowledge that describe and calculate the phenomena that must be intervened, in this case, phenomena like disengagement, for example. Knowledge of things like disengagement relies on a range of

human sciences, professional knowledge, tools, programs, and intervention devices. For example, people from the disciplines of social work, psychology and youth work are employed under the ambit of the RSLA policy. They provide case work and design and implement programs for students at risk of disengaging from education. Each of these disciplines also contains its own particular rationalities; they devise and deploy particular methods of interventions, know how, and tools for practice. To identify the particular rationalities that render reality 'amenable to political deliberations' means to identify the knowledge at work in the RSLA domain, and how this knowledge is expressed in ways that render particular problems visible and thus governable.

Technologies

Technologies are the distinctive forms of practices, tools, intellectual ideas and processes that come into existence within the context of the forms and functions of governing (Ball, 2001; Dean, 1999). Rather than seeing government as a constellation of abstracted values and ideologies, the "*techne*" of government refers to the "means, mechanisms, procedures, instruments, tactics, techniques, technologies and vocabularies [in which] authority [is] constituted and rule accomplished" (Dean, 1999, p. 31). In any policy field, enclaves of professional knowledge and expertise will reside (Foucault, 2007). These professionals are organised in systems and they develop and draw on specific kinds of knowledge and expertise to do their work in a calculated way (Foucault, 1980b; 1980c). For example, by applying knowledge and expertise to students who withdraw from school before age 17, technological innovations are invented, shared, and modified in practice. Examples of technologies discussed later in this thesis are 'engagement programs' that are designed to keep young people in education.

These are designed and invented to solve particular problems about disengagement from school.

However, these technologies do not cluster in a single centre, but rather, they are dispersed across multiple points, thus making governing at a distance possible (Rose & Miller, 1992). Clusters of technological know-how, such as knowledge developed and shared by professional groups, may emerge as a strategic alignment with state interests, or they may identify as being politically allied with the populations they manage, or they may be *enclosures* of professional expertise advancing their own interests (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 188). Centres, in all their multiplicity, form by establishing conduits and links in networks of power, by harnessing resources, knowledge, and people (Rose & Miller, 1992).

Technologies of government can take on more sophisticated and intentional forms too. Rose and Miller (1992) cite Bruno Latour in explaining two methods of the technologies of government: inscription devices and centres of calculation. Inscription refers to the procedures by which phenomena are translated into information. The process of documenting and recording events and phenomena is one of rendering things amenable to calculation and evaluation, and ultimately, intervention (Dean, 1994; Rose & Miller, 1992). An example here is the way that records of school attendance can be organised in ways that create categories of students who are then judged as being engaged or not engaged in their education. For example:

...the grid, the timetable, the chart, the graph, the examination – which promise greater efficiency in defining and measuring stages of excellence, mediocrity, and failure, as they sort, circulate, and manage,

reward and punish students, staff and schools...Regrettably, matters of curriculum, school organization and culture, and professional development as collaborative responses to the school community's collective needs and aspirations are being buried under a blanket of surveillance, shrouded in a haze of frightfully crude and narrowly defined performance indicators. (Pignatelli, 2002, p. 171)

The purpose of these technologies is to expedite the ability to govern and control particular phenomena.

Centres of calculation refer to the collection and organisation of information to such an extent that the information can throw the spotlight on an individual or group (Rose & Miller, 1992). In many cases the formal authorisation for this to occur is given under legislation.

The enactment of legislation is a powerful resource in the creation of centres, to the extent that law translates aspects of a governmental programme into mechanisms that establish, constrain, or empower certain agents or entities and set some of the key terms of their deliberations. (Rose & Miller, 1992, pp. 189-190)

Legislation authorises the crafting and deployment of intellectual technologies, forms of expertise, and it sets the parameters of what kinds of knowledge, concepts, and other strategies may be legitimately thrust into the public domain (Rose & Miller, 1992). In the study of RSLA, I looked at the legislative, programmatic, procedural and intellectual technologies developed and utilised in RSLA.

Ethics

The concept of ethics discussed here differs from the commonly understood normative ethical formulations and doctrines derived from general frameworks,

principles and schemas common in Western moral philosophy; for example, the deontology of Immanuel Kant (Kant, 2002) and the utilitarianism of Mill (Mill, 2002). It differs only somewhat from the other major normative ethical theory in Western thought, that of Aristotelian virtue (Aristotle, 2000). Ethics here, in the Foucauldian sense, can be thought of as “styles of life”, as a process of working upon the relationship to oneself according to moral obligations (Davidson, 1994, p. 125).

Foucault’s concept of ethics is the:

Process in which the individual delimits that part of himself [sic] that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal. And this requires him to act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve, and transform himself. (Foucault, 1984, p. 28)

According to Davidson (1994), Foucault’s concern for an analysis of the subject intersected with his studies of governmentality because the production of the subject, its ethical characteristics of life, and its self-conscious work are part of the history of governmentality (Foucault cited in Davidson, 1994, p. 119).

The ethical project of the self is connected to the normalising powers that exert control of the subject as well as the specific mechanisms by which the subject exerts self-control (Dean, 1998). These can be defined as the “*tekhnē* of the self...the *tekhnē* of life, the *tekhnē tou biou*, how to live (Foucault, 2000, p. 260).

Analysis of RSLA in this respect is concerned to trace the effects of governmentality on the ethical development of the self. Governing is an ethical enterprise in the sense of being “concerned with the conduct of individuals and

groups, and, most especially, with the way they conduct themselves” (Dean, 1998, p. 88).

While the conduct of people and how they work on themselves is an ethical endeavour, it is at the same time a political and economic expectation as well (Dean, 1998, p. 89). As shown later, the RSLA interventions that young people are subjected to involve strategies at self-improvement and a calling to better oneself. In practice this involves further training, deportment, job readiness skills, counselling and attention to self-esteem. These practices are examples of “self-formations, that is, practices concerned to shape and reshape the attributes, capacities, orientations and moral conduct of individuals, and to define the rights, obligations and statuses of such individuals” (Dean, 1998, p. 92). These governmental-ethical practices aim to elicit a certain desirable “disposition” (Dean, 1998, p. 93) or state of being, attribute, or ideal self. However, in these kinds of situations, an epistemological cleavage may occur between “‘active citizens’ and ‘targeted populations’” (Dean, 1998, p. 104). Students who do not participate as expected are more likely to experience more coercive expressions of power, because the goal of RSLA is not just education, but participation, engagement, and self-improvement.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the background, meaning, and conceptual framework developed out of the governmentality theory and literature used to frame the inquiry into RSLA. The ideas discussed here are ‘conceptual tools’ that

describe and theorise forms of governmental power operating in RSLA. Table four on the following page summarises these concepts by distilling their core meaning.

Table 4: Summary of governmentality concepts

Concept	Description	Condensed meaning
Conduct of conduct	The guidance of one's conduct and the conduct of others. Self-government of thought and action. Attempts to encourage self-management.	Strategies of government of self and others.
Pastoral power	Forms of surveillance, 'shepherding', watching over particular groups of people. A concern for the welfare and whereabouts of particular groups of people. Methods of providing an account of the welfare and whereabouts of people. Strategies of individualising student engagement in education.	Shepherd, caretaker, power over the one.
Biopower	Approaches to ensuring the health, welfare, and social functioning of population groups; rationalities about social welfare and how to optimise social functioning; broad methods of categorising and defining social problems and how to address them; methods of regulating the conduct of population groups.	Strategy for health, wealth, social welfare, power over the many.
Discipline	Panoptic processes of inspection of conduct; norms and routines of managing conduct; institutionalised and routinised forms of regulation and control.	Power as institutional practice, routines.
Rationality	Pattern of legitimating thought; common sense ethos; forms of knowledge that make a problem governable; moralistic propositions (for example, goals, correct functions, roles and responsibilities; responsibilities of social actors); epistemological account of the problem to be governed; an idiom or rhetoric that orientates thinking in a way that makes problems amenable to intervention.	Thought, reason, epistemology of problem.
Technologies	Administrative and surveilling practices; mechanisms and practices of authorities; intellectual tools (for example, calculating, assessing, documenting); inscription devices (for example, procedures by which phenomena is translated into information); centres of calculation (for example, enclaves of knowledge and professional expertise); programs (for example, translation of taken-for-granted rationality into practical interventions and the groups of people who design and run them).	Tools, methods, instruments.
Ethics	Self-formation practices; ideal disposition or subject position (ethical substance); obligations of citizenship (mode of subjection); mastery of one's conduct (attitude); goal for one's self practices (teleology).	Norms, virtues, self-constitution.

The task of this study is to identify and specify more clearly how these forms of power are formulated and applied in practice. Why is this important? Keeping people in school is a political problem that cannot be dealt with by force alone (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 175). RSLA is more to do with instigating a diverse and dispersed network of rationally calculated forms of administration aimed at organising the conduct of populations—in this case, students—through a vast array of sites, techniques and technologies. An analysis of RSLA seeks to examine the intricate relations between political rationalities and technologies, and how they connect with the lives of individual people and particular social groups. Thus, when seeking to understand forms of power in RSLA, I am directed to focus on the various points of contact between political thought and social practice.

The next two chapters explain how I went about this task. Chapter five begins by outlining the research design by explaining the link between governmentality theory and the methodology, and chapter six explains the specific methods used to inquire into RSLA.

CHAPTER 5 – THE THEORY IN THE METHODOLOGY

An analytics of government attempts to show that our taken-for-granted ways of doing things and how we think about them are not entirely self-evident or necessary. An analytics of a particular regime of practices, at a minimum, seeks to identify the emergence of that regime, examine the multiple sources of the elements that constitute it, and follow the diverse processes and relations by which these elements are assembled into relatively stable forms of organization and institutional practice. (Dean, 1999, p. 21)

Introduction

In chapter four I outlined the theoretical and conceptual ideas that have shaped the governmental approach to researching the policy and practices of raising the compulsory school leaving age in Western Australia. This framework informed the research aims and questions, and structured the first level of data analysis (discussed in the following chapter along with the specific methods of data sampling, collection and analysis). The purpose of this chapter is to establish the rules of thinking that underpin the inquiry generally and the methods of analysis specifically.³⁶

This chapter explains the research design and methodological approach used to do this research. I have incorporated ideas from critical realism (Bhaskar, 1998; Brown, 2007; Danermark et al., 2002) into the governmentality theory as a way of establishing some further criteria for data analysis. In structuring this chapter and the following chapter, I have followed Crotty's (1998, p. 3) approach to making distinctions and links between four elements that comprise a research

³⁶ Further discussion relevant to this the concepts in this chapter are in appendices two and three.

design: ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods.³⁷ In doing so, I aim to make plain the various assumptions and perspectives that I adopted in the research. Thus, the four elements stated above work together to form the scaffolding for the design of this research. Although presented here in sections, ontology, epistemology, methodology and method *interact*, and there should be connections and philosophical congruency between each (Carter & Little, 2007). The ideas presented here are informed by the theoretical and conceptual framework outlined in chapter four, and thus connections between theory and methodology will be made. To simplify, the overarching research framework of this study is outlined in Table five below:

Table 5: Research design

Element	Concerned with...	This study...
Ontology	View of reality	Critical realism
Epistemology	View of knowledge	Constructivist
Methodology	Theoretical framework/design	Governmental analysis
Methods	Techniques: data sampling, data collection, data analysis	Interviews, policy documents, document analysis

I begin this chapter by outlining the methodology, which is a governmental analysis of RSLA. The theory of discourse that underpins it is outlined accordingly, and this provides the overarching approach that guides the research methods, the latter of which are the specific techniques or procedures implemented (Brewer, 2000; Crotty, 1998).

³⁷ For ease of presentation, methods of data analysis are discussed separately in the next chapter. Data analysis involved an iterative process of applying the insights of discourse analysis to the data (Altheide, 1996; Graham, 2011). These methods are discussed in chapter six as a form of a “personal testimony” (Lofland, 2002, p. 153) of how the study was done.

Second, I explain that my standpoint towards knowledge adopts both constructivist (Barkin, 2003) *and* realist (Bhaskar, 1998; Danermark et al., 2002; Houston, 2001; Outhwaite, 1998) aspects and this has enabled me to keep my focus on language *and* practices in the RSLA context (Hall, 2001).

Finally, I conclude this chapter by outlining the ontological position underpinning this inquiry. Broadly speaking, ontology refers to questions and perspectives on reality, and what is said to exist (Crotty, 1998). The ontological position informing this study is a blend of Foucault's theories and critical realism (Al-Amoudi, 2007).³⁸

Methodology: Governmental discourse analysis

Foucault's approach generally has been important to the development of the governmental analysis used in this research. This style of research is intended to provide a basis for orientating specific inquiries that multiply possibilities of understanding (Foucault, 1993; Rabinow & Rose, 2003a). In regards to the approach used here, I quote Hunter, who describes a Foucauldian approach to studying schools as follows:

Foucault's concern is to describe not the ideals of education or its hidden class functions but the detailed organization of the (monitorial) school as a purpose-built pedagogical environment assembled from a mix of physical and moral elements: special architectures; devices for organizing space and time; body techniques; practices of surveillance and supervision; pedagogical relationships; procedures of administration and examination. (Hunter, 1996, p. 147)

³⁸ See Appendix five in which I make the case that a critical realist reading of Foucault is possible and useful (Al-Amoudi, 2007; Joseph, 2004) in informing a governmental discourse analysis.

What methodological concept can assist with this sort of analysis?

Discourse

The major organising methodological concept that links the overarching elements in this research design is *discourse*. Garrity explains that Foucault's use of the term discourse is not reducible to language, or conversation, or narratives, but has as its concern an attempt to "scrape away the rhetoric to notice what function these discursive formations have: what do they enable and what do they disallow?" (Garrity, 2010, p. 200). Hall explains Foucault's use of the term as follows:

Discourse, Foucault argues, constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. (Hall, 2001, p. 72)

There are a number of points, then, to be made about the term discourse and how it is understood and applied here in a methodological sense.

First, a discourse is generally characterised to refer to modes of communication (for example, text, language, images) that have a productive enabling capacity (Hall, 2001; Mansfield, 2000, pp. 58-59). For example, medical discourses produce categories, concepts and an acceptable form of reasoning about disease

and wellness—in doing so it enables knowledge of things.³⁹ However, as Garrity (2010) notes, this on its own is a limited notion of discourse.

Second, discourse sets the boundaries of what can be thought. In specifying an object of *knowledge*, other ways of thinking about something are rendered marginal or invisible (Kendall & Wickham, 1999). The circulation of specific discourses can therefore operate to shut out other ways of talking, thinking and practicing (Hall, 2001). Truth, according to Foucault, is not something that is exterior to power, and truth is “linked in a circular relation with systems of power that sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it” (Foucault, 1980b, p. 133). Thus, what may be counted as true arises within a particular context and discourse. For example, disengagement today may be seen as a ‘truth’ about some young people, but such truth is dependent on the discourses of disengagement that are *peculiar to this time*. Without such discourses, a disengaged young person cannot be a meaningful category and hence cannot be thought of or spoken about. A ‘disengaged young person’ is “*produced within discourse*” (Hall, 2001, p. 79, original emphasis). Knowledge then, such as knowledge of disengagement, is also produced within discourse.

Third, discourse concerns the material conditions that make thought and language possible (Hall, 2001; Kendall & Wickham, 1999). Historical conditions enable certain rules or procedures of thinking and speaking possible. Foucault

³⁹ For example, physical objects, such as a human body, may be non-discursive (it is an object after all) but this object may exist as a discursive regularity. Once the body (or the behaviour and conduct of a young person, for that matter) is scientifically investigated and described it is intricately connected with a swathe of other conditions of possibility that render it into discourse. Medical discourses about illness and how to treat it contain rules of formation, regularities, and so on, which are revealed and created through a complex arrangement of institutions (such as universities, hospitals, research centres) medical knowledge (such as research papers, books, websites and technical language), medical research, practices, and so on.

refers to this as the “conditions of existence” (Foucault, 1991b, p. 60). These conditions of existence “reveal the rules of formation, the regularities, and the modes of organization of thought which lay beneath particular formations of knowledge” (Smart, 1985, p. 37).⁴⁰ Thus, there is no deep centre of *A Priori* thinking that is brought into existence via language (Kendall & Wickham, 1999). How thought manifests in particular ways is an artefact of the conditions and subtle rules and processes that enable it (Hook, 2001).

Finally, discourse is concerned with practices and how these practices “construct and create individuals and groups” (Garrity, 2010, p. 202). Here is how Foucault described his approach:

The target of analysis wasn't ‘institutions’, ‘theories’ or ‘ideology’, but *practices* – with the aim of grasping the conditions which make these acceptable at a given moment; the hypothesis being that these types of practices are not just governed by institutions, prescribed by ideologies, guided by pragmatic circumstances – whatever role these elements may actually play – but possess up to a point their own specific regularities, logic, strategy, self-evidence and ‘reason’. (Foucault, 1991c, p. 75, original italics)

Rules of analysis

Foucault’s analysis of discourse is less about the formal construction of statements (and whether or not they are legitimate), less about the motivations for discourse (or the insides of the minds of the authors of discourse), and more about an identification and dissection of the events and conditions that make certain discourses possible, and not others (Foucault, 1991b). Thus, Foucault

⁴⁰ The same can be said for discourses about young people ‘at-risk’. The corporeal activities of young people are rendered into discourse by the social sciences and instruments of regulation (Lupton, 1999, pp. 86-87). Theoretical categories about young people and the labels used to describe them examine, scrutinise and theorise risky behaviour, turning it into knowledge about their deficits and failings (Valencia, 1997).

does not seek to interrogate the hidden meanings in the discourses, but rather, seeks to identify what transformations they grew out of and effected. This is to treat discourses as a historical and living “monument” (Foucault, 1991b, p. 60) that charts the fields and practices in which the discourse is applied.

Like Foucault, I have also set out to examine RSLA in terms of its practices as well as its more ethereal and abstract conceptual dimensions that include its language, concepts, discourse and rationalities.⁴¹ For example, within the discursive framing of disengagement, specific technologies and instruments of power and social administration regulate and intervene in this form of disengagement. So, a particular kind of practical intervention on disengagement is a possibility only insofar as a particular kind of discourse about disengagement permits. The analytical task is to attempt to identify and examine the linkages between language and social, cultural, political and economic contexts of rules, institutions, routines and norms that shape the social universe (Hook, 2001).

This approach to analysis is a form of political criticism because the methods and approaches aim not only to understand how reality is depicted and represented, but how this connects with and shapes, and is shaped by, social practices and contexts (Garrity, 2010; Jacobs, 2006). Marston explains further:

...the task of the discursive policy analyst is to explain how particular discourses become hegemonic: to identify the nodal points that privilege some arguments over others, to clarify how individual discourses come to influence others, to uncover the ways discursive resources are distributed across social systems and to show how these

⁴¹ Further details on this framework are outlined in Appendix four ‘Synopsis of the theoretical inception of this study.’

socio-historical constellations legitimate specific courses of political action. (Marston, 2004, p. 48)

This approach is especially useful in my study of RSLA because, as Marston (2004) explains, policy, state, and categories of people are produced and reproduced through relations of power, through language, and through discourse.

In summary, by figuring out the strategies and contours of power in RSLA, I can begin to ascertain what the material consequences and background contexts are. This is a way into understanding the mechanisms, strategies and forms of power that are associated with policy development and the governing of young people. As Graham (2006) says, this approach is not about looking for truth, nor is it about hunting for root causes. It is an approach aimed at “problematizing taken-for-granted practices” and examining and identifying their effects (Graham, 2006, p. 4). Methodologically, the rules of analysis in this research are guided by a focus on:

1. The overall discursive contours of the school leaving age policy, and the relations that exist between different people with the RSLA context (for example, relations between a young person and a Participation Coordinator or youth worker). The analysis is directed towards conceptual and other ideas about young people, and how this is used in a material sense to classify, sort, order and regulate the conduct of young people.
2. The way that RSLA is conditioned by wider material, structural and other factors that create conditions and structures various forms of conduct and practice. The analysis looks at state and non-state institutions as centres of knowledge, power and authority.
3. The contingent forms of transitive knowledge such as notions of ‘risk’ and ‘disengaged’, and how these shape varying and multiple forms of practice. This means to look at discursive constructions in their finer

details and look at the micro practices involved in the governing strategies of young people.

The epistemological basis

In drawing on a Foucauldian governmental analysis, epistemological aspects of this research are situated within a broadly constructivist research paradigm.

This means that this research is part of a process of piecing together or constructing a sense about RSLA in theoretical terms. Constructivist epistemology *illuminates* a research pathway or trajectory, rather than explicitly stating what lies along the borders and contours of this pathway (Blumer, 1954, cited in Schwandt, 1994). This research, then, is intended to shine a light onto RSLA in a particular fashion and to orientate a theoretical way of looking at RSLA policy and practices with young people. Along these lines, such orientations are usually concerned with revealing experiences regarding truth and knowledge from the cultural vantage point of those being researched (Schwandt, 1994).

That is why social constructivism is an epistemological view found in a range of qualitative sociological traditions including phenomenology, and critical theory (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009; Berger & Luckman, 1966). Although subjected to considerable debate (Hacking, 1999; Schwandt, 1994), it is a counterpoint to positivist assumptions about knowledge being independent of people and amenable to objectivist inquiry (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). As such, this research accepts the idea that in undertaking a governmental analysis, I am attempting a form of criticism as an argument about RSLA, rather than pointing to RSLA as a set of objective facts existing independently of people, society and social context (Marston, 2010).

Generally, constructivist epistemologies are largely anthropological, interactionist, and phenomenological (Schwandt, 1994), concerning themselves with questions of meaning, culture, and agent-centred humanism. But that is not strictly how I use that concept here. Instead of focussing on meaning and culture in an ethnographic sense, I focus on discourse and practice as artefacts of power and governmentality. In researching RSLA, I am seeking to describe and analyse the contents of the policy and the conditions of its existence. I aim to examine and identify the visible and sayable dimensions of government and construct a perspective and argument about the production, distribution and adoption of knowledge, truth and ways of thinking; particular forms of action, techniques and technologies; and, methods of forming and shaping the subject (Dean, 1999, p. 23).

The ontological basis

In focussing in on things like discourses, rationalities, practices and technologies of RSLA, a philosophical problem becomes apparent. On one hand the knowledge about RSLA can be viewed as a construction. That is to say, policy knowledge is what is produced by people in the same way as people might produce cars or radios. This might include empirical, theoretical or discursive knowledge, known as *transitive* forms of knowledge (Danermark et al., 2002) and this exists in ideas, words, concepts and texts. On the other hand things actually happen as a consequence of RSLA that are material and open to direct observation. These are *intransitive* things in the world that exist as real material things (Bhaskar, 1998).

However, these 'things' are not to be confused with 'truths' in an absolute sense, rather, they are functions of discourses and practices (Graham, 2007).

In the Foucauldian tradition, things like disengagement for example are, to some extent, discursive constructions, even though they coalesce with material practices of varying kinds. This means that something like disengagement is brought into a particular form within the confines of the conceptual and discursive framing that renders it into existence. While disengagement may also have a material quality of existence, is not an undisputed fact that exists independent of people. Yet, the practitioners employed to administer RSLA considered disengagement to be a real thing existing as an independent fact and it would be easy as a researcher to accept this *prima facie*. They considered disengagement to be a real observable state of affairs concerning what young people actually do or do not do, and their practice responses to this state of affairs did involve actual observable practices with definite consequences in the lives of young people. What distinctions can be made between disengagement as a discourse and rationality and disengagement as something as an observable practice, including the observable interventions into disengagement?

Critical realism (CR) adapted from philosopher of science Roy Bhaskar (Benton, 1998; Bhaskar, 1998; Joseph, 2004; Outhwaite, 1998) is intended to assist this research in this task by providing me with some specific concepts to help with the data analysis. It is the case that a realist ontology accepts that there are actual material things (Al-Amoudi, 2007) and in this case accepts the existence of an intransitive real material reality. Critical realism also accepts the idea that

transitive knowledge is that which is produced and constructed by people—this is the critical aspect (Al-Amoudi, 2007).

Given this research is a governmental analysis, it was important to avoid characterising RSLA as little more than a discursive language game, or, on the other hand, to accept that things like ‘disengagement’ are undisputed objective facts existing independent of people. As mentioned, this is despite the fact that the policy literature and discourse actually *did* conceptualise things like disengagement as objective facts existing independently of people. The analysis required a scepticism of such ‘facts’.

I kept my focus on the construction of things like disengagement and things that actually transpire in the form of events, actions, and practices. Explaining this further, Sims-Shouten et al., write:

In critical realism, language is understood as constructing our social realities. However, these constructions are theorized as being constrained by the possibilities and limitations inherent in the material world. (Sims-Schouten et al., 2007, p. 102)

To illustrate how this applies, I again refer to the example of disengagement.

Disengagement might entail a discourse about young people, but it could also point to a repertoire of embodied material practices that persist over time. Much of what critical realism suggests is that material reality does not refer always to observable objects, but to structures, patterns and mechanisms that *interact* with discourses and socially constructed phenomena that are not directly observable, but sit within a deep social structure that is amenable to theoretical

“attempts” (Sims-Schouten et al., 2007, p. 106) towards understanding and analysis. For example:

In examining governmental policy and other institutional power we take the position that whilst policies and psychological theory can be theorized as social constructions, the institutions that shape and form them, and the economic interests and necessities which uphold these institutions, hold extra-discursive power. (Sims-Schouten et al., 2007, p. 106)

This has meant that I have had to consider material structures that are non-discursive. The kind of ontology that I am outlining here is a notionally open configuration of realism that is reflexive around each of these theoretical standpoints (Reed, 2008). So, I have included in my analytical task attempts at distinguishing between disengagement as a construct and as a set of practices, practices that the construct ‘disengagement’ authorises in specific ways.

Conclusion

The analytical starting point for RSLA is to see it as an historical event and a series of practices that are ‘peculiar’, rather than natural or based in common sense (Foucault, 1998a; O’Farrell, 2005). Accepting from the outset that RSLA is a historical oddity helped to remain critical and sceptical about the mundane and ordinary hue of the data. RSLA—like other social policies aimed at governing—is contingent upon social processes such as the use of language and certain practical ritualisations that comprise society (Berger & Luckman, 1966). However, it is discourse, practice, rationality and techniques of power that are the object of study here, not the study of meaning as culture (Kendall &

Wickham, 1999). In these epistemological terms, and in following the Foucauldian and critical realist position, theoretical insights about knowledge can be made in an analysis of “language *and* practice” (Hall, 2001, p. 72, original emphasis) as opposed to culture and meaning.

The ideas outlined in this chapter should be seen in terms of their overall integration, and this research involves bringing a set of *perspectives and thinking tools* (Privitera, 1995) to an analysis of RSLA. In this sense, I have endeavoured here to outline how I have applied a set of *ideas* to this research, as opposed to a set of *procedures* that would be appropriate in other forms of inquiry, such as a quasi-experimental design (Cook & Campbell, 1979), for example.

Having canvassed the ideas that form the scaffolding of the research design, at the actual point of conducting the data collection and analysis I was more than a little apprehensive: would it actually work? And how would I take these ideas and get down amongst actual data? In the next chapter, I explain the process of data collection and analysis at the *method level* of the research process and provide a brief overview of the main findings and conclusions drawn from this analysis.

CHAPTER 6 – METHODS

In practice, however, there are few examples in the social policy literature of empirical studies that draw on an analytics of governmentality. Further, there are no upper level academic texts from which to draw advice on how to 'do' social policy research using the tools inspired by Foucault's work. As a consequence, beginning researchers have to draw out of the governmentality literature a unique conceptual scaffold to support and guide their research, and they have to develop an appropriate and congruent research design and methodology. (Marston & McDonald, 2006, p. 4)

Introduction

The quote above by Marston and McDonald (2006) represents concisely and accurately the challenge I faced in developing a conceptual and methodological approach to this research. The previous two chapters have been an attempt at meeting this challenge. The first task was to develop a conceptual framework that enabled a descriptive analytics of the government of RSLA. Chapter four outlined seven concepts that frame this level of the analysis. This has allowed me to produce detailed *descriptive* accounts of the forms of power at work in the RSLA policy context. At the same time, I was also concerned to order this analysis by drawing on critical realism and constructivist epistemology to develop analytical rules that coalesced into a governmental analysis of RSLA. This was the second task described in the previous chapter.

While previous chapters explained the central ideas underpinning the conceptual framework and research design, this chapter brings these together by explaining the third task, which was the development of the technical

elements of this research: *data collection, analysis, representation*, and how the *conclusions* and *argument* were arrived at.⁴²

This chapter explains the methods of data analysis, and how governmentality theory and critical realism were applied to the process of writing and representation. This process is what Alvesson and Sköldberg call “reflexive interpretation” (2009, p. 271). It is a process of undertaking a reflexive approach to data analysis and theory development and refinement by using different levels of interpretation (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

This chapter should be read as an ‘interlude’ between the theory/methodology framing and the following chapters that present the research analysis and substantive argument of this thesis. Here, I aim to be transparent so as to provide an “audit trail” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 128) and justification for my methods (Tracy, 2010).

At the same time, I am mindful of the problem and criticism of being definite about the methods used here (Graham, 2011). In doing Foucauldian research in education, Graham notes the tension between the aims of being explicit about the methods used as a testament to academic rigour, and a “reticence to declare method, fearful perhaps of the charge of being prescriptive” (Graham, 2011, p. 663). This is because Foucault himself worked against prescribing a single way

⁴² It should be noted that even this research and thesis can be seen as a form of governmentality. The very act of inscribing, differentiation and categorising knowledge is in many ways similar to the categorising of knowledge used within the RSLA policy and practice. This is a point made by Foucault when he writes that “Statistics [further] shows that, through its movements, its customs, and its activity, population has specific economic effects. Statistics enables the specific phenomena of the population to be quantified...” (Foucault, 1991b, p. 104). The methods taken to work data into an analysis highlight that this research is not ‘outside’ or apart from RSLA, but part of it to some extent too.

of conducting an inquiry and rejected the notion that there is a single objective truth that can be yielded through any one approach. The point of clarifying my methods and methodological assumptions is in the interest of explaining how this study was done, not to presume that the approach here could be replicated, because as Graham states, “no matter how standardised the process, the analysis of language by different people will seldom yield the same result” (Graham, 2011, p. 666).

Collecting data

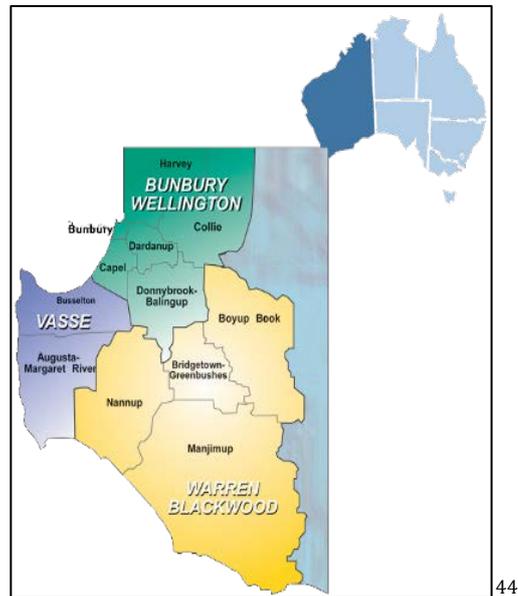
Chapter five provided an explanation of the methodology and highlighted some of its main features. This methodology is an overarching *thinking* framework that is informed by critical realist ontology and constructivist epistemology. At the ‘method level’ of research, more technical processes were used to sample, collect and analyse the data.

Context of the data collection

Data was collected between 2008 and 2009. This was the period that the RSLA policy implementation was beginning to fully take shape. While the selection of policy documents was ostensibly taken from a State-wide context⁴³, interviews were conducted in the South West region of Western Australia, including the large regional centres of Bunbury and Busselton (see Figure three, following).

⁴³ This was because I was able to draw on publically available information about engagement programs being developed and implemented throughout the State of Western Australia.

Figure 3: Map of the South West region



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The South West of Western Australia is home to more than 157,000 people, with the Bunbury local government area at almost 34,000 and Busselton local government area at about 30,000 (South West Development Commission, 2010). Bunbury and Busselton are the largest regional centres in the South West and the economy of the South West is a mix of mining, retail, tourism, viticulture, agriculture and timber (South West Development Commission, 2010).

The South West geographical area is the responsibility of the Department of Education and Training Bunbury District Education Office and the Warren-Blackwood District Education Office. As of 2009 there were approximately 7,500 high school students in these districts (Department of Education and Training, 2008-2009). It should be made clear at this point that the context of the data collection and subsequent analysis is focussed on the public high school system

⁴⁴ Map source: <http://www.warrenblackwood.com.au/>

in Western Australia and is based on a snapshot of the data collected between 2008 and 2009. Consequently, this research represents a particular period in history and does not account for changes in policy and practice post 2009.⁴⁵

Sampling the data

It is noted by Sharp and Richardson (2001) that Foucault has been criticised for being selective in his sources, choosing materials that tended to confirm his observations. When considering the sampling strategy, I was mindful to collect a broad variety of data from different sources, and then only enter into a methodical analytical process after the data was collected. The purpose of this was to counter, as much as possible, any selective tendency and to just try as far as possible to generate a comprehensive mass of information about RSLA. There were two methods of data sampling. Data were collected via interviews with informants on the policy, and by collecting a selection of policy documents and various literature sources about the policy (Punch, 2005). The purpose of using these methods in combination was to generate a detailed qualitative corpus of the policy contents and practices.

The sampling approach used to identify and select participants for this research utilised a combination of convenience, purposive, and snowball sampling (Blakie, 2000; Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2001, p. 163; Neuman, 1997). This was necessary because the rules governing the sample were to ensure that the data was reflective of the authoring, orchestrating or implementing the RSLA policy.

⁴⁵ At the same time, the arguments and conclusions reached in this research go beyond the particulars associated with historically specific policy arrangements of RSLA because they point to a broader argument about young people and compulsory education, of which RSLA is a particular example.

Regarding the interviews for example, participants were deemed to have a warrant or authority on the policy. This form of a warrant is deemed a “substantive contribution...obtained by virtue of one’s proximity to the situation, by offering a unique point of view, specific expertise, [or] generalized knowledge” (Fox & Miller, 1995, p. 125). Overall, the approach used to sample and collect data is what Altheide (1996, p. 33) calls “progressive theoretical sampling” referring to a process of selecting “materials based on emerging understanding of the topic under investigation”. Interviews and policy and program documents were selected because they were “conceptually and theoretically relevant” (Altheide, 1996, p. 34).

Interview data

Semi-structured interviews (Punch, 2005, pp. 168-178) were conducted with 14 sampled participants, and I posed questions to them about the policy, their work in this area, the context of the policy, and the thinking that they were using in their practice.⁴⁶ I interviewed nine DET Participation Coordinators, three Youth Workers, and two Teachers/Student Advisors.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ An outline of the interview guide is in Appendix one.

⁴⁷ Initially I wanted to interview students because I wanted to hear from them and include their voices in the research. However, despite many attempts, I had significant difficulty recruiting students for this study. For starters, I had to go through several levels of sign-off in order to access a student or young person. This included obtaining written consent from: (i) Murdoch University Ethics Committee, (ii) DET Ethics Committee, (iii) signed DET District Director approval, (iv) signed school or site approval, (v) signed parent consent, (vi) signed student consent. I placed advertisements in school newsletters, contacted youth workers, schools and Participation Coordinators, to seek their assistance in recruiting young people for the study, but none of these officials would allow me to contact a student or young person unless all documentation had been signed, so accordingly I was never able to even speak to a young person to explain what my research was about in order to gain consent. Consequently I gave up and kept the data focus on official accounts of the policy. Thus, the transcript of the one student that I did interview was not included in the final data set. Not including young people in this research is a limitation and, despite these difficulties, an opportunity for further research. This is discussed in chapter 11.

The process of gaining access and approval to DET staff was time-consuming and onerous.⁴⁸ For instance, I had to 'sell' my way into DET sites (Walford, 1999) in order to even begin a discussion about what this research is about. This is a not uncommon problem in educational research (Walford, 1999). Doing some preliminary research on potential contacts, *before* making contact was helpful, since I am an outsider researcher and I do not have strong links into the school or education sector.

Potential participants were contacted either in person or via a third party, and invited to participate in an interview (Birbili, 1999). Interested participants received an information letter and consent form, which were explained again to the participant at the point of interview. Willing participants signed a consent form, and following this, a mutually suitable time and place was agreed upon to conduct the interview. All participants were asked about their views on the RSLA in a face-to-face interview situation. Interviews traversed between being semi-structured and quite unstructured. This allowed for some conversation or discussion to occur around the questions. Accordingly, some of the questions were modified in the context of the interview in ways that made it understandable for the participant. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed into word-processing documents by a professional transcribing service. In all, the interview participant sample was, by-and-large, self-selecting, and therefore, not a representative sample of the whole population.

⁴⁸ The most obvious barrier to proceeding with gaining access DET sites and DET staff was the DET ethics approval process itself. This was very lengthy and involved several levels of sign-off before I could even approach a research site.

Policy documents

As mentioned, in addition to interviews I collected a range of policy documents, referred to here as documented data (Punch, 2005, pp. 184-186). This included official policy proclamations, policy documents, tools, plans, promotional materials, charts, and diagrams. The scope of potential documented data was wide-ranging, and subject to selection bias and ambiguity (Jacobs, 2006). In order for a document become part of the sample, I made a judgement of its overall significance to the study of RSLA using the following criteria:

1. Authenticity
2. Credibility
3. Representativeness
4. Meaning. (Jupp, 1996, cited in Punch, 2005, p.185)

Documents were chosen because I had assessed them to be substantive representations of the policy because they were either documents that were directly about the policy or were documents produced by the people closest to the policy practices, that is, those people authorised and resourced to translate the policy dictates into practice.

In collecting a sample of documents relevant to RSLA, I used a number of methods. I searched the Factiva⁴⁹ database for newspaper accounts of the policy using search terms such as 'raising the school leaving age' and 'school leaving age'. The *West Australian* daily newspaper was selected. I also searched

⁴⁹ Factiva is an online searchable database that can be used to source news content. See further: <http://factiva.com/>

Hansard⁵⁰ online using similar search terms. This provided some documentation of the parliamentary commentary that occurred in the lead up to the legislative change.

Another important source of documentary data was the DET website itself, which had a link to a webpage dedicated to the raised school leaving age⁵¹. This website contained many public domain documents, including numerous PowerPoint and PDF documents outlining various engagement programs that were being developed and trialled throughout Western Australia. These engagement programs were presented at an annual 'Engagement Forum' hosted each year by DET in Perth.

Engagement programs are an important component of the policy practices, for they seek to provide ways to enable students to continue an approved pathway in education, work or training until the end of the year that they turn 17.

Engagement programs focus on students deemed at risk of 'disengaging' or not participating in school, work or other education. Furthermore, given that these engagement programs were being developed State-wide, these documents enabled me to gain a broader perspective of what was happening throughout Western Australia.⁵² The documentation of the various State-wide engagement programs also contained data and photographs of the programs 'in action', offering an additional window into the policy practices beyond my local area.

⁵⁰ Hansard is a record of the full recorded transcripts of parliamentary proceedings. Hansard records of the Western Australian Parliament are available online. See further: <http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/web/newwebparl.nsf/iframewebpages/hansard+-+daily+transcripts>

⁵¹ <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolleavingage/detcms/portal/>

⁵² This enabled a set of data that was representative of a geographical area that was broader than the interviews, which were confined to the South West of Western Australia.

The DET website also contained additional public domain documents that were readily accessible, such as reports, plans, strategic frameworks, tools and job position descriptions for people employed under the edicts of the policy.

Table six summarises the data types and their quantities that comprised the final data set:⁵³

Table 6: Data types and quantities

Quantity	Type	Details	Total interview time
2	Interviews	School Teachers/Student Advisors	92 minutes
9	Interviews	DET Participation Coordinators / Managers of Participation	196 minutes
3	Interviews	Youth workers	116 minutes
184	Documents	Details on these documents are in Appendix six	
Total interviews	14		
Total policy documents	184		

Analysis and representation

How were the conclusions arrived at? What is the basis of the analysis and argument? What methods and processes were used? There have been some methodological problems to deal with in trying to undertake a governmental analysis, but some benefits too. The seven conceptual tools developed out of the

⁵³ The volume of the final data set was of a substantive nature, and when printed and catalogued filled four A4 Lever Arch files.

governmentality literature and discussed in chapter four provided the groundwork for the first layer of analysis, which is an analytics of government (Dean, 1999; Marston & McDonald, 2006). Critical realism provided the second layer of analysis (Brown, 2007; Danermark et al., 2002; Houston, 2001; Sims-Schouten et al., 2007). Here, I explain how I tackled these perspectives, worked with their strengths, processed the data, drew conclusions, and wrote the basis for the following chapters.

Analysing the data: What were the methods and steps?

Coding

Once the data was collected, transcribed, printed and filed, I began the process of data organisation and reduction, working on refining codes for the first level of analysis (Neuman, 2007). I developed codes that would enable the analysis to be undertaken in a coherent manner. *A Priori* codes (Willis, 2006) from the governmentality literature as described in chapter four guided this step. Codes were refined further using axial coding processes (Neuman, 2007) that linked the emerging data analysis with the theoretical framework; the aim here was to avoid descending into a straight-forward grounded theory analysis (Dey, 1999) using only inductive codes (Willis, 2006). In short, codes were derived from the theory first and then worked into the analysis and back again in a process of dialectical theory building and conceptual refinement. This is a process of abduction, in which empirical material is used to enrich theory, and theory is used to “transcend ‘facts’ in order to achieve scope” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 4).

Utilising the bones of the conceptual framework from chapter four made trawling through a significant volume, scope and variety of data more focussed than using an inductive grounded approach. The seven coded constructs derived from governmentality theory provided an analytical frame from which to make judgements about the data. At the same time, I was mindful of the potential that the data would be selectively sourced only insofar as it conformed to the theoretical concepts. The danger of confirmation bias is acknowledged, and I worked to keep the focus on locating the specific character of the data in light of the concepts as to highlight its illustrative power primarily. Table seven—introduced first in chapter four and reproduced here as a point of reference—provided the means for categorising and organising the data.

Table 7: Codes for analysis

Concept	Description	Condensed meaning
Conduct of conduct	The guidance of one's conduct and the conduct of others. Self-government of thought and action. Attempts to encourage self-management.	Strategies of government of self and others.
Pastoral power	Forms of surveillance, 'shepherding', watching over particular groups of people. A concern for the welfare and whereabouts of particular groups of people. Methods of providing an account of the welfare and whereabouts of people. Strategies of individualising student engagement in education.	Shepherd, caretaker, power over the one.
Biopower	Approaches to ensuring the health, welfare, and social functioning of population groups; rationalities about social welfare and how to optimise social functioning; broad methods of categorising and defining social problems and how to address them; methods of regulating the conduct of population groups.	Strategy for health, wealth, social welfare, power over the many.
Discipline	Panoptic processes of inspection of conduct; norms and routines of managing conduct; institutionalised and routinised forms of regulation and control.	Power as institutional practice, routines.
Rationality	Pattern of legitimating thought; common sense ethos; forms of knowledge that make a problem governable; moralistic propositions (for example, goals, correct functions, roles and responsibilities; responsibilities of social actors); epistemological account of the problem to be governed; an idiom or rhetoric that orientates thinking in a way that makes problems amenable to intervention.	Thought, reason, epistemology of problem.
Technologies	Administrative and surveilling practices; mechanisms and practices of authorities; intellectual tools (for example, calculating, assessing, documenting); inscription devices (for example, procedures by which phenomena is translated into information); centres of calculation (for example, enclaves of knowledge and professional expertise); programs for example, translation of taken-for-granted rationality into practical interventions and the groups of people who design and run them).	Tools, methods, instruments.
Ethics	Self-formation practices; ideal disposition or subject position (ethical substance); obligations of citizenship (mode of subjection); mastery of one's conduct (attitude); goal for one's self practices (teleology).	Norms, virtues, self-constitution.

Units and levels of analysis

In keeping with the theoretical and methodological framework of this study, the level of analysis used to develop conclusions, themes and insights about the data is that of macro/society (Neuman, 2007, pp. 95-97).⁵⁴ I approached the data by making judgements at this broad macro level and strived to avoid just theorising at the level of individuals, per se. This is because the policy, as I am studying it, is framed as a broader political discourse that can be understood at the level of society, even as it intersects with and interacts with individual people.

It follows then that the unit of analysis is groups and social artefacts, rather than individuals, organisations, geographical locations, or social interactions (Neuman, 2007, pp. 96-97). By groups I mean a collective of people authorised to make proclamations about and intervene with young people under the policy. These are the people interviewed for the study and the unit of analysis is directed at what this group as a whole does and says. Such groups may be seen as broadly implicated in and part of a wider political and social culture concerned with RSLA. By social artefacts it is meant the written products published under the remit of the policy. These are the literature and policy documents. When looking at the different kinds of data together as a complete set, I was categorising and organising the statements in the transcripts and the

⁵⁴ According to Neuman (2007, pp. 95-96) a level of analysis “is the level of reality to which theoretical explanations refer.” The macro/society level of analysis here refers to the Western Australian socio-political policy context of RSLA.

text from the policy documents into themes that are broadly understood and applicable at a macro/society level.

The issue though is that the transcript data is collected from *individuals* and it was tempting to keep the unit of analysis there. In the presentation of the data I do indicate the positional role of the respondent and I also indicate the source documents used in the data, but what I am really focussing on is participant testimony and documents as exemplars of the broader political discourse of which they are a part. In the following chapters, extracts of data are used as forms of evidence of the broader data themes. Keeping the focus on macro/society was achieved also by the incorporation of other policy documents and literature more broadly and in doing so I strived to avoid making generalised claims from a single case (that is, a person interviewed). Furthermore, the theoretical/concept descriptions used as codes in the analysis were kept broad enough to keep the focus on the macro/society level rather than concluding on what this person or that person says or does. The purpose of the analysis was to build a 'whole picture' out of the parts that I am focussing on.

Handling qualitative materials

When undertaking the data analysis, I understood the theoretical and conceptual backdrop that informed it. However, at the level of handling raw data I found I needed a more specific *process* to deal with all the data, particularly at the point of writing the findings into a coherent discussion and argument. To solve this

problem I drew selectively on Altheide's (1996) work on analysing qualitative media data as a framework to help me move from codes and pieces of text to something more along the lines of a discussion about what this all means. This included practical matters of sorting, cutting, synthesising and shuffling the data back and forth in order to decide what level each piece of data resembled, and what should be included or discarded. The result was the development of a perspectival analysis on the 'problem' of compulsory education and school leaving age.

Process of data analysis

Data analysis involved a process of conceptual refinement, identification of overlapping concepts, comparing and contrasting differences and contradictions, and identifying and developing useful illustrations and examples. When performing the data analysis, I summarised the themes, codes, and frames, and began to incorporate illustrative examples, relevant theoretical concepts and insights about the data. Theorising the data involved taking concepts, codes, and themes, and beginning the process of theoretical interpretation. At this level, a critical realist reading of governmentality provided the intellectual tools for this task. To be explicit, and in following Altheide (1996), I worked with the raw data in the following ways:

1. I began by coding and cataloguing the data. I had already sorted all of the transcripts and policy documents into four x A4 Lever Arch files, assigning each 'document' a distinctive number. These were the hard copies of the data, but I held a full electronic set catalogued in the same

way. I began to code the data according to the governmentality concepts in Table seven previously. I created two separate templates, each containing a table with columns headed with the coded constructs (rationalities, biopower, pastoral power, conduct-of-conduct, ethics, technologies, and discipline) and systematically began to work my way through the data for text that illustrated these constructs. I began to copy/paste sections of the raw data into each relevant column in the table. In this way, I selected large pieces of text and passages of interview data that were most directly representative of the conceptual meanings in the codes. This involved making specific judgements about each segment of text.⁵⁵ Once this was completed, I had reduced hundreds of pages of data to down to 50 pages of raw data text organised into columns, each assigned to a concept in the theoretical framework.

2. These documents were printed and I then examined them again using a 'low-tech' method of a highlighter marker and ball-point pen, working on isolating key pieces of text that were the most illustrative of the governmental concepts and theory.⁵⁶

Figure four, following, gives a snapshot of what this looked like:

⁵⁵ Segments of text include a paragraph of interview data, sentence, statement, or heading used in policy documents.

⁵⁶ I experimented with Nvivo (a qualitative data analysis software program) but found this too mechanical and it did not allow much room for an intellectualisation of the data, something that Privitera (1995) explains is the point behind Foucault's archeological and genealogical methods, and what Alvesson and Sköldberg refer to as the intellectualisation of method (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

Figure 4: Example of a template used to sort data

Phase 1 Data Breakdown: Transcripts

CONDUCT OF CONDUCT	PASTORAL	BIOPOWER	DISCIPLINE
<p>tangent and then realise, well hang on a minute, I can't do that until I'm 18 because I can't get my HR license until I'm 18, and something like that. So, okay you've only just turned 16, and what are we going to do between here and there, and stuff like that. #7</p> <p>Yeah okay. It's actually, also the IPP is part of the career development that they're trying to implement at school, which is like, running parallel to this legislation, and looking at career as a long term - what's the phrase - lifelong learning process is your career. Yeah so, it might be doing various jobs in your lifelong pathway. #7</p> <p>[disengaged is] Being a couch potato, which is what - yeah so, basically, our role is to get them participating again in something. And so, for some that actually might only be a casual job at McDonald's, or IGA, or something like that. But for them that's a good outcome if they haven't had a role model actually working, getting up and going to work and whatever. So, for others it might be doing - we've got a great Certificate I program in leadership - Cert I in Leadership - happening now, and it's got young people who haven't been engaged in school, but engaging in doing a variety of different things that will add to their life skills and whatever. #7</p> <p>It's probably more case management. We're actually supposed to be transition brokers. So, basically, our position is - come in - we identify what the barrier is to the young person being involved in education, training or employment - and negotiate the breakdown of that barrier, supposedly. So, which is sometimes easier said than others. For example, say, transport - you know, I mean, now if you've got a young kid who wants to be working in an agricultural area, transport's a huge issue, unless they've got family they can rely on. Because</p>	<p>Yeah - tends to be - yeah, the norm. It's not very often that they get to us just through lack of attendance. So, because there's supposed to be certain processes and procedures at different attendance levels, but that's all a school thing. And we don't go chasing them because we've got enough on our plates anyway. So, yeah, but generally, I mean yes, that's the terminology and the way it's used, but it's because they've got other things happening in their life, which means they are at risk of staying disengaged, you know ... #7</p> <p>Well it probably is helping some young people because it is something that's being offered that wasn't before, that these young people wouldn't be followed up, which some would really appreciate that it wasn't still happening, because they get sick and tired of you coming and knocking on their door - and, why aren't you doing anything, etcetera. #7</p> <p>I guess the most important thing is how to work one on one with a young person; so some knowledge around what adolescence is, and, that cycle of life is really important. Some skills in initial counselling, so being able to build rapport and also to make an assessment of where the persons at and what's required, and then at some point to implement some kind of intervention, nothing too detailed necessarily #7</p> <p>and if you can get to them then, when they're experiencing, I don't want to come to school anymore, I'm not getting anything out of it, then, I think we could probably, it's better to implement something then, than try and get them back into the system after they've been away for 12 months, but we're definitely having some success with young people down there in re-engaging them, and building their confidence in themselves, that they can do things, and enrolling them in courses and things, and getting them</p>	<p>actually moving on any kind of pathway towards anything, so their behaviours are usually quite difficult, or they're just simply stagnant and not moving. #8</p> <p>Now, I mean, another part of that might be that there's a whole range of reasons why the young person is not engaging, and those could be through no fault of their own, for example, we've had a number of young people with mental illness, a number of young people whose parents are sick, and they're the main carers, and a number of young people where transport is a real, it's just too demanding for them, and they're not ready to leave home. So there's a whole range of reasons why they could be not engaging, not simply because of their experience of school, although that is quite a significant factor from many of our young people, because of their negative experience at school, either between them and the teachers, them and the curriculum, or them and their peers. #8</p> <p>Well once they leave school, it's often the case that they'll get in with the wrong crowd, they'll start to, because of the boredom factor, they're not doing anything, they'll get involved in either drugs or some kind of criminal behaviour and it all spirals out of whack from there, so, and the other thing I guess is confidence, their own self-esteem, we certainly see that in some of the ones that haven't been to school in over 12 months, and, so the other thing that we would like to see is being able to tackle some of those young people a lot earlier, because a lot of them do drop out in year 9, or start to disengage in year 9, they're still attending, but they're disengaging. #8</p> <p>I think, due to the skills shortage the overall skill shortage, they've compared what migrants are skilled in - and they're coming</p>	<p>Q: Okay.</p> <p>A: We're called transition brokers.</p> <p>Q: Okay so brokerage is the -?</p> <p>A: So brokerage is the key word for the - and the title would have been transition broker or something like that originally. #13</p> <p>We get a little bit of background from schools mainly on their attendance and behaviour - you need to actually encourage them all to talk about the cases and talk to Jeanette who's our Retention and Participation Officer who does 15 and under in the Aboriginal Team because we do a lot of home and as I said, to ensure your safety at least know a little bit of the history and while combine to some of the house, that's the main thing is collect a bit of that background.</p> <p>Q: And what about statistics and data that the Department produces anything, do you have lists?</p> <p>A: We have lists, we get the school enrolment list, that's what I said, we know every child because you actually get - every school will send you their lists of Year 11 enrolments.</p> <p>Q: And any red flags on there?</p> <p>A: They - you tend find we just collect what we call the need data, so we've gone round to every school in the district and asked them to identify Year 10 students potentially at risk of disengaging or have already disengaged, so we've already done that so you have a data and Jeanette the Retention Officer, she passes over her Year 10, so there's a bit of an issue if she's got students on there that the school hasn't identified, so you really have a good idea of how many - places like Bunbury High, you've got a few more but of them because they've got eaten at Donnybrook students</p>

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- Having sorted the data conceptually, the next step was to begin to identify frames, themes and discourses (Altheide, 1996) within the resulting data. Here, I took all the coded data and began to refine it further. To assist this process I wrote and described the main themes and frames under each conceptual heading onto an A2 piece of card-paper. This process was drafted and redrafted several times and enabled me to represent the main theoretical components in thematic form by writing the data into conceptual themes and by including some descriptive illustrations.

Figures five and six, following, show the final drafts of this process:

Figure 5: Map of sorted data and conceptual themes

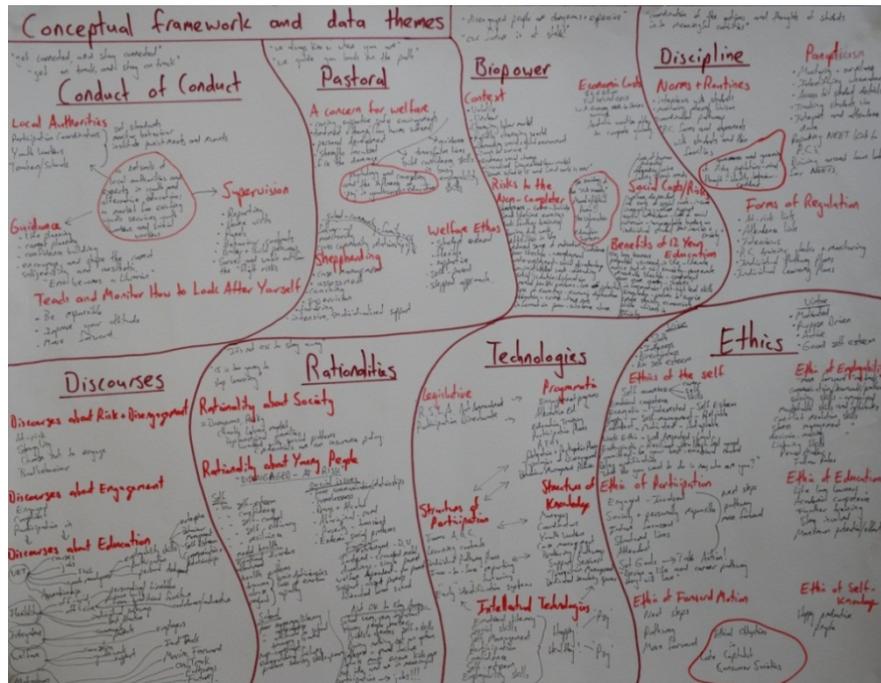
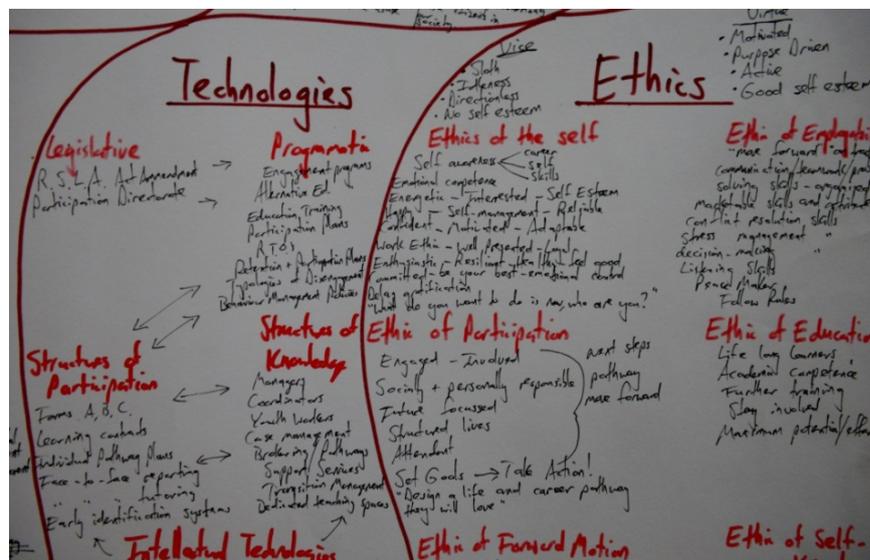


Figure 6: Close-up map of sorted data and conceptual themes



4. Having completed this 'map', I then began to write drafts of this analysis in note form, including relevant pieces of data as evidence and illustrations of the theoretical ideas at work. This ultimately became the basis of a detailed document of data analysis using just the seven governmentality codes as the *first level of analysis*. The result was a 75-page document that incorporated examples of data, conceptual illustrations, and references to further theoretical literature on the topic. This presented the data in thematic form and in reference to the theoretical and conceptual governmental framework of this research.

The final schematic of this governmental coded analysis is depicted in Table eight, following:

Table 8: Data analysis schematic

Concept	Theme
Conduct of conduct	<p>Conduct as acceptable participation</p> <p>Conduct as acceptable attitude</p> <p>Conduct as acceptable aesthetic</p> <p>Conduct as being visible</p> <p>Conduct as self-control</p>
Discipline	<p>Norms and routines</p> <p>Panopticism, watching and checking on young people</p>
Rationalities	<p>Rationalities about society: The world is dangerous</p> <p>Rationalities about young people: Young people are at risk</p> <p>'Self' is damaged and needs repair</p> <p>Mental health in crisis</p> <p>School is not for some people, but it is</p> <p>Social problems keep kids out of school</p> <p>Family problems keep kids out of school</p> <p>Moralistic sensibility: It's not OK to stay away</p>
Biopower	<p>Context: Risk society</p> <p>Economic costs: School leaving is expensive</p> <p>Social costs and risks</p> <p>Risks to the non-completer</p> <p>Benefits of 12 years of education</p>
Pastoral power	<p>Shepherding young people into education</p> <p>Surveillance</p>
Technologies	<p>Legislative technologies</p> <p>Programmatic technologies</p> <p>Procedural technologies: micro-management</p> <p>Intellectual technologies: Engagement and disengagement</p>
Ethics	<p>Ethic of the self</p> <p>Ethic of participation</p> <p>Ethic of employability</p> <p>Ethic of learning</p> <p>Ethic of well-being</p> <p>Ethic of forward motion</p>

5. Once this level of governmental analysis was complete, I went back over these findings and began to consider them again, but this time using a more critical realist lens. This was the *second* level of interpretation. I wanted to know what was underneath or informative and constitutive of RSLA, and what could account for or *explain* the deployment of these particular forms and expressions of governmental power identified in the first phase. Furthermore, I began to identify distinctions between transitive concepts and constructs and intransitive practices and objects. So, I subjected the 75-page governmental analysis document to a realist reading and again began to draw out themes, recurring tones, and concepts more broadly representative of the background context of RSLA looking more closely at practice and material forms. At the same time, I layered into the writing some evaluation and criticisms of RSLA by identifying its weaknesses and limitations. These are summarised in chapter 11.

To be clear, the first level of analysis (analytics of government) is *descriptive*, and the second level (critical realism) is *explanatory*. However, in presenting this analysis, I work the two processes together in the following chapters, and in doing so, combine the strengths of a governmental critical realist analysis to produce the findings and conclusions about RSLA.

The argument that follows...

The data and the related sub-themes and categories presented in the next four chapters are best seen as a series of related and overlapping discussions and examples that are used to give conceptual depth and specific illustrations of RSLA at work. As will be shown and explained, much of the analysis and conclusions drawn echoes other governmentality education and policy studies (for example, Edwards, 2002; Gillies, 2008; Peters, 1996). At the same time,

there are local and specific characteristics at work in RSLA, and these will be identified also.

What is revealing about the analysis portrayed in the next four chapters is the pervasive, almost seamless rationality that is woven into the RSLA policy. This power and rationality is set amongst a backdrop of neoliberal ethics, a preoccupation with risk and its historical antecedent—globalisation—and perceptions about a crisis among young people, families and their limitations and difficulties in obtaining work and functioning as self-reliant citizens. In the final analysis, four broad arguments are identified. These are:

1. RSLA is driven by an explicit focus on developing and styling young people's ethical self as a neoliberal citizen-subject. This argument is the basis of chapter seven, and the relevant theoretical concepts are *technologies*, and *ethics*.
2. RSLA is underpinned by a preoccupation with risk and young people, and sees disengagement as a danger to young people themselves and society more broadly. This argument is the basis of chapter eight, and the relevant theoretical concept is *rationalities*.
3. The practices of RSLA are examples of the way that the roles and functions of families are being subsumed and taken over by state and non-state entities. This argument is the basis of chapter nine, and the relevant theoretical concepts are *pastoral power*, *conduct of conduct*, and *discipline*.
4. RSLA embodies a distinct 'anxiety' about global and local economic uncertainties and expresses a moral concern for young people to become work-ready. This argument is the basis of chapter 10, and the relevant theoretical concept is *biopower*.

It is likely though, that by itself this could be seen as an incomplete picture.

There are undoubtedly gaps and silences, breaks, ruptures and discontinuities in

RSLA discourse not identified in this analysis. This point is not to homogenise RSLA as a causal totality (Kendall & Wickham, 1999). However, the RSLA policy discourse and its mechanisms of power and rationality appear to look like a perfectly hermeneutically sealed black box (Latour, 1987); a closed system of ideas and practices that are self-referential and beyond question. The RSLA political discourse and its practices lack depth and imagination because it cycles around a few simplistic ideas about school, young people, and compulsory education and work. It is a graphic portraiture of a dim repertoire of well-rehearsed and tired ideas about school and young people, dug out of the 1980's and 1990's and recycled with a 21st century gloss. It is a rationality that constitutes education as a narrow instrument of capital, that casts young people as economic fodder, and that saddles the responsibility for managing the many real and significant risks of 21st century society squarely on the shoulders of the young people themselves.

Once I had completed the data analysis, I wrote a short piece of prose to try and stitch together the main threads of the RSLA reasoning. This was so I could sort out in my mind what the program logic was. The extract that follows is an amalgam of the findings in the data, presented here as a prelude to the following chapters. The policy 'logic', if it were to be expressed as series of 'if-then' propositions and conclusions (Wall, 2001, p. 21) can be described as follows:

*It's a **dangerous world out there**.*

Some kids are damaged by the dangerous world; others soon will be.

So, they need to stay engaged in education and training until age 17—for their protection and for the good of society.

But, some kids are disengaged, or at-risk of being disengaged from school. They fall off the track. Go missing. Become lost.

Because they lack nearly everything that makes up being an acceptable human being/citizen, they can't participate, or choose not to. They will become a burden on society, and a risk to themselves and others. Unless something is done.

So, they must be classified, watched, monitored, and tracked at every opportunity. Always visible. Always accounted for; known, and in the light.

They need therapy, counselling, and repairs to their broken self-esteem and lack of confidence and self-worth.

They need welfare services, referral services, and social support.

They need flexible and individualised programs of learning.

They need someone to always watch over them, to light the way forward, to move on and to keep moving.

They need rules, obligations, contracts—and they need systems and people to enforce them.

They need adventure camps, cooking classes, and lessons in resumes and first aid training.

The need to start to think of themselves as motivated, and goal setting, self-reliant, and responsible people.

They need lots of pathways and access to vocational training, apprenticeships and traineeships. Lots!

They ought to participate in and re-engage with meaningful activities that are designed and sanctioned by 'experts' in working with youth.

Soon, these young people become work-ready. Employable. Happy. Confident. Self-reliant. Goal-seeking.

Now they are compliant functioning citizen-subjects who can manage their own affairs and find and keep jobs.

*When they have found and kept their jobs, all is well. They are now 'on-track' and not as at-risk of (or to) the **dangerous world out there**.*

Although I originally thought that RSLA was *prima facie* about education and learning, I was wrong: I found very little to do with learning and education at all.

RSLA is a compelling example of the formulation and deployment of

governmental power on young people in educational settings, as the following chapters attest.

CHAPTER 7 – TECHNOLOGIES AND ETHICS OF THE RSLA NEOLIBERAL ENTERPRISE

There's still students coming through, but this time the issues that we face with year 10, we now face at year 11. What do we do with our pathetic group, what do we do with the disengaged group, what do we do with the unmotivated group? (Interview #14, Teacher/Student Advisor)

...it is axiomatic that selves of certain sorts are necessary for the market, or, more specifically for late capitalism's acquisitive march. That is, in basic ideological terms, capital's ongoing expansion benefits from the participation of individuals who fit whatever the current mold [sic] is for an ideal citizen – that is, a 'good' consumer and a 'good' worker. (Sanders, 2012, p. 321)

Introduction

The quote above by Sanders (2012) neatly encapsulates the argument of this chapter: RSLA is concerned with developing and styling young people's ethical selves as neoliberal citizen-subjects. In this sense, RSLA practices involve attempts at getting young people to *participate*, to be more self-reliant and confident, to see themselves as valuable workers with potential, and to embark on a journey into the future where they will be happy, goal-orientated, purposeful workers and consumers.

Specific technologies of power are developed and put in place and operate as a framework that situates various interventions with young people. These include higher order legislative technologies, right down to specific tools and methods used in counselling young people into appropriate forms of education, training

and work. The moral expectation placed on young people expects them to commit themselves to normatively defined and socially sanctioned standards of participation in education. These standards are tied to expectations of responsible citizenship. That is, a responsible citizen *ought* to freely participate in required forms of education, and required forms of education *should* produce responsible citizens.

However, it is not really education that that is the goal here—it is participation and the cultivation of a particular disposition, attitude and behaviour that is the real aim. Learning, in the sense of the curriculum of discipline specific knowledge and skills, is not the main game. What is more important is *being*; and various technologies exist under RSLA to work into young people an ethos of *participation* and *forward motion*. The destination? A journey into employment.

Theoretical considerations: Neoliberalism

The cultural and political context that intersects with the RSLA policy reform is that of neoliberalism. This concept of neoliberalism is more than just a *political ideology* or a set of various beliefs about the role of governments, about the economy, and about the ‘fundamentals’ of human nature (Kendall, 2003; Nevile, 1998; Wheelwright, 1993). These ‘fundamentals’ are typically said to be activated by a free-market self-regulating economy and minimalist state

encouraging individualism, entrepreneurial attitudes and acquisition (Gilbert, 2013; Thorsen, 2010).

More sophisticated accounts of the meaning of neoliberalism are offered by Brenner, Peck and Theodore (2010a). They explain that neoliberalism can be understood as involving highly specific market driven forms of re-regulation, which are reactions to historically and geopolitically specific processes.

Furthermore, neoliberalism is hybridised and patterned, as opposed to being totalising and singular in its expression and practice (Brenner, et al., 2010a).

Brenner, Peck and Theodore (2010b) refer to neoliberalism as “variegated” (p. 182). They say that “neoliberalism is understood variously as a bundle of (favoured) policies, as a tendential process of institutional transformation, as an emergent form of subjectivity, as a reflection of realigned hegemonic interests, or as some combination of the latter” (Brenner et al., 2010b, p. 183). Far from being a global and totalising ideology, neoliberalism contains specific forms and functions that are articulated in diverse ways.

The term neoliberalism is rarely discussed in the literature in sympathetic tones (Thorsen, 2010), with some writers linking neoliberalism with policies that include deregulation, privatisation, cutbacks in public spending on public/social policies and programs, and, belief that the individual in society is paramount and will find freedom, democracy and emancipation through rational choice in the market (Ife, 1997; Rees, 1997). Neoliberalism may be these things, but it is also marks an intellectual development of liberal philosophy (Coleman, 2013); it is an

expression of modernity that finds its expression in educational settings too (Peters, 1996).

The argument here is that neoliberalism, as an intellectual project, finds its way into various contexts by which knowledge and education are turned into economic prescriptions coded within a discourse of *entrepreneurialism*. Peters (1996) gives examples of this discourse:

“excellence,” “innovation, improvement and upgrading,” “achieving more with less,” “technological literacy,” “information and telecommunications revolutions,” “international marketing and management,” “skills training,” “performance,” “efficiency” and “enterprise”. (pp. 88-89)

Some of this terminology—enterprise, for instance—are examples of transitive constructions and codes that are given to interpretation and change. At the same time, these also point to forms of an intransitive realism. *Things happen* in specific contexts and in specific ways as an artefact of these political ideals and discursive formations. Structures and material patterns are given life, and this is the point made by Wilkins (2012) in saying that neoliberalism should be understood not only within the remit of its own lexicon, but as “cultural forms and relations that underpin its articulation and mobilization” (p. 162). RSLA is an expression of neoliberal discourse that is formulated into various practical technologies and ethical edicts that give shape to a series of everyday practices directed towards young people. These are specific governing *practices*, but their very existence is made possible within a broader context of neoliberal discourse, ethics, and politics.

There is a distinction though that needs to be made between classical liberalism and neoliberalism.⁵⁷ Somewhat awkwardly, RSLA straddles both of these views. The classical Ordo-liberal view takes things such as ‘human freedom’ as *naturally* occurring pre-conditions, and government is the main formal mechanism for intervening with and constraining such freedoms, albeit in varying degrees (Lemke, 2001). In this sense, RSLA is an intervention couched as a form of welfare that is a corrective to market forces, and is seen to work with young people’s natural proclivities towards achievement and excellence.

For neoliberals, people are subjected to and constructed *by market principles* and as such governable *by them* (Lemke, 2001). What ensues is an illusion of liberty, for the behaviour of the supposed autonomous, rational, economic subject is not specifically an *A Priori* naturally occurring human condition after all, but is artificially stimulated and designed by the conditions and forces of the market (Lemke, 2001). People are products of the market and being a certain *kind* of consumer is a market invention (Lemke, 2001). The social expectations of being a consumer, entrepreneur, and of being economically rational and autonomous have the veneer of human nature, but these are market inventions written onto the body of the young person. Young people are indelibly inked by the ideals of neoliberalism and their lives, trajectories and narratives are designed accordingly. Under the neoliberal view, the participating young person, for

⁵⁷ According to Lemke (2001) the difference between the classical Ordo-liberals and the neoliberals is one of inversion. Whereas the Ordo-liberals see the market as brought into existence by the intervention of the state, the neoliberals see the state, and indeed all human activity, as subjected to the organising and regulating principles of the market. In this sense, the state and its institutions are a product of the market, not the other way around. For a more detailed explanation of this argument see Appendix two.

example, is an effect or product, or what Lemke (2001) refers to as an *A Posterior* construct. So, for neoliberals, the self must be worked upon and styled— participation, for example, must be styled, groomed, and *produced*.

In this sense, neoliberalism is not just an abstracted essentialised ideology of the market, but a “political *practice* [that is] extremely inventive” (Kendall, 2003, p. 2, emphasis added). In other words, neoliberalism is an ideological doctrine and a discourse manifest in the myriad of daily interactions, practices, and strategies of power (Gordon, 1991, p. 27). This is a shift away from a political rationality of welfarism towards a political rationality of neoliberalism. The latter embodies particular governmental technologies and ethical programs (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 200). In RSLA, both welfarist and consumer ethics are evident.

Neoliberal ethics

What do you want to be when? is now replaced by who are you and what do you love to do? (Document #24)

Who are you and what do you love to do? The quote above from the data captures an important point about the styling of the self. Ethics in the sense used here concerns self-awareness and self-improvement in accordance with culturally sanctioned moral obligations (Bernauer & Mahon, 1994; Binkley, 2009; Davidson, 1994, p. 125). These cultural norms are those associated with neoliberalism by which the “subject is an individual who is morally responsible for navigating the social realm using rational choice and cost-benefit calculations

grounded on market-based principles to the exclusion of all other ethical values and social interests” (Hamann, 2009, p. 37).

Under RSLA, these obligations are concerned with participation in education and training and the preparation of employability skills. Practical interventions in the form of engagement programs are structured attempts at transforming the self of young people from being disengaged, damaged and underdeveloped into high functioning worker-citizens, who have mastery over their self-conduct. This is the obligation of citizenship to which young people are expected to submit. Thus, these interventions involve normalising powers that exert control over young people, but at the same time, are exhortations towards self-control. Taking care of oneself and learning how to live (Foucault, 2000, p. 260) is important, and energy and resources are directed to this end, particularly towards certain groups of young people classed as being ‘at-risk’. In essence, they are directed and exhorted to work on the self, to craft it into a *neoliberal subject* (Binkley, 2009).

The principal RSLA technologies used to house these ethical self-practices are engagement programs. Engagement programs are specific school and non-school based programs that were developed in response to the change in legislation. These are designed to take disengaged at-risk young people and redefine them as better people, more attuned to learning and work. This is the ideal disposition or subject position—the ethical substance or product. The goal

of such self-practices is an ethical obligation of late capitalist consumer society to become better workers, or *homo-economicus* (Hamann, 2009).

Consider the following extracts from the data as examples of an ethic of self-improvement under the guise of education:

Improved performance. Self-management skills. (Document #5)

Enhanced self-esteem, confidence, motivation and social skills.
(Document #66)

A balanced and integrated set of self-management, interpersonal, study and employability skills. (Document #174)

Skills in intelligent self-management...[and] a set of technology skills essential for 21st century working and personal life. An enhanced awareness of their career potential and a greater knowledge and confidence to pursue it. (Document #174)

These are typical of the promises of various engagement programs developed between 2006 and 2009 that targeted and enrolled young people deemed disengaged from school and life. What is instructive about these programs and other aspects of RSLA is that they reveal a particular kind of ethic of the self—the ideal subject to aspire to and the ethical substance aimed for. It also reveals the forms of power deployed to govern, shape and design this kind of person. This is the overall policy ethic insofar as practices underneath the ambit of the policy steer people into an ethical frame, and in doing so, reward certain subjectivities and scorn others.

There are a number of strands to this, set out as ethical expectations or norms. First, there is an ethic of the self. The ideal subject is configured as a form of self-

awareness and works towards being more confident, in control, energetic and committed to excellence. They ought to freely and actively participate in all learning and work opportunities available to them and they are future focussed and goal orientated. Second, young people are expected to work hard to acquire and develop a repertoire of 'employability skills', skills that are concerned with 'getting along' and functioning in work environments. These include communication, teamwork, problem-solving and even mediation and peace-making skills. Finally, the ethical young person subscribes to and is compelled by a narrative of 'forward motion'. History is linear and life is a journey along a track. The ethical young person will undertake this journey; always moving forward—happy, productive, confident.

Ethic of the self

Much of the intent or purpose of working with young people in engagement programs and elsewhere focusses on self-awareness, and in particular, improving self-esteem. The ideal disposition and character of the young person should demonstrate emotional competence and self-management. They feel good about themselves. They are happy, reliable, confident, motivated and adaptable. Here are some typical examples of some of the purposes or intentions behind specific interventions such as engagement programs:

Feeling better about themselves. (Document #50)

Build their emotional skills for success. (Document #66)

Enhance self-esteem, confidence and motivation and social skills.
(Document #62)

Drumbeat is for improving self-esteem, confidence, communication and social skills, cooperation and emotional control. (Document #64)

Improve self-esteem, self-awareness and responsibility. (Document #68)

Improve self-esteem. (Document #73)

The starting premise behind all this is that young people who are seen to be disengaged from school are at the same time seen to be disengaged from *themselves* and from life in general. Their histories and social circumstances have presumably damaged their self-esteem and self-worth and this needs to be worked upon and nurtured. An added element to this concerns special attention to social and communication skills. So compelling is this idea that many engagement programs and practitioners conceptualised their main purpose along these lines and made self-esteem, confidence building and social skills development core objectives in their programs and other interventions with young people. This included things like adventure and outdoor activities and practical activities like cooking, first aid, and performing in group based challenges.

All this work and effort is a means to other ends: employment. The program logic⁵⁸ operating within the RSLA engagement programs is that for young people

⁵⁸ Program logic is a program's theory of action (Ganley & Ward, 2001) and is often used in program evaluation (Brousselle & Champagne, 2011). It proceeds from a conceptualisation of a problem, allocation of resources towards that problem, a strategy of intervention such as practical inputs, and a chain of reasoning to then produce outputs and outcomes. Engagement program logic was not explicitly stated in RSLA. However, in a crude sense the program logic supposes that disengagement can be corrected with interventions that produce engagement that then leads to employability that then leads to employment.

to secure employment, their self-esteem must be intact first, and they must be able to function in social settings. For example:

All this training helps but the essential ingredient is the desire to help students at risk to regain their self-esteem and to acquire employability skills that will advantage them in their pursuit [sic] of further education, training or employment. (Document #66)

Thus, a combination of what could be termed 'self-constructing activities' is integrated within an ethic of employability and includes things like:

...[a] structure of learning that enables young people to develop:

- a range of personal and work related skills;
- their confidence and self-esteem;
- their sense of personal and social responsibility. (Document #25)

Ethic of participation

Participation is a second dimension to this ethic. Participation means being engaged and involved. The normative elements of power running within the RSLA policy practices demand and expect participation. To not participate—to be 'disengaged'—is the great moral sin. Consider this example extracted from an interview with a Participation Coordinator:

...basically, our role is to get them participating again **in something**.

Q: And what should they be doing?

A: They should be involved in school, apprenticeships, traineeships, TAFE or employment or accommodation. (Interview #6, Participation Coordinator)

The push for an increase in overall participation outcomes, especially attendance, drives this. Arguably this is because the measure of success of the RSLA policy is a quantifiable increase in the number of students involved in full-time school, training, or work, as the following examples illustrate:

Increased student achievement, attendance and involvement in learning. (Document #1)

Increased attendance, improved performance. (Document #5)

However, while it is true that there is a legislative force operating here, in practice what is aimed at is voluntary compliance, or willingness on the part of the young person to recognise and come to terms with the 'fact' that participation is desirable and the *right thing to do*. Young people are interpellated⁵⁹ (in the philosophical sense) (Althusser, 1984) to see themselves and think of themselves as participating subjects who demonstrate and embody the following kinds of ideals:

Initiative and enterprise, planning and organising, self-management. (Document #10)

Under this ethic, young people should inhabit certain kinds of characteristics, such as:

Motivated, adaptable, positive self-esteem, reliability, work ethic, personal presentation, enthusiasm, loyalty. (Document #6)

⁵⁹ Interpellation is the idea that people are not autonomous and free but are constituted in terms necessary for successful capitalist accumulation. An example being the way that practitioners in RSLA 'hail' to a young person as being 'independent and self-reliant' and seeking out a life of work and consumption. Through this 'hailing', answers to the question 'who am I and what shall I do?' are provided and internalised.

As well as improvements reported in...structure of their lives.
(Document #50)

To adhere to the ethic of participation means to be involved and it means being socially and personally responsible. It requires having a structured life and to set goals and to take action to reach these goals.

Ethic of employability

A neoliberal self and an action of participation steers young people's attentions and their life trajectories towards employability. For example:

What are your special talents and skills?, What types of situations, environments and work roles have special appeal for you?, What types of organisations need what you can offer?, What innovative work arrangements will suit you and potential employers? (Document #24)

These are the sorts of questions put to young people as they contemplate a journey from school to work. But in order to make this journey, they must be armed and equipped with 'employability skills'. Unlike other learning contexts where the focus is on academic or vocational skills, the skills referred to here are not specific to any one job or career. They are not content-focussed academic or vocational skills or applied or pure forms of knowledge such as language, science, or mathematics. Rather, they are couched in the language of 'life skills' and skills associated with *personhood*. These include things like communication, teamwork and problem-solving skills. They refer to skills in being organised, managing conflict, managing stress and making decisions, such as:

Employability skills, communication, team work, problem solving, learning, technology. (Document #6)

The aims of the [program]... are to develop students' skills, confidence and career planning. Other life skills are also integrated such as: Learning Styles & Study Techniques, Effective Listening Skills, Conflict Resolution Strategies, Effective Communication in the Workplace, Problem Solving Skills, Decision Making Skills, Stress Management Skills, Tai Chi & Zen Do Kai, Relaxation Techniques, Independent Living, Outdoor Education. (Document #66)

It is apparent when examining the data that the kinds of benefits local authorities have in mind when they refer to and institutionalise these skills in their programs pertain to creating the right conditions for promoting positive organisational behaviours. In the absence of any formal qualification or credential, these kinds of behaviours and abilities are seen as marketable skills that would be attractive to employers as they would contribute to the employee fitting in and following the rules of work, while at the same time maintaining and contributing to a harmonious and productive work environment.

Ethic of learning

Education and learning, in whatever form it takes, is valorised. The value of learning is especially pushed towards those 'at-risk' groups who do not participate in learning (Fejes, 2006). Young people are expected to embrace an ethic of being lifelong learners. As before, they are interpellated (Althusser, 1984) to see themselves and think of themselves as lifelong learners, where learning is an investment in one's economic security (Simons, 2006). Such self-practices can be seen as a broader strategy of mobilising lifelong learning,

whereby state entities monitor and regulate these practices instead of providing direct services (Edwards, 2002). Young people's ethical responsibilities are to stay involved in education and training, and, as the following examples show, planning for and desiring further education and training is expected:

...assist students to **develop the awareness**, skills and knowledge that will enable them to become lifelong learners. (Document #1, emphasis added)

...further training/education...return/remain in school. (Document #5)

Perform and stay in school or get meaningful work. (Document #10)

As before, the purpose of this is linked to employment. Being a life-long learner is a governmental strategy of shaping peoples conduct in relation to their productivity (Edwards, 2002; Simons, 2006). So, lifelong learning is not just about learning *per se*, it is about creating a work ethic, competing in a market environment, and being as productive as possible (Edwards, 2002; Simons, 2006). Here are some examples of this:

Inspire young people to be their best in their life, career and study...Maximise their performance at school. (Document #66)

Students realised the concept of working for reward developed a work ethic. Increased awareness of the value of preparing for work. (Document #73)

Capitalist systems have a proclivity for growth and expansion (Joffe, 2011).

Learning for work, couched in the language of employability, is an important instrument of neoliberal capitalism (Ball, 2009).

Ethic of well-being

Integrated into these ideas of participation, employability and life-long learning is a worry over young people's happiness, as the following extract demonstrates:

Engagement, happy productive kids and that can be whether you're pushing trolleys, whether you've just been able to get out of bed at 8 o'clock every morning consistently, whatever it is that makes them happy, productive people and I don't mean productive as in earning lots of money or whatever just productive in that when they go to bed at night time they feel good. (Interview #11, Youth Worker)

Happy productive people: a modern expression of Aristotle's notion of eudemonism,⁶⁰ (Aristotle, 2000), perhaps? Partly driven by a dismal view of society and certain groups of young people, and partly by genuine concern, there is a worry and fretting over the happiness or otherwise of young people:

So, I want to make sure that they're happy doing it, knowing that there's something else. (Interview #4, Youth Worker)

Because participation in school has been linked to social wellbeing and health development (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004), any notion that young people would skip over or miss this truism raises alarms. In RSLA there is a desire for young people to attain a state of being happy and contented, but this is always intrinsically linked to employment, regardless of its form:

...they have a job, it might not be the best job, but they have a job, but

⁶⁰ Eudemonia is a core idea in Aristotle's ethics and political philosophy. It refers to an end point of all human activity to reach a state of well-being, or flourishing, and living a good life (Mann & Dann, 2005, p. 106). In RSLA this is somewhat evident, but unlike in Aristotle's more rounded conception, the pathway to happiness here is simply an instrumental activity involving some form of employment.

they're happy, because they're happy with who they are, they're happy with what they are doing, they're happy with who they're with.
(Interview #14, Teacher/Student Advisor)

It is also linked to an overall logic of social functioning and community wellbeing, where self-reliance and independence is the policy teleology:

I would like to think, that with our input, that they would fundamentally be doing something that they really enjoy and that they are healthy and happy in their occupation, and gainfully working in the community and providing for themselves and being able to sustain themselves and their families. (Interview #1, Youth Worker)

Ethic of forward motion

Finally, circulating in the ethical discourse of RSLA is an ethic of forward motion, of being on a path to somewhere better. Forward motion, expressed as *progress*, is an idea deeply ingrained in Western modernity (Harvey, 1989). Here are some RSLA examples of a discourse of progress and forward motion:

'Fast Track' their career / **transition** planning and mentoring programs.
(Document #66)

The program will provide a supportive stepped approach for each student to begin to **move into** their chosen field. (Document #174, emphasis added)

Transitioning to change, **moving forward** into work and education.
(Document #53, emphasis added)

Some engagement programs are even branded with this idea and include names such as *Fast-Track*, *Redirect*, *Kicking Goals*, *Change-makers*, and *Fostering Transition to Change*. These approaches "assume that the 'correct' route is a

linear movement from school to work, along a narrow trajectory from youth to adulthood” (Wyn, 2007a, p. 166).

In RSLA, young people are obligated to adhere to and demonstrate *forward motion* (Kemshall, Boeck, & Fleming, 2009), and they ought to be motivated to move forward much in the same way that unemployed people are solicited towards motivation to find employment by their income support case managers (McDonald & Marston, 2008). Someone who is not demonstrating an ideal of moving forward from an undesirable state (typically not participating in full-time activity and lacking a clear goal or plan) to a more desired state (typically willing participation in full-time activity with a clear goal or plan in mind) is seen as disengaged and marked out for attention:

You know, you can have a young person that does nothing through year 11 and 12 and it doesn't matter what you do with them or what you offer them, **they're just not going to move forward**. One day in the future they might move forward, but in that time, and really, **they just get marked at a certain point as refusing to engage**. (Interview #5, Participation Coordinator, emphasis added)

In concert with much of the starting premises underpinning the work of engagement is the view that some young people have 'fallen off the pathway' and with assistance can be guided back on:

[program] aims: ...re-engage youth at risk into education, training and/or employment...establish a **pathway** for each student. (Document #62, emphasis added)

The importance of facilitating the development of specific (life) skills that will assist students to **'move' forward**, to overcome or work around

problems and or issues that in the past have interfered with their schooling. (Document #1, emphasis added)

Self-esteem is important to successful forward motion:

...and then they'll feel good about it, then they can **move onto** the next step. (Interview #4, Youth Worker)

...which can assist someone to really look at what their strengths are, to build their self-esteem and to enable them to **move to the next step**. (Interview #7, Manager, Participation Coordinator, emphasis added)

Although the pathway of forward motion is determined by the policy instruments and technologies, the context is uncertain. Furthermore, in keeping with the late modern ideal of identity and self-construction (Rowlands, 2005), the journey can be personally styled:

Young People will....

- Explore their dreams, set goals and take action
- **Design a Life and Career Pathway Plan** they will love. (Document #66, emphasis added)

This ethic in RSLA is picked up and expressed by parents too. Consider the following quotes, and in particular the way that several of the ethical ideals (engagement, self-esteem, participation, future focus, and forward motion) are encapsulated:

My son's **emotional energy has improved**—he has **self-respect** and speaks in positive terms about his relationships with the teachers...This course has been the best thing for our son. It has **kept him interested**, a lot **happier** and **keen to stay at school**. Thank you. Thank you. This has been a great **turn around** for our son in his **attitude** to all aspects of life. Thanks for helping him to **get back on track**. (Document #3, emphasis

added)

This programme [sic] has helped **focus my child on his future**. It has even made him **think more responsibly**. (Document #28, emphasis added)

These quotes above are comments from parents offered up in discussions about the success stories of engagement programs.⁶¹ What is revealing here is that parents of the children in these examples extol the virtues of interventions that are intended to make their children 'better' people, in which better is synonymous with exhibiting the right disposition, attitude and responsible behaviour. Here, the policy motif can be set in Aristotelian terms (Aristotle, 2000) as a distinction between policy virtues and vices. The virtuous young person is motivated, purpose-driven, active, and possesses a healthy measure of self-esteem. Conversely, vices are associated with sloth, idleness, directionless and lacking self-esteem. These are an ethos associated with a meta-narrative of neoliberalism (Peters, 1996; 2005). That is to say, in the RSLA policy field, practitioners, whether they realised it or not, kneaded into the subjectivity and corporeality of young people a distinct ethic that parallels the broader ethic of neoliberalism.

Summary

'Freedom' and 'choice', so often espoused as part of the substance of neoliberal ideals, are ideals that cannot exist or arise from within a society that is close to

⁶¹ These quotes were published by DET in documentation about engagement programs and were made publically available by DET on their website.

an anarchic 'state of nature' (Dean, 2002). Freedom cannot be achieved in chaos. Rather, the conditions for freedom and choice may well be arrived at through a process of enforcing "common obligations of citizenship" (Dean, 2002, p. 39) and as such liberalism and authoritarianism are not entirely incompatible; in fact, they are connected by relations of necessity.

In RSLA, the ethics of government is linked to the ethics of the self and to the way the self relates to the self. Under this view, the formative practices of the young person involve examination of themselves, their conduct, and their mode of being. It entails work upon the substance of this examination in ways that line together an ontological position (the ethical substance), the practices that the subject is obliged to submit themselves to (the mode of subjection), a specific disposition or mastery of one's self-conduct (attitude), and a goal or fulfilment of one's self-practices (teleology) (McHoul & Grace, 1993).

A neoliberal ethic becomes a technology of power

As established, neoliberalism is more than an ideology and involves a political *practice*. Such practices entail state and non-state technological inventiveness. In terms of political practice, the deployment of RSLA has necessitated the development of various technologies. Policy technologies are instruments and forms of power used to conduct and execute the policy aims and include decisions, actions, practices and ideas (Ball, 2001; Rose & Miller, 1992).

Technologies are practical and intellectual, formal and informal (Rose & Miller, 1992).

Technologies are a dispersed form of power (Rose & Miller, 1992), but undoubtedly, the formal authorisation of legislation and the deployment of resources allows for clusters of professional expertise to form and coalesce around a particular problem (Rose & Miller, 1992). In the case of RSLA, an industry already concerned with the whereabouts and welfare of young people aged between 15 and 17 was invigorated and given new levels of authorisation and influence. For example, the passing of legislation to increase the school leaving age is a formal expression of a technology of power (Rose & Miller, 1992). The creation of the Participation Directorate is also a formal practical technology that creates a centre, or node of power (Rose & Miller, 1992).

Four technologies of power

What are the technological forms of power at work within RSLA? Broadly speaking, there are four technologies of power, each operating at a different but related level. At the most obvious and visible level, there is legislative technology in the form of The Acts Amendment (2005) and the establishment of the Participation Directorate. Second, sitting beneath that are programmatic technologies that include district level engagement programs, education and training participation plans, behaviour management and students at educational risk policies and procedures. Third, at a more interpersonal and face-to-face

level, Participation Coordinators and others in similar roles use officially sanctioned tools such as Notification of Arrangement forms, Individual Pathway Plans, data sets and reporting and monitoring processes with young people to design and sanction their obligations and actions. These are housed within quasi-counselling and case management technologies. Finally, feeding into and resulting from these technologies are intellectual technologies—the principal one being constructions of ‘engaged’, ‘disengaged’, ‘at-risk’ and NEET. These are forms of knowledge designed and circulated in the policy domain that have as their principal purpose the ability for individuals and systems to reach an assessment judgement about who falls within the remit of these kinds of technologies and who does not. Here, I discuss each of these technologies in turn.

Legislative technologies

Arguably the most visible technology of power is the passing of RSLA legislation in 2005. Legislation gave the state the full authority to monitor and intervene in the conduct of 15-17 year-olds. It made attending full-time commitments to school, training or work a legal obligation, but it did so much more. It also established an industry that would implement the goals of the policy through various technological, procedural and intellectual means. An important aspect to this was the establishment of the Participation Directorate, which directed resources and authority towards a systematic and institutional response to compulsory education, explained as follows:

The government has committed \$25.5M over four years to the creation of 100 Participation Coordinator positions (inclusive of Managers Participation). There are a total of 54 positions currently allocated. These include 44 Participation Coordinator positions allocated with plans to appoint more in October...Current planning envisages all 86 positions to be in place by the end of 2008. Additionally, there are 14 Managers Participation who supervise the work of the Participation Coordinators and have the delegated authority of the Minister to approve Notices of Arrangements, forms B and C. MP [Mangers of Participation] and PC [Participation Coordinators] allocation to districts is subject to a review currently being undertaken. (Document #7)

Informal technologies—such as the Individual Pathway Plans (IPP)—design and sanction alternative education and training options for students not in full-time school. The practice of using the IPP tool is an expected practice, but one that is largely left to the discretion of Participation Coordinators, who may choose to develop and use other tools with young people, such as mind maps or learning contracts. Another technology is the use of official DET forms to sign-off and approve alternative education and training arrangements for students not in full-time school.

The roles of Participation Coordinators and their managers essentially administer the policy by approving variations to the standard Year-12 pathway, and providing support and information to young people and their families on alternative approved forms of participation. The main focus here is targeting those young people identified as disengaged or NEET.

Programmatic technologies

In the context of administering the policy, forms of knowledge and methods of collecting and conceptualising data were developed. Data-sets provided a sense of where the critical problem areas were and how best to deal with them. This information was disseminated and shared in forums such as the Annual DET *Engagement Forum*, and through the conduits of local governments and schools, who pulled together various forms of data and information to design and justify funding for their specialist engagement and other programs. In this way, statistical phenomena such as leaving or not attending school or training or work are given shape and purpose and translated and communicated among experts (Rose & Miller, 1992).

In the first encounter of disengagement, the practitioner, school or system 'fumbles in the dark', so to speak. By inscribing this encounter and a series of like encounters into a programmatic form of knowledge, a form of truth can be shared with others, and experienced at a distance (Latour, 1987). The translating of phenomena into knowledge strengthens its political power and its rationality, and it turns hunches, guesses, and fleeting experiences into a technology of power (Rose & Miller, 1992).

To develop a relatively coherent response to 'disengagement' a programmatic response developed in each district and school area was required and implemented. Some of these involved the development of idiosyncratic

engagement programs aimed at creating alternative education options and remedial services. These even include the development of dedicated 'off-site' teaching spaces that are custom built and fitted out to cater for the needs of the disengaged young person. Other aspects entailed the production of education, training and participation plans:

Training Participation Plans or ETPPs are formulated in each district to produce collaborative plans to ensure that 16-17 year olds at risk of not engaging in education, employment or training participate in programs to suit their needs. (Document #7)

These work in conjunction with other programmatic tools, such as the DET retention and participation plan:

The Retention and Participation Plan is one of five focus areas of the Students at Educational Risk strategy - Making the Difference which aims to significantly improve the educational outcomes for all students at educational risk. The Retention and Participation Plan specifically targets those students at educational risk through issues of alienation. (Document #171)

Linked into these are the involvement of Registered Training Organisations (RTO) who have a vested interest and a stake in taking students into their vocational training programs. Other components include behaviour management policies that set out the scope of desired conduct and outlined sanctions and penalties for transgressions.

Overall, even though the passing of legislation is the most overt artefact of sovereign power, the overall technologies of power resulted in the creation of a network of calculated programs and tools (Dean, 1999) dispersed throughout

Western Australia and among a collaboration of stakeholders—schools, district offices, employers and training organisations.

Procedural technologies: Micro-management

Legislation and programs of government aim to govern the conduct of specific population groups, but governing powers can be narrowed to a specific relationship between two people in a pastoral sense (Sanders, 2012). In the RSLA situation, Participation Coordinators and their managers have delegated authority and official documentation at their disposal to enable or disallow particular forms of conduct. DET Forms A, B, and C are the specific tools used to structure decisions and agreements between students and their families, and the state. These are described as follows:

There are three forms:

1. Notice of Arrangements (Form A): This form is used by a parent of a 16 year old child to notify the Minister for Education and Training that instead of participating in schooling, the child will be participating in a training program delivered by a public or private registered training organisation (RTO), apprenticeship or traineeship, or a gazetted course.
2. Application to Participate in a Combination of Options (Form B): This form is used for a parent of a 16 year old child to seek approval from the Minister for them to participate in a combination of education, training and employment rather than full-time schooling.
3. Application to Participate in Full-time Employment (Form C): This form is used for a parent of a 16 year old child to seek approval from the Minister for them to participate in employment rather than full-time schooling. (Document #81)

They are applied in practice as a simple yet powerful technology of governing:

So and that's one of the things – we've only got three forms, Form A – education, training basically, Form B - a combination and Form C – employment. (Interview #12, Participation Coordinator)

Arriving at these agreements requires a quasi-counselling intervention and perhaps the preparation of learning contracts or Individual Pathway Plans (IPP).

These are developed in a face-to-face consultation environment. For example:

There's some counselling sort of strategies and things like that, so you try and identify any issues... But for the actual career planning, as to where they want to end up and how they can get there, we use what's called an IPP, which is an Individual Pathway Plan. And basically, what that is, it identifies current skills, values and what they've already done. (Interview #6, Participation Coordinator)

Constant reporting and the use of data gathering and early identification systems ensure that compliance to such agreements is adhered to. Within the spirit of a commitment to lifelong learning, a young person is expected to submit oneself to this as an ongoing project of continuous learning and accountability:

...the IPP is part of the career development that they're trying to implement at school, which is like, running parallel to this legislation, and looking at career as a long term – what's the phrase – lifelong learning process is your career. Yeah so, it might be doing various jobs in your lifelong pathway. (Interview #6, Participation Coordinator)

A further example of a micro technology is the adoption and use of the case file and case management principles in practice. Despite ambiguity in meaning and differing professional perspectives, case management is essentially a process of coordinating a client's interaction with formal and informal services and

supports in order to enhance their physical, emotional, social and psychological functioning (Gursansky, Kennedy, & Harvey, 2003). Managers, Participation Coordinators, and youth workers drew loosely on a combination of case management techniques to broker pathways, enable young people to access and use support services, and oversee the management of approved transitions from school-to-work. The statement below is a taken from a Participation Coordinator role statement:

The Participation Coordinator provides individualised case coordination and support services, including case brokerage (referral) services to 15 to 17 year old students at risk of disengaging prematurely from school...They will provide support and advice to those students identified as being most at risk of disengaging from school and will broker access to other providers offering the most relevant service to each individual's circumstances. (Document #179)

In more straightforward terms it is simply understood as managing the whereabouts, movement and conduct of certain young people:

...if you think about the policy around, the work that PC's do, you know there are certain components that manage kids' movements across different systems and so on. So that's also an enabling thing around young people as well. (Interview #10, Manager, Participation Coordinator)

Keeping young people visible, moving, and connected to 'systems', is a strategy of improving the *engagement* of young people.

Intellectual technologies: Engagement and disengagement

Technologies are also intellectual and performative (Ball, 2001) and are developed, and sculpted into ideas that are shared within the policy field (Rose & Miller, 1992). A good example of this intellectual technology is the development of a typology of engagement and disengagement (discussed below) that can be used for assessment purposes, or for classifying and quantifying the number of students who may need monitoring and/or intervention.

An important aspect of an intellectual technology for RSLA has been the use of the concept disengagement. The idea of disengagement actually pre-dates the Acts Amendment (2005) change to the compulsory school leaving age. In fact, it was a key idea underpinning arguments to increase the school leaving age in the first place. It is an idea that has been around for some time in youth policy fields more broadly (Atweh et al., 2007). Atweh et al., (2007) note that disengagement is usually conceptualised on “either side of the individual/social debate” (p. 2). The individual side tends to blame the student for their disengagement while the social side tends to blame wider systems and institutions. Thus, engagement/disengagement is rooted in sociological and psychological analyses of the problem and who is implicated in it (Atweh et al., 2007, p. 2).

Within RSLA, practice-based technologies informed by constructs of dis/engagement are heavily individualised and thus fall more to the individual side of the construct of disengagement. It follows, then, that RSLA interventions

would include training and counselling for the disengaged young person in everything from emotional literacy, to social skills, self-management, and self-esteem. Working together and relying on local data from schools and elsewhere, these ideas conspire to construct a whole new category of person particular to RSLA: the NEET student. The following are examples of the use of NEET in the practice discourse:

Well one tool that schools – the education department – are using to identify – it’s called collecting NEET data – N.E.E.T – and that’s Not Engaged in Education or Training, and that has different factors that are identified, and the schools are asked to do that in third term, of all the year 10 students. And so, any that they – at a certain point – that are **going to be at risk of leaving** – so, that’s one target group. (Interview #6, Participation Coordinator, emphasis added)

They call them NEETs, so that's short for not engaged in educational training, and in our district, that's about 15 per cent of all young people between the ages of 16 and 17 and that means young people who are either not attending school, or they're attending school, but they're actually not learning or engaged in school, they're simply going to school as a social activity and **not actually moving on any kind of pathway** towards anything, so **their behaviours are usually quite difficult**, or they're just simply **stagnant and not moving**. (Interview #7, Manager, Participation Coordinator, emphasis added)

And we do these surveys every year called NEET Surveys, and it’s for kids that are not engaged in education or training. And a lot of those statistics that come through are around **low literacy** and **low numeracy**, you know, the kind of families, **low socio-economic families** and that kind of thing. (Interview #5, Participation Coordinator, emphasis added)

How do practitioners distinguish and recognise a NEET student? DET did produce a typology of engagement and disengagement that gives some rudimentary qualitative behavioural descriptors, and in doing so, maps out the kinds of official responses and pathways certain groups of students would

receive (see Table nine, following, recreated from English & Reynolds, 2008, p. 22). This framework was adopted into the NEET Student Profiling Software 2007 (NSP07), which was a data collection tool used to document and account for NEETs.

Table 9: DET “typology for participation behaviours and responses – practical model”

THE STAYERS				
Risk Identifiers	Typology	Pathways	Transition Brokerage	Program Response
INSTITUTIONAL PERSONAL & CULTURAL FACTORS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical • Material • Intellectual • Academic • Social • Emotional • Education & Training 	Positive Stayers Those who readily access available options in training, employment or combinations of these	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ TEE ○ VET 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teachers ○ Counselors ○ Student Services 	Schools TAFE Colleges Private RTOs
	Reluctant Stayers Students who may be uncertain as to options available after school and/or opportunities for leaving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ TEE ○ VET 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teachers ○ Counselors ○ Student Services 	
	Discouraged Stayers Those who have not experienced success in schooling and whose level of performance and interest in school matters is low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ VET ○ Remedial Literacy & Numeracy (L&N) ○ SSEP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teachers ○ Counselors ○ Student Services 	
	Disengaged Stayers Similar to discouraged stayers, although identified as having multiple needs and requiring more cross agency support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ VET ○ Remedial L&N ○ SSEP ○ Attendance Monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teachers ○ Counselors ○ Student Services 	
PROGRAMS – ISSUES OF FIT & ACCESS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical • Material • Intellectual • Academic • Social • Emotional • Education & Training INSTITUTIONAL PERSONAL & CULTURAL FACTORS	THE LEAVERS			
	Discouraged Leavers Those who have not experienced success in schooling – whether from an educational/academic or personal/social perspective, e.g., those who find it hard to make friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ VET ○ Remedial L&N ○ SSEP ○ Attendance Monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Participation Coordinator 	CTEC Fairbridge Parkerville HCSG (etc.) TAFE Colleges Private RTOs
	Circumstantial Leavers Students ‘forced’ from school for non-educational reasons, personal and social circumstances – e.g., transient families, family breakdown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ VET ○ Remedial L&N ○ SSEP ○ Attendance Monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Participation Coordinator 	
	Opportune Leavers Students who leave school without an IPP and with hopes of securing a career path based largely on luck and chance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ VET ○ Remedial L&N ○ SSEP ○ Attendance Monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Participation Coordinator 	
	Positive Leavers Students who leave school for employment, apprenticeship, traineeship, TAFE etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ VET 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Participation Coordinator 	

While the DET framework in Table nine does attempt to balance the tensions between individual and social accounts of dis/engagement as noted by Atweh et al., (2007), practitioners tended to lead with a more individual orientation. In some instances, as the following example illustrates, the methods used to assess disengagement were less than robust and relied on intuition:

Q: How do you assess disengagement and risk?

A: Sure. There are so many factors. Usually, **you go with your gut. You go this one is a serious flight risk.** Some, you just know will turn up anyway, and that's due to behaviour. Like, we've got lots of new students from – and we don't know their backgrounds – we have no idea. **And it's usually the way they sit in a chair, how easily they open up to you. If they force it, they're usually lying.** (Interview #11, Youth Worker, original emphasis)

This kind of assessment is an intuitionist rationalisation, a post-hoc construction “generated after the judgement has been made” (Goldstein, 2012, p. 814). The social and cultural influences seated within an established individualised discourse of dis/engagement allow practitioners to draw on an already existing set of common place practices and ideas that informed these ‘gut feelings’.

The DET framework (Table nine) is a broad-brush classification tool used for sorting and labelling students into distinct groups. Becoming part of any of these classifications is the result of a network of surveillance, reporting, and assessment processes, of which most students would be dimly aware. In fact, students are not especially involved in these kinds of determinations and the labels imposed on them:

But we don't tend to identify them from their [the student's] perspective, it's more of an outsider looking in and saying this is what's going on with this young person. And then they're identified as NEET. It's not them identifying themselves. (Interview #5, Participation Coordinator)

Students may, of course, find themselves in the remit of particular interventions and programs as a result of becoming NEET. The principle identifier of these programs is that they are non-mainstream, often off-grid and off-site, and branded and marketed as customised and flexible enough to meet the specific needs of NEETs:

In addition to the outcomes for this particular student cohort, this program aims to develop sustainable model for working creatively and effectively with a range of our senior school students who may for any number of reasons seek **a more flexible program**. It will identify and trial a significant number of resources suitable for customisation for **flexibly delivered programs**. (Document #174, emphasis added)

Summary

There resulting policy technologies are due to the particular characteristics of the RSLA Legislation and the kinds of centres and structures that it facilitated, such as the Participation Directorate and the deployment of Managers of Participation and Participation Coordinators in already existing Education District offices around Western Australia. The instruments they use, and the authorisation they enjoy, arguably embodies a distinct Western Australian inflection. So too, in some respects, are the use of engagement programs in schools and school communities, each one uniquely styled and developed in its local context, under specific local conditions, and to meet specific local needs.

The specific and unique nature of the RSLA technologies is, by-and-large, contained in its legislative, programmatic, and procedural domains. It is the intellectual technologies of *engagement* and *disengagement*—although developed into a locally specific typology—that draw on concepts and ideas from elsewhere, such as NEET. As mentioned, these are essentially crafted in psychological terms. What follows in practice is a complex theoretical and practical tension between attempting to deal with matters of context and matters of individual characteristics of young people. In the end though, interventions based on the individual psychology of young people dominate the RSLA practices.

Conclusion

What are the ethics and technologies of RSLA? The ethical content of RSLA owes its genealogy and pedigree to a broader neoliberal political, cultural, and economic project. This project is concerned with maximising self-reliance, independence, and the cultivation of the spirit of entrepreneurialism. The *telos* here is employment and active citizenship, where citizenship is equated with being a self-maximising rational consumer, aware of one's interests as an individual first and foremost. What is worked upon and worried over in RSLA is the extent that young people participate in this ethos, or not. In RSLA, young people will come into contact with the intent of this ethos once they are in contact with RSLA technological innovations. These innovations extend from a

legislative force that prescribes the legal framework for participation, right down to a one-to-one counselling and planning interview between young people, their families, and local authorities such as Participation Coordinators. But for what purpose is this taking place? Why all the fuss? What is the problem that all this work is trying to solve? What is its rationality?

As mentioned, Rose and Miller (1992) state that a rationality is often expressed as common sense knowledge or political justification for something. This 'something' could be any manner of social or economic problems, and it may entail views about the nature of the problem including a coherent claim about what must be done about it. Rationalities make problems governable. There may be competing rationalities about the same thing, but sometimes a particular way of thinking about something takes centre stage as simply the most common sense and unquestionably right way to think about and respond to something. Politicians and media personalities love to turn these into tropes and sound-bites.

As discussed in the next chapter, all this energy and activity is fuelled by a broader preoccupation and political anxiety about *risk*. Risk is the 'thing' that focusses the attention, and as introduced in chapter three, this makes up a good proportion of RSLA's rationality. Managing risk is RSLA's reason for being; its *raison d'être*.

CHAPTER 8 – RATIONALITIES ABOUT RISK SOCIETY, YOUNG PEOPLE AND RSLA

...they're at risk of being homeless. They're at risk of having unstable environments where they have to go back to because that's where their home is. They're at risk of having no employment because of the backgrounds of their family, the role modelling of their parents. (Interview #5, Youth Worker)

Experts no longer simply dwell on risks—they are also busy evaluating *theoretical risks*. And, since theoretically anything can happen, there is an infinite variety of theoretical risks. (Furedi, 2005, p. viii, original italics)

Introduction

From the outset in researching RSLA it was clear that 'risk' was an important idea framing the debate and the shape of the policy (see chapter three). This is not surprising. 'Risk' and 'youth' are practically synonymous (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001). The linking of risk to the context of young people's lives and its impact on education is replete throughout the literature (Gross & Capuzzi, 1989; McWhirter et al., 2004; Stringfield, Land, & National Society for the Study of Education., 2002) and numerous policies concerned with young people (Audrey, Mosen-Lowe, Vidovich, & Chapman, 2009) and have been for some time now (Besley, 2009, p. 58; National Commission on Excellence in Education., 1983). In the Western Australian public school context, risk takes on a particular meaning in relation to one's achievement, performance and engagement in school (Department of Education and Training, 2001).

RSLA is a striking example of an actuarial policy rationality that construes young people as a dangerous problem to be watched over and governed (Kemshall et al., 2009). This chapter examines the characteristic features of risk in RSLA and explores its link to governing practices. Theoretically speaking, risk in RSLA is a transitive construct not specifically grounded in any clearly defined empirical way. That is to say, the idea that young people are 'at-risk' is set out in RSLA only theoretically and hypothetically, even at the same time as this is taken to be a *fact* by exponents of this risk theory in practice. RSLA provided fertile ground for identifying political rationalities about young people, school, and society in general, and despite its broad features, the RSLA rationality is best seen as specific and locally contextualised (Peters et al., 2000). In this chapter I conceptualise 'risk' in RSLA as a rationality and examine its links to everyday practices.

Risk and its location in RSLA

There are no obvious, tested, empirically grounded models of 'at-risk-youth' integrated in any systematic way in RSLA, and yet the idea of risk has significant currency amongst practitioners working with young people. This may well have something to do with claims about expert knowledge held by people trained and authorised in youth focussed practice, and how it is possible that phrases such as 'at-risk-youth' are given epistemological legitimacy to the extent that they become common sense truisms.

In RSLA, risk is proffered up in fairly simplistic terms as a real phenomenon that can be calculated, predicted and intervened in. *Prima facie*, this picture of risk conforms to a cognitive science schematic.⁶² An understanding of risk in this sense is based on an accumulated knowledge of a particular situation and context, in which a stock of data is acquired (for example, in the form of statistics and trends) in such a way as to infer judgements about the *likely possibility* of risk (Lupton, 1999).

Rationalities about risk in RSLA

In reading the accounts about risk and young people in RSLA it seemed that risk was actually a ‘thing’ that was epistemologically and ontologically self-evident, timeless, and everywhere. It is clear that this becomes an important plank in the governing strategies of young people. The following examples epitomise this view:

Today’s global economic and social environment is more demanding of education and training than ever before. Broad – rather than narrow – capabilities are essential. Young people need high levels of knowledge, skills and values to make a living that is economically and socially sustainable into the future. They need to become lifelong learners if they are to achieve their potential in their personal and working lives and play an active part in the civic and economic fabric of the community. (Document 161)

...the young people that I work are at risk all the time, and they don’t care what policy’s around, who’s blaming who for whatever’s going on in the whole generation. They’re at risk. They’re damaged young people that are coming from very dysfunctional backgrounds. And they just

⁶² A cognitive science perspective sees risk as made up of objective facts that can be known, quantified and managed using rational risk management principles (Lupton, 1999).

won't go to school no matter what. (Interview #4, Youth Worker)

...they're at risk of being homeless. They're at risk of having unstable environments where they have to go back to because that's where their home is. They're at risk of having no employment because of the backgrounds of their family, the role modelling of their parents. And just the drug and alcohol that's ... and it's quite prevalent, and it's easy to access. So, they're all at risk of that. So, we're finding that, just that most of the young people that are at risk are the ones from, I'd say, probably 80 per cent are dysfunctional families. (Interview #4, Youth Worker)

Risk forms an important part of the basis of RSLA rationality. Its 'legitimated' status as a rationality is expressed as a coherent pattern of thought (Lemke, 2001; Rose & Miller, 1992). In RSLA, risk is a form of 'truth' that circulates in the public domain as official and sometimes unofficial knowledge that make problems visible and therefore amenable to governing (Dean & Hindess, 1998; Lemke, 2001).

This is an understandable policy episteme because such rationalities are necessary to guide and substantiate political programs and political interventions (Lemke, 2001). Thus, a risk rationality is not only political, but epistemological in that it provides a detailed account of the problem to be governed (Rose & Miller, 1992). The production and circulation of this knowledge is necessary because objects and situations cannot be effectively governed if they are 'unknown' (Dean, 1994, p. 187).

A rationality about risk also designates the correct goals, functions, roles and responsibilities of social actors by specifying levels of proper conduct of those governing and those subject to governing powers (Rose & Miller, 1992). It

contains an idiom or particular rhetoric that orientates thinking in a way that makes problems amenable to intervention (Rose & Miller, 1992). In RSLA this surfaced as a short-hand slogan or set of easily circulated and digestible ideas that policy actors, experts and specialists can call on to explain, guide, and legitimate their work (Miller & Rose, 1993). This idiom is that the ‘world is dangerous’.

Rationalities about society: The world is dangerous

A rationality about society as being dangerous and youth being at risk (Gorey, Thyer, & Pawluck, 1998) is central to the justification of RSLA and steps are taken to calculate this risk and address it. Within the RSLA lexicon, two distinct versions of risk are apparent. One is a view about the condition of 21st century Australia, and the other, more specifically, is a systematically coherent rationality about young people themselves. Both offer a dismal view of the world. The former exists as a view of society as being a bleak dystopia that negatively impacts and damages groups of vulnerable young people. The latter is distinctly about young people and their failings and profound limitations. It should be clarified though that the latter only really pertains to *particular groups of young people* who, as a result of their NEET status, are classified as ‘at-risk’. What this means is that within RSLA some groups of young people are *constructed* in this way whereas those who continue uninterrupted educational trajectories are outside of this classification.

A dangerous society though is a generic condition and there are some similarities in RSLA with some of the arguments to raise the school leaving age to 15 back in the 1960s (Kandel, 1951; Scottish Education Department, 1966; Seaborne, 1970). Whereas the 1960s view was about preparing young people to meet the world head on, what is different now is that education is couched more in the language of *protecting* young people from the world. Young people are being protected from particular *kinds* of future scenarios, and as indicated in a DET policy document, they are linked to work and economy:

The consequences of not acquiring formal post-school qualifications by the age of 25 include:

- Poor access to a reasonable lifestyle
- Long periods of unemployment
- Social disadvantage; and
- Work opportunities limited to low-paid and low-skilled jobs. (Document #80)

Intertwined among this are perceptions about the decline of the family (Popenoe, 1993) and the disintegration of the social order, including an explosion in youth violence (Möller, 2008), and changes to family structure—particularly the effect of single parent households on youth substance abuse, misconduct, and early school leaving (Kostos & Flynn, 2012). This view is part of a broader actuarial paradigm in education (Peters, 2005) that also represents a crisis in the effectiveness (or lack of) of the governance of young people (Gorey et al., 1998).

Rationalities about young people: Young people are at risk

Combing through the data proved difficult to find any accounts of young people that portrayed them as anything but deficient on almost every indicator. Again, this is a different view than in the policy literature of the 1950s and 60s that debated increasing the school leaving age to 15. Although this previous era drew clumsily on developmental psychology to portray young people as bumbling and awkward, it did contain a sense of their emerging adulthood and ability to learn and function as responsible citizens (Morey, 1945). The RSLA rationality about young people is far from being this optimistic. Reading the data one could be excused for thinking we are talking about a completely different species of animal altogether, one that has 'special needs' and should be 'handled with care' and that only trained and highly skilled practitioners know 'how to handle them'. These young people are portrayed as damaged goods, underdeveloped in almost every respect, unable to care for themselves, clueless and apathetic. Here is an example of this, worth quoting at length:

The reality is that many students within our program:

- Have a fairly negative view of themselves as learners (and usually as individuals)
- Have had bad experiences of schooling
- Have had critical events in their lives which have seen them struggle with education, health and family issues
- Currently have health and well-being issues which place them at serious risk
- Have significant educational needs. Have specific learning difficulties
- Have extremely low literacy levels (middle primary)

- Are living independently
- Had or still have substance abuse problems
- Are or have been involved with JJ,⁶³ DCD⁶⁴ and/or other agencies
- Have mental health issues
- Have significant 'other' social and personal issues
- Have conduct and/or emotional disorders
- Have had school attendance issues (truancy or school refusal)
- Are estranged from family support. (Document #1)

At the same time, this is not to deny that there are not real and genuine risks facing young people. There are real and significant dangers that many young people do face in regards to unemployment (Brotherhood of St Lawrence, 2014), mental illness (Ivancic, Perrens, Fildes, Perry, & Christensen, 2014), violence (Mordaunt, 2010), homelessness (McLoughlin, 2013), and alcohol and other drug related harms (Lindsay, 2012). Thus, a portraiture of young people such as this is based on genuine concern and a response is indeed necessary and warranted. However, the strong emphasis on risk in educational policy and practice paradoxically problematises certain young people in ways that further contribute to them being marked out as different and this deepens their status as a problematic group (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001). As Dwyer and Wyn state:

...'at-risk' categories are used to stigmatise and mistreat particular segments of the population as if the problems were unique to them and entirely their own fault. The false distinction between the mainstream and those 'at risk' glosses over the social and personal problems they have in common, and reinforces a 'blaming the victim' mentality. (2001, p. 154)

⁶³ JJ refers to Juvenile Justice, to the youth offending arm of *Department of Corrective Services*, Western Australia's statutory justice agency concerned with running prisons, detention centers, parole, and community service orders.

⁶⁴ DCD refers to the Department of Community Development, since renamed the *Department of Child Protection*, it is Western Australia's statutory child protection agency.

Dwyer and Wyn also argue that “the standard response to non-completion begins with a negative premise that defines the non-completers as essentially a ‘problem’ group” (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001, p. 55). This was certainly the case with RSLA. Insofar as this group is treated as a homogenous group of people subjected to individualising analysis, there seemed to be little attention to the fact that many of these young people will eventually, at some stage, re-engage with education, or find work, or pursue alternative forms of study (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001).

The urgency of the aims of compulsory education reflected a view that young people have one shot at making a go of their education, and this was in part due to the problematic nature of the socio-economic context of their lives, as explained by Miles:

Young people’s experience of life in a risk society is all too often portrayed as entirely negative in nature. There is an alarming tendency to imply that young people do not actively engage with the risk society, but that they are powerless victims of that society. (Miles, 2002, p. 58)

Deficits, such as dependency and moral failure, beckon ready-made prescriptions for surveillance and intervention that logically fall out of a policy and research paradigm that has little to do with the actual experiences of many young people (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001). Such approaches tend to be overly reductionist, reducing social structural problems to single individual problems.

This phenomena is what Furlong and Cartmel (2007) term the “epistemological fallacy of late modernity” (p. 5). This means that in a risk society, even though people’s experiences may be quite structured and collective at some level, the conceptualisation of solutions to collective problems are *individualised* (Beck, 1992). This is because although the “chains of interdependence” (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007, p. 144) that bind collective experiences together may remain intact, they are at the same time so complex they remain outside of the control and comprehension of most people and institutions. Hence, the locus of analysis and intervention is not structural and systemic, but levelled at the individual.

Here is their example of school leaving:

...problems faced by school-leavers in less advantaged areas may be seen as a reflection of their poor record of academic performance rather than as a consequence of material circumstances and the lack of compensatory mechanisms within the school. The individualization of risk may mean that situations which would once have led to a call for political action are now interpreted as something which can only be solved on an individual level through personal action. (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007, p. 6)

The same can be said for RSLA. The experience of being ‘at risk’ is heightened because at the very point when the social and economic conditions of late modernity contain increasing opportunities to overwhelm the lives of many people, the responsibility for managing risk is largely a personal one (Beck, 1992). What becomes situated alongside this experience is the expectation that now, more than ever, *individual people* are responsible for, and hence held accountable for, *their own destinies* (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). This is why the

focus of risk management in RSLA was centred right down to the core element of the young person themselves: *their self*.

'Self' is damaged and needs repair

What is striking about the RSLA risk rationality was the focus on the 'self' and the mental state of mind of young people. This starts with a take on the self-construct of young people who are seen as disengaged or at risk of disengaging from school. They are portrayed as lacking the right self-disposition, and being low on several criteria: low on self-esteem; low in confidence; low in self-control; low in self-efficacy; and, low in self-resilience. Here are some examples:

Poor self esteem. (Document #157)

Low level of resilience; little or no self esteem; lacking self confidence. (Document #174)

Have low self esteem. (Document #162)

It is important to note that self-esteem is a transitive construct, not an intransitive thing that exists in a quantifiable way. Therefore, it makes little sense to speak of self-esteem in terms of being 'high' or 'low' or 'lacking', and any strategies that suggest practitioners can *hand over* or *give* young people self-esteem are misguided (Crocker & Park, 2004). Furthermore, this focus on the self as exclusively the purview of the individual brackets out the social context and thus de-politicises mood states like depression, for example (Philip, 2009).

Techniques of constructing notions of self-esteem as a problem of the individual student neatly segue into practices of self-restoration that are imbricated with liberal virtues and ethical obligations of self-improvement (Philip, 2009). In other words, worrying over and improving ones self-esteem is a technology of the self (Philip, 2009), but its political power is economic and this is what makes it omnipresent, particularly when it is linked to individualised programs of self-improvement (Sanders, 2012). This technology is all the more powerful when it is hinted even so slightly that low self-esteem is a risk that *can* be managed with just the right kinds of interventions and programs for young disengaged people. The power is vested in whoever can point to a young person and label them as having low self-esteem, and categorise them as belonging to a class of young people who are somehow damaged and need improvement. As such:

Some members of society then, have the resources and power to define others and make such definitions stick, despite the efforts of those labelled to resist such categorization. The concept of risk and its operation is so effective and has become so pervasive...as it draws on older categories such as sin, danger, cleanliness, purity and pollution. As sin and danger did in the past the concept of risk works today as a way of categorising social membership and in the process helps to maintain social order in modern societies. (Cieslik & Pollock, 2002, p. 2)

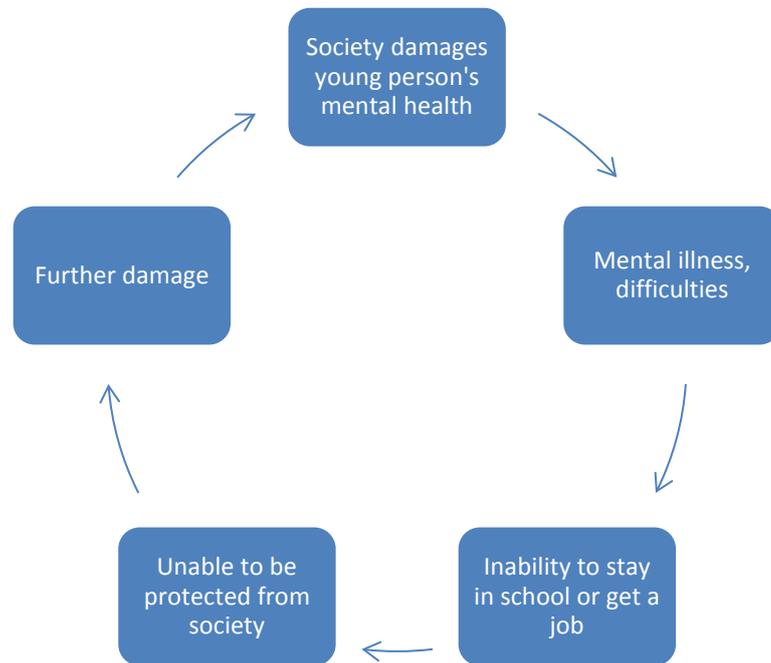
The broader context behind this fixation with the self-concept of young people is mental health (or illness more exactly) and this provides a fertile well-spring of common sense views about the mental health crisis of at-risk young people with failing self-esteem.

Mental health in crisis

Given the prevalence of media and political attention on Australia's mental health 'crisis' (Thompson-Brenner, Glass, & Westen, 2003), and an increase in mental health problems actually linked with economic downturn (McEvoy, Papadopoulos, & Procter, 2010) it is not surprising that practitioners working with young people were able to access and draw from this discourse with some ease. This is despite the fact that the work of attempting to engage and re-engage young people into education, training and work did not actually involve a formally sanctioned and systematic assessment and intervention program into the mental health of young people. Schools are increasingly being styled as sites for mental health interventions on young people (Fouracres, 2011), whereas it would be better to create education policies and practices that assist "young people to choose and achieve those things that they value and in enhancing individual and community wellbeing" (Wyn, 2007b, p. 47).

In RSLA, young people were seen as having a range of emotional disorders, attachment disorders, and general mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. It was not clear as to the veracity of these proclamations, but many practitioners and some policy documents tended to offer up these kinds of diagnoses fairly effortlessly but without the qualifications or authorisation to make such diagnoses. They are seen as self-evident. In RSLA, the mental health of young people sits within a 'theory of society' as depicted in Figure seven, over the page:

Figure 7: RSLA theory of risk society and young people



In some cases this was spelt out explicitly, where the picture of the disengaged young person is one who has a raft of mental health problems as a result of trauma, abuse, and neglect at the hand of their families. For example:

Poor behaviour and performance among some children may be the result of trauma, abuse and neglect that has resulted in brain deficiencies and a range of emotional, cognitive [sic], psychological and social abilities – loss of emotion, language, empathy, etc. Attachment disorders problem too [sic]. (Document #8)

Taken together, these become a powerful but narrowly defined causal explanation of why someone might leave school, or present with behaviour and other attitudinal problems, as indicated by this youth worker:

But you know what, but they don't stay in it because they just can't. They just can't maintain sitting still because of their **mental health issues**. (Interview #4, Youth Worker, emphasis added)

School is not for some people, but it is still important though

Behaviour and attitude towards school is an important part of the rationality about young people. But what is different today, as opposed to the 1950s and 60s view about school, is that the structure and culture of school itself within RSLA is absent from the accounts: in RSLA the gaze is squarely on *the young person as the problem*. In the 1950s and 60s situation there was a much stronger focus on how schools could reorganise themselves to be more responsive to the needs of the young adult student (HM Inspectors of Schools, 1976; Schools Council Welsh Committee, 1967; Scottish Education Department, 1970). In that previous situation, school itself was seen as the problem that warranted attention. There was, back then, extensive discussion and debates about curriculum, teaching, and creating a school ethos that would be attractive to students (Schools Council Welsh Committee, 1967).⁶⁵

This situation today is now reversed. Historically, the focus on schools as an object of inquiry entailed significant investment and reform on the mainstream educational enterprise (Morey, 1945; Scottish Education Department, 1966,

⁶⁵ Although these examples are from the UK, strikingly similar discourses and arguments about increasing compulsory school leaving age were debated in the Australian context even as far back as 1945 (Morey, 1945).

1970). In RSLA, this intellectual and practical activity is hived off into the development of alternative education programs that are 'off-site' and 'off-grid'. The 'problem', so to speak, is shifted *out* of the mainstream. These alternative programs are designed for the student who has already 'failed' in a 'mainstream' environment, and rather than that environment actually being changed or improved, the student is removed and put somewhere else 'more appropriate'. Here is an example referring to an engagement program:

The fact that this is off site is the biggest plus for the program and other schools should consider offering similar programs. There does not have to be a school farm to support them, **a shed rented in the industrial area of a town would serve just as well**. The important fact I think is that at risk students are not good at handling relationships and the complex nature of a school...They make better progress in smaller communities where they are exposed to a small number of competent staff who are skilled in the handling of **this type of student**. (Document #15, emphasis added)

Rationalities about these students paint them as having poor attendance and poor attitudes to school. So they must be housed elsewhere, even in a 'shed rented in the industrial area of town'. They are seen as bored and non-compliant with poor problem solving skills, and, generally speaking, are educational failures lacking basic numeracy and literacy. So they need specially designed programs and learning spaces and mentors. For example:

A program for Year 11 NEET students which aims to re-engage them in learning. This flexible, student centred program will use technology to support individually tailored learning programs delivered within the students own communities. The initial focus will be on building core skills in literacy, numeracy and emotionally intelligent self management as a basis for identifying career paths and building employability skills.

(Document #174)

Of course, the broader context for these problems emanates out of the many and varied social problems that undoubtedly affect many young people and their ability to make a go of it in school. While the RSLA practice drew heavy attention to the young person specifically, there was some acknowledgement of social context as well, as the following section discusses.

Social problems keep kids out of school

Complex interactions between social context, young people's self-perceptions, their engagement to school (or lack thereof) and their academic achievement often conspire to produce a situation of early school leaving (Fall & Roberts, 2012). Contemporary research on young people leaving school early is mindful to situate young people's social experience as being shaped and influenced by things like consumption of illicit drugs (Lynskey et al., 2003), and the role that family violence and poverty play in early school leaving (Smyth & Hattam, 2004). RSLA picks up on these arguments and more. Those deemed most at risk of disengagement are portrayed as:

...young people from 'disadvantaged' family backgrounds characterised by unemployment, welfare dependence, parental absence or instability, violence, lack of a tradition of education or training and other endemic social and economic problems. (Document #161)

Disadvantage is the core idea here. Absent and disengaged parents and lack of family support is said to compound these problems and in some cases it was

explained that school was, for some young people, a minor preoccupation fading into the distance as they struggled to care for mentally ill parents, siblings, or find somewhere to live, or earn money to pay the household rent and bills. For example:

...we've had a number of young people with mental illness, a number of young people whose parents are sick, and they're the main carers.
(Document #8)

While the context of young people's lives is given some focus, their families are situated as one of the primary factors in explaining disengagement as well.

Family problems keep kids out of school

Perceptions about changes to families link in here (see a review of this argument in chapter three). In fact, it is apparent that elements of RSLA are remedial in the sense that some of the practices begin to take over many of the socialising and educational tasks normally reserved for the family unit. According to Wyn, Lantz and Harris, (2012) the role of the *family* in school-to-work transitions has largely been ignored in sociology for at least two decades, with the analysis instead assuming that state and non-state authorities take on much of the transition functions for young people. This might explain why there is a continuing focus of responsibility for policy responses to handle transition. In RSLA, some young people are construed as being estranged from their family generally, but also are negatively impacted by domestic violence, or lacking the social and cultural

capital needed to thrive in schools as a result of living in fostered and single parent households. For example:

Family doesn't consider an education to be a priority (often) [sic].
"Difficult" family circumstances (often) [sic]. (Document #174)

Households that lack parental or caregiver support in their child's education, or are deficient in the material resources needed to sustain children at school feature strongly here:

Lack of significant parental support in their education. (Document #80)

Yet, research by Wyn et al., (2012) found that the young people in their study overwhelmingly gained support from their families, in the form of security, social interdependence, health, wellbeing and opportunities for social and civic participation. As discussed so far, it is established that RSLA is infused with ideas about risk. This is an example of its political rationality. What are the implications of this?

Moralistic sensibility: It's not OK to stay away

One of the implications is that a preoccupation with 'risk', however well intentioned, often has the double-edged capacity to fuel moral panics about young people, as though all young people are by definition 'at risk' and on the precipice of becoming an underclass (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001). In this way, schools inevitably become sites for the management of 'risky young people' (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001, p. 145). Devising strategies to usher risky young people back into the

mainstream is also an ethical enterprise. As mentioned above, a political rationality is moralistic in that it also stipulates and maps out what should be done about social and political problems (Lemke, 2001; Rose & Miller, 1992). In this sense, the moral side of rationalities explains who should do what and what people's proper roles ought to be—their conduct, official designation and responsibility. Also mentioned above is that rationalities are sometimes condensed into a rhetorical device that provides a shorthand slogan explaining and legitimating political interventions (Rose & Miller, 1992). In RSLA, this slogan actually appeared in the official DET literature as follows: "*It is not OK to stay away*". Another example appeared early in the policy development in the form of a website and television campaign: "*15 is too young to stop learning*".

A couple of points can be extracted from this. First, in saying it is not OK to stay away what is meant here is that staying away from school, education, training, work, or any institution or routine where, being fully visible, engaged, participating and accounted for, is morally unacceptable. This is the message to young people themselves: *you need to participate*. Doing nothing is not an option. Idleness is equated with moral failure. However, this is also a message for adults as well. Parents, educators, youth workers, employers and others are also responsible for ensuring that participation in the fullest sense of the word is attained. It is a message especially directed at parents as indicated in a DET communication to parents:

Under the law, you are responsible for making sure your child goes to school on ALL [sic] school days. You must not keep your child away from school for minor reasons. It's not OK to be soft on school attendance ... because **we want all children to be their best**. (Document #84, emphasis added)

Adults must ensure young people are *not idle*. They must ensure that young people participate in meaningful ways. Adults have a duty to shepherd young people into jobs. Given everything discussed above about young people and the context they live in, why is this so morally important? Part of the answer to this question can be explained by the view that young people matter and that all the worst aspects of modern society is a political and cultural blemish that could be remedied, in part, through more education. But more importantly, young people are seen as a form of capital that can be disciplined and commoditised as an extension of the logic and culture of capitalism and its modern form, globalisation (Giroux, 2012). Education, it is argued, builds and creates self and skills. A functioning self with employable skills is not really a moral goal in and of itself. Rather, it is a means to other, more economic ends, couched in terms of 'lifestyle'. Here is an example of this from a DET document:

By the age of 25, young people need to have acquired formal post-school qualifications if they are to enjoy a reasonable lifestyle. Those who leave school early risk unemployment and social disadvantage. They are likely to experience long periods out of work, and, when they do get jobs, these will probably be low-paid and low-skilled, often casual and part time. Of those who leave school early, up to a third are unemployed in the following year and continue to have difficulties over the next six years. The young people most 'at risk' of current and future social dislocation, alienation and long-term economic dysfunction are those 15-19 year olds who are unemployed or not looking for work and are not in any meaningful form of education and training. (Document #4)

A failure to protect oneself from risk is seen as a failure of the self in general; a form of carelessness, evidence of a lack of skills, and a practice of *irrationality* (Wilkins, 2012, p. 170).

The construction of risk is entirely necessary as a mechanism in rendering people and problems governable (O'Malley, 1996). A designation of risk is linked with self-practices aimed at risk protection and insurance. Programs of government isolate and amplify the meaning of specific kinds of risk, and solicit people towards self-management practices to protect themselves from the risk. The rational person ought to make a rationally informed decision to avoid risks or to act in a manner so as to minimise the negative dimensions of risk (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). The irrational person fails this task as is therefore 'legitimately' subjected to more stringent and targeted forms of intervention. Education, now more than ever, is part of an insurance policy and risk protection strategy (Peters, 2005).

Conclusion

Since the decision to raise the school leaving age to 17, a category of person known as an 'at-risk early school leaver' has taken on new and deeper significance. 'At-risk early school leaver' is a common place statement used to refer to particular groups of young people, but it is used today in ways that did not specifically refer to the same group of people 50 years ago. Hence, a new

form of knowledge is generated and opened up as an object of investigation and intervention.

Clearly then, something has occurred in order for this classification of 'at-risk-youth' to emerge. When the school leaving age was set at 15 in 1966, a person leaving school after completing year 10 would not be classified as at-risk and subjected to a raft of interventions as they are today. Yet, the emergence of risk and its linking to young people and their educational attainment is now a central preoccupation of parents, schools, social workers, counsellors, policy makers, program designers, youth workers, researchers, and trainers.

A change in the "conditions of existence" (Foucault, 1991b, p. 60) permits the deployment and rational acceptability of this particular discourse. An established connection between youth and risk can be taken into a new direction that now links these things with levels of education and the relationship between these and economic security of the individual and of society. At the same time, this means that there are rules about what cannot be reasonably claimed. For example, it might be difficult to claim that people who leave school at age 15 are likely to have secure social and economic futures. This is becoming unthinkable, and unsayable.

The phenomenon of an 'at-risk early school leaver' is not simply a transitive idea, but an intransitive *practice*, and importantly, it is a practice that is connected to a range of other material practices too: the production of statistics on retention

and participation; the invention and use of risk assessment tools; case management models and plans; the development of programs for 'bored disengaged at-risk-youth'; counselling; media stories about youth crime, drug use, and violence; and, services set up to provide mentoring, training and 'job-readiness' workshops for young people.

'At-risk-youth' is a category of young person subjected to increasing levels of surveillance and intervention, and various educational standardisation procedures that produce certain kinds of subjectivities (Kamp, 2005). Such categories are tied to normative standards of young people's development and conduct, and those who step outside such categories are often constructed as "deviant, delinquent and deficient" (Kamp, 2005, p. 41) and in turn are subjected to an "almost unlimited opportunity to regulate behaviour and disposition" (Kamp, 2005, p. 41). In this scenario, official agencies, policies and procedures are established to manage risk.

What was surprising in this analysis of RSLA was that despite the official rhetoric of empowerment and the goals of nurturing the inner potential of every young person, a bleak and uninspiring rationality about the inherent failings and risks circling young people dominated the policy landscape. The policy motif here is that "*it is not OK to stay away from education, and if you do you pose a risk to yourself and others*". However, and in contradiction, there is also a message that says, "*well, these kids are damaged by society and they are consequently underdeveloped, so that is why they can't succeed in school*".

The discourses of at-risk-youth have reached deep into the political consciousness underpinning RSLA. So, too, do the discourses of a failed and crumbling society. In RSLA, the two combine perfectly to produce a dismal and negative view about some groups of young people, even at the same time as there is a superficial rhetoric of empowerment and a belief in personal fulfilment. RSLA takes an *A Priori* view of risk as a form of rationality. A psychologised view of young people as damaged selves is situated amongst a risky world filled with almost every conceivable social, cultural, familial and economic hazard. Governing practices appeal to young people's 'rational prudentialism' (Kemshall et al., 2009) in attempts for them to work on themselves, to engage in programs of self-improvement in order to repair their damaged self-esteem. The result is a moral split between young people who escape the 'risk label' and those who are marked out by it; the latter of whom are more likely to become ensnared in a web of policy interventions, and, in the ensuing gaze, are held responsible for the many and varied ills that are said to beset their lives. Such is the case for the neoliberal project, in which "the state further absolves itself of collective responsibility and citizens are burdened with the risks generated through late capitalism" (Wilkins, 2012, p. 170).

CHAPTER 9 – DISCIPLINING THE CONDUCT OF YOUNG

PEOPLE

And I think that when the kids are coming in, we are here for them, but there is a line in the sand; they have got to do the discipline, we try and get them to do the dishes. We provide lunch, you do the dishes, and if they don't then we are on to it, so it is not like a holiday camp, there are rules and we try and enforce them as much as we can, that's your responsibility, you eat here you clean up here and you put your plate back, so you are teaching them that in a roundabout way...Boundaries are really, fairly tight, we don't just let them run rampant... (Interview #1, Youth Worker)

Government is any more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seek to shape conduct by working through our desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs, for definite but shifting ends and with a diverse set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects and outcomes. (Dean, 1999, p. 11, original italics)

Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the risk rationality that dominates RSLA. As indicated, a designation of risk results in some form of intervention on young people. These interventions are conceptualised in this chapter as 'discipline'. The strategies of discipline under RSLA resonate with the contours of Foucault's analysis of the development of the modern welfare state (Foucault, 1991a). They include the rise and prominence of a professional class of experts engaged in the monitoring and disciplining of specific population groups, including the systematic mechanisms of surveillance deployed around them. This is the main focus of this chapter.

The establishment of the Participation Directorate and its subsidiaries enabled this strategy of power to quickly reach pre-eminence and this is a hallmark feature of RSLA in action. The roles that Participation Coordinators and other professionals working with young people play are important to the implementation aims of RSLA. Drawing on policy concepts and assumptions about young people, and utilising the state authorised status of their roles, Participation Coordinators are able to instigate and put into place a range of methods concerned with conducting the conduct of young people. That is to say, the role of the Participation Coordinator is to assess and direct the conduct of young people within a framework of what is and is not considered *acceptable behaviour*. The policy motif in this sense can be expressed in a two-fold manner: “*Get connected and stay connected. And, get on track and stay on track*”. ‘Getting connected’ means being visible and participating in formal educational structures, systems and methods, and it involves the monitoring of young people’s whereabouts and their conduct. ‘Staying on track’ means adhering to a normatively defined transition from school-to-work, by moving from one participation space to another, in sequence.

What is apparent in RSLA is the degree to which this took place without debate and without the establishment of any ‘contentious’ wide-scale curriculum or pedagogic reform in schools themselves.⁶⁶ In fact, the movement towards these strategies entailed a seamless segue from an existing *modus operandi*. The

⁶⁶ For example, the two Upper High School teachers I interviewed said that the main impact RSLA had on their work was having to deal with a new group of students in their classes who would rather be elsewhere, and some institutional pressures **not to fail anyone out of school**.

analysis suggests that the RSLA is an extension and amplification of a system and rationality about education and young people already well ingrained.

In this chapter, I also argue that the practices of RSLA are good examples of the way that the roles and functions of families are being subsumed and taken over by state and non-state entities. Specific disciplining techniques are deployed not so much in regards to formal educational goals, but in the form of family surrogacy. The broader context of family change and 'decline' exemplifies a situation whereby school systems are increasingly being turned into "parent-substitutes and all-purpose welfare agencies" (Zinsmeister, 1996, p. 43), a phenomenon reported in the United States in the 1990s, and evidenced in RSLA today (see a review of this in chapter two).

In this chapter I begin by briefly rehearsing the theoretical concepts of discipline (Hook, 2004a, p. 213) and conduct of conduct (Dean, 1999, pp. 10-13; Gordon, 1991) insofar as they provide the main scaffolding for the following discussion about RSLA. Next, I support this argument by reviewing and contextualising the evidence (data) and tease out the main threads and ideas of each concept. Finally, I argue that these practices are drawn from a broader moral panic about some young people and why it is that a core aspect of RSLA involves taking on disciplining and socialisation functions with young people.

Discipline

What are the disciplining strategies of RSLA? The starting point for governmental intervention is some conceptualisation of a problem that must be worked on, because as Rose and Miller (1992) state, “government is a *problematizing* activity” (p. 181, original italics). RSLA is a good example of this problematising process. It is within this problematisation that governments elaborate their programs (Rose & Miller, 1992)—for example, in the way that RSLA problematised young people as at risk and disengaged, and then set out a program of interventions to redress this problem.

Policies like RSLA are shaped and refined by experts, committees, documents, reports and inquiries, and so on (Rose & Miller, 1992). A variety of professional groups and their knowledge and expertise are mobilised, and, in Johnson’s (1993) words, these groups become “empowered [as] a radical extension of the capacity to govern” (p. 142). This is the nature of the ‘conduct of conduct’ (Dean, 1999; Dean & Hindess, 1998; Gillies, 2008; Korteweg, 2006). In the context of RSLA, various professional groups were empowered to govern over the conduct of young people.

This ‘conduct-of-the-conduct-of-young-people’ concerned those deemed to be not adequately participating in education, work or training. Visibility of students is key and this becomes a significant policy concern: ‘Just where are these disengaged young people and what is it that they are they doing?’ is the question

posed. Being visible and accounted for means that norms and expectations of proper conduct can be subtly and not so subtly worked into the subjectivity of the person (Hook, 2004b; Rose, 1996).

None of this is especially new. The governing of risky populations—their thought, identity, behaviour, conduct—has long been under the jurisdiction of social workers, psychologists, pastoral care workers, and others involved in the human and social sciences (Johnson, 1993). RSLA is no exception and a component of the disciplining of young people is delegated from the family to state and non-state based institutions and practitioners as a broader program of disciplining practices. In fact, some Participation Coordinators conceptualised their work as quasi police officers, whereas others saw themselves as welfare workers. Attempts to encourage the self-management of young people were largely interventionist and took on welfarist and pastoral forms. Various authorities, such as Participation Coordinators and youth workers, assumed the responsibility of the governing of young people through supervision, guidance, and by enrolling them into various programs, participation commitments, and therapeutic techniques.

RSLA and disciplining young people

In RSLA there are two main forms of discipline. First, there is the establishment of practice norms and routines that include interviews with students, monitoring their attitudes and behaviours, and the official signing of agreements with

students and their families in the form of Individual Pathway Plans, Individual Learning Plans and Notice of Arrangements. There are strategies of referral, liaison, and 'coordinated' learning pathways. Part of this involves a form of *tutelage*⁶⁷ (Donzelot, 1979) in that young people are taught very basic rules, etiquettes, and habits of mind. Second, a form of panopticism (Foucault, 1977) is arranged so that strategies for monitoring and surveilling the whereabouts and conduct of young people are put into place. This involved identifying students at risk by examining student attendance and performance records, and drawing on other attendance data, at risk lists, and interviews. In some instances it even involved driving around the streets looking for NEETs.

These interventions involved various forms of supervision of young people's whereabouts and guidance towards the spirit of participation. Such guidance also included dealing with various factors considered 'barriers' or hindrances to participation, be they structural, material, or psychological. A distinct space in the RSLA intervention lexicon was informed by a fixation on the psychology of the young person. In doing so it drew from various 'psy'⁶⁸ professions in attempts to intervene in and govern the young person's behaviour (Hook, 2004b). As such, acceptable conduct is not just about the formal obligations of participation, but about the more subtle elements of young people's attitudes,

⁶⁷ In his book *The Policing of Families*, Donzelot (1979) scrutinises the development of European social work in the 20th century. The 'tutelary complex', as he refers to it, is a combination of educative, psychiatric and judicial functions theorised and administered towards children, youth and their families. Rather than strict forms of punishment or coercive tactics used to instill correct behaviour, so-called risky populations are monitored, verified, and psychologically examined, educated, and 'tutored' into more acceptable forms of conduct. According to Donzelot, social work is the main technology deployed in this field.

⁶⁸ 'Psy' refers to a constellation of human sciences sitting under the broad umbrella of psychology, that work together to produce "governable subjects" (Rose, 1999, p. vii).

beliefs, and self-management; all of which are put to work in the servitude of employability (Dean, 1998).

Conduct as acceptable participation

The following exchange from an interview with a Participation Coordinator demonstrates the way that the idea of participation is limited by certain notions about what is and what is not acceptable:

Q. Let's say for example, Bob, who's in year 11, and his three mates (they've just started year 11, so that makes them 16) they decide, as a group, that they're going to stop going to school, and they're going to focus their time, during the day, every day, writing music for their band that they're putting together. And they're very focused, and very committed to the band, but they're not going to school. What would the Department [of Education] make of that?⁶⁹

A: Well that doesn't meet any of our requirements, because they're not employed full time, they're not studying in a registered training organisation, and yeah, I guess the way we would approach that kind of activity would be to work with them on a weekly basis to see how they're progressing, to talk to them and counsel them about what training they could be, talking to them about their obligations under the Act,⁷⁰ and trying to move them, while recognising and acknowledging their need, and you know, their opportunity that they have in terms of this band, but also trying to also negotiate some kind of, I guess activity that the Department [of Education] would accept.

Q: Would they be classed as engaged or disengaged?

A: Well we, I guess, in our view, I guess, as a worker on the coal face, we would say he's definitely engaged.... Whether he then meets the requirements is what we need to determine, whether we can get him approved or not. And in some cases we may just continue to monitor someone like that, without trying to interfere too much, even though

⁶⁹ In the context of this interview I wanted to explore the boundaries of what is classed as acceptable participation and engagement.

⁷⁰ Acts Amendment (Higher School Leaving Age and Related Provisions) Bill 2005.

he's not quite fitting the guidelines, or the policies so to speak...
(Interview #7, Manager, Participation Coordinator)

As this example shows, under the RSLA Legislation, Participation Coordinators, youth workers, teachers/schools enforce the standards of acceptable conduct. They monitor behaviour against these standards, and they can, if necessary, institute sanctions against the young person and their family if they consistently fail to meet those standards. As the conversation above in Interview #8 indicates, there are acceptable and unacceptable forms of conduct that are determined by the mechanisms of power within the RSLA domain. These include the formal policy proclamations and dictates, but also by the judgements and assessments made by individual workers.

Conduct as acceptable attitude

The formal rules that constitute acceptable forms of 'participation-as-conduct' are fairly straightforward: young people must be in full-time school, approved course (usually provided by a Registered Training Organisation), or full-time paid employment or a combination of either, so long as it is full-time. These are the standards set at a more formal level of policy and the assessment of these is more intransitive and easily determined. At the practice level with young people themselves, things are different. Here the focus on acceptable conduct is couched within the terms of attitude, disposition, and general outlook on life. This forms the contours of a transitive notion of engagement or disengagement. Here, the standards for acceptable conduct are far more ethically based, and as such, these

standards may be set and policed by individual workers in their interactions with young people, as the following indicates:

And it is just teaching the kids, I know a couple of kids with this notion of a sickie, like it is OK to have a sickie because I am entitled to it. But with those sorts of things we say “no it’s not”. And we explain to them what it actually is for because where they have come from maybe there has been abuse of that system and **they don’t understand a work ethic**. So, we see ourselves as really trying to get them to understand, and that is a bit hard, when all they have heard for the last 15 years is “who gives a shit”. **We are trying to change their attitude**. It’s all “who gives a crap” so with that sort of attitudinal stuff we try and talk to them about “well it’s not OK to do that and these are the reasons why”, but it’s a bit hard to start that at 16 and 17. (Interview #1, Youth Worker, emphasis added)

Attitude in this example is central. What is common amongst the conduct of young people’s conduct undertaken by Participation Coordinators and others in similar roles is that acceptable and unacceptable conduct is guided by some notion of a work ethic, or a sense of what a responsible person *should* be doing with their lives. Thus, strategies of intervention are not simply concerned with meeting the formal rules of participation, *per se*, they are also directed towards the ‘beliefs, desires and aspirations’ of young people, in an attempt to make them more responsible, more accountable, more visible and motivated.

Various tools are used to try to elicit the right dispositions that would lead to this acceptable conduct. For example:

There’s **purposeful conversation**. There’s some **counselling** sort of strategies and things like that. So you try and identify any issues, I mean, which is asking and whatever. But for the actual **career planning**, as to where they want to end up and how they can get there,

we use what's called an IPP, which is an **Individual Pathway Plan**. And basically, what that is, it identifies current skills, values and what they've already done. (Interview #6, Participation Coordinator, emphasis added)

These conversations and quasi-counselling techniques are directed towards the beliefs and attitudes of young people. They sit as invitations and directives to 'become' a particular kind of person. However, if the right sort of conduct is not apparent, a more formal intervention based on sanctions and punishments may be deployed, as exemplified by excerpts from RSLA policy documents:

The outcome of the panel is a negotiated written contract of behaviours to be exhibited by the student. The consequence of breaking the contract is removal from the [engagement program]. The workplaces are visited regularly by the student's SWL teachers and by the teacher to get feedback from both the student and the workplace supervisor. Positive feedback equals success. (Document #10)

The students are expected to attend the program five days a week. Three days in the classroom and two days in the work place....If a student is not at school by 9.30am (Monday, Wednesday, Friday) a phone call is made to their parent/guardian to ascertain either their location or reason for not attending. This helps keep the students attending as they know they cannot get away with not coming. (Document #10)

These examples here sit at the 'bottom of a ladder of participation', in which the student is simply expected to 'turn up'. In this scenario, the 'body' of the student is expected to be present and accounted for, simply as a corporeal visceral object located in the right space at the right time. Beyond that are more involved standards of what this 'body' should actually be doing, thinking, and how it actually presents to the world, and as such there is an aesthetic attached to proper conduct.

Conduct as acceptable aesthetic

Proper conduct then is more than simple compliance with the participation requirements of RSLA, more than just 'turning up'. It also involves displaying a 'correct' aesthetic. In the example below, a young person styled her conduct to include a physical transformation that met the approval of her Participation Coordinator:

But now she has a fabulous traineeship in a primary school as a librarian, and she is in demand. Like 'bang' it was like seeing a flower open. This kid went from this stereotypical, with the clothes, the heavy make-up and the drinking to, well, **she looks like a librarian now**, she's got the glasses, she ties her hair back, she wears really neat clothes, and she's happy and it has just opened up so many opportunities. (Interview #3, Participation Coordinator, emphasis added)

For what purpose would the styling of the self in this particular way be for?

What subtle forces of power work on and through this young person to elicit such a transformation? As indicated elsewhere, the *telos* of these self-practices are set against a backdrop of forms of power that are appeals to employability, a theme throughout the data, as this example from an engagement program shows:

The behavioural expectations of the students are modelled on what an employer would expect of them in a workplace. The **classroom is considered the third workplace**. (Document #10, emphasis added)

Connecting young people to various systems concerned mainly with employment reinforce to orientate young people towards their work obligations and to build a career-focussed identity (Meijers, 1998). That is, it is not just

Participation Coordinators' who send the messages of acceptable conduct for employment, but these come from multiple other sources as well. Young people are encouraged and pushed to engage with and participate in the ethos being work-focussed. For example:

So it really is about meeting with them, establishing that kind of rapport and you know, even if it's sitting there and making a phone call with them, so that they hear how to do it, and then they can do it themselves. Or going to Centrelink⁷¹ or going to the Apprentice and Traineeship Company with them and linking them in. Or if their parents are willing and able, I'll just give them the information and say you know, can you go and do that? Yes, and they go off and do it. (Interview #5, Participation Coordinator)

In this example, it is apparent that RSLA is not the only mechanism involved in governing the conduct of young people, because, as Dean says, government is "*undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies*" (Dean, 1999, p. 11, original italics). That is why the practices of RSLA seek to connect young people into other services, systems and government and non-government agencies.

Conduct as self-control

Being 'in control' of one's life is also part of the aim of RSLA and this is expressed in practical terms by interventions aimed at improving and enhancing young people's *self-control*. The following example is from an engagement program's promotional materials:

The young people who are engaging in self destructive [sic] and negative

⁷¹ Centrelink administers Australia's social security system.

behaviours will be targeted with initiatives which will provide them with **life changing challenges** such as wilderness experiences with the aim to **switch them onto taking control of their lives**. (Document #174, emphasis added)

A 'life changing challenge' here is designed to 'switch on' young people to wake them up to the obligations of self-control. 'Be responsible', 'improve your attitude', and 'move forward'. These are the sorts of motifs replete within RSLA. They are intended as invitations and directives for young people to look after themselves and in doing so, pose less of a risk to themselves and others (Dean, 2002). Strategies of power are concerned with self-control, self-awareness, and self-improvement. For example, here is an excerpt from a practitioner interview:

But sometimes with the really tricky ones it is almost like **you are just teaching them to get here on time**, that's an issue for the really tough ones—you need to be here at 9.00am and you just keep going on about that because at the end of the day, if they have got that down pat, then I think that's really, really important; they need to understand time management, that it is not OK to come in at 9.30am. If by the end of the week if they have come in at 9.00am then you know that you have tried to teach them that, that 9.00am is important—it is a start...And I think that when the kids are coming in, we are here for them, **but there is a line in the sand they have got to do the discipline, we try and get them to do the dishes**. We provide lunch, you do the dishes, and if they don't then we are on to it, **so it is not like a holiday camp, there are rules and we try and enforce them as much as we can, that's your responsibility, you eat here you clean up here and you put your plate back, so you are teaching them** that in a roundabout way...Boundaries are really, fairly tight, we don't just let them run rampant... (Interview #1, Youth Worker, emphasis added)

As the above quote indicates, disciplining the minds and conduct of some young people involves matters to do with routine, such as keeping time, and simple expectations such as contributing to the washing up. The fact that these activities

should form part of the practices of compulsory education demonstrate its disciplining and tutoring characteristics that are arguably about training the mind and body for routine work (Moore, 2009). The quote above from Interview #1 is not unique—much of the data was indicative of these kinds of practices and authorities spoke of their concerns about undisciplined, almost uncivilised young people.

Participation Coordinators in particular, and others for that matter, engaged in a form of *tutelage*, (Donzelot, 1979) by assuming the role of protective and watchful teacher and mentor. To this end, they adopted some of the socialisation tasks normally reserved for the family unit, and in doing so, took on board several monitoring and pastoral functions, such as guiding and stewarding young people in the decisions about education and work they were making:

...yeah it's a big role on monitoring and making sure kids are motivated, making sure they're getting the help they need, making sure you point them towards work agencies or Centrelink or anywhere they need to be because a lot of them just aren't aware and they have bad information usually from their mates...and [for] some of them it's a matter of getting them counselling, that kind of help first, holistic help and **that's what we are, kind of an overseer in a way** because they can't get [into] education or training until some of those things are sorted out.
(Interview #11, Youth Worker)

Again, it can be seen that the scope of work within RSLA contains both psychological tactics aimed at self-management, but in the background in this example are the agencies and structures of government, because “if youth cannot or will not govern/control their conduct, they cease to be ‘docile bodies’ and

‘useful’ so in weilding [sic] its biopower, the state youth justice system intervenes to control youth” (Besley, 2009, p. 36).

Collecting and sharing information: Getting to know you

To work effectively requires an assessment (Coulshed & Orme, 1998), and assessment, particularly in risk societies, requires and legitimates collecting information about people (Webb, 2006). In the case of RSLA, local authorities were able to share information quite freely about individual students, and this was argued as an effective pre-requisite to doing ‘good work’. Getting to know the young person student means getting to the heart of their situation, understanding their hopes, dreams, fears, and identifying the kinds of barriers that are seen to frustrate a ‘normal’ educational trajectory. Here is an example from a Participation Manager:

The way I like to see the team operate or PC operate is that they **initially conduct some background on the kid...**at the end of the day, **it’s appropriate to capture as much information as you can about the young person** before you dive in head long, so that’ll be talking to various parties. If it’s an external referral, talking to the referrer. If it’s a school, you go and talk to the year co-ordinator or whoever your contact person is at the school, build up a profile, initiate contact with the young person and their family, start building up a working relationship with that person. (Interview #10, Manager, Participation Coordinator, emphasis added)

These strategies are aimed at understanding the subjectivities of the young person in sufficient detail so that plans for orchestrating different kinds of attitudes and behaviours can be worked on and routinised. Interviews with

students and their families formed the basis of planning their commitments and responsibilities, often ratified in formal agreements, as the following excerpt from an engagement program demonstrates:

Each student will have a contract where they agree to follow the program protocols for on and off line attendance and participation.
(Document #174)

The basis of assessments, plans and agreements are informed from regular liaison with other authorities and institutions, as this Participation Coordinator testifies:

We get a little bit of background from schools mainly on their attendance and their behaviour...I actually encourage them all to talk about the cases and talk to...our Retention and Participation Officer who does 15 and under in the Aboriginal Team because we do a lot of home [visits] and as I said, to ensure your safety at least know a little bit of the history...that's the main thing is collect a bit of that background...**We have lists, we get the school enrolment list...we know every child because...every school will send you their lists of Year 11 enrolments...we just collect what we call the NEET data**, so we've gone round to every school in the district and asked them to identify Year 10 students potentially at risk of disengaging or have already disengaged, so we've already done that so you have an idea and...the Retention Officer passes over [the] Year 10 [data]...so you really have a good idea of how many...will drop out in first year. (Interview #11, Participation Coordinator, emphasis added)

Clearly, a coordinated approach to building a picture of who should be watched over was undertaken. A coordinated case-management approach was also used to design and authorise particular pathways. The most common of these was expressed as an Individual Pathway Plan (IPP):

Individual Pathway Plan is basically goal setting, so what are you interested in, what would you like to do, how do you see yourself doing in 5 years, 10 years, attached to that what we've done here is with that pathways plan, we've done a risk assessment tool, so you go through and you – drug use, been involved with the police, so you've got an idea what's gone on in their lives. Like I said a consent for exchange of information and just a little bit of background, what are your hobbies, do you have work, that sort of thing, do you look after your brother and sister before or after school, that sort of questions to give you a little bit broader background. (Interview #12, Participation Coordinator)

The IPP was the disciplining tool used to craft and sanction the right kind of conduct. Getting to *know* the student was central to this and data collection and interviews were methods used to achieve this. Once the plan was developed, various forms of monitoring and practices in the art of *tutelage* (Donzelot, 1979) could be drawn from to ensure the plan was successful. Overall, the establishment of regular norms of participation and behaviour, and the routines of managing these comprised both welfare and policing mentalities.

Watching and checking on young people

The practice of reporting, home visits, panels, behaviour contracts, and, as one person put it, watching over the “serious flight risks” (Interview #9, Teacher/Student Advisor) aim to ensure that part of the conduct of young people is to remain visible and accounted for. Knowing where every young person is and what they are doing at all times was a major policy objective explicitly stated in official policy documentation (Department of Education and Training, 2005b). This objective was set back even before the consultation phase of 2004 where the concerns about absent and unaccounted for students ‘doing

nothing' were already well-rehearsed (Carpenter, 2004). Here are some examples of this objective in action, taken from DET documents:

...**monitor** student attendance and intervene where necessary...for some students, schools may need to closely monitor and follow up their attendance. (Document #174, emphasis added)

Their [PC] first task will be to **identify** the Year 10 students in 2005 considered at risk of disengaging. (Document #164, emphasis added)

A student does not need to have 'dropped out' to be referred to a Participation Coordinator; a school or RTO can refer students covered by the new legislation who are at risk of becoming disengaged. (Document #164)

Participation Coordinators will be authorised by the Director General of the Department of Education and Training to have **access to relevant student details** (eg address and contact details). (Document #164, emphasis added)

Attendance/engagement in the program...can be **monitored by tracking students** via their web based learning platform and their individual attendance at face-to-face sessions...ongoing informal and formal email and face-to-face feedback in which students 'check in' with their teacher to discuss their academic and emotional and social progress and to problem solve as issues arise. (Document #174, emphasis added)

How these aims translate into practice varies, but what was common among the data was the adoption of a surveillance mentality. As the following example shows, this mentality was well understood by those charged with the responsibility of implementing RSLA:

Q: Okay and your role as Participation Coordinator, what does that sort of encompass?

A: Monitoring, supporting and assisting young people to access education, training or employment options.

Q: So, on a day-to-day basis what does that involve?

A: Being 'Big Brother'.

Q: Is that how you see the role, a bit like 'Big Brother'?

A: Very much 'Big Brother' – you know you are tracking and monitoring every student, you know what they are doing and what they're not doing. (Interview #12, Participation Coordinator)

If the institutions of RSLA are not directly involved in eliciting and ensuring visibility, other institutions concerned with the conduct of young people may take on similar roles. For example:

But then the way I look at it, there's you know, the 3-5 per cent sort of population that we struggle with, they end up being picked up in other ways, shapes or forms. You know, youth pathways or eventually if they are on benefits, they **bump into Centrelink**, you know, mutual obligation and those sorts of things. Or **Justice gets involved** with them or you know, other organisations. So at the end of the day there are **other activities that pick those kids up**. (Interview #10, Manager, Participation Coordinator, emphasis added)

In this example, even if some young people do 'escape' the watch of RSLA authorities, trust is placed in other systems to eventually scoop them up. It is telling, but not surprising, that these 'other' systems would be largely judicial and statutory in nature.

Overall, the regulating and monitoring/policing practices are part of the techniques of enabling young people to conform to the normative standards set within the policy rationality and its associated practices (Mansfield, 2000, pp. 60-62). These practices are panoptic with specific automatic functions (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). The young person who is compelled to turn up to a workshop at 9.00am, who is obligated to wash dishes, or sign an IPP contract, is expected to

do so 'willingly' as an automatic function of the proper self. They may do this because they are held within a network of micro practices that *know* about them, *know* of them, and *teach* adherence to a set of obligations and commitments concerned with participation in a normatively defined and officially sanctioned education, training and employment pathway. Intersecting with this preoccupation to watch over and intervene in the conduct of young people is a form of moral panic about some young people and their families.

Moral panic: The school as surrogate family

Changes to families, and a view that widespread family breakdown besets young people, has meant that that schools and other educational systems and authorities are stepping in to carry out disciplining functions (Zinsmeister, 1996). In the data presented above, a couple of key points can be extracted. First, the disciplining of the conduct of young people stretched far beyond the straightforward aims of education and learning (in the sense of two more years of learning formal curriculum) and deep into the behaviours, attitudes and dispositions of young people themselves. Achieving this involved closely monitoring and getting to *know* the at-risk young person and working with them to *become a better person*. Second, these functions have been picked up by local authorities who have stepped in to fill a vacuum of some kind. Teaching young people to turn up on time, to have confidence in themselves, to wash dishes, and to exercise proper deportment and grooming has fallen to a network of experts

in RSLA because—for some at least—it is no longer a function that sits within another significant socialising institution: the family⁷².

It is not the intention to argue here that family change is *the* explanatory variable behind RSLA's disciplining character, but to give some context behind the socialising functions that are unquestionably part of RSLA's fixation on the conduct-of-the-conduct-of-young-people, not simply towards educational aims, but towards moral and social aims too. This situation may also explain why such disciplining practices take on the veneer of being so normal, and by this it means that nowhere was there any indication that people had stopped and asked: 'What is going on here with all this work 'parenting' disengaged young people?' Such practices are actually not normal in a universal sense, because they are historically and culturally specific. Still, a crisis and moral panic about young people is a powerful discourse (Giroux, 2012). For example:

We have a child care crisis in our country. I'm not talking about the increasing numbers of working mothers or the greater need for preschool programs. Those are merely symptoms of a more profound problem facing society. The crisis is a moral one, a devaluation of life at every level of experience that affects our children as they grow and develop what in contemporary slang is called 'attitude!' (Fields, 1994, p. 40)

Moral hysteria, such as indicated in the quote above, is instructive in explaining the increasing role that education systems take in disciplining and socialising young people (Besley, 2002), a role that has been flagged as one of several major

⁷² See chapter two for a review of the literature and arguments that suggest that family functions are being shifted to schools.

challenges for education systems everywhere since at least the 1980s (Godet, 1988). As explained in chapter two, this disciplining and socialising function has always been a part of mass education. However, since at least the 1980s-1990s, hypersensitivity around the morality and education of young people has deepened (Giroux, 2012).

For example, Fields (1994) argued that adults have abandoned young people, and in doing so, have relegated them to the scrapheap, emptying them of any moral character and turning them into “ethical ignoramuses” (Fields, 1994, p. 40). Schools and educational spaces are but one of many ‘playgrounds’ where these ‘problems of attitude’ can surface. In the case of RSLA, they are also sites where a corrective to this situation can be made.

However, there is more going on here than just the rhetoric of moral panic (Cohen, 2011). Arguably, a shift in the relationship between schools, families and young people does account for why there might be an emergent focus on disciplining young people through policy instruments like RSLA. It might explain why doing this seems so normal and beyond question. It might also explain why the RSLA policy focus is so much centred on the young person themselves (and to a lesser extent their families) and *not* so much the broader educational enterprise. Within the RSLA discourse, there was no extensive frank and fearless examination of why, for many young people, schools can be such difficult places to inhabit (Hodgson, 2007; Hosie, 2007). Furthermore, there was little debate about what can be done about it either.

Conclusion

It is clear that the policy aims of compulsory education extend well beyond ideas about *learning* because the aims are also about young people's conduct around the goals of participation and engagement. In the context of RSLA, these aims rely on, in part, the establishment of a network of local authorities and experts in youth and alternative education. As a consequence, an opportunity for existing youth services, youth workers and social workers was created to extend their existing work with young people to now include 'participation' in compulsory education as an important priority and rationale for their involvement and interventions with young people and their families. Although the strategies deployed by a 'multiplicity of authorities and agencies' do embody an ethos of self-government (Dean, 1998), young people in the RSLA context were mainly thought of as unable to exercise self-government, at least in the short-term. That is *why* they are disengaged, because it is thought that they have failed to take responsibility to adequately govern or steer their own behaviour into full-time participation.

Combing through the data I did get a sense of the following: when young people are deemed at-risk, or disengaged, and are required to participate, or are embroiled in some form of intervention with state authorised engagement activities, they are at the same time engaging with a quasi-family concerned with their socialisation. Except, it is not really a family at all—because all of this concern is really about getting young people into jobs; and this is a narrow

policy prescription given that young people want more from life than credentials and jobs (Wyn, 2007a, p. 176).

CHAPTER 10 – ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY AND SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITIONS

[RSLA is]...to do with trying to improve participation rates and therefore if you cut to the chase with the whole thing, it's about trying to increase young people's attainment and all the research clearly indicates that if you increase a young person's attainment and effective participation they have better life outcomes. So that's it, if you carve away all the tripe around the policy, that's what we're talking about. (Interview #10, Manager, Participation Coordinator)

Training emptied of any depth of knowledge content and organised according to notions of work-based competencies is increasingly provided for those expected to fill the insecure and low status jobs that are the reality for many in the 'knowledge economy'... (Simmons, 2008, p. 435)

Introduction

In concluding chapter nine, I indicated that the *telos* of RSLA was to ensure that young people move as seamlessly as possible from a full-time educational environment to employment. Under this expectation, a moral standard is installed and judgements about young people who do not meet this standard are circulated and put into practice. One of the results of this is that distinct differences emerge in a discourse about those young people who do not complete 12 years of education and those who do. In fact, as will be shown in this chapter, the lines between these two groups are sharply drawn.

It is apparent that *not* completing 12 years of education is a problem because it is so distinctly tied to the health, welfare and prosperity of not only the individual, but society at large. At the same time, the virtues of completing 12

years of education are akin to winning some kind of ‘lifestyle lottery’, where financial wealth as well as social, cultural and civic benefits lie in wait. This kind of biopolitics is concerned with the corporeal activities of groups of young people and what they are doing—their behaviours, attitudes, conduct, and outlook towards life. As mentioned, acting right, dressing right, thinking right, and embracing life-long-learning is celebrated and incited.

In the context of RSLA, a particular kind of person is created that provides a shorthand way of examining whether or not someone comports to these expectations. This person is the NEET person.⁷³ NEETs are *the* group of young people to worry over, and NEETs fall directly into the RSLA gaze and interventions. Much is on the line here under this policy motif: *NEETs are dangerous and costly; our collective future is at stake*. And the reason this is the case is because of the mounting evidence that links disadvantage, early school leaving, and protracted difficulties in securing meaningful work (Vinson, cited in Down & Smyth, 2012, p. 205).

In this chapter I argue that RSLA is not just about the education of young people, but about the economic and social functioning of the community at large. RSLA can be seen as a practice in biopolitics—as a strategic attempt through compulsory education—to improve the health, wealth and prosperity of the many, by actively intervening with the few. However, while these social and economic goals may be important, the path towards attaining them invariably

⁷³ See a discussion and critique of this concept in chapter three.

involves the creation and construction of problems and problem groups who need to be dealt with and managed. I begin this chapter by briefly reviewing the main theoretical concept at work in the analysis that follows, namely biopower.

Theoretical considerations: The biopolitical contours of RSLA

Biopower is a politics concerned with intervening in ways to optimise the health, welfare and social functioning of *populations* (Dean, 1999; Foucault, 2003; Rabinow & Rose, 2003b). 'Population' here refers to all those young people entering the upper high school years and at the point of transition from school to further study or work. How do we know who these people are and what they are doing? 'Population' and what it is doing is a concept made visible via statistical representation, especially through the advent of the social sciences (Foucault, 2003, p. 247). In this way, patterns and trends can be identified and problems at a whole of society level conceptualised and thought about (Foucault, 2003).

Research and data trends about youth, transition, employment, and the link to schooling is the statistical fodder that informs and legitimises RSLA.

Consequently, NEETs are created and drawn into existence; NEETs are the population made real through research and conceptual elaboration (see chapter three). Many of the interview respondents pointed to 'research' in a very generalised and abstract way as the *knowledge* (truth) that proves that 12 years of education is ideal, not just for the individual, but for society and the economy,

and they compared and contrasted this against NEETs, who were seen as the problem here. One of the consequences of this is that young people are dragged into this binary. They are invariably constructed, labelled and classified according to their group membership as either completers or NEETs. This membership is defined by certain behaviours, characteristics and attributes broadly representative of NEETs, and the various social, psychological and cultural theories and discourses that inform such constructions about young people generally (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001). While background research gives a statistical basis for policy reform, it also constructs the way the problem is thought about, and it constructs particular identities too (Bacchi, 2009).

This may be done with the very best of intentions. However, even though it is a form of vitalist life politics (Hook, 2004b, p. 245; Rabinow & Rose, 2003a, 2003b), biopower is not strictly a benevolent form of political power (Rabinow & Rose, 2003b). For example, judicial and medical power in the 19th and 20th centuries—despite being a power expressed about the common good—placed great emphasis on social hygiene and regulation, and in doing so, legitimated racist, regulatory and punishing corporeal activities against those seen to threaten notions of racial ‘purity’ (Bernasconi, 2010). Similar biopolitical strategies can be found in eugenics movements that infiltrated schools, permeating and degrading debates about intelligence and the social order (Chitty, 2007). More recently, biopower is a distinctly capitalist endeavour as biology has transmogrified into an economic powerhouse that Peters and Venkatesan (2010) call biocapitalism.

These kinds of ugly biopolitics were not overtly evident in the RSLA focus on NEETs, but an economic angle was. Instead, there was—at least at the level of official rhetoric—an ethic of empowerment and desire for *all* young people, especially those most vulnerable and disadvantaged, to reach their potential and be the best they can be. Here, young people are seen as bubbles of economic and civic potential that must be mobilised as best as possible, and in doing so, the biopolitical side of RSLA could be described as a weak form of *economic nationalism*. It was economic in the sense that the *raison d'être* in biopolitical terms was state and national economic competitiveness in an ocean of global economic turmoil. It was nationalist in the sense of attempting to structure, through policy, more capacity for civic participation and in doing so, constitute young people as workers and consumers. These broader ideals hook up with other political aims of reconstructing identities of lone parents, carers, and even children as workers and economic functionaries (Redmond, 2010). It is along these broad political contours that an increase in compulsory education is argued on the grounds that it is good for the nation's economy and social functioning.

In RSLA, distinct contrasts between completing and not completing 12 years of education were made, and by extension, groups of people were classified as NEETs (non-completers) or at risk of being NEET (potential non-completers)—the latter were constructed as problems to be worried over and dealt with somehow. The principle signifier of being NEET in RSLA is 'disengaged'. Being disengaged is the worst kind of state to be in because it is both a corporeal

situation that poses a risk to the individual (for example, lying around on the couch doing nothing) at the same time as it poses a political problem (for example, wasted economic opportunity and a drain on society's resources). Inevitably, groups of people classified as risky, dangerous and a threat to the social, political and economic order are subjected to state and non-state based interventions, such as actuarial programs of risk management that sit the responsibility of dealing with risks on the individual (Petersen, 1997).

Thus, biopolitical interventions about disengaged NEETs are concerned with social welfare, and RSLA biopower is a productive and enabling power that aims to maximise the health, welfare and social functioning of particular groups like those disengaged (Rabinow & Rose, 2003b, p.14).

The biopolitical persuasions of early school leaving

Early school leaving will hurt the young person

According to the RSLA policy logic, NEETs are the most vulnerable group of young people, at risk of the world that lies in wait. In this world, it is argued, it is tough to survive. Less than optimistic views permeate the discourse. Consider this statement, for example: "*The days when students could leave school at the age of 15 and find a job with good long-term prospects are over*" (Document #161). In such a context, anyone who leaves school at 15 without prospects for work or

further study is automatically 'at-risk'. As mentioned, at this level of concern the risk is *to the young person*. Here, the metaphor of the pathway and the journey is often evoked. In the scenario below, the pathway from school to work is akin to a harrowing four-wheel-drive track, for which there are no maps or signs. In the following example, Career Development is proffered as the solution:

Students need the keys to operate their own all-terrain vehicle. Students need a map of the terrain they will be facing. Career Development can help provide the keys and the map! (Document #24)

The tenor of the interview data and policy documents about early school leaving and NEETs is one of alarm, most obviously because this is linked to research studies and popular perceptions of falling educational standards, especially among boys (Smith, 2010). In the case of the Western Australian State Government's RSLA consultation paper (Carpenter, 2004), bold type font with several exclamation marks is used to highlight the statements that suggest we have a serious problem on our hands and we must act now!

The bearers of such concerns are schools and the community at large:

Schools and communities are increasingly concerned about a significant number of students who feel alienated from schooling and who are therefore unable to achieve their educational potential. These concerns have increased importance when we consider the possible consequences of student alienation and under-achievement, such as substance abuse, truancy and crime. (Document #174)

In response to this, a rallying cry is issued evoking a sense of collective responsibility to deal with this situation:

Parents and schools must work together to ensure students have every opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in life. (Document #184)

To summarise, part of the RSLA argument tends to run like this:

- The world is dangerous and full of social and economic and other threats.

Therefore

- 12 years of compulsory education is necessary in order to meet those threats head on.

In setting out a broad scale political argument like this, it is inevitable then that people who do not complete 12 years of education will be viewed as a problem to themselves and to society generally. For example:

There is **strong evidence** that links poor attendance with poor educational outcomes. Poor attendance has also been linked to **juvenile offending rates, social isolation of students, mental health problems and reduced employment prospects later in life**. (Document #184, emphasis added)

Terms like ‘research’ and ‘evidence’ were repeatedly put forward as the foundations of these kinds of arguments, even though the sources of these studies remained elusive. Although, as alluded to above, there were some fairly specific statements about the ‘kinds’ of risks facing young people who do not complete 12 years of education. Analysis of the data revealed numerous kinds of risks to non-completers that were repeated and recycled through multiple data

sources. These were identified and I produced a list of these statements and then and converted the list into a Wordle, as shown in Figure eight:

Figure 8: Risks to non-completers



These risks are overwhelmingly pitched as a concern for the welfare of the individual—in this case, the NEET student—but linked to this is a sense that *en masse* this all this amounts to an economic problem.

Early school leaving will hurt the economy

Figure eight, above, comprises the kinds of concerns that RSLA holds about young people. Underpinning this in no small part is the sense that there are costs to the broader community too. Most obviously, it was put forward that it is

economically costly to have young people exit education and training at age 15 without further prospects. It is repeatedly stated in the RSLA policy literature that the economic costs to Australia of not completing 12 years of education is around \$2.6 billion. Concerns abound that Australia will fall well behind other OECD countries on several indicators, namely economic competitiveness:

In terms of secondary school completion, Australia ranks behind most other OECD countries (seventeenth [sic] out of 28). This gap between the education “haves” and “have-nots” is undermining Australia’s ability to compete in the global knowledge economy. **A failure to address the issue will exacerbate income inequality and undermine social cohesion.** (Document #161, emphasis added)

Australia, it is thought, won’t be able to compete nationally or internationally unless its young people complete 12 or more years of education. These arguments extend to a more local level as well, where the continual growth and strength of Western Australia’s State economy is raised as an issue to fret over. Lifting the compulsory school leaving age is couched as an important strategy to this end. A statement by then Minister for Education and Training Ljiljana Ravlich expresses this sentiment well:

This is a change that is not just in the best long-term interests of all students, but one that will also help ensure WA’s economy continues to thrive. (Document #122)

An important source used in RSLA to make the case that having large groups of young people not completing 12 years of education is an economic problem is the Business Council of Australia 2003 publication titled *The Cost of Dropping*

Out: The Economic Impact of Early School Leaving (Business Council of Australia, 2003). This publication argued that:

The trend of young people not completing year 12 or equivalent will inevitably result in lower employment rates, increased welfare payments, lower productivity and lower tax revenue for Australia. (Business Council of Australia, 2003, p. 8)

This general argument was also picked up by practitioners working within RSLA to some extent. However, economic matters were not really their main concern or focus. Rather than being a purely economic end in itself, participation and completion of 12 years of education it was framed more in the terms of *social functioning*—a view also expressed in informing documents like *The Cost of Dropping Out* (Business Council of Australia, 2003).

Early school leaving will hurt society

There is a sense, then, that notwithstanding matters of economy, there are other more direct pressing *social* costs at stake. As mentioned, not completing 12 years of education is seen as a social problem inasmuch as it is seen as a problem for the individual (Atweh et al., 2007; Cavanagh & Reynolds, 2007; Smyth & Hattam, 2004). The (mis)fortunes of young people and society more broadly are intertwined (Business Council of Australia, 2003; Manni & Kalb, 2003; Marks & McMillan, 2001; Spierings, 2000). In the RSLA context, all sorts of social and economic costs are offered up, from a burgeoning group of people who are welfare dependant, to widening income inequality, to an almost complete

breakdown of the social order. Not completing 12 years of education is seen to pose an “*unacceptable burden on the individual student, their families and society*” (Document #171).

Frequently, the link to crime and not completing 12 years of education is made. For example:

The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research and the Australian National University examined the influence of school retention and long-term unemployment among males aged 15-24 on trends in home break-ins in NSW between 1989 and 1999. The study suggested that if these individuals had continued in formal education to year 12 and achieved some degree of success in education or training, the instances of breaking, entering and stealing among them would have been reduced by almost 15 per cent per year...This highlights some of the potential benefits to society in terms of crime reduction that follow from the introduction of policies that promote young people’s educational success. (Document #161)

Crime, drugs and mental health problems were frequently cited in the data not just as problems for young people themselves, but as social problems as well.

The link between not completing 12 years of education and social problems was often argued in direct causal terms, as though early school leaving *determined* social problems:

Well once they leave school, it's often the case that they'll get in with the wrong crowd, they'll start to, because of the boredom factor, they're not doing anything, they'll get involved in either drugs or some kind of criminal behaviour and it all spirals out of whack from there. (Interview #7, Manager, Participation Coordinator)

The virtues and benefits of 12 years of education

It is not surprising then that the virtues and benefits of completing 12 years of education are extolled. These benefits are also borne out in a range of studies (Lamb & McKenzie, 2001; Marks & McMillan, 2001). In RSLA, young people who complete 12 years of education are seen as lifelong learners with potential, who are more likely to succeed in life. They are viewed as being more literate and numerate, and having higher level skills that will enable them to take a more active part in civil society. They are thought to possess better social values and a work ethic that will contribute to creating a more socially and economically successful society. For example:

There is a trend among Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries to retain students in school or vocational education and training for longer because of the clear benefits in literacy, maturity and preparation for work and further study.
(Document #161)

Importantly, completers of 12 years of education are thought to be able to earn *more money* and a higher income is frequently called upon as a benefit of more compulsory education. The distinctions between completers and non-completers were evident in the data and are summarised in Table 10 on the following page:

Table 10: Binary split between completers and non-completers

A: Do not complete 12 years of education	B: Complete 12 years of education
Lack access to further training	Lifelong learners
Information poor	Information rich
Dull, boring work	Interesting, challenging work
Social disadvantage	Succeed in life
Alienated	Citizen
Have nots	Haves
Mental health problems	Potential
Impoverished lifestyle	Active part in civil society
Lack of motivation and confidence	Values to survive (work ethic)
Small lifetime earnings	Earn more money

It is clear that a divide between those who complete and those who do not complete 12 years of education exists. This is a good example of a binary that exists in many debates about youth and risk (Besley, 2009, p. 56). The effect is that a juxtaposition between completing or not completing 12 years of education creates the discursive regularity for mounting a case for an increase in compulsory education. By 2005 when the consultation process was complete, it was proclaimed there was widespread community support and that this proposal was inevitable in its simple necessity (Department of Education and Training, 2005a). It is no wonder really. An extra two years of education is, in today's terms, unquestionable—and virtually unthinkable to counter otherwise.

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose

A comparison of the RSLA data with literature about raising the school leaving age in the post-World War II era (sources used were HM Inspectors of Schools, 1976; Kandel, 1951; Morey, 1945; Scottish Education Department, 1966, 1970; Seaborne, 1970; The Schools Council, 1965) shows clearly that 'the more things change the more they stay the same'. Why was age 15 an acceptable age to leave school in 1966, but so unacceptable today? As mentioned, the context has changed. This is understandable. But in what ways has it changed? The literature from the post-war era as well as the RSLA policy literature contains particular concepts, ideas, arguments and debates. These are set out in condensed form in Table 11, following. I used some overarching themes to organise my findings (see Table 11, left column). As is apparent in Table 11, there were some similarities and some stark differences between these two historical periods.

**Table 11: Raising the school leaving age – post-World War II era
and early 21st century**

Theme	1945-late 60s	1990s – 21st century Australia
Social change	Changes in technology in the workforce and in society	Globalisation
Relationship between school and employment	For instrumental reasons regarding employment	For instrumental reasons regarding employment
Purpose of learning	For instrumental reasons regarding employment and to help develop a society of critical thinkers, politically engaged and culturally enlightened citizens	For instrumental reasons regarding employment and to help people become entrepreneurial consumers and life-long learners
Curriculum development	Focus is on humanities and arts	Focus is on vocation and competency
Intervention frame	Focus is on making school a better place for students	Focus is on making students comply with compulsory education rules
Intervention practice	Teacher training, reorganising curriculum, investment in public education	Surveillance and monitoring of student conduct
View of student	Emerging young adult	Social danger, problem, at risk of disengagement
Moral dimension	Society, citizenship, civilising the masses	To protect young people from risk and dangers; individual self-improvement

Table 11 shows some differences in ideas about school and young people between these two periods. Underpinning the thinking about school and young people in the 21st century is said to be the backdrop associated with late modernity and the many economic, social, political and ecological crises

associated with late capitalism (Beck, 1992; Gibson, 2011; Giddens, 1990; Goldstein, 2012; Pelling, Manuel-Navarrete, & Redclift, 2012; Phillips, 2008; Ramirez, 2012). Many features of society and an abstracted ill-defined notion of ‘*the economy*’ is conceptualised as being volatile, unclear, and given over to unpredictable change and flux (Fidler & Nicoll, 2010). We are said to be living in a rapidly changing world that gives rise to a demanding social and global environment (Cieslik & Pollock, 2002). These ideas are picked up with considerable ease and redistributed in the context of RSLA. For example:

The composition of Western Australia’s workforce—and the skills that the workforce need—has undergone enormous change compared with 30 years ago. (Document #161)

The problem with this kind of social change analysis is that it is laden with reductionist assumptions about a linear history moving in a forward direction. Walters (2006) argues that notions of distinct epochs largely obscure the poly-temporal and overlapping components of society, and unduly give theoretical power to epochal narratives like globalisation as distinctly logical explanations for present day situations.

What *is* the case here is that the present context is seen to contain specific problems of a mismatch between the skills and training of young people due to the contemporaneous condition of the labour market. On January 11, 2009, in the context of reporting the *failings* of RSLA Western Australia’s weekend newspaper, *The Sunday Times*, referred to WA Curriculum Council CEO David Wood who was concerned that “teens might be going into jobs without training

[that] might not offer good career prospects". It was a view that was shared by Education Minister Liz Constable who stated that "teenagers who opt for employment when they are 15 or 16 may not have the necessary general *coping skills* to succeed in the workforce" (Lampathakis, 2009, p. 9, emphasis added). This view has been around for some time and is summarised by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research paper as follows:

Young people leaving school, early or otherwise, face problems of decreasing job availability and access, lack of work experience, increasing casualization of the labour market, and conflicting pressures to complete their schooling and/or to take on volunteer and part-time work. (NCVER, 1999, p. 2)

According to Teese (2004), these concerns are well-founded because successive studies have found that "it is not in the economic interests of young people to leave school early, however strong their economic motives" (p. 188) and that "early leaving, where it involves flight from school and is essentially negative in nature, may thus have wider cultural consequences" (p. 189). Part of the emphasis on employability skills is reflected in an attempt to prepare young people for "a life of social and economic risk and uncertainty" (Simmons, 2008, p. 435) and part of it is because NEETs can be utilised as a supply-side solution to economic demands for a cheap and compliant workforce (Simmons, 2008). This situation was clearly reflected in numerous examples of RSLA engagement programs and associated practices with NEETs and those deemed at risk of becoming NEET.

Conclusion

Education is a social and institutional domain ripe for policy interventions of a biopolitical nature, because education concerns the wellbeing of populations *and* the corporeal activities of individual people (Audrey et al., 2009). The individual young person and their conduct, their achievement, their discipline, and their learning in school is a corporeal activity that can be scrutinised, assessed, examined, trained and managed. But, *en masse*, the education of an entire population has biopolitical aspects insofar as it has implications for economic prosperity and civil conduct (Foucault, 2003). This view is quite clearly set out, for example, in the DET RSLA consultation paper where increasing the school leaving age is argued as a strategy towards attaining social justice and economic prosperity (Carpenter, 2004). From this perspective, compulsory education is not just about any one individual, but about the welfare and economic prosperity of a population.

One of the outcomes of this is that it has created a much sharper dichotomy between completers and non-completers. Completers are seen as better equipped to tackle the social and economic context they will inherit. Non-completers are seen as being at risk of this context at the same time as they are viewed as an economic and social problem. In working out who falls into what group, RSLA has adopted the concept NEET to create a new category of young person, one who falls within the intervention scope of RSLA. The issue is that this concept itself is highly problematic and has been extensively critiqued in the

United Kingdom (Furlong, 2006; Yates & Payne, 2006). NEET fails to adequately represent or deal with the problem of early school leaving, and its psychological and individualising nature fails to address the socio-economic and institutionalised problems that predict early school leaving in the first place.

This chapter concludes the presentation of the data and analysis. The following chapter will draw from this the main conclusions of this research. As a lead in to that chapter, I end chapter 10 with a brief summary of the findings of this research.

A summary so far...

A clearly articulated rationality circulates in the context of the raised school leaving age policy context in Western Australia. It starts with a view that some young people are damaged by the 'dangerous world out there'. The damage is usually to their mental health, their development, and to their self-esteem. They are now 'at-risk'. The risk here is that they won't be able to get jobs or manage their own affairs and then they will become a burden on society and disadvantaged. So, in order to help them one of the things they can do is stay engaged in education and training until age 17—for their protection and for the good of society. Education is now seen as an insurance policy, not just for young people, but for everyone.

Under this rationality, the problem is framed as a problem for young people themselves that can be addressed with counselling, and programs to repair their broken self-esteem and boost their confidence and self-worth. That is why some of the interventions under the guise of compulsory education include things like outdoor adventure camps, cooking classes, and lessons in how to prepare for work. It also includes the provision of welfare services and social support. As far as education goes, disengaged and 'at-risk' NEETs are sometimes provided with individualised programs of learning, usually because they are seen as not able to function in a mainstream learning environment.

A distinctly deficit view of some young people is tied into this policy. These young people are exhorted by authorities to start to think of themselves as motivated, self-reliant, and responsible people. However, the real aim driving all this is getting young people into employment, because (so the thinking goes) when they have jobs they will be happy, confident, and most importantly, self-reliant.

Context is important in understanding these sorts of innovations and changes in policy. Two significant factors are worth noting. The first concerns changes in the youth labour market and worries about economic downturn. In Australia in the 1980s the youth labour market collapsed and the number of secure full-time jobs available to young people rapidly diminished. When that is coupled with a nervousness about economic decline an increase in education is offered up as a solution.

Second, some of the care and control socialisation functions of children and young people that were normally under the purview of the family institution have in some ways been transferred to the school. The phenomenon of schools being turned into surrogate quasi-families has been noted since the 1990s in the US and is a trend elsewhere. This is why some of the practices under compulsory education don't seem to resemble education and learning in the sense of curriculum, but include things like deportment, grooming, and basic workplace etiquette. Perhaps schools have always done these sorts of things, but the scope and extent of these family roles is taking on a new sense of urgency. Thus, a panic hangs over some groups of young people who are marked out as not participating in their education in the right ways because they are thought to be at risk of failing not only in school but in life too.

CHAPTER 11 – CONCLUSION

Major innovations in educational policy, such as the implementation of compulsory education, vocational training or the expansion of special education...have been the keystones of this welfare governmentality – alternatively definable as a belief in education.

Belief in education is, of course, a worldwide phenomenon. Governments of all persuasions offer ‘education’ as the solution for almost every conceivable problem, not least unemployment. Marshalling the unemployed into manpower training schemes is everybody’s favourite:

Unions like training programmes because they can use them to push up wages. Academics like them because they increase demand for education. Parents like them because they give out-of-work, out-of-school youths something to do. Prophets of a post-modern society praise them as part of an ethic of life-long-learning. And employers don’t mind them because the public pays the bill (The Economist, 6 April 1996). (Osmo & Risto, 1998, p. 41)

Introduction

Raising the compulsory school leaving age in Western Australia is less about increasing and extending the education of young people and more about managing their whereabouts and their conduct. Its focus is on instilling a set of virtues concerned with employability, participation and engagement. It is undergirded by a rationality about youth-at-risk and it entails the deployment of specific monitoring and discipline technologies concerned with the psychology and visibility of young people.

This chapter ends this thesis by outlining the main conclusions, as well as providing a critical commentary about the research theory and methodology.

This chapter begins by addressing the research question(s) and summarising the

main arguments concluded about RSLA. Then, I identify three main criticisms that can be levelled at RSLA and suggest some ways forward to improve the RSLA policy framing and its associated practices. In the context of identifying some of the limitations and problems with my theoretical and methodological approach, I then outline some possible directions and lines of inquiry for future research.

A summary of the conclusions in theoretical terms

This section begins by providing a condensed summary of the findings of this research in theoretical terms, first in reference to the governmentality framework discussed in chapter four, and then in regards to the critical realist position of this study discussed in chapter five. The purpose of this is to provide an accessible overview of the conclusions in theoretical terms as a way of providing a 'way in' to the arguments and criticisms that follow in this chapter. Table 12, following, summarises the conclusions against the seven theoretical governmentality concepts:

Table 12: Summary of conclusions within the governmentality framework

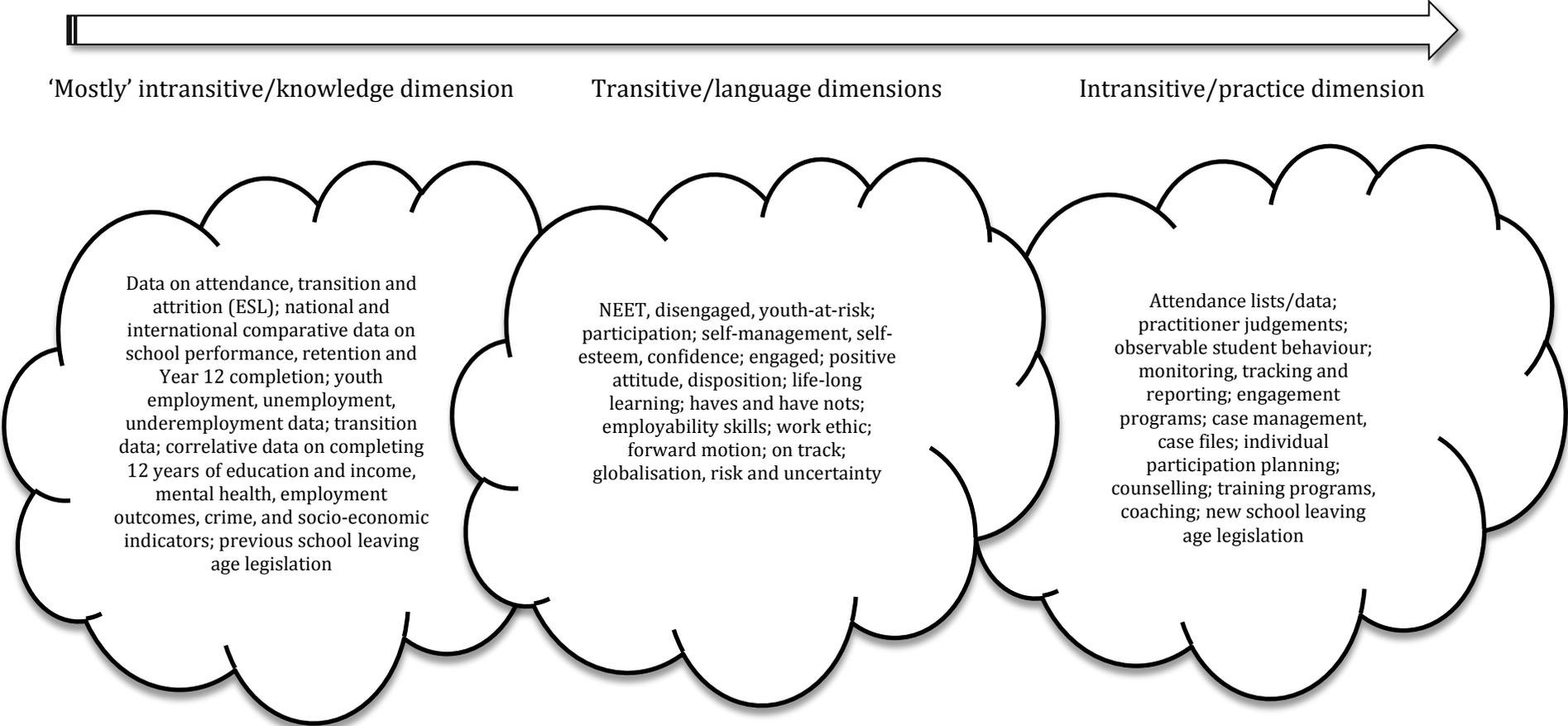
Concept	Condensed meaning	RSLA themes
Conduct of conduct	Strategies of government of self and others.	Proper conduct means participation in school, work or training. Young people are interpellated to develop a better conduct of attitude. The <i>telos</i> of governing conduct is to ensure visibility and active willing participation.
Pastoral power	Shepherd, caretaker; power over the one.	Pastoral power is deployed by PCs, youth workers and social workers. It involves shepherding young people who have 'fallen off the path' back into school, work and education. Caring for the psychological well-being of young people and caring for their 'souls' means getting them to realise that education is the pathway to economic and social <i>salvation</i> .
Biopower	Strategy for health, wealth, social welfare; power over the many.	A risk society signals a threat to health, wealth and social security. Educational standards are falling; young people are leaving school early and this will harm them, the economy and society. Successfully completing 12 years of full-time education is an actuarial strategy to insure society and young people against social disadvantage, impoverishment, mental illness, alienation and social decay.
Discipline	Power as institutional practice, routines.	Young people are enrolled into doing routinised work and disciplining their actions by being punctual, courteous, and performing basic self-care tasks. Social pedagogy and a form of <i>tutelage</i> is institutionalised in policy practice. Panoptic methods of checking and surveilling young people are sanctioned and normalised.
Rationalities	Thought, reason, epistemology of problem.	The world is full of inherent risks and dangers. Young people in particular are most at risk of these dangers. Some young people are damaged and vulnerable (poor mental health, broken self-esteem). Some young people can't handle school because of their overwhelming social and family problems. Everybody has a duty to ensure that these young people are protected by staying in full-time school, work or training.
Technologies	Tools, methods, instruments.	Legislative technologies create governing centres and legitimise an industry concerned with young people. Programmatic technologies involve the creation and distribution of engagement programs designed to keep young people in school, work or training. Procedural technologies include case management, IPPs, assessments, learning contracts, data reporting, counselling, and pastoral care. Intellectual technologies include a typology of engaged/disengaged, NEETs, and classifications of risk.
Ethics	Norms, virtues, self-constitution.	Ethics means a concern with oneself, with how one feels, and a concern with self-esteem and self-concept. Ethics is to participate, and involves a program of improving the self and skills of young people to make them better employees and citizens. The ethical self is a life-long learner—responsible, self-reliant, emotionally and mentally well, and moving in a forward direction.

Figure nine, following, presents the conclusions in critical realist terms. Figure nine shows the progressive movement from intransitive forms of knowledge

that feed transitive language constructions about young people, which in turn, shape the practices that follow. While there is a logical relationship between the transitive constructions about young people and the practices deployed towards them, the same cannot be said about the link between the broader intransitive knowledge and the constructivist language about young people. For example, the intransitive knowledge⁷⁴ behind RSLA is broadly contextual, whereas the constructions about young people are highly individualistic about young people themselves, and in effect, are de-contextualised. As will be explained below, this resulted in a disjointed practice regime that is tackling the problem in a lopsided manner.

⁷⁴ In Figure nine, following, I refer to this as 'mostly' intransitive. By this I mean that even the most 'objective' forms of knowledge can be seen as constructions in some manner. However, in terms of the development of RSLA, these were treated as uncomplicated and objective facts, and in this sense, were pitched as intransitive forms of knowledge that were beyond question and framed as though they simply existed 'out there' as things in the world.

Figure 9: Summary of data in critical realist terms



With this summary of the findings of this study in mind, I now turn to address the research question(s) by summarising the four main arguments about RSLA. I follow by outlining a critique of the RSLA policy and practice.

Addressing the research question

The overarching research question was:

- What are the discourses, rationalities, technologies and ethics of the RSLA policy in Western Australia?

At first glance one might conclude that RSLA is about increasing time in school, and by extension, increasing educational outcomes in Western Australia. But this belies much of what was occurring in RSLA. The enactment of new legislation was intended to address a problem of early school leaving and participation. In practice, it gave extension to an ethic of participation insofar as it was expected that young people would embrace education and learning, and think of themselves as educable learning subjects. As such, participation is ultimately intended to occur as though it is an act of rational choice, rather than compulsion. The focus of this broad and theoretically based question allowed me to conclude with four main arguments about RSLA.

Argument one: The discourse of RSLA is permeated by a fixation on practical work aimed at styling and producing employable worker-citizens

The RSLA discourse involves a practice in the conduct-of-the-conduct of young people. RSLA is a strategic attempt to create an 'ideal' situation where being engaged in education is synonymous with being self-reliant, future oriented, and risk averse. There is a particular ethic running here that places a moral expectation upon the shoulders of young people to always willingly remain engaged and interested in their education, their learning and development, and their journey into meaningful employment.

Neoliberalism is the politico-ethical background that provides the fodder and substance for this ethic. Neoliberalism is not just an ideal or an ideology—it is also ingrained in various technologies of power (Kendall, 2003). These include the invention of legislative, programmatic, procedural and intellectual technologies (Ball, 2003; Dean, 1997; Rose & Miller, 1992). A consistent line of policy thinking can be traced from the enactment of legislation that prescribes these ethical standards of as an act of law, right down to the practitioner who counsels the young person about their obligations towards participation—and in doing so, the integration of judicial and political power with psychological practice is achieved (Rose, 1996).

Argument two: Risk is a very pervasive and cogently circulated rationality within RSLA

Circulating in RSLA is a rationality about risk. Risk is linked to other concepts such as disengaged and NEET. The way risk works here is two-fold. First, risk is used to mark out and define the social and economic context that young people inhabit and will find themselves within once they leave school. This context is portrayed as uncertain, and dangerous and education is the insurance policy against this context. This leads into the second usage of the term risk. Here, judgements about risk are levelled at young people themselves. To not *actively* participate in education is to exhibit risky behaviour. To not *actively* participate in education is to put oneself at risk. In this sense, the young person is the object and embodiment of risk by what they actually do or do not do—their conduct. Both positions exist together by necessity.

One of the consequences here is that in practice risk becomes overstated and overplayed, as though all young people are inherently at risk of a context that is also inherently dangerous (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001). As mentioned in chapter nine, this has some grounding and it is not to say that these issues should be minimised or ignored. However, what has found its way into public discourse is a bleak picture of young people and the world they inhabit that is instrumental in forming RSLA policy and practice. In such an analysis, cause and effect cease to be conceptually useful, and two conclusions about RSLA follow. The first is that young people are thought to be at risk of the context they inhabit (that is, context causes risk to young person). This means that economic uncertainty and

low-end employment options are triggers that lead to poverty and disadvantage. The second is that the risky behaviour of young people is said to put everyone else in jeopardy (that is, the risky young person causes further problems to the social and economic order). This means that risky young people are thought to pose a threat to the broader social and economic functioning because they will not be employable and will place a drain on social resources. A rationality such as this provides a powerful justification for interventions on NEETs. This justification is difficult to counter because it is such a hermeneutically sealed way of thinking, and explains the uniformity in the thinking and practice in RSLA.

Argument three: RSLA is about disciplining the conduct of young people more than it is about goals of education and learning

There is a very clear focus on disciplining the conduct of young people using methods of case management, brokering, counselling, referral to engagement programs, engagement programs themselves, and if necessary, formal sanctions. RSLA is a disciplining instrument working on and through the subjectivities of young people. In fact, there are some similarities between the disciplining practices of RSLA and the domain of socialisation and care and control that has historically been reserved for the family institution.

RSLA has picked up and set into practice the demographic and cultural changes occurring to the nature of families themselves; occurring at the very same time that social bonds and ties and structures are disintegrating under the weight of

globalisation and late capitalism (Gibson, 2011; Pelling et al., 2012; Phillips, 2008), and at a time when market ideology and neoliberalism is experiencing a serious decline in legitimacy (Peck, Theodore & Brenner, 2009). RSLA has circulated a perception, rightly or wrongly, that young people are being left to their own devices precisely when the world becomes *more* dangerous⁷⁵ (Fields, 1994).

It is understandable that social workers, youth workers and counsellors are employed in these systems because these disciplines have historically taken on care and control functions for vulnerable, disadvantaged and risky groups (Donzelot, 1979) and the leap to these forms of practice under RSLA is an easy one to make. It is true, though, that mass education has always assumed socialisation functions (Seaborne, 1970). RSLA is a good case example of how these have coalesced together, become more intentional, more aligned, and more closely linked to the notion of compulsion and participation—and more instrumentally focused towards employability skills as the overarching panacea to various social and economic problems circulating in the public and political discourse.

Argument four: RSLA is a biopolitical intervention, aimed not at improving education, but at social and economic functioning

More school is economically and socially better—this is the overarching policy logic. In setting out this seemingly obvious claim, new categories of young people

⁷⁵ See argument two above.

and conceptual divisions between engaged/disengaged and completers/non completers are created. Engaged completers are the normative standard against which all other forms of behaviour and attitudes are measured. Disengaged non-completers are the problem group here that are watched, worried over, and intervened in.

In practice, RSLA adopted a United Kingdom policy concept—NEET—to give some terminology and conceptual description to this group of disengaged non-completers. The way NEET is applied in RSLA is very similar to the United Kingdom experience. However, NEET is a highly problematic concept and its adoption is misguided (Furlong, 2006). Its ontology about the world and young people is rooted in deficit (Simmons & Thompson, 2011). It lacks conceptual precision because it homogenises what are actually heterogeneous experiences (Finlay et al., 2010). Its analysis of the problem and the methods to address it do not cohere (MacDonald, 2011; Thompson, 2011a). As a concept in the exercise of biopolitical power it is effective, because it can create and describe groups of young people who—by not doing the ‘right thing’—are likely to pose broader social and economic problems. Thus, disengaged young people are demonised and interventions on them are legitimised as though they (NEETs) are the epitome of the problems themselves.

A critique of RSLA

RSLA is based in a narrow ontology

Most of the RSLA policy thinking relies heavily on a transitive ontology intertwined with an epistemology and practice that produced a range of fabrications about young people. These include disengaged, at risk, NEET, and psychologically damaged. It entailed discourses about education that are pitched as remedies and prescriptions for instrumental capitalist and economic purposes. It turns education as a means to economic ends and in the process “erodes the ability of schools to contribute to the development of human capabilities” (Graham & Harwood, 2011, p. 136).

The RSLA ontology has two main problems. First, it sidelines much of the actual experiences, actions, habits and ambitions of young people and second, it glosses over a social realm that is actually explanatory in understanding the problem of early school leaving in the first place. Because of this, RSLA lacks an adequate social theory that is elementary to an effective policy on compulsory education. A narrow ontology means that the RSLA intransitive practices fall out of a psychological epistemology or ‘truth’ about what the problem is and what should be done about it. This epistemology entails a set of concepts and constructs held *about* young people by authorities, but not necessarily by young people themselves. Furthermore, the problem here is that it reduces young people and education to psychological and risky entities (Besley, 2009, p. 58). An

ontology about the world in these terms means that it is difficult to think about young people in any other way, and in doing so, ignores the importance of social context, especially the nature, structure, and culture of schools and the communities that young people inhabit.

RSLA embodies a discourse of blame and deficit

Troubled by the classist and racist implications and potentially stigmatizing effects of the cultural-deficit risk model implied by targeted compensatory education programs, educators and researchers welcomed the shift in focus away from individual student characteristics towards factors that characterize school systems and the political and economic contexts in which they operate. (Land & Legters, 2002, p. 3)

This quote stands in contrast to RSLA's deficit and individualising discourse. A deficit discourse in RSLA is a particularly unhelpful starting point if the aim is to actually engage young people in the spirit of *education* and *learning*. Deficit thinking in education is defined by Valencia as follows:

Deficit thinking is a person-centered explanation of school failure among individuals as linked to group membership...The deficit thinking framework holds that poor schooling performance is rooted in students' alleged cognitive and motivational deficits, while institutional structures and inequitable schooling arrangements that exclude students from learning are held exculpatory. (Valencia, 1997, p. 9)

This describes very well the RSLA situation. Because some young people are constructed in deficit terms then it is somewhat contradictory to expect that young people should at the same time be engaged, motivated, self-reliant and goal seeking. Furthermore, there is a confusion operating where part of the

rationality is protective of young people—insofar as wanting the shield them and protect them from the dangerous and uncertain world that they inhabit and will continue to inhabit—while at the same time circulating a rationality about young people as being part of the root cause of social and economic ills. Young people are constructed, rather unhelpfully, as both cause and effect, but as Valencia claims, this form of ‘knowledge’ is a “form of pseudoscience” pursued in “methodologically flawed ways” (Valencia, 1997).

Furthermore, the conceptual horizon of RSLA established by this deficit and individualised discourse acts to shield the wider educational system from the kinds of critical scrutiny and debate that might lead to improvements in how schools attend to the needs of some young people (Graham, 2006, p. 12). Shifting the gaze from the student to the school and community would act as a counterpoint to this forensic focus (Land & Legters, 2002).

RSLA lacks an empirically grounded theory of the problem and theory of practice

As mentioned, the discourse and practice of RSLA is instrumentally focussed on the psychology and circumstance of the individual student. Nowhere is this more telling than Education Minister Liz Constable’s announcement to employ 50 new school psychologists to address Western Australia’s dismal participation and attrition statistics (Department of Education and Training, 2009). This psychological and interior way of thinking about young people is perhaps an

artefact of the way that throughout the 20th century psychology was the invention of the:

...deep interior that inhabits each of us, the repository of our life history, the seat of our desires, the locus of our pleasures and frustrations, the target of knowledge, intervention, management and therapy, the basis of our ethics. (Rose, 2008, p. 460)

A heavy reliance on a transitive and interiority about young people (NEET, at risk, disengaged, damaged) comes at the expense of a theory about the intransitive context and experiences of young people. In simple terms, this means that RSLA does not draw heavily enough on empirical studies about early school leaving that take into account in more adequate ways the social, cultural, economic context of young people, and their experiences and identities and subjectivities (Wyn et al., 2012; Wyn & Woodman, 2006). It fails to adequately take into account the extra-discursive (Hardy, 2011) nature of the institutions and economies that impact in a material manner on the lives of young people.

A comment on theory and methodology

The criticisms above are intended to provide brief starting points for debates and discussions about policy and practice might be reformulated. Having outlined these criticisms, I now turn the focus inwards and on this study itself.

As mentioned in chapter one, a book by Marston and McDonald (2006) inspired a governmental framing of RSLA. There have been some particular challenges

and fruitful elements of this kind of research and below I outline what I think I have accomplished in adapting a governmental framework for researching education policy. At the same time, there have been some particular difficulties in seeking to rework some of Foucault's ideas into an applied and contemporaneous study of policy. I maintain a cautious and sceptical view on the extent to which I have succeeded here, noting some of the criticisms of Foucauldian research I have attempted to address.

Strengths and benefits of a governmental analysis

One of the main strengths and benefits of doing governmental research was the extent that it focussed the research beyond abstract and morally charged debates about policy ideology and social and political structure, down to a more fine-grained analysis of everyday practices (Marston & McDonald, 2006). In reading the work of Foucault and others (Dean, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2002, 2006; Foucault, 1991a, 2003, 2007; Lemke, 2001; Rose, 1999a; Rose & Miller, 1992) I could frame the inquiry into RSLA in terms of it being a statement of ideas about problems and what should be done about them. This also helped to identify and examine the technical and practical innovations that manifests as *practice*, while at the same time focussing on the moral and ethical characteristics of RSLA (Dean, 1998; Foucault, 2000).

Drawing on a variety of Foucauldian concepts also provided me with some diverse ways to conceptualise RSLA. For example, it can be seen as a rationality

as well as a practice. It is a discourse as well as an ethic. As a policy it is concerned to govern the one (individual) but also the many (society). It is an expression of state power and also a dispersed form of disciplinary power taken up by experts and authorities concerned with governing the lives of young people. It has authoritarian elements in the forms of it being an expression of law and enshrining legal edicts of participation, but it also embodies caring functions in terms of being pastoral and aimed at empowerment and self-development.

Governmentality theory is also revealing as it shows how something can emerge in the political landscape as a common sensibility with such ease and yet without any robust theoretical logic or empirical grounding. In commenting on public policy, Fox and Miller describe this situation as follows:

Democratic discourse runs in scarce supply. The airwaves and media prefer to broadcast titillating messages that register with the visceral sensibilities of potential customers. It is as if humans have lost their capacity to sort information. Ideas grand and trivial occupy our thoughts with equal priority. (Fox & Miller, 1995, p. vii)

Changes in thinking and practice about compulsory education have emerged alongside other social, economic and political changes. A fairly simple idea (keep kids in school longer) can emerge out of complexity and uncertainty. This idea though is not fixed and may well change in unpredictable ways. Using this theory has enabled me to address the question “what’s going on?” (Dean, 1997, p. 205) in the field of compulsory education in Western Australia. However, the benefits

of this theory and the methodology it informed came with some conceptual and methodological problems that required working out.

Conceptual problems with the governmentality literature

The first problem was trying to arrive at an understanding of governmentality itself. This is because Foucault is not overly clear and there are several other related ideas of his that need to be understood in order for governmentality to make any sense, insofar as it being a useful basis to do applied policy research (Marston & McDonald, 2006). It is also the case that various writers have interpreted and applied Foucault in different ways and in regards to vastly different fields of application (O'Farrell, 2005). Furthermore, Foucauldian discourse analysis is difficult to pin down, and as Graham (2011) explains, many writers who draw on Foucault may eschew an approach that lays bare their methods for fear of arriving at a position of 'truth', when in fact no such truth may exist. Yet, approaches to research that develop a nuanced and conceptually rich governmentality methodology for policy research would be welcome forms of research that challenge and interrupt status quo and taken-for-granted versions of truth and reality (Graham, 2011; Hastings, 1998).

Problems of knowledge and reality

One of the bigger philosophical issues to grapple with in this research concerned the nature of the reality that I was seeking to understand and explain. For

starters, Foucault's theory tends towards a dispersed rather than stratified or structural ontology (Joseph, 2004). Under this view there is no deep structure, or centre, to either people or the systems they inhabit (Kendall & Wickham, 1999). According to Kendall and Wickham's interpretation of Foucault, reality is comprised of contingencies and discourses that are more or less surface events given to shift and change and without any clearly identifiable causal mechanisms behind them (Kendall & Wickham, 1999). This has been a helpful way of thinking about RSLA as part of an ongoing but discontinuous event in the history of compulsory education. I have tried to also identify the effects of such discourses as opposed to leaving them sitting as abstract linguistic constructions. In other words, the approach was to "trace the relationship between words and things: how the words we use to conceptualise and communicate produce the very 'things' or objects of which we speak" (Graham, 2011, p. 668). Furthermore, there is an effect of discourse in that it is a component of specific and material context (Al-Amoudi, 2007; Houston, 2001).

In trying to address this, I attempted to link critical realism to Foucault's theories and was heartened to find some good arguments in the literature that contended that Foucault can be seen in realist terms (Al-Amoudi, 2007; Hardy, 2011).⁷⁶ Critical realism seemed to fit here in acknowledging the existence of both objects and constructs in making up the social universe (Danermark et al., 2002). In working together Foucault's ideas and critical realism I have tried to straddle and weave together ideas about object and construct, discourse and practice,

⁷⁶ See Appendix five for an expanded discussion of this argument.

thought and materiality, description and explanation, scepticism and evaluation, and, causality and discontinuity. There is not a substantive body of literature that works Foucault and critical realism together, but this could be an interesting and useful line of research to pursue.

Problems with method

At the method level, there were some problems I had with my initial plans to interview students.⁷⁷ I received ethics clearance from two institutions to carry out face-to-face interviews with students (University and DET), but actually gaining access to students presented some difficulty. Part of this problem arose from the fact that before I could interview any students I needed sign-off from the Director of the District Education Office, the School Principal or Manager of the site concerning the student, parents/guardian, and the student themselves. This may be a fair enough expectation, but the effect meant that I was not allowed to approach students to even discuss this research with them until I had all these signatures in place, and the only way I could communicate an invitation to students to participate in this research was in a very impersonal manner through flyers and school newsletters. The response rate was so low (n=1) that eventually I abandoned the aim of interviewing students and shifted the focus of the research onto the official policy discourse. Besides, this was more in keeping with the aims of the study, which were to examine RSLA in regards to its discourses, technologies, rationalities and ethics.

⁷⁷ It should be pointed out that these problems had nothing to do with the use of governmentality theory, but were instead a practical problem in regards to gaining access to participants.

This problem of being unable to interview students occurred at about the time that DET put in place a new ethics and approval system for researchers doing research on DET sites or with students. Prior to the change in leaving age legislation, it was much easier to interview young people who had left school aged 15-17 because they were no longer considered to be students and therefore not under the jurisdiction of DET. However, once the new legislation was in place, a 16 or 17-year-old, who may for all intents and purposes not be participating in school, is still considered to be under the jurisdiction of DET and hence all the new ethics protocols applied.

Challenges of reflexivity

Before starting this research I was familiar with writers in the critical theory research tradition (Apple, 1999; Fleming, 1997) and also the literature that picked up these ideas in the context of radical and critical social work (Briskman, Pease, & Allan, 2003). I have found the critical theory tradition a particularly important means to investigate and criticise social, economic and institutional policy and practice. In this study I have attempted a more guarded and sceptical position about a critique of social structure and ideology in terms of meta-concepts like class and race. And I have tried to walk a line between making strong claims and arguments about RSLA and being sceptical of my own conclusions. In following Foucault, I was attempting a scepticism towards knowledge and concepts like 'truth' (Bernauer, 1990; Foucault, 1972, 1998b; Kendall & Wickham, 1999). Aiming to be reflexive about my politics and

positionality meant having to undo some learning and watch for second order judgements about RSLA.⁷⁸ Dean's analytics of government⁷⁹ provided some methodological guidance to how I set up the research design and also in regards to how I have thought about the data, the kinds of questions I posed and the issues I remained open to understanding and thinking about. I remain uncertain as to how well I have achieved this degree of reflexive scepticism; however, in attempting to evaluate the rigour of this research along conventional lines, I refer to Tracy's criteria for quality in qualitative research in Table 13 following.

⁷⁸ Second order judgements are judgements used that are made about one thing even though they are derived from another place. The methodological aim is to be skeptical and reflexive about these judgements and how far they can be stretched. For example, if I was to judge and conclude here that RSLA is an artifact of *ruling class ideology*, then I should at least suspend and examine this judgement for its basis. This is because it would be erroneous to make such a judgement within the theoretical remit of this study, because the judgement has been lifted from elsewhere that draws on Marxist theory.

⁷⁹ See Appendix four. Here I refer to Dean's analytics of government and provide some reflections and observations on how these ideas shaped my thinking in this research. This is intended to provide further transparency about the adoption of governmentality theory to this research.

Table 13: ‘Big tent’ criteria for assessing qualitative research

Criteria	Meaning	Response
Worthy topic	<p>The topic of the research is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relevant ▪ Timely ▪ Significant ▪ Interesting 	<p>The change to the compulsory school leaving age is regarded by DET as the biggest change to education in Western Australia in 40 years. I have begun my study of RSLA right at the time that these changes were beginning to be implemented.</p>
Rich rigor	<p>The study uses sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Theoretical constructs ▪ Data and time in the field ▪ Sample(s) ▪ Context(s) ▪ Data collection and analysis processes 	<p>I have drawn upon several concepts from the governmentality literature and theory as well as adapting aspects of critical realism into the research. Data was taken from multiple sources and was analysed using a detailed process that was outlined in this thesis. The context of the study was elaborated upon and incorporated into the analysis and conclusions developed.</p>
Sincerity	<p>The study is characterized by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Self-reflexivity about subjective values, biases, and inclinations of the researcher(s) ▪ Transparency about the methods and challenges 	<p>I have included where possible details about the theoretical assumptions and concepts used in this research, as well as sufficient detail about my methods and processes.</p>
Credibility	<p>The research is marked by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thick description, concrete detail, explication of tacit (nontextual) knowledge, and showing rather than telling ▪ Triangulation or crystallization ▪ Multivocality ▪ Member reflections 	<p>Details of the data were included to support the main assertions and points. The examples of the data were extracted from multiple data sources. This is also why I sampled data from interviews as well as numerous different kinds of documents, in an attempt to create a data-set that was broad rather than narrowly selected.</p>
Resonance	<p>The research influences, affects, or moves particular readers or a variety of audiences through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Aesthetic, evocative representation ▪ Naturalistic generalizations 	<p>This study seeks to avoid making generalisations beyond the RSLA discourse. I have attempted to avoid using evocative or highly descriptive language in the analysis and argument, and tried to avoid this thesis becoming polemical. The aim has been more description and analysis. At the same time, I have attempted to extract from this</p>

Criteria	Meaning	Response
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transferable findings 	description and analysis some arguments and criticisms that can be made about RSLA.
Significant contribution	<p>The research provides a significant contribution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conceptually/theoretically ▪ Practically ▪ Morally ▪ Methodologically ▪ Heuristically 	Hopefully the governmentality theoretical and conceptual framework makes a contribution to furthering examples of applied governmentality policy research. One of my aims was to ‘test’ this theory insofar as I wanted to see how it might work as a way to frame a policy study.
Ethical	<p>The research considers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Procedural ethics (such as human subjects) ▪ Situational and culturally specific ethics ▪ Relational ethics ▪ Exiting ethics (leaving the scene and sharing the research) 	Respondents in face-to-face interviews were provided with written information and consent forms before proceeding with interview and I have taken steps to protect the identities of those interviewed. The analysis is a criticism of the RSLA thinking and practice as a policy and expression of governmental power, and it is not the intention to single out any particular person or group for criticism.
Meaningful coherence	<p>The study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Achieves what it purports to be about ▪ Uses methods and procedures that fit its stated goals ▪ Meaningfully interconnects literature, research questions/foci, findings, and interpretations with each other 	The study sought to understand RSLA in terms of its thinking and practices and used governmentality theory as a ‘way in’ to this objective. Connections between a variety of literature—both theoretical and empirical—are made where possible in the research design, literature about the RSLA and what it is attempting to do, the data, and international and historical literature about compulsory education more broadly.

Source: (Tracy, 2010, p. 840).

Further research directions

This study into RSLA is limited to an analysis of the mechanisms and processes of power within RSLA from the perspective of the policy itself, and the practitioners who were employed to carry out the policy aims. This begs further questions along the following lines:

1. What are/were the experiences of students who were under a Notice of Arrangements and required to commit to a managed pathway of compulsory education? Research along these lines might involve grounded theory (Tayyaba, 2012) or ethnographic studies (Atkinson, 2001) that aim to explore the cultural milieu and lived experience of young people in the context of the RSLA interventions.
2. What is the effect of the conduct of conduct on young people? The theory set out in this study argues that RSLA is a strategic attempt to elicit more self-governing and 'responsible' behaviours from young people, but testing this more empirically would be a useful addition to this research.
3. To what extent has RSLA made an impact on student's participation and engagement in school, work and training? This is an evaluative question concerning RSLA and its stated aims and objectives concerning retention, participation and transition. Did RSLA address its aims of reducing risk and disengagement? Has it resolved the NEET problem? As above, these are also evaluative questions concerning the effectiveness of RSLA.

These questions and more could be explored from the vantage point of *students*.

Why is this important? It is important to governmentality theory because it would explore and document the specific ways that students govern their conduct and shape their desires and attitudes towards the ethos of compulsory education, or otherwise. Research from the perspective of students could also explore the forms and practices of resistance and the counterpoints and gaps in

the rationalities of compulsory education. For example, Wilkins' (2010; 2011) study of mother's decision-making around school choice showed the deployment of emotional labour as an alternative to rational calculations in consumer orientated decision-making discourse. Thus, research that explores the ways young people negotiate and subordinate the discourses and practice of RSLA would add something to this existing portrait of RSLA. For example, not all students would think of themselves of being NEET, or disengaged, or at risk. What do they do with these labels? Not all students would so readily subscribe to the corporeal practices of participation staged under RSLA. So, what *do* they think and what *do* they do?

There is also a more pressing need to include student's voices in research about compulsory education because what is at stake is the epistemology of the problem (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). RSLA conceptualises the problem as somehow being along a continuum residing in the student and their family and community context, but when it comes down to the practices, the interventions are fundamentally about the student. This presumes something about a theory of intervention that may not line up with how young people see or experience it. Including students' voices and experiences would add to the debate about how issues to do with compulsory education and school retention are thought about and understood, and what should be done about it (Smyth & Hattam, 2001).

Finally, further research that is more conceptually specific in the field of governmentality research could be undertaken. In this research it helped to

arrange my understanding in seven conceptual ways (explained in chapter three). This provided a way of examining RSLA along different lines, even as these ideas contained some considerable overlap. Having these seven concepts allowed me to cut the data about RSLA in different ways, but it would be worthwhile for other studies in policy to drill down into any of these concepts as a point of inquiry. For example a study into the pastoral nature of RSLA could provide more depth into the pastoral power practices that are deployed towards young people.

Speculation

Where might the thinking and practice regarding compulsory education in Western Australia be heading? In trying to address such a broad, future-oriented and speculative question like this, I take a lead from Flybjerg (2001, p. 145) who argues for the importance of four value-rational questions in social science inquiry:

1. Where are we going?
2. Who gains and who loses; by what mechanisms of power?
3. Is this desirable?
4. What should be done?

Where are we going?

We are heading towards a situation where compulsory education is synonymous *not* with education and learning *per se*, but with young people's obligations

towards correct, publically visible, officially monitored and sanctioned habits of self-control and rational conduct. We are also going down a path where not participating in school is seen in deficit terms, and interventions that address early school leaving, disengagement and risk are likely to be couched and framed along these lines. Furthermore, a moral split between completers and non-completers is being established to such an extent that non-completers are rapidly becoming constructed as a new form of deviance, and a moral panic and cloud of worry hangs over them.

If sociologist Nikolas Rose (Rose, 2003; 2008; 2013) is correct, we may be heading towards a situation where theories and practices about education and school draw more heavily from a neurochemical and biological episteme and associated technologies and practices. Rose argues that the 21st century may well be the century where psychology and other social sciences that were born and enjoyed their halcyon days in the 20th century are patterned into and integrated into corporeal and biological technologies and frameworks and methods of governing human understanding and conduct. Might early school leaving one day be seamlessly thought about as being a neurochemical or genomic problem, solved with pills and medications?

Who gains and who loses; by what mechanisms of power?

The main winners are employers who stand to benefit from a pool of docile and work-ready economic functionaries who turn up on time to perform work in

jobs at the bottom of the labour market—at least, this is the policy intention.

Other winners are politicians and bureaucrats who can point to a system of increased visibility and participation of young people who are no longer seen to be idle and a drag on society. An industry of ‘psy’ professionals have also benefited and have been able to stake a claim in the domain of education and participation and have been successful in framing compulsory education in terms favourable to their professional interests.

Young people are the main losers in this scenario because if they become NEET or can’t get jobs they are held accountable and blamed for the state of the labour market and their school experiences—experiences that can often be unhappy and compromised by factors outside of their control or doing. This includes both the experiences and circumstances they bring to school as well as the experiences they have in school. It also includes the context of the labour market opportunities and limitations that await them. RSLA does not substantively intervene in either of these, and it is for this reason that young people have lost out in this reform to their education.

The mechanisms of power are contained in the RSLA discourse and practice. Various concepts, assumptions and theories about young people at-risk have permeated the policy discourse to the general exclusion of other more empirically supported theories about early school leaving and participation. A further mechanism included the way that the policy thinking has been collapsed into a set of easily digestible slogans and idioms about the failings of education,

the idleness and sloth and risk of young people, and what should be done about it. This has been instrumental in obviating the need for a more considered debate and development of a policy theory of practice that would broaden some of the thinking and practice about compulsory education.

Is this desirable?

It is not desirable for a number of reasons. First, the policy thinking and practice is out of step with a body of evidence about why young people leave and become disengaged from school in the first place (see chapter two discussion on early school leaving). This means that the interventions may be misguided and ineffective. Second, it is reductionist and blaming of young people at the same time as it is pastoral and protective. This is a confused form of logic in which notions of cause and effect become mixed up. Again, not only is this ethically dubious, but theoretically confused. It is not clear in this situation where the interventions should be targeted: at the student, or the context that impacts on them? It could be argued that both are important, but for convenience sake (and probably for cost reasons as well) the interventions are targeted at young people themselves. This is a lopsided approach to policy and practice, and again it has obviated the need for wide-scale and systematic revisions of educational systems, schools, curriculum, pedagogy, and making improved linkages between schools, families and communities. The latter of these require more sustained debate and investment, whereas placing a young person into a therapeutic case-management relationship is, by comparison, quicker and easier to do.

What should be done?

Building a more empirically grounded and broader theory of practice could include several areas of policy development. First, there could be a greater focus on policies and programs to address disadvantage, the effects of high geographical mobility, and loss of social capital that some communities and geographical areas are particularly vulnerable to (Astone & McLanahan, 1994; McNeal, 1999). Second, policy and practice could address in a more systematic and comprehensive manner instances of poor school culture and negative approach towards students (Lee & Breen, 2007; Patterson et al., 2008). The fact that this is not a significant focus of RSLA is a weakness in its theory of practice. Third, a sense of belonging in schools is important to engagement (Osterman, 2000) so it seems illogical that programs for disengaged young people would actually excise their participation out of school and into off-grid and off-site models of learning. Further, misaligned occupational aspirations (Yates et al., 2011) are also contributing factors in ESL, yet this too was a distinct absence in RSLA, begging further questions about why the focus is so much on the student and not on the educational systems that are actually designed to support them. Finally, policy and practice should attend to background factors such as mental health and wellbeing (Duchesne et al., 2008). However, this should shift the focus away from the psychology of the individual and more broadly to the health and functioning of the school, community and population that is demonstrably influential on community mental health (Adelman & Taylor, 2006; Atkins & Frazier, 2011; Todman & Diaz, 2014; Yearwood, 2011). Here, it would be

appropriate to draw on well-established and empirically backed public health models of mental health, and include also the development of educational policies and strategies for social justice (Down, 2009; Smyth, 2009), social inclusion (Graham & Harwood, 2011; Razer et al., 2013), civic participation (Black, Stokes, Turnbull, & Levy, 2009; Fleming, 2011), and democracy (Shor, 1996).

A more balanced approach to theorising and intervening around early school leaving and disengagement is needed if early school leaving and disengagement is to be seriously tackled. The position adopted by writers in the post-war era debating the increase of the school leaving age to age 15 incorporated far more attention to the structure, context, and cultures of schools (Morey, 1945; Schools Council Welsh Committee, 1967) than can be said for RSLA. However, recent research into early school leaving has significantly improved understanding of why some young people want to exit school early even since then (Smyth, 2005). What needs to happen is a much more considered and systematic integration of the broader theories and research about early school leaving and disengagement into the development of policy and practice.

Furthermore, there needs to be a closer logical fit between the theory of the problem of compulsory education and the practices and interventions that ensue. For example, it is largely pointless to theorise early school leaving as an artefact of general decline in community social capital and then try to remedy that with youth counselling. This is not a criticism of the practitioners whose job

it is to carry out this counselling—it is a criticism of the policy rationality and its discursive framing. As it should be clear, this critique here is levelled at a political discourse and contemporary episteme, not particularly about any group or individual person.

Postscript

In a book about Australian policy, Althaus, Bridgman and Davis (2007) make the following pertinent point about policy:

Policies are built on theories of the world, models of cause and effect. Policies must make assumptions about behaviour. They contain incentives that encourage one behaviour over another, or disincentives to discourage particular actions. Policies must incorporate guesses about take-up and commitment, and mechanisms to deal with shirking and encourage compliance. (p. 7)

This research has explored RSLA's theories, models and assumptions about the world, and its mechanisms to encourage certain kinds of behaviour. As concluded, these are limited in their scope and form. Such thinking has become commonplace and effortless in its simplicity.

An article published in the *Sunday Times* newspaper one year after the final increase of the school leaving age is indicative of the problem facing the Western Australian secondary school system and the one-track focus to thinking about it.

The lead paragraph reads:

LAWS [sic] to keep WA students at school until they turn 17 have failed to keep thousands of teenagers off the streets. (Lampathakis, 2009, p. 9)⁸⁰

Two people were interviewed for the report: Curriculum Council CEO David Wood, and Education Minister Liz Constable. A number of concerns were noted in the article and can be summarised as follows:

- Concerns about young people getting and keeping jobs.
- Concerns about young people being unaccounted for.
- Concerns that young people won't develop effective coping skills to succeed in employment.

A year and nine months after the final increase in the school leaving age, a similar article was published in the *South Western Times* newspaper. Its lead paragraph reads:

BUNBURY [sic] schools have recorded a high number of students with unexplained absenteeism. (Margo, 2009, p. 7)

The article then went on to situate this problem more broadly by noting that this was a trend for all of Western Australia (Margo, 2009), even though Bunbury was singled out as one of the worst performing districts. Again, what is telling is the theory of the problem and how it should be dealt with. Bunbury Education Department superintendent Neil Milligan was interviewed, citing the problem as “...more likely to be behavioural non-attendance...” and that this can be remedied if only parents were more “aware of the importance of attendance for

⁸⁰ Even in 2013, the situation had reportedly not improved. A newspaper article in the *South Western Times* with the headline “Low graduation rate ‘a risk to the economy’” noted that “MORE [sic] than 40 per cent of the South West’s population aged 15 and over has not progressed beyond Year 10 making the region one of the least educated in the State” (Zimmerman, 2013, p. 1).

their children” and that “Strategies such as the introduction of SMS notification to parents when their child is absent has helped increase the importance of attendance” (Margo, 2009, p. 7).

If this is the thinking behind early school leaving, absenteeism, and disengagement, and what to do about it, then schematically it looks like this:

Explanatory hypothesis

- Parents unaware of importance of attendance + behaviour problems = absenteeism and early school leaving = at-risk/NEET/disengaged.

Predictive hypothesis

- Parents made more aware of importance of attendance (by SMS for example) + improved student attitude = attending school.

Nowhere in the research literature about early school leaving and disengagement does such a theory exist. In response to an Auditor General’s Report that criticised Western Australia’s retention and participation rates, Education Minister Elizabeth Constable outlined in a report entitled *Better attendance: brighter futures: Mutual obligation to improve school attendance in Western Australian public schools* a nine-point plan to address poor attendance rates (Department of Education and Training, 2009). Eight out of the nine points concern interventions directed towards students and/or their families.

Fundamentally, the strategies are concerned with monitoring, surveillance and penalties for students and families for non-attendance. The tone of the document

indicates a 'tough on non-attendance' standpoint. Support for schools is remedial and selective, and includes things like breakfast programs and small grants for attendance improvement programs. Posters to inform parents about the importance of school are to be produced. A more effective SMS system to alert parents of their child's non-attendance is to be trialled. Prosecuting non-responsive parents is to be fast-tracked. An increase in resources and support for students draws on the 'psy' paradigm:

Fifty additional school psychologists will be employed in schools over the next four years to support students with *mental, behavioural and other health issues* which have a direct impact on student attendance. (Department of Education and Training, 2009, p. 13, emphasis added)

But this is the whole point about power and rationality. It is formative of what is thought, said and done. Understanding this can lead to insight into how these things were made, and how they can be unmade and fashioned anew—and I end this thesis on the following quote that makes this point plain:

...that the things which seem most evident to us are always formed in the confluence of encounters and chances, during the course of its precarious and fragile history. What reason perceives as its necessity, or rather, what different forms of rationality offer as their necessary being, can perfectly well be shown to have a history; and the network of contingencies from which it emerges can be traced. Which is not to say, however, that these forms of rationality were irrational. It means that they reside on a base of human practice and human history; and that since these things have been made, they can be unmade, so long as we know how it was that they were made. (Raulet, 1983, p. 206)

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Appendix 1: Interview guide

- Exploration of participants' understanding of the history and purpose of the change in compulsory education
- Exploration of the participants' roles and responsibilities under the policy
- Exploration of how the participant would define and characterise the various groups who may be subject to interventions arising from the policy
- Exploration of the purposes and goals of the policy
- Exploration of the methods and approaches taken to implement the aims of the policy
- Exploration of the kinds of knowledge required and developed as a consequence of the implementation of the policy
- Exploration of the sorts of problems or obstacles that arise as a consequence of implementing the aims of the policy
- Exploration of the kinds of networks, systems and structures used and developed in order to implement the aims of the policy
- Exploration of the participants' perceptions on what they see is working or not working about the policy

Appendix 2: Synopsis on neoliberalism

Foucault demonstrates an important link between neoliberalism and what he termed governmentality (Peters, 2007, 2010). Lemke (2001) outlines the content of Foucault's lectures on neoliberalism, delivered in 1979, in which Foucault makes a distinction between the Ordo-liberals, associated with German post-war liberalism, and the Chicago School US styled neoliberalism. For the Ordo-liberals, the market and competition are unnatural constructions that must be subject to political interventions if they are to be kept alive and function effectively. The market arises only through government: "the state and the market economy are not juxtaposed but...one mutually presumes the other (Lecture 7 February 1979)" (Lemke, 2001, p. 193).

By drawing on Foucault's taped lectures, Lemke (2001, pp. 193-194) makes the following points about Foucault's analysis of Ordo-liberals anti-naturalist view of the market:

1. To separate the state from the market is false, as the economy represents a realm of *socially regulated practices*.
2. Following the first point, capitalism exists within a symbiotic relationship with social institutions and practice.
3. Capitalism has no inner logic and no inherent nature: it is invented, constituted and reconstituted by political interventions.

It is along these lines that the Ordo-liberals say that the extreme tendencies of capitalism (monopolisation is the example provided) are not the result of the logic of capitalism, but due to the "result of a failed political strategy and

inadequate forms of institutionalization” (Lemke, 2001, p. 194). In short, the Ordo-liberals characterise capitalism in *institutional terms*, and judge that the successes and failures of capitalism are linked to the successes and failures of political and institutional frameworks and interventions that must be subject to a historical and political process that is open and revisionist. From the Ordo-liberal point of view, policy is corrective and constructive, broadly aiming to create the conditions whereby cultural and moral dispositions towards enterprise is possible—“to anchor the entrepreneurial form at the very heart of society” (Lemke, 2001, p. 196).⁸¹

Whereas the Ordo-liberals see the market as one of many social creations, subject to necessary political interventions, the Chicago school of neoliberals see the social realm as entirely subjected to, and constituted by, the economic realm (Lemke, 2001). The neoliberals see that all areas of human existence are potentially subject to economic categories. One such category is human labour. Labour is not simply a product sold to an employer, but forms all aspects of human capital, and as such, the human person is seen as a vessel of continual capital potential: he or she is a natural entrepreneur that rationally and in a

⁸¹ What I take from this is a question concerning the entrepreneurial character of RSLA. It is not an economic policy or even a social policy strictly speaking if one understands social policy to be part of what remains of the traditional welfare state. As a policy concerned with education, to what extent does it have an entrepreneurial ethos?

calculative manner draws from his or her acquired stock of knowledge and skills in an economically rationalist manner (*homo economicus*).⁸²

It should be apparent then that Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism does not reduce it to a political ideology or economic theory, but rather he sees neoliberalism as a form of government, from which questions of *how* to exercise power arise (Peters, 2007). Thus, neoliberalism contains a *method* of governing (Peters et al., 2000) or as Gordon states, neoliberalism concerns the "art of government" (1991, p. 14).⁸³ Gordon continues:

The idea of an 'economic government' has, as Foucault points out, a double meaning for liberalism: that of a government informed by the precepts of political economy, but also of a government which economizes its own costs: a greater effort of technique aimed at accomplishing more through a lesser exertion of force and authority. (Gordon, 1991, p. 24)

Under the neoliberal view, although government still retains some of its traditional regulating forms, it also takes on new forms. These are less conspicuous displays of power entailing "indirect techniques for leading and controlling individual subjects without at the same time being responsible for them" (Lemke, 2001, p. 201). The indirect techniques for leading derive from the neoliberal aim to construct a "responsible and moral individual and economic rational actor" (Lemke, 2001, p. 201) who is fully responsible for his or her

⁸² This means that the human person is *A Priori* an economically rational subject. It seemed in RSLA that there were threads of this *A Priori* view being distributed and called on because it was presumed to be natural and obvious that young people would be inherently interested in making rational decisions about their economic future – some practitioners seemed frustrated and confused when this was not the case.

⁸³ This means that neoliberalism is much more than just an ideology of the ruling elite.

actions. Under this arrangement, socio-economic and political problems and risks, and the responsibilities for managing them, are transferred to the individual:

Neo-liberalism encourages individuals to give their lives a specific entrepreneurial form. It responds to stronger 'demand' for individual scope for self-determination and desired autonomy by 'supplying' individuals and collectives with the possibility of actively participating in the solution of specific matters and problems which had hitherto been the domain of state agencies specifically empowered to undertake such tasks. (Lemke, 2001, pp. 201-202)⁸⁴

These power/knowledge practices exist in tandem with a principle of sovereignty. That is, sovereign society and disciplinary society go together, in heterogeneous manner, and the operations of power sit in between (Foucault, 2003). The rules and codes of disciplinary power are not based in simply legal right; instead the jurisprudence is "clinical knowledge" (Foucault, 2003, p. 39) such as knowledge of the human psyche. This approach provides clues as to the "manufacture of subjects" (Foucault, 2003, p. 46) and the power practices that produce the subject. The way that the subject is produced is, essentially, an effect of power.⁸⁵

The task of neoliberal rationality is not to articulate reality as it is already there, but to specify and constitute a reality it presumes is already there; it is a task of aligning subjectivity with political goals. As Lemke states, political rationality

⁸⁴ This was clearly a feature of a lot of the practice with young people. It is interesting to me to conceptualise neoliberal power in this productive enabling way, as opposed to a force that says no—no to welfare, no to public goods and services, no to state regulation.

⁸⁵ As before, this has allowed an examination of disciplinary knowledge as a form of power. Curiously there were a lot of psychological theories of young people, particularly regarding self-esteem, that were given considerable currency and justified various interventions to improve self-esteem.

“constitutes the intellectual processing of the reality which political technologies can then tackle” (Lemke, 2001, p. 191) and as Watts states, “the administrative systems of governmentality ‘invent’ the reality they are designed to regulate” (cited in Goodwin, 1996, p. 68).⁸⁶

⁸⁶ The idea that power could invent problems in order to justify a regulatory apparatus makes sense when we think of all the work undertaken by social workers, for example, solving problems of an ill-defined nature. It also means that if the unstated goal of RSLA is to keep watch on all the missing young people, then it is important no doubt to create an edifice of risk that legitimates technologies of surveillance.

Appendix 3: Synopsis on power

According to Foucault (1978), the most effective forms of power are those which are more or less 'invisible'. For example, Foucault explains:

Let me offer a general and tactical reason that seems self-evident: power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms. (1978, p. 86)⁸⁷

In other words, the most visible and most repressive elements of power are probably the least effective. The invisible, masked and productive elements of power are the most effective, precisely because they are productive and precisely because their mechanisms are rendered invisible.⁸⁸ For Foucault, power is everywhere and is woven through the fabric of everyday life:

The omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. (Foucault, 1978, p. 93)⁸⁹

These productive mechanisms of power occur at the levels of discourse, epistemology, and surveillance and self-disciplinary practices. We should be concerned to trace these forms of power and their effects. In an interview with

⁸⁷ This is such a tactical view of power, different to Marxist critical theory and even Machiavellian notions of power. Power in RSLA is somewhat hidden by its "moral, good intentions".

⁸⁸ In this respect, the psychologist is more powerful than the executioner.

⁸⁹ Again, this theory of power does not elevate sovereign power or the power of the ruling elite. Power sits even with the Participation Coordinator in their interactions, tutelage, and empowerment practices with young person.

Pierre Boncenne, here is how Foucault argues for an examination of the strategies of power:

Who makes decisions for me? Who is preventing me from doing this and telling me to do that? Who is programming my movements and activities? Who is forcing me to live in a particular place when I work in another? How are these decisions on which my life is completely articulated taken?...I don't believe that this question of "who exercises power?" can be resolved unless that other question "how does it happen?" is resolved at the same time. (Foucault, 1988c, p. 103)

PB. So we can't study power without what you call the "strategies of power" ...

FOUCAULT: Yes, the strategies, the networks, the mechanisms, all those techniques by which a decision is accepted and by which that decision could not but be taken in the way that it was. (Foucault, 1988c, p. 104)

Foucault (1988c) argues that the existence of strategies of power emerge out of a history of the developing techniques of human management. These include, for example, the organisation, confinement, surveillance, supervision and fixing of bodies in certain spaces at certain times.⁹⁰ These strategies cannot be reduced to an economic logic or economic rationality—they are also the necessary means of coming to know and managing the problems posed by population. In this sense, the strategies that are a form of population managerialism produce knowledge on and about the population and the best methods of managing it.⁹¹ The human

⁹⁰ The social and human sciences are important here. More recently, the life sciences of biology and genetics are distinctly influential forms of power and knowledge (Rose, 2013).

⁹¹ When thinking about RSLA, it was helpful to consider questions regarding the population it is seeking to manage, and all the minutiae of practices and techniques undertaken towards these ends. This included all the knowledge and concepts and ideas produced and refined and distributed within the policy circles.

and to some extent the natural sciences produce and reify certain versions of 'truth' to which people submit (Foucault, 1988c).

Consequently, power, truth, and right exist in a triangular and mutually reinforcing relationship (Foucault, 2003). Power puts into place rules of right that establish and legitimate discourses of truth, which are ultimately necessary for the existence of power. Second, power is to be understood not so much in terms of the juridical, or even of a conscious intent. This is the problem of assuming that there is an "inside" to power that can be dug up—according to Foucault, trying to get inside the motives of power is a labyrinthine quest to nowhere. Rather, it is best understood by looking at powers:

...external face, at the point where it relates directly and immediately to what we might, very provisionally, call its object, its target, its field of application, or, in other words, the places where it implants itself and produces real effects. So the question is not: Why do some people want to be dominant? What do they want? What is their overall strategy? The question is: What happens at the moment of, at the level of the procedure of subjugation, or in the continuous and uninterrupted processes that subjugate bodies, direct gestures, and regulate forms of behaviour. In other words, instead of asking ourselves what the sovereign looks like from on high, we should be trying to discover how multiple bodies, forces, energies, desires, thoughts, and so on are gradually, progressively, actually and materially constituted as subjects, or as the subject. (Foucault, 2003, p. 28)⁹²

⁹² In my analysis, I tried hard not to point the finger at any one person, thing, or institution. I tried to refrain concluding that all the business about RSLA is part of master plan of some sort.

These forms of power—the body-disciplinary-power and the population-regulation-power—are not dichotomous to or distinct from the third point in the power triangle, sovereign-right-power (Foucault, 2003).⁹³

Thus, power is best seen not as a possession that is wielded by one group or person over another. Instead, power is something that “functions” and “circulates” through “networks” (Foucault, 2003, p. 29). As Foucault (2003) states, “power passes through individuals. It is not applied to them” (p. 29). An analysis of power needs to begin at the extremities of the social network, at the micro level. These have a history, logic, and application that are not merely the result of a set of dictates that emanate from some kind of sovereign ‘centre’ (Foucault, 2003).⁹⁴ These processes of power are unable to exist without the production of knowledge and truth, and this knowledge must be put into circulation (Foucault, 2003). How is this knowledge produced? A constellation of practices inspect, record, communicate, analyse, verify, observe, invent and organise concepts, and theorise.⁹⁵

⁹³ In RSLA, all these forms of power coalesce together. Disciplining power concerns the conduct and behaviour of the single student. Population-regulation-power abstracts this to craft and legitimate a notion of risky young people and their life trajectories, and sovereign-right-power legislates and resources participation as a matter of formal policy.

⁹⁴ As above, this has been helpful in nuancing a theory of power about RSLA and allowed me to focus on the detail, rather than an abstract view of power as somehow ‘out there’.

⁹⁵ This is the focus on knowledge as power and begs the question: what are the forms of knowledge in RSLA?

Appendix 4: Synopsis on the theoretical inception of the study

Dean's (1999, pp. 27-34) analytics of government was an important step in the process of developing the framework for the inquiry into RSLA. In the beginning stages of developing questions and thinking approaches to study RSLA, I drew on this framework to begin to sketch ideas, questions and lines of inquiry. It is presented here in summary form, quoting verbatim the headings from Dean to show the kinds of ideas and approaches that formed the initial stages of this inquiry.

The identification of problematizations

Problematizations denote the particular moment and situation in which governing occurs, or is seen ought to occur. It refers to the way that the 'conduct of conduct' becomes a problem for government and it refers to questions regarding how conduct (of ourselves and others) should be considered.

Questions and thoughts: A problem regarding the proper school leaving age has emerged. What *is* this problematisation? How is this problem managed at the level of the governing of people's conduct in their relation to the problem? Following this line, I sought to try and work out what was the problem that RSLA was seeking to solve as well as working out how RSLA went about trying to understand this problem and solve it in a practical way.

The priority given to 'how' questions

'How' questions focus on the many and varied practices on which a problematisation is made, and importantly, how these practices are thought

about and understood. Such practices include the vast “empirical routines of government” (Dean, 1999, p. 28) rather than questions of how rule is established, by whom and on what basis. Dean provides an example of how this could be applied to income support for the unemployed:

The administrative structure, integration and coordination of various departments of state and other agencies, organizations and businesses; the forms of training for public servants and other professionals (counsellors, case managers) and the expertise expected of them; the means for the collection, collation, storage and retrieval of information about specific populations of clients, and methods of queuing, interviewing and assessing them; the design and use of assets tests, eligibility criteria, waiting periods, forms of certification; the use of forms, publicity, advertisements, etc. (Dean, 1999, pp. 28-29)

Questions and thoughts: If staying in school longer is the problem that government seeks to address, *how* does this happen? Focussing on how questions in RSLA directs attention to the detailed constellation of practices and includes everything from the file, to the interview, to the formation and implementation of an engagement program, to the concepts used to give the problem a shape and direct practices in multiple forms towards that problem.

Practices of government as assemblages or regimes

As Dean claims, the practices of government are multiple, having “diverse historical trajectories, as polymorphous in their internal and external relations” (1999, p. 29). Practices are both materialist as well as enshrined in ideas and thought.

Questions and thoughts: Focussing on the practices of those employed under the edicts of RSLA meant that I could focus the data collection on what people did with young people inasmuch as the language and ideas they held and circulated about young people. So, the inquiry inevitably focussed on language and practice, ideas and actions, discourse and things

in the world. In doing so I attempted to work out how these things link or join up. In some cases they did, in other cases they did not cohere so neatly.

The examination of fields of visibility of government

This refers to the materialist dimensions of government: the visible products, tools, techniques, architectures, objects, discourses, and characterisations of what the objects of governing are, how they can be understood, organised, explained and so on.

Questions and thoughts: As well as interviewing practitioners about their thinking and practice, I also sought to collect visual representations of the policy. These included pictures of young people participating in engagement programs, job descriptions for Participation Coordinators, plans and documents produced by DET about RSLA's strategic and operational directions, frameworks that classified NEET, blank Individual Pathway Plans (IPP) used in practice, the various forms that parents and employers need to fill in to track and monitor participation under a Notice of Arrangements. The principle here posed by Dean meant I sought a selection of data about RSLA beyond an interview transcript.

The concern for the technical aspect of government

In contrast to seeing government as just a constellation of values and ideologies (abstractions) the "*techne*" (Dean, 1999, p. 31, original italics) of government refers to the "means, mechanisms, procedures, instruments, tactics, techniques, technologies and vocabularies [in which] authority [is] constituted and rule accomplished" (Dean, 1999, p. 31).

Questions and thoughts: This is why I included 'technologies' and 'discipline' as part of the conceptual framework, and sought to identify what technologies and disciplinary practices

are developed and put into place under RSLA. I did this because I wanted to move my analysis from just seeing RSLA as an abstracted ideology, and to see it also as a form of material practice.

The approach to government as rational and thoughtful activity

Questions arising from this include those associated with the rationalities or mentalities of government; its “*episteme*” (Dean, 1999, p. 31, original italics).

These include, for example:

What forms of thought, knowledge, expertise, strategies, means of calculation, or rationality are employed in practices of governing? How does thought seek to transform these practices? How do these practices of governing give rise to specific forms of truth? How does thought seek to render particular issues, domains and problems governable? (Dean, 1999, p. 31)

Questions and thoughts: As a counterbalance to the realist and materialist focus on the practices of RSLA, I sought to explore its ontology and epistemology of the problem it seeks to explain and respond to. This is actually quite a tall order, and so the concept that worked best for me to tackle this was ‘rationality’. In drawing on rationality, questions regarding the thinking and the forms of truth and knowledge that give governing a particular focus around the problems it seeks to invent and construct and bring into clarity are examined.

The attention to formation of identities

This refers to the kinds of identities “promoted and presupposed by various practices and programmes of government” (Dean, 1999, p. 32). Such identities are elicited and nurtured through governing practices; the acting upon and

transforming and production of particular forms of identity for particular kinds of political goals.

Questions and thoughts: This is why I included a section on RSLA ethics and pastoral power, because these forms of power are concerned with particular identities and I wanted to see what sorts of strategies were deployed to elicit particular kinds of identities among young people.

The extraction of the utopian element of government

By this it means that within the art of government will be a utopian view that presupposes that end-points can and will be reached through the correct means. It means that an art of government holds that by drawing from adequate knowledge, formulating correct goals and following logical strategies, desired outcomes will be reached—problems fixed, solutions found, and ideal situations created. Dean argues that an analytics of government needs to extract or identify the various utopian claims that sit within the strategies of government.

Questions and thoughts: Following this line, I tried to work out what sorts of promises RSLA made about young people, society, economy, work, citizenship and social and individual wellbeing. It made plenty of utopian promises, particularly about the benefits and virtues of 12 years of compulsory education, which were offered up as a panacea for all sorts of social and economic ills.

The circumspection about the role of values

Values and ideological positions should be seen as part of the rhetoric, rationalities and mentalities of government, and not specifically the single

arbiter of the technologies of government. Values and ideological positions may be attached to the technologies and practices of government. As Dean says, “values, knowledge, techniques, are all part of the mix of regimes of practices but none alone acts as guarantor of ultimate meaning” (Dean, 1999, p. 34).

Questions and thoughts: This has meant that I have included a concern to identify the ethics of RSLA, but not in isolation to other forms of power, such as its disciplining tactics and rationality about young people. When seeking to explore the ethics of RSLA, I do not mean to imply that RSLA is morally virtuous. I have been mindful that behind these subtle forms of power sits the full weight of the state. RSLA is legislated, after all.

The avoidance of ‘global or radical’ positions

Government is not to be seen in totalising, global or monolithic forms. It is not by *necessity* good or bad, oppressive or liberating, constraining or enabling, coercive or consenting, utopian or dystopian. Instead, it may contain elements of each of these, or all, or none. The point of an analytics of government, according to Dean, is not to foreclose thinking and possibilities through the abrupt shutting down of history and meaning, but rather to open up possibilities of understanding and acting as a form of criticism of the modes of thinking and acting which implicate us all. This form of clarity pre-empts a radical foreclosure of meaning. It stands apart from *A Priori* end-point conclusions and a zero-sum analysis of power. It aims at clarity and criticism of how we govern ourselves and others.

Questions and thoughts: I admit that this has been particularly difficult, because it is hard not to see RSLA in all-encompassing terms. I have tried to maintain an open description of

the policy, offering a critique in some places. However, the most challenging thing about this was that, in my analysis, it seemed like RSLA *was* a seamless and watertight form of thinking and acting. This was made worse in my mind when I read about the situation in the UK and elsewhere and found that their policy rationalities and practices concerning the governing of young people in education were practically the same. Could neoliberalism (as a social system) be global?

Appendix 5: Synopsis on critical realism and Foucault

When 18th century German philosopher Immanuel Kant posed the questions, ‘what is Enlightenment?’ and ‘what is the revolution?’ he laid down a dual path in modern philosophical thought. These can be summarised in two ways: what are the conditions by which truth is possible? and “what is our present?” (Foucault, 1993, p. 18). It is against the latter question that Foucault situates his work as a practice of critical reflection on the present and in following this approach, my methodological task is likewise geared towards addressing the question “what’s going on”? (Dean, 1997, p. 205). Such a question is really about what Owen refers to as “a ‘critical ontology of ourselves’” (Owen, 1994, p. 141), and Dean refers to this as a form of inquiry that is “an investigation into the conditions of existence of what we take to be our present and how we have come to think about and act on ourselves and others” (Dean, 1997, p. 206).

Like all research, this research involves an intervention with the reality it seeks to understand (Danermark et al., 2002). That is to say, some objects and phenomena like RSLA are not easily understandable through a casual glance—they must be revealed using various techniques in order to produce knowledge about things ordinarily unseen. For RSLA, its “reality is not transparent” (Danermark et al., 2002, p. 20) and knowledge produced by studying RSLA is shaped by the context of the observation and whatever perspective is operating at the time the observation is taking place (Slott, 2005). This is why it is

important for me to state in detail my approach and the perspectives taken and be reflective and reflexive on their use (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009).

While it may be possible to casually observe 'everyday events' associated with RSLA⁹⁶ there are interpretations of reality that 'sit below' the everyday mundane policy practices that are not transparent, but nonetheless, have an important effect on RSLA as a social experience (Danermark et al., 2002). RSLA should not be reduced to just the surface appearances of a discourse, nor should it be reduced to a set of law-like essentialised and deterministic forces (Frauley, 2007). This would be to treat RSLA as ontologically flat (Danermark et al., 2002; Frauley, 2007) and was something I sought to avoid. In my analysis, I have tried to work together structure and discourse, without reducing the policy to matters of just being empirical facts or statistics, or mere discourses. In applying critical realism to Foucault's ontology, I incorporate a stratified notion of reality in seeking to describe the practices of power and reach a broader level of depth analysis entailing understanding and explanation (Al-Amoudi, 2007; Bhaskar, 1998; Danermark et al., 2002; Houston, 2001).

As mentioned, I see that critical realism and Foucault are not wholly incompatible (Al-Amoudi, 2007; Frauley, 2007). For example, Al-Amoudi (2007) explains that Foucault's work post *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1977) is by-and-large compatible with critical realism at an ontological level (Al-Amoudi,

⁹⁶ Everyday events might include an interview or phone call with a student and their family, a workshop on engagement, an assessment, filling in a file or entering attendance data into a database, or a liaison between a school and a social service over a student.

2007). Al-Amoudi (2007) argues that it would be contradictory for Foucault (or those who interpret his work) to claim that all truth is *merely* a social construction. If this were the case, we risk conflating objects with ideas and classifications about such objects (Hacking, 1999).

Al-Amoudi (2007) contends that Foucault's work does incorporate an intransitive realm beyond the transitive context of discourse that he focuses on. It is logically impossible for there to *not* be an intransitive material reality of something if one accepts the notion of a transitive construction of it. It does not make sense to have a social construction of nothing (Hacking, 1999). As explained by Al-Amoudi:

Bhaskar readily admits that knowledge is not only determined by its intransitive objects but also by social mechanisms. Knowledge, then, is a social phenomenon and Bhaskar's point is that it is erroneous to conclude from the very social nature of knowledge that it *constructs* alone the object to which it actually *refers*. (Al-Amoudi, 2007, p. 548, original italics)

The point that Al-Amoudi (2007) makes and one that I agree with is that Foucault's work focusses largely on the transitive side of the discourses, power/knowledge, truths, episteme, and so on. But this should not be read as a wholesale excising of an intransitive reality from ontology. For example, the intransitive realm of 'the body' and its actions must exist in a realist sense for Foucault's work on the development of judicial, medical and psychiatric discourses to make any sense (Al-Amoudi, 2007). That is to say, although Foucault focuses on the transitive realm, this realm is linked to an intransitive

(realist) *context*. Foucault's work, if read in a manner sympathetic to critical realism, is concerned with real things, inasmuch as it is concerned with the transitive constructions that are made about them (Al-Amoudi, 2007). In applying these ideas in theoretical and methodological ways to RSLA, I kept my focus on constructs and contexts, discourses and practices, and things that actually happened within RSLA.

Appendix 6: List of data documents

#	Description	#	Description	#	Description
1	2006 Engagement Program Documentation	66	2009 Engagement Program Documentation	131	Newspaper Article on RSLA
2	2006 Engagement Program Documentation	67	2009 Engagement Program Documentation	132	Newspaper Article on RSLA
3	2006 Engagement Program Documentation	68	2009 Engagement Program Documentation	133	Newspaper Article on RSLA
4	2006 Engagement Program Documentation	69	2009 Engagement Program Documentation	134	Newspaper Article on RSLA
5	2006 Engagement Program Documentation	70	2009 Engagement Program Documentation	135	Newspaper Article on RSLA
6	2006 Engagement Program Documentation	71	2009 Engagement Program Documentation	136	Newspaper Article on RSLA
7	2006 Engagement Program Documentation	72	2009 Engagement Program Documentation	137	Newspaper Article on RSLA
8	2006 Engagement Program Documentation	73	2009 Engagement Program Documentation	138	Newspaper Article on RSLA
9	2006 Engagement Program Documentation	74	2009 Engagement Program Documentation	139	Newspaper Article on RSLA
10	2006 Engagement Program Documentation	75	Youth Service Brochure	140	Newspaper Article on RSLA
11	2006 Engagement Program Documentation	76	Youth Service Brochure	141	Newspaper Article on RSLA
12	2006 Engagement Program Documentation	77	Govt. of WA School Leaving Age Information Book	142	Newspaper Article on RSLA
13	2006 Engagement Program Documentation	78	Govt. of WA School Leaving Age Flyer	143	Newspaper Article on RSLA
14	2006 Engagement Program Documentation	79	Govt. of WA School Leaving Age Flyer	144	Newspaper Article on RSLA
15	2006 Engagement Program Documentation	80	Govt. of WA School Leaving Age Flyer	145	Newspaper Article on RSLA
16	2006 Engagement Program Documentation	81	Govt. of WA School Leaving Age Information Book	146	Newspaper Article on RSLA
17	2006 Engagement Program Documentation	82	Message from the Minister	147	Newspaper Article on RSLA
18	2007 Engagement Program Forum	83	School Leaving Age FAQ	148	Newspaper Article on RSLA
19	2007 Engagement Program Synopsis	84	Govt. of WA School Leaving Age Flyer	149	Newspaper Article on RSLA
20	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	85	DET Good Practice Guide	150	Newspaper Article on RSLA
21	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	86	School Leaving Age Workshop Notes	151	Newspaper Article on RSLA
22	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	87	School Principal Timetabling Discussion Paper	152	Newspaper Article on RSLA
23	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	88	DET RSLA Information and Procedures	153	Newspaper Article on RSLA
24	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	89	DET Form A – Notice of Arrangements	154	Newspaper Article on RSLA
25	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	90	DET Form B – Options Application	155	Newspaper Article on RSLA
26	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	91	DET Form A – Employment Application	156	Newspaper Article on RSLA
27	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	92	DET Curriculum Council Receipt of Advice	157	Hansard Record
28	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	93	DET Application for Exemption from School	158	Hansard Record
29	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	94	DET Notice of Employment Cessation	159	Acts Amendment Notes
30	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	95	DET Notice of Change of Learning Program	160	Hansard Record
31	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	96	DET Notice of Change of Provider	161	DET Consultation Paper
32	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	97	DET Notice of Change of Student	162	DET Consultation Report
33	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	98	Govt. of WA Media Statement	163	DET School Leaving Age Information
34	2007 Engagement Program	99	Govt. of WA Media Statement	164	DET School Leaving Age Information

#	Description	#	Description	#	Description
	Documentation				
35	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	100	Govt. of WA Media Statement	165	DET School Leaving Age Information
36	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	101	Govt. of WA Media Statement	166	DET School Leaving Age Information
37	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	102	Govt. of WA Media Statement	167	DET School Leaving Age Information
38	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	103	Govt. of WA Media Statement	168	DET School Leaving Age Information
39	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	104	Govt. of WA Media Statement	169	DET Participation Directorate Strategic Framework 2008
40	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	105	Govt. of WA Media Statement	170	DET Students at Risk Policy
41	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	106	Govt. of WA Media Statement	171	DET Retention and Participation Plan
42	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	107	Govt. of WA Media Statement	172	DET Participation Directorate Strategic Framework 2006
43	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	108	Govt. of WA Media Statement	173	DET Alternative Education Programs
44	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	109	Govt. of WA Media Statement	174	DET District Education and Participation Plan
45	2007 Engagement Program Documentation	110	Govt. of WA Media Statement	175	District Youth Services Directory
46	2008 Engagement Program Documentation	111	Govt. of WA Media Statement	176	DET District Education Model
47	2008 Engagement Program Documentation	112	Govt. of WA Media Statement	177	DET District Education Program Proposal
48	2008 Engagement Program Documentation	113	Govt. of WA Media Statement	178	DET District Education Plan
49	2008 Engagement Program Documentation	114	Govt. of WA Media Statement	179	Participation Coordinator JDF
50	2008 Engagement Program Documentation	115	Govt. of WA Media Statement	180	Participation Coordinator JDF
51	2008 Engagement Program Documentation	116	Govt. of WA Media Statement	181	Participation Coordinator JDF Notes
52	2008 Engagement Program Documentation	117	Govt. of WA Media Statement	182	Participation Coordinator Advertisement
53	2008 Engagement Program Documentation	118	Govt. of WA Media Statement	183	DET NEET Profiling Guidelines
54	2008 Engagement Program Documentation	119	Govt. of WA Media Statement	184	DET Attendance Kit
55	2008 Engagement Program Documentation	120	Govt. of WA Media Statement		
56	2008 Engagement Program Documentation	121	Govt. of WA Media Statement		
57	2008 Engagement Program Documentation	122	Govt. of WA Media Statement		
58	2009 Engagement Program Documentation	123	Govt. of WA Media Statement		
59	2009 Engagement Program Documentation	124	Govt. of WA Media Statement		
60	2009 Engagement Program Documentation	125	Govt. of WA Media Statement		
61	2009 Engagement Program Documentation	126	Govt. of WA Media Statement		
62	2009 Engagement Program Documentation	127	Newspaper Article on RSLA		
63	2009 Engagement Program Documentation	128	Newspaper Article on RSLA		
64	2009 Engagement Program Documentation	129	Newspaper Article on RSLA		
65	2009 Engagement Program Documentation	130	Newspaper Article on RSLA		