From ‘Lads’ to ‘Losers’: The new discourses surrounding ‘anti-school’ young people and their potential for social justice and improved school outcomes.

School Context

- A government school in a working class area.
- The median household income of this area is approximately $270 below the median Australian household income of $1,028 (ABS, 2007).
- A ‘rural’ area in that it is 30-120 minutes from the city of Hobart (from the closest and furthest point) and transport is poor.
Research Context

Qualitative and multi-method research involving observation, in-depth interviews and discussion groups with a group of 28 grade 10 students, the 4 core grade 10 teaching staff and the school principal.

Currently conducting analysis involving thematic analysis and typologies.

Nick: In the old days we had one [school] model and we said if you don’t fit that model hop off. Nowadays it’s you’ve got to come so the models got to change. I think we now realise, we know that people learn in different ways and have different needs so one system or one delivery mechanism doesn’t provide for all kids, so you’ve got to provide lots of different programs to support kid’s different needs.
### Engagement Schooling

- Based on the goal of school retention.
- Teachers operate on an individual’s engagement with school through revealing the relevance learning has for them and encouraging the young person’s active role in learning.
- Teachers also assist young people to develop career pathways meaningful to the young person.
- However, the young person is ultimately responsible for their school outcomes and they must be active in constructing a future pathway and in self-disciplining themselves.
Jan: [The students say] ‘Why should I put the effort in when it’s hard? When all of these years it hasn’t worked for me, so why now? Cause you’re telling me to? No that’s not gonna [be enough], [you] don’t have that much power.’ So it had to be like, ‘well you’re going to need this in the workplace and that’s why.’

Sue: I think as a teacher you have to sort of be a bit inspiring. And to be inspiring you have to deliver. I sort of think if I’ve gotta find out about something that I know nothing about I just begin to put it in the too hard basket. Whereas if I go to a talk and someone tells me about something and that gets me interested, then I can go find out about it... Well that’s what I think we have to do for kids because their world’s pretty narrow. They’ve gone nowhere, done nothing... And I figure if I don’t do that for them then they’re not going to be inspired by [learning] because who would?

Outcomes

• A more democratic relationship between teachers and young people based on mutual respect and guidance rather than coercion.
• A greater sense of the value of learning through understanding how knowledge is relevant to one’s current and future life.
• Opportunities to develop skills in areas of interest to the young person, rather than learning only that they ‘are not good’ at academic work.
• More informed and successful transitions to post-grade 10 pathways.
Democratic Relationship

Dooly: My grade eight teacher, the teacher I don't like, is like 'do it or else,' kind of thing. Like 'do it or you'll get a detention...'. It was like if I didn't know the answer I wasn't listening or anything like that... They teach you and if you don't learn well then they don't care... So in grade eight I used to be a kind of 'bluhh' [pulls bored face] kind of person, and then grade nine and ten, I was just completely changed, it's good.

Ebony: Why the change?

Dooly: Probably the teachers... The teachers I've got now are good... Like Mr T, you do something for him and then he'll reward you by giving you some time at the end of the lesson to do what you want. Yeah, he gets me going [involved in work], shows me things...

Beth: And I'd like to - I like to know things, like, you know, like know things about the world. I'd like to have, like, the best of what I can, like, I wouldn't like to miss out on stuff, that sort of thing, or ... I want to make sure that I'm getting all that I can.

Ruth: I want to learn things so that when I finally go out into the world I'm not at a disadvantage.
Outcomes

• Does a school framework which offers different school options to young people because of their different backgrounds and aspirations sacrifice social justice goals? (i.e. is this a return to a dual school system)
• Does a school framework which is based on responsibilisation (self-responsibility for school outcome) create new forms of inequality?

Some Closing Thoughts

Engagement schooling has the potential to:
- Provide young people with a better understanding of social relations of power and a greater capacity to operate on those relations of power.
- Empower young people with self worth and knowledge.

This may mean that the ‘cultural capital’ young people come to school with is less important in terms of determining future pathways.
Some Closing Thoughts

• However responsibilisation may create a new form of ‘cultural capital’ based on the skills of self-discipline, reflexivity, planning, imagination, etc, which will cause new forms of disadvantage.