‘TROUBLING’ BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT: LISTENING TO STUDENT VOICE

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“This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Murdoch University”

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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.

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ABSTRACT

At the beginning of the 21st century, education is increasingly being privatised at the expense of the public. This can be explained in terms of the neoliberal agenda, with its emphasis on efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and standards and the damaging impact it is having on all aspects of school life. As governments abdicate responsibility for public education, schools are exposed to the forces of market competition, choice and individual performance rather than the collective public good serving the needs of all students.

This research investigates how students who do not conform, fit in, or help maintain a commodified image of the school, are often left on the margins, resist, or leave school altogether. It is these students specifically who become the focus of system wide attempts to homogenise behaviour in ways that are mostly demeaning and unhelpful. In particular, this thesis critiques the mandated Behaviour Management in Schools (2001, 2008) policy of the Western Australia Department of Education and Training by listening to the voices of students themselves and what they have to say about life in a Western Australian public secondary school. In the process, the thesis: highlights the lack of respectful consultation and negotiation with teachers, parents and students in the creation of behaviour management policy, protocols and rules; challenges the deficit and pathologising thinking that underpins it; and identifies an alternative vision based on the values of trust, respect, and care.

Drawing on the tradition of critical ethnography, twenty-seven Year 10 students were interviewed to better understand the contradiction between official policy discourses and their own daily experiences of behaviour management policies, routines and habits.
Official policy claims of creating a safe, welcoming and caring school environment are contrasted with student narratives which illustrate their concerns and struggles with inequality, and a desire for respect and voice in a system that often appears harsh and unfair. The analysis of these narratives, together with a genealogical investigation of the historical evolution of behaviour management discourses in Western Australia, sheds light on some of the reasons why students resist and disengage from schooling. The emergent themes selected from the narrative student portraits provide a focus of discussion: student voice - ‘they just won’t listen’; disengagement - ‘I am bored’; control - ‘they wear me down’; marginalisation - ‘I feel left out’; relationships - ‘can or can’t we relate’; and powerlessness - ‘when they don’t care’.

The alternative understandings that emerge from student insights and perspectives together with a critical theoretical orientation provide the foundations for building a more democratic and socially just approach to schooling. This alternative archetype is based on a vision of emotional and social connectedness and the principles of trust, care and respect nourishing pedagogical hope. Such a learning community has no ‘end place’ and no ‘product’ but instead is built on a spirit of belonging and negotiation and is not afraid to be bathed in affection, and authentic conversations.

The ultimate purpose of this thesis is to provoke and ‘trouble’ Behaviour Management in Schools policy in order to instigate a more meaningful dialogue about the social, economic and educational futures of all young people.
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I also wish to thank the Principal, administration and teaching staff of Anchorage High for providing me the opportunity to speak with this group of young people.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADHD      Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder
ASHS      Anchorage Senior High School
BMaD      Behaviour Management and Discipline
BMIS      Behaviour Management in Schools
BMP       Behaviour Management Plan
CMIS      Classroom Management in Schools
CMS       Classroom Management Strategy
CFS       Classroom First Strategy
HREC      Human Research Ethics Committee
IEP       Individual Education Plan
S&E       Society and Environment
SIS       Student Information System
SSTUWA    State School Teachers Union of Western Australia
WADET     Western Australian Department of Education and Training (Formally also known as Education Department of WA, The Ministry of Education of WA, Department of Education of WA and since 2010, known as WA Department of Education).
CHAPTER 1 - SETTING THE SCENE

1.1 Introduction

I have a story to tell about how a group of young people experience behaviour management and discipline regimes in a public high school in the state of Western Australia. In 1995, I returned to teaching after a break only to find myself in an unfamiliar, disturbing and strange environment. I was genuinely shocked by the shift in school culture compared to my earlier life as a teacher. At this point of my return, I also told a story about the daily struggles of teachers as they attempted to negotiate managerial inspired accountability, performativity, testing and surveillance (Robinson, 2005). In the following chapters, I trace a similar journey; this time telling the tales of a group of sixteen year old school students attending a typical public high school in the state of Western Australia. Unlike novels where one is often able to ‘escape’ into the lives of fictional characters, this thesis investigates the lived experience of students who increasingly face a diminishing sense of hope and optimism as schools are increasingly “abandon[ed]… as democratic public spheres” (Giroux, 2003b, p. 562). Through their exposure to various codes of conduct and good standing policy, legitimised in this case by the Behaviour Management in Schools (BMIS) policy (2002), these young people share stories of what life is like for them. It should not be surprising then to hear from these young people that what is important to them is the ability to establish engaging relationships based on the principles of trust, respect and care rather than conformity, control and bureaucratic rules; this is crucial to whether students engage or not in schooling.

This first chapter begins to elaborate the personal and relational social world of students. This world is captured through stories offering a counter-narrative to
dominant behaviour and managerial discourses. It endeavours through student narratives to expose the contradictions, tensions and dilemmas of non-democratic pedagogical practices, as students struggle against ‘what is’ and search for what ‘ought’ to be in terms of a “pedagogy of relation” (Margonis, 2004, p. 50). Giroux (2005) describes this broader democratic vision as “educated hope” because it “pluralizes politics by opening up a space for dissent, makes authority accountable, and becomes an activating presence” (p. xxxiii). These issues are addressed by revealing how the personal is political. From this standpoint, I am able to critically investigate how behaviour management policies are enacted in schools. This is carried out using a critical ethnographic investigation of a public high school site. This kind of political investigation sheds light on how easily BMIS expeditently transfers into Good Standing policy and binds students by structures that become punitive and policed. Anchorage Senior High School (hereafter known as ‘Anchorage High’) is the case study site where this investigation takes place and Gary, a sixteen year old from the school is introduced as a typical student caught up in such policy enactment, neglecting the significance and fragility of relationships in his learning and education.

This research story challenges the dominant perception that globalization means civilization should be “seen through economics and economics alone” (Saul, 2006, p. 35). The economic dominance of neo-liberalism (Hill, 2008), where some are winners and others losers, works against the notion of the relational school (Smyth, Down & McInerney, 2010) and ultimately democracy itself. As a consequence, serious damage is done to more local, authentic and indigenous pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning. In this sense, my dissertation is a story about the struggle against neoliberal discourses in favour of human agency and the creation
of socially just schooling (Giroux, 1983a, p. 36). This democratic project involves exposing the disproportionate prominence and impact of neoliberal discourses of performance, standards and efficiency and the ways in which they jeopardise the development of critical thought, hope, collegiality, relationships and global equity (Hill, 2008).

In the context of these broader struggles, it is important to allow young people themselves to have a say “because it is at the point where they engage with institutions such as schools that social justice is either promoted or social divisions entrenched” (Wyn & White, 1997, p. 6). As Ayers (2004, p. 146) reminds us, in this context there are few winners and even larger numbers of losers including young people, some of whom are having difficulty finding a place to eat and sleep, let alone attend compulsory schooling. Samuel (1982, p. 19) explains that “the current call for the extension of repressive measures in schools is intended to produce a docile compliant working class who will unquestioningly follow orders.” By acting in opposition to the pedagogy that oppresses students (Noddings, 2004, vii), one can advocate for a more relational pedagogy which opens the way to an intellectually and socially just way of life.

An alternative democratic relational vision emerges in this thesis after asking the research question “how do students understand, experience and respond to the Behaviour Management in Schools policy?” In searching for answers, this thesis sets out to do three things. First, it attempts to disrupt the dominant economic rationalist discourses around education policy as it relates to behaviour management in schools. Second, it provides a space for students to have a voice in the debates which directly impact on them. The intent is to allow students to speak back to the
current policy deafness as it relates to the desires, needs, aspirations and identity of young people themselves. Finally, this thesis maps some broad principles and values of a more democratic alternative founded on the ideal of the relational school which I argue are essential to the task of rethinking schools.

1.2 The significance of this thesis

Freire (2004, p. 84) explains that “the more education becomes empty of dreams to fight for, the more the emptiness left by those dreams becomes filled with technique.” This research, therefore, is significant for a number of reasons. First, it creates a space to document the voices of students such as Gary as a counter narrative to the dominant technical and instrumental views of education that Freire describes. It is the public secondary high school that locates the micro politics of my research question under the umbrella of global politics because “schools are pivotal organizing points for most peoples’ lives” (Gibson, Queen, Ross & Vinson, 2007, p. 6).

Second, this thesis locates the politics of schools within the broader context of global capitalism and its corollary new public management (Welch, 2007, p.13). Slee (1995a, p. 118) explains that such public policy acts like a drama script, having considerable interplays between the text, the performance and the audience and, therefore, is open to contestation. This is what my research does. It seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the social construction of student behaviour within the context of institutionalised schooling as “they are one of the few public spaces in which people are engaged with each other in the interactional work of making meaning” (Wexler, 1992, p. 155). I argue that increasing numbers of students such as Gary resist the culture of a competitive market driven style schooling by actively
or passively dis-engaging as a form of resistance against policies that continually exclude them from having a say, and undermines authentic teaching and learning relationships.

Third, the thesis advocates the importance of critical social research as a way of understanding the ‘problem’ of student behaviour management in schools. This theoretical tradition provides the framework I use to expose economic, social and historical phenomenon. One of the overriding features of critical social research is the recognition that all social practices, including those of education, are by their very nature political in character, serving to reproduce dominant interests of various kinds. Critical social theorists are interested in “explore[ing] the relationship of knowledge, schooling and the social order and the role schools play in spreading ideology, maintaining or challenging social inequality, and serving democracy” (Torres & van Heertum, 2009, p. 227). Thus my research is interested in what accounts for particular biases, who gains, who loses and whose version of a story has not been told, and therefore is concerned with the power relations that are protected within the status quo (Walton, 2005, p. 69).

Fourth, this thesis draws on the tradition of critical ethnography as a preferred methodology because it provides a set of theoretical and methodological tools to listen, observe and reflect on student understandings and experiences of the Behaviour Management in Schools policy in relation to broader structural processes. Unlike traditional ethnography, critical ethnography does not merely describe and uphold the status quo, but rather following the “central tenet of critical theory” is interested in removing inequality and injustice (Robertson, 2005, p. 4). Critical ethnography encourages researchers to be sensitive to educational structures and
practices from the perspectives of students instead of those who have control or are in power (Pasco, 2000, p. 31).

Fifth, I do not hide behind a neutral stance in pursuing this investigation. My thesis challenges the assumption that policy is fair for all thus opening a debate on the damage being experienced by many children in public schools as the instrumental, rational and technical replaces the relational. This type of critical qualitative research takes an alternative textual and narrative approach that is often criticised as ‘unscientific’ or merely ‘exploratory’ by positivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 12). I argue that it is the so called scientific evidence based research which presently dominates educational policy making circles that is part of the problem. There is, therefore, an urgent need for research approaches that are capable of illuminating how power operates to perpetuate inequitable and unjust policies and practices in schools. Only then can one better understand how educational policies serve to reproduce the dominant economic and social order by inculcating students with a narrowly conceived and instrumentalist human capital approach to education. In a competitive nation state there is no place for equitable values because what matters most is being accountable to efficient financial budgets and performance assessments (Yeatman, 1990).

1.3 The personal is political

Teachers can have a positive influence on the present and future lives of their students by viewing education as a public issue and not simply a private matter (Gale & Densmore, 2003, p. 113). During the early 1990’s, I experienced concern at the unfamiliar territory that working as a teacher had become. Rather than being an enjoyable and engaging profession, I found it exhausting and unfulfilling. This
research endeavours to understand why? No longer did the process of education feel like a caring profession that I had experienced and expected to return to. The secondary school experience instead seemed to be one of survival, competition and avoidance of responsibility. The emphasis on being kept ‘busy’ with ‘performance’ and ‘accountable’ tasks, compounded by a lack of trust seemed to lead to a deskilling of professional judgements and methods (Apple, 2000, p. 116). There also appeared to be more stress on control and punishment of students and more attention on rewarding compliance if one was to be considered ‘a team player’. Other more complex relations of respect, dignity, appreciation of difference and the sharing and exploration of ideas for the development of knowledge seemed somewhat radical and out of place. The journal entry below captures my experiences at the time:

Once Upon a Time, there was a very big school, located near a beautiful sandy beach called ‘Cape Neal’. Janean was so happy to be going to this ‘dream school’ because she and her family could live by the sea and she could return to working with teenagers again after a five year break. She liked that.

On her first day, she walked enthusiastically into the staff room. Immediately she felt uneasy. Everyone was staring, no-one was welcoming. She felt like she had come from another planet, not just another country. There were lots of little tables with ‘huddles’ of people all around who seemed to separate themselves from others.

She thought it would not be so bad once she went to the familiar terrain of the classroom.

The siren went. It deafened her and reminded her of a war siren. She wondered why it had to be so loud and militant. Suddenly, hundreds of kids shoved and pushed each other in a noisy pack as they moved like angry swarms of bees along the narrow grey corridors towards their respective hives. She sensed the other teachers ‘checking’ out how she would cope with getting these ‘wild ones’ into the classroom to pacify them.

6 months later ……

Janean is really tired. She has tried all her old reliable tricks yet none seem to be working. She keeps refusing to fall victim of becoming a controlling and authoritative disciplinarian and persists with the student orientated approach to learning that she knows. She had always believed learning could be about discovery and excitement and espoused the possibility of mutual respect and responsive relationship with her students. Yet, she felt more and more that she was fighting a losing battle and not many teachers seemed to be working together or understanding her plight. Some teachers and administration even told her that she was
letting the ‘team’ down by not enforcing the ‘no-hat’ rule and that her classes seemed ‘too loud’ and too many of the kids were ‘out of seats’. Janean battled on in this work environment for another ten years. One wonders why: She often felt alone and her timetable was a conglomeration of the ‘leftover’ larger groups that no-one wanted to take. What she did know is that it was difficult to gain respect from the school staff in those ten years and that was something that had often happened in her twenty plus years of teaching before. Janean stayed because she believed she could make a difference. She had to somehow prove that ‘questioning’ the way things were in the school may make people consider other ways of working. In the end, she could not do this alone. Her own family and health were suffering and only by sliding away could she hold her head up again; only then could she realise that she could make a difference in the lives of others. This time, not by trying to battle it out alone in a field of angst, but by writing, speaking, advocating from the experience – telling her story and the stories of others in order to reclaim what teaching and learning was all about. [Journal Entry, May 2006]

What is revealed in this reflective journal entry is how the personal becomes political. Freire (2004, p. 71) explains that “education is always a certain theory of knowledge put into practice” and is, therefore, naturally political. To enable a ‘reflection of the self’ to emerge as a political actor within the politically unfamiliar pedagogical world elaborated on, I used third person to arrive at a place of knowing (Aronowitz, 1993, p. 8). By implementing the reflective journal as a research tool it “becomes an invitation to identify, analyse and critique, to understand the discursive practices that construct the sense of self – which in turn offer possibilities for social change” (Kamler, 2001, p. 3). Journaling is an important heuristic tool employed throughout this research to explain the political and contextual situation more personally and specifically. This personal micro-political reflexion serves as a ‘hook’ in understanding the macro, global picture. It does this by disclosing the significance of the relational connectedness in teaching. It also reveals the damage done when bureaucratic and administrative tasks are devolved into teaching, causing extra stress and strain on the profession and limiting teachers’ relationships with one another and
with their students. Gunter (2009) explains neatly the connection between the personal and the political:

It is a relief to people that they realize that they are not actually responsible for the problems laid upon them. Self-reflexivity also enables people to recognize their achievements in difficult circumstances and work out a sense of self and of the social that can support activism. (p. 100)

In this first journal entry I have revealed how as an experienced teacher returning to the profession, I felt stifled in my work as an educator. Shor (1992, p. 12) argues that people are naturally curious and are born to be learners; “education can either develop or stifle their inclination to ask why and to learn” (p. 2). There was a constant tension between what I believed and formally experienced as authentic teaching and the alien and constricting form that teaching and learning had become. There was also continual pressure to moderate, test, account for and be measured and managed on benchmarks and standards. My own performance, under this regime, instead of improving as the professional development and performance management packages stated would happen; actually declined, as my working days were reduced to filling out forms and trying to survive without collapse. What was especially concerning is that I also began to witness these tensions and contradictions happening to students. They too became alienated, more disengaged, and their own academic achievements declined as classrooms became more focused on silence and control rather than engaged in any real learning.

Whitty (2002, p. 79) offers an explanation that helps us to understand the reasons why these contradictions and tensions are occurring in teachers’ work. Over the last twenty years throughout the world, the devolution of many administrative and bureaucratic roles and responsibilities at all levels of government has crept into
schools. He argues that this has kept teachers busy with issues of short term survival in order to cope with the flow of new initiatives, policies and inspections. Education then, “is being treated as a private good rather than a public responsibility” (Whitty, 2002, p. 79). When the main purposes of education becomes focused on economic advantage and the main measure of success is higher test scores, then it an easy next step to regard schooling as a “consumer good rather than a common good” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 136).

I believed and still do, that the role of a teacher of young adults is privileged because it is relational. This role provides the opportunity to learn as well as teach as a facilitator, a mentor in relationship with students, to marvel at, enjoy but also try to understand students’ lives and experiences. Ayers (2004, p. 30) reminds one that teaching is at the core of oneself and that the processes of teaching and healing merge, to restore, feed and nourish. Such teaching also allows the creative processes of new possibilities to occur in learning. When, in contrast, teaching focuses on administrative duties and enforcement of bureaucratic rules and regulations, many of which serve little purpose and potentially create more problems, it is no longer a creative or fulfilling role for teachers like me. Teaching involves a complex web of reciprocity, trust, participation, equity and inclusiveness. It is no longer an empowering education (Shor, 1992) when intangible elements of relationship are caught up in the technical measurement and performance of a neoliberal economic market. Even more concerning is when the place of relationships in teaching and learning is harmed. According to Smyth, (2001b, p. 37) “schools are fundamentally relational places, and when relationships become undermined, then schools become damaged places.”
The trivialisation of relationships by economic and technical discourses in education was highlighted in Australia in May 2007 when the Australian Government education agenda was released at the Centre for Independent Studies. This agenda was titled “Australia rising to the educational challenge” (Grattan, 2007). The intransigent words of Australia’s then Prime Minister, John Howard, confirm the disproportionate use of technical over relational discourses when he states:

I am an avowed education traditionalist. I believe in high academic standards, competitive examinations, and teacher-directed lessons based on traditional disciplines….and strong but fair policies on school discipline.

At the same educational forum, the shadow Prime Minister at the time, Kevin Rudd, also centred his speech on economic factors; “I want us to set a vision to become the most-skilled economy, the best trained workforce in the world” (Grattan, 2007).

I began to understand, after reading critical theorists and practitioners such as Smyth (2001a, 2001b), Giroux (1983), Weis and Fine (2004), Harvey (1990) and McLaren (1989), that such change in education was not personal and had actually very little, if anything, to do with my teaching style. Welch (2007, p. 3) for example, explains that “many educators feel that these changes are outside of their control and their views are not sought nor appreciated.”

I did not want to be part of a culture that stultifies young people in their interests and possible futures and restricts teachers in their pedagogical work. Instead, I wanted to be part of an education that enabled a “rereading of the world” (Freire, 2004, p. 27) in order to change it to a more humane and hopeful education. It was not enough for me to remain neutral and passive or to accept the state of the world and
adapt to it, but rather “to transform it” and engage in practices that were consistent with this vision of social change (Freire, 2004, p. 7). Smyth (2001a) echoes these sentiments when he states that:

One of the primary reasons teachers come into this line of work is because of the opportunities it presents them with to connect with and help shape and form the lives of others - students, colleagues, and members of the wider community. (p. 150)

As a way of examining this interference of economic influence over the relational in education, this story will investigate a particular policy that has been accelerated in its implementation throughout government schools in the state of Western Australia. Similarly, this policy is reflected within many other states and countries throughout the world. This particular policy is interrogated as a micro-study of political intervention shaping and forcing schools to be accountable, measurable and seen to be solving civic problems. It will be argued that this happens because policy involves politics and emerges in specific circumstances at a particular time (Welch, 2007, p. 3). This policy is titled “Behaviour Management in Schools”.

1.4 Behaviour management policy

The focus on behaviour management by the West Australian Department of Education (WADET) as a formal strategy officially began in 2001. A sum of $64.5 million (AUD) was launched in August that year and was termed ‘Behaviour Management and Discipline’ (BMaD). This strategy evolved from the Behaviour Management in Schools (BMIS) (1998) policy and the guidelines for suspension and exclusion that operated under the Education Act (1928). The BMIS (1998) policy was already a major component of the Making the Difference strategy of the plan for Government School Education 1998-2000. The purpose of this strategy was to
reduce class sizes in the first two years of secondary schooling. It also began to address issues of challenging student behaviour because “students who are not participating fully in their education program because of disruptive behaviour, withdrawal from school activities, suspension, or exclusion are placed at educational risk” (BMIS, 2001, p. 3). Ironically, the stories revealed by some students that were interviewed for this research indicate that many of the actions policed, controlled and endorsed by such policy, actually led to some students becoming more withdrawn, excluded and eventually expelled from the very school attempting to implement the policy.

All WADET schools were provided with a proportion of annual funding to spend on programs, staffing and services that fitted the strategy. Each year the school sent a report to the department, profiling how money was spent and what strategies had been put into place as a consequence. The BMIS (2001) policy evolved from this strategy and as a result was mandated in all schools throughout the state by the following year, 2002. The footnote on each of this policy’s 20 pages reflects a statement confirming this legal authority:

All policy and procedural statements contained within this document are lawful orders for the purpose of section 80(a) of the Public Sector Management Act 1994 (W.A.) and therefore to be observed by all Department of Education and Training employees.

A significant amount of the (BMaD) monies was spent writing individual school behaviour management plans and codes of conduct, as well as participation in professional development training and attendance at School Council meetings. One feature in many West Australian public schools during the four year implementation of the strategy, was the absence of accountability and evaluation of expenditure and more significant for this study, any space for students’ voices. According to Gunter
(2009, p. 96), “neo-liberal reform has been developed and implemented without actually involving children, except as data providers to prove that elite adults are doing their jobs.” What is important about the absence of student input in the evolution of this strategy is that it does not have at its core, significant influence or knowledge and experience about students’ lives. Manifestations from such a strategy are thus even less likely to be democratic and socially just on behalf of the very persons the policy was intended to benefit, students themselves. Indeed, one could argue that the initial intent may actually have been more about control and order rather than of any benefit to students.

There have been various models promoted throughout schools over the last ten years as a result of the release of the (BMaD) strategy, the most strongly promoted being the Classroom Management in Schools (CMIS) project, launched by WADET and endorsed by the State School Teachers Union of Western Australia (SSTUWA). This project was written and promoted by Barrie Bennett and Peter Smilanich (1994), both international educational consultants from Canada specialising in classroom management workshops, workbooks and training programmes intended to skill teachers in techniques and strategies with the major goal of minimising bad behaviour.
Figure 1 below illustrates a range of other behaviour modification approaches endorsed by WADET since the mid 1980’s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Model/ Approach</th>
<th>Authors/ Advocates</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Raising and teaching adolescents’</td>
<td>Steve Biddulp</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>‘The secret of happy children: A new guide for parents’</td>
<td>The biological pubescent’ (Based on Stanley Halls, 1916 scientific study in which puberty creates ‘storm and stress’ causing turmoil for those around them).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>‘Raising boys: Why boys are different and how to help them become happy and well-balanced men.’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Building Resilience’</td>
<td>Andrew Fuller</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>‘From surviving to thriving: Promoting mental health in young people.’</td>
<td>Clinical psychology work to develop ones resilience, rescuing them from an adolescent ‘identity crisis’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>‘Beating bullies’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>‘Australian issues in boys’ education.’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Assertive discipline’</td>
<td>Canter &amp; Canter</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>‘Assertive discipline: Positive behaviour management for today's classroom.’</td>
<td>Based on positive rewards and negative penalties as consequences to behaviour choices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Behaviour modification models
What makes these approaches problematic is the dominance of behaviourist assumptions by the various authors and consultants who cleverly manage to package them for school consumption. These ‘seductively attractive’ packages and desktop manuals save both time and resources to already tired and frustrated teachers attempting to deal with ‘disruptive students’. Much of their appeal lies with the simple and systemic steps for behaviour modification of individuals (Slee, 1988, p. 20). Such behaviour approaches often make the assumption in their implementation that genuine consultation between students, parents and community has occurred and that steering committees were involved in developing them. In reality, due to time constraints, complexity and practical difficulties, these collaborative processes rarely eventuated. In the meantime, the student rather than the school is portrayed as the problem (Smyth & McInerney, 2007, p. 131).

In 2006, WADET was still enmeshed in implementing a new K-12 outcomes based curriculum (WA Curriculum Framework). This process had been taking hold in education since the mid 1990’s to replace the former unit curriculum and was designed to ensure a more ‘accountable’ focus on results and standards (Barnett, 2006). At the same time, a departmental restructuring occurred. As part of this restructure, what was the ‘Student Services’ department, consisting mainly of school psychologists, then became the ‘Behaviour, Standards and Wellbeing’ directorate whose motto was “to ensure that schools are safe, supportive and engaging environments for learning and teaching and the social and emotional wellbeing of all students and staff is nurtured and developed” [http://bswb.det.wa.edu.au/bswb, 2006]. Barry Bennett and Peter Smilanich’s classroom management package aligned comfortably with this paradoxical amalgamation of standards and pastoral care. Their book, ‘Classroom Management: A thinking and caring approach’ (1994) was
the major resource used throughout many schools to attend to classroom management issues. By using this book as its basis, classroom management strategy awareness workshops were conducted by WADET, employing consultants throughout the state for new, experienced and training teachers alike. All principals, deputies and heads of sub-schools (known as level 3 managers) are continually skilled in these strategies, via a new directions program at the Leadership Centre of WADET.

The complex concerns and frustrations of teachers in dealing with extra administrative duties, complicated by attempting to engage students who have become disenfranchised, I argue, are not addressed within these programmes. The importance instead is based on student outcomes and adoption of technical skills dealing with behaviour which rarely detours the problem away from ‘the individual’. These programmes focus and sometimes place attention and blame on the individuals (teachers and students) who are struggling to sort things out. They are trying to survive each day with cumbersome and accountable challenges such as covering mandated curriculum content, dealing with bureaucratic form filling and the administration of testing for ‘certain’ targets and standards. Added to this, teachers are also attempting to cope with extremely complex and often dysfunctional social behaviour. In response, the CMIS programme, promotes ‘bump sequences’, ineffective and effective teacher ‘continuums’, ‘choices’, ‘winnings over’, ‘pauses’, ‘gestures’, ‘signals to begin’, ‘thinking pairing sharing’, and ‘charting’, all of which may be well intended at one level, but largely miss the point when it comes to questions of power and control. Furthermore, these strategies fall way short of understanding reasons as to why these struggles persist. The BMIS policy and CMIS programmes have both been implemented into schools at the same time as
economistic approaches to school improvement, efficiency and standardisation gained political favour. Policy initiatives such as CMIS and other projects rely heavily on individualising and pathologising student behaviour as will be evidenced by four emerging strategies implemented by WADET since 1998.

The first is WADET’S 1998, *Students at Educational Risk (SAER)* strategy. The BMIS policy was a major component of this strategy and evolved from the *Plan for Government School Education* (1998-2000) which “aimed to coordinate and improve the provision and delivery of programs for the diverse groups of students at educational risk” (*Making the Difference*, 1998, p. 1). Smyth (2005b p. 117), explains that “the difference is between describing an individual as being ‘disadvantaged’ in contrast to being ‘put at disadvantage’”. In schools pathologising (treating as a disease), the lived experiences of children becomes a process of treating differences (in behaviour for example) as deficits that locate the responsibility in the lived experiences of children (their home life, socioeconomic status) rather than locating responsibility within classroom interactions, relationships and the educational system itself (Shields, Bishop and Mazawi, 2005, p xx). One consequence of pathologising such behaviour is that students are further disenfranchised, again separating them from positive experiences in their schooling.

A second strategy adopted by WADET was the appointment of extra school psychologists and chaplains into schools. This was announced by the Liberal Party of Western Australian in their 2008 election campaign, ‘*Better Behaviour in Schools, 2008*’, for addressing perceived behaviour problems in schools. Education Minister, Liz Constable, announced to the public in January 2009, when launching the first stage of yet another state government behaviour management strategy (Hiatt, 2009),
that $10 million was promised over four years for schools to hire school chaplains and $8.8 million to appoint an extra fifty psychologists on top of the two hundred and twelve psychologists already in schools. An extra $252,000 was also allocated to train forty school psychologists in mental health first aid.

This strategy was then quickly followed by the establishment of Behaviour Centres. These centres opened initially in primary schools throughout five WADET districts. By 2008 they opened in secondary schools over four WADET districts throughout the state, mainly city, in which ‘troublesome’ students were withdrawn from their schools. These Behaviour Centres are an expansion of the Socio-Psycho-Educational Resources (SPER) centre in which students are assessed, analysed and provided with individual management plans. Referrals to these centres occur through the school psychologist in liaison with the District Office and the school.

Finally, an out of school thirteen week counselling programme was trailed in 2008 by WADET as a response to recommendation 7 of the Education Workforce Initiatives Report (Towmey, 2007) to ensure safe schools for teachers and students. As a consequence, all district offices now have the option to recommend students undergo school psychologist counselling in students own time after school or on a Saturday morning. This trial was based on a model run by WADET four years earlier.

Regardless of the implementation of these strategies, political party promises, accusations and large volumes of money spent on public schooling in Western Australia; the evidence shows an increase in suspensions (a total of 12,529 students in 2009, almost 5% of the total student population) and truancies (50% of Year 10 students did not attend school regularly in 2008) (Government Media Office, 2009).
Worse, is that there continues to be many students who are not experiencing school as a place that understands and welcomes them or accommodates their social, emotional and cultural needs. The Auditor General’s Report, tabled in Parliament in August of 2009 (Cann, 2009) revealed that many students were not attending public schools. The State Government’s response to date has been a superficial ‘9 Point Plan’. This response involves “taking swift action”, and primarily places blame via prosecution channels, on families already struggling to cope with adverse conditions. The response also involves increased levels of surveillance and monitoring of students and families and includes WADET working more closely with Centrelink, a centralised Australian Commonwealth government social security agency, “to share data on all compulsory school-aged children” (Government Media Office, 2009). Other strategies implemented include increased surveillance by police and businesses, training to address poor attendance and handing out more rewards to compliant students and their parents, all of which potentially further individualises and/or pathologises an already complex situation.

1.5 Thesis structure

In this, the first chapter, I have introduced in a preliminary way some of the contradictions and tensions between the personal, relational and social world of schooling and the narrow world of behaviour management discourse. The second chapter explains how when governments choose technical and rational approaches that inform policy such as Behaviour Management in Schools, then they become disciplinary sites where ‘good image’ practices are expected and enforced. In other words, schools easily become governed, controlled, disciplined and closely observed. I introduce the research site, Anchorage High, as a case study to highlight
the struggles that occur when image and control in managing behaviour become more significant than other important social relations in learning. Gary, a sixteen year old participant and member of the school is introduced and tells his story of being caught up in some of the disciplinary practices that eventually lead him to drift away from school.

In the third chapter, I explain the contradictions and tensions arising from the broader set of neoliberal forces currently shaping Australian society and education. As Groundwater-Smith, Brennan, McFadden and Mitchell, (2003, p. 56) observe, “in Australia, the economic, social, political and cultural circumstances of young people have changed considerably over the past fifteen to twenty years.” This thesis is concerned with how these broader economic and political conditions are impacting on schools, eroding the capacity for democratic schooling and contributing to the corrosion of relationships in education. This chapter also explains why I adopt a reflexive position as a critical researcher to better understand the neo liberal agenda by asking worthwhile questions with a view to interrupting behaviour management discourses. I explain the process of becoming a critical researcher so that I can provide a more troubling and discomforting reading of behaviour management discourses by illuminating the operation of power and control from the point of view of those most directly affected, students themselves. I engage in the politics of praxis and build theory dialectically to open spaces for student voices because it is “voice that locates the individual within a bigger interpretive realm, a public space, or a shared culture” (Shacklock, Smyth & Wilson, 1998, p. 3).

In the fourth chapter, I adopt a genealogical approach to explain how schooling can be better understood historically in terms of the way society is organised (Tait,
2000, pp. 10-4). I trace the historical origins of behaviour management in schools and highlight the shifting discourses of disciplinary policy in Western Australia as it moved from punishment and reward prevalent in the time of mass schooling in the 18th century to the pastoral care dominance of the 20th century. The first formal document unearthed on discipline was published in 1959. This was a one page supplement in the West Australian Education Circular. I then trace the progression from the pastoral emphasis of this time to ‘self-management’ of the 1970’s. I demonstrate how this movement rapidly evolved into the present obsession with behaviour management and culminated in the thirty-page mandated Behaviour Management in Schools policy of the 21st century. I have used critical ethnography as a research methodology to link the historical and cultural conditions shaping schooling.

In the fifth chapter, I explain the nature and purpose of critical ethnography as my chosen methodology. Here, I enact the principles and values of critical social theory in my own practice as I listen to and portray the narrative stories of students. Central to this kind of critical research is the importance of developing dialogic spaces where students feel comfortable and safe in recounting their experiences of school life. This does not come without difficulty or struggle as I endeavour to maintain an “ethic of caring” (Noddings, 1984) during the process of collecting students’ stories.

It is the purpose of chapter six to then outline in more detail some of the specific struggles encountered in doing this type of research. These include representing and interviewing students, maintaining their trust and overcoming the hurdles in gaining ethics approval. More importantly, I also trace throughout each struggle, my own
journey in overcoming some of these challenges and how as a result I was able to gain important research access to student stories.

In the seventh chapter, I represent student stories as narrative portraits, disclosing inside knowledge based on lived experience of disengagement, control and marginalisation. I then use the theme of powerlessness to explain students ‘opting out’ as a result of being caught in a loop of disharmonious relationships. Finally, I discuss the significance of rebuilding relationships in schools as a lever in turning around students learning in a more meaningful and purposeful way.

In the eighth chapter, I organise student interpretations and experiences of schooling into themes of analysis for discussion around the place of belonging, respect, and negotiation in building relationships, democratic decision making and school community capacity building. I search for new ways forward using the idea of the relational school based on the principles and values of trust, respect and care (Smyth, Down, & McInerney, 2010). Understanding social change and the nature of the relational school are two threads continually woven throughout this thesis.

In the concluding chapter I search deeper towards a vision for democracy and public school policy as the impact and potential of my own research is summarised and an alternative to the status quo is imagined. A final reflexive turn is made in this chapter, when as a critical ethnographer I question the impact of my own research to influence policy and practice in schools.
CHAPTER 2 - SCHOOLS AS DISCIPLINARY SITES

2.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces schools as disciplinary sites, and Anchorage High the case study, as one example. This concept is important because it reveals how schools can become agents of government policy without considering the views, needs and lives of the young people who inhabit them. The technical rationality which has come to inform all government policies in education increasingly couches policy in terms of performance criteria, accountability and testing mania. In the interest of social control within the modern capitalist economy, governments choose such technical and rational approaches. Ball (1990, p. 3) states that “human beings are thus made subjects and objectified by processes of classification and division.” State systems, schools and teachers are expected to enact policy and to account to governments for what they have or have not done (Kenway & Willis, 1997, p. 168). The dynamic that is produced from this climate imply that teachers and students do not understand, cannot be trusted, and must be directed into ‘good practices’. Thus schools become disciplinary sites.

In 2007, as a result of continuing education staffing shortages in Western Australia, the Minister for Education and Training established a taskforce, Education Workforce Initiatives. One of the recommendations from this report, known as the ‘Twomey Report’ (2007, p. 55) was that there be an increase in collaboration and communication with appropriate Government agencies so that “teachers are aware of current problems/situations relating to particular students” and more “effective monitoring of student behaviour”. This monitoring and evaluation created a “culture of surveillance of the self and others” (Gunter, 2009, p. 97). By making student
behaviour a pathological situation that requires monitoring and remediation then students can be governed, regulated, managed and marginalised. Shields et al. (2005, p. 119) claim that this type of pathologizing is a mode of colonization. A journal entry captures this analogy between a disciplinary approach in prison with that of the secondary school:

Written on a board at the Fremantle prison mechanics workshop entrance, was an order that no prisoner was allowed to loiter by the gate! This prison was still in use up until 1991 as West Australia’s maximum security prison. Failure to comply with this order resulted in disciplinary action. Similarly, I witness often within schools, students being classed as defiant, needing to be contained, punished for non compliance and rewarded for compliance. These parallels echo the same disciplinary society. [Journal Entry, January 2006]

Deleuze (2006, p. 322) explains that a disciplinary society is a control society and control is not discipline but instead becomes “generalized surveillance” (Foucault, 1979, p. 209). Schools have been caught up in this discourse of the marketplace and conscripted to its cause, thus inflicting enormous damage to people and schools. Preston and Symes (1992, p. 241) explain, that “it is impossible to isolate schooling from its context in society at large, from its contact with other institutions in the fabric of modern society” because “schooling as a mechanism has been instrumental in generating a disciplinary society, a society of subjugated subjects”. Hunter (1991, p. 49) explains that “to speak of the rationality of government is to refer to the manner in which its subjects are rendered methodical and its objects calculable through the deployment of systematising instruments and disciplines.”

2.1.1 Moving into public schools

The question then becomes how did this system creep into schools? Moos (2004, p. 3) explains how governance founded on the devolution of management shifted from the state to local level, to local institutions (in the case of education to self-
managing schools), to classrooms (classroom management techniques) and to the individual level (self-managing students). Such ‘governmentality’ then seeps into public schools through the neo-liberal technologies of governance relying heavily on the market as the basis for, and logic behind public policy. Marshall (1990, p. 15) defines governmentality as a “control of population, political obedience and a docile and useful workforce to meet the demands of capitalism.” It filters down into the public education system via globalisation which according to Saul (2006):

… has produced myriad market-orientated international binding agreements at the global level and not a single binding agreement in the other areas of human intercourse. The deep imbalance of the movement, however successful in its own terms, cannot help but provoke unexpected forms of disorder. (p. 25)

Dean (1999, p. 10) uses Foucault’s ‘conduct of conduct’ to explore the concept of governmentality. By articulating governmentality and its power and rule in modern society he extracts and embellishes the extent to which it is “a deliberate attempt to shape actions of others or oneself.” In this sense, ‘self-regulation’ takes form and teachers can become agents in this governing. He calls these organised ways of doing things as “regimes of practice” (p. 18) whereby the government not only maintains relations of authority and power, but also governs our own selves and identity (p. 18). He goes on to explain that “we govern others and ourselves according to various truths about our existence and nature as human beings” (p. 18).

Usher and Edwards (1994, p. 84) reinforce the notion that “modern forms of governance and social discipline are secured through education, in an important sense, they work through educating” thus governance becomes more dangerous because of its “insidious silence” (Marshall, 1989, p. 109). When knowledge (including beliefs, ideas, feelings and thinking) is blocked there is also a blockage of reflective action (praxis). As Ball (2006, p. 134) explains, “in fetishising
commodities, we are denying the primacy of human relationships in the production of value, in effect erasing the social.”

Schools functioning in this manner become obsessed with testing regimes (Connell, Johnson & White, 1992), and are extremely competitive because that is “one of the best ways of controlling people” (Chomsky, 2003, p. 29). Foucault (1979, p. 184) points out that “the examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgement. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish.” A consequence of this testing is a technical curriculum, based on delivery and standards (Hill, 2008) emphasising skills rather than processes. Finally, collateral damage results as “the need to test replaces the need to care, corrupting that important role of teachers” (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p. 73). As Kohl (2003, p. 65) points out, clinical studies of moral development such as those encouraged by ‘Piagetians’, in particular, talk as if the conclusions based on samples of a few children are universal. Tests and programs are then based on these studies and children are subjected to classification and stigmatization often for accountability purposes and economic competitive reasons.

One of the main assumptions of neoliberal reform centres on accountability and academic excellence thus forcing schools to concentrate on skills and content. Whilst this capitalist/corporate culture may be delivering commodified excitement, issues of social justice are hence sidelined and instead a regimented and dull pedagogy is imposed on schools. For example, “School to Work” programs prevail and are enthusiastically adopted, bringing a corporate model in which pupils are often considered and trained as a worker, the teacher as technocrat and principal as
This means a vocationalisation of subjects and programmes, especially in working class areas. The child’s futures are often predetermined by a partnership between businesses in the area and the career counselling at the school. This forms a neat utilitarian framework and routine, serving the interests of the corporate world first. These courses are based on competence based approaches with accompanying work-based learning. There is a contradiction here, as Wrigley (2007, p. 12) alludes to, of a dynamic economic system such as we presently experience in the West. This system needs its workers to acquire certain competencies, yet is afraid of workers becoming too educated as they may become independent thinkers.

Bingham and Sidorkin (2004, p. 2) explain that “this academic ‘purification’ of educational purposes tends to destroy the already fragile layers of public education conducive to development of flourishing human relations”. They also point to the irony of this reform as once the relational basis of the school is destroyed or limited, it becomes more and more difficult to achieve high academic standards anyway (2004, p. 2). To complicate matters, the schools become less inclusive, more competitive (Pope, 2001), and many students without the right economic, social and cultural capital, even more alienated. These students do not always have access or guidance into meaningful careers or education but instead are often directed into the “dead end service sector” (Robertson, 2005, p. 5; Kincheloe, 1995, p. 34) often heavily regulated and suppressing independent thinking (Kincheloe, 1995, p. 29). Compounding the situation, alienated students are also likely to confront extra challenges such as rising accommodation, energy and water costs and depleted environments, all characteristic of globalizing economies (Bardsley, 2007, p. 496).
To cope with competition between schools in a corporate market, corporate ‘image’ becomes much more important. Glossy newsletters, brochures and magazines promoting and reinforcing the ‘good’ school image are produced, specialist programmes are set up, advertising banners and entry statements are installed and intranet web-pages with the school logo on all merchandise are created. With schools being treated like firms (Connell, 2009), it is then easy for a behaviour management industry to prevail. As formally discussed, this is obvious in the successful promotion of CMIS (Classroom Management in Schools) using material based on the work of Bennett and Smilanavich (1994). Another example can be found in the professional development diary for WADET in School Matters (2007, Issue 9, pp. 31-2) which advertise Brad William’s ‘behaviour tonics’, David Koutsoukis’s *Behaviour management toolkit*, Dr Thomas Phelan’s 1-2-3 Magic for Teachers program and John Josephs ‘learning in the emotional rooms’ for building resilience in students and teachers. Furthermore, a visit to the website, www.edna.edu.au, a free online network for educators, reveals hundreds of web based sources providing skills and techniques for ‘managing’, ‘coping’ and ‘coaching’ students by investing in behaviourist models and packages that help deal with student problems. One prominent example is found at www.behaviour.com.au, advertising professional development workshops, training, books, audio visuals, and other e-purchases. These corporate training programmes compete for the behaviour management market by offering one-on-one simple methods and formulas in an attempt to fix complex problems. These programmes also demonstrate that behaviour management becomes a “thought packaged as a commodity for exchange in the marketplace” (Leistyna, 2007, p. 118).
Due to the competition in the behaviour management business, the divide between ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ increases as efficiency, competence, and saleability used as standards in the neoliberal market eat away at the ideal of citizenship (Greene, 1995, p. 64). This competitive orientation leads to isolation and alienation among students, encouraging a handful of winners often setting the scene of an aggressive affect in the classroom (Shor, 1992, p. 24). The behaviouralist reward system as used in the *Good Standing* policy of West Australian schools, outlined earlier in chapter one, encourages more competition, creating winners and losers and resulting in peer surveillance, rivalry, envy and contempt.

Due to these significant impacts of neoliberalism on schools, a series of cascading consequences result and students’ versions of events are silenced as a culture of conformity is encouraged. Critical, independent thinking is not promoted; therefore, active resistance arises from those who do not conform. A militant, disciplining culture is readily adopted to control those students who resist. Added to these complexities is the tendency for schools to produce students who begin to participate in their own oppression. Robertson, (2005, p. 12) states that “students most often acquiesce and become a participant in consensual corporate structure” because of the stronghold that corporate structure intertwines with education. Foucault (1997, pp. 156-7) explains that management requires and gains the cooperation of the subjects involved in modern society by the relations and techniques of such power.

Philip Jackson’s classic work, *Life in Classrooms* (1968) as discussed in Vinson and Ross (2003, p. 112), demonstrates some of these consequences. From as early as kindergarten, students he studied began to learn the life of being in a ‘company’. From this experience, students learnt the elements and mechanisms of power, who
holds it and why. “They discern their ‘appropriate’ ranks and responsibilities as cogs in the larger capitalist machine” and increasingly “master the skills of taking orders, of behaving properly, and of conforming to pre-established norms” (Jackson, cited in Vinson & Ross, 2003, p. 112). On top of all this, students also learn to expect rewards for their compliance and submissiveness. In such a culture “authenticity might only be achieved by somehow escaping it” (Jackson, cited in Vinson & Ross, 2003, p. 112). This way of operating in schools, takes the responsibility and power away from the students, leaving them with the option of becoming docile, complying subjects or resisting as ‘deviant rebels’. This discussion now focuses on Anchorage High, as a case study school caught up in the capitalist machinery of disciplining future workers and citizens. In following Foucault’s (1979) understanding of the disciplinary society it becomes easier to explain “the movement from one project to the other, from a schema of exceptional discipline to one of a generalized surveillance” (p. 209).

2.2 Anchorage High

The lens of this discussion will focus on the micro politics of one school to explain the damage, inequity and technical changes that have so far been outlined. The BMIS (2001, 2008) policy will be further investigated, illustrating how policy is ‘transported’ and ‘filtered’ into a school setting. It is not the intention to treat the policy as abstract and ‘separate’ from the global re-structuring of schools and other public services that have been outlined earlier in chapter one. It is also not the intention that this school is portrayed as an isolated struggling school, but rather as a typical case study school that serves, “to close in on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice” (Flyvberg, 2006,
p. 235). Finally, this case study school serves to highlight the unequal power battles that act out and impact on the people who work and attend them in their day-to-day lives.

The case of Anchorage High is presented as the school of study from which data and field research was conducted and collected to “clarify the deeper causes behind a given problem and its consequences” (Flyvberg, 2006, p. 229). The school is presented by describing as vividly as possible, the setting and context through the use of field notes and journal jottings. Pole and Morrison (2003, p. 160) explain that ethnography enables one to view education as part of a wider social and economic context whilst simultaneously holding on to specific details of location, events and settings. In line with critical case study method (Smyth, Dow, Hattam, Reid & Shacklock, 2000), contradictions and ambiguities experienced and observed at the school are emphasised to show divisions between the ‘image’ (specialist, classroom management), ‘gloss’ (signs, pamphlets) and the ‘reality’ (graffiti, barbed wire, detention and suspension).

The school is located on a coastal strip 50 kilometres from the centre of Perth, the capital city of Western Australia. Originally, this school was on the outskirts of the city, however, with uncontrolled urban sprawl, has grown from its original weekend holiday village to become a larger suburb with affordable housing for lower income families. It interfaces a large traditional industrial area and a naval base. The results of these complex and diverse demographics have contributed to “pockets of affluence on the seafront which mask the hint of poverty in the hinterland” (Smyth, Angus, Down & McInerney, 2009, p. 13).
Driving into the school always provides one with a hint of things to come. This school, like many others in Western Australia, is surrounded by ‘ramshackled’, ‘hotch-potch’ cyclone fencing and gates. There is only one entry and one exit gate to the school. These are locked at the start of school lessons and not reopened until the end of the school day. If any students need to leave school, then they have to go through the ‘sign out’ system in the administration office.

There are over one thousand students attending this school each day and it has one hundred and twenty staff. ‘On duty’ staff check the arrival of students is safe and orderly and that parents and buses drop students down in an expedient manner. On a few of my visits I also noted that some past or expelled students, or even present students, hover on the outskirts of the school, hoping to catch their friends, relatives (or enemies), whenever such an opportunity arises.

The entrance to the school, as is typical with all public secondary schools in Western Australia over the past several years, will have a billboard, advertising the school, its motto, its logo, achievements and approaching events to watch. The motto for Anchorage High is “school of work place learning, learning excellence, equity and care.” This motto, as will be observed later in this thesis, proved at times to be at odds with the reality for many students that I interviewed.

Once in the car park, alongside about eighty other cars, (staff and some final school year probationary drivers), one finds the sports grounds. These grounds consist of two large ovals (to accommodate predominantly the specialist soccer programmes), tennis, and netball and basketball courts. Students have to ‘sign in’ to be able to use these courts and equipment at lunch times, they need to be in uniform and have ‘good standing’.
The next feature that I observed in the school was the ugliness of the demountables that surround the basic original structure of the school. Their haphazard and sprawling nature always creates an image of impoverishment. They have been designed with the intention of being temporary; however, as the respective bureaucracies try to work out what must be done, they end up becoming permanent fixtures to the institution. They are grey, fibro, stilted monsters! Inside they are hot, cold, noisy and flimsy. They are often placed on the outskirts as though no-one wants to believe that they are needed or indeed exist, so eventually they become separate, lone, ugly boxes that no-one takes ownership of. The less favoured classes are often conducted in them with teachers who have ended up with challenging classes and are new to the school.

The school is also typical in that it is divided into sub-schools. The school was opened in 1978 and was designed with the open-area mode which has now been turned into learning areas. These areas each have a Head of Department (HOD) and about seven teaching staff. These hubs have a name on their door and are often locked to keep students out. It is here that staff also have their lunch. The common staff room, traditionally designed as an eating, meeting place, is only used at recess each day by all staff and for staff meetings.

The first learning area at Anchorage High that I came across was ‘Student Services’, consisting of a manager, assistant manager, nurse, chaplain, psychologist and administration officer. Even though one would assume that such a ‘hub’ had been designed for pastoral care services, their main roles, energy and time was taken up with dress code and attendance. The manager commented that “sometimes it feels like our job is to mop up the mess.”
A uniform shop, as in many schools, is set up and manned, often by volunteers who sell the prescribed uniform. An address from the principal in Issue 1 of the school newsletter for 2007 is typical:

It’s been a great start to the year with the overwhelming majority of students in correct uniform. Week 4 has seen the orders from the uniform shop start to arrive and then all students should be in uniform. Denim is out and although it has been hard for some parents and students to modify their uniforms, it is nice to walk around the school and see all of our students correctly attired. With the temperature cooling off, I would like to make everyone aware that bright coloured jumpers are not school dress. Jackets can be purchased from the school canteen and as with all tops there must be a school logo.

These school newsletters are now a regular device created by schools for communication (also read accountability) and promoting school image. They are either sent to parents by post or an electronic version is e-mailed. In some schools they are also duplicated into the local community newspaper. There are about four issues per term. The cost of these is often part of school fees. The competition between schools and consequent image making has meant that these newsletters have become quite sophisticated, glossy, high resolution productions. They will have the WADET logo on them as well as the school’s own logo and motto. There will be a welcome statement or letter from the principal on the front. Issue 1 of 2007 from Anchorage High, thanks parents for their efforts in getting students into uniform and suggests that this is endorsed by the community who have rung the school to say how good they looked. Then an explanation is given about the SMS messaging system which has been introduced to deal with absenteeism. Parents are text messaged if their child is not at school. A Good Standing policy has been implemented and parents are informed how this is linked to attendance, uniform and behaviour. Parents are then encouraged to have “students do the right thing”, making them “eligible for the many extra programs run by the school such as reward
activities” (School Newsletter, 2007, p. 1). The final message given in the principal’s report is the classroom management programme for managing student behaviour in 2007 in which “five primary schools and Anchorage High have been awarded $80,000 to work with our teachers in improving their teaching skills.” The next two pages of the newsletter contain notices and policies on mobile phones and Mp3 players. The final pages are devoted to each of the year groups. These year groups are sectioned into sub schools, and as with the subject area schools, have their own ‘manager’ and team of subject specialists (approximately 12 teachers), who oversee about two hundred and sixty students. Anchorage High calls this “an embracement of Middle School philosophy” (School overview, online school profile, 2007). Other ‘learning areas’ of the school consist of The Arts, which covers Dance, Music, Drama, Photography and Visual Arts. This department is often called upon to hold showcase performances and exhibitions. Mathematics and Physical Science departments are often expected to cater for the academic and TEE bound students. Practical Arts consist of Home Economics and Design and Technology and cover much of the vocational skills training. The final learning areas are Humanities and Human Movement. A specialist Soccer Academy is part of this last learning area.

Anchorage High, as is common in many public high schools, has a Vocational Education and Training emphasis (VET in Schools programme) and is linked with a local industry partnership. The skills and work placements at Anchorage High are in the areas of building and construction, automotive, hospitality, metals and engineering, visage, electro technology, horticulture, business services, and sport and recreation. Students complete certificates and structured work placement towards the appropriate industry or attend TAFE (Tertiary and Further Education) at least one day a week.
Another commonality that this school has with many other public high schools in Western Australia, are specialist area/s designed to attract and draw students to the school, stretching the facilities and expertise to become competitive in a niche market. Anchorage High has a Soccer Academy with elite and development squads beginning in Year 8, and “has won numerous awards and state titles since its inception in 2001” (School overview, online school profile). Anchorage High also offers Specialist Music, Dance, Mime and Movement, Specialist Computing and ‘Pathfinders’, an academic extension programme.

Areas of the school which are typical and intensely used by the students as meeting places in between lessons and in breaks are the canteen and the library. The canteen also has a manager and a team of two staff, and survives by parental volunteers preparing and serving the food. Once again duty teachers are allotted to patrol these areas.

Field Notes… Stepping in the door….

My first visit to the school was to meet the principal and introduce my study. I had received approval from the school to conduct research at the site. The principal together with the ‘management team’, consisting of deputies and student service managers, had sent me a letter to confirm this. The principal, as is in most large secondary schools, was not able to see me personally, as they were either too busy or the task had been automatically allocated to the deputy. I waited in the front office of the school for my meeting with much excitement; some nerves and spasms of enthusiasm to have the ‘real project’ begin. As I had worked in many high schools before, the front office was not a completely new experience for me, however, I did try to separate myself as an ‘insider’ and imagine what it would be like for someone who stepped in for the first time. It is often the busiest ‘hub’ at that time of day. My next experience, whilst waiting for that first meeting with the deputy was listening to the receptionists at the front office. There were six of them. They were occupied attending to calls coming in from parents or making calls to parents and guardians asking the whereabouts of students. They were also re-directing incoming calls to the appropriate student manager. Other busy activities were students signing in late, the year co-coordinator reassuring and or chastising students, parents coming in confused, sick people looking for the nurse, people signing in and out. I, like all non-staff at the school, had to sign in at the front desk. This
means filling out a duplicate form, with name, area, time and purpose all listed. I am then identified as a visitor, parent or contractor and receive a pass number. This is then worn at all times and returned upon departure. My signature endorses that I will not smoke on the property, will follow evacuation procedures during an emergency and that I will observe all safety signage and instruction of the workplace health and safety officer! I had to fill out and return one of these at the front office at each of my visits to the school, therefore became a familiar face to the six receptionists at the front office. Whilst still sitting in the ‘holding room’ at reception, waiting for my interview with the deputy, I took the chance to gaze at the walls and desk in the office. On the walls were the traditional trophies and merits that adorn all such places. Typically are the names of high achievers, sporting accolades and photographs of past students who are now famous icons. I picked up one of the local journals. In it I found the “keeping kids in school project” that had been developed between the school and the local shopping centre and supported by the local city council. It was one of the strategies to “beat truancy” by banning the serving of school students during school hours. (Ah! I thought to myself, that explains one of the reasons for uniform enforcement).

Finally, I am escorted into the deputy principal’s office. Introductions and pleasantries abound. The deputy is continually interrupted with incoming calls, forms to be signed and budget decisions that urgently need endorsement. He does manage to give me a copy of the school’s ‘Behaviour Management Plan’ and states that the school has received $100,000 dollars towards behaviour management. He then asked me what I wanted the school to do towards my research project and offers on behalf of the administration team to ‘pick out some pointy end kids’ for ‘my sample’ to save me time and effort. I politely decline the offer and explain that I would prefer to speak and invite all Year 10 students. Finally, the deputy expresses concern over this decision as it is considered to be ‘a too high ordered task’ for many of the students and he ‘warns’ that there will be much ‘apathy’ when it comes to dealing with the consent forms.

I will now begin to elaborate on the manner in which BMIS policy and its accompanying strategies were enacted at Anchorage High as representative of what occurs in many other high schools throughout W.A.

2.3 Behaviour management at Anchorage High

Since 2001, all public schools in Western Australia have been required to have their own ‘Behaviour Management Plan’ implementing BMIS policy guidelines. Principals of schools are accountable for this plan’s implementation. The plan must include among other criteria; the code of conduct, describing the schools
expectations and consequences of student behaviour, the management procedures used to implement the code, rights and responsibilities of staff and students, roles and responsibilities of teachers and administrators regarding behaviour management and mechanisms for reviewing the plan (2001, pp. 5-6). Teachers are held responsible for developing a class behaviour management plan that supports the school behaviour management plan and keep records of incidents of misbehaviour (p. 6). As this creates extra administrative duties and time for all staff concerned, consultants that specialise in behaviour management such as Barrie Bennett are employed and all the data regarding misbehaviour is then recorded and processed by implementing software licences such as Student Information Systems (SIS).

Anchorage High has a forty-five page Behaviour Management Plan (last update, December 2005) that dedicates a page each to general principles, rights and responsibilities and contains a student code of conduct. The remainder of the plan (pp. 7-14) is dedicated to a specific process of school behaviour management which uses Barrie Bennett and Peter Smilanich’s Classroom Management in Schools Programme (CMIS). These high profile consultants promote their programme as research driven: “what we’re trying to do is take what we know about assessment, what we know about how kids learn and what we know about change and system change” (WADET, School Matters, Issue 5, June 2008). The final pages of the school’s behaviour management plan remind administrators of the roles and procedures for withdrawal and suspensions of students and outlines attached bullying policies.

Together with its five ‘feeder’ primary schools, Anchorage High has been involved in a WADET initiative on behaviour management since 2004. The school
was selected as part of the Australian government ‘Quality Teaching Program’ (QTP) to showcase and work with other schools on ‘Instructional Leadership’ and ‘Cooperative Learning Strategies’. The major aim of the program is to “provide consistency for Kindergarten–Year 12 in managing student behaviour” (ASHS Newsletter, Issue 1, 2007). One feature of this programme involves teacher clusters participating in training on these various strategies. For instance, Classroom Management Strategy (CMS) trains ‘key staff’ to receive ‘level 2’ training which enables them to observe all CMS trained colleagues in their respective schools and assess their individual teaching according to the strategies explained at the workshops.

Anchorage High and its cluster schools attended a workshop for behaviour management in early 2007, involving two hundred teachers, of whom sixty were selected and/or nominated to have regular meetings based on the Classroom Management Strategies. Part of the intention of this initiative was to have “meaningful professional dialogue” (manager of upper school), and “is consistent with the Director General’s recently released Classroom First Strategy” (School Matters, 2007, September, p. 4). The manager of upper school from Anchorage High, also a deputy principal and the ‘professional learning community coordinator’ had this to say:

At the end of 2006 it was clear that our cluster was ready to focus on instructional intelligence, particularly co-operative learning. All of our schools were highly committed to classroom management strategies, our principals had regular effective cell meetings, our transitional teachers frequently held moderation meetings and we all had highly committed and effective staff. (WADET, School Matters, Issue 5, May 25, 2007)

The CMIS training has been adopted by many WADET schools as part of the emphasis on behaviour management. This style of individualised training in which a
teacher is assessed on specific codes of interactions with students in classrooms, I argue, serves to distract teachers from bigger and more complex issues surrounding behaviour management. Regardless of these complexities and the many changes that have occurred in the global structure of schools, programmes that are simplistic in nature and constructed as lock-step progressive solutions such as ‘cooperative learning’ and ‘instructional intelligence’ become ‘flavour of the decade’ and ‘recipe of the month’ in assisting time poor, under resourced teachers trying to deal with the bureaucratic consequences of their profession.

One of the teachers of Year 10 from Anchorage High was selected as an ‘expert’ and her lessons were videoed to be deconstructed by other ‘experts’ from each of the other five cluster schools. This process was highlighted to reveal how the training helps teachers dissect their methods, examine and then evaluate how effective their teaching strategies are in preventing behaviour problems. This teacher was chosen as an exemplar of what good training can do for teachers. Interestingly, this same teacher who was selected as one of the ‘role models’ or ‘experts’ for this kind of behaviour training, was also the same teacher who was highly respected by students because of her capacity to build positive relationships. In other words, it may be the case that the ability to develop productive relationships rather than behaviourist strategies is what matters most to students. Whilst this teacher had been professionally trained in classroom management strategies it was her willingness to forge strong relationships and an ethic of care (Noddings, 1984) with students that counted most. The teacher was an important mentor in their lives. Again, the significance of relationship surfaces as a counter argument to the attention placed on technique and training in working successfully with young people in schools.
2.3.1 Critique of Good Standing policy

As an extension of the Behaviour Management Plan of the school, Anchorage High, like many others schools have a Good Standing policy (2007) which “is an extension and articulation of the current policy with the significant differences being the clarifications for students of what is expected of them” (p. 1 Anchorage High Good Standing policy). This policy accounts for requirements of the BMIS policy to describe the schools approach to positive behaviour and a description of the consequences and sanctions (BMIS, 2001, p 6). Anchorage High “rewards exemplary behaviour, attendance and work ethic” and “shows a hierarchical set of responses for positive or negative behaviours” (Good Standing, 2007, p. 1). Students can be ‘in’ or ‘out’ of Good Standing.

BMIS policy can thus smoothly transcend and transfer into the schools individual Behaviour Management Plan and other related policies such as Good Standing and Uniform policy. Notions of what are ‘good’ or ‘bad’ behaviour are rarely contested in this system and readily determined by individual teachers and other staff. “Students who continue to fail to meet their expectations are case managed” (p. 1 ASHS Good Standing policy). Particular behaviour, attendance and work ethic are rewarded and punishment is distributed accordingly. ‘Good Standing’ usually refers to the students’ compliance to school uniform code and regular attendance at school. It is considered that students will have an ‘element of choice’ in their status of Good Standing and if they do not comply then this so called ‘choice’ is removed from them and “monitored by form teachers” (Anchorage High, Good Standing, 2007, p. 1). The status of students is consequently recorded on SIS (Student Information Systems). Classroom teachers enter their records of behaviour (usually relating to
dress code, lateness and truancy) onto the system whenever they get an opportunity.

My field notes capture the significance and potential damage of such data:

*It is interesting to note that the SIS project at ASHS has a Behaviour Management module attached to it and is used by this school as with many other schools to provide a mechanism for recording, monitoring and reporting on student behaviour, plus links students directly if they have truanted. It is also used to create, view and manage individual behaviour plans. [20th March 2006]*

Students lose their ‘Good Standing’ (3 unexplained absences, or 3 negative behaviour records such as out of dress code) and are subsequently ‘case managed’ by the ‘Student Services’ department of the school. Once there is a loss of ‘Good Standing’, the student is issued a report card for a week, and then additional weeks until it is completed ‘correctly’. This card is illustrated in Figure 2.

![Figure 2: Behaviour ‘Good Standing’ report card](image)

As can be seen by this example, the teacher has to tick and sign if they consider the student has attended and acted appropriately. The parent has to also sign the card at the end of each day. The reason that this card is being brought to close attention, is firstly to illustrate how students are ‘labelled’ as not having a ‘Good Standing’, and secondly, the humiliating and pedantic administrative tasks involved for teachers and students alike. The student has five different teachers per day who need to be
distracted from other significant roles; the student is then singled out and ticked or crossed off and then the card is signed. In addition, the student is also expected to report to their parent at the end of each day for further approval. Finally, witnessing what other teachers, colleagues and parents have or have not endorsed that day and the remainder of the week is likely to influence the teachers’ decision regarding good or bad standing. This ‘branding’, and ‘endorsement’ or otherwise is a very subjective process as teachers struggle to determine if students have been ‘good’ or ‘bad’, which often results in friction between students, teachers and/or parents.

The main objective of the Behaviour Management Plan is to “provide students and teachers with a clear understanding of behavioural expectations” (WADET, 2005, p. 1). It is intended to be “developed in consultation with students and parents to make sure that they are in a safe and welcoming environment” (BMIS, 2001, p. 1). Statements made concerning the safety and welfare of the students via a ‘plan’ tend to be overly simplistic and intentionally vague, and fail to take account of the many differences in students’ experiences, family lives, and class systems. Furthermore, such statements do not get to the bottom of the complex problems of what causes bullying, harassment, violence, truancy and resistance. It is often by sheer chance that any consultation between students, their families and administrators of the school occurs at all during the development and implementation of these plans.

Another objective of the plan is that schools are required to “consider key values of learning, equity, excellence and care when developing and implementing their behaviour management plans” (WADET, 2001, p. 1). Anchorage High has listed two out of the eight code of conduct responsibilities as “come to school” and “obey
school rules” (Anchorage High BMP, 2005, p. 6) with one of the responsibilities “to behave so as to uphold the reputation of the school” (p. 5).

In a neoliberal climate, and despite these aspirations, schools and teachers, such as those at Anchorage High, often become caught up in the routine of control and compliance, making it easier to pathologise young people as “sick” or “disordered” (Brannock, 2000, p. 41). By 2006, violations of the schools code of conduct became one of the two categories with the highest incidents of suspensions in West Australian public schools (WADET media statement, 27th August, 2007) and by 2007, 25% of total suspensions were for violations of the school code (WADET media statement, 4th November, 2008). As documented throughout this thesis, one of the main reasons that students lose their good standing is because they have broken the schools code of conduct regarding being out of uniform or being late to class. Category 6 (violation of school code of conduct, behaviour management plan, classroom or school rules) is one of 9 categories of suspension, yet has a disproportionate number of suspensions of students from school. Other categories, including physical assault, verbal abuse, harassment, wilful offence, substance misuse and other serious incidents do not rate in comparison for prevalence of suspensions.

Neoliberal capitalism has always had a problem with education (Wrigley, 2007, p. 1), and as Giroux (2000) demonstrates there is an increasing takeover of schools by corporate culture. Neoliberalism or the “mutating market paradigm” (McMurtry, 1998, p. viii) is now the most dominant ideology spoken, practiced and legitimised in our schools, yet continues to filter and consolidate unabated like lava from a volcano, erupting carcinogens (McMurtry, 1998, p. viii). Even though many schools
try to provide access to knowledge relevant to survive within a capitalist society, this only contributes to sustaining and reinforcing its logic, “functioning as a reproductive force that offers different and unequal kinds of knowledge and rewards” (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2002, p. 45). It is, therefore, time to pause and ‘trouble’ such ‘truths’ or ‘common sense’ actions such as the *Behaviour Management in Schools* policy, and question its impact on teenagers who are struggling with complex lives.

To continue the story of how important relationships with young people can be undermined and disregarded both in the categorisation of ‘troublesome kids’ and the enthusiastic adoption of ‘one size fits all’ instructional packages to solve complex problems, I now step further inside the school door to introduce ‘Gary’, a sixteen year old Year 10 student from Anchorage High, to gain an insider’s perspective. Gary like the majority of the students who attend this school, is part of an education district that is predominantly working class compared with state averages. This means that he is more likely to be from single parent family, have low weekly earnings and little education. The statistics for this district also reveal a high rate of youth unemployment (12%) and a lower than average life expectancy (Smyth et al., 2009, p. 13).

### 2.4 Gary’s story

Gary is 16 years of age, tall, beginning to grow sideboards and starting to shave. He is physically healthy and active, likes to skate board, likes hanging out with friends and wants to make a go of school. When I interviewed him the first time, together with a classmate, he indicated that he was really struggling with the new rule about not being allowed to wear denim clothing to school. Two of his
Gary seemed to be so intimidated by the emphasis and enforcement of the newly introduced denim school rule that he had chosen to rebel and not wear the school top either. Furthermore, he had gone out of his way to make sure that he was totally dressed in a uniform of his own; entirely black, with the occasional commercial advertising logo rather than the compulsory school one. He appeared to be making a strong stance against the stringency of the new enforced rule by his choice of uniform. He stated that “if they did not make such a big deal about it, then I would probably wear it…but I choose not to just to piss them off!”

WADET endorsed a policy on dress requirements for students in public schools in 2007. Many schools, such as Anchorage High were already endorsing the compulsory uniform through their own school’s student services a few years before this policy came into place. This made it easy for the school to react strongly against students not wearing or complying with the Uniform policy. The Good Standing policy of the school is linked to uniform compliance. In turn, the Good Standing policy is linked to the Behaviour Management in Schools policy. My observations at Anchorage High, as with other schools I have worked in over the past few years, reinforce Gary’s episode in that it is the enforcement of uniform that consumes most of student service, administration and teachers time and meetings. Often the first item on the staff meeting agenda or in the school newsletter, over the past few years, focuses predominantly on such issues as uniform. Other breaches of behaviour code, such as physical abuse, smoking in toilets, bullying, swearing at teachers and
damage to property are made more difficult to deal with as teacher’s time and attention is focused on enforcing the uniform code.

The “Dress Requirements for Students in WA public schools” booklet released to parents and schools in 2007, has the image on the cover of pearly-white, smiling students, providing an impression that they have a choice and are happy with the uniform that they are wearing. These students are all displaying a student councillor’s badge (to demonstrate their mentoring role) and are attired in traditional ties, blazers and school jumpers with neat hair and photogenically proud faces. Many students that I interviewed, when shown this booklet, did not relate to the image as one from a public high school but an elite private grammar school. Mark McGowan, the then Minister for Education and Training of Western Australia, confirms this in the preface of the booklet, where he states “traditional styles of uniform will play an important part in keeping up the strong reputation of public schools and ensuring parents continue to send their children to public schools” (2007, p. 1). On page five of the booklet, it is recommended that “students are involved in developing, discussing and promoting the dress requirements”, however, this rarely occurs except through token Student Council input. It is also suggested (p. 5) that schools set up dress advisory panels to support students and their families where difficulties with complying arise and to be aware of and sensitive to local conditions. This has been translated to mean that the school alerts parents and families of the financial assistance that they may obtain through ‘Centrelink’, the government agency that provides financial support for low income earners. Students such as Gary do not have families that are necessarily of ill-health or on the pension.
Gary’s refusal to wear the uniform code was considered to be a breach of the ‘code of conduct’ of the school and hence he was continuously placed out of ‘Good Standing’. If a matter cannot be resolved with non compliance of the dress code at the school, “the Principal may apply sanctions prescribed in the School Education Regulations 2000” (p. 7). This meant that Gary was not able to go on school excursions and end of term functions or reward days as he was one who had not complied. He was really looking forward to the end of term ‘party event of the year’ which was the Year 10 river cruise. This event marks the end of ten years schooling together, however, by the time I had come to interview Gary the second time, he had been in so much trouble with ‘Student Services’ that he had been placed on an ‘Individual Education Plan’ (IEP) for behaviour. By the third visit, two months later and only half way through the school year, Gary had left. This situation is in stark contrast to the statement of the Minister for Education and Training’s (page 1 of the same booklet) that dress codes promote a “positive image” and a “sense of identity”.

It is not the intention to portray Gary as a typical student to highlight the number who leave school for not wearing uniform, but rather to show how such altercations and frustrations escalate into bigger issues which can eventually lead to failure and suspensions or “dropping out and drifting off” (Smyth & Hattam, 2004). An interesting choice of the penal system convict uniform practiced in the West Australian Swan colony of 1840, poses a stark and very similar comparison with present day educational emphasis on compulsory uniform. The broad-arrowed bright yellow top and pants were designed to humiliate the wearer. It was so effective that prison authorities often ordered its wearing rather than administer corporal punishment. The black arrows they were forced to wear denoted government property (National Library of Australia, 2005, pp. 42-3).
Many of the students that were interviewed for this research seemed to be caught up in a similar loop of contestation. In trying to imagine what life is like for a sixteen year old at Anchorage High, it is worth considering some of the questions that often trouble them. Some examples include: How will school be today? Will it be better than home? Have I got anything to eat? Will I look okay? Will I fit in? Are my friends there to greet me? Will Mr ‘X’ or Ms ‘K’ be on my back today? Will Mr ‘B’ or Ms ‘J’ be there to give me moral support? Have I got another Maths test or is it just another of those boring days?

The students I interviewed did not feel that they were being given fair treatment about issues of identity and that their opinions about these issues were not respected or invited. They were on the other hand, very polite, respectful and articulate when being interviewed for this research project and listened to each other and communicated extremely well. Their self-image and identity seemed confident, strong and secure yet had nothing whatsoever to do with school uniform. Studies of students reported by Wexler (1992) show that school life in fact “centres around the daily project of establishing a social identity” (p. 128). Unfortunately, as Hattam and Prosser (2008, p. 96) argue, the “focus on behaviour management in schools frames students with problems in schooling as problem students”. Gary is one student who was framed as a problem.

Students like Gary do not leave school because they have gone through the entire ‘Good Standing’ process, which after report card stage, involves meetings with parents, case conferences, support staff, district office representatives and other agencies. Gary left because he had already experienced enough at the report card stage as mechanisms of discipline spread “throughout the whole social body”
(Foucault 1979, p. 209). As Smyth, Angus, Down and McInerney (2008, p. 46) explain it, “a key instigating factor in this early exit from school is around poor relationships”, a theme I explore in more detail in Chapter 7.
CHAPTER 3 - SEARCHING THE BROADER LANDSCAPE

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I demonstrate how thinking about the broader socio-political landscape in which schools are located, helps to understand how it is that students like Gary and others in schools experience schools as disciplinary sites. To begin this discussion, I look at the global influence of neoliberal market control and how this has spread into the public domain of education. I argue that this approach dominates the relational, social and emotional aspects of education.

The second half of the chapter concentrates on explaining evolving theoretical insights that have aided in understanding the research problem how students experience and respond to behaviour management in schools. By doing this, I develop new and non static theoretical insights, or what Kincheloe and McLaren (2005, p. 306) describe as ‘evolving criticality’. A journal entry below begins to explain my own sense of evolving criticality.

Even though it is difficult to ‘locate’ my theory and methodology in a precise and pinpointed manner, it is exciting and creative to explore diverse understandings and discover the language/discourse that frames what it is that I am doing! I have my question; that seems to have been defined but ‘how’ to go about answering it is another matter. Presently, I find critical social research a place at least to begin, even if it is not the only place I locate my work. [September 2006]

The broader landscape in which I will investigate and locate my research and discussion is in the global context of neoliberalism.
3.2 Neoliberalism: The market and control

Globalisation is a term that has come to express the capitalist market economy and its expansion and penetration into almost every aspect of social life (Raduntz, 2005, p. 233). Neoliberal reform has meant a policy re-alignment over the past two decades with individual private good taking priority over societies public good (Welch, 2007, p. 6). The implications of this re-alignment in the policy formation around schools involves managing already scarce resources, being more accountable to financial budgets, more surveillance and performance assessments and “all at the cost of equity and provisions of services, especially for marginalized or disadvantaged groups” (Welch, 2007, p. 6).

I acknowledge the comprehensive description provided from Leishyna (2007) to situate the global context as he defines the features and distinguishing qualities of the social order under neo-liberalism and how this impacts on students in schools:

Neoliberalism is a political and economic ideology that works to largely eliminate government’s power to influence the affairs of private business. In the name of privatization, the goal is to maximize profits-with the vague promise that wealth and prosperity will eventually make their way down to the rest of society. In order to achieve this end, standards such as a minimum wage, job security, health insurance, collective bargaining rights, and environmental protections are replaced with an unrestricted flow of production and trade, and a global division of labour. (pp 97, 98)

Schools then, through the impact of global neo-conservatism, render the people working in them and those forced to attend them (students), to be compliant and methodical via the systemic impact of globalisation. Acting like a virus, such conservative and restrictive policy approaches have spread around the globe (Edwards & Usher, 2000, p. 3), and permeated all aspects of education and society with binding rules such as in the case of the General Agreement on Trade [GATT]
(Robertson, Bonal & Dale 2006, p. 229). Enforcing these policies are international organisations such as OECD [Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development], the International Monetary Fund [IMF] and the World Bank (Knight, 1997, p. 81). Furthermore, major global and local trading agreements such as the WTO [World Trading Organisation] promote knowledge and education as tradable commodities on the market (Edwards & Usher, 2000, p. 93).

Welch (2007, p. 6) argues that Australia in particular “has licensed considerable privatisation of services in education … while at the same time presiding over a process that has seen responsibility for problems in delivery exported to the local level.” The nation state has reduced its responsibility for funding under economic rationalism, yet increased regulations under the name of accountability, thereby diverting the nation state’s risk of failure (Welch, 2007, p. 6). Governments at both state and federal levels in Australia sculpt the educational landscape by implementing public policy shaped by privatization of utilities and a user pay approach (Smyth & McInerney 2007, p. 53). Thus international competitiveness connects the institutional practice of schooling to the marketplace (Knight 1997, p. 82), so it is the market that then ultimately controls and disciplines schools.

Even though Western Australia has constitutional responsibility for public education as a residual power, the transfer of sole authority over income collection to the Commonwealth government during World War 2 (Section 96 of the constitution) paved the way for federal influence and intervention. This change occurred partly following the collapse of the post-war boom experienced by all OECD nations, forcing the public sector, including education systems, to be more efficient. This in turn forced State Departments such as The West Australian Education Department to
have less say in detailed policy but rather a broad based ‘one fits all’ model. What this meant for schools is more responsibility for the adaptation and implementation of directions determined from the centre (Lingard, Knight & Porter, 1995, p. 82). The market in schools is thus a ‘quasi market’ as devolution of services are continually monitored and intervened from the state, resulting in a “separation of purchaser from provider” (Levacic cited in Whitty, Power & Haplin, 1998, p. 1) and an element of user choice between providers. Organisations such as public schools were never designed and intended to be places that maximise profits and be privately owned. It is no surprise then that “ambiguity, contradictions and general incoherence” abound (Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992, p. 35), and that “those schools ill-paced to capitalise on their market position” are likely to be blamed as the rhetoric of self improvement and autonomy, promised with devolution, fails (Whitty, 2002, p. 13).

My research is concerned with how these broader sets of economic and political forces impact on schools, eroding the capacity for democratic schooling and contributing to the corrosion of relationships in education. Policy protocols and practices are not typically questioned or debated in this system yet continue to be legitimised through the market place metaphor. My research intends to interrupt this situation because such metaphors imagine schools as “commercial enterprises and important players in the ‘restructuring of the nation economy’” (Bessant, Watts, Dalton & Smyth, 2006, p. 310) and are accompanied by a vision of students as human capital (Apple, 1999, p. 9). When it is the neoliberal regime that drives this agenda by travelling worldwide, imposing itself (Ball, 2006, p. 135) through the global satellite of economic rationalism, then public places like schools are blamed for global economic and social woes. These simplistic human capital versions of
society and the individual fail to match up to the complexities of social, emotional and relational circumstances encountered in most high schools. For this reason, “adolescence is often characterised in the media as a time of rebellion, crisis and deviance, rather than as a time of evaluating, decision-making, commitment and of carving out a place in the world” (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2003, p. 56).

This competitive reform only serves to increase inequality in schools. Gibson et al. (2007, p. 16) confirm that today’s educational practices are guided by policies that have a powerful alliance of class privilege with philosophies of education that “sharply divide mind and body, theory and practice, culture and utility.” Inequality is thus the consequence and this is not a natural state of affairs (Gale & Densmore, 2003, p. 110). Whitty (2002, p. 20) confirms that, “market-oriented reforms may merely enable advantaged schools and advantaged families to enhance their advantages” becoming a system to “separate the winners from the losers” (Knight, 1997, p. 82). The irony is that such an approach increases inequality rather than decreasing it. It is an amalgamation of global economic, historic and social structures where market competition interests are aligned to production and accumulation (Martin, 2007, p. 337). Consequently, administrative responsibilities of schools increase and larger demands are placed on principals and teachers, without any real democratic influence or involvement other than the empty and residual rhetoric of phrases such as ‘consultation’, ‘collaboration’ and ‘advisory panels’.

This restructuring has resulted in a devolution of a broad range of responsibilities, few that are democratic or political in nature but in the “pursuit of efficiency and economic rationalism” (Lingard, et al., 1995, p. 84). In turn, what eventuates is a market place that governs and manages public schools with policy presenting as
universal and commonsensical whereas its interest and influence are partial (Gale & Densmore, 2003, p. 38). As Blackmore and Thorpe (2003) explain, this governance or “steering at a distance” (p. 577) is made even more invasive by the media “at a time when policy has taken on greater symbolic power, serving the needs of the performative state” (p. 578). Policy such as *Behaviour Management in Schools* can then be “seen to be doing something” (p. 578) to help solve the ‘youth out of control in schools’ problem. The final irony of this situation is that it forces increased control and self management around policy such as behaviour management so that schools are not held up to public display and scrutiny (Blackmore & Thorpe, 2003, p. 594).

Apple (2005, p. 215) confirms that “for neo-liberals, the world in essence is a vast supermarket.” It is in this broader context that I explain what is happening to young people in schools through the lens of *Behaviour Management in Schools* policy because economic and political forces of globalisation are “antithetical to the social market economics of the welfare state” (Ball, 2006, p. 133). As the private sectors expanding global influences control policy and process on the public sector, there are human costs in terms of equality, welfare, loss of real motivation, powerlessness and further demoralisation. As schools abandon their role as democratic public spaces (Giroux, 2003b, p. 562), they become spaces of containment and control rather than places of learning. Convincingly, Eric Fromm (1984), in applying psychoanalysis to Marx’s theory, alerts us to the harm being done by capitalism to children and indeed all humans:

_Homo consumens_ is under the illusion of happiness, while unconsciously he (sic) suffers from his boredom and passivity. The more power he has over machines, the more powerless he becomes as a human being; the more he consumes, the more he becomes a slave to the ever increasing needs which the industrial system creates and manipulates. He mistakes
thrill and excitement for joy and happiness and material comfort for aliveness. (pp. 17, 18)

By way of summary, I have argued that the spread of market control, conduct and behaviour practices invade and encroach on education for financial gain (Rees & Rodley, 1995, p. 5) resulting in a corrosion of relationships and greater inequity through the broader landscape of globalisation.

3.3 Understanding the neoliberal agenda: Evolving criticality

I now outline the key theoretical tools that helped me to understand the impact of this neoliberal agenda on schools. By drawing on the notion of “evolving critically” (Kincheloe & McLaren 2005, p. 306) in the tradition of critical social theory and the politics of praxis, I ask some important questions and open up spaces for student stories about behaviour management discourses.

Returning to the research question, ‘how do students experience, understand, and respond to behaviour management’, I come from the premise that having young people in control, well-disciplined, quiet, neat and compliant, is easier to maintain in a society that is managed by economic and puritan values than children who stand up, speak, question, gather, influence, and cry out for change in the face of silencing, frustration, boredom, anger and alienation. Young people are often excluded from the politics of schooling by the imposition of authority, discipline and passivity (White, 1990, p. 189) because “mass schools systems were created to instruct and control at the same time” (Connell, Johnson & White, 1992, p. 60).

In this research the critical tradition is used to critique the behaviour management discourse embedded within a neoliberal conservative ideology. Even though many of the goals of critical inquiry may appear utopian, for researchers such critical forms of
struggle are considered worthwhile (Crotty, 1998, p. 157). I do this in two ways. First, I draw on critical social research to better understand how schools in Australia have been historically and socially produced and controlled (Preston & Symes, 1992). This came about “under the sign of Taylorism and scientific management” whereby “instrumental rationality extended its influence from the domination of nature to the domination of human beings” (Giroux, 1983a, p. 23). Second, I bring into question how the social sciences have become mesmerized by quantitative research since the mid-twentieth century (Inglis, 1988, p.7), so that human behaviour was explained in much the same way as one might explain how machines work (Inglis, 1988, p. 12). This process was easily implemented because “by functioning within an operational context free from ethical commitments, positivism wedded itself to the immediate, and ‘celebrated’ the world of ‘facts’” (Giroux, 1983b, p. 15).

Within this framework, social meanings become organised, produced, circulated and reproduced by the cultural systems that are operating mass media, education, art and literature (Inglis, 1988, p. 12). In order to stimulate a counter-discourse to this position, I have used critical social inquiry to disrupt the status quo and offer other ways of thinking and knowing about the world.

Even though there is much debate within feminism and postmodernism about the limits of critical social research (Gore, 1992, Orner, 1992 & Ellsworth, 1992), it is not the intention here to engage in these debates; rather I draw on the analytical tools to help illuminate the ‘problem’ of behaviour management in schools. The aim is to better understand, interpret and unravel policy discourse so that underlying assumptions are exposed and subject to scrutiny. Ball (1991, p. 188) claims that it is indeed “perverse and constraining to want to direct all social science into one model for understanding human action”. Garrick (1999, p. 154) confirms that “the
generation (and legitimisation) of knowledge about the social world is stronger when not reliant upon a one-best-way approach.” It is the intent of critical research that is paramount (Smith, 1994, p. 47), so that an “illumination, empowerment and emancipation from those social arrangements which perpetuate injustices” (p. 47) becomes possible. This research project is approached from this theoretical and methodological perspective. As Kincheloe and McLaren (2005, p. 304) argue, “critical theory should not be treated as a universal grammar of revolutionary thought objectified and reduced to discrete formulaic pronouncement or strategies.”

To challenge the dominant privileging of what can be said and done in classrooms, eclectic elements of critical social education research are thus utilised throughout this research to question behaviour management discourses that pathologise, individualise and domesticate student behaviour (Preston & Symes, 1992). Common elements such as critique, understanding power and oppression, discourse analysis, resistance, knowledge and agency that these traditions enlist, are beginning points to use as tools of interrogation and an extrication of the discourses of behaviour management. It is important to remember, however, that to “lay out a set of fixed characteristics of the position is contrary” to critical theory (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 303). Instead, the usefulness of critical pedagogy rests on its ability to “respond to the problems posed within particular contexts” (Giroux, 2003c, p. 155) and in this case, ‘Anchorage High’ in the public school system of Western Australia.

At this point, I elaborate on key features of critical social research that have assisted in helping me to understand Anchorage High as a disciplinary site. These include: asking worthwhile questions; interrupting behaviour management
discourses; illuminating the operation of power and control; building theory dialectically; engaging in praxis; and opening spaces for student voices.

3.3.1 Asking worthwhile questions

I was drawn to critical social research as a way of seeing the world when as a classroom teacher I felt lost and concerned about the direction that education was taking. As noted in Chapter 1, I felt alienated in my quest at times to make things better. Wilson (2008, p. 40) confirms that this sort of anxiety can generate “a turbulence of heart that results in an active questioning of the status quo, a perpetual longing to create new ways of being and seeing”. By interrupting the impact of neoliberalism on schools, questioning the status quo is important because “what is happening in our schools is hidden right in front of us. We see it; we just do not see it” (Steinberg, 2006. p. 277). By asking worthwhile questions researchers become detectives of theoretical insights (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 306) by “perpetually searching for new and interconnected ways of understanding” the ways in which behaviour management policy have shaped everyday life in classrooms. This requires interrupting technical rationality and bureaucratic control as a “first step toward a form of political action” in unravelling and questioning control in high schools (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 305). As Delpit (1993, p. 133) explains, “to act as if power does not exist is to ensure that the power status quo remains the same.” I do not profess to put myself in a position to provide answers to complex situations and how schools could be governed better, rather I act as a “subject of government, who has a right to contest the practices that govern us in the name of our freedom” (Rose, 1999, p. 60). Freire (1972, p. 141) believes that by having such a vision we can begin to create a better world.
In pursuing this vision, Foley (2002, p. 477) advocates the importance of linking theory and fieldwork in developing a conceptual framework that helps us to map and represent the taken for granted cultural and political practices and realities that have and continue to be observed. In his words, “no matter how provisional a construct or explanation may be, it functions as a lens or heuristic device which maps cultural practices and spaces much like cartographers map physical space” (Foley, 2002, p. 477). This questioning begins in my research by challenging technical rationality in schools because as Inglis (1988, p. 6) proclaims, we do find ourselves in a world influenced heavily by the industrial world in which knowledge is dominated by science. Thompson and McHugh (1990) relate this ‘rational’ culture to work organisations:

… modern states and enterprises involve complex functions, management of competing interests, and performance of problematic tasks according to observable rules and norms. Some of these processes are created by and reflect specific relations of production, as in layers of supervision whose sole function is labour control and discipline. (p. 44)

Due to this rational work culture, other ways of knowing and thinking and acting that are not scientific can often be treated as mere opinion, religious zeal or distortion. What is even more disturbing is that this not only occurs in private work organisations, but also in public organisation such as schools. In this world, appearances are preferred over reality and ‘truth’ is “that which sells-that is, if people ‘buy it’ it is right and true” (Scatamburlo-D’Annibale, Jaramillo & McLaren, 2006, p. 4). As a consequence, science and technology becomes a dominant value set that distorts the world (Inglis 1988, p. 6). The significant point is that the simplistic assumptions of rational management continually fail to match up to the complexities of cultural, social and educational change. Instead they open the way to totalitarianism where there is no line between the truth and the falsehood to
embarrass the lies (Scatamburlo-D’Annibale et al., 2006, p. 4). So this thesis asks a series of socially worthwhile questions identified by Thomson (1999):

- What is going on here to produce this mis/behaviour?
- What’s the story?
- How could this mis/behaviour be ‘social’ and not just about the individual?
- If the school was involved in contributing to this student’s mis/behaviour, how might that be?
- If this mis/behaviour was a curriculum problem, what would that be, and what could we do about it? (p. 12)

As Thomson (1999) demonstrates, when asking worthwhile questions, rather than formulating forms of punishment, then the focus shifts to the underlying causes of behavioural problems. Hickey and Fitzclarence (2000, p. 125) warn that by not asking questions it “privileges intellectual ways of knowing at the expense of other ways of understanding and expressing ideas and feelings about the world.” Hickey and Fitzcarence (2000) instead use ‘narrative therapy’ (p. 125) to counteract the over-emphasis on the rational by infusing the emotional and irrational toward democratic change. In applying these personal and transformative elements, I ask questions about what is really going on here? Is it a result of neo-liberal constraint and technical rationality? In searching for answers I begin the process of auditing Anchorage High to extract contradictions in behaviour expectations and ‘code of conduct’ rules. Thomson (1999) believes that by doing so, we can step away from the distancing and regulating texts of behaviour management policy and see that many current forms of schooling may actually be part of the problem rather than the solution. From the aftermath and experience of the terrible Columbine Tragedy outlined in Rethinking Schools Online (1999), the authors suggest the use of a ‘safety inventory’ to ask provocative and pertinent questions. These include:

- Do we tolerate…?
Are we allowing students to be different?
Who is marginalised by the school culture and how?
Are students able to speak openly?
Are teachers given resources and time to personally connect with students?

Tackling these kinds of questions as they relate to behaviour management discourses opens up for investigation the social-cultural relations within the school environment rather than seeking quick fix simplistic solutions.

3.3.2 Interrupting behaviour management discourses

Once worthwhile questions concerning the social-cultural relations of schools are posed, it becomes possible to interrupt prevailing discourses of behaviour management. Ball (1990, p. 2) defines discourse as “what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when and with what authority.” In describing the bodily inscription of discourse analysis, Threadgold (2000, p. 50) explains that it is “not just language, but the practices, behaviours, objects, technologies and concepts, all of which shape and form the disciplined body.” When mapping the cultural practices that relate to behaviour management, it can be understood that social policy (such as Behaviour Management in Schools, BMIS) married to a dominant technical rational model of science, creates a union which has the power to restrict and limit thinking around policy or at worst to ‘close down’ alternative practices and principles thus reinforcing regulation and domination (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 310). More egalitarian, relational and compassionate practices of working with children in schools, are placed in the background simply because they may not be rationalised, classified or count as properly known. In contrast, this research advocates a conceptual framework that provides for personal and social agency.
To this end, I have used discourse analysis (Ball, 2006, pp. 48-51) to investigate policy procedures and documentation and illustrate the discrepancy between the rhetoric and the reality of what is going on in schools. Firstly, I examine the discourse of the Plan for Government Schools (2004-2007) which has as two of its four key objectives to motivate and engage students and provide them with inclusive, safe and stimulating learning environments (p. 9). By interrupting the rhetoric, it becomes questionable whether the support, flexibility and motivation claimed to be promoted and developed in this plan actually meets the needs and interests of all students. Furthermore, the rhetoric statements made in the BMIS (2001) policy, in which claims of welcoming, care, support, fairness, sensitivity, responsiveness and consultation are made (p. 4), do not appear to correlate with the reality of students' lives. My argument is that BMIS is a social phenomenon; hence the language becomes enmeshed in relations of power and processes of social change. This means that leaders in schools are addressed as ‘managers’, students as ‘clients’ and work as ‘products.’ As such, claims of collaboration, procedural fairness, cultural sensitivity and positive social participation do not match the reality of students’ experiences as they increasingly find themselves subjects of self-disciplinary processes (Rose, 1990).

As well, when examining WADET’s Plan For Public Schools (2008-2011) to “ensure(s) every public school is a good school” (Objective 3, p. 9) there is a focus on excluding “misbehaving students” (p. 9), reinforcing again the oppressive and discriminatory nature of policy power to regulate and discriminate. These relations of power are also found in WADET’s Direction for Schools (2008) focus document which monitors schools success in managing behaviour as part of its standards review process. By asking ‘troubling’ questions and analysing the power and
surveillance dynamics operating in these kinds of practices and its links to ‘managing behaviour’, it is no longer possible to claim that policy is neutral, innocent or harmless.

The process of interrupting managerial discourses allows us to “open the door to a broad range of technologies of surveillance and regulation designed to control” (Wyn & White, 1997, p. 90), and therefore, shifts the debate from individual circumstances and blaming the victim (Stevenson & Ellsworth, 1993, p. 261) to a clearer understanding of why students respond socially and culturally to educational circumstances the way that they do. The present obsession in schools with individualising, blaming and treating students as offenders that require rescuing is unhelpful in illuminating what is actually at stake. Instead, problems are ‘welfarised’ or ‘pathologised’ (Shields, et al., 2005) and in so doing, continue to marginalise and stigmatize students, keeping them powerless (Wyn & White, 1997, p. 89). Throughout this thesis, I use critical ethnography to interrupt behaviour management discourses as it is a qualititative description that “frequently treads a careful path between vignettes of the ‘familiar’ with the ‘strange’ in order to evoke a range of understandings about ‘what is going on here’” (Pole & Morrison, 2003, p. 90). This process then is political in nature, and uses critical social theory as a framework to capture knowledge and create spaces for groups of people who are “situated at some distance from the centres of power” (Smyth, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson & Wurst, 2000, p. 22).

Using an ethnographic narrative approach based on critical social theory, that interrupts the status quo, is in stark contrast to the more mainstream positivist views about educational research. These are often characterised by objective measurement,
cause and effect relationships, emphasis on laws that govern activity, analysis and intervention; predictions, controlled events, prescriptive recommendations and emphasis on technique rather than values (Thompson & McHugh, 1990, p. 28). Positivist research methodology is considered functional, rational and therefore issues or questions of a political nature are limited or removed altogether.

By way of illustration, the Australian government, Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) demonstrates the stark differences between positivist and critical educational research approaches. DEST regularly publish reports titled ‘Schooling Issues Digests’. The status report from 2005 (Issue 2), focused on student motivation and engagement. Behavioural engagement (p. 4) in this report was measured according to the students’ “positive conduct, rule following and adhering to norms” [italics added]. The problem with this approach to research is that it excludes the lives and experiences of real actors, human beings, in the search for quantifiable evidence about school life. Furthermore, it serves to view behaviour management as a “pathological or temporary phenomena arising from breakdown in organisational systems, rather than a fundamental product of the structuring of the division of labour” (Thompson & McHugh, 1990, p. 28), idealising the neutral, value-free social science that mimics the natural sciences in method and purpose (Foley, 2002, p. 472). As a consequence, according to Thompson and McHugh (1990, p. 28), “many deep rooted features of organisational life – inequality, conflict, domination and subordination, manipulation – are written out of the script [italics added] in favour of behavioural questions associated with efficiency or motivation.” Giroux (1983b, p. 14) explains that under the guise of neutrality, such scientific knowledge and theory becomes rational on the ground of whether it is efficient, economic or correct.
3.3.3 Illuminating the operation of power, knowledge and control

Thinking more deeply about issues and relations of power helps us to develop critical consciousness (Leistyna, 2007, p. 97). This thesis is drawn to critical social research as a theoretical tradition because it signifies my intent to uncover and investigate “undisclosed interests of power that normally remain shrouded and hidden” (Smyth et. al, 1997, p. 21). According to Foucault et al. (1997, p. 25) critique of this kind “is akin to virtue.”

Within critical theory, dominant hegemonic practices in the daily lives of people in schools are exposed. The reasons why these practices continue to survive within societies and institutions are also explored. By analysing the power structures operating when devising, implementing and enforcing policy around student behaviour, I expose how social, political, ethical and class injustices operate. This counter-hegemonic practice is set to challenge the dominant structures of classroom and organisational meaning already in place. The critical theoretical orientation of this research attempts to replace the objectifying of students as individuals ‘at risk’ and focuses instead on understanding how they are constructed as ‘subjects’ of particular behaviourist discourses that serve to disempower them.

Power can be considered as both an enabling as well as a constraining force. Foucault and Gordon (1980, p. 98) do not accept that there is single form of power preferring to emphasise the complex and multiple forms that power can take (Bessant & Watts, 2002, p. 368). Underpinning this thesis is the view that “only a theoretical perspective which considers the nature of the power relationships operating in school and in the wider society can provide any answers” (Samuel, 1982, p. 17).
Critical social research looks at the deeper issues, the ones lying under the obvious and simplistic and often binary classifications. If one only asks questions that are medical, technical and/or scientific then these are the answers one receives. However, if asking questions about problems or issues that concern one that are educational, social, historical and political, one gathers a more inter-textual, complex and multi-layered understanding of the world. By carefully critiquing and analysing the sophisticated layers and levels of power operating in schools, then it is possible to expose and disrupt the ways in which power operates to discipline and silence individuals. As a researcher interested in examining inequities of power and control among students, I seek to undo and change things as they presently stand. I do not feel comfortable in the research role of merely observing and theorising and leaving information sitting open to interpretation. Looking at the school through a critical lens, how the political, economic and historical are constructed and how power relationships operate, makes the picture of the school and student behaviour within them, far more complex and nuanced than suggested by overly psychologised and behaviourist responses.

My contention is that knowledge about behaviour management is not found in the research literature itself but in the actions of people creating history (Quantz, 1992, p. 468), in this case, the students themselves. However, what is also worth keeping in mind is that this knowledge is power only for those who can use it to change their conditions (Shor, 1992, p. 6). Students interviewed in this research, may never be in such a position, especially in a quasi-democratic society, however, they do have power and control over the extent to which they choose to engage or not in the processes of schooling, and in my case the process of contributing to the research knowledge. Critical social research as advocated by Kincheloe and McLaren (1994)
provides assurance in freeing academic work (p. 139) from these dominant forms of power presently operating within schools.

3.3.4 Building theory dialectically and engaging in praxis

The ultimate purpose and intent of critical social theory as it is applied to my research is to provide a place of transformation in education through human agency, hope and liberation (Freire, 1972, 2004). To do so, I needed to build the theory and fuse with the practice of schooling. Lather (1986, p. 266) describes the idea of dialectical as “a shunting backwards and forwards between the data and the theory”. This dialectical thought reveals the power of human activity and human knowledge as both a product of and force in shaping social reality (Giroux, 1983a, p. 18) thus linking power, knowledge and domination (p. 18). The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology (Scott & Marshall, 2005) defines praxis as “human action on the natural and social world. It emphasizes the transformative nature of action and the priority of action over thought” (p. 517). Thus, I envisage my research to be more than merely research; rather I intend it to be transformative. Quantz (1992, p. 465) reaffirms that praxis does not actually occur until critical theory is fused in the practice of transformation. Transformation is thus at the heart of praxis. If education is not transformative then it “is for domestication, meaning it is built on a false understanding of individuals as objects regarded then as adaptable, manageable beings” (Preston & Symes, 1992, p. 47). So how did I go about this process of blending the dialectic with the notion of transformation?

Firstly, I engaged critical ethnography as a process in which to listen and respond to the voices of students whilst at the same time, enhancing my own self reflection as a researcher. To do this, I consciously built on the theory and data mutually, whilst
understanding how power operates, so as to connect the two, one informing the other, dialectically. Critical ethnography used in this way shifts the goal of praxis away from the acquisition of knowledge about the other to the formation of a dialogic relationship with the other, making it possible to illuminate how schools operate to discipline and silence students. By consciously blending together theory, morality and politics as an essential research tool for social transformation of the students, change becomes possible (Torres & van Heertum 2009, p. 230). It is my intent that by engaging in this type of critical reflection based upon perspectives of social responsibility, that broader corporate/economic, political and historical issues around schooling are exposed. Moos (2004) elaborates:

Self-reflection means that the self is able to focus its attention on something in the outer world and at the same time on itself. This ability enables the human being to act and to reflect on the action and thereafter initiate other actions. (p. 7)

This critical engagement with theory provided the space to make social inequalities problematic because “it seeks to construct a dynamic contextual, historically and socially relational account” (Young, 1997, p. 101) of young lives.

Secondly, I searched for counter interpretations (Lather, 1986, p. 267) of the existing ‘common sense’ construction of students ‘at risk’. By using personal storying as a political vehicle, I attempted to expose the mythical identification of ‘youth in crises’, ‘youth at risk’ (Kelly, 2000), ‘dangerous youth’ (Malone, 2000) and the climate of fear and danger that prevail. This ‘awareness’ allowed for a better understanding of circumstances different from the dominant view and an opportunity to “counter misleading notions of dangerousness” (Malone, 1998, p. 12). This “more intimate understanding of the views of participants” (Smyth, 1998b, p. 3), makes it easier to tease out the patterns in the stories of students and the theory in
turn, becomes enriched and re-fashioned in light of the data (Smyth, Angus et al. 2006, p. 134).

Thirdly, in being dialectical and “examining theory and practice from both perspectives” (Purpel, 2001, p. 183), there was also a concern with the social construction of experience. The investigation of truth is revealed by viewing BMIS in alternative ways so that even within the most “authoritative modes of classroom discipline and control are fleeting images of freedom that speak to very different relationships” (Giroux, 1983a, p. 36). In my research, the data (the practices experienced by students) and theory talk to one another. In writing up the stories of the students, I confirm or modify the theory. There was a point when writing this research, where I stopped theorising for awhile and immersed myself in the writing of student narrative portraits to ensure that the dialectical process of the theory was continually connected to practice. Thompson and McHugh (1990, p. 34) agree that “any critical theory not testing its ideas through empirical investigation or practical intervention is ultimately arid.” This process was invigorating because as a researcher I was able to ‘switch’ between the theory and practice and at the same time remain true to both. This dialectic process ensured a transcendent dimension as a precondition for the student voices to be heard (Giroux, 1983a, p. 19). Mischler, (1986) explains how this could be:

Through their narratives, people may be moved beyond the texts to the possibilities of action. To be empowered is not only to speak in one’s own voice and to tell one’s own story, but to apply the understanding arrived at to action in accord with one’s own interests. (p. 119)

Thus critical theory “cannot be easily separated from practice” (Torres & van Heertum, 2009, p. 224) but is synthesised throughout the research. Giroux (1983a, p. 20) says that “one begins not with an observation but with a theoretical
framework” situating the observation in rules and conventions that give it meaning. Giroux (1983a, p. 20) also states that it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this perspective and be aware that it is not without its problems (Young, 1997, p. 110). There was then a constant requirement for me to continually struggle with theory in the light of evidence from the field (Giroux, 1983a, p. 33). Through the idea of an ‘evolving criticality’, a concept borrowed from Kincheloe and McLaren (2005, p. 306), I realised that this process was never static but evolving and changing in light of new problems, insights, and circumstances.

Finally, engaging in dialectical theory building and praxis in my research also caused me to question my own teaching practice. I was curious if I was becoming too passive or conforming to authority that I had worn weary of resisting. I was also questioning if I was becoming less flexible in my approaches. I became more conscious that it was sometimes tempting in this role as a teacher to become less curious, spontaneous, creative, apolitical and silent; and in doing so, being less aware of students needs. I caught myself reflecting on the importance of passion and caring, so essential to teachers’ intellectual work. This resulted in me questioning my own work, consciously examining and rethinking daily events and being aware of my own values and assumptions. As Kincheloe (2005, p. 45) states, “as language utilizing organisms we cannot escape the effect of the ways discursive practices construct our ways of seeing ourselves and the world.”

3.3.5 Opening spaces for student voice

By “reaching out more to meet young people and welcome them” (Smyth et al., 2008, p. 114), I have as much as possible infused the incorporation of student voices throughout the thesis to provide personal experiences that relate to the research
question. Candy (1989, p. 7) confirms that critical research approaches are more overtly political than either positivist or interpretive approaches because they are directed towards personal and/or social transformation rather than scientific description. In using student dialogue and experience, new knowledge, based on everyday life becomes collective lived experience (Freire, 1972), and validated through empirical research (Farrell, Peguero, Lindsey & White, 1988, p. 50). Nagle (2001, p. 10) states that “voice can provide the critical conditions by which people in the margins of the mainstream can reclaim their own stories and histories and so begin to struggle to challenge those powers that attempt to silence them.” By using semi-structured interviews and creating a more invitational approach in which to speak, this research enables students to “talk with their inner voices about the voicelessness that occurred for them in most classrooms” (Nagle, 2001, p. 75).

In this genuine space in which students can reveal (Smyth & Hattam et al. 2004, p. 25) more textual and intricate layers of their lives, real identities become apparent. Farrell et al. (1988) explain the importance of cultivating research approaches that better connect with students’ lives:

The classroom must appear a bland place to this population, far removed from the real life of the streets and the real concern of one’s friends. The adolescent-as-loyal-friend or the adolescent-as-group-member is a much more meaningful identity than the adolescent-as-student. (p. 496)

Much of the current research about young people is often done ‘on’ or ‘to’ them rather than ‘with’ them. Rather than exploring young people’s knowledge, commitments and understandings, rational research tries to lay the blame with the individual, portraying young people as problem makers causing concern for their teachers and schools. The concern is that young people take on this negative identity whilst their emotional and social selves are disregarded.
Smyth and Hattam et al. (2000, p. 3) reiterate that schools are structures of power where the “clear unfettered voice of students is rarely heard”. These unequal power relations are “controlled through sanctions, and reinforced by moral imperatives about what should be done” (Smyth & Hattam et al. 2000, p. 3). Negative identity can sometimes be the only pathway that students can find as a way to claim back some of this misplaced power. Stevenson and Ellsworth’s (1993, p. 260) study of white dropouts from a working-class suburban school in the United States of America suggest that the influence of young people’s voices are severely limited because they are perceived as deviant and therefore not worthy of consideration. They often then internalise this image of deficiency and silence themselves in voicing criticisms of the school. Instead, I have purposefully opened spaces for the voices of students as a deliberate political action with the “explicit agenda of reinserting, in multiple ways, opportunities for expression that have been expunged because dominant social visions hold sway” (Smyth et al. 2004, p. 25). As such my research does not rest easy with policy makers who are often required to compile simplistic and utilitarian research (Smyth et al. 2004, p. 26).

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have searched the broader landscape in which schools are located. Firstly, I argue the case that there has been a restructuring of public education due to the global impact of neoliberalism, which has resulted in many changes as “the classroom has become the test tube where the inequities of capitalistic corporate power are fermented” (Robertson, 2005, p. 5) and governments steer the system whilst appearing to devolve power to them. This devolution of responsibility leads to an increased emphasis on surveillance, accountability,
measurement and performance so that teachers own professional judgment and skills are replaced with overcrowded, impersonal bureaucratic and competitive school systems (Pope, 2001, p. 159). *Behaviour Management in Schools* policy is one example of how central and state education systems can ‘steer’ what goes on as it is seen to be doing something to solve the ‘youth out of control in schools’ problem (Blackmore & Thorpe, 2003, p. 578). In doing so, it reinforces the divide between the achievers and well behaved and those that are not toeing the line (Whitty, et al., 1998, p. 126).

In the second half of this chapter, I have employed Kincheloe’s (2007, p. 18) notion of ‘evolving criticality’ to explain the oppressive forces that shape the society we live in, and thus be less absorbed in individualist explanations of social phenomenon such as student behaviour management (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 48). This means I am interested in what accounts for particular bias, who gains, who loses and whose version of reality has yet to be told. This form of critical inquiry is more likely to reveal whose interests are being protected within the status quo. Preston and Symes (1992) explain:

> One of the overriding features of this theory is its commitment to political change, its recognition that all social practices, including those of education, are by their very nature political in character, serving to reproduce dominant interest of various kinds, part of the invisible hand controlling the movement of society through time. (p. xii).

Critical theoretical frames highlight the links between issues of cultural production in the classroom, relationships between students and the school environs and student identities. Dissembling behaviour management processes and the implications of these processes in the lives of students, thus becomes my pivotal aim. I have identified, described and explained some of the key principles and ideas from critical
research informing my thesis. These key principles are: asking worthwhile questions, interrogating behaviour management discourses, illuminating the operation of power, knowledge and control; building theory dialectically and engaging in praxis; and finally, opening spaces for student voices.

By adopting Freire’s concept of praxis (1985, p. 124), I am able to inform this research with particular regard to action and reflection on that action. In this action, I am also able to maintain dialectical connections between theory and personal struggles in practice (Apple, 1999, p. 17). I make a conscious attempt to not adapt to a world of schooling that no longer treats children in a fair manner, but instead attempt to break away to portray the interactions connecting politics to Anchorage High School, via The Behaviour Management in Schools policy and make public the experience of students. As Kincheloe and McLaren, (1994, p. 140) state, “critical research can be best understood in the context of the empowerment of individuals”. They reiterate (p. 140) that the purpose of critical inquiry “must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or sphere within the society.” Rather than the focus on behaviourist constructions of students and the schools failure to treat behaviour problems, there needs to be an investigation of “deeper social and educational concerns” (McInerney, 2009, p. 25).

What I emphasise throughout this thesis is that schools can become social and democratic spaces because “after all is said and done, it is the engagement between teachers, students and knowledge that produces learning” (Hattam & Prosser, 2008, p. 90). Presently these spaces are being shut down, in part, for the reasons outlined in the early part of this chapter. I invite the reader to come on a journey in this thesis where the major intention is to find or create new spaces (White, 1990, p. 163) in
schools for young people using alternative sets of values to the regulatory and rationalist corporate ones currently dominating public debates.

This struggle to think ‘otherwise’ about behaviour management policy is not new as will now be charted in the next chapter, in which it becomes clearer when further engaging in critical social research, that throughout the history of schooling there have been many obstacles to a democratic and socially just schooling.
CHAPTER 4 - EXPLORING THE HISTORY OF BMIS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I continue the process of reflective praxis with a focus on the history and shifting discourses of Behavior Management in Schools policy throughout public high schools in Western Australian. Freire (2004) explains that:

Conscience of the world engenders conscience of the self, and of others in the world, and with the world. It is by acting in the world that we make ourselves. Therefore, it is by inserting ourselves into the world, not by adapting to it, that we become historical and ethical beings, capable of opting, of deciding, of breaking away. (p. 72)

By inserting this research into a genealogical mode of understanding I explore the evolution of behavior management and discipline policy historically. Meredyth and Tyler (1993) explain that a genealogical approach to behaviour management has an:

… interest in making the present strange, rather than the past familiar. Its move is away from a search for origins and foundations and towards an attention to the precise, sometimes mundane, historical changes which give the present its shape. In the process, the present becomes a less familiar landscape. (p. 4)

This process allows one to trace the patterns, continuities, discontinuities, repetitions, connections and contradictions that emerge over time. By interweaving historical and cultural practices (Tamboukou, 1999, p. 203) history can no longer be considered a continuous linear development but rather oriented to discontinuities. In concentrating on the past and revealing the driving forces into the consciousness of the present (Foley 2002, p. 482), patterns and events that have influenced BMIS policy become clearer, revealing the recursive nature of discourses at different historical moments. Unlike cumulative, chronologically determined linear patterns of
events popular in the sciences, this recursive approach to policy analysis directs attention to local contexts and specific actions without the inherent evaluation of steps, stages and socialization (Lesko, 2001, p. 196).

I have identified these ‘shifts’ as ‘movements’ as in a musical movement, and are intended to be explicatory in that by ‘unfolding’ them, they reveal their powerful impact on the present and likely impact in the future. As Tamboukou (1999, p. 210) explains, “a history of the present is, however, more interested in the future.” This historical overview, therefore, serves as a means of illumination as “history is always there, troubling and cyclical” (Saul, 2006, p. 27). Again, I use Ball’s (1990, p. 2) interpretation of discourse to explain this process; that is “what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when and with what authority”. When combining genealogy with the other features of critical social research discussed in the previous chapter, one can ensure a greater interplay between organisations (schools) and their environment (social, political, historical, and physical) without freezing both human beings and history (Giroux, 1983a, p. 15).

Drawing on a Foucauldian historical perspective, I untangle and “reflect upon the ways the discursive and institutional practices of the past still affect the constitution of the present” (Tamboukou, 1999, p. 205). Adams St. Pierre (2000, p. 497) explains that using Foucault’s historical analysis to examine the relation between truth and power allows one to trace ways in which codes of discourse and social practices represented in historical documents such as the BMIS policy can become an object of investigation, consequently revealing which knowledge and truth claims can be spoken. Giroux (1983a, p. xiv) agrees that “there are only fleeting possibilities for us to think through the past, to examine the sedimented histories that
constitute who we are, and to insert ourselves into the present so as to struggle for a better society.”

Serres (1998, p. 65) refers to this untangling as ‘unpleating’ or ‘explicating’. He uses the image of a folded handkerchief so that time and events can be considered as folds or sieves, “as passing but also not passing” (p. 58). In this model, time doesn’t flow easily, it percolates and some events and aspects pass through and others do not. Time is considered to be extremely complex, unexpected and complicated. Employing this image in which some aspects of the past are folded right next to the present and other aspects of the past are farther away, events and circumstances in the history of Behaviour Management in Schools policy are not only unravelled but also seen as “…polychromic, multitemporal, and reveal a time that is gathered together, with multiple pleats” (Serres, 1998, p. 60).

Critical ethnography as a research methodology is especially useful in linking the historical and cultural conditions shaping society. As Quantz (1992, p. 487) explains, critical ethnographers are less likely to accept participants’ meaning as a fully accurate representation of their cultural constructions unless it is located in the historical conditions that helped form them. Using critical ethnography in this way, Giroux (1983a) links genealogy and the features of critical social research that were highlighted in the last chapter:

Critical theory points educators toward a mode of analysis that stresses the breaks, discontinuities, and tensions in history, all of which become valuable in that they highlight the centrality of human agency and struggle while simultaneously revealing the gap between society as it presently exists and society as it might be. (p. 36)

For the remainder of this chapter, the historical and cultural practices of behaviour management and discipline policy will be traced with a view to exposing patterns
and events over time. These historical origins are explained as ‘movements’. The first movement is described as a shift from corporal punishment to pastoral care, the second, from a mode of pastoral care to self-management, and third from self-management to behaviour management.

4.2. Tracing the historical origins of BMIS

In tracing the historical origins of the BMIS policy in Western Australia and distinguishing a series of three distinct movements, I am able to demonstrate that each movement is self-contained yet part of a composition. Whilst I have selected these three distinguishable shifts or discourses as movements in the story of evolving behaviour management policy, they are part of a particular story through time that inter-relate thematically as they exert a cumulative effect, displaying patterns, repetitions, continuities, discontinuities and contradictions.

4.2.1 The First Movement: From corporal punishment to pastoral care

I begin with this movement by tracing three emergent patterns to organise the discussion. Firstly, I trace the control and punishment of the ‘masses’ evident from the 18th century through to the 20th century. Secondly, I focus on the shift that occurred via the emergence of pastoral care designed to improve one’s self-esteem. Thirdly, I trace the evolution of the ‘Whole School Approach’ in relation to pastoral care. To commence, I go back to 1871 when compulsory schooling was established in Britain, and then trace this practice through to its migration into Australia in the first half of the 20th century. Smith (1991, p. 40) argues that “mass schooling came into being at least partly as a response to the problem of how to regulate large
numbers of children appearing in cities as a product of industrialisation.” Australia, in particular was a nation to adopt this style of controlled schooling “as its population was regarded, with its convict origins, as recalcitrant and refractory, needing moral guidance from a Christian perspective” (Preston & Symes, 1992, p. 41). The main purpose of discipline was based on religious correction, as stated in the Shorter Oxford Dictionary (Fowler, 1967) “the mortification of the flesh by penance; also, a beating, or the like.”

Harber (2004, p. 71) explains that the key purpose of these mass systems of formal schooling in industrialising countries was control, surveillance, and a preparation for subordinate roles in the workplace and wider society as a way to control the poor and disadvantaged (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler & Dowsett, 1982, p. 60). Mass schooling also had disciplinary connotations associated with dealing with refractory conduct (Preston & Symes, 1992, p. 33) as “...it became universal, which placed new demands on children and redefined them, transforming the character of childhood and introducing new dimensions of governmentality” (p. 39). Puritan values such as obedience could easily be adopted and were Calvinist in character as they were based on “ideal capitalist, quasi-militaristic, patriarchal social relations and industrial order” (p. 40). Olsson (1999) explains the history of this pastoral shift which he traces to 16th century reformation:

The protestant religion gave rise to a new spirit of individualism whereby each individual could communicate directly with god and was solely responsible for his or her salvation. With the expansion of empire, the growth of science and the enlightenment belief in progress, the idea that the individual was master of their fate was further encouraged. (p. 162)

Curtis (1988), a Canadian educational historian, traces the building of the educational state in Canada West, 1836-1871, a similar time and historical context to
Australia in which the “creation of the educational state was the construction of a
general condition of discipline for the population as a whole” (p. 376). He explains
that “educational practice contributed to the construction of bourgeois hegemony by
normalizing particular forms of character and comportment” (p. 371). Another
example of such ‘normalization’ is obvious in instructions taken from a German
child rearing manual from 1748 (Sulzer cited in Miller, 1990), in which:

> Obedience is so important that all education is actually nothing other than
learning how to obey. It is a generally recognized principle that persons
of high estate who are destined to rule whole nations must learn the art of
governance by way of first learning obedience (p. 12)

Rose (1990), like Preston and Symes (1992), adopts the idea of governmentalisation
as he explains how during the 18th century calculated supervision and administration
emerged simultaneously. Students at this time who did not conform were determined
as being ‘maladjusted’. Then, by the late 18th century in the Anglo-Saxon world,
Foucault, (1979) explains that:

> …punishment was seen as a technique for the coercion of individuals; it
operated methods of training the body-not signs-by the traces it leaves, in
the form of habits, in behaviour; and it presupposed the setting up of a
specific power for the administration of the penalty (p. 131).

In Foucault’s language (1979, p. 82) the ‘power to punish’ was exercised more
deeply into the social body as the disciplinary society gradually extended the
mechanisms of discipline making it easier to forge a controlled, docile working
student (p. 209).

From the mid 19th century onwards, Rose (1990) describes the rise of
‘individualism’ linked to Protestantism, Romanticism and the growth of a market
society and theories of natural law (p. 217). What had also evolved from ‘the
enlightenment’ at this time was the science of cognitive psychologies and behaviourist attitudes toward ‘the student’ and, therefore, how their behaviour was perceived and constructed. Usher and Edwards (1994, p. 97) explain that “the divining of the individual’s needs and the coherence of the package the person progresses through are inscribed in the growing importance given to the practices of guidance and counselling.”

Rose (1990) helps us to understand that this shift from religious control of the body and the masses to the moral and self had its roots in mid 19th century Europe. It was in this Anglo Saxon world in which the Christian soul unified the body and soul, culminating in the Protestant identification of person, soul, self, and consciousness (p. 218). This Protestant notion of a disciplined character resulted in both universalizing and individualizing, in which each human being was inhabited by a personal conscience and admonished to constantly scrutinize thoughts and actions for failings (Rose, 1990, p. 220). Citizens were conceptualised and the state’s role was to protect the human being as citizen. The new forms of self-regulation were manifested in a range of new technologies of the self in which self-inspection came to replace the confessional (p. 220).

A similar emphasis on moral education occurred at the beginning of the 20th century. Cladis and The British Centre for Durkheimian Studies (1999) explain the influence of Emile Durkheim’s sociology and morality on education at the beginning of the 1900’s when he was chair of education and sociology in Paris. Being a humanist, he opposed the use of corporal punishment; however he justified child punishment as one of training (p. 41), and as a natural consequence of an immoral act (p. 49). In doing so, he distinguished respect for rule and authority, which was
held to be ‘good’, from fear (p. 53). This intention meant that “wilful or irregular personalities would become responsible subjects by being made objects of pedagogical intervention” (p. 49). Rose (1990) elaborates what was happening at this time:

The school was to act as a moral technology, not merely inculcating obedience, but also seeking to shape personality through the child’s emulation of the teacher, through the use of pastoral techniques to encourage self-knowledge and enhance the feelings of sympathetic identification, through establishing the links between virtue, honesty, and self-denial and a purified pleasure. (p. 223)

Between the 1920’s and 1930’s, the interwar years in Australia, a strong education guidance movement was adopted from the USA with an emphasis on psychology to intervene and remediate maladjusted problem children as a way to correct their deficiencies (Wright, 2010). Thus, by the 1950’s in Western Australian schools, pastoral care and to some degree the Protestant church philosophy, underpinned by notions of care, responsibility and personal development was in large part a response to the concern about corporal punishment which was being abolished by law elsewhere at the time throughout Western Europe.

The second emergent pattern I identified in this discussion is the shift from external control and punishment to an emphasis on the individual, psychology and self-esteem. This becomes evident in my research into Western Australian schools when in 1959; WADET issued a 10 page statement, *Discipline in the Secondary School and Classroom*. This was a supplement to the Education Circular, in which the term ‘discipline’ was used to “signify the degree of order or organization within a group which works, or is required to work, for a particular purpose” (p. 20). The “*Discipline in the Secondary School and Classroom*” (1959) document stressed the influence and co-operation of staff members as one of the most important factors in
determining “school tone” (p. 23). The intent was to eliminate disciplinary problems because “a cardinal principle in the development of good tone and discipline is that positive attitudes are developed through experiences that are meaningful and satisfying” (p. 21). Good tone was something that this statement defined as deriving from “good example, from the absorption of the energies of pupils in constructive learning activities which hold their interests, and from the development of self-discipline through progressively increasing responsibility” (p. 29).

In 1967, WADET established a committee under the chairmanship of the Director-General, H.W. Dettman, to investigate and report on the future organisation of secondary education in the state. It was the first time that the aims and the role of schools were explicitly stated (Hyde, 1992, p. 63). This represented the most extensive government enquiry into student discipline in Australia (Slee, 1995a, p. 123). All secondary schools in the state were surveyed (approximately sixty), regarding rates of suspension, their efficacy and discipline and this investigation was to culminate in The Dettman Report (1972). There were 78 case study reports of ‘deviant behaviour’ from 28 schools and five of the recommendations related to punishment (p. 3). These were mainly related to the phasing out of corporal punishment. In its place, specific reference was made to pastoral care and moral education. From the 43 recommendations and the 376 page report, three critical areas were identified by Hyde (1992):

1. Involve guidance officers and support staff in counseling difficult students.
2. Establish pastoral care structures and programmes in schools.
3. Break down the impersonal organizational structures in some large secondary schools (through sub school structures). (p. 65)
Curriculum reforms were introduced as a result of this review and included mandatory ‘human relations’ lessons. In the Dettman Report it was also suggested that students “detachment in school may be a symptom of the larger picture of psychological discontent rather that a specific malfunction of school operation” (1972, p. 110). The thinking was that because the alienated adolescent is “engulfed with feelings of mistrust and misfortune” and the school desired to aid them, “small group instruction or individual counselling be recommended as a course of action that the school could pursue to ameliorate such alienation” (p. 111).

In 1979, with the emergence of ‘The Year of the Child’ and United Nations ‘Rights of the Child’, the issue of corporal punishment was even more confronting for schools. At the same time there were increasing levels of disengagement and alienation of many young people. An emphasis on ‘human relations’, morals and values education, although well intended and important at this time, was not always adopted within the context of students and their milieu, therefore, more often that not, experienced as token ‘projects’ in isolation and destined to failure. Hunter (1994, p. 65) explains that there were links between this bureaucratic adoption of Christian pastoral pedagogy to the needs of social training and that they were intended to regulate individual and group behaviour by conforming and complying to societies rules.

This pattern continued in Western Australia during the early 1970’s as Guidance Officers (Educational Psychologists) were introduced into WADET schools. Then in 1984, the Committee of Inquiry into Education in Western Australia (from here on known as the Beazley Report) recommended that Government schools appoint chaplains for pastoral care and counselling (Recommendation 77). By 1985, The
‘Chaplaincy in School’ programme was established. As part of the most recent Behaviour Management Strategy (WADET, 2008), $8.8 million (AUS) was allocated by the State Government to appoint an extra 50 psychologists into schools for “mental health first aid” (Hiatt, 2009). Also, in 2008, new chaplains were employed in public schools as part of the Behaviour Management in Schools (BMIS) directive and another $10 million dollars invested over four years to hire future school chaplains (Hiat, 2009).

Psychological and pastoral care discourse “formulates a way of organising the world and in doing so it positions people in relation to the categories and classification it constructs” (Olssen, 1999, p. 165). Student behaviour in schools is thus easily categorised as problematic, treated as ‘at risk’, and therefore, individually case managed. Through practices of guidance and counselling, “the confession, the ascribing of meanings to experience” becomes a form of regulation and self-discipline (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 95).

The third emergent pattern in the movement from corporal punishment to pastoral care emerged as ‘The Whole School Approach’. By the 1970’s, the notion of discipline attempted to take on an even more human face as cited in the Dettman Report (1972):

…discipline may be recognized as the process whereby student and staff relationships are structured to maximize the educational, social and emotional well-being and attainments of the students, to attain the most effective and efficient use of human and material resources and to facilitate the maximum satisfaction of needs for all members of the school. (p. 7)

This same report also warned against student suspension as a strategy to manage behaviour:
…if the suspension is being used as a punishment for the purpose of deterring extremely deviant behaviour, then it should be realised that it is relatively ineffective. The students most likely to incur this punishment are the students who dislike it least. For these students, suspension may even, inadvertently, become a reward. Gratification may come from being singled out for the apparently ultimate form of punishment. The student’s peer group may elevate him into a hero who easily manages to accommodate the worst that the school can do. (p. 158)

and,

The major advantage of suspensions would seem to be in its effect of isolating the deviant student from the teaching body rather than the student body. Its greatest effect, therefore, is likely to be an increase in teacher rather than student morale. (p. 159)

As a replacement to suspension, the Dettman Report also recommended a ‘Whole of School Approach’ to discipline. In 1980, at the West Australian Principals secondary schools conference, great concern was expressed regarding disruptive behaviours. Practical resolutions were sought. As a result, the ‘Whole School Approach’ programme evolved and operated throughout twenty schools during the period 1983-1984. The Beazley Report (1984, p. 149) recognised the significance of “care and self-esteem for all who work in schools, and in particular, for students”. The committee used a discussion paper titled ‘The provision of caring environments in secondary school’ (EDWA, 1982), to then develop seven of its own recommendations (70-77) that were based on the need for ‘caring environments’ in secondary schools.

In 1985, a report on Disruptive Behaviour in Schools in Western Australia was commissioned by the Ministry of Education (from here on known as the Louden Report) resulted in recommendations and emphasis that schools adopt and resource the ‘Whole School Approach’ to disruptive behaviour. It was also recommended that school improvement and the enhancement of teachers’ skills, pedagogical and interpersonal, would reduce levels of student alienation and disruption. In addition,
recommendation 18 (p. 33) requested that “resources be made available for the development of a school-wide caring environment”.

The ‘Whole School Approach’, like many models before and after, has a percolating effect. Certain practices and codes evolving from the ministerial recommendations have followed through, resulting in a hegemonic, normalizing function but alienating those who do not conform to the dominant discourse of this approach. Field (2010) for example argues that the ‘Whole School Approach’ is best practice for efficient and effective behaviour management in schools by responding to ‘good behaviour’, therefore, reducing the incidence of “oppositional defiant” students.

4.2.2 The Second Movement: From pastoral care to self-management

During the later part of 1970’s, the main focus in behaviour management policy was on ‘time out’ and ‘self discipline’ to deal with misbehaviour. During 1980 a report was published, *Do Schools Care?* (Dynan, 1980), which was a joint research project by WADET and the Nedlands College of Advanced Education. This report revealed that a significant minority of students regarded schooling as a frustrating, alienating experience. The pastoral care procedures recommended earlier from the *Dettman Report* (1972) did not appear to be helping and it was proposed that this could be to do with the functionalist models of pastoral care “which become mechanisms of social control and administrative convenience, productive of alienation instead of preventing it” (Dynan, 1980, p. 15).

In *A Study of Student Suspensions* (Hyde & Robson, 1984), WADET used research findings from the USA and UK to justify a closer analysis of the contextual and school based factors which contributed to student disaffection and disruptive
behaviour (Slee, 1995a, p. 126). The findings of both these reports expressing students’ views, contextual and school based factors were not acted upon by further research or policymakers. Such inaction and disrespect for the social and contextual situations of students further silenced their voices of dissent. Instead, what was enacted was more emphasis on detention to separate the problem as individual and a return to more simplistic and pathologising, remedial discipline approaches. This discussion on the movement from pastoral care to self-management now focuses on three evolving patterns of policy interpretation. These patterns comprise of: firstly, increases in isolation; secondly, the emphasis on self discipline; and thirdly, an increase in surveillance of students’ behaviour.

The increasing use of isolation and ‘time out’ practices can be traced in the *Dettman Report* (1972) recommendations related to punishment (p. 3). These five recommendations were dominantly related to the phasing out and abolishment of corporal punishment, (even though this had been recommended in many previous reports) and in its place advising that students be detained during the lunch recess with the proviso that the period of detention did not exceed one half of that time period (recommendation 9, p. 161). Two other recommendations related to severely deviant students (pp. 170-1). One of these (10.2) recommended that students be withdrawn for special supervision and counselling and the other (recommendation 11, p. 4), “encourage[d] the development of schemes designed to foster the pastoral care of students” (p. 194).

In 1982, ‘time-out’ rooms and William Glasser’s (1969) discipline model were implemented throughout schools in an attempt to replace corporal punishment. The *Louden Report* (1985) recommended that “each school give consideration to
incorporating a time-out process in its discipline policy” (p. 25), and that schools establish in-school suspension procedures along with time-out rooms. Although the Glasser ten step model is seldom used in schools today, ‘time out’ rooms are still operating; however, generally as a form of detention. The administration, staffing and management of these rooms have often proven to be contentious and expensive. The National Report on Truancy and Exclusion from School (Commonwealth of Australia, 1996) noted that schools were forced to use ‘time out’ programs in an attempt to contain students with challenging behaviours (p. 63). They also concluded that “there is a risk that these programs will be used in a ‘punitive’ manner or in the management of crisis situations instead of being an integrated part of preventative and intervention support strategies” (p. 63). Regardless of this advice, The Behaviour Management in Schools Policy (1998, Section 2) continues to provide specific guidelines for isolation of students from school.

School plans should encompass a description of isolation procedures to be used when students are disruptive. The term ‘isolation’ refers to any situation where a student is removed from the classroom as a result of disruptive behaviour. Isolation therefore includes situations where a contract; or ‘time-out’ room is utilized.

Detention time, both during lunch time and after school, is often a feature of the Good Standing policy practised in many schools today. Such is the case at Anchorage High, in which the teacher, who has demanded detention, or the manager of student services, administers ‘time out’ in an allocated room during lunch or after school. Another form of withdrawal often practised today in many WADET secondary schools, is a ‘buddy’ system negotiated by subject departments, in which students from lower school are placed into the back of upper school classes. Ev, one of the students that I interviewed, explains his version of the consequences of this system:
In science, I had these dark shorts. Everyone kept telling me that they were blue (school colour) so I did not think I would get into trouble, but as soon as I went into science I got sent out to get a dress pass. I argued with them a bit and then I ignored the teacher a bit. Then the teacher yelled my name really loud, twice. I turned around and said “what” and then he said “go straight to the head of science class. As I walked out, he started calling the roll. He called out my name, and then the other students said “you just sent him off to buddy class”. He ignored that so I got into even more trouble for being absent.

What Ev demonstrates here is precisely what the 1996 Commonwealth report on Truancy and Exclusion had predicted; that when time out is used in punitive ways then there is little time or effort given to understanding or preventing the situation or setting in place support strategies.


> The functioning of the school community through a system of relationship, rules, rewards and sanctions designed to develop progressively self discipline within students. (p. 10)

In comparison, discipline policy guidelines from the Education Circular of 1959 *Discipline in the Secondary School and Classroom*, 22 years previous, had emphasised a more preventative approach (p. 27) although the trend was at the same time moving toward encouraging a “good example” of “self-discipline through progressively increasing responsibility” (p. 29). These guidelines had recommended that the subject of discipline take on a new meaning in times of change and therefore warned of the danger of “reversion” to “repressive practices” which had proven to be “ineffective” (p. 20). Regardless of this later advice, the attention on self-discipline has remained in the 2001 version of *Behaviour Management In Schools* policy with continued emphasis on ‘codes of conduct’, ‘good standing’ and ‘good order’;
schools expectations of student behaviour shifting from the context of community and social to the responsible self, the individual. The 2001 and 2008 BMIS policy documents outline how schools should create their own Behaviour Management Plans, filtering into codes of conduct. These codes of conduct place an emphasis on punctuality and conforming to uniform, management of records of behaviour incidents and rewards for compliance and behavioural consequences for non compliance. This guardian culture of individualism (Harre, 1999, p. 267) with a pragmatic shift from custom to code becomes the new mode of social control. As Miller (1990, p. 4) discovered in her search for understanding the hidden cruelty in child-rearing and the roots of violence, it seems “the former practice of physically maiming, exploiting, and abusing children have been gradually replaced by a form of mental cruelty.”

The third and final pattern towards self-regulation was the increase in surveillance of students. The 1980’s was a period when schools in Western Australia were experiencing a shift towards devolution of responsibility. This was accompanied by increased powers of central surveillance and accountability by the State and Commonwealth Education Departments (Whitty et al., 1998, p. 43). In March of 1984, The Beazley Report listed 7 recommendations which related to disruptive students. One of these recommendations (266) was that schools develop and make public their discipline policy (in consultation with parents and local community groups). This was considered to be another way to improve co-ordination of community and government agencies responsible for services to ‘problem’ children.

power. One of the consequences of this power was new technologies of surveillance and exclusion of students from school as increasingly student behaviour became individually monitored and scrutinised. Under ‘neoliberalism’ there has been an escalating emphasis on ‘responsibility’ as a ‘self-actualised’ and ‘ethical self’ - individuals having to fulfil duties and sign contracts and be rewarded accordingly. Treated like any other commodity, individuals become the ‘property’ of the state. Examples of these contracts include Anti-Social-Behaviour-Orders (ASBO), Individual Education Plans (I.E.P’s) and individual behaviour records such as Student Information Systems (SIS). An example of an individual behaviour record produced through SIS and displayed by WADET is replicated below:

![Individual Behaviour Report]

Figure 3: Individual Behaviour Report

[Source: Behaviour Management Release Notes, General Functionality, March 2007, WADET]

WADET contracted RM Asia-Pacific Pty Ltd (RMA) to provide this web-based management system as a mechanism for recording, monitoring and reporting on student behaviour and attendance in all government schools. It was piloted in a number of school from 1999-2000, and then by January 2001 to 9 July 2004 the software management system was rolled out to all WADET schools, including
Anchorage High School. As schools have become more accountable and measurable to outside sources, these electronic modes of individualisation are easily accessed potentially and globally further afield than simply the school’s own regulatory power.

The directive ‘Individual Education Plan’ (IEP) and behaviour contracts issued to students have evolved from schools having to follow directives from their own Behaviour Management Plan. This plan had been dictated under the instructions of the BMIS policy in which principals in schools were to be held accountable. Within this audit culture, it is an easy step to see students as ‘disruptive’ and as a consequence placed on a regulating IEP. In these ways, students are constructed as particular kinds of learners with deficit characteristics residing in them (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 96) rather than what the school may or may not be doing to support these students.

4.2.3 The Third Movement: From self-management to behaviour management

This third and final movement explains how the evolution of discipline in schools moved from a focus on the self to a focus on behaviour management. As schools became more attuned to the influence and realities of the broader neo-liberal project outlined in chapter 3, more control, surveillance and management of individual student behaviour prevailed. The concept of social justice and equality were lost in policy debates as the focus shifted to individual difference and human capital (Wyn & White, 1997, p. 7). Codes of conduct, Individual Education Plans (IEP’s) and behavioural units were developed to discipline young people “from the inside out” so that the individual could be blamed and take greater responsibility for their image
and performance (Wyn & White, 1997, p. 134). Students who did not fit the commodified image in which education was increasingly portrayed in terms of “exchange-value” rather than “use-value” (White & Wyn, 2004, p. 129) were considered non conforming clients and increasingly pushed out of school. I use three significant organising ideas and patterns to discuss and explain how such a shift from self-management to behaviour management occurred. These elements are codes of conduct, the raising of standards and a ‘toughening up’ regime.

First, in discussing the implementation of the code of conduct in school, I turn to The Louden Report (1985) which as its first recommendation states “that, in consultation with their communities, all schools should develop and make public a care and discipline policy”, incorporating principles such as “a consistent mode of applying rules” (p. 20) – hence the evolution of the code of conduct outlining expected behaviours and management of those behaviours.

Thus, by 1987, when corporal punishment was formally abandoned in Western Australia, what followed was the formalisation of Guidelines for School Discipline (1988) by WADET. Then by 1998, the first Behaviour Management in Schools policy was released as a major component of the Making the Difference strategy (1998). The emphasis had by then shifted from discipline and punishment, to attention on violence, bullying and harassment prevention (p. 2) with accompanying instructions on developing codes of behaviour.

Furthermore, in 2006, when it was Government policy that all schools have student attendance audited, the ‘Behaviour Standards and Well Being’ directorate of WADET became more involved with the ‘Keeping Kids in Schools’ programme. This directorate organised a state wide attendance forum consisting of key note
speakers and workshops that linked the ‘Whole School Approach’ and ‘pastoral care’ to student engagement and school improvement as a means of improving attendance. This is exactly the type of linkage which has helped shift the focus from ‘pastoral’-self to the ‘managed’-self.

The second shift from self-management to behaviour management was the greater importance placed on corporate image and the consequent raising of standards in order to maintain that image. In the Beazley Report of 1984, Recommendation 266 encouraged the formulation of individual public statements by schools about their discipline policies and procedures. At the same time, school councils had been established. Initially these councils were supposed to consist of students as well as administrators of the school (Dettman Report, p. 74) and be given responsibility for meaningful decision making regarding student behaviour (Recommendation 14.2, Dettman Report, 1972). Unfortunately, even though these councils developed greater power in the review and implementation of behaviour management policies in their school, it remains that students have little if any representation in important decision making on behalf of the student body that they represent. This is partly due to the escalating control exerted centrally through mandated directives. By the 1990’s, School Development Plans became the key mechanisms to improve standards, outcomes and performance. Since then, WADET published a Plan for Government Schools (1998-2000), containing instructions on the management of behaviour. These plans have continued to be updated and used as a basis of setting WADET strategies, foci, priorities and outcomes (2001-2003, 2004-2007, 2008-2011), directing schools by using mission statements, planning frameworks, objectives, performance measures and targets. The latest direction document for schools, Focus 2011, takes “action in raising literacy and numeracy standards” and “student
behaviour and attendance”. *Behaviour Management in Schools* policies (1998, 2001, and 2008) are directly connected to these plans and are mandated policy in all public schools throughout the state of Western Australia.

In 1996, The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training released a Report of their inquiry, *Truancy and Exclusion from School*. This report highlighted the importance of schools creating conducive learning environments for all students rather than simply relying on suspensions (Commonwealth of Australia, 1996, p. 38). The report also noted that schools were now forced to find their own methods of raising money by marketing the school, in turn attracting corporate sponsorship, or generating fees from ‘clients’ able to pay. This also meant projecting a desirable ethos, based on high academic results, to attract the better students and suspend poorly behaved students, all reasonable courses of action in a competitive market. The report also noted that schools doing so were forced to operate more and more like small businesses because their budgetary expenses were calculated not only on the level of student enrolment and staffing but on minimising per ‘unit’ cost (p. 40). Students then had become an expensive problem! The impact of this corporate image and emphasis on the market is apparent when listening to several students interviewed for my research. These Year 10 students were often made to feel uncomfortable or were actually prevented from participation in extracurricular activities at Anchorage High:

*Ev* - *I almost could not go to the career expo because I was wearing navy blue shorts; they were the correct school colour but they had a logo. I think it was unfair. Like these shorts that I am wearing, they are long enough, comfortable and clean, but still they are not allowed. But the school shorts are really uncomfortable because they come up high and are not good to wear.*
It is also interesting to note that the students’ compulsory school T-shirt uniform has its own ‘logo’, the school crest. These sorts of dynamics that prevent Ev from attending school excursions also often result in students becoming ‘on edge’ and anxious. They feel victimised as Ev explains:

*Ev* - *I was battling to find myself a blue jumper that looked any good.*

*Janean* – *would you get into trouble for the jumper you are wearing today?*

*Ev* – *I am not sure. It depends on the teacher and whether or not they are having a bad day. They might expect you to take it off, but if you say ‘well it is navy blue’, then they say, ‘yes, but it has a logo on it’.*

*Cameron* – *sometimes it is very stupid even if you wear the correct school colour, like you have blue shorts on but they have a line down the side or tiny logo on them, that means you have to go and get a ‘dress pass’ from student services to exempt you for the day.*

Students like Ev and Cameron become easily caught up in a system that does not allow them their own space and sense of identity in schools as they do not fit the new ‘managed’ market discourse.

In summing up the changes in the ways schools operate, the federal government inquiry into truancy and exclusions of young people (1996) stated that, “the new competitive school is not in business to meet the needs of those experiencing the most problems” (p. 39). In fact, school principals, empowered to act as both prosecutor and judge in determining disciplinary outcomes, were under budgetary pressure to suspend or exclude those students who required most help. The same parliamentary inquiry was told that, “changes in discipline regulations which give individual school principals the power to expel have exacerbated the tendency to discard students who present difficulties, or who could be seen to detract from the
image of a school...” (p. 40). The report elaborated further in detailing the damage to students and their families as a result of this new corporate model:

Parents are increasingly expected to contribute financially to schools. Some families are unable and others unwilling to contribute to a system which is provided from the public purse and the consequences for the young people from these families are embarrassment, humiliation and negative attitudes to schools. Schools where the breach of strict uniform codes is accompanied by punishment or prohibition from attendance at sports and other school events, or where the failure to pay the extra costs of excursions, visits or camps means exclusion from these activities, are not comfortable environments for students from families which cannot or do not provide for these expenses (p. 39).

The emphasis on marketing has placed more pressure on schools to keep up a clean image and reputation. Students who do not fit this image are often removed. Yet, as Hyde and Robson (1984, p. 46) state, “it would be unfortunate if suspension had to be used by schools to help solve their problems” as market reforms continue to escalate. Students are separated and excluded because they do not ‘fit the image’. These are the students who typically encounter poor relations in high schools as they have trouble conforming to codes of conduct and can be suspended from school because they break the rules. Yet, Max, another Year 10 student, elaborates on how easy suspension at the school level can be:

Student services pounce on you, get on your case, they are like breathing down your throat. They try to suspend you as well, like if you don’t tell them what they want to hear, they say you are withholding information and stuff. But you can’t always do that because that is like dobbing on a friend.

Max explains that it is more important for students like him to maintain strong bonds and relationships with their peers than conform to rules that make no sense to them in their identity formation. Noddings (1984, p. 24) states that “caring involves stepping out of one’s own personal frame of reference into the other’s”, considering
their point of view, their objective needs and what they expect of us. Max’s attention then is on his friends, not on himself.

The third and final shift I identify in the movement from self-management to behaviour management is the ‘toughening up’ regime. This regime has resulted in more exclusion and suspension of students from school and the establishment of behaviour centres to remove them from school. I trace this shift by beginning with the Dettman Report of 1972 which strongly advised against the use of corporal punishment in schools and hence recommended a replacement:

In principle, the committee does not approve of corporal punishment… There does not appear to be any positive advantage that comes from caning a student rather than applying some other form of negative sanction. (p. 159)

Adding to this advice was Recommendation 272 of The Beazley Report (1984):

…that corporal punishment as a means of dealing with disruptive students be discontinued and greater authority and force be given to other sanctions, including within school suspension and suspensions from school. (p. 366)

Ironically, suspension in the time of the Dettman Report (1972) was often portrayed as a failure by schools and education to engage students. By the 1980’s, however, more power was given to schools to suspend students. A pattern was then set in motion to increase suspensions and exclusions as more prescriptive policies, strategies and directions were administered to schools. In 1987 when Guidelines for Student Exclusion Panels were issued by WADET, the power was vested to principals to suspend students for up to ten days, and thirty or more days for exclusions. Previously, principals had been required to obtain the approval of district officers even though many informal suspensions were not always recorded.
With the increased focus on suspension and exclusion aided by an unsympathetic media and political interferences (Kovacs, 2009; & Hiatt, 2007), there was now a strong shift towards individualising the behaviour problem. This shift took the focus away from schools and pedagogy to the ‘problem kid’ (Brannock, 2000, p. 35) who requires management, isolation and generally a ‘tougher’ stance so that the student does not become a repeat offender. A review of statistics of student suspensions from WADET shows that in 1994 there were 1,630 student suspensions in Western Australian government schools (Commonwealth of Australia, 1996, p. 12), yet only three years later, in 1997, there were more than 12,000 students suspended (Carpenter, 2003). Ironically, this statistic was hailed as progress in 2003, by the then, Minister of Education, Alan Carpenter, who at the time was comparing suspension rates in a media statement by the State Government Department of Premier and Cabinet. WADET had already launched a BMaD Strategy in August 2001 with a $64.5 million funding commitment over four years to 275 of its schools. By 2003, the Minister of Education made yet another announcement in which $28 million over four years was released for this same strategy to operate in 44 target high schools. In 2004, still another 7,610 students were suspended. In 2005, WADET’s Director-General (Paul Albert) claimed that the additional BMaD funding was helping to improve student behaviour even though 7,645 students had been suspended that year (WADET media statement, 12th August, 2006). He stated that “suspension gives students and their parents the chance to consider their actions, before the student returns to school with new goals”.

As a consequence, “every day, hundreds of students are being removed” from school through suspensions (Zimmer, 1999, section 1, para. 1). In 2006 the number of suspensions from WADET schools was still high at 10,000 out of a total of
250,000 students, (WADET media statement 27th August 2007). One in 25 students is not a statistic to be ‘glossed over’ as was done in this media statement, claiming that the increase was believed to be due to “more accurate reporting of incidents” (p. 1) and the tougher stance taken by schools. By 2007, 10,536 students were suspended from a total of 252,000 students (WADET media statement, 16th March 2008). The then Minister of Education, Mark McGowan, stated “that this increase on the numbers in past years show that considerable toughening-up has already occurred” and that suspensions had been “streamlined” so that they could be sped up (p. 1). By 2008, 11,417 students were suspended (Hiatt, 2009) and WADET’s Director-General, Sharyn O’Neill, made no apology for the increase, claiming that bad behaviour would not be tolerated in Western Australian schools and that new electronic reporting that had been introduced into schools (SIS) made it easier for schools to report these suspensions. In 2009, suspensions continued to increase (12,529), yet the Director-General still claimed that this was the tougher stance taken on disruptive behaviour and that because more than half (57.2%) of those students had only been suspended once that they had learned their lesson (WADET media statement, 21st May 2010).

Suspensions have proven over time to be problematic for schools and education departments. Many inconsistencies are reflected in schools decisions about durations and reasons for suspension. Some schools suspend students longer for class disruption than for assault. Some suspend for truancy while others do not. Smoking induces suspension in some but not in others, the same for illicit drugs and alcohol. As Slee (1988, p. 9) explains; “time of the week, number of disciplinary problems already dealt with on a particular day, predisposition and humour of the incumbent” are but a few of the variables. The illusion of ‘integration’ in many school behaviour
management plans is accentuated when students deemed as disruptive continue to be segregated from a regular classroom at an increasing rate.

In 1981, a group of principals in the metropolitan area of Western Australia requested the establishment of a behaviour centre for students considered to be challenging. A consultant, Ross Colliver, was commissioned to investigate. When the principals’ request was not supported by WADET, this working party made a submission to the Beazley Committee of Inquiry on the same issue. Ross Colliver’s report, *Severely Disruptive Behaviour in School: A Review of causes and school responses* (1983), rebuked the value of off-site behaviour units. The literature review of this report, however, did draw special attention to the range of social and school-related factors contributing to disruptive behaviour. In March of 1984, *The Beazley Inquiry* listed seven recommendations which related to disruptive students. One of these suggested conditions under which the setting up of offsite withdrawal units might be considered (Recommendation 271).

In 2007, WADET made a decision to build off-site behaviour centres throughout the state without any consultation or evidence based research. In 2008, Mark McGowan (then Minister of Education) announced in a media statement (WADET, 16th March, 2008), that “schools crackdown on bad behaviour” and “three new behaviour centres would be trialled” for secondary students throughout the state. This was in addition to the five primary behaviour centres already in operation. The establishment and rapid expansion of behaviour units in the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) occurred in the late 1970’s in a similar desperate attempt to segregate and control disruptive students and reduce suspensions. The rate of expansion of these units was such a concern that Her Majesty’s Inspectors (HMI)
reviewed all 239 behaviour units in 1978. As Slee (1995a, p. 81) confirms, these behaviour centres “provide a regulatory mechanism for schools’ inability to respond to, and value, diversity”. Once such a provision is established, as has occurred in Western Australia with the same ‘moral panic’, “it becomes politically difficult to alter that service delivery” (Slee, 1995a, p. 81) and even worse can lead to “an uncritical acceptance of the status quo” (Mongon, 1988, p. 195).

4.3 Discussion

In tracing recurring patterns and irregularities regarding the evolution of behaviour management and discipline in schools, it is clear that a shift occurred, moving from the role of controlling the masses and providing pastoral services, to one of self-regulation and behaviour management (Ball, 2006, p. 132). This resulted in policy that is more prescriptive, politicised and mandated. The limitations of behaviour management policies become apparent when tracing various recommendations from key historical reports developed outside of schools and passed down through the educational organization for implementation. In this scenario the “school was perceived as a policy destination rather than as a policy-making site” (Slee, 1995a, p. 130).

The market emphasis that dominates often means that policy reports are already politicised before their recommendation phase. A case in point is the informal suspensions administered by principals throughout the state of Western Australia but not recorded in the official study of student suspensions conducted by Hyde and Robson (1984). Another example is enforcement of school uniform before the official “Dress requirements for student in WA public schools” was implemented in 2007. Other attempts to de-contextualise behaviour occurs when reports sit on desks
as was the case with Colliver’s (1983) report, *Severely Disruptive Behaviour in School: A Review of causes and school responses*, and Dynan’s (1980) *Do schools care?* At least these reports were, however, an attempt to acknowledge record and question a perceived problem. It is interesting to note that since these reports were conducted in the 1980’s, no more reports have been requested, conducted or compiled on school behaviour and discipline in Western Australia. Policies such as *Behaviour Management, Uniform, Good Standing, Attendance* and *Exclusion*, however, continue to be legislated and mandated without any consultation or evidence. *Behaviour Management in Schools* policy is further consolidated and mandated not by genuine review or audits from schools, but through General Agreements between SSTU (State Schools Teachers Union) and WADET continuing to cement and endorse an emphasis on behaviour management and discipline in schools (2007, Clause 22; 2009, Item 55.1).

Thus, *Behaviour Management in Schools* policy guidelines, whilst couched in terms of care, safety and fairness are actually causing more harm and concern for students and their families. In just over thirty five years, school discipline policies emphasising student welfare have shifted from pastoral care producing “more students capable of leading socially constructive and personally satisfying lives” (*Beazley Report*, 1984, p. 6) to codes of conduct culminating in more suspensions and withdrawal from regular school programmes. Initially, government guidelines required schools to have a range of mandatory alternatives to suspension. That is, suspension was to be the last, not the first, response to incidents. The evidence from the case studies conducted by Hyde and Robson (1984, p. 49) into student suspensions suggested “that suspensions do not always occur as a result of rational
sequential processes” and that “there should be regular opportunities for schools to reflect on their practices”.

There has been a dramatic shift in the thinking around the removal of students from schools. Now the blame is placed on children and their families. In September of 2006, the Department’s then Director-General, Paul Albert, claimed in a media statement, titled “school suspensions lead to positive changes” that “suspension gives students and their parents the chance to consider their actions before the student returns to schools with new goals”. The students’ behaviour history is subsequently recorded on SIS to continue to ‘brand’ them, their behaviour and possibly taint their future career paths. Hyde and Robson (1984, p. 50) tried to warn of the dangers of this when they stated that “unless reputations and identities can be changed it is unlikely that any sanction will be effective.” It is very difficult, if not impossible to remove the data recording student behaviour and suspensions that have been placed into student information systems. The students future welfare is not considered when “schools crackdown on bad behaviour” (WADET Media statement, 16th March 2008) and once a student is excluded from a public school they will not be allowed into another school but catered for in a behaviour centre (McGowan in Media statement, 16th March 2008). Regardless of past lessons and recommendations from the Dettman (1972), Beazley (1984) and Hyde and Robson (1984) reports, The Minister of Education continues to argue that “this historic change to the way exclusions and suspensions operate will help to restore greater discipline and standards” (WADET Media statement, 16th March, 2008).

I have argued in this chapter that Behaviour Management in Schools policy is generated within a context of cultural, economic and historical dominant ideologies.
Present policy responses and programs are pointless if ‘grafted’ on top of the school’s curriculum, as Slee (1992a) explains:

They do little to shift the residual resistance and alienation that may be nurtured by assessment practices or discipline sanctions that are non-redemptive. If failure and alienation are encouraged by a curriculum that denies the importance of certain groups along class, ethnicity or gender lines, or by teaching that obscures the objective for some students because of limited pedagogy, then the welfare of students is permanently jeopardised. (pp. 7, 8)

Of concern, is the present political obsession and unabated expenditure in maintaining a market culture. This has occurred at the same time as the evolution of mandated policy, often resulting in knee jerk, look good, quick fix actions rather than concern and care based on relationships. WADET’s BMaD Strategy, (Launched in August 2001) with $64.5 million funding commitment over four years to 275 schools, shows money often distributed in ad hoc, band-aid, quick fix ways. An example of how one state district divided and utilised their funding in 2006 is presented below:

A funding totaling of $7 million to be spent over the four years and includes four key initiatives; Focus Area 1: $3M to reduce class sizes in Years 8 and 9, Focus Area 2: $2.5M for identified schools with behavioural issues, Focus Area 3: $1M for intensive training in behaviour management, and Focus Area 4: $0.5M for support to schools through specific initiatives.

In 2003, a further $28 million dollars was released by WADET for spending on BMaD and then again in 2008, $16.5 million was released. In contrast to an emphasis on spending money on marketing and compliance, other research (Slee, 1992b) indicates that:

Where schools and departments have sought to collaborate with the schools community and enlist all players – teachers, parents, students, school and regional administrators and their various representative organisations – in the policy-development process, there seems to be a greater sense of securing greater achievements. (pp 194-5)
Added to these findings are those from the *Commonwealth Report on Truancy and Exclusion from Schools*, (1996, p. 74) which noted after examining a number of schools, those that stood out as having principles of good service delivery. These schools used flexibility of structure, environment and curriculum content that suited the special needs of non-mainstream students; involved and cooperated with parents, the welfare community and other relevant government agencies and had a strong focus on teaching the young person and not the subject.

4.4 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter we have seen how shifting discourses of punishment and pastoral care share common patterns and elements of control, isolation, and the marketing of schools. I have used ‘movements’ to explain shifts, inconsistencies and consistencies; a filtering of some discourses and a reinforcement of others. In the first movement there was an overall emphasis on mass schooling for control and a shift to developing pastoral care to replace corporal punishment. This pastoral, self-disciplining evolved into the ‘Whole School Approach’ which then merged into control of the individual via codes of conduct and individual education plans. During this process, the government moved from being a welfare provider to a state regulator (Ball, 2006, p. 132). This political change expresses contradictory themes as attempts to emphasise the importance of care and relationship in teaching and learning struggle alongside the push to market and manage limited resources resulting in greater demands for control and conformity. Such economic marketing of schools alongside mandated policies and regulation increases auditing, accountability and surveillance in schools.
By examining the origins and consequences of everyday behaviour and illuminating internal and external constraints, it is more likely that one can uncover a wider possible set of alternatives for future action (Berlak & Berlak, 1981, p. 230), a theme I shall return to when discussing the significance of relationships in chapter 7. In the next chapter, I explain how I gathered student voices to confirm the argument that marketing and compliance are taking precedence over cooperative and caring relations in teaching and learning communities.
CHAPTER 5 – THE NATURE OF CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY

5.1 Critical ethnography ‘unearthed’

In the first four chapters, the global and historical policy context of the research has been outlined for the purpose of understanding the complexity of school life. In this chapter the application of general theoretical and philosophical underpinnings to the research problem is discussed. Drawing on the tradition of critical ethnography, this thesis examines how students experience, interpret and understand behaviour management in school. Smyth, Angus, Down and McInerney (2006) explain the ethical and political urgency of doing critical ethnography:

> when the stakes are clearly as high as they are in communities that have been devastated by the ravages of economic restructuring and globalization, and the people in them systematically pathologized, rendered passive, and excluded from a voice in their own destiny, then we need a robust research approach that is up to the task of describing and explaining what is happening and with what effects. (p. 125)

Defining critical ethnography is no easy matter because of its messy, complicated and ongoing nature, bending and evolving throughout the entirety of the research. Due to this multiple shifting between theory and practice, it is easier to place it within a discourse because “method is fully embedded in theory and theory is expressed in method” (Quantz, 1992, p. 449). By implementing and engaging in the process of critical ethnography in this way, it becomes more apparent what it actually is. This research practice has emerged from the field of critical pedagogy therefore, lends itself to “dialogue about a cultural context to develop critical action” (Brooke & Hogg, 2004, p. 117). For this reason its main purpose is to challenge the
dominant stories and versions of events such as behaviour management policy and its impact on young people. Brown (2004, p. 299) explains that as critical ethnography unites the political and the personal, it is more sensitive to the political interests of these young people and committed to altering the conditions that oppress them. Understood in this way, it is clear to see that as a critical ethnographer I become an “author [who] is a living, contradictory, vulnerable, evolving multiple self, who speaks in a partial, subjective, culture-bound voice” (Foley, 2002, p. 474). Much introspection, autobiography and memory work comes from this method of researching, but once inside the realm of understanding and interpreting the research, it is very difficult to find an exit from it.

This chapter has three major purposes. The first is to elaborate how critical social research methods can illuminate the problem of behaviour management discourses in schools. In particular, I explain the methodological importance of building trust and respect by listening to the voices of those students who are typically marginalized and silenced on matters that affect them directly and deeply. Through the use of “voiced research” (Smyth & Hattam, 2001), I make problematic the authoritative and undemocratic choices, decisions and practices often made on the behalf of students. This problem-posing approach unsettles traditional behaviour management strategies in classrooms by critiquing current assumptions and misconceptions informed as they are by fear, suspicion and poor relationships. As Crotty (1998) reminds us, critical social research is about critique and social action:

Critical inquiry cannot be viewed as a discrete piece of action that achieves its objectives and comes to a close. With every action taken, the context changes and we must critique our assumptions again. Viewed in this way, critical inquiry emerges as an ongoing project. It is a cyclical process (better seen, perhaps, as a spiralling process for there is movement forward and upward) of reflection and action. (p. 157)
Second, I provide a space to describe the power of narrative stories by weaving my own narrative as researcher and teacher into the research process. As Freire (2004, p. 34) explains “the future does not make us. We make ourselves in the struggle to make it”. Third, in pursuing this larger transformative project, I detail some key features of critical ethnography that I engaged in when searching the voices of the students. I begin by making the familiar strange by interrupting the status quo of behaviour management in schools policy, therefore, able to find some meaning from social action.

5.2 Discovering meaning from social action

The main purpose of choosing to ‘do’ critical ethnography as a method in this research is to ‘get up close’ to the case study site, Anchorage High and then share with the reader the emerging stories, field notes and journal jottings from the first interactions with participants. The aim, then, is to create ‘a picture’ of how critical ethnography and critical social research theory come together in particular places. Kincheloe and McLaren (2005, p. 305) note that “critical researchers often regard their work as a first step toward forms of political action that can redress the injustices found in the field site”. Like them, I wanted to examine how critical ethnography could assist in making the personal more political as a means towards building political solidarity with students and in the process learning about myself as a teacher/researcher (Brown 2004, p. 311). A journal entry begins to explain some of the complexity of ‘doing’ critical ethnography:

First, finding an opening – delegation of duties, people so busy…the school managers offering to find the ‘pointy end kids’ for my ‘sample’ – I never asked for a ‘sample’! They keep reaffirming that I will not get any volunteers because the task (to take a consent form home) is ‘too high order’ and kids are apathetic. [February 2007]
This journal entry serves as a powerful reminder that, “the field site no longer can be considered simply the geographical location of the study; it is also the location where geopolitical vectors of power crosscut the cultural terrain under investigation” (McLaren, 1995, p. 274). As critical ethnographers we are consistently engaged in making sense of social relations through the discourses used in the field (McLaren, 1995, p. 274). This reflection is revealed in three ways: with self, with colleagues and with students. I will use journal and field notes to elaborate on all three features. Firstly, the field notes below reveal the reflection of self (me as researcher):

When introducing my research to student service team, I noticed the struggle to maintain initial authority in my own research plan as it was placed in the hands of management teams. Sometimes others are wishing to manipulate and filter the selection of students to mould and divert the research into another direction. Their suggestion was firstly to pick out some Year 10’s that had been troublesome and then to appease my intention that it be cross board, a decision was made by some of the team to use SIS (Student Information System) to generate a list of 45 students. It was decided that they would become ‘the sample’ that I could use. I had planned otherwise and really sincerely wanted to introduce my research to the entire cohort of 250 students. [6th March 2007]

One of the truisms of this type of research is that it changes you. Brooke and Hogg (2004, p. 115) explain that “in the research encounter with some ‘Other’ culture, your understanding of your own culture and your own self will transform.” This becomes more obvious as I reflect and question in my own field notes in these examples in which I try to understand the meaning of particular actions and series of events that occurred in the first few days at Anchorage High:

I was too amenable at the first meeting with Student Support Staff and felt that I lost some of the integrity of my research and its intentions, purpose and design. I had made a lot of assumptions and had chosen to ‘block out’ some of those dynamics. It is critical to the design methodology of my research that students are not ‘picked’ by any method or criteria, random or not. It is important for me not to rely on or depend on ‘personality’ as a means to establish my research goals. If students do not volunteer to participate (as already predicted by deputy principals) then I will need to revisit my methodology and not before. If the school
does not allow me to speak to the Year 10 cohort, then do I try to take my research elsewhere? Considering the ethical procedure to get into the school, I am not too keen to go down that path again. I also need to remember that a lot of assumptions are made by people in schools as a way of dealing with complexities of social change, so I need to continue to reinstate for myself and others that I have a professional approach to this research. [Field notes, 20th March 2007]

Ruth Behar (cited in Foley, 2002, p. 474) explains how ethnography that is more emotionally open is vulnerable to “a long, irreversible voyage through a tunnel with no apparent exit.” The ethnographer, as I have demonstrated in this journal entry, is much more willing to utilize introspection, intuition, personal memories and experiences. In doing so, I utilise my commonsense experiences of life as much as I use the abstract theoretical frameworks. The rational is not privileged over the emotional. Foley (2002, p. 475), claims that by “using a much more robust, embodied, situated language allows auto ethnographic interpreters to engage more fully the intractability of life.” The act of writing itself becomes a way of being and knowing and makes meaning through dialogue with my reflective self.

The second mode of reflection in ‘doing’ critical ethnography is revealed in collaborating and discussing my experience with colleagues. An example written to colleagues during field work demonstrates more of this introspection, intuition and intractability:

Subject: school visit

Hi

I just wanted to touch base with you both in regards to my research. Out of the blue yesterday, I was informed that the Year 10 Assembly that I have been patiently awaiting for was going to be held today at 8:30am. Well off I went with my bundle of consent forms and addressed the cohort. That went really well. The students appeared interested and engaged in the information. There were two hundred and fifty of them! There were quite a few administrators and other staff there to address students about their vocational issues, so I am not sure how well it will flow now or be followed up as I had to leave. I guess I am feeling the ‘lone ethnographer’ syndrome and just would appreciate some
‘experience’ from you both as to how to keep charged in all of this. I do not want to have the staff of the school offside, yet do not think they are terribly sure about why I would want to address or even ask students about these things. I just hope that some of those consent forms start appearing!

In collegiality

As I have demonstrated in this account, ethnographers are not concerned with presenting distanced, scientific and objective interpretations of the social world, but rather those “that recognize the subjective reality of the experiences of those people who constitute and construct the social world” (Pole & Morrison, 2003, p. 5).

The third mode of introspection occurred during the interview process. Whilst transcribing interviews, I observed myself empathizing with students as my own childhood memories resurfaced. This self reflection became a powerful reflexive tool as I became intimately involved in the research and the social phenomenon being studied (Quantz, 1992, p. 472). In the following transactions, I provide an example.

In this case, I was discussing with the students the use of corporal punishment in schools.

Nat – my Mum thinks they should bring back the cane.

Mel – I don’t

Janean – it is being debated at present in England and Australia. (I also share and discuss a newspaper article (Hiatt 2007) regarding a proposal by Tony Abbott, Federal Minister of Health, to use more authoritarian discipline measures in schools.

Nat -it wouldn’t be for petty stuff like the old days, but for really bad stuff.

Mel – so what do you mean by bad stuff? Just schools?

Nat – in the old day’s people got used to the fact that they would get a whack on the hand. They survived; they are all fine, not mentally disabled yet.

Mel – how would you know if you were going to get it?
Janean – good question. I think what ‘Nat’ is saying is that there used to be an ultimatum, a threat to make you behave. The other extreme then is when people misbehave on the streets with their cars, then simply get a warning or lose their car for a day. The other side of the debate, however, is people are harmed. Like ‘Mel’ says, who defines what is bad; it becomes subjective, depending on who has the power of the cane and making the decisions. Who is also to say that it is not causing mental damage or trauma? How do people know? What may mentally disturb someone may not affect everyone the same (like the different pain threshold we were discussing earlier). I used to get strapped. I find it difficult to be close to my parents, and still see them as authoritarian. I was a sensitive and busy child. My parents probably also had it done to them. I don’t think it really helps behaviour. I agree that we do need boundaries. I have friends whose children I don’t like visiting because they run amuck, and think they can do, say and be however they like.

Mel – they think they can get away with everything, they ruin your house. I have a child I babysit sometimes like that. When she has to go to bed, she says ‘no, my Mum is in charge’, and keeps saying ‘no’. She is 5 and won’t go to sleep. Even when she chooses to be looked after by me.

Janean – yes and those things can remain a problem. They can’t seem to make choices, don’t know what they want and start playing games with people. It does not do them any favours as we all need to learn some boundaries and not think we can just do whatever we like whenever. It is the hardest thing in the world, when to say ‘no’ and what rules are important, as any parent will tell you. Some grace is often a determining factor.

In reflecting on these interviews, I tried establishing what these thoughts and actions meant not only for both me but also for the students involved in meaning making (Watts, 1993, p. 59) as demonstrated in the journal entry below:

What I notice when transcribing the interviews, is that I sometimes reveal just as much about myself as the students do, especially when I am trying to prompt their responses, extend the conversation or encourage more depth on a topic – even at times when I am trying to steer the conversation along a certain path or direction – I use my own experiences (especially of my own adolescence or of parenting my own teenagers). [26th July 2007]

In the interviews, as I became more familiar with the students, their lives and the process of maintaining dialogue, mutual trust developed allowing for relaxed and “purposeful conversations” (Burgess, 1988). This is confirmed again by my field notes:
Transcribing, I realize how much students generate conversation together. 4 students seems too many but with 2 or 3 speaking together, ones thoughts generate ideas and experiences of the other so the conversation tends to flow on. These students came in small groups from the same class, so they often already bring a group cohesion and support which means that they easily share experiences; anything from pain to joy [20th June 2007].

Not only was this fieldwork reflective of my own meaning making but also the student dialogue took on richer verbal forms and more personal questions and expressions (Nespor, 1997, pp. 232-3). Students were able to use bridging devices to make transitions from one topic to the next, bouncing “off any element in the previous speaker’s comments or made thematic connections to the previous turn” (Nespor, 1997, p. 232). Coming to this realisation made me wonder just how rich this type of ethnographic data collection could evolve over time at the same site. As Pole and Morrison (2003, p. 8) confirm because ethnographers are concerned with the “significance and meaning of social action for the actors upon whom the research is focused” they try to catch the behaviours, values and attitudes that prevail.

This chapter will now elaborate further with more specific discussion on the features, nature and purpose of critical ethnography relating to my research process using the themes of triangulation, dialogic spaces, narrative, participant observer and analysis.

5.2.1 Layering and Triangulation

Critical ethnography as a research approach enabled me to layer a combination of field notes, journal reflections and participant transactions, together with critical social theory, capturing the realities of behaviour management regimes from the point of view of those most directly affected; students themselves. This layering approach as an evolving process involved a tapestry of events, woven together over
time to create a picture. Ezzy (2002, p. 149) argues that such “writing is an act of constructing meaning”. The final challenge, however, was in keeping the complex tapestry together. One way of dealing with this challenge was to ‘triangulate’ the anecdotal data with the theory and the collection of student stories, doing research with rather than on the ‘other’. Even so, Kincheloe and McLaren, (2005, p. 311) warn that no one pristine interpretation exists that enables the production of authoritative knowledge and that “researchers must always speak/write about the world in terms of something else in the world”. Ones interactions with the objects of our inquiries, “are always complicated, mercurial, unpredictable, and of course complex” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 317), and as with all methods and forms of representation, will be partial, thereby both limiting as well as illuminating our work (Eisner, 1988, p. 15).

With these tensions in mind, I chose to combine historical (genealogical), ethnographic, case study and policy research methods to create the complex tapestry of events that surrounded. This resulted in using the research problem as ‘methodological negotiator’ (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 317) resisting any concrete placement and allowing elasticity and awareness of the diverse tools available in my own toolbox (p. 320). By getting “behind the curtain” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 324) and moving beyond assimilated experience, I was able to expose the way ideology constrains yet confronts the way power reproduces itself. To do so, I “employ[ed] a plethora of research methodologies” (p. 324).

5.2.2 Developing dialogic spaces

As critical ethnography emerges from critical pedagogy one of its main goals is to engage students in the “dialogic work of understanding their social location and
developing cultural actions appropriate to that location” (Brooke & Hogg, 2004, p. 116). I attempt then to develop as a ‘dialogic knower’ or ‘witness’ to the culture of school behaviour management, positioning myself as a researcher who is much less imperial or authoritative. This process obligates me to create research spaces that are sensitive to questions of power and identity, and appreciative of relationships based on reciprocity, trust and care towards participants (Foley, 2002, p. 475). Smyth et al. (2006, p. 129) explain that “ethnographic approaches that have an overt agenda of changing the status quo, operate in ways that uncover perspectives and voices of those who are silenced or muted, and represent them as counter narratives.” By using critical ethnography in this manner, students’ voices are in the foreground during the process of understanding social phenomenon such as behaviour management and this dialogue links us together through discourse, enabling us to have moments of reflection and action (Shor, 1992, p. 86). Thus, it is no longer an ethnography in pursuit of knowledge about the other, rather it aims to “foster political agency with the other” (Brown, 2004, p. 306). By linking my research analysis to the wider social structures and systems of power relationships operating within schools and society, it is possible to “get beneath the surface of oppressive structural relationships” (Harvey, 1990, p. 11). McFadden and Munns (2002, p. 364) reinforce the point that it is the students themselves who will be able to tell us what works – what it is that engages them, and that is relevant and real.

These dialogic spaces are like “the cracks in her fingers” through which “a silver light fell” (Flanagan, 2008, p. 222), a mode used by this novelist to capture ‘spaces’ and possibilities that can be discovered when digging beneath the surface and searching the counter narratives. Max, a Year 10 student participant helps explain what I mean by developing this dialogic space, as he delivers threads of his
communication, binding us to him by reflective action (Shor, 1992, p. 86). He is trying hard to fit in at school and get somewhere in life. His ambition is to become an engineer, but he remains caught in a loop of behaviour constraints that are out of touch with his own world and culture. Max reveals what works for him as he states; “it is like I was talking about before, we notice things. We want our teachers to notice things”. Like ‘Mathininni’ in Flanagan’s (2008) novel ‘The Wanting’, students such as Max survive school by “clinging to the smallest things” (p. 222). Max’s call for ‘being heard’ and ‘becoming somebody’ (Wexler, 1992) was very much the focus of his narrative and his experiences of school. Max has a vivid imagination. He used to think there were tigers in the trees from watching and reading ‘Jungle Book’ as a child. The disappointment and frustration develops early in his schooling, when he discovers that this type of imagination is not welcome. No longer is his ‘self’ considered imaginative or creative at play, instead his playful drama is labelled mischievous and considered defiant.

Max – I am planning on doing technical engineering.

Janean – Tell me more

Max – working with lots of different people and building things. I will start with building skate ramps then work my way up. Then maybe even manage more, like a diploma. But the first thing my Dad would say is about my report...it always has on it that I talked too much, even when I was little.

Ali – mine too, my mouth always gets me into trouble.

Max – I believe you need to know the basics, but if someone gives you a chance to sit down and observe what it is you wanted to do, like being a lawyer, now you have to work hard to get there, but if you did a lot of observation, after a while you get to learn lots from that. Do you know I nearly got expelled from kindergarten? I always had this big imagination. I used to think there were tigers in the trees. I used to watch ‘Jungle Book’ about tigers and lions. So I told the others that there were tigers in the trees. The others would not go outside because they were scared. When they did, I would make a roaring sound. I caused so much trouble by just having fun. I nearly got expelled because I did not want to
stop and have ‘lay down’ time. Instead I would want to be jumping around.

2 weeks later...

Janean – so has anyone had an episode they want to talk about?

Max – yeah, when I was in Year 8. I got a ‘juve’ (juvenile) caution together with some guys I went to Anchorage primary school with. We had finished school early; so we went through the walkway past our old primary school. There were others going through there as well. My mate got one of the cleaners’ trolleys, he was going as fast as he could, then turned a corner, it went flying against a wall and it broke to pieces; then these other guys started – they decided to do that too. They went ahead so did not get blamed at all, only we got into trouble. ‘Cops’ (the police) came to the school to get us, even though it had happened after school. We got ‘juvenile warnings’ and my Dad was not happy.

I use the above script to illustrate the relationship between the theory and the data for “it is through analysis and imagination that we penetrate the ignorance and blindness that surround social inequities and find ways to alleviate human misery” (Purpel, 2001, p. 17). Max’s ‘dream’ of becoming an engineer or lawyer are unlikely to be fulfilled as he becomes tangled in the culture of control, continually trying to ‘do the right thing’, without breaking into the ‘right mould’. Similarly, a research report devised by the Australian Schools Commission, (Collins, 1980), encapsulates the views of secondary schooling held by school leavers. This report revealed that the overly academic orientation of schooling had distorting effects on students because it hindered rather than helped the maturation process of most students (p. 135). Two important and constantly recurring themes of complaints from students were, firstly, the school was primarily not a very caring or nurturing environment for most and secondly, disciplinary practices in schools were inappropriate (p. 135). Narrative scripts such as Max’s reflect similar themes of disenchantment, alienation and disengagement of large numbers of students from the cultural experiences of schooling. The respondents of the report, such as the students I interviewed, suggest that schools hinder rather than help them in their personal development and identity.
formation (Collins, 1980, p. 140). In contrast, by opening up Max’s narrative, the counter information exposed becomes a ‘dialogic space’, an effective act of resistance (Deluze, 2006, p, 322) as it “is human and an act of art”.

When conducting student interviews, some such as Max had great determination and urgency to share their stories with others hoping to make a difference or change situations for the better. Students like Max wanted their identities to scream loud and clear on the page and were not happy to think that pseudonyms would shadow this. As Schultz (2001, p. 20) states, students like Max are “more often willing to participate in the construction of knowledge through talk.”

5.2.3 Adopting a reflexive position

Being reflexive involves employing an ongoing process of self monitoring. It enables me to be conscious of shifts and new possibilities of understandings in and around the research process. Anderson (1989) explains:

> Reflexivity in critical ethnography, then involves a dialectical process among, a) the researchers’ constructs, b) the informants commonsense constructs, c) the research data, d) the researchers ideological biases and e) the structural and historical forces that informed the social construction under study. (p. 255).

Thompson and McHugh (1990, p. 31) define reflexivity as the capacity to reflect upon oneself so that one’s values, practices and knowledge are not taken for granted. For me, it involves purposeful reflection and consequential action because of the reciprocal relationship between the theory and the data. Foley (2002, p. 486) explains that reflexivity involves holding dichotomies like science and humanities/art in a useful tension. Being reflexive in research then is to know, map, and explain the lived reality of ‘cultural others’ whilst trying to tap into introspection, intuition, and emotion. The reflective journal that I constantly carry
and scribble in becomes a worthy ethnographic tool in capturing this spirit of reflexivity. Consider my own reflections on gaining “rite of passage” (Rist, 1981, p. 266) into Anchorage High:

Introducing myself and research to staff. I started looking at problems as the beginning of solutions so went along with greater determination and confidence.

The Year 10 Assembly (introducing my research to the Year 10 cohort). This had been postponed several times but I was again determined to go ahead. I had re-assured the school services and management that my address would be short and succinct just as I had done at the staff assembly. It is almost better to reveal very little of what my intentions are in order to gain the approval of many of the gatekeepers. I am also learning to persist with reminders – send more calls and e-mails to keep my research ‘alive’. Finally after one of those calls, I discovered that the assembly would be at 8:30am the next morning! [20th March 2007]

Another reflexive turn…a debrief. Talking it over with other researchers. Seeing the soft vulnerable spaces as opportunities rather than ‘wounds’. Trying to take part in the community rather than as a suspicious outsider. I am considering the range of reasons that I felt like this, this experience of loneliness. Instead I am looking for the gaps and spaces and trying to understand the culture of resistance. Teasing out the deliberate from the imagined. Visioning. Some of those resistances are the only way to stay sane in an institution. Maybe these policies provide structure or instructions; simplistic answers as schools struggle to function. Instead, I will try to build relationships. I will consider walls of resistance, not as bricks but plastic strips. I will try to allow for people’s subjectivities – I seem to be listening and reacting to the dominant voices and these are not necessarily the ones that will assist.

There is some urgency that I try to work through all of this and interview now, whilst this still feels to be an authentic and well intended study. Maybe I should search some supportive Year 10 teachers… [23rd May 2007]

This reflection becomes ‘real’ as it sends me back to the “given situation in which [to] act” (Freire, 1985, p. 124). This kind of “reflexivity is the capacity of language and of thought – of any system of signification – to turn or bend back upon itself, thus becoming an object to itself” (Babcock cited in Foley, 2002 p. 473). Methodologically, I used this reflexive journal not only for collecting anecdotal data and making observations in the field at Anchorage High but also during more challenging moments. These included confronting ethical tensions in meeting
WADET and university human ethics protocols and finding spaces to enter the school site whilst “screened” by gatekeepers of the school (Rist, 1981, p. 266). Journaling in these situations became a powerful and legitimate tool in my research as I reflected back on accounts of my own learning experiences during interviews, challenges and blockages and then attempted to understand and interpret them. Clandinin and Connelly (1994, p. 421) explain how the practice of journaling helps to sort things out, as one “weaves together accounts of the private and the professional by capturing fragments of experience.” In being reflexive, I was thus able to use self-reflection (reflection on my own biases) and reflection on the dialectical (relationship between structural/historical forces and human agency) (Anderson 1989, p. 254) to better understand the cultural life of schools and the experiences of those who inhabit them.

5.2.4 Constructing narrative portraits

Initially, I had intended to use student poetry, art - even photography in this research design to ‘capture’ a visual representation of student stories. What emerged instead during analysis of data was the possibility and power of using narrative portraits that revealed student perspectives. These narratives were structured by creating ‘mini scenes’ from the transcripts that had been compiled after interviewing the students.

In writing up the research, I found myself struggling with attempts to articulate and theorise the practices that I had observed, experienced and recorded whilst developing and reflecting on the research question. As a way of helping to overcome this dilemma, I began creating scripts or portraits of the stories that I had collected both from students and my own field notes whilst collecting data. I noticed that these
had a powerful affect as I reread them and also noticed the effect that they were having in terms of understanding the research. This became both a creative and enabling process as I was able to weave together the complex and everyday real life stories of students. The theoretical literature and the methodological framework that I had been drawing on became clearer as I created portraits of people’s lives around emergent themes in ways that enabled me to “portray the interactions connecting politics, institutions and experience” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 314). Constructing these portraits was an act which helped create and make sense of the world (Richardson, 2001) and assisted in the process of allowing personal experience to become more political. An example is taken from my ethnographic journal during data collection:

Today Kim really inspired me when talking about his paintings. He said that he wanted to bring things and people ‘into the picture’ and collect the ‘loose ends’. I always ask others he said; for their ideas, a symbiosis – then the picture ‘talks to you’. I related his quest to mine, as I try to capture, captivate and grip the imagination of my readers as I tell the stories of others, which represent what I sense, is an untold story about their collective lives. I want to create portraits that speak and engage and help to imagine a better world – one that trusts, respects and understands. I want these portraits to provide the knowledge for that understanding. [Journal Entry, March 2008]

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997, p. 4) identify the process of creating narrative portraits as one that comes closest to creating a painting by “merging the systematic and careful description of good ethnography with the evocative resonance of fine literature.” In this process, portraits are shaped through the dialogue between the researcher and the participants as they co-jointly paint the image. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) the “encounter between the two is rich with meaning and resonance and is crucial to the success and authenticity of the rendered piece” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis 1997, p. 3).
Narrative portraits are adopted in this research to illuminate the personal knowledge of students about BMIS policy thus bringing into play the perspectives of previously excluded, muted, or silenced voices (Smyth, Hattam et al., 2000, p. 22). Narratives provide a means of unravelling dominant behaviour management discourses. Quantz (1992) explains the intent of critical ethnography is to:

Find some way to move from ‘self-transparency’—implying an ability to see things as they really are—to ‘self-articulation’—implying an ability to construct discourses that reposition the subject. It must also find techniques for representing the multivoicedness of people and their cultures. (p. 489)

Riley (2004, p. 63) explains the importance of narrative inquiry because “through listening to the voices of the young people themselves – experts in their own schooling experience – we can learn much about how to reshape schooling.” Smyth, Hattam et al. (2000, p. 17) assert that we need these accounts that are better at naming the problem from the position of the students themselves so that we can “identify and give voice to alternative world views” (Delpit, 1993, p. 121).

The narrative portraits that I created have the power to effect change in those who read them. They are a form of “circulating knowledge” (Connell, 2009) because they “emphasise communicative experiences and structures as well as cultural typification’s” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 327). Storytelling as a reflective act invokes a reciprocity in telling and responding which is relational. As Kohl (2003, p. 57) argues, storytelling and parable making actually gets to the heart of moral issues through this connection between teller and responder. In using narrative portraits, a more conscious understanding is brought to the reader and more intensive connections with those telling their stories. Using narrative this way is important within a dominant discourse of managerialism because it creates spaces where
students can carry out their own inquiry into issues of behaviour management and explain the impact it is having on them.

There is a deliberate attempt in my research to overturn conventional adult-child relationships because “students are people who are worth listening to” (Shor, 1992, p. 26). Schultz, (2001, p. 22) claims that “participation in research itself can give adolescents tools, knowledge and autonomy, a worthwhile goal by itself if it furthers their learning and provides opportunities for them.” Unlike conventional ethnography where culture was studied for the purpose of description, the overriding goal of critical ethnography is to go further than simply informing; it is to free individuals from sources of domination and repression. These sentiments are expressed in one of my ethnographic journal entries:

It is surreal; you step into ‘their’ world-a guest
Yes, one that is invited
One who is privileged to experience their stories of wisdom,
Of living,
They look out for each other-They share
Once they know you are someone who will listen and take the time of day to hear.
They have so much to say,
So many experiences,
So many secrets that they want the world to hear
Now!
Their urgency drives me to write with vigour and passion.
[June, 2007]

This journal entry captures some of the knowledge gained from interpreting student voices and understanding and appreciating the value of students as co-researchers (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998). An example of co-researching is provided by Max, who expresses concern that his identity, like many at the school, can too easily be misunderstood and quickly categorised, thus resulting in him having a ‘reputation’ within the school community. Max explains that “no matter what person it is, all students have a reputation before they do anything.” Three other Year 10 students
together with Max reveal in their conversation how they find themselves negatively labelled by the school, especially if a fight erupts:

*Max – the other thing is if you stick up for someone you get a reputation. Yet, even if you are doing some of those little things, then you happen to be around a fight, even just looking, you get blamed for it, just because you have a reputation. That is something that happens at school, like last year I wasn’t the best person in the school sort of thing, and then I just did a few small things. But this year, because I have this reputation that they gave me, they pounce on me for the smallest things.*

These students go on to reveal how important the camaraderie is between them as they defend their friends in what they perceive to be unjust decisions.

*Es – just like us sticking up for our friends when there is a fight or something. You stick up for your mates; they stick up for their mates.*

The students also reveal how important this act of support is in order to maintain their association with the group whilst at the same time placing them ‘offside’ with their teachers.

*Kai – If the kids in the class don’t hear you stick up for yourself in class, they get really intimidating. But when you do say something to stick up for your rights, then the teacher gets really narky, and says ‘you’re not coming back to my class’.*

*Max – if you incite it, you are the one who gets into trouble. You can’t really complain because if the teacher feels like making a deal then the other teachers will believe that story, not the students version.*

These narrative portraits provide a significant arena to better understand students like Max who repeatedly expressed the need for self assertion, and a place for self development (Wexler, 1992, p. 86). Weis and Fine (1993, p. 1) stress the significance of capturing these voices in public education because “from within the very centres of structured silence can be heard the most critical and the most powerful, if excluded, voices.” In a similar vein, Anderson (1989, p. 261) argues that “multiple voices within the individual and within the community are in constant
struggle for legitimacy.” Recording these multiple voices within a school community is the first step in the process of interpreting what’s going on for students in schools and recognizing some of the reasons why (Quantz & O’Connor, 1988, pp. 98-9).

As one can ‘read’ from the student narratives, meanings are affirmed or contested by different students in different ways. Historically, educational research has typically ‘made use of’ students (Pasco, 2000, p. 31, & Giroux, 2000) rather than portraying them as participants in the narrative. By allowing students to join in as narrators provides a different kind of data that practitioners can use in important discussions of pedagogy, praxis and policy (Pasco, 2000, p. 33) that is more likely to consider the complex inter-relationships between students, teachers, and administrators as they negotiate and mediate behavioural meanings in schools and classrooms.

5.2.5 Searching silences

In order to find the ‘silenced voices’ of the student participant, as a participant observer, I needed to continually keep ‘check’ on my own perceptions of the data. Whilst critical ethnography involves the participant observer collecting systematic observations about a phenomenon or situation first hand, it also requires them to periodically withdraw from the site of investigation in order to analyse the data (Anderson, 1990, p. 149). I used Wolcott’s (1981) four staged strategies to assist me as a participant observer: First, by observing and recording everything, second, by observing nothing in particular, third by looking for paradoxes; and finally by looking for problems confronting the group being observed (pp. 254-6).

Jeffrey and Troman (2004, p. 546) explain that ethnography is well placed to respond to the demands of checking our own perceptions as “the process of
ethnography itself is one of data collection, analysis and theorizing being carried out simultaneously while continually refining the analysis”. I engaged in the process of being a participant observer, observing and looking for paradoxes and problems confronting the group and reflecting on what values and perspectives that I took with me into the data collection. I began to notice that some stories had not been told. When consciously searching for one of these ‘silenced voices’ to search messages that sit underneath the spoken, I came across Lyon, a student from the academic pathway class who I had overlooked at first because I did not recognise his discontent as it was less overt, angry and obviously marginalised. Lyon states:

*it sounds cliché’ for a student, but I got into trouble for something that I didn’t do!*

To eliminate the trap of only using what was literally said (Sultana, 1995, p. 114), instead a critical ethnographer (Sultana, 1995, p. 119) will take note of what is not said and consider it as important as what is by looking for the silences and the gaps and asking what they mean. When I began to analyse my data with Sultana’s advice in mind, I searched ‘different’ data from the collection of profiles and found a voice in Lyon’s transcriptions that I had not noticed before.

*In Year 8, I was in Art and because I was new, and because of my accent I wanted to control my voice. The teacher said I should stop talking. So I did, I lowered my voice down, but not till whispering level because that would be going behind her back.*

*So I was talking to my friends and talking quietly. The teacher pointed me out and said ‘turn around and get on with your work by yourself’ and I said ‘I can’t because I have no table to work on, only a drawer’. Then she sent me outside.*

*I thought to myself, ‘now I will get into even more trouble for not working well, what had I done wrong?*
Everyone was whispering, pointing the obvious to her but she didn’t like being made fun of even though I was not trying to make fun of her; I was just trying to ask her to do something for me because I couldn’t work.

As a researcher, I had fallen into the trap of not looking out for the substance of Lyon’s story. I had not identified, and therefore also not extracted any theme or tensions in his portrait. Yet, when considering the advice of Sultana (1995, p. 119, 123) to also use ‘inverted’ ethnography in which we distance ourselves from the familiar modes of representation, I realised that I could also “privilege silences because of the contention that the more substantial is to be found in that absence” (Sultana, 1995, p. 123). Candy (1989, p. 6) confirms that “the ideological and cultural parameters of social science are not necessarily those which people articulate, they may lie below the surface of verbal communication.” Thus, the privileging of silence is a strategy for recognising the status of the ethnographic text as a construct and hence rendering it as available ‘for deconstruction’ (Sultana, 1995, p. 115). When I continued to deconstruct this narrative, I discovered that Lyon was actually confronted with his own accent:

*I have been here 4 years and still have not got rid of my accent. I thought ‘give it 6 months’ but it has been a long 6 months.*

Lyon began primary school in Australia and then returned to his birth place of England and Wales. He found his English accent in an Australian school a problem as it segregated him. Macy (1991, p. 186) refers to “the fact that it is not talked about very much makes it all the more pivotal, because nothing is more preoccupying or energy draining than that which we repress.” Rist (1981, p. 265) argues that my task was to “suspend prejudgment and frame the development of a theoretical perspective in an analysis that emerges from the data.” Once I *really* started searching in the text for elements of Lyon’s story by suspending the prejudgment that I had made about
what I thought he had been saying earlier, then I discovered text which spoke about what really concerned him. Earlier analysis of his portrait had centred on him sharing his concerns for lack of respect from other students. What I found emerging instead with a new theoretical framing, was a voice that was speaking about and on behalf of fellow students relating to issues of classroom and social respect and justice as Lyon explains:

*I believe there should be respect for the staff and from the staff. Because if you just look like you might cause trouble, even if you are not, then the teachers don’t look at you or pay attention to you like they do with the other kids which I think is really unfair.*

I also begin to discover things about Lyon that had sat below the surface of the text such as the prejudice he experienced based on his name:

*She used to do that to my sister as well, cause when I mentioned my last name, I could see it in her eyes. She remembered.*

The idea of using narrative portraits this way is to not only inform and analyse but also to inspire and intervene. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997, p. 11) explain, as an audience reading and engaging in narrative portraits, “we enter people’s lives” and “we pursue the silences.” Therefore, everything that is narrated is not neutral. Hence, I needed to be conscious that as a researcher, I myself also became embedded within the text. My presence and activity defined a certain space outside the constraints of the teachers, a space in which the students had relatively free rein to talk and interact (Nespor, 1997, p. 227). As such, there was a deliberate attempt to overturn conventional teacher-student relationships that emphasized separation (Nespor, 1997, p. 222). Sultana (1995, p. 116) explains that “ethnography inscribes culture in discourse rather than merely describing it – for the very act of writing binds politics and poetics.”
As is illustrated by my selections of student narrative, critical ethnography has a political rationale as it seeks contradictions in policy and practices but also moves from simple description and analysis to ‘active’ involvement within the school community (Sultana, 1995, p. 122). This was no easy task because as Sultana (1995, p. 123) indicates, the whole point of bureaucracies is system-preservation (p. 123). However, Kohl (2003) stresses that moral questions about the unspoken and silence is essential, and therefore, such an approach would consider vulnerability and “people afraid to speak out, individual as well as social censorship of ideas and the suffocating of feelings” (p. 62). As a participant observer, engaging in critical ethnography, I have intentionally exposed detailed accounts of what has all too often been silenced.

5.2.6 Forming themes of analysis

Forming themes of analyses is a lengthy, complex and cyclic process; one could say it never really ends. I did this by firstly collecting pieces of data (from field work) before the socio-cultural patterns/themes were fully analysed and too many conclusions were drawn. This was a totally different approach than the deductive scientific approach of experimental researchers (Anderson, 1990, p. 150). Likewise, the research of Prosser (1999, p. 192) applies Richardson’s (1994) notion of ‘method of inquiry’ as a means of speaking and writing experience into order as techniques of meaning making and interpretation. Similarly, I develop themes of discussion and analysis in much the same way and will elaborate on this in chapter 7. In that chapter, student narratives are deliberately detailed as I share and discuss the power of relationships and further complications that arise when students are not listened to. These complications include disengagement and alienation.
To follow is an extensive ethnographic section in which I explain in detail how I applied this process of writing experience into order to interpret and make meaning from connected events. It is an example of exploring how the thematic analysis chapter of this thesis was developed. It meant using rigour and constant ‘tinkering’ to turn back and reassess representation of ‘others’ [the students] throughout the writing up process. Kincheloe and McLaren (2005, p. 317) confirm that such construction and reconstruction, diagnosis and readjustment is complex yet characteristic of field based and interpretive research.

Why my analysis needed tinkering... I thought I had it! The themes, the hooks to hang the data on - 'identity' for example, nice and broad, 'class division' to get the critical Marxist stuff out – but then I found I had placed huge slabs of transcribed data under the theme, had the script with a few token statements from authors helping me to legitimise and then everything important seemed to disappear as if it had become 'lost' in it all. When I came to formulating the contents page, it 'appeared' – this big gap, the analysis was not that at all – instead it was slabs of text – like thick heavy mud cake, not really grabbing the attention that it deserved, or that I had intended. The next stage then was to 'revisit' the themes and the voices, simultaneously searching for new themes that shouted – the one liners, the provocative titles, the voices and statements that could not be ignored easily. First, what emerged from students was the "I want to be heard, they just don’t listen" theme. Not that I wanted to divide the students voices from their teachers into armies of 'them' and 'us' or 'goodies' and 'baddies'. The policy itself, however became the 'evil' player – a mandated document legitimising certain actions and discourses and covered by a blanket of rhetoric pretending to care and be there for the well-being of the school. Students often find themselves frustrated with the senseless rules that they feel are limiting their individuality, freedom of expression and emerging adult identity. This frustration, unable to vent itself within the quagmire of control and codes of legitimizing conduct, then goes underground to bubble and brew erupting into actions of defiance, rebellion or despair. Other more silent students just slip away into oblivion.

The next theme that appeared in this culling selective process was one of 'the alienated'. Many students had told stories of how their lives clashed with the expected behaviours of the school. I had been trying to analyse this purely as a class issue. I have not entirely disregarded this notion, however, feeling alienated from the culture of the school, even though it is where many spend a majority of their day, seemed to be a common complaint of many of these sixteen year old students. They have often been marginalised because they were not conforming – they were late, talking, and not complying with rigid uniform dress codes. Often however, when looked at outside of the behaviours, it was not the non-
conforming that was the issue for the school – it was the student power
that seemed to threaten the school’s own power structures. These students
were then considered resistant and defiant, yet what they were saying
was that they were being autonomous individuals in conversations,
displaying an attempt to voice their anger, opinions, disappointments,
rights; their own versions and interpretations as to why they were late
and out of code. They were talking in lessons because they were often
bored out of their brains. ‘Resistance’, thus appeared as a common
thread running through and around this chapter. Not just resistance as a
negative, anti-authoritative power but also as a way of communicating
back to the behaviour management policy and talking to the deafness and
short-sightedness of it.

The theme of ‘being monitored’, especially around use of mobiles,
attendance, and uniform on SIS (Student Information System), allowed
me then to frame the student stories of how they had been under
surveillance, what they could and could not say and do, what they could
look like, speak and how they could use their bodies. The control of their
use of space (on an oval only if in uniform), canteen lines, the lining up
outside class, their use of time, timetable of 6 hour slots, odd timings,
their breaks, even their home lives were being monitored but not as a
way of explanation but as a mode of control of power. The notion of Foucault’s (1980) technology of power and ‘self’ came to fore at this
point. The use of SIS to record the students who had threatened or
disturbed the peace, the quiet, the compliant unit of the classroom, the
sports field, the canteen – these were the ones that had their names
recorded on the data screen to be stored, collated, monitored and viewed
forever. Every time they were out of ‘good standing’ or on detention it
was recorded. And in reality what did this crime mean? Stealing?
Bashing? Cheating? No.....it was for not wearing the correct colour
shirt, being one minute late to another boring maths lesson or talking to
one of their friends instead of listening to a tedious lecture! Chomsky
(2003, p. 28) states that “this is pretty much what schools are like—they
reward discipline and obedience and they punish independence of the
mind.”

By having gone through this process of reflection has been quite
liberating. I have been more selective in which pieces of script I use –
mine, the students and the authors that I draw on. I have also found my
argument flowing more fluently, not as easily lost in the copious quantity
of information, tangents and scattered themes that I tried to gather
together. One large story with one large argument – rather than trying to
cover all elements of the themes, possibly branching off anywhere! I
think I was afraid of missing out significant components of the students’
stories and or authors research and points around critical and social
research, however in being so broad and all encompassing, I think I was
beginning to lose the thread and possibly the reader!

Now I feel confident in saying that what helped determine how I used
their stories was to consider ‘freedom’ – the expansion of students’
voices because they were telling me loud and clear that they were fed up
with being watched, contained and controlled. If this research has
managed to do that, I have succeeded, because to not allow our young
people to engage and develop their minds and social place, is a
dangerous and undemocratic place and a concern for our civil future.
Leistyna (2003, p. 122) confirms that, “resistance is used to help individuals or groups deal with oppressive social conditions and injustice and needs to be rerouted so that it is connected to positive political projects of change.” [Field Notes, August, 2008.]

When using a critical approach, it becomes obvious that discipline policy in schools look stranger, more complex and perplexing (Bessant & Watts, 2002, p. 375). As described in these field notes, researching as an ‘insider’ requires making the familiar or normal setting unfamiliar (Pole & Morrison, 2003, p. 25). The use of critical ethnography as a research tool enables me to access student’s experience of schooling, their perspectives and the complexity of their needs and then creates themes to tell their stories. I began to explore how student ‘identities’ had been constructed as two dimensional; the ways we experience ourselves as well as the ways other people interpret and interact with us, an inside and an outside (Bessant et al. 2006, p. xii).

5.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have unearthed not only the meaning of critical ethnography but also explained the impact of using this methodology as a way of collecting, interpreting and understanding the voices of the student participants. Like Foley (2002, p. 487) I use “common sense, autobiographical experiences, ordinary language, irony, satire, metaphor and parody to understand everyday life.” This enables me to unite the personal and political, illuminating the problem of behaviour management discourses in schools. I have also identified and outlined in detail features that I have employed in using critical ethnography in my research.

In the next chapter, the focus is on the process and experience of ‘doing’ critical ethnography by describing the complexities encountered when interrupting the status quo. I will therefore explain the ethical and methodological struggles in finding the
voices of students at Anchorage High as I engaged in the ‘true’ context of the research.
CHAPTER 6 – DOING CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY

In this chapter, I discuss the challenging experiences I encountered in doing critical ethnography in educational research but more importantly, I also share the negotiation processes that occurred, working through some of these challenges to eventually find the voices of students. These struggles included representing the ‘other’, collecting student narratives, gaining ethics approval for the research, opening the school gate, and maintaining connections.

6.1.1 Struggle 1: Representing the ‘other’

One of the challenges facing critical ethnographers is the task of representing the complex lives of participants. Whilst transcribing and developing narrative portraits I became uneasy about representing their lives and asked whether it was indeed possible to account for the complexity and degree of sophistication required in constructing the lives of ‘others’. The following journal entry begins to explain some of my reservations:

So what is it I am trying to define here? What is/was the role? I feel at times that I was a sort of friend who wanted to develop the respect and trust of the student participants so they would feel comfortable sharing snippets of their lives, both at school and at home. They were curious and brave and at times just as scared as me. They had volunteered, but were not sure what for. Behaviour management is not something that is often in their vocabulary. So once I had spent half an hour, just with them, making them feel valued, appreciating their input, giving them a space and place to speak and question and reflect…then I began to develop empathy, understanding, appreciation, admiration and respect. Then what do I do with those feelings? What do they do with me? I kept reassuring them that I could not change things entirely, but that their comments and thoughts would be contributing to my research and hopefully make a change for others in the future. As ‘Max’, so proudly said, puffing out his lovely big chest, “at least the kids that are in Year 8 now may notice some difference when they come to Year 10”.

So being a critical ethnographer has many complications about power and relationships. It is difficult sometimes to know how much to allow yourself to represent the ‘other’ and how much to allow yourself to ‘feel’
knowing that you are going to have to ‘unfeel’ again and continue on with the research and further and other research which may or may not involve those particular participants. In some ways, it almost feels cruel, cold and calculated. It is as though, sometimes, the researcher is using student lives and their stories to add richness and context to one’s own writing. [Journal Entry, 25th July 2007]

It becomes clear from this entry that I started to doubt my methodology and theoretical standing and became restless about the notion of trying to represent the ‘other’ when I was not one of them (the students). I began wondering about imbalances of status, age, experience and positions of power. This was another ‘reflexive’ moment of which I go into more detail later in this chapter. Pole and Morrison (2003, p. 151) explain that this ethical problem in the collection and analysis of ethnographic data is not just about being overt but also a “recognition and interpretation of the ways in which your identity as male or female, outsider or insider, youthful or mature” are consolidated. I found confirmation in Schultz’s (2001) explanation of a similar struggle that she experienced when recording the insights of urban adolescents:

How do I reconcile students’ reluctance to represent themselves, their acceptance of my representations, and my belief that by representing them I am creating them as others, laying their lives open for surveillance or at least curious observation? In my writing about adolescent identities, I tell the students’ stories for them. I appropriate and transform them to construct my own narratives. While I do not claim that our relationships were equal, I am interested in the ways they can be considered to be collaborative. (p. 20)

Lather (1991, p. 137) attends to this issue by arguing that researchers should act less as masters of truth and justice and more as creators of space in which those directly involved can act and speak. Lather (2003) draws on Derrida’s concept of ‘deconstruction’ to argue for textuality as praxis. She explains that:

This is a non-reductive praxis that calls out a promise, not a new concept but of practice on a shifting ground that foregrounds the limits of the
fixing, locating, defining and confining that is the work of the concept. This is a praxis that can survive the critique of Marxism, praxis immanent in practices that help us think not only with but in our actions. (p. 266)

So I began to locate myself as an educational researcher being in the action doing research ‘on’ and ‘with’ the voices of the students that I interviewed, transcribed and organised into selective pieces of discourse. I began to see that there was enough data to keep creating new stories, however, this was not only an attempt to unmask but also a “keeping open, alive, loose on guard against itself” (Lather, 2003, p. 260) the voices of the students as I attempted to interweave them in the research story. As Ezzy (2002, p. xii) argues, by doing any qualitative research means participating in other people’s lives and then writing about that participation. My field notes demonstrate a growing awareness of the ethical dimensions of being a researcher and attending to the realities of students own dialogue. As Brown and Dobrin (2004) explain, this reflexive approach involves:

…redirecting the critical gaze of ethnography away from science and toward politics, away from the interests of the ethnographic Self and toward a concern for altering the material conditions that determine the lived reality of the Other. (p. 3)

Noddings (1998) believes that if we are concerned with these moral outcomes then most episodes of critical thinking must start with the arousal of such feeling. She advises (p. 163), therefore, to “care about the people, causes, and problems to whom and to which we will apply our thinking skills.”

Prosser (1999, p. 159) believes that the researcher must seek to counteract any inequalities in power that immediately emerge. I was explicit from the beginning that the researcher and students can together work on taking a responsible position for the consequences of understanding and improving situations in schools regarding school
culture. Prosser (1999, pp. 175-176) also highlights the complexity of the researcher and researched relationship. He aims for a relationship of equality in discussion and co-construction. He admits to the difficulty of such an ambition (p. 176), as one “will represent all the authority of universities as well as the school, while working with young people who generally have struggled with authority.” I encountered a similar dilemma as I also had a sense of responsibility in wanting to protect and advocate for the students. This was alleviated to some degree when reading Rose (1990) who explains the notion of ‘ethics’ by lessening any illusions or assumptions about truthfulness and humanity:

The location of ethical statements within the field of science is double edged. On the one hand, in freeing many questions concerning the proper conduct of life from the authoritative prescriptions and proscriptions of political, religious, and social authorities, it pluralizes the answers that can be provided, opening up a field of diversity within which each subject is obliged to locate themselves. On the other hand, in relocating these questions of the conduct of life within the field of expertise, in tying it to norms of truth and health, it binds subjects to a subjection that is the more profound because it appears to emanate from our autonomous quest for ourselves; it appears as a matter of our freedom. (p. 256)

Pole and Morrison (2003) and Watts (1993) enlist ethnography’s concern with everyday events and its emphasis on meaning and action to resolve such tension. They claim that the accounts from ethnography are usually *insiders’* accounts and that the attention to detail provides the researcher with a privileged view over that of an outsider (Pole & Morrison, 2003, p. 8 & Watts, 1993, p. 54). In revealing self (the etic/emic) one is being an insider and an outsider. In this manner, my own experience of schooling as a student and as a teacher can be seen to frame my research question. The following prose, written while collecting data for this research, captures an element of this relationship and the understanding of the social structure of such schools:

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The outsider
coming in, trying to squeeze through the fences
and the gates.
Climbing up and around stairs, through corridors
searching an entry point,
to find yet another barricaded door.
Once the next key and the revealing clue discovered,
stumbling into another set of obstacles.
New negotiations, more paper work,
another explanation
carefully crafted to
release a little
but not too much of myself...
and my purpose.

When you are an insider
you know it is a strange land, but you get through by not asking too many questions,
and you play the games required to get you by.
You try not to think too
much about the absurdity of it all because it would drive you
to mad hattedness!

So you find distractions, colours, shapes,
words that dazzle and glimmer.
You search songs, poems, metaphors, movies that take you away awhile.
You dream and fantasize how it could be
so that the gulf between the reality and the imagined
can be bridged by a traveller moving from
the outside to in
and from the inside out.

Foley (2002) provides an explanation of what I am attempting to express in writing this prose:

Directing one’s gaze at one’s own experience makes it possible to regard oneself as ‘other’. Through a constant mirroring of the self, one eventually becomes reflexive about the situated, socially constructed nature of the self, and by extension, the other. (p. 473)

6.1.2 Struggle 2: Collecting student narratives

As has already been expressed throughout this chapter, critical research presents a number of ethical dilemmas and struggles because being a “witness with a personal cultural history” (Foley, 2002, p. 475) is very different from being detached and scientific. In addressing this problem, Foley (2002, p. 483) advocates the use of
metaphor to help overcome the ethical dilemma of being moralistic or preaching. I often felt that the students’ narrative portraits needed to be openly ‘subjective’ and honest in judgments and remarks made about events and people. This allowed me to separate from the objectifying scientific voice. Therefore, I had a deep commitment to the use of personal voice and ordinary language and intentionally separated myself from the classifying and generalizing discourse of theoretical anthropology (Foley, 2002, p. 484). Use of personal voice assisted in demonstrating respect for and skill in the language of the students both during the fieldwork and in the final written ethnography. Foley (2002, p. 484) believes that it is important to foreground the people and events we are studying over the academic, theoretical commentary. McLeod (2000, p. 49), however, warns that insight into the students’ lives is always going to be partial and that power relations (such as between researcher and researched) can constrain and incite particular responses. However, she also argues that no research can really claim to provide a complete and full account of the subject. What it does mean is that “any findings drawn from interviews must be interpreted cautiously, reflexively and in relation to other interviews and research” (McLeod, 2000, p. 49).

Prosser (1999, p. 176) confesses to having to actively work through his own language and behaviour so as to not reinforce the authority that many students have resisted, however, as he says one “cannot help being an adult”. Therefore, the best that can be done in this situation, as an adult research participant, is to be satisfied that one’s genuine altruistic desires to involve students be seen as a positive act in the methodological processes of the research (p. 176). My journal entry reflects this:

It is a lot more complex trying to put myself into the shoes of the young people that I wish to study… I know I will never be able to do that, as I
could, in some respects when studying teachers lives; however, the attempt to look from the ‘others’ perspective feels worth something. [24th February 2006].

Hickey and Fitzclarence (2000, p. 121) outline the methodological problem of generational interpretation. They point out that the socialisation process is quite different (in terms of values, attitudes, beliefs and general social mores) between the researched and the researcher. Because of “power differential” (p. 123) it is unlikely that young people are going to seek adult counsel in dealing with emotional and personal issues. As they state, many adults already have problems communicating in this way with other adults! However, rather than treating young peoples’ knowledge and understandings as problematic, Hickey and Fitzclarence, (2000, p. 122) argue that by interviewing students as researchers, our interest is in “nurturing a greater sense of connectedness” as we engage in conversations with them.

Young (1997) makes it clear that ethical decisions about education and educational research are made within a political context and that as researchers we need to take this context into account (p. 113). Some examples of the ethical decisions that I needed to consider in this research included; what parts of student stories do I use or not use, which parts do I report on or not report on? How will I (re)present their stories; as told or in conversation? Will I use poetry? Who will lead the conversations, me or the student or both? Finally, to help answer some of these questions in a quest for moral excellence in researching the lives of others, I consulted Noddings (1998, p. 159) who advises that “while maintaining a deep respect for others whose similar quests may lead in different directions” we are more likely as researchers to have a deepening of self understanding. She explains how:

Critical thinking needs a starting point in both character and feeling and most episodes of critical thinking should be liberally sprinkled with
turning points – points at which the thinker reaches toward the living other with feeling that responds to the others’ condition. (p. 161)

With this critical thinking in mind, combined with an “ethic of care” (Noddings, 1984), I planned to keep participants informed throughout the research process as well as creating a safe space for them to tell their stories around behaviour management. I wanted the research design to be inclusive and respectful of the students and those teachers that were involved. My research participants then reviewed data, helped devise questions for discussion and had an ongoing impact on analysis and development of narratives. Watts (1993, p. 56) confirms that by doing so, ethnographers come closer to incorporating into their work the “the patterns of belief and value and significance of the people they study than do most other social scientists”.

Throughout this research process, I have continually worked on the premise that one’s own knowledge and thinking is rich in context and legitimate. I have also been mindful that by inviting students’ own recital that I may evoke strong reactions and/or emotions. Providing the space to reflect on student opinions, views, and images was significant and needed to be monitored to reassure students that it was a safe place to share their own views. By doing this, I was able to witness them finding solace with one another when they shared stories. I remained sensitive to emotions and collective stories whilst creating an environment of confidentiality and safety. I maintained a balance of respect, honesty and keen interest in the lives of these young people. I did these things because I genuinely wanted to retain their dignity as a co-researcher.
From the beginning of my research, I had planned to conduct semi-structured interviews with students and then follow these up by maintaining contact, developing sound relationships between the students, myself and each other. Hickey and Fitzclarence (2000, p. 125) stress the importance of such ‘affinity’ in the process of nurturing conversation with participants. I was aware that such a quest may not be such an easy task, however, I wanted to make a conscious effort to overcome some of the structural barriers and reduce the participants fears to encourage ‘ebb and flow’ of conversation (p. 125). As Hickey and Fitzclarence (2000, p. 125) state: “affinity is formed around equality and camaraderie, not compliance!” I intended that the questions asked were to be relatively unstructured and non-confronting and “grounded in the young person’s experience” (Smyth, Hattam et al., 2000, p. 24). I then decided on asking open style questions for broader or more general information, placing fewer restrictions on how the students might answer them. I had the confidence by then that the students would give me recognition as a respondent and satisfy their own communication needs; talking through their own ideas while I attentively listened. In contrast, Hickey and Fitzclarence (2000, p. 126) confirm that “one of the reasons why many young people do not verbalise their problems and anxieties, or seek the counsel of older people is because they do not believe they will get a fair and considered hearing.” Thus, the use of open ended questions allowed students to discover their own priorities and frames of reference (Anderson, 1990, p. 234) involving a process of ‘externalising’ their experience to make meaning (Hickey & Fitzclarence, 2000, p. 126). By exposing general questions that would start ‘purposeful conversations’ (Burgess, 1988) and nurturing ‘open-ended discussion’ (Hickey & Fitzclarence 2000, p. 125), I asked questions such as ‘how is school for you’ and also began taking field notes, continually writing and critically
reflecting in my journal. All these actions helped to distil and crystallise events and ideas about the research process in particular, hence melding the theory with the practice.

6.1.3 Struggle 3: Gaining ethics approval

In this section I recount the procedures and experiences of gaining ethics approval for this thesis. I knew from the onset that investing in research including students was going to be problematic for any ethics committee because I was asking students what it was that they thought about behaviour and how it was managed in schools. Applying a critical inquiry approach into school life for sixteen year olds is neither neutral nor passive so I was destined to come across challenges as questions designed in this style of research provoke and unsettle the world as it is, with a view to looking at how it might be (Giroux, 1983b, p. 14). In my original ethics application I submitted the following kinds of questions to ask students; ‘What is school like for you at the moment?’ ‘What can you tell me about school rules?’ ‘Have you ever been punished?’ and ‘What rule did you break and how did you feel?’ Such questions were regarded by both ethics committees, The Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and the expedited sub-committee to be far too complex and “sensitive” to be considered as a part of “normal educational activity” for Year 10 students (who are aged between fourteen and sixteen years). At this stage, subjective terms such as ‘normal’ became problematic for me and I began to question what the term meant in the context of an ethics application. I had argued in my application that the research was “undertaken in the best interest of the children” and was very clear and well versed about the “legal and ethical obligations to guarantee confidentiality to the subjects”, two of the checklist requirements on the form. I soon realised that an expedited ethics process, cannot by its own restriction, involve any
students from schools, as the main contradiction of this process is that students are required to provide informed consent yet are still caught up in the legal situation of being in dependent relationships.

Originally I wanted to encourage student participants to join the research project by using an invitational questionnaire as a way of initiating interest in this research and to be more familiar with the type of questions they could be discussing. An example was, ‘are you aware that there is a behaviour management plan at your school?’ This proved too challenging as the HREC insisted that I would need informed consent from parents to conduct any such questionnaire. Due to the onerous task of doing this for the two hundred and fifty students concerned, I made the decision to reconsider this recruitment strategy. Ironically, the initial intention was to familiarise the school and the Year 10 cohort with my research goals and procedures to minimise as best as possible any suspicions or concerns about the ethics of my research. Regardless of such intentions, conducting such a questionnaire was considered unethical. The ethics committee did approve interviewing students but only if I explored issues that could not be considered sensitive, intrusive or personal. The questionnaire also had to be characteristic of day-to-day classroom activities and interactions. In the view of the ethics committee, I was asking students for their opinions about behaviour management, therefore, my research was considered to be too sensitive and not a normal activity in which Year 10’s should participate. I was asking students questions about how school is, what their understandings of behaviour management and discipline are and their interpretations of the policy. The paradox is that during interviews, students regularly expressed their dissatisfaction with many aspects of behaviour management, which had often been the result of unequal power relations within classrooms.
For many students, the daily experiences of school life are indeed sensitive, intrusive and personal and for many disempowering in terms of their own identity formation. These students will often spend much of their day at school both in and out of the classrooms discussing issues around their own behaviour management. The invitation was initially intended to be a stepping stone into this research, yet soon appeared as an ethical boulder as it became the basis of five major concerns of the ethics committee. A journal entry captures some of the experiences, frustrations and contradictions that I experienced at this time:

Ethics by intervention…I use this phrase to highlight the contradictory position I found myself in when applying for ethics approval for research. My aim was to be ethical to student needs, understandings and perceptions of behaviour management, yet I was being forced to indicate that I would be intruding on personal lives and initiating anxiety and restlessness. Suddenly I was instructed to declare my impact on students. I am being forced to state to students that I could not guarantee their confidentiality. By declaring and professing to possible, social, emotional, and psychological complications, maybe requiring counselling because of my questioning reminded me of the big and ugly fire risk sign in front of the beautiful Australian bushland. “BEWARE” it says ‘prevent fire’ yet all it does is draw attention to the vulnerable – it does not appreciate the aesthetic, the community; instead, it declares danger and arouses panic where often in fact panic is not required. In the remote bush, the chance of lightening striking is much more sporadic and less of a risk than the attention, frenzy and glamour gained when a firebug watches as flames rise, smoke billows and they can listen to the crackling action of limbs burning. This psychological and simplistic approach is the same approach that I feel is being presented to me by ethics clearance procedures. [Journal Entry, 18th December, 2006].

The Human Research Ethics Committee had insisted that I declare intrusiveness as a component of my research. Ironically the intention of the research was to provide students with freedom of expression about behaviour management policy and its impact on their lives. The major contradiction for me then became the fact that my research had deliberately set out to create spaces for students’ voices to be heard around a policy which had largely silenced them.
The next requirement of ethics approval application was to carefully consider the issue of student confidentiality and to ensure no harm. In this task it was thus important to involve the Student Support Services in my research as this team comprised a manager, year leaders, school psychologist, a chaplain and a school nurse. Ironically, further on in the research process, this team had also been assigned by the school principal and deputy as a gateway into the school for my research and a way of processing ‘difficult kids’. Because I had not wanted the school to choose the participants for me, some resistance was already presented by dominant members of this team to my research proposal. Another point of contention and complication in this ethics approval process was the requirement that students be given an independent point of contact within the school for recruitment. I had been particularly careful to follow ethical protocols regarding confidentiality to participants throughout the application and now was being asked to deny this as I must share identification of subjects with other public personnel. It also meant that the data collection process was being taken away somewhat from the authority of the researcher.

The final challenge in this initial process was that I was forced to construct a letter of consent that included informing consenting parents that it may not be possible for all data to be kept confidential. It was not an intention of my research to have ‘alarm bells’ aroused about situations that probably would not occur just because I was asking questions about behaviour. Eventually, however, I was able to find a way around this challenge by constructing a respectful letter to candidates which covered the ‘duty of care’ component of the research without losing the essence, critical nature and intention of my research [Appendix B]. Thus the process finally commenced by me asking for student volunteers only and obtaining their
approval to participate in the research as well as their parental/guardian’s consent. I had also written letters informing parents and guardians that the students could withdraw their consent at any time during the research process. I had written five drafts of the form and spent as many weeks ensuring that the form was ‘ethical’ for the HREC but also remained conducive and faithful to the research methodology and my own ethical intentions as a researcher.

Three months later, a decision was made that my research was not to be approved and that it needed to be resubmitted addressing 13 key points. One of these concerns was that it had not yet gained approval from WADET even though I had already long before received approval from the school principal concerned. Procedure 2c of the WADET policy states that the “school needs to sight written evidence from the research institution that ethics and methodology have been vetted.” This stage of the ethics procedure became caught in a loop as I required the reciprocal approval of each institution, WADET and HREC, yet I needed to apply for both separate from the other.

What followed was an onerous process of swinging to and fro between e-mails, phone calls and edited written proposals in order to have an application considered ‘ethical’. There were times when it would have been easier to give in and do away with researching student interpretations at all. Fortunately, this did not happen. Instead, by remaining doggedly persistent and receiving the support and advice of others who had shared similar experiences, the design of my research method remained reasonably authentic to its original intentions, making the many procedural hurdles worth the determination and patience. In addition, the research interviews were conducted very soon after final ethics approval was granted, making the
remainder of the research data process relatively smooth and productive. This meant that the rigour, time and persistence required getting into the school and starting the research process was not in vain. Giroux (1983b, p. 14) explains how the challenge of obtaining ethical authority from ethics committees could be understood as being ensnared in a rational positivist discourse of a conservative and increasingly restrictive research climate. Such scientific research advances the immediate and celebrated world of ‘facts’ and is often protected within ethical regimes of control.

During the ethics approval process, a major learning curve was not to assume that people will understand what it was that I was planning to do, just because I did! I had to learn to make explicit any decisions made and provide minute details about every action planned. I gradually learned that sometimes it was better to say less than more. Ironically, on occasions, it also appeared that to be ethical in your own research you have to work around unethical procedures to gain the access that is required in order to be in a position to listen to research participants. On the other hand, being in such a predicament meant that I was forced to define my position as a researcher and continually refine my research project.

Whilst ethics approval is very important and designed to clarify and simplify, this research approval experience, in its overzealous attempt to rationalize, had the potential instead to actually cloud enthusiasm and almost push the research proposal out of existence! On reflection, however, the struggles experienced in gaining ethics approval have provided the opportunity to search and discover creative spaces to work within the constraints of the positivist paradigm. Similar sentiments are expressed by Simons and Usher (2000, p. 11) who assert that making ethical decisions is a “process of creating, maintaining and justifying an ethical integrity that
is more dependent on sensitivity to politics and people than it is on ethical principles and codes."

6.1.4 Struggle 4: Opening the school gate

A strange week in my life; fears, insecurities. Searching for knowledge, understandings, and explanations. I have been visiting schools for my field analysis but also for supervisory teachers. I have ‘felt’ intimidated by the practices, the routines, the power plays that I witness. It has me questioning my own place, practices, understandings and research. I search discourses of explanation and understanding. [Journal Entry, 23 May, 2006]

Nespor (1997, p. 205) observes that gaining access into a school is not the same thing as gaining access to the students or people working in them. My own journal entry above expresses some of the frustrations in dealing with gatekeepers and other blockages that presented themselves during the research project design as I tried to get into the school and interview students. There were times that the challenges of getting into the school and past ‘the gatekeepers’ proved extremely difficult. At this stage, journaling, field notes, and discussions with colleagues at university became vital and valuable modes of working through these hurdles as I struggled to understand situations and find workable solutions to what at first seemed insurmountable. Below are further examples of how I employed ethnographic tools of journaling and field notes to work through these challenges:

A debrief to/for myself, a lone ethnographer....
The surveillance of being an outsider trying to ‘come in’ trying to make contact, be familiar, and make even the slightest connection. It feels like walking into a prison – the order, the control of people and their emotions. [Field Notes, 23rd May, 2007]

Schools...
Looking the same…
The ‘cyclone’ buckled fences,
Cold concrete verandas
Pockets of space to escape
Demountables to hide between
And break
Sneak around.
Leaking roofs,
Dilapidated furniture
Lockers ripped out
Drain pipes tapping and dripping…. [Journal Entry, 30th May, 2007]

‘The Assembly’
What felt so assaulting (insulting?) at the time, was the lack of respect towards me from staff as I engaged with the students about my research. I could hear the mumblings and mutterings and gasps from some of the teachers and administrators as I was briefing the students succinctly and clearly on what I was doing. It was as if I was trying to establish a secret code and that my work should be treated with skepticism and suspicion. There were no nods of acknowledgement, no reassuring thanks or smiles, only diverted glances away and whisperings. The students seemed in contrast, 100% attentive, (all two hundred and fifty of them) to what I had to present. Then I had to go and leave the consent forms at the back of the gym. I felt frustrated having to leave them there as I was not sure if students would be in a position to collect them after I had gone.
I also asked that forms be left at the Student Services office. They were abruptly snatched away, out of sight, so that students then had to ‘ask’ for them. It is as if the predictions of skeptical administrators are being confirmed; the chants of “No students will just take them. Let us pick the students for you” echo in my mind.
At least I had a chance to speak to the cohort. Maybe even if I follow the school’s method of distribution, then at least there is an ‘awareness’ of my study. Sometimes I just need to feel strong in all of this and know where my intentions lie and where and when to ask for support.
I should be prepared for this skepticism and cynicism. I am rocking some solid foundations of what is normally asked and how students are approached – so I should be brazen and confident enough to pursue it when some of these predicted resistances emerge. [Field notes, 17th May 2007]

Rist (1981, p. 266) agrees that the work of researchers in the field requires some negotiation and bargaining to overcome impediments and constraints to site access as demonstrated in my field note entries:

I am digging, digging deep. No not crawling out and away as I nearly did yesterday, but excavating the culture of the school in search of an ‘open free space.’
I received an e-mail today from the Year 10 leader inviting me to interview students. She also offered me her assistance. After the struggles with ethics approval for my research, then the blocks in getting into the front office, Student Services meetings, staff meetings, through management gatekeepers and others trying to mould and carve my research into something completely alien to its intention, this e-mail was a jewel, a huge breath of fresh hope and a major cause for celebration! [Field Notes, 24th May, 2007]

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Denscombe (2003, p. 88) explains that as researchers, the meanings we attach to things that happen and the language we use to describe them is a process that relies on what we already know and believe. I had worked for the past ten years in a school with a culture and system that had felt alien to my style of teaching. So my past experience had influenced what I was observing and may have contributed to the feeling of being blocked in my entrance as a researcher. I engaged in critical ethnography to find out how effectively the BMIS (*Behaviour Management in Schools*) policy was being implemented in schools and to question much of the current research used to legitimate current behaviour policy prescriptions in schools (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004, p. 546). It is no wonder then that I was being met by gatekeepers and therefore, had to expect challenges such as those revealed in the prose and field notes above.

**6.1.5 Struggle 5: Maintaining connections**

As Rist (1981, p. 267) warns, “...a researcher not only must secure access but must also negotiate permission to stay.” I experienced frustration at not being able to gain easy access to the students in the school after the first round of interviews had been conducted. It seemed that the chance to ‘survey’ the students had been provided and therefore it was time for me to finish and allow things at the school to go ‘back to normal’ without my intrusion. The students were not so well informed that they could be interviewed and meet me a second time round by their Year Leader as it was assumed by the Student Services Team that I would only want to survey students, and not in any way or form want to talk to them personally! Often it was by sheer chance and luck then that the students could attend the second interview when I was on their campus. Fortunately, this was still considered a legitimate process as the students had parental approval and were completing hours towards their
community service commitment. Anderson (1989, p. 249) confirms that “critical ethnographers seek out research accounts that are sensitive to the dialectical relationship between the social structural constraints on human actors and the relative autonomy of human agency.” A journal entry captures my struggle around this issue at the time:

The problem is, in the process of first finding the students, then getting to know them as I chatted, had coffee, listened, joked, cried and laughed; well then yes a certain relationship is formed. This is not a relationship that you have with family or friends. It is not one that you can define as collegiate or supervisory or even the one you would have as a teacher. It is a unique relationship that you build as an outside researcher, an unknown adult, not really a teacher, not a parent, not a friend, not even an acquaintance. [Journal Entry 25th July, 2007]

After a few persistent phone-calls, e-mails and hastily finished transcriptions, I was granted the opportunity to visit the students for a second round of interviews, two weeks after the first. Woods (cited in Jeffrey & Troman, 2004, p. 536) states that because “social life is ongoing, developing, fluctuating, becoming” then such events when experienced in this way do not have to be considered limitations. Rather these events are a feature and an honest appraisal of critical ethnography itself as it is a dynamical and contextual approach to social and relational structures as expressed in the field notes below:

The only other ‘hurdle’ was when the first round of interviews was complete, that I wanted to give students an opportunity to read and add to their transcripts if they wished. I was told to send the transcripts to the Year leader and she would organise that this happen. Again I had concerns about confidentiality and beside that I really wanted to meet some of them again, plus interview a few who had been sick on their allocated interview day.

[Field Notes 2nd August, 2007]

Smyth et al. (2006, p. 139) argue that critical ethnographers have to be prepared to live with such tension and uncertainty as expressed in these field notes and be prepared to be continually surprised. The inconclusive character of such experiences,
they advise, can be considered legitimate virtues rather than limitations (p. 139). Other researchers such as Walker (cited in Jeffrey & Troman, 2004, p. 538) advocate alternative ways of thinking about the cyclic nature of critical ethnography because “ethnographic projects are never finished, only left, with their accounts considered provisional and tentative”. By overcoming these challenges, with the support of other experienced researchers, I was then finally able to conduct the interviews. In the next section, I outline the process of ‘how’ these interviews were eventually administered.

6.2 The Interview Process

In conducting the interviews, I used as a structural guide a three phase process from Shacklock’s (1997) interview strategy. This allowed me to adopt a legitimate and reflexive position. The first interview phase was one of reconnaissance, checking and finding my feet and orientating myself in the school site and at the same time, familiarising the students and the school with my research. Clandinin and Connelly (1994, p. 420) explain that “the way an interviewer acts, questions, and responds in an interview shapes the relationship and, therefore, the ways participants respond and give accounts of their experience.” The kinds of questions asked and the ways they are structured provided a frame within which participants could shape their accounts of their experience. Schultz (2001, p. 2) distinguishes a similar participatory research approach as she crafts research projects ‘with’ and ‘for’ the participants rather than ‘on’ them. Building on this approach assisted in developing the critical form of data collection by inviting students to participate in, reflect on and have more control over the research process than more conventional methods. As such, these interviews were able to develop between participants and myself, the
interviewer, in a reciprocal manner. An example of the invitational question to encourage students’ perceptions of their school experience and begin this reciprocal process was “I am interested to know about your schooling”.

During the first month I had planned to interview about ten to fifteen student volunteers aged between 14 and 16 years of age (Year 10 cohort) using relatively open-ended questions. The interview was to last about 35 minutes each and held during the first semester of 2007. It was the initial intention that students be interviewed individually or in small groups in a quiet, private space of the school nominated by the year co-ordinator. What eventuated, however, is that the students did not want to be interviewed on their own so I arranged for the participants to be grouped in fours or pairs to capture the incidental conversations that occurred. The place and timing of interviews remained the same. Instead of ten students, I had twenty four volunteer participants attend in their groups of four or pairs, capturing not only answers to the open ended questions, but also other incidental conversations. The students were stimulated from the comfort of having at least one other peer in their presence. Only one interview was conducted alone out of the total cohort, and that was when the other student was absent:

I have also noticed that when students are being interviewed together as a group that the conversation really flows easily. They are often familiar with each other, many having stayed in the same class since primary school years. Their interactive relationships mean that they often trigger communal memories, visions, thoughts and understandings. I often find myself humbled and in awe of their amazing group cohesion, respect and knowledge. [2nd August 2007, Field notes]

By interviewing the students in groups this way also reduced the methodological and ethical problem of me as adult interviewer controlling the interviews and eliciting from students what they thought that I wanted to hear (Nespor, 1997, p. 232).
This first phase of the interview process also included the compilation and execution of important letters and forms. These consisted of a letter to the principal of Anchorage High, information for parents and an invitational letter and consent form for students. A copy of these letters is attached in the appendices at the end of this dissertation (Appendix A and B). The purpose of these letters was to request permission to conduct interviews, familiarise concerned parties with my research intentions, outline plans for support, the rationale of the study, and supply a range of contact numbers and expertise if further concerns or information was required.

The second round of the interview process was a more in-depth and active phase. I ensured as best as possible, within the constraints of the school structure, that this interview was in a relaxed and comfortable conversational style to promote greater interaction, the emergence of students own stories and further development of their ideas. As this was a more active and detailed stage of the field work, it meant pursuing and checking transcripts collected from phase one as well as seeking clarity of details and developing a sharper focus. The data became richer as I became more familiar with the students, in turn; they became more familiar with my style of interviewing. I also began to notice richer verbal forms appear in their more casual conversations. As Nespor (1997 p. 233) notes, the students talk over each other, tell jokes, relate to television and movies programmes, ask more personal questions of me and each other. This became even more authentic as I was able to enlist student stories as the social change agent (Giroux, 2005, p. 143) as they expressed themselves in a relaxed yet respectful manner. Smyth (1992, p. 4) argues that there is a need for educators to approach and view schools in this way so one can be actively engaged in the production and struggle for voice. Instead, what often occurs it that
the “dominant school culture generally represents and legitimizes the privileged voices” (Giroux, 2005, p. 143).

I then began to target discussions more strategically. I had more specific questions about topics that had emerged from the first round of interviews, such as those related to ‘code of conduct’, students own experiences of being on detention and the impact of friends and family on their lives at school. I was able to take advantage of the easy flowing conversations that were occurring between participants, making my role as interviewer much easier. All I then needed to do was to continue encouraging this natural ‘flow’ and help monitor equal distribution of their stories. These ‘critical dialogues’ were structured in a way that engaged participants in topics relating to their own experiences and raised both their and my own consciousness. The dynamics of the observer-participant relation was allowed to become less hierarchical and more dialogic. Brown (2004) explains how this occurs:

It is not an act of analysis but of interpenetration insofar as ethnographic inquiry is doubly sheathed in the experience of the ethnographer and in the lived reality of the participant, which are brought into dialectical contact in the knowledge-making process. Knowledge is, therefore, the outcome of a ‘web of relations’: a collaborative effect that is a precondition for collaborative cultural action. (p. 308)

The third phase was the reactive phase based on Shacklock’s (1997) three phase interview strategy. This involved following up of gaps, sorting clarification, sounding out hunches and even more group interaction. Initially, the intention was that this phase occur when students were being interviewed, however, it eventuated between the participants themselves. A rich, relaxed, informal and authentic style of interview occurred managing to remain on the topic of behaviour management thus capturing the students own experiences, understandings and interpretations. My role
during this phase became more of a participant researcher, mentoring and maintaining respectful purpose. Hickey and Fitzclarence (2000, p. 122) draw on the principles of affiliation and narrative to develop such ‘conversational flow’ with participants that aims to “nurture active listening, uninterrupted speech and engagement with emotional content.”

I then began to combine these ‘captured’ interviews with my own observational data and other literary observations and points of reference, to develop common themes or portraits for further discussion. Smyth and Hattam et al. (2000, p. 74) term this mapping and organising of material as “orienting concepts” which can then be organised into an inter-related group to form “a constellation of orienting concepts” (p. 74). Hickey and Fitzclarence (2000, p. 130) also use this spatial metaphor of mapping the “landscape of action”. According to them, it is characterised by a focus on description of a situation, moment or event within a sequence of events, references to situations, moments or events within the context of past, present and future; and options for alternatives – “the counter plot” (p. 130). This exploration of alternative stories involved turning subjective understandings of these students into more objectified perspectives, so that I was able to see the alternative stories that existed. Returning to Wolcott’s (1981) staged strategies for participant observation; I was also constantly searching for the paradoxes and problems facing the group.

6.3 Discussion

At first critical ethnography seemed overwhelmingly difficult and cumbersome to not only grasp as a methodology but also awkward to define and rather elusive. However, when approached as a mapping process and using other researchers’ literature and advice it became more accessible and purposeful for my own research.
It allowed me to listen to and represent students’ accounts and to highlight the mismatch between what the behaviour management discourses advocate and what students themselves have to say about the policy experience. Foley (2002, p. 477) states that these “mappings are always approximate and subject to reformulation and debate within the field of production.” A journal entry reflects this:

Today, going through the transcripts again a year later, I have this sense of time and change as an ethnographer. I captured something in a place at a particular time – unique, yes, but I also cringe sometimes when I read some of the questions asked and the words and phrases used. I want to be able to go back, to edit. Yet, ultimately, I am confronted with the fact that it would be both unethical and change the data. I have changed my ideas, my thinking and the way I look at things. So yes, of course I want to change this story. This must be a continual challenge in the recording and recounting of events; the fact that one cannot predict how that story will frame when actually written and yet again, how it will deliver when read over the passage of time. [Journal Entry, 20th June 2008]

What I struggle with here is the understanding that there are no original voices because as Denzin (1995, p. 585) explains every transcription is a re-telling and each attempt at repetition creates a new experience.

During this field work, two types of observation were recorded; descriptive and reflective. The fieldwork was a form of enquiry in which I became personally immersed in the ongoing activities of the students for the purposes of the research. It was characterised by personal involvement to achieve some level of understanding that could then be shared with others (Wolcott, 1981). Next, I gained the respect and trust of those in the school setting and established a working relationship which gave license to observe, to question and to participate. I took memos to capture preliminary analysis and concepts as a way in which to theorize (Jeffery & Troman, 2004, p. 539) and sort through many of the contradictions and challenges that had
presented along the way. An extensive example of this ‘sorting’ is recorded below in a reflective journal entry made after the collection of data:

The feeling of regret of not being able to interview those students who I said goodbye to 12 months ago. What do I do? I realise that I missed some opportunities to ask them questions that may have assisted the research. I could have got more in-depth information. Is this because my awareness has changed and my understanding of the topic? Was I too focused on the question and not allowing the conversation to move into a new terrain? How permanent is this data? – The spoken word said at a particular time about a particular topic in a specific context – so vulnerable, so many factors, brings forth sometimes more questions than it answers. Does this mean I have to evaluate its worth to such a degree? Can I not just be content that the substance of what is said is still valid/valuable/pertinent to the research? Maybe there would have been other pathways of conversation and responses but then again maybe not. By not having begun somewhere, the data would not even exist. Who is to say that a conversation will always lead on a particular path anyway? It is temporal – I have made it permanent by recording – am I being too expectant, too judgemental about its content? Looking too intensely at its fibre and fabric as though it is to be worn and displayed (to model) or to be hung in a wardrobe (to store)?

The temporal essences of conversations are being shrouded in a blanket of doubt – rather than celebrating their presence, their uniqueness. The participants, I am sure do not doubt what they said or where they went. I begin to see I write to answer my own questions but I also write to express, to ‘prose’ – it begins to feel like a dance that I perform with my pen. [Journal Entry, 27th June 2008].

In this journal entry, I consciously attend to orientations of data collection and analysis, shaping what I see and what I make of what I see (Peshkin, 1988, p. 21). As he confirms (p. 17), my subjectivity is “like a garment that cannot be removed” as it is so insistently present in my research. By actively soliciting the stories and interpretations of behaviour management as told by the students, I make a conscious decision to represent their versions of their experience, with the intention that others can understand and ‘see’ the impact of daily social relations and institutional practices on students and how these can often result in inequities in schools.
6.4 Conclusion

Informal conversations have been shared throughout this chapter in an attempt to deconstruct the behaviour management discourse presently prevalent by using critical analysis to ‘push against’ the ‘status quo’. Narrative portraits have been woven throughout this research to bring to the fore ‘real voices’ that speak to and with the theoretical discussions. Ultimately, this could potentially open more conversations between students, teachers, teachers and students, with parents and with educationalists, especially around how the school may accommodate the students (Thomson, 1999, p. 12). What has often been distant in thoughts, as expressed by my journal entries, can become closer and more accessible through the process of focusing on what students have to say. Young (1995, p. 10) explains that the “purpose of struggles around issues of voice and who gets the speaking parts in the drama of the social construction of reality is strategic” (p. 10). Other strategic crafting tools I have drawn on throughout this research are the traditions of voiced research, critical ethnography, case study, policy analysis and auto-ethnography interwoven as a complex methodological approach. I have intended that the narratives presented (both mine and the students) together with field notes and journal jottings “document human behaviour and experience in context” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997, p. 11) unlike positivism which prefers to ignore humanness and history. This is because my theoretical framework found itself at odds with the positivist emphasis on the immediate and that which can be expressed, measured and calculated in precise neat formulas and abstracted from the setting. Throughout this research, I am not asking simple questions that have clear and accurate instrumental type answers. The context instead, is rich in cues about how the actors or subjects negotiate and understand their experience. It is only then that
the tension between potentiality and actuality begin to dissolve (Giroux, 1983a, p. 16). It is also because of the nature of critical ethnography that I found myself ‘crawling through a tunnel’ of challenges in order to find the voices of students. These challenges included gaining approval to enter the school, collecting and representing the students via their narratives and finally maintaining the contact made with them in the school. In closing this chapter, Inglis (2003) provides a timely ‘wake-up’ call for my methodological intentions, when he says that we should not presume any absolute boundary between body, mind and emotion:

The grand task, one quite enough to make one’s heart swell and blood run quick, is to help contrive out of the facts of the matter an everyday story about education that will help students and teachers alike to do right and live well. (p. 132)

In the next chapter I will expand on this everyday story about education, by exposing in more detail in a thematic constellation of orientating concepts, what it is that the students have to say regarding The Behaviour Management in Schools policy.
CHAPTER 7- FINDING THE NARRATIVE: ‘THEY JUST DON’T LISTEN’

There are all kinds of stories. Some are born with the telling; their substance is language, and before someone puts them into words they are but a hint of an emotion, a caprice of mind, an image, or an intangible recollection. Others are manifest whole, like an apple, and can be repeated infinitely without risk of altering their meaning. Some are taken from reality and processed through inspiration, while others rise up from an instant of inspiration and become real after being told.

[Allende, 1991, p. 158]

Sometimes one reads a story to lose themselves and the pain of the world by going into the fiction – other peoples’ lives somehow distract from their own. This is not one of those stories – this is about real people experiencing real frictions and it is a story waiting to be told. [Journal reflections, July, 2009]

7.1 Introduction

This chapter reveals the narrative portraits of the students as they speak the realities of school life and as Shacklock, Smyth and Wilson (1998, p. 2) argue, “voice functions to remind the reader that research deals with the lives of real people”. In this way, I call upon the reader’s imagination to give credence to alternative realities (Greene, 1995) and allow space for change “to discover how it looks and feels from the vantage point of the person whose world it is” (p. 4). By gaining insight into the social reality of schools such as Anchorage High (Goodman, 1992, p. 44), these stories have been positioned to display the emotional capacity and revelations that are possible when students do really feel safe and welcomed to share lived experiences thus providing the reader with the possibility of a ‘cultural shift’ in understanding them.
Whilst reading and understanding the theory surrounding schools and school policy, I began to notice what at first seemed a ‘tangle’ eventuated to reveal a ‘knot’ of contradictions. To reiterate the main argument flowing throughout this thesis and now into this chapter, is the proposal that if *Behaviour Management in Schools* policy genuinely provided safe and secure relationships then such policy may have some positive impact. Instead this policy appears to have been hurriedly devised, implemented and enforced without actual consultation and consideration of the complexities of schools and the students in them. The impact of such actions resulting from this policy can create further resistance and alienation of students as education practices continue to operate as a form of ‘social control’ (Preston & Symes, 1992). As a result, there is more likely to be “alienation of body from mind, reason from feeling and emotion, action from thought, and self from other” (p. 36). Paradoxically, the statements within this policy claim to “develop a learning environment that is welcoming, supportive and safe” and are “made according to principles of procedural fairness” (DET, BMIS Policy, 2001, p 4). These statements do not match the reality of the lives of some of the students that I interviewed during this research. Whilst such rhetorical claims of caring and fairness are easily made in policy statements, the enactment of them, according to Ball (2008, p. 195), becomes increasingly more complex and challenging. Accordingly, the BMIS policy appears to be written with the intention of alleviating school behaviour problems yet it largely serves to exacerbate an already complex ‘knot’ of troubles. Brannock (2000, p. 39) refers to this as the “behaviour management industry” as there is often much attention to rigid rules, the surveillance and documentation of such rules; truancy and attendance, individual behaviour plans, isolation, detention, compliance, uniform, testing, standards and accountability. This chapter then provides a space and forum
for students (Shacklock et al., 1998, p. 12) to speak back to the behaviour management industry about their own understandings, interpretations and experiences of school behaviour management.

If we think and talk about students as real people (Nakkula, 2003) with a lived experience that is ongoing “integrating successes, failures, routines, habits, rituals, novelties, thrills, threats, violations, gratifications, and frustrations into a coherent and evolving interpretation” (Nakkula, 2003, p. 7), then we are more likely to know who they are, and how their lives have been shaped. It is these everyday experiences of family, friends, and schools that carry significant weight in the ongoing cultural processes of identity formation (Nakkula, 2003, p. 15). My intention in this chapter is to illuminate narratives of the students by creating portraits that are more likely to “capture” and “to probe” (Goodman 1992, p. 45) what is going on for students in secondary schools.

7.2 Stories from the students

Student narratives unfurl the reality of complex lives, and in so doing, illustrate the power of discovering something about people’s social identity (Wexler, 1992, p. 128) and voice. Max, a Year 10 student, explains that:

> It doesn’t just effect you it effects everyone else as well.

Wexler (1992) elaborates on the significance of what students like Max have to say when considering identity:

In their own words, students are trying to ‘become somebody’. They want to be somebody, a real and presentable self, anchored in the verifying eyes of friends whom they come to school to meet. While they are aware of a life after education, in the occupational world of work, and in varying degrees acknowledge interest and attention to the learning of school subjects, their central and defining activity in school is to establish
at least the image of an identity. ‘Becoming somebody’ is action in the public sphere, and this is what life in high school is about (p. 155).

In the section to follow we hear from Shane, Jen and Stu who have stories to tell of connected events in their lives, revealing their own social identities as they too try to ‘become somebody’. I have chosen the narratives of Stu, Jen and Shane at the beginning of this chapter to highlight the extreme mismatch between the search for spaces and relationships that these students reveal in identity formation and the school’s emphasis on following codes of rigid, corrective rules that have no relevance to them.

7.2.1 Shane’s story: ‘Trying to fit in’

Shane’s story represents this theme of identity as he continually struggles to fit in at school. The complex series of social events he describes reveal a mismatch because of the potent mix of institutionalised schooling and the largely ineffective practices and principles underpinning behaviour management regimes in schools.

Shane is a kind and resilient student, he looks out for his friends and they look out for him. Like many young people, he is trying to work out where he fits into society. He endeavours to get on the right side of the school and the authorities and tries to get along with people. He does not have an outright rebellious attitude. He is gentle, agile, and slight in build and loves to skateboard. He is polite to his teachers and tries to do the right thing by the student management team. Yet life at home for Shane has not been easy. His mother was having her own battles with heavy drug addiction with three other young children to look after. She had been in serious trouble with the law and in the prison system for the past six years. Shane has three step siblings and he is the eldest. He tendered to others’ concerns during the time I observed him in interviews, being at ease and familiar with his responsible caring role.
The school’s code of conduct, however, does not take into account Shane’s awkward living situation. For example, the ‘out of uniform’ rule actually makes life more difficult. Shane tries to do the right thing to maintain his ‘Good Standing’, have a clean slate to attend school functions and be on the right side of the teachers. This constant struggle to fit in and be accepted is apparent in Shane’s words. One consequence of Shane having to continually comply with rules regarding uniform and attendance, in the context of his current living arrangement, is a sense of frustration and loss of motivation.

Shane lost his ‘Good Standing’ because he was out of school uniform. The schools standard uniform is a t-shirt with the school logo on it. In Shane’s case, the focus on Shane's image, in uniform, rather than on his situation, meant that his complex life circumstances were not considered. For example, he had just moved house during a family crisis situation and his grandparents were trying to help him the best they could. This is a cycle that Shane has been trying to break during his high school years, as he had already been expelled from school at a young age, reacting to his mother being imprisoned.

"It was because I bashed a guy. I was in Yr 6, and my Mum was going to court that day and probably going to gaol, and did end up going to gaol. That day I was sitting in school really depressed then this guy said “what is wrong with you, get over it, just cause your Mum is going to goal” then I just knocked him off his chair and beat the ‘crap out of him’. My family is so confusing; it is like a trivia game or something. I have so many step-parents and parents and now I have moved to live with my grandparents because I can no longer live with my parents and it is a lot easier there. Now there is just me and my two younger brothers even though sometimes they drive me mad.

It is easier now that I am living with my grandparents and I can get on with my schooling, but when I was living at my Mum’s it wasn’t easy because of the lifestyle there. It was really bad. The teachers didn’t understand that, I was getting into trouble all the time, because of things like not waking up on time or getting to bed late. My Mum is slack, she did not care if I went to school or not. Even though it is okay to have a day off school, it is not good two days out of every week. It gets really
boring. That is why I changed that and I moved out, so I could do better. So far it is working.

It just makes you angry having to fill out this attendance blue sheet every day. It means you don’t want to come to school so you just stay at home. I have had letters sent home only about my attendance. I have been getting into lots of trouble at home, because the teachers have said that I haven’t been there when I have. They mark me absent and then my family think that I have been ‘wagging’ [absent from school].

Also if you haven’t explained with a note why you are out of uniform then you get detention. I tried to explain to Mr R. (manager student services) when he came up to me ‘look I don’t know where my shirt is, I think my sister might have stolen it off me because I don’t live with her anymore so my school top is obviously lost somewhere around there’. I was going to buy a new one but I have already spent the money today on lunch. I did try to explain to Mr R, but he said I would have to do detention anyway. I am trying really hard to get my Good Standing back so that I can go to the end of year function.

7.2.2 Jen’s story: ‘Feeling left out’

Jen, like Shane has been in trouble with the school system as a consequence of a difficult home situation from very early on in her life. Like many students she became easily disengaged with a system that singled them out because they were not conforming to issues of appearance, uniformity and regimented time schedules. What the school does not have is either the time or inclination to discover or understand that fifteen year old Jen, kidnapped at 2 years of age by her estranged father, has been shunted back and forth between three different states of the nation. She is often not able to attend school because of her unstable home life making school an alien place. When she does attend school now, it is mainly to meet up with friends and have some reassurance from them that she is coping with life.

I lost my Good Standing for being out of uniform. Last year I only came for a few weeks because I just could not be bothered trying to get it back.

Generally she does not attend formal lessons and at home fends for herself. She is an articulate, tall, and beautiful girl. Students such as Jen and Shane do not have the
cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, pp. 71-106) to be able to demonstrate that they can push beyond barriers of control and image, repairing the negative history of their reputations to improve their position and status in the school culture. They do not have supportive families that are prepared or able to turn up to parent meetings or restorative panels, and advocate for their children. Even if they could, some families may not have the appropriate social and cultural ‘capital’ themselves to know how to play the advocacy game as they often have bad memories of school and failed in the same system. What is remarkable about young adults like Jen is that in spite of all of these difficulties, they themselves have coping strategies that they call on to survive. Jen, for example, managed the situation by coming to school occasionally to catch up with her supportive network of friends, including Shane and Stu. She continues to experience a difficult time at home. In deciphering what is going on in Jen’s family ‘appears’ as a complex jigsaw.

Jen – I’m the... uuh... No I am not the eldest out of my Mums kids, but the youngest out of my Dad’s kids. My Mum and Dad were together when my Mum was 12 and Dad was 14, they were together till he was 17, then they broke up, my Dad had 3 kids (twins and me and another before the twins) then got back together with my Mum. Then my Mum cheated on my Dad, my Dad died, then my Mum had four other kids and then my Mum died. I was kidnapped when I was two years old. I was on the news and everything. I was over here then and it was a month after I was born. My Mum was still with my Dad at the time. My Mum was 19 when she had me so she still went out to parties and left me with my Dad’s sister. My Dad was in gaol in Melba. So they took me to Melba.

7.2.3 Stu’s story: ‘It is not easy’

Stu is a tall, solidly built young man who is protective of his Mother and Jen, the student in the above narrative. He has been in the same class at school as Jen and Shane for the past four years and they have all developed a caring, supportive relationship with one another.
In his interview, Stu reflects on difficult situations that both he and his friends find themselves in and tries to fathom the situation. He is not someone who minces words. Stu is clear about what troubles him and his peers regarding the school’s emphasis on attendance and image that emanate from the code of conduct.

It is not hard to get into trouble. Like attendance, if you have 3 unexplained absences, you lose your Good Standing. But sometimes the teachers just forget to mark the roll. You come late, so they don’t mark you present.

Stu’s parents have recently separated from each other and their future lies in the family court. Stu is frustrated that the school has not listened to requests they do not pass on their private and school information to his father. The school, however, did not honour this request, as the protocol is that a parent interview be administered when one is out of ‘Good Standing’ as Stu explains:

This school needs to listen. When I got into trouble, the school asked my Dad to come in for a meeting. I tried to explain that they could not do that as they have both just separated, that is going to cause problems putting them into the same room at the same time. I live only with my Mum. So my Mum and Dad both still came, and yeah they argued in our interview! They should have listened….now my Mum and I have to drive around to my Dad’s place every week to gather the mail out of his mail box that the school sends there even when my Mum asked that the school not do that. They (the teachers) all seem to think that we have life easy at home. They think that out of school is easy, so we should just come happily to school every day, do our work and not talk. If you hold all that stuff in, you get nowhere in life and you are then going to be miserable. Jen’s life is not good at the moment so I try to talk to her to help, but the teachers don’t understand.

7.2.4 Shane, Jen & Stu’s story: ‘They don’t understand’

Shane, Jen & Stu speak lucidly and calmly about complicated life situations, yet in school they are required to conduct themselves in a manner that conforms to punitive and often irrelevant rules that do not take into consideration their adverse situations at home. For example, during the interview process, it became apparent to
Jen and to Shane that their respective mothers had been in the same maximum security prison at the same time.

Jen – I have pictures of my Mum when she was in goal. We have so much in common [talking to Shane].

Shane – yeah, my Mum was in prison for a year – her sentence was for two, but one year was probation (good behaviour). That was in 2003. She was in prison for my birthday, Christmas and everything.

Jen– yeah, my Mum went in various times for a lot of different things. When I was six years old I was allowed to stay overnight with her.

Shane – Yeah, the same.

Jen – there were these houses and playgrounds; I think it was Corridale Prison.

Shane – Yeah, did it have a fence with no barbwire?

Jen [becoming very excited] YEAH

Shane – that was so good…OH MY GOD, our Mums went to the same prison! It had actual little houses, little kitchens,

Jen- yeah, they had TV and everything,

Shane – they had their own rooms and about 4 people under one roof. I remember that because we had roast chicken and gravy for tea.

Jen – yeah, I remember when I stayed over, they had face painting and were taking pictures and stuff of all the people in the house. They were professional photos. That day I remember because I was supposed to see my Dad. I had not seen him since I was like two months old. But Mum did not know that he had died. He had died three years previous and she only just found out that day. I hated my Mum. I did not like my Mum because she lied to me. She said that I would get to meet my Dad. I got really excited, but he didn’t come.

These stories reveal the poignant points in these young people’s lives where they share moments of pain, and in doing so, also share points of understanding and compassion. They also reveal what is relevant for them. Non-conformity to rules enforced around punctuality and being out of uniform cannot match the chaotic complexity of their lives. Due to such oppressive schooling arrangements, these students often become situated ‘on the outside’ of mainstream and struggle to be
allowed the privileges of other ‘class members’ (McInerney, 2009, p. 28). They do, however, find solace and acceptance in these discussions and interactions with their peers who on many occasions are experiencing similar alienation and frustrations. They survive by trying to ‘get on’ and look to the future with a sense of possibility and hope.

It is paramount that if we want to work successfully with these young adults and help sustain their dignity individually as well as socially (Smyth, 2006, p. 40) then we need to listen to their narratives and versions which reveal rich textual meanings. Their portraits could then construct an account from their own perspective, creating spaces for “existential” realities (Smyth, 2006, p. 36). Field notes I wrote after data collection explain how powerful an impact the student narratives of Jen, Shane and Stu can have:

Now I am using these narratives 10 months later and feel a sense of something – I don’t know what words to use, but it is an acknowledgement, an awareness, that I probably will never see these people again, yet, they have provided so much insight from these two interviews, into their worlds. In creating this narrative, reliving the actual event, is like being able to step inside again, being privy to their sacred spaces; their combined interactive knowledge’s and shared experience. [Postscript field notes, April 2007]

Wexler’s (1992) ethnographic research on student voice and social life in high schools supports such awareness and speaks to the emotion that is often difficult to express as a researcher in the position outlined above:

The participants speak and I record and selectively re-present their voices. But to pretend that this is simply a dialogical construction of the facts of the case would be arrogant, exploitative and deceptive. I hear their voices in my ears, and I speak my words, conditioned by my place in historical social movement and by the language and analytical resources available to me. (p. 2)
Beginning with the theme of ‘Student Voice’, I will continue to weave students’ voices into themes of discussion with the provocative intention of “disturbing the natural rhythms of social reality” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997, p. 11) and begin untangling the many contradictions that prevail. It is not the intention to blame this particular school or any school or its specific teachers. Rather, I stress throughout this discussion, the ‘tensions’ that arise between student versions of events and the powerlessness that occurs when relationships break down from the enforcement of irrelevant rules of conduct. It is time to disrupt ‘common sense’ versions and construct alternative readings about these young people (Weis & Fine, 2004, p. 150) because their stories remind one that the most powerful meaning of democracy is formed “not in glossy political rhetoric, but in the details of everyday lives” (Apple & Beane, 1999, p. 120).

To introduce these themes, a heuristic model and explanation has been developed from the data collected. This model provides an explanatory framework of the student narrative portraits including those of Stu, Shane and Jen.
This model represents what the student narratives reveal about their experience of BMIS policy. The key emergent themes are shown on the outside of the model; student voice, disengagement, control, marginalisation, relationships and powerlessness. Each theme is reflected in quote verbatim from student transcripts to capture its essence:

- **Student Voice** - ‘They just don’t listen to my side of the story and to my life outside of school’
- **Disengagement** - ‘I am bored with the same old stuff and some does not make sense’
- **Control** - ‘They wear me down so it becomes like a prison’
- **Marginalisation** – ‘It’s just not fair’
- **Relationships** – ‘Can we get along because when they help me things really improve’
- **Powerlessness** - ‘They don’t care so I just give up and do nothing’
These key statements, drawn from transcripts recorded during student interviews, ‘spoke’ to me in powerful ways and demanded my attention as they represented what I thought were the essence of each theme. A journal entry captures this:

When you are absorbed into storytelling, almost everything you look at touches you – all that draws you in – grabs your attention, has a story sitting close behind... [Journal Entry, 18th March 2008]

At times the text has been re-worded or quotes inserted from relevant literature to expand the theme. Whilst these comments may appear overly bleak, I acknowledge that these negative and constraining patterns can be reversed or ‘unmade’. Giroux (1983a, p. 31) argues that “human beings not only make history, they also make the constraints”. Foucault (1988, p. 37) makes a similar point that “if things have been made, then they can be unmade, as long as we know how it was that they were made”. The following discussion is, therefore, focused on how these situations came to be with a view to remaking them in more empowering ways (see Chapter 8).

7.3 Themes of Discussion

To transfer the ethnographic data into some form of analysis, I considered many aspects of student experiences of behaviour management and the dominant and recurring stories they shared, including their resilience through difficult circumstances. I also noted if students had actually negotiated the system in order to cope whilst others remained disaffected. Osler and Starkey (2005, p. 198) confirm that such evidence to help identify the causes of disaffection can be collected by listening to young people’s stories. Critical ethnography encourages a continual repositioning, so as a researcher I am trying to capture and represent the students’ perspectives by continually considering my own positioning when collecting data.
Brannock (2000, p. 38, 39) warns of the tendency of adults not to listen to young people. This ‘adultcentrism’ is “especially evident in the current preoccupation with behaviour management in schools” (p. 39). Kelly (1998, p. 30), also asks us to think problematically about the failure of listening to student voices because “the discourse of ‘youth-at-risk’ uses a form of probabilistic thinking about the relation between certain preferred adult futures and the present behaviours of youth.” By distinguishing a minority of students to be ‘at risk’ misrepresents the lives of most other young people and draws attention to what is wrong with these students rather than what may be wrong with schooling (te Riele, 2006 & te Riele, 2007, p. 64).

During the process of transcribing the first interviews, combined with a slow, reflective period of data analysis (Ezzy, 2002, p. 70), I gradually linked the experience of students with the theory I had been immersed in as researcher. Two dominant themes of ‘not being listened to’ and ‘being bored’ revealed some of the reasons for student disengagement, alienation and resistance. Once disenchantment occurs there is often a snowball effect of students failing and falling into a spiral of powerlessness, further marginalisation, unhealthy relationships and destructive interactions within the school. In the section to follow I shall examine in turn each of these themes; student voice, disengagement, control, marginalisation, relationships and powerlessness.

7.3.1 Student voice

‘They just don’t listen’

_Max – some teacher’s help you when they know things are happening at home and stuff; others don’t take account of that at all. Like here they say, ‘yeah’, we have student services to help you, but they don’t notice it. They wait for your parents to call the school. Like last year I used to go off at my teachers and that because my Mum was trying to kill herself. It happened 3 times. My parents were splitting up as well. I didn’t know_
For Max, as MacLure (2003, p. 177) warns, “the hazards of failing to be ‘heard’ are multiple and cumulative, precisely because knowledge, expertise and identity are all implicated in discourse.” And yet, what Max’s narrative is saying is that he is not really listened to, because the reasons behind his actions and behaviours are much more complex than simply him being rebellious.

Janean – did you get a chance to talk to anyone about it?

Max – only when my Dad rang the school. They, (the teachers) did not seem to take it into account. I ended up getting into a fight with an old mate, Doug, because he brought my Mum into it. He got suspended again, and no one seemed to understand the reasons behind the fight. I tried to tell them about it, but they did not seem to be concerned as they were more concerned about me getting into trouble for what I did.

In this dialogue, the social, cultural and environmental needs and experiences of Max appear not to be taken into consideration when mainstream expectations and decisions are made of how students should be as a member of one’s school. The mismatch between Max’s interpretation of events and the reaction of a school struggling to ‘fix’ things continues to exacerbate the problem. Consequently, “children who do not get this kind of apprenticeship run the risk of not being ‘heard’ because their discourse habits do not fit the pattern that teachers are listening out for” (MacLure, 2003, p.177). Stu and Shane share some of their insights around the same problem:

Stu & Shane – that is the problem, teachers never listen to your side of the story. They always think that they are right.

Stu – that is what ticks me off about teachers, I want to be a primary school teacher, but the teachers I experience never let you get a word in. I do not want to be like that. I want to listen to both sides of the story and not assume. I want to be talked to, not just yelled at.
Such events in which these young people are entangled will only make sense in behaviour management practices by abandoning “the habit of thinking about troublemaking as a kind of irrational, pathological syndrome, that is, as a kind of person, and instead thinking of it as a particular relationship, a form of resistance to conventional schooling” (Connell et al., 1982, p. 84). Student voices need to be heard in order to reverse such passivity and provoke involvement (Shor, 1992, p. 54) especially at the cognitive and affective levels. Students such as Stu and Shane “routinely hold back their voices as a means of resisting traditional classrooms where authority is unilateral and where they lack an inspiring life of the mind which speaks to their dreams and needs” (Shor, 1992, p. 54).

*Stu – then you shout at them, and you get into trouble for shouting, for them not listening!*

*Shane – then they shout at you, you feel really belittled, when you are sitting down and they hover over top of you, shouting.*

Viewed from this perspective, it is possible to see a pattern of power struggles between students and teachers, circulating back and forth as more control is imposed upon students as they resist, refuse to comply or dis-engage, ultimately resulting in poor relationships. It is important that student versions such as Stu’s and Shane’s are heard because failure to do so “often leads to either outright sabotage or silence” (Smyth, Hattam et al., 2004, p. 78) and “being heard is important in becoming a person” (Smyth, 2005a, p. 229).

### 7.3.2 Disengagement

When students are disengaged, they sense that their own interpretations of events are dull, unimportant, disregarded and disrespected, and then it is only a small step to
‘switching off’ from the curriculum and other events that the school consider important for students. They are essentially bored with school.

‘I am bored’

Jason – Some teachers do not even want to be here, like our last teacher will just give you work, write a lot of stuff on the board and then just gives us textbooks.

Beth – yeah, then it is ‘just write this down’, then he will go to this page, write the questions down, these numbers, and then he just goes out of the room for about 30 minutes.

Many of the students reported the curriculum to be repetitive and unimaginative. Pedagogically it was delivered in a very dull, un-explorative manner, with notes being copied off the board, or given as a text book exercise or worksheets to fill out. Often, the curriculum did not relate to their own needs or interests and consequently there was limited opportunity to engage with the teacher or others in their learning. They felt they were ‘spoon-fed’ information just for a test or to please the teacher. It was seldom relational or contextual to their culture or identities. These bored students then presented as a problem in the classroom, as no longer could they sit still or be docile. In short, they resisted. As Shor (1992, p. 24) states, student resistance to dominant discourses is thus “provoked, driven underground, where it becomes a subterranean source of acting out”. What these students reveal is that:

‘It does not make sense to me’

Stu – you can’t learn if you are doing it from a book. You need someone to talk to you.

Shane- yes when you have to use a book, you need to take time to understand; when you are speed reading you just skim and get a few key words for that question.

Shane – like in class, she will put a projector on, and then we have to just copy it down quickly before she changes to the next sheet. We are just writing and copying words, we are not taking anything in and she is not explaining it to us.
Stu – then she talks while we are writing! What is the point in doing that? You can’t look, write, understand and listen at the same time. Especially for us guys, I can read, but it is not something I like to do.

Throughout my research, I have noted that a ‘mainstream classroom’ is often constructed as something that is the ideal; perfect, happy, eager faces enthusiastic to learn and engage. However, what is often the reality is a classroom with rows of isolated seats, an emphasis on content and uniformity, punctuality, neatness, silence and conformity. Connell (1985, p. 110) suggests that in these later practices there exists a “yearning for a quick, once-and-for-all solution” by teachers. Thus students become even more disengaged.

‘We are bored with the same old stuff’

Cor – we are not missing anything in class. It is so repetitive and boring.

Tam – we did this stuff last year,

Cor - some of it in the year before

Janean – so what do you do when you are bored?

Tam – just don’t do our work and talk or draw or something

Cor – Society & Environment is the best to be bored in

Janean – why is that?

Tam – we don’t do anything and the teacher does not care

Cor – or we sit on the floor if we are really bored

Tam – lay down on our backs, sometimes the teacher lets us lay our heads on our desk…..we only ever watch videos, or learn about the war...

Cor – the work is so repetitive. You are doing the same thing week after week. It just keeps on going. Kids get agitated. Some days we just do not want to get up and come to school.

What Cor and Tam demonstrate are sources of “systematic difficulty” (Connell, 1994, p. 137). This difficulty plays out particularly for students in disadvantaged schools, in which traditional subject content, texts and teaching methods along with
an emphasis on standardised testing that divides the students. What this means is an even greater gap “between an academically successful minority and an academically discredited majority” (p. 137). These challenges and dimensions have a powerful effect on how these students make sense of their schooling as they attempt to negotiate “the spaces that exist for them to be listened to and how they work to shape schools as places” (Smyth, 1998a, p. 7). The conversation between Gary and Eli demonstrates students shaping their school:

*Gary – some people get sent out for just asking questions. She expects us to behave when she sits us next to people that we don’t like. If I go and sit next to my friend, she yells at me, yet she places people together who stuff up.*

*Eli – then we get entertainment out of her. She has big frizzy hair, and we stick stuff in it.*

*Gary – she deserves it.*

*Eli – the best thing is she is trying to get us Bunsen burners.*

*Gary – with our class, that is not the smartest idea.*

*Eli – yeah, like in year 8, I burnt things. Like my paper, cause you just sit there holding this test tube over a flame and it gets boring. So you stick other things in the flame to get more fun out of it.*

Power (1986, p. 251) also argues that “students ‘turned off’ school because teachers were ‘boring’, because teachers ‘pick on ‘students, and because they are too demanding in terms of their work expectations.’ Teachers’ roles have become more accountable and bureaucratic, administering such policies as the *Uniform* and *Good Standing* policy. This can result in filling the day with mindless, boring activities as one attends to the administration of time keeping, uniform code compliance, confiscation of i-pods, and the monitoring of mobile phones. What this means is that teachers too are caught up with techniques of surveillance, having less energy to engage students.
7.3.3 Control

By the word punishment, one must understand everything that is capable of making children feel the offence they have committed, everything that is capable of humiliating them, of confusing them: … a certain coldness, a certain indifference, a question, a humiliation, a removal from office (La Salle, cited in Foucault, 1979, p. 178).

Based on the stories of the young adults that I interviewed, this 18th century quote by La Salle is still relevant in schools today. It is almost impossible to have a discussion about student control in classrooms without a simultaneous discussion about power. This dynamic is represented in Figure 4 earlier in this chapter, as power shifts from being dominated and constrained, leading to a sense of ‘powerlessness’ and ‘being worn down’. Many times in analysing the data for this research, power and control overlap as discussion themes, so it may appear at times an arbitrary decision to separate them. Together, these two complex elements of power and control become a tangled influence in marginalising students.

To highlight the theme of control, firstly I use an extract from my ethnographic journal:

Controlling bodies…
I watched children skipping happily, full of energy, full of fun, Chatting, smiling as they headed along the streets to school.
I then caught myself wondering. Where do they place those bodies, that energy? When they have to line up, sit down, be quiet and put their hands up?
(Journal Entry, May 30th, 2007)

To juxtapose this prose above, a section of Anchorage High’s Good Standing policy is described below to accentuate how current punitive control mechanisms presently considered ‘normal’ can also turn into forms of control. Gary’s name appears in this pro forma letter as he was a student who left school because he had enough of this ‘controlling’ system:
Students who lose their ‘Good Standing’ are required to complete a report card. This card will require a signature from every teacher each day for a week as well as having a parent signature each evening. Should [Gary] fail to complete this within the week, additional time will be added to [Gary’s] loss of ‘Good Standing’. (p. 5)

Foucault (1979, p. 136) defines a ‘docile body’ as one that can be “subjected, used, transformed and improved”. In most secondary schools, one of the procedures used for managing student behaviour and complying with the expectations and protocols of the Behaviour Management in Schools policy is to have a ‘code of conduct’ and a ‘Good Standing’ policy embedded into the schools’ own Behaviour Management Plan. Students can be ‘in’ or ‘out’ of Good Standing. Status is a binary of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ with behaviours determined by individual teachers and other staff of how students conduct themselves in and around the school, especially with regards to compliance to prescribed attire, time schedules and attendance. “Students who continue to fail to meet their expectations are case managed” (ASHS Good Standing policy, p. 1). This attempt to socially condition students, training them to be identified by their bodies and appearance, and their use of space and time leaves little space for alternative readings of the actualities of their lives. Kylie, another student, explains why this system has a “short shelf life” (Slee, 1997, p. 18):

I have had 4 behaviour cards; when teachers cannot put up with your behaviour you get put on a behaviour card. They change the colour every year, so that you can’t copy or forge them.

Janean- I don’t understand...why would people want to forge behaviour cards?

Kylie- so they don’t get suspended... If they are constantly getting bad behaviour reports on their cards, then your rights get taken away, like, your good standing. That means you can’t go on excursions and extra curriculum things and stuff like that... Then the next step is that you get suspended and the next step is you get expelled. So the system doesn’t really work.
When students’ versions of school life are not taken into consideration, problematic behaviours often culminate in power struggles over the particularities of rules and regulations intended to constrain students. The result of this conflict can mean even more controlling action administered from school authorities to prevent situations that may appear ‘out of hand’. As is demonstrated throughout these student versions of events, this ‘hunkering down’ by schools further tightens control and discipline, especially around use of time and positioning of students bodies in space and their identities. It gives students something else to ‘struggle over’ in reclaiming power. As Connell et al. (1982, p. 88) argue, this resistance by students is in relation to the school and is often generated by the interaction with the authority structure. Eventually, much of this futile resistance means students leave school as they give up the struggle. This is what happened to Gary, but not before he exercised some resistance to the rules.

‘Then they wear me down’

Gary explains:

... if only they did not make such a big deal I would probably be able to do what they want, but they wear me down, make such a big deal that it is easier if I just don’t do what they want... at least then I can be a winner somehow!

According to Connell (1985), this emphasis on control is the side of school life that students resent the most:

...being shouted at, ordered about, sometimes being hit; being regimented, lined up, marched about; being shut up when they want to talk, made to be active when they want to be still; being subject all the time to arbitrary dealing by the teachers which they often experience as ‘unfairness’; being picked on, criticized, sometimes, sworn at, and subject to a range of sanctions and punishments at the teacher’s will. (p. 104)
Gary’s resistance to authority does not have to be considered as something negative and destructive either in the lives of students or the culture of schools. Employing alternative reactions and considerations of such incidents, according to Preston and Symes (1992, p. 43); “can be transformative and hopeful… and lead to institutional reforms, to the redesign of education programs and to more humane pedagogic practice…it can also be the catalyst for viable emancipatory classroom practice.” Students such as Gary, however, feel intimidated and constrained as their bodies and identities are controlled in school with the intention that they become more compliant and docile. This is not something new. Almost a century ago, Dewey (1916/1966, p. 141) claimed that the “chief source of the ‘problem of discipline’ in schools” lies with the compulsion of the teacher having to spend large parts of their time in suppressing the bodily activities of students. Such compulsion takes teachers attention away from the joys of authentic teaching and learning because “a premium is put on physical quietude; on silence, on rigid uniformity of posture and movement; upon a machine-like simulation of the attitudes of intelligent interest” (p. 41). As a result, the teachers’ main pre-occupation often turns to punishing any deviations likely to occur such as making too much noise in class:

‘It feels like a prison’

Jenny - One kid in our class is so funny we can’t help but laugh. Then we get into trouble. We get kicked out for laughing. It is like a prison.

Brad – if we make fun of teachers, especially this one we have, or even if you get out of your chair, like this (stands up and rotates on spot) then we get kicked out. The teachers are always finding a way to get you into trouble.

As Foucault (1979, p. 152) states, the “correct use of the body” makes possible a “correct use of time, nothing must remain idle or useless”. Brad and Jenny seem to
be expressing their frustration at this regime of being controlled; this time by being
told the specific details of their uniform:

*Brad* – I was wearing pants that had faded a lighter colour and the
teacher made me go and get a uniform pass.

*Jenny* – same with jumpers, you are not even allowed to wear them. Like
if they are the wrong colour and it is cold, you have to take it off.

*Gary* – It happened 3 weeks ago in science. I refused to take my jumper
off. The teacher kept telling me to take it off and I had a cold at the time
so I didn’t want to take it off.

*Janean* – why did they want you to take it off?

*Gary* – because it wasn’t uniform.

*Eli* – half of us don’t wear uniform. So what is the point of pushing it?

*Gary* – so I got kicked out of class and given a detention notice. I
couldn’t go because I had work and my Mum didn’t realize I had work,
so said okay to going to detention.

It is clear that by individuating students (objectifying them); it is then just a small
step away from them becoming differentiated. Tait (2000, p. 11) confirms that when
differentiating students in this manner they become normalized and thus a
manageable population. The panopticon has moved into the school (Tait, 2000).
Students, meanwhile, often perceive many of the requests to have their bodies
controlled and monitored as being inauthentic. Within this system, school practices,
lack of choice, and the marginalisation of students can often be overlooked
(Brannock, 2000, p. 39). The timetable, for example, in schools such as Anchorage
High, becomes divided into complicated time slots. The day begins at 8.25am then
students must be back into class after recess at 11.05am and after lunch at 13.38pm.
In some instances, the students have to collect a late note from the administration
office if they are late by one minute.
‘We have the weirdest times’

Foucault (p. 1979, p. 205) explains the timetable as a “temporal elaboration of the act” or “distribution of individuals in relation to one another”. For example, Gary’s school timetable demonstrates how this mechanical technique or tool of discipline operates in schools:

<table>
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<tr>
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Lunch

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This form of timetabling, according to Foucault (1979), is as an old inheritance that has spread from monastic communities to “establish rhythms, impose particular occupation and regulate the cycles of repetition” (p. 154). The grids and codes on student timetables demonstrate how these rhythms, occupations and cycles of repetition separate students on the basis of rooms, subjects and specific times in the name of efficiency and order.
It is not only the breakdown of time that is the problem for students, but also the consequences of being late to class as explained by Jenny.

Jenny – in class, like if you are late or whatever you get detention. You sit there after school on Tuesday and if you laugh then you have to stay in longer.

Foucault (1979, p. 151) describes detention time as that which is “measured and paid” and espoused with “precision and application”. When students have been placed on detention for being late, out of uniform or disobeying rules related to electronic devices such as mobiles, then a behaviour incident is recorded on the Student Information System (SIS) into which:

Classroom teachers manage student behaviour and enter records of behaviour in class and during break times on SIS. This is a computer data based programmed used to record the ‘status of students’ and records weekly information on student’s attendance and behaviour (ASHS Good Standing policy, p. 1).

‘Now we are on the system’

Anchorage High’s Good Standing policy indicates that:

If a student has ‘good standing’ they are eligible for the reward of excursion/incursions/carnivals/balls and dinners. A student ‘loses’ their ‘good standing’ when they have,
3 unexplained absences or
3 negative behaviour records in any two week period (p. 2)

The policy problem occurs because of complications arising from these systems such as inaccurate or miscalculated record keeping. Other examples of how this policy becomes problematic include the ways in which negative behaviours can be interpreted. ‘Out of uniform’ could range from ‘being the wrong colour’ to ‘having a stripe too wide’, a ‘logo too big’ or a ‘skirt a centimetre too short’. Assessment of the rule appears to depend not only on who administers the rule, but also the curriculum subject, the student’s relationship with the teacher or manager, and the
student’s reputation within the school community. For example, having a mobile phone on in class is a rule that was okay for some but not others. Ironically, some teachers use their mobile phones during class time. This highlights the contradiction between what is allowable and what isn’t, and for whom the power relations are sacred and safe in and around the school. It also highlights the persistent struggles that occur in school where policy and rules do not keep up with the everyday social lives of students. As Denscombe (1985, pp. 206-7) claims, “the possibility of classroom control will rest on the ability of schools to adapt and reflect the social changes rather than try to hold fast on outdated domination strategies for control”.

Since the 2008 version of the Behaviour Management in Schools policy, mobile phones have become a major issue. Very specific procedures (6.1.2, p. 10) are dictated regarding conditions of mobile use and confiscation of phones and other electronic devices if found on the student’s person. An interesting irony of such policy change, however, is exposed in the following student vignette:

Evan – The teacher had a big problem with controlling us. He would send most of us outside while he was interviewing kids for their news report. We were just talking to each other and running around, because we were bored. He came outside, told us off, so we turned it down a little bit. Then the day after he got complaints from other teachers, saying “what is wrong with your class, can’t you control them?” So I can see in some ways it would have been a little embarrassing for him. But instead of having a harsh talk, which he did anyway, he got out a tape recorder, saying he would not tell us when exactly, but if we started to be disruptive, he would start taping us.

Tara – and then he threatened to let our parents listen.

Evan – and he always has his mobile on him, so he said he could start contacting our parents straight away.

Such control, Vinson and Ross (2003, p. 83-6) argue, is related to image as greater global economic scrutiny encroaches into the sphere of public education. A greater level of surveillance and spectacle, together with the need to ‘win’, implies
an enhanced demand for seeing/being seen, watching/being watched. Teachers are often under pressure to participate in this “finer-meshed network of surveillance and regulation” (Connell, 1985, p. 115). Foucault (1979, pp. 195-228) uses ‘panopticism’ to explain this system of surveillance in schools based on Jeremy Bentham’s architectural figure resulting in ‘objectification’ as human beings become subjects of surveillance. “Each individual is fixed in his place. And, if he moves, he does so at the risk of his life, contagion or punishment” (p. 195).

Foucault (1979, p. 200), also explains that through surveillance the student “is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication.” In the same way, schools use SIS as a disciplinary apparatus, “where a single gaze” is able to “see everything constantly” (Foucault, 1979, p. 173). Surveillance then is “not only integrated into the teaching relationship” (Foucault, 1979, p. 175) but also “becomes a decisive economic operator both as an internal part of the production machinery and as a specific mechanism in the disciplinary power” (p. 175). Hence, surveillance becomes an ‘integrated’ system, “linked from the inside to the economy and to the aims of the mechanism in which it was practised” (Foucault, 1979, p. 176). SIS has enormous potential to be an ‘integrated’ system. WADET contracted RM Asia-Pacific Pty Ltd (RMA) to provide this web-based management system as a mechanism for recording, monitoring and reporting on student behaviour and attendance in all government schools. Piloted from 1999-2000, this software management system is now used in the majority of WADET schools. The present contract for support from RMA has been negotiated until 2010, after which time the system will be considered independent. Students’ behaviour and attendance is tracked and profiled on this system using codes, subtypes and fields. Information regarding details of behaviour and suspension status is able to be
recorded on each individual’s profile. Consequently, the privacy and protection of confidentiality becomes a major concern as information and history of the student can be accessed from one school to another, not only state wide, but nationally and potentially globally. McMurtry (1999, p. 88) warns that societies suffering from the restructuring of global market operations “have highly developed immune surveillance, recognition and response systems”. As teachers become more accountable and schooling systems more bureaucratic through implementing technical apparatuses like SIS, teachers too become exposed to further scrutiny in administration, record keeping and monitoring of rules.

Hawkins (1982, p. 24), argues that schools acting in this way are often found to be praising the virtues of mature adult behaviour whilst at the same time, continually denying students ways of expressing themselves. Vinson and Ross (2003, p. 69) argue that this surveillance spectacle is a disciplinary power operating in schools, expecting students to not only know the ‘right’ thing but behave in ‘proper’ ways regardless of their own explicit individual and diverse life circumstances. However, as Connell (1985, p. 109) asserts, “discipline is not a thing, it is a state of play in a very complex set of relationships between schools and their clienteles, teachers and students, administrators and teachers.” In pursuing a deeper insight into the social, political and cultural events occurring in schools based on relation, reflection and sensitivity to young people themselves, then it may be possible to reconstruct the discourse of behaviour management and begin to open up more dignified spaces and responses (Purpel & Shapiro 1995, p. 194).
7.3.4 Marginalisation

When the control of students becomes the major priority then it is not difficult for students who do not comply with the code of conduct be labelled as difficult, resulting in a downward spiral of conflict with their teachers and increasing truancy (Riley, Rustique-Forrester, Fuller, Rowles, Leth, & Docking, 2002). Student alienation is escalated by experiencing that the school no longer wants them present. Samuel (1982, p. 19) discovered that this labelling process is very easy to set in motion as students actually begin to label themselves. Categories such as ‘at risk’ focus blame on the individual students, their families and/or backgrounds. At Anchorage High, like most schools, the code of conduct acts as a tool of separation in forming categories of ‘difficult’, ‘pointy end’ kids, ‘problems’, ‘at risk’, ‘border line’ and so forth. This is partly because the code of conduct of any school behaviour management plan has to “comply with procedures outlined in the Department of Education Act 1999, and BMIS policy of 2001 and the School Education Regulation of 2000” (Behaviour Management Plan, Anchorage High, p. 4). It seeks to establish good behaviour patterns by “outlining school and classroom rules within the general code of conduct” (p. 4), and the school community has the responsibility to “behave so as to uphold the reputation of the school” (p. 5). Such policy statements may appear well intentioned on paper, but what too often occurs is that non complying students are easily marginalised.

According to Foucault (1979), school archives from the late 1700’s in Europe, have been entrenched into education systems for hundreds of years:

It distributed pupils according to their aptitudes and their conduct, that is, according to the use that could be made of them when they left the school; it exercised over them a constant pressure to conform to the same model, so that they might all be subjected to ‘subordination, docility,
attention in studies and exercises, and to the correct practice of duties and all the parts of discipline. (p. 182)

To complicate matters, in today’s schools the media and politicians often sensationalise issues relating to declining standards, discipline and control. Kelly (2001, p. 24-5) warns that this view of young people as being ‘at risk’ and ‘out of control’ is a dangerous development in which to regulate student identity. He claims (pp. 24-5) that such discourses “constitute in part a historical continuity in the construction of certain youthful populations in terms of deviancy, delinquency, and deficit” and therefore we should be wary of blindly accepting common sense ‘truths’ about school behaviours. Denscombe (1985, p. 196) confirms that the aims of many codes of conduct are used as a logical way to protect the privacy of the classroom by protecting the impression of control to outsiders. If teachers are seen to have quiet classes, not needing to call on colleagues and their students are still, compliant and well behaved, then the image of sound behaviour management is maintained. Jenny and Brody explain:

*Jenny - You cannot get out of your chair. We have to get our diary signed to go to the toilet. It takes ages to get it signed. After all that the teacher called me ‘stupid’ so I said it back.*

*Brody – so we learn to just keep our mouths shut.*

These codes of conduct and the students responses to them can be read as a “socially constructed phenomenon” (Denscombe, 1985, p. 199) as “attempts to reinstate Victorian values will provide only a recipe for resistance and rebellion by pupils for whom such values are irrelevant and repressive” (Denscombe, 1985, p. 206). When rigidity and intolerance replace compassion and understanding then schools are likely to become more militant and prison like (Giroux, 2003b, p. 561). Year 10
students, aged between sixteen and seventeen years of age in this study, express their frustrations with this punitive stance:

‘It is not fair’

Janean – Which rules do you think are unfair?

Nik & Ed – The uniform.

Ed – Yeah, I don’t like that one. It was on the news about denim being banned. I was alright with that. But then they banned board shorts which are good for sport, and they banned anything with a big logo on it, or anything that is not the right colour. It is hard for me to find something suitable because I am quite big and it is difficult to find the right size. I had some navy blue shorts [school colour] with a sign logo. The logo wasn’t big, but the school said ‘no it is not acceptable, get a dress pass’ and I lost my Good Standing. I almost could not go to the career expo. In the end I was allowed to go, but I still had to do after school detention.

In this dialogue, it is not so much uniform compliance that is the real issue; it is the attempt to be made uniform that frustrates the students. The obsession with uniformity without really knowing students as unique, accessible and personable people, jeopardises the opportunity to build trust and relationship (Meier, 2002, p. 40). Rules that attempt to regulate students’ identity, especially around school uniform (Smyth, Hattam et al., 2000, p. 84), reflect conformity to social and cultural homogeneity (Connell, 2009). This is a conformity that many young people cannot afford because their appearance is “so central to the performance of their identity” (Smyth, Hattam et al., 2000, p. 84).

In traditional classrooms, where the affective and cognitive lives of students are often in conflict, “students learn that education is something to put up with, to tolerate as best they can, to obey, or to resist” (Shor, 1992, p. 26). Power’s (1986, p. 248) case study on alienation in schools, suggests a sequence of events in which students who are “unwilling or unable to cope with the academic and social demands of high schools either enter into conflict with, or withdraw from, the work of the
school.” What is even more concerning is that the students themselves are often mislead to thinking that the fault lies solely with them rather than the institution of schooling itself (Power, 1986, p. 249).

Janean – what was your new behaviour card for Shane?

Shane – I was late in the morning, had lost my good standing more than 3 times and had not done anything to get it back. So I got this behaviour card, where they tick off every class that you got there on time. I have done that so far. But, yeah, I had to also do lunch time detention for that, me and some of my mates.

Teachers need to be wary of calls for more discipline and political pressure to ‘toughen up’ because, “the current call for the extension of repressive measures in schools is intended to produce a docile compliant working class who will unquestioningly follow orders” (Samuel, 1982, p. 19). One student, Max, expressed it this way:

It is not just us noisy ones who believe this, even the quiet ones who come in sit down and shut up. They will tell you this is the same for them. It is not like we are getting yelled at for doing something really wrong.

Max, like many of the students interviewed lost respect for rules that they view as ‘stupid’. Noddings (2006) explains the way this exacerbates an already fragile situation:

We seek to fix blame for acts and events that members of the society – at the given level – deplore and want to prevent. The prevailing response is to pursue prevention through rules, procedures for detecting and fixing blame, and the infliction of penalties. This approach to the prevention of unwanted acts has never been very effective, and often it makes things worse. (p. 112).

‘Yes, some of the rules are really stupid’

Nik – I reckon rules are stupid, because no-one follows them anyway, because they are so silly. Like not swearing in class, it does not make sense, as people swear anyway.
Ev – if you make rules, they are going to get broken.

Nik – so there is no point – like that uniform rule. Not eating in class, having to always ask permission to go to the toilet.

Ev– get your diary signed

Nik– so you have to always have your diary on you or walk all the way back to get it

Brad – the consequence of breaking any silly rule is that you get detention for 15 minutes at lunch and for not wearing uniform you get an hour detention after school on a Tuesday.

Janean – does that make people wear uniform?

Jenny – most people, but there are those who don’t even come to school because they don’t want to wear it. Some don’t care and just wear what they want.

The problem is that rules emanating from student behaviour management policies are not only from the point of view of students, ‘unfair’, but also shift the focus of attention from the school itself, to students and their families. Thomson (1999) explains that this works by “codifying” student’s behaviour and making it an individual problem by describing them as single “critical incidents” rather than requiring an explanation of context or any ongoing pattern of events (p. 11). For re-entry to school after suspension, for example, a plan is required which only focuses on how the student needs to change. There is also no place in any of the text for parents or students to record their version of events (Thomson, 1999, p. 12). This practice “renders invisible the micro-politics of school life, making the school and the system ‘blind’ to how many students are “belittled, marginalised, ignored and ‘othered’ (p. 12). Sometimes students may be reacting against schoolwork that does not challenge them or is uncreative thus leading to further disengagement. Instead of laying all the blame on the individual student, what these student narratives have revealed is that they are not ‘engaged’ and motivated and are not forming positive
relationships in the school environment. Stevenson and Ellsworth (1993) explain why:

High schools, as organizations responsible for the welfare of a large and diverse number of adolescents, are confronted with a difficult task in establishing and enforcing rules for orderly and acceptable behaviour. When these rules have the potential for exacerbating the problem, or creating additional problems for the student to which they are being applied, then the rules themselves, or their uniform and rigid application, need to be re-examined. (p. 266)

7.3.5 Relationships

“As human beings we want to care and to be cared for” (Noddings, 1984, p. 7).

This theme is one of the most important as it underpins all the complex interactions that impact on student alienation and resistance. What is revealed in this section, however, is that a collection of positive stories from students based on relation are scant. Positive relationships that students can have with their teacher(s) are important because it is through them that they can reverse the “drip feeding disappointments” (Bunting 2009).

‘Me and that teacher just don’t get along’

*Kia – if I was in Society & Environment right now, that teacher and me just don’t get along; if I was in there now, I probably would have lost it. Today I am not in the best of moods, cause last night my Mum kicked me out and I am living with my Dad at the moment. So today if the teacher just niggled, I would lose it.*

For a number of students like Kia, schooling unfortunately is “alienating, bewildering, unsatisfying, unrewarding and damaging” (Smyth, 2006, p. 31). Likewise, Gary explains how important the relationship between students and their teachers are:

*Gary – If they were not so strict on it, most people would probably wear school uniform. It is just rebellion. Most people want to be rebellious. It’s*
like you want us to do one thing, but we are going to do the opposite. – If they weren’t so strict on it, I would probably buy the uniform. But I choose not to, to annoy them! I like pissing the teachers off about it.

It is evident in Gary’s story that he is choosing to go out of his way to annoy teachers because he does not have a good relationship with them. Tripp (1986) also relays a student story from his own case study of high school alienation:

If you have got a strict teacher he will keep you at it and you will have to do the work, but you can’t do any more. If you have got a slack teacher, I don’t mean a slack teacher, I mean one who is not so strict, and you can get on, you can get ahead, not too far ahead, or you can go and do other things as well. But you get a strict teacher, and you just have to do what everyone else does. (p. 48)

Power’s case study on alienation (1986) indicates that it is relations with teachers that influence students’ acceptance or rejection of schooling:

Students ‘turned off’ school because teachers were ‘boring’, because teachers ‘pick on ‘students, and because they are too demanding in terms of their work expectations. In particular, it was the ‘mean’, strict’ teachers who were blamed rather than ‘good’ teachers. (p. 251)

To complicate matters, the collapse of the youth labour market (Smyth, 2006, p. 34) gives “the message for an increasing number of young people that they are bound for nowhere” (p. 21). Bardsley (2007, p. 496) also confirms that due to “socio economic inequality, political unrest and the employment challenges of globalizing economies” students are “likely to confront an era of risk” as costs of accommodation, energy and water increase, climate changes and environments disappear.

In schools that work positively, there are commonalities in terms of the relationships between teachers and students (Meier, 2002, p. 20). From the point of view of students:

‘When they [teachers] help me things really improve’
Nic – the teachers I respect, like my English teacher, he helped me through everything. Like my English isn’t really all that good and he helped me then it really improved. My co-ordinator helps me.

Ev – My Yr 8 English teacher, she was a great help. She found out that I was one of the best spellers that she has ever known. I was a better speller than her Yr 11 students, when I was in Yr 8. That made me feel good.

Kylie - Ms ‘B’ saw that and she helped develop me into a better person. She actually cared and she was there if any of us needed someone to talk to. She is just so human; she cradles you through high school.

When students’ have an opportunity to express what’s going on inside their own lives, there is a greater chance that they will respect their teachers and their schooling. Smyth (2006, p. 45) terms this respect a “social glue”, or a “gift relation” (Connell, cited in Smyth, 2006, p. 47) meaning that students like ‘Kylie’ are respected in a social process of positive and possible communication. The enabling essence of this relational power is explained by Kia:

Kia – we learn from teachers who know how you are feeling and will have a little joke with you.

In this section, the students have expressed the importance of personable trust in relationship among a community of presumed equals (Meier, 2002, p. 9) rather than demonising and criminalising their behaviour (Giroux, 2003b, p. 559).

7.3.6 Powerlessness

In contrast to students experiencing positive relationships in school, the theme of powerlessness does not enable them to feel good, improve and belong. When the dominant culture means that students have not been heard, are constrained and become disengaged, they often become more restless. Some students give up the fight and become resisters by passively ignoring, being apathetic, and/or engaging in
other discourses that disrupt the teaching and learning of others. Giroux (1983a) explains the position that I have taken regarding such resistance in this chapter:

Central to analysing any act of resistance would be a concern with uncovering the degree to which it speaks to a form of refusal that highlights, either implicitly or explicitly the need to struggle against the social nexus of domination and submission. (pp 108-9)

‘I don’t care anymore’

In the conversation below, there is a clear difference between Jaz’s response to losing her Good Standing (she complies), and Beth’s who gets ‘pissed off’. Jaz has the motivation to be allowed into TEE (Tertiary Examination Entrance) for upper secondary school whereas for Beth it has created more apathy and harm.

Janean – has losing your good behaviour had any effect on your behaviour?

Jaz – yeah

Beth – no, I just get pissed off

Jaz – it has made me more conscious of my behaviour, to wear school uniform and be on time and not be absent

Janean – do you have a goal that motivates you?

Jaz – I want higher levels so that I can do TEE

Janean – have you had a behaviour card?

Beth – I have had heaps of them, so it’s like I don’t care anymore. I try to be good but the teachers don’t seem to care. It is so annoying. I try but they don’t accept it. Like normally I don’t do my work, but now I am trying. Like yesterday, I got kicked out for saying that I had an itchy eye and then I got sent to upper school for the whole day (and that was only 2nd period). Teachers just piss me off, like I do try and they don’t accept it, it is hard for me, like I have been like that since year 4, getting into trouble with teachers.
Beth is making the “active decision” (Smyth, 2006, p. 31) to give up and if the situation doesn’t improve she is likely to ‘drift off’ and ‘drop out’ altogether (Smyth, 2006, p. 31). The perspectives of students like Beth and Jaz demonstrate that certain students’ knowledge is encouraged and their voices included in learning whilst others like Beth are excluded (Torres & van Heertum, 2009, p. 232 and McFadden 1995, p. 297). Other students such as Jo and Shane also explain how easy it is to be caught in this cycle of disempowerment.

Jo – We lost our Good Standing for being out of uniform and not having a uniform pass.

Shane- To get it back we have to carry behaviour cards and serve detention. We did not bother getting the uniform pass because we had already lost good standing three times before hand.

In these cases “what gets said and what gets listened to is determined by unequal power relations” (Smyth, Hattam et al., 2000, p. 2). This becomes obvious when comparing the lives of ‘Jaz’ who adopts the identity of the successful student (Smyth Hattam, et al., 2004, p. 87) and manages to comply by wearing the school uniform and being on time, whereas students like ‘Beth’, ‘Jo’ and ‘Shane’ are caught up in a spiralling cycle of disengagement that begins with trivial misdemeanours like being out of uniform or late to class. For teachers to be sensitive to such unequal power relations involves “responsiveness to passivity, silence, rebelliousness and alienation” (Smyth, Hattam et al., 2000, p. 2) to find out what is at the core of the situation; otherwise students are likely to give up hope. Freire (2004b) explains that:

…all liberating education practice—which values the exercise of will, of decision, of resistance, of choice, the role of emotions, of feelings, of desires, of limits, the importance of historic awareness, of an ethical human presence in the world, and the understanding of history as possibility and never as determination- is substantively hopeful and, for this very reason, produces hope. (p. 24)
McLaren and Farahmandpur (2002, p. 42-46) argue that economic globalization has contributed to this deepening of social disparities, reinforcing class inequality and a capitalist logic of values, attitudes, dress, mannerisms and style as corporate culture dominates unabated without the addition and emphasis of any critical knowledge. Brad expresses a lack of freedom in this corporate culture so he feels like ‘giving up’.

‘So I just give up’

*It is depressing. I remember when we were in primary school, we couldn’t wait to come here, (to Anchorage High) then when we did come here, it was like, ‘no take me back’, where the rules weren’t as harsh. We would want to be good kids. Here there are too many rules that are stupid and they try to get you into trouble. Like you can wear your board shorts because you are in swimming class but then you come back to school and teachers or the principal will see you and say, ‘go and get a dress pass because you are out of uniform’. It makes me feel frustrated and annoyed, because it is something that I was free to do before.*

Fromm (1968, p. 21) warns that an outcome of the “shattering of hope” is a “hardening of the heart”. Many of the students that I spoke with make a conscious decision that they will be better off not feeling anything, and then no-one can hurt them. Students, however, out of frustration and/or depression, struggle to regain the power taken away, and then retaliate with behaviour that can escalate into more problems.

*Janean – so what do you do with that frustration?*

*Jenny – I take it out on the teacher; tell them, I don’t let them get away with it.*

*Brad – I wait till I get home and take it out on my skateboard.*

*Jenny– if they say something to me, I just give it straight back.*

*Janean – then what happens?*
Jenny – they say ‘get out’, but then I just sit outside the whole lesson and then I go to lunch.

Foucault (1979) explains this situation:

Thus discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an ‘aptitude’ a ‘capacity’ which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection. (p. 138)

These structurally sanctioned ways of working with young people relying on surveillance and monitoring encourage further resistance, limiting social unity.

Gary – I want to go, but it will mean that I have to buy a uniform. That is the only thing that I have lost my good standing for, is uniform. But for 4th term, I am going to buy the uniform so I can go to the river cruise. That is the only time I will wear uniform.

Damage to the person can result when students like Gary are treated as children in need of training (Smyth, Hattam et al., 2004, pp. 180-1) rather than young adults. The unfortunate ending to this story is that Gary never did have the chance to attend the anticipated ‘end of year function’. By the time I came to interview him in the second session, half way through Year 10 and one month after this transcript was recorded, he had already given up the struggle and had chosen to leave school. This is a confronting yet typical story of students who give up and leave school, ironically to regain dignity and some power. Obtaining respect is more complex as the “changing nature of students” (Smyth, Hattam et al., 2004, p. 77) and a well developed sense of justice, means that many students expect more democratic ways of relating with school authorities rather than simply doing as they are told. The conversation between Cor and Taz reveals a more complex dimension to the culture of power in schools (Delpit, 1993, p. 121).
'So we do nothing and just walk around the school.’

_Cor – sometimes you need rules_

_Taz – but not for every single thing. There is basically a rule for every little thing...like me and my friend Es, play basketball on the courts and if we are not in uniform we are not allowed to play._

_Cor – and if you don’t bring your own ball, you are not allowed on the oval._

_Taz – that means you can’t just go onto the oval, only if you play sport. Me and my friend Es, we wanted to train for the coming lightening carnival, as we are in the basketball team but she was wearing black shorts and not blue and the teacher said she could not go on. Then we explained about training for the carnival, but they said they did not care. So we do nothing, just walk around the school._

Delpit (1993) explains Taz and Cor’s situation:

…there are codes or rules for participating in power and these are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power. If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier. Those with power are frequently the least aware of – or least willing to acknowledge- its existence. Those with the least power are often most aware of its existence. (pp. 121-2).

### 7.4 Conclusion

The _Behaviour Management in Schools_ policy (2001, p. 3) “requires schools to develop a learning environment that is welcoming, supportive and safe.” Whilst the values that underpin this policy remain based on standards, management and control and enforces rules that reward some behaviour and sanction others, then many students will not be able to develop a positive and caring relationship with other students and teachers (as in a critical and collaborative learning community). Students instead, are more likely to become de-motivated, have a limited sense of self achievement, less shared knowledge, and less likely to take risks that help them develop new ways of learning and thinking. Ironically, as (Smyth 2005a, p. 229) claims, such policies “often exacerbate student disengagement and alienation.”
Overly bureaucratised schools are “struggling to learn how to learn” (Greene, 1995, p. 5), as they become less liberating and more controlling. Weis and Fine (2004, p. 121) suggest, “although it is well understood that schooling plays a crucial role in offering opportunities for individual social mobility, it does, at the same time, serve to perpetuate and indeed legitimize widespread structural inequalities.” Whilst children remain segregated into schools that are increasingly class structured, the cultural conflict and divide created between schools as institutions and their understandings of young people’s experiences and behaviours grow further apart. Osler and Starkey (2005) report that schools in typically economically disadvantaged areas are often stigmatised as failing. “To avoid such labelling, schools have been inclined to exclude students whom they see as troublesome, demanding of resources and contributing little to their academic profile” (Osler & Starkey, 2005, p. 201). By excluding students from the school, the real issues of the social construction of their experiences have been avoided. What these narrative portraits reveal in this chapter is that “those pushed to the margins are struggling for voice” (Weiss & Fine, 1993, p. 6).

It is important not to confuse utopia with hope as it is the journey of wanting things to be democratically just that is important, rather than the achievement of it. As Giroux (2003b, p. 562) explains, “...as schools abandon their role as democratic public spheres and are literally “fenced off” from the communities that surround them, they lose their ability to become anything other than spaces of containment and control”. Mouffe (2002, p.129) declares “democracy is a process which we are continually working towards…it involves accepting the contingent nature of our struggle.” So in a sense, this chapter is a hope coming out of the struggle for things to be otherwise for such schools, in which all students, all relationships and
everyone’s conjoint responsibilities are taken into consideration. Fromm (1968, p. 9) explains that “to hope means to be ready at every moment for that which is not yet born, and yet not become desperate if there is no birth in our lifetime.” Zournazi (2002, p. 274) reflects that “hope may be that force which keeps us moving and changing- the renewal of life at each moment, or the ‘re-enchanting’ of life and politics – so that the future may be about how we come to live and hope in the present.”

What student narratives in this chapter reveal is another version of classroom events that suggest that it is time for alternative interpretations and understandings of the behaviour management problem. Ayers (2004, p. viii) explains, “… stories we tell ourselves can mystify and confuse us, or they can open us, propel forward motion to more intentional choices and more powerful conclusions” and “you only have a voice when your speaking is heard, listened to and responded to” (Shacklock et al., 1998, p. 4). It is the purpose of chapter 8 to respond to these voices.
CHAPTER 8 - BUILDING THE RELATIONAL: ‘CAN WE GET ALONG?’

Admitting to the need for change is not the most common human trait. And the more power we have, the less change interests us; indeed, the more it frightens us. Nevertheless, eras do stumble, grind, pitch to an end and then, there we are, once again groping our way through an obscure vacuum (Saul, 2006, p. 7).

8.1 Introduction

By allowing a discourse of thinking differently “in and for” (Green & Reid, 2010) students in our practice of relation in teaching and learning, I provoke alternative interpretations of behaviour management in schools. To continue with the current behaviour management discourses outlined so far runs the risk of creating the ‘obscure vacuum’ of change that Saul refers to above. We may, therefore, need to “rest in uncomfortable places” and “linger for awhile” (Green & Reid, 2010) as we begin the process of rebuilding the relational school.

In Chapter 7, a forum was created to listen to the voices of students and what they had to say about the Behaviour Management in Schools policy and its impact on their lives. In this chapter the discussion pursues a new vision of relationships between school community members based on a sense of hope and optimism. The themes that have been identified attend to the silenced, muted and alienated voices we heard in the previous chapter, thus focusing on building a critical learning community based on the principles of belonging, community, negotiation, decision making, relationships and respect.
Figure 6: Hope and reconstruction-struggling for something

Figure 6 illustrates how we might begin to rethink behaviour management policy in schools differently. Sidorkin and Bingham (2004, p. 6) argue that we need to “move from struggling against something to struggling for something”. The collected narratives of students highlights the importance of struggle and hope in reconstructing schooling in ways that build respect, relationships, belonging and community. This means recognising the centrality of human encounter and affective responses as basic components of what it means to be human (Noddings, 1984, p. 4).

The major themes of this relational approach to schooling, based on student narratives collected from Anchorage High, are highlighted in the solid inner ring and link to one another through the outer ring where the elements of choice, communication, learning, care, listening, partnerships and creative spaces and places play a significant role. All of these elements feed into and in turn create a sense of
hope in the task of reconstructing the relationally engaging school. As Giroux (2003c, p. 164) states, “what students learn and how they learn should amplify what it means to experience democracy from a position of possibility, affirmation, and critical engagement.” Purpel and Shapiro (1995, p. 26) explain that “change depends on the way in which diverse groups—very different in their material interest, social positions, and cultural attitudes—can be brought together around what is perceived to be a unifying theme or concern.” This model is, therefore, cyclic, interactive, and based on a vision for things to be otherwise (Greene, 1995). The first important theme of this vision to be discussed will be that of ‘belonging’ to the school community.

### 8.2 Themes of discussion

#### 8.2.1 Belonging

The same expansion of horizons which marks youth as a time of emergent and enhanced individuality also provides a broader context for affiliation and belonging (Hall, Coffey & Williamson, 1999, p. 509).

Belonging is used in this discussion in terms of reconstruction. It refers to places and spaces for students lives to be connected to schooling and engagement with their schools, their learning, each other, and with their teachers. It also refers to an engagement of the teachers with each other and with students. One way of doing this is to build on students’ existing knowledge base, for example popular culture and students’ own histories which “value student knowledge as legitimate and intellectual” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 172). By embracing meaningful problems, it is more likely that authentic and integrated learning will occur for students (Schulz, 2008, p. 9). This is because students are then provided with opportunities and responsibilities to be active participants in the development and
design of their own learning rather than complying out of fear (p. 9). Using this approach is more likely to “build bridges into other forms of knowledge that will give students access to the codes that allow them to crack into, extract resources from, and change dominant institutions” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 172).

Critically engaged learning of this kind increases students’ capacity for “critical reflection and social action” (Smyth et al. 2008, p. 164) thus agency, autonomy and a sense of belonging in the school community is more likely to be developed.

As in Chapter 7, and consistent with critical ethnography as a methodology, student narrative portraits are incorporated throughout this chapter alongside my field notes and journal entries and are then woven together throughout to instigate productive change (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997 p. 11). I will begin with field notes that were written after an interview with Beth, one of the students. These notes are important as they represent moments of positive change for Beth as she reveals the significance of belonging in a school milieu:

My last interview was held with Beth. The other students did not make it that day. Beth had been reserved and easily dominated by others throughout the first interview. She was also ‘closed’ for the first half of this interview. She then began to show me around the school and this is when I was to experience the real ‘Beth’ within her own place in the school culture. It is as if she could find that gap interstices as Stengers (2002) coins it, a way to break the cycle of withdrawal of feeling and being touched by something. Stengers (2002, p. 257) claims that you can crush somebody’s freedom, like that of Beth’s and other students when you separate them from the process, personal or collective through which they become able to think and feel. So in this instant, Beth appeared proud and able to ‘feel’ comfortable to be leading me around and showing her place as a participant in an important field orientation for my research. Other students were also relating with her. This became evident as they recognised us and smiled at her as she gently and quietly ushered me through the library, the gym, the canteen and any other social meeting pocket of the school. Throughout and within these spaces she had a real sense of pride of her place, even though, within the classrooms, things were not conducive to her learning or development because there the thinking and feeling had been separated. [Field Notes, August, 2007]
What becomes evident in these notes is that in order for students like Beth to feel successful at school they need to be more actively involved in meaningful and responsible ways. Affect and emotion play an important role in their identity but also in creating a spirit of social collectiveness (Giroux, 2003c, p. 164). With a sense of belonging, Beth was able to transform and create opportunities for alternative dialogue (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997, p. 11) and make “maps of meaning” (Giroux, 2003c, p. 164) in partnership with other students that intervened and engaged in her life at school. For example, when I asked Beth what helped her to learn, she replied:

_Sometimes when I am on my own and get on with my work, but other times when I am with my friends and I can ask them something._

These partnerships and experiences of connectedness to others are essential for students like Beth to maintain their sense of belonging to the school community and require respect towards young people. As Miller (1990, p. 122) argues, this period in young peoples’ lives is never relaxing as it is when they experience ‘feeling’ most intensely. Ayers (2004) creates a comprehensive profile of how such respect may be achieved:

A primary challenge to teachers is to see each student as a three dimensional creature, a person much like themselves, with hopes, dreams, aspirations, skills, and capacities; with a body and a mind and a heart and a spirit; with experience, history, a past, several possible pathways, a future. This knotty, complicated challenge requires patience, curiosity, wonder, awe, humility. It demands sustained focus, intelligent judgment, inquiry and investigation. It requires wide-awakeness, since every judgment is contingent, every view partial, and every conclusion tentative. The student is dynamic, alive, and forever in motion. Nothing is settled once and for all. No view is all views and no perspective every perspective. The student grows and changes—yesterday’s need is forgotten, today’s claim is all-encompassing and brand-new. (p. 3)
8.2.2 Respect

Respect is “the crucial bridging mechanism” necessary for students to engage in their learning (Smyth, 2006 p. 45). Wyn and White, (1997, p. 120) state that “rethinking youth means rethinking the very role that young people have in society, and the responsibilities that society has for youth” [italics added]. Significance of respect is explained by Brad;

\[Brad\] - Sport is a good subject. Every Thursday I get to go surfing and body boarding at 'The Point'. I get to be out and about walking around the bush. There are not too many stupid rules so it is a lot of fun and you don’t get into trouble. The teacher gets into the water and has fun too.

Smyth, Hattam et al., (2000, p. 291) explain that “students are often placed in situations where they have to consciously place on hold their personal views about respect, authority, dignity and fairness.” Brad and Jenny elaborate;

\[Brad\] – some teachers scream to get your attention

\[Jenny\] – Mr B just glares and makes noises and then takes you outside, very close to your head, tells you what to say.

\[Brad\] – then when he comes walking around, we pretend to be doing the right thing, and then we throw things when he is on the other side of the room.

\[Jenny\] – the same with the phone. When he is away, we get ours out. Then when he is nearby we put it away. So dumb.

\[Janean\] – what classroom do you learn in?

\[Jenny\] – no we don’t even do that, we just sit there.

\[Brad\] – if we modelled our teachers, we may be the biggest brats in the world. For example, teachers scream, so you scream back.

What this dialogue reflects is that “learning is a social process and having people around you who treat you with respect is crucial to student engagement and success”
(Smyth, 2005a, p. 229). Consequently, when there is an absence of respect and care, students like Brad and Jenny often disengage and easily fall into a path of failure.

What is revealed by these student narratives is also consistent with the literature. For example, Riley (2004, p. 62) refers to the significance of relationship in a collaborative two year project on disenfranchised young people in the north of England (Riley et al., 2002). After listening to the young people themselves, these researchers found that pupil’s views about school were shaped by a number of key people and events. Encounters with one or two hectoring teachers could tip the balance in their behaviour and send them spiralling down the path of exclusion or truanting from school. Equally, the support and endorsement of key teachers who understood their needs could keep them on track. Pupils were particularly critical of teachers who tried to control their behaviours. A reoccurring image for students who saw themselves at ‘the bottom of the heap’ was of school “as a prison from which children continually try to escape” (Riley, 2004, p. 65). Nora and Ev from Anchorage High, confirm Riley’s findings:

Nora – for the teachers, they often think that we should respect them because they are our elders and stuff, but from a student’s perspective, if they do not respect you, then why should you respect them?

Ev – and sometimes they can be very disrespectful.

As an antidote to feeling at the bottom of the heap, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008, p. 172) recommend that educators should create “a critical counterculture in their classrooms and programs” and not have such low expectations and exploitative actions. This counterculture would include excellence and justice in learning; hence democracy becomes closer to being a reality.
8.2.3 Relationships

Relationships based on care and trust and allowing humour and fun to be legitimate components of learning are vital for a school community. Instead in the behaviour management plans of Anchorage High and other schools, various rules, codes and bureaucratic practices work against healthy relationships. When powerful student-teacher relationships are built based on reciprocal friendship and respect, powerful educational interactions are more likely to be developed (Margonis, 2004, p. 47). Margonis (2004) examines the case of ‘Eliot Wigginton’ as a teacher-director in a New York high school (1986) who initially employed strict disciplinary attitudes, sending the message to students that he did not trust them (Margonis, 2004, p. 48). This surveillance and classroom deportment often reinforced institutional predeterminations. In response, Wigginton (1986) adjusted his approach which is charted in his educational odyssey, ‘Sometimes a shining moment: The Firefox experience’, to the social reality of his classroom, seeking new and meaningful relationships with his students. Margonis (2004) explains how this happened:

Student resistance signaled that the social relationships of his class were not capable of supporting profound educational engagement and that the students and teacher would need to find new relationships. The ontological relations in the classroom intimated that a new direction must be sought, and that the new direction would need to be one that showed students greater degrees of respect while holding them accountable for educational aims. (p. 49)

What is important about Wigginton is the way in which he was able to discover the right blend of relationship and respect without taking away the responsibility of the student in their own knowledge and understanding of what education means. Noddings (2006, p. 104) believes that “we listen to teachers we trust. Those who care enough to develop relations of care gain our trust and we listen to them.” One of the students I interviewed, Daniel also confirms this:
Some teachers let you talk and listen to music yet we still do our work. We respect them by doing our work because they respect us.

To further support this argument, Sadowski (2003) points out that one of the most consistent findings in psychological research with youth is the importance of caring, trusting relationships with adults. He states that “such a relationship with even one adult has been demonstrated to give children and youth the resilience to cope with some of the difficult experiences they might face growing up” (p. 92). In resiliency research, Freeman, Leonard and Lipari, (2007, pp. 22-3) cite key findings of numerous other researchers, reinforcing the significance of relationships. They state that “resilient children were those who had at least one person in their lives who accepted them unconditionally” (p. 23). Such is the situation for Kylie:

When I was in Year 8 and new to this area, I just shut down. Sure I was learning about myself and other people but I felt out of place because there were just so many people that I did not know. Ms ‘M’ saw that and she helped develop me into a better person. She actually cared and was there if any of us needed someone to talk to. She is just so human; she cradles you through high school. She is like a best mate as well as a teacher. She has the respect of almost the whole school because she is human and knows that there is a time to work, but also a time to joke and have a laugh.

Such a perspective can be grounded in caring (Noddings, 1984). In her book on the feminine approach to ethics and moral education, Nel Noddings calls for the type of care that a mother would give for a child. Such a moral attitude is a longing for goodness that arises out of the experience or memory of being cared for (p. 149), a state of being in relation, characterised by receptivity, relatedness and engrossment and informed by interpersonal reasoning. The strength of her approach is its emphasis on reciprocity. In fact, Noddings argues schools organised for caring would not need “management” or “disciplinary skills” (p. 198). Scott (1999, p. 275) calls this reciprocity “all-purpose social glue” – a kind of abstract capacity for joint
action. This is in contrast to the authoritarian, simplified mechanical orders (Scott, 1999, p. 273) such as those hierarchically situated in the Behaviour Management in Schools policy containing the codes of conduct and the Good Standing policy. As Young (1995, p. 17) states, “with this imagination we are able to engage in an ethic of care for the other through communicative respect – one which tackles both obstacles to autonomy and to solidarity (without domination)”. Schulz (2008) describes how he was able to achieve this respect with his students:

...with a commitment to building relationships in my classroom and with the community, I pursued ways to learn about their daily lives as an outsider. I saw myself in many ways as a student of my students; able to learn from them by sharing. (p. 145)

In contrast, the ‘aggressive school’ archetype described by Smyth, Hattam, et al. (2004, p. 164), is distinguished by an emphasis on fear, silence and resentment and an absence of trust and respect. It is also a school that tries to cling to tradition and competition enforced by conformity and conservatism (Smyth, Hattam, et al., 2004, p. 184). Trust, however, is essential in developing a more active school culture that works for students. Meier (2002, p. 3) terms this a “hard-won, democratic trust” that is “tempered by healthy, active scepticism and a demand that trust be continually earned.” This is an intricate, informal, reciprocal, voluntary, public life trust. These relations, Scott (1999) terms “geographies of trust”, and they are mutual, unlike the hierarchical structures presently prevailing in many public schools and institutions (p. 273).

Recent research about young people can be used as an example of these two contradictory ‘trust’ modes. The ACEE (Australian Centre for Equity through Education) and AYRC (Australian Youth Research Centre, 2001) combined report
on the perspectives of young people, emphasised that the most important factors connecting young people to school are linked to relationships: “friendship with other students and relationships with teachers that involved mutual respect and responsibility” (p. 6). In contrast, they reported (p. 9) that the major reasons for disengagement from the school system centred on issues of school culture and structure. Counter to this finding, the DEST (Department of Education Science and Training) (2005, p. 5) publication on student motivation and engagement, claimed that “the school has no direct control over” factors that influence engagement, but can “adapt its approaches to the needs of its particular students.” This latter approach, I argue, individualises and pathologises the problem. ‘Engagement’ in the (DEST) report is defined as “an end in itself and a means to an end” (p. 1). This ‘outcome’ approach to learning has a simplistic, technical-rational and measurable basis and contrasts profoundly with ACEE and AYRC’s (2001) report that young people wanted roles of real value. Their sense of belonging was affected by the degree to which they felt they were able to connect with adults and other students around issues that were important to them (p. 9). DEST (2005, p. 2) on the other hand, uses a linear, individualistic approach to learning engagement where having ‘a’ (motivational goals) + ‘b’ (learning strategies) = ‘c’ (achievement). In contrast, learning opportunities and support could instead be more personal and structured around choice (ACEE, 2001, p. 13). Qualitative, observational approaches based on relationships when studying students learning, enriches ones understandings of the complexity of social and cultural interactive factors. In comparison, collecting information on vandalism, attendance, attention span and completion of schooling, evident in DEST (2005, p. 5), continues to place blame on the “aberrant individual behaviour” (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995, p. 62).
The significance of student experiences and their relationships with others cannot be overestimated in the context of their school lives. Beth, for example, was originally disillusioned with school and her reputation and apparent apathy meant she was often not able to participate in school excursions and projects:

\[\text{Janean} – \text{are you going on the movie excursion?}\]
\[\text{Beth} – \text{yeah}\]
\[\text{Janean} – \text{are you looking forward to that?}\]
\[\text{Beth} – ‘dunno’, not really, I am just going cause my friends are\]
\[\text{Janean} – \text{do they ever go ice-skating?}\]
\[\text{Beth} – \text{yeah, they went last term. But I did not go cause I had lost my Good Standing.}\]
\[\text{Janean} – \text{so what was that about?}\]
\[\text{Beth} – \text{just because of behaviour,}\]
\[\text{Janean} – \text{with one teacher?}\]
\[\text{Beth} – \text{no not really, you lose it after 3 times, so it can be with different teachers as well.}\]
\[\text{Janean} – \text{was it all for the same thing, like lateness, uniform, answering back?}\]
\[\text{Beth} – \text{I cannot even remember}\]

During the same interview, Beth began to open up, relax and share her more positive experiences of school:

\[\text{Janean} – \text{what other subjects do you like?}\]
\[\text{Beth} – \text{Maths, English – just because the teachers are nice}\]
\[\text{Janean} – \text{so what sort of things do you get to do in those subjects}\]
\[\text{Beth} – \text{listen to your i-Pod, talk, eat, she lets you do anything but not swear and stuff.}\]
\[\text{Janean} - \text{I would like to have a tour of the school, do you mind showing me?}\]
\[\text{Beth} – \text{if you want}\]
I have the chance to see where ‘Beth’ hangs out with her friends, where she does sport, and meet some of her friends who are in the library doing reading….I then have the chance to see the historical pictures of the school (from its implementation in 1973). I also meet the librarian and another of Beth’s teachers who acknowledges both Beth and I. The conversation we all have together is full of respect [Field Notes, July, 2007]

Fromm (1968, p. 67), confirms that an awareness of this situation in which Beth is initially disengaged, and then later more open and relaxed helps to change her reality of schooling. As Lankshear (1995, p. 308) explains, these “systems are more than just accumulations of individuals – individual biographies interact with societal structures.” Once we “engage in the creation and protection of counter publics” (Weis & Fine, 2004, p. 124), alternatives of positive change become more of a reality. Counter public spaces, such as the one explained in Beth’s tour of the school, are important places where adults and youth can challenge the status quo and more genuine, collaborative and reflective decision making regarding schooling be made possible.

8.2.4 Democratic decision making

Genuine decision making recognises decisions based on research and an ability to self-evaluate honestly and accurately (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 174). It also requires attention to good communication, especially listening skills. Kohl (2003, p. 138) advises us to make a conscious effort to “look and listen without judging, to slow down and take advantage of what is revealed in the pauses and silences in relationships as well as what is said or acted out”. By talking and listening to students like Beth, a trust develops that reciprocates. Moos and
MacBeath (2004) acknowledge that it is clear that not all such deconstruction is utopian, smooth and without struggle:

The notion of a learning-centred school is unnerving for management because it complicates managerial accountability. It is unsettling for teachers because it requires a paradigm shift in pedagogy, in school structures and in culture. It crosses the boundaries of classroom and home, school and community. It is lifelong and life-wide, continuous and permeating. It is underpinned by a conception of learning as a potentially more open, more accessible and more democratic process than at any other time in history. It blurs the roles of teachers and learners. It problematises knowledge acquisition and knowledge creation. (p. 194).

On the other hand, when schools rise to the challenge of involving pupils in their own learning, they “come to be seen as a rich untapped resource for knowledge creation” (Moos & MacBeath, 2004, p. 194). Other examples of genuine and collaborative decision making include real ‘listening’ to what is going on for young people who have been subjected to unjust practices in the name of ‘behaviour management’ or ‘codes of conduct’. Delpit (1993, p. 139) argues that this takes a special kind of listening requiring “not only open eyes and ears, but open hearts and minds.” She confirms (p. 139) “that we do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs.” Sean, one of the students interviewed explains this sensitivity:

*The teachers I work well with are those who teach the subjects that I like, and then they make it interesting. Whereas in other subjects they tell you what you have to learn and ‘yeah’ then that is it.*

The impact of positive relationships in which expression is encouraged in school cannot be underestimated in promoting democratic values. It seems meaningless to promote the use of morals and values in schools, if not actually put into practice as educators. To learn values and behaviours such as trust, then it is more likely to occur by example and practice than by instruction. In order for students to feel successful at school, they want to be involved and participate in all aspects of the
place and be provided with meaningful and responsible actions (Freeman et al., 2007, p. 23).

Gitlin and Peck (2005) use a centrepiece termed ‘educational poetics’ which is useful in explaining reconstruction of schooling practices and policy. They state that it is “moving into a space from which one can look forward, toward the ‘ought’, while also looking back to interrogate what is” (p. 4). Collaboration in such decision making is therefore essential. Slee (1992b) explains why:

Where schools have sought to collaborate with the school community and enlist all players – teachers, parents, students, school and regional administrators and their various representative organisations – in the policy development process, then there is a greater chance of survival. (pp. 194-5).

The engagement of young people in decision-making that affects them may even develop into a means of preventing violence in schools (Osler & Starkey, 2005, p. 196). Ekholm (2004, p. 96) advocates that to engage young people, then we need to look at their rights and find out how they are being treated. He explains that:

To be democratic, the learning that takes place at school needs to be based on real power sharing between the learner and the teacher. The views that children and young people hold need to be accorded respect by staff and learning seen as something that students own and have essential influence over. (p. 96)

Swedish schools are highlighted as an example by Ekholm (2004, p. 97) because they share the lowest rankings on ‘indiscipline’. He goes on to argue that this is because they promote student voice and representation in decision making.

For education to be linked to freedom and in order to know and transform education, policy change needs to be linked to the change in young people’s relationships with education (White & Wyn, 2004, p. 81). What sort of ideals,
culture and regime is being created and promoted in schools with policy directions such as the *Behaviour Management in Schools*? Are we teaching and promoting a democratic ideal of thinking, creating and questioning or rather is it one more interested in control, conformity and compliance?

Goodman (2006, p. 225) claims that school discipline is in “moral disarray” because ethical distinctions become unhelpfully blurred. For example, as demonstrated by the student narratives throughout this thesis, minor deviations such as being a few minutes late to class or wearing a stripe or wrong uniform logo are made equivalent to cheating and stealing. Purpel and Shapiro (1995, p. 151) emphasise that “competition (masked as excellence) and authoritarianism (masked as effective schools)” have replaced real democracy in education, with “the corrosive force of grades, tests and tracking” taking priority and weakening the commitment to “human dignity” (p. 150). Students in this climate are expected to be quiet and compliant, yet they are often “controlled through fear, intimidation, frequent appeals to competition and public embarrassment” (Goodman, 2006, p. 228). Students experience and learn real democracy from a “position of possibility” (Giroux, 2003c, p. 164) rather than valued for its freedom to compete (Gale & Densmore, 2003, p. 104) and for consumption practices (Apple, 2005, p. 215) in an “unfettered market” (p. 219).

Dewey (1916/1966) argued at the turn of the 20th century that if schools are to be genuine sites of democracy, then they must be places that support the masses rather than a few privileged, powerful and wealthy. This also means taking into consideration the needs and contexts of all students’ lives rather than authoritarian transfer of knowledge and control set within a climate of competition. Penalties in
the form of behaviour cards and detention time, experienced by many of the students interviewed, do not help build citizens with strong leadership; if anything they undermine it (Goodman, 2006, p. 223).

Student narratives throughout this thesis reveal that many classrooms and their structures, in the absence of a struggle for democracy, dehumanise students (Schultz, 2008, p. 140). Yet, the “true value of a public education can be measured only to the extent that it makes public life better for all citizens” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 18) and linked to changes in society (Peterson, 1999, p. 95). Students and teachers still need rules, structure, direction and discipline in a democratic classroom but not threats, penalties and mandates. With legitimate engrossment in intellectual activity (Noddings, 1994, p. 169) and students rewarding their teacher with responsiveness (Noddings, 1984, p. 181), we can avoid punishing students for failure to achieve particular goals, and instead allow them to experience “the joy of relation and the quest for understanding” (Noddings 1984, p. 169). Discipline does not need to be a ‘temporary fix’ but rather a resolution – liberating rather than intimidating (Goodman, 2006, p. 223). Teachers do not need to be missionaries or saviours to bring democracy to their classrooms, but they do need to be collaborators with members of their community. “Teachers should love their students” and by this, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008, p. 187), refer to a revolutionary love that is “strong enough to bring about radical change in individual students, classrooms, school systems and the large society that controls them” (p. 187). Such revolutionary love calls upon revolutionary courage (p. 188) requiring risks, engagement, time, energy and a struggle for social justice.
This research provides a counter argument to the infatuation and conformity to behaviour management discourses and instead persists with an emphasis on the larger social, emotional, ethical and cultural arenas of students’ lives, staining it with the “dye of democracy” (Connell, 2009).

The intention of this research has been to have an impact on education as “research involves politics” (Ezzy 2002, p. 33). Throughout this thesis, reporting on students’ experiences is intended to provoke ongoing conversations that interrupt Behaviour Management in Schools policy based on a technical, apolitical process of following protocols, writing up management plans and codes of conduct. Rather, the call is for an education that takes a political and deconstructive stance, which thinks otherwise, does not have all the answers and can rest in uncomfortable places (Green & Reid, 2010). This “ruin of representation” (MacClure, 2010) or embodied knowledge, steps outside the present status and speech acts, to find a “wilder discourse that slides over and makes language stutter” (Deluze, cited by MacClure, 2010). Such critical reflexivity interrogates the meaning of language, actions, intentions, values and beliefs surrounding Behaviour Management in Schools policy and practices and the tensions that exist in present social and economic contexts. Purpel and Shapiro (1995, p. 3) explain that “to educate is not only to describe the world but also to affirm and create a better one.” As teachers and educators our position of intervention can offer “a variety of analytic tools, diverse historical traditions, and a wide-ranging knowledge of dominant and subaltern cultures and how they influence each other” (Giroux, 2003c, p. 163). Educational institutions can therefore inform social policies and cultural visions as well as being informed by them (Purpel & Shapiro, 1995, p. 1) [italics added].
8.2.5 Negotiation

The negotiation of curriculum and rules relating to policy such as the behaviour management policy is paramount. As Moller (2004, p. 161) explains “education cannot be developed mechanically with administrative decrees and regulations. It requires an ongoing subjective communication and negotiation.” Giroux (2003c, p. 159) reminds us that “pedagogy is never innocent” thus “must be contextually defined, allowing it to respond specifically to the conditions, formations, and problems that arise” (p. 158). With negotiation, one can build in the perspectives of students and foreground their voices as discourses are explored and pedagogic spaces acquired (McFadden & Munns, 2002, p. 364). Purpel and Shapiro (1995, p. 115) suggest a “transformation of pedagogy and the development of a curriculum that facilitates critical reflection on our lived experience and the examination of the culturally constituted meanings, relations, mores, norms and values that structure that experience”.

When rules and codes of conduct are not negotiated, nor conducive to the culture and context of students within their society, then these rules are more likely to become something more to struggle over without any real educational benefit or cause. For example, rules around the use of electronic devices such as mobile phones and Mp3 players cause considerable disquiet among students. The rule simply becomes something else to struggle over rather than for any real cause. The conversation between students below explains:

*Kylie* - *I am picked on for everything. Like one day I was looking at my phone to see what the time was and the teacher said he would have to confiscate it. When I told him I was just looking at it, I was sent to the front office.*

*Jenny* – *yeah, you are not allowed to have it out and if you do it will get confiscated all day and you have to collect it at the end of the day. If you
are caught with it again, then your parents are contacted to come and get it.

**Brad** – they say it is better if you don’t have it at school. But they are important for emergencies. Like you parents are trying to contact you or if you are sick or letting each other know what you are doing

**Janean** – I guess it is hard trying to make rules that keep up with things.

**Brad** – yeah, but these are just rules to get rid of us. Like if the teacher is talking I can understand, but if you are doing a test, the music helps me relax. It makes me work and I don’t get so distracted.

**Jenny** – it makes you concentrate better, you focus on what you are doing.

The latest version of the West Australian *Behaviour Management in Schools* policy (2008) has very specific procedures (6.1.2, p. 10) prescribed for the use of mobile phones in public schools in an attempt to manage their use and ensure that they are not used in classrooms. Educational and pedagogical contradictions emerge from such actions. In 2007, for example, it was announced that all WADET state schools (770 of them) would be “armed with MGM Wireless software” (Spagnola, 2007) that automatically sends text messages to parents’ mobiles “demanding to know” why their child is not at school. This investment was considered sound by WADET as a way of demonstrating intolerance to inflating truancy. Other contradictions emerge in recent educational research advocating the positive, creative, inspiring and engaging learning that can occur when incorporating mobile learning into schools (Paschler, 2007 and Traxler & Kukulska-Hume, 2005). WADET itself advertises that “education is in tune with iTunes” (2009 Media Statement) providing students with “significant online resources” by sharing audio files. Further cynicism is bred, however, when students instead witness rules that preach one thing whilst practicing something distinctly different (Pearl cited in Slee, 1997, p. 8).
Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008, p. 172) explain that instead of developing a curriculum and pedagogy for students we should be addressing the concerns of students and their communities “that permit and encourage students to use what they are learning to act upon those concerns”. Instead of power struggles over things like mobile phones and music, students are more likely to be struggling for something that is meaningful in their lives, reflecting and evaluating such work to “move forward on the basis of the knowledge gained from that reflection” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, p. 172). By not being so prescriptive of what and how we teach (Purpel & Shapiro, 1995, p. 146), teachers are more likely to “offer a broad and inclusive discursive framework”. It is paramount that students are consciously involved in significant decisions regarding course content and processes by means of genuine collaboration and cooperation in learning. McFadden and Munns (2002, p. 364) explain that “it is at the messy point of teachers and students responding to each other culturally in relation to classroom discourse and assessment practices where we are truly going to see whether students feel that school is for them.” If, instead, as Smyth (2006, p. 44) explains, one tries “to tightly orchestrate, institutionalize and constrain what goes on in the highly charged and emotionally unpredictable world of young adolescents”, then things are more likely to go awry.

### 8.2.6 Community

It is vital to listen to the perspectives of young people if we are to achieve a sense of community in our schools and “if we aspire to create conditions conducive to student growth” (Pope, 2001, xiii). As Gale and Densmore (2003, p. 113) conclude, teachers can still have a positive influence on the present and future of young peoples’ lives by “viewing education as a public issue, not simply a private matter”
and positioning and recognizing communities as integral and knowledgeable in learning.

When places like schools are commodified, then there is a limit to understanding the kind of responsibility we have as members of a community (Tsiolkas, 2002, p. 107). Community is a kind of mutual acceptance, not just tolerance. As Hattam (2010) describes it, this community has an understanding of all its members without necessarily requiring consensus. This applies to the collection of ‘captured’ voices in this research. The voices are varied in their life and educational stories, but collective in their message of solitary or ‘one voice’ speaking. These voices speak about the experiences of working class secondary students struggling to have their knowledge’s represented and power gained. When a group’s ultimate resource of everyday knowledge, no matter how diverse, is both accepted and appreciated by working together (Martin, 2007, p. 346), then power is gained.

Hage (2002, p. 162) reiterates that communities are a “practical ensemble for relations between people that one uses as a support in the pursuit of being.” Being part of a community is then more likely to provide important objective and subjective gratification for people. ‘Objective’ in the sense of wanting to be part of it if you feel capable of achieving more by being part of it than you can on your own, and ‘subjective’ in that you take on the greatness of the mass you are living in. The idea of responsibility as an extended family is expressed by Tsiolkas (2002, p. 108) because, in the end, you are involved in relationships with other people, and this brings with it a responsibility to the group. A school with a vibrant community is more likely to encourage students to respect each other and their teachers, which in turn promotes the possibility of reciprocal learning.
Smyth et al. (2008, p. 158) identify such a community as an essential component of engaged learning. They argue that even though issues of care, respect, and regard for others in relationships are important in schools, “it is a case of how students are enabled to relate to one another, to their teachers, school leaders and members of the community”. Once the needs of students are met, it is more likely that the specific needs of the larger community are also met (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 174). Schultz (2008, p. 154), terms this coming together as a “counternarrative” in which the construction of the classroom becomes based on democratic participation and community.

Zournazi (2002, p. 93) discusses the notion of ‘clusters’ as a positive grouping of people coming together around the idea of community or communal belonging. This is an aspiration of many people working in schools with young people. Young people often desire this naturally, however, teachers and support staff working with them have often had this urge or desire ‘sabotaged’ by competitive hierarchical systems in operation at the school site, minimising educational participation and opportunities which would allow the development of a critical learning community. This kind of community is distinguishable by a shared sense of purpose, continuity, connectedness, and is safe to take risks because it is based on relationships (Smyth, 1998a, pp. 8-10).

8.3 A vision imagined: Parachutes and dreams

The title of this section came about one chilly morning sitting at the train station and reading ‘on believing,’ a conversation between Christos Tsiolkas and Mary Zournazi on belief and hope (Tsiolkas, 2002, pp. 98-121). Simultaneously, I was listening to a moment of a song called ‘parachutes’ written and sung by ‘Radiohead’
lead singer, Thom York. Whilst trying to maintain the sense of faith and dreams for change in the future that Tsiolkas pleads for, I had visions of ‘little parachutes’ dancing in the air. This in some small way provided a vision of hope and possibility that my thesis may open opportunities for public schooling and the learning and education approaches in them might be ‘seen’ differently. These parachutes became metaphors for the young people interviewed for this thesis. I wondered about where they were, what life was like for them since the last interview, and if this research had or would make any difference in their lives.

In some ways I wanted the image of the dancing, floating and playful parachutes to stay and linger awhile longer. I was a little afraid to confront the image of their landings. Would they find base camp? Was it to be a place that they wanted anyway? How many limbs would be broken executing the landing? The thought of them left floating around, without any real landing, simply wafting in the wind or space, also then appeared as one that was futile. They have to come back to earth, face the reality of uncertain futures, just as I do as a researcher (who at times loves to be lost in the daydream), and find a pad to land as gracefully as possible then move onto other ventures.

Tsiolkas (2002, p. 101) states that our imagination is crucial in dreaming possibilities and futures for our education beyond poverty, destruction and narrow definitions of what it means to be a student. Such imaginative work assists in summarising what it is that my research findings mean and do not mean, and suggest ways for future educational researchers to pave a way that creates choice, creativity and community of learning rather than control, compliance and conflict. As Ev, one of the students says:
If students like Ev are to have any impact on change, then a different vision of schooling is paramount for the future: many factors need to be considered and imagined. According to Purpel and Shapiro (1995, p. 136), this educational vision should speak to people’s needs, anxieties, tensions, feelings and insecurities where “different concerns are articulated on, unrecognized or unfulfilled desires come to the fore, new voices are heard, and new forms of outrage and indignation are expressed.” Our education needs to be oriented towards needs and concerns of ordinary people and speak to us in our daily lives. It must touch people emotionally through “wholeness, compassion, care and responsibility” (Purpel & Shapiro, 1995, p. 147). By allowing students to find their own potential and challenge present restrictions and control on their learning, instead of blindly following rules and providing the correct answers, then it is more likely that young adults, like those I interviewed can find spaces to “problem pose, challenge and deliberate” (Schultz, 2008, p. 15). It is then that students are more likely to develop independence as they devise their own understandings, explore, invent and make important life-long decisions.

Teachers who teach against the grain and replace the language ‘of risk’ with that of renewal and possibility (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995, p. 71) are often challenged by their own schools. Being an advocate for social justice and trying to overcome bureaucratic challenges whilst maintaining a stance rooted in and relevant to the lives of students is never going to be easy (Schultz, 2008, p. 127). It is not a romantically utopian place and comes with struggle and pain and requires constant inquiry, debate, reflection and confidence. It is not to say that education is not empowering or enabling because as Ayers, (2004) explains, we can allow:
... something deeper and richer than simply imbibing and accepting the
codes and conventions of the time, acceding to whatever common sense
society posits. The larger goal of education is to assist people in seeing
the world through their own eyes, interpreting and analysing through
their own experiences and reflective thinking, feeling themselves capable
of representing, manifesting, or even, if they choose, changing what they
find before them. Education at its best, then, is linked to freedom, to the
ability to see but also to alter, to understand but also to reinvent, to know
and also to transform the world. (p. 20, 21)

It is important that an alternative learning community based on relationship,
belonging, respect, community, negotiation and democratic decision making should
not be imposed and the identity of the group already determined (Zournazi, 2002, p.
94). Instead a common identity could be created out of an experience and a sharing
of certain beliefs, goals and having affinity and empathy. By instilling this form of
caring, “the humour, the harmless desires, the tendency toward playfulness of the
cared-for, enter us” (Noddings, 1983, p. 53). In contrast, Oakes, Rogers and Lipton
(2006, p. 15) explain that the usual approaches to school reform are technical and
scientific, and have a limited capacity in resolution as they do not reach to the root of
cultural and political problems. Hence they often maintain the unequal status quo
among and within schools. Alternatives to this situation are imperative. Burbules and
Torres (2000, p. 22) explain that this includes being more flexible and adaptive so as
to encourage coexistence with others in diverse public spaces, helping to form and
support a sustainable sense of identity within multiple contexts. Freire (2004, pp.18
& 105) advises that we ‘denounce’ the old order and way of doing things like
mandating curriculum, testing and policy, so that we can move on and ‘announce’ a
new way of thinking about schools. This alternative thinking allows a reflexive
motion, a turning point from inside to out – so that circumstances can be different. A
possibility of reinvention is thus more likely, rather than simply repetition or
reproduction of the same (such as evidenced by the Behaviour Management in
Schools Policy, updated and legislated five times since its inception in 1998). Such
policy only acts as another bureaucratic tool of accountability rather than serving any useful purpose in schooling. If school change is to succeed, according to Ayers (2004):

…people actively define and then solve their own problems. Instead of reinforcing passivity and powerlessness, the change process itself develops agency and efficacy, the sense of oneself as an active participant able to create change. (p. 140)

Ayers calls on a critical reading of the world which denounces existing oppression and injustices (Freire, 2004, p. 105) and recognises that “the very nature of ‘youth’ is the result of social and political processes through which social inequality is constructed and reconstructed” (Wyn & White, 1997, p. 5). Therefore, “we should reject discipline as a practice concerned with an unreflective and unthinking obedience toward authority or as a mindless conformity to institutional rules” (Purpel & Shapiro, 1995, p. 193) but instead nurture “a discipline that makes clear its connection to the care and respect for others and the earth” (p. 193). As Noddings (1984, p. 43) explains, as caring teachers, we do not “seek security in abstractions cast either as principles or entities” and we would want to think carefully about the establishment of rules and even more carefully about the prescription of penalties. Instead, we would want to establish a climate of cooperative ‘we-ness’ so that the rules and penalties can be kept to a minimum (p. 44).

During this research, it is the voices and concerns of these students that can help to craft solutions as active agency and participation. These solutions become obvious through what they say:

Ev - I don’t want people to hate me. No-one does

Carl – the work is so repetitive. We do the same thing week after week. It just keeps on going. Kids get agitated.
Responding to these voices requires what Ayers, (2004, p. 13) describes as “a call to freedom”, as consciousness links to conduct and upheaval is in the air. A journal entry of mine attempts to capture this call to freedom:

Today I watched the joy experienced by teenagers playing in the surf. They were like young seal pups free-excited-doing what they will. The sand glistened and the waves rolled… I caught myself thinking about that freedom to be who you are to be doing what you want to do to express what you need to say…

The tide ebbed and flowed as it always does something consistent experiencing that movement-that moment and what it means or brings into our consciousness something that matters. What made the day especially memorable was that those kids were having the day off and I could not help but be caught up in their sense of adventure expression and dare.

That would have been hard to find between the grey walls of school that day. [Journal Entry 4th March, 2006]

Caruthers (2007, p. 61) reveals that “in schools where educators and community members work to reconstruct their work, children are supported in the development of resilience by skilled people who link affective factors to cognitive outcomes such as achievement and behaviour.” This is in strong contrast to the competitive top down managerial school focusing on high grades, sporting and specialist subjects, and glamorous events where students are often to be passively obedient or face disciplinary consequences (Shor 1992, p. 212). Nora explains:

Some of the rules are really stupid so no-one follows them because they are so silly, so there is no point. Like that uniform rule, not eating in class, having to always ask to go to the toilet.
In such schools, as the story told throughout this dissertation shows, it is often difficult for students to develop their own self discipline or to realise that they have something valuable to contribute to society. Ayers (2004) confirms that it is the teacher who is in a position to create alternative possibilities and openness. “The teacher points to what could be, but is not yet. The teacher beckons you to change your path, and so the teacher’s basic rule is to reach.” (p. 13).

Thus reconstruction of schooling requires acknowledgment that the aims of education go well beyond the preparation of a skilled workforce, and the isolation created through the divisions of labour (Sidorkin, 2004, p. 68). Solmitz (cited in Hinchey, 2006, p. 65) warns that “the nature of our schools will not change as long as our schools continue to focus primarily on preparing students to become economically viable.” The more common version of freedom alluring many in society is a callous one, because it is one in “which profit is sacred; if you’re poor it is your own fault and if you complain that makes you a communist” (Allende & Peden, 2003, p. 168). Such an interpretation of freedom, caught up in economic choice is not the call to freedom imagined by Ayers (2004, p. 13) but rather a limited neo-liberal freedom which “consists of having many brand names to choose from when you go out to buy on credit” (Allende & Pedan, 2003, p. 168).

When the purpose of education is to prepare students for the workforce and for participation in a culture characterized by competition and consumerism (Hinchey, 2006, p. 68), then student resistance can become a major concern. The rhetoric of policy reform that is supposed to help students is counteracted by the reality of commercial interests or individual interests being satisfied. To further exacerbate this problem, the fallout from punitive rules, authoritarian insistence of rewards and
punishment, promotes even more rebellion and alienation among students (Goodman, 2006, p. 226). It is important for students to be connected to others and have a sense of well being (Hinchey, 2006, p. 117). Carl, for example is a student whose life at home is not considered in the administration of punitive rules relating to promptness, uniform compliance and obedience in the use of electronic devices. He is frustrated by the schools lack of understanding and therefore becomes further marginalised:

*I want them to understand that sometimes we need to be contacted. Like my Mum messaged me the other day to say she was going back into hospital, but you have to sort of keep your phone low so you don’t get spotted and have your phone confiscated. We live with our Nan who bruises easily and her bones are brittle. Mum and Dad are divorced. Nan stays at home and does all the housework. She is getting old. Mum has just come out of hospital with an irregular heartbeat.*

Wyn and White (1997, p. 123) explain that the subsequent increase in marginalisation of young people from institutions such as school, revolving around production and consumption means that students like Carl are at the same time being disconnected and disempowered from that culture. Real learning for these students occurs “in contexts where students receive feedback that celebrates growth and that point to areas for development and improvement” (Smyth, 2005a, p. 230).

There are practical ways that schools can create personal and relational ways of supporting students in their learning experience. These begin with advice from researchers and practitioners such as Sidorkin (2004) who suggests we provide; more services to students; more effective mediating roles; recognition of peer culture and peer interaction; systemic effort to integrate peer culture with academic culture; opportunities for teachers to interact with students outside of traditional settings and non academic time that is better organized and funded (p. 68). Smyth (2005b, p. 126)
also argues for new ways of understanding students through their lives and experiences. He specifies various actions that can enable this. First, by paying more regard to the wider circumstances of school culture, structures and pedagogy. Secondly, by having more “dialogue around supportive conditions and pathways that exist or are brought into existence by considering how barriers and interferences are negotiated”, and finally, by “the navigation of youth identity, boundaries and spaces” (p. 126).

Smyth, Hattam, et al. (2004) explain that this form of “active school” culture then becomes more inclusive and responsive to all young people (p. 185). There is a shift away from individual and competitive styles of learning, towards a sense of family and community with students engaged in curriculum and decisions important for their learning. Learning is not just for the individual, but for the benefit and well being of all society. Learning is thus in ‘being’ mode (Lankshear, 2003, p. 59) – a process of knowing, a critically reasoning which tries to understand aspects of the world more deeply, to be curious, to experience ourselves and others at a point of interaction with the world. Such values centred on the group contrast to that of the individual, thus promoting and rebuilding social connections and socially responsive behaviour. In this manner ‘difference’ is more likely to be accommodated by the group rather that conforming to the status quo.

Finally, as Peterson (1999, p. 82-83) discovered, in order to teach students to be responsible, teachers have to consciously help students make the transition from the past to the future because they “had been treated like mindless sheep”. Riley (2004) drawing on examples from Uruguay and the State of Parana in Brazil, emphasises the importance of ‘social accountability’ rather than ‘consumer accountability’.
Teachers’ professional judgement is valued and social partnerships are developed with the entire school community. As she concludes (2004):

Reforming for the future is about developing an approach to reform which equips our children and young people to think, learn, reflect and work together. It is about resisting the temptation to hanker after a mythical golden age in which tractable children sat in uniform rows awaiting the next input of knowledge nuggets. (pp 70-1)
CHAPTER 9 - CONCLUSION

9.1 What has been said?

In essence this thesis argues that no matter how much energy, effort, money, time and expertise is invested into the formulation of education policy that impacts on students, if students themselves are not consulted, considered and understood then these efforts are futile. These students have been unacknowledged witnesses of the effects of educational policy (Smyth, 2005a, p. 222), and therefore, should be involved in genuine decision making and more fully engaged in schooling in ways that are meaningful and connects to their lives and their communities. This is a schooling that is respectful, relational and creative and involves making choices and decisions in which consequences and reflections on those choices are learnt. These choices do not occur in an authoritarian or patronizing climate. The importance of relationship in teaching and learning cannot be overrated and any priority of policy formulation and implementation needs to take this important component into consideration. Consequently, a standardized policy such as *Behaviour Management in Schools* policy is always going to have difficulty catering for all students in all schools. Hence, to not consider the importance and complexity of relationships, student experiences and circumstances, and local responses will only exacerbate and jeopardise policy effectiveness.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I introduced my own personal experience as a teacher to the political domain of schooling and chose *Behaviour Management in Schools* policy as a way of ‘troubling the change’ occurring within public education. I focused on West Australian secondary schooling and traced the specific changes
that have occurred in the Education Department policy as more accountability, control and surveillance replaced the complex social and cultural spaces, turning them into disciplinary sites.

In chapter two, I described in more detail what I meant by ‘a disciplinary site’ and then introduced ‘Anchorage High’, the case study site used to capture the rich ethnographic descriptions and insights of students, schools and their communities. Gary, a student of Anchorage High, was introduced in this chapter as a way of revealing the interpretations and understandings of a sixteen year old struggling to conform to changes and practices filtered down into classrooms when accountability, testing, image and control take precedence over relationships in learning.

In the third chapter of the thesis, the broader landscape of the neoliberal agenda, of marketisation, corporatisation and disciplining of schools was the focus of discussion. Here I argued that the neoliberal model of education deskills teachers, focuses instruction on tests and limits curriculum content, and uses “outside experts and funding to ensure business interests trump all others in the school” (Torres & van Heertum, 2009, p. 232). Instead of education being based around young people and their lives and learning, advocates of neoliberal reforms want to reshape education around “increasingly narrow instrumentalist approaches” (Smyth et al., 2008, p. 156). As a way of explaining the impact of this neoliberal agenda, I used a critical theoretical perspective to question and interrupt the ambiguities associated with the Behaviour Management in Schools policy and the day-to-day practices of life in secondary schools.

Critical social theory and its components were outlined in the second half of the chapter as I explained the idea of an evolving criticality (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2009).
2005, p. 306). By changing in light of new theoretical insights, social circumstances and educational contexts (Kincheloe, 2007, p. 18), I opened spaces for student voices to move narrative ethnography from the margins to the centre (Tedlock, 2003, p. 191). These narrative insights were used to interrupt the status quo by asking ‘troubling’ questions about behaviour management discourses. In doing so and at the same time engaging in praxis and building theory dialectically, I illuminated how power and control operates in schools. Such praxis provides a “diagnosis of what is wrong with society and a provisional roadmap for change” (Torres & van Heertum, 2009, p. 228). This is because critical pedagogy responds to problems posed within particular contexts “marked by changing configurations of students, cultural resources, community histories, and relations of power” (Giroux, 2003c, p. 155).

Education reform over the past thirty years has focused on improving productivity and efficiency throughout the Western world and now the developing world to increase industrial output. It was during the late 1970’s and 1980’s that many policies and public debate about social welfare and education policy moved to the right (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995, p. 3). This has resulted in a perceived need to ensure a more disciplined work force, accepting long hours of labour and less tardiness and absenteeism. It has also resulted in a greater emphasis on implementing behaviour and attendance policies with clear sanctions and incentives to improve work skills. Complicating this situation has been a greater emphasis on the competitive ranking and testing of performance as confirmed by Purpel and Shapiro (1995):

…in attempting to tie the quest for higher economic growth to the reform of public education, the public discussion of schooling was increasingly dominated by the language and logic of industrial life-the concern with output, performance, and productivity. (p. 6)
Preparing students for the workforce with an emphasis on productive skills and vocational competencies, despite the collapse of the youth labour market and impact of de-industrialisation (Smyth, 2006, p. 34) is evidence of one of these reforms. Another is the emphasis on traditional discipline regimes and a focus on uniform, attendance and compliance to rules. To complicate and jeopardise the teaching learning relationship even more, is the push for mandated curriculum, monitoring and evaluation of students, conducting standardized tests and ranking student performance against benchmarks. These factors together make the daily struggle of teaching and learning in a socially democratic manner very difficult. This obsession with servicing a post-industrial economy avoids political, moral and social issues, preferring the safer, less controversial realm of technical solutions to social and economic problems (Purpel & Shapiro, 1995, p. 6). As McLaren and Farahmandpur (2002, p. 51) acknowledge, critical educators recognise that schools are social sites linked to wider global social and political struggles in society. This acknowledgment provides hope that such a theoretical and political stance can have some impact in the future.

Chapter four traced the evolution of behaviour management policy in West Australian public schools. Emanating from shifting discourses around punishment, pastoral care, self-discipline and behaviour management are common patterns of control, isolation, compliance and social order within a market view of education. I brought a genealogical understanding to the evolution of behavior management policy which has an interest in making the present situation strange rather than the past familiar (Meredyth & Tyler, 1993, p. 4). For example, during the 16th century in Europe, La Boete (1975, p. 78) noted a historical pattern of people in society. He claimed that as many people to whom tyranny seemed advantageous for profit
making, there would also be those to whom liberty from this would be desirable. In modern education reform, with schools often blamed for failing economies (Angus, 1991, p. 150), policy is more likely to be shaped by offering particular financial rewards and penalties that the economy wishes to encourage or discourage (Hinchley, 2006, pp. 67-69). At the same time, there are still many educators resisting this pattern and desiring freedom from reward and penalty systems connected to mandated policy.

In the fifth chapter of this thesis, critical ethnography was the chosen methodology used to interrogate the mandated *Behaviour Management in Schools* policy. In this chapter I detailed the importance of capturing the voices of students to “better inform us on how teachers and young adolescents jointly construct creative narratives of learning” (Smyth, 2006, p. 42). The qualitative data was analysed as it “dance[d] between the worlds of rigorous and reasoned interpretation, imaginative visions, calculated distance and engaged political practice” (Ezzy, 2002, p. 165). This was done by finding out what the ‘Other’ (students) were thinking, and at the same time, developing dialogic spaces for students whilst adopting a reflexive position as a researcher.

In chapter six, the ethical and representative challenges of ‘doing’ critical ethnographic research on ‘Others’ voices and interpretations were explained and more importantly, modes of working through the tunnel of these challenges was chronicled. Student stories have been told throughout this dissertation as a way of taking the reader into *their* life worlds of schooling. It is the intention that this creates a space in which *they* can be heard. Even though some of the students often feel alienated at school, they show us places and spaces where they do feel a sense of
belonging. This is an opportunity for them to be with those people and places where they feel they can be and want to be who they are: at the canteen, the sportsground, the library – even the detention room or the journey to and from school. These students are recognised by other students and teachers, thus they are genuinely acknowledged and respected as young adults. This recognition makes them proud to be showcasing ‘their version’ of what a school can be – fragments of the school in which they can belong and communicate with and which accepts them. These are spaces for sharing, spaces for genuine and relevant thinking and places of support.

In the seventh chapter, large spaces are created to allow student voices to speak back to the behaviour management regime via the themes of student voice, disengagement, control, marginalisation, relationship and powerlessness. These voices are often the ones excluded in policy formation, yet unfurl what is real for students because they “have interesting and valuable things to say” (Smyth, 2006, p. 37). Students’ versions of events need to be heard in order to imagine how a different experience of schooling could be if creative spaces are freely allowed and where students are not living in fear or humiliation. This chapter begins the search for such alternatives.

In neoliberal times where economic aspirations are closely connected to hope, security and comfort, it is important to be reminded if we ignore the suffering of others when evoking hope; we create a hope based on fear (Zournazi, 2002, p. 15). As Zournazi explains, (2002, p. 16) “when people have no hope to give they also have little space to reflect and engage with others”. Student narratives that speak about sharing and the experiences of teachers caring provide such hope. These young people express how important it is for them to be involved, to be invited to think,
contribute and associate unconditionally in their learning. Students want to be acknowledged as real people who have lives outside of the confines of the classroom that may not be conducive to conforming and writing notes and sitting still. Instead, these students actually have experiences to share, to learn, and to discover. These complex lives are then no longer hidden behind the restrictive, mandated curriculum and the preparation and administration of testing regimes.

Chapter eight turns to the task of reconstructing the Behaviour Management in Schools policy. Drawing on student counter-narratives, the data is constellated around the themes of belonging, community, negotiation, decision making, relationships and respect. I argued that schools as ‘controlled societies’ do not have to be the way they are but rather places for learning without fear, guilt or conformity to inflexible codes of conduct and testing regimes. Ayers (2004), claims instead that:

… this is the beginning: to assume a deep capacity in students, an intelligence (often obscure, sometimes buried) as well as a wide range of hopes, dreams, and aspirations; to acknowledge, as well, obstacles to understand and overcome, deficiencies to repair, injustices to correct. (p. 11)

In acknowledging such capacity, there is room for thinking otherwise, exercising reflective practice and transformative action. Schools and education are more than just finding out things, consuming and measuring content but also present opportunities for “finding ourselves” (Purpel & Shapiro, 1995, p. 156). Carl, Tara and Ev reveal solidarity based on such respect:

*Carl – When we were in Year 7, a girl in our class was killed in a car accident, it was three years ago since her death, last Tuesday,*

*Janean – what did your school/class do to help you through that experience?*

*Tara – we planted a mulberry tree, it was raining that day, we were all around in a big circle, and there was a big tarp*
Carl – we had a big ceremony,

Tara – and a poem was read out...the tree is still there now,

Carl- that is because it has been fenced off,

Tara – it even has fruit on it.

Ev – everyone cried – I couldn’t say anything my throat was too dry,

Carl – some of us were trying to make the others happy. They played her favourite songs on one of her favourite CD’s, so many of us started singing.

Tara – she was a really good horse rider. Her friends brought her horse riding ribbons in. That made us even more upset.

Ev – she had a page with a poem on it in our Year 7 graduation book.

The discussion between these students reveals the significance of relationships between people and the place of memories and connections. The incident these young people are sharing occurred three years prior to the interview, yet the impact of the incident remains important to them. Such emotional, social and moral connections are disregarded when the focus in schools is on measurement and monitoring. Student portraits such as these reveal a “keen[ness] to receive a rigorous and relevant education connected to their culture, interest and lives” (Smyth et al., 2008, p. 132).

In our role and responsibility as teachers, parents, researchers, community activists and other citizens, we are in a position to reclaim and have confidence in our right to fully informed and critical participation in creating school policies and programmes as educators, at the same time enriching the lives of students by providing them with codes of belonging, identity and listening to their stories (Beane & Apple, 1999, p. 8). We may need to help students to establish their own voices, (Delpit 1993, p. 138), and “coach those voices to produce notes that will be heard clearly in the larger society” (p. 138). This work is prepared to take the risk of
raising questions about discrimination even though “it means turning yourself inside out, giving up your own sense of who you are, and being willing to see yourself in the unflattering light of another’s angry gaze” (Delpit, 1993, p. 139). Smyth et al. (2008, p. 118) witnessed during their extensive research into engaged learning that the teachers who were passionate and committed and where respected by students were often those that “taught against the odds” and in “circumstances of diminishing resources”. As they grappled with the complexity of the changing times, there were also the ones “willing to take risks and experiment”, making learning fun, respecting students’ own knowledge and abilities and negotiating and making relevant the curriculum and its assessment.

### 9.2 Impact of this research

What this research does is to highlight some of the differences between parents, educators and policy maker’s definitions of *Behaviour Management in Schools* policy and the voices of students for whom they were designed, whilst continually posing the question, ‘are we considering the interests and needs of students?’ and ‘what is really important here? Policy texts such as the *Behaviour Management in Schools* are often ambiguous, everyday implications and effects often unclear and contradictory, culminating in practices that are confusing and not in the best interests of the students themselves.

I am left with the question, how might this research influence policy and practice in schools? As explained by Bardsley, (2007, p. 504) such policy “must be developed and applied within the context of students’ current and future needs”. I ask this important question as a postscript because after nearly five years of critically examining and attempting to understand the impact of this policy on students in
public institutions such as schools; I have a niggling concern that research such as mine may have very little persuasion in the formulation and implementation of policy in the future. A major reason for this is that “those who produce education policy, the who of policy production, tend to be removed from contexts of practice” (Gale & Densmore 2003, p. 51), yet if teachers are not able to join in leading such changes, the changes will not take place (Meier, cited in Smyth, 2006, p. 44).

The mandated *Behaviour Management in Schools* policy was introduced as a way of improving student learning and relationships in the context of the neoliberal school improvement, efficiency and standards movement. These policies and ideas often grind against each other and cause friction in decision making panels and committees within schools because it is school effectiveness and school image that become more important. It is these contradictions between why policy was created in the first place, what policy is then supposed to attend to, and what solutions it attempts that provided the impetus for this research. Haynes (2002 p, 16) for example, makes the point that education policy in Australia is “expected to effect the promotion, in a morally acceptable manner of worthwhile learning”… and that education policies are responses to social change (p. 136). I argue, from the results of this research, however, that the *Behaviour Management in Schools* policy has not evolved from school initiated social change, but school effectiveness and neoliberal change searching quick fix solutions to complex social, cultural and economic problems.

Throughout this thesis I have interrogated the tensions and contradictions within the supposed ‘best practice’ around the implementation of the mandated *Behaviour Management in Schools* policy. My data suggests in reality that a “deficiency
orientated policy” (Smyth, et. al, 2008, p. 67) as this one may actually be nonsensical because it does not enhance relationships in schools that are built on trust, respect and a positive learning environment. This research dissertation has asked many more questions about policy and educational practice than when it began. For example, what research has informed this *Behaviour Management in Schools* policy both before and during its implementation? Have any audits or assessments been done on its impact? What research is being done on the practices that emerge from this policy? Who is informing who and how is the policy affecting those for whom it was written? Who benefits and in whose interests does it continue? Why now is this policy so prevalent and powerful?

Ball (1994, p. 19) explains that policies do not normally tell you what to do but instead create constricting circumstances that limit options. Prunty (1984, p. 3) asks for a critical reformulation of this style of education policy, so that “real change will come about through the achievement of a greater consensus about basic values and a greater understanding about the relationship between schools, society, and the realisation of human potential”. Likewise, Whitty, (2002, p. 20) claims that there is an “urgent need to balance consumer rights with a new conception of citizen rights” to give voice back to those who have been excluded from dominant policy discourses.

If the education policy process is to be properly informed then it needs to access the perspectives of those most directly affected by schooling (Smyth, 2006, p. 33) rather than follow the incentives of the market (Connell, 2009). Schools are not stand alone places “but rather are constrained or enabled within policy discourses” (Smyth & Hattam et al., 2004, p. 195). If policy, like *Behaviour Management in Schools* is
viewed, analysed and interrogated for real interests driving them, then the existence of “dominant discourse, regimes of truth, erudite knowledge’s”, are more likely to be revealed (Ball, 2006, p. 50). Many policies have come about because of the ability and power of neoliberal and neoconservative groups who are quick “to blame educators for unemployment, a supposed loss of traditional knowledge and values, and just about everything that was wrong with society” (Apple & Beane, 1999, p. xv).

The call for more control and accountability in schools, as well as the ‘normalisation’ of schools as bureaucracies should urgently be questioned. It is important to ask if this style of control and operation is really serving the needs of students in a democratic and equitable manner or is it serving the needs of efficiency, accountability and corporatisation? This research provokes a debate about the purpose of such policy and practice in schools which do not serve the needs of students well and do not encourage enriching, reciprocal, trusting and caring relationships within schools.

Thus my research takes a political stance that speaks clearly and firmly against the many injustices and inequities that have already emerged and likely to be further exacerbated if behaviour management policy is not interpreted and understood from the point of view of students themselves. This has been no easy task; one cannot be too disillusioned or romantically utopian about the complexity of reconstructing schools because as McMurtry (1999, p. 4) warns “critical questioning of the social status quo” is an ancient and forbidden subject; it is “dangerous business”. Sometimes it may mean being strategic or carefully ignoring some ‘instructions’, or adapting or altering ‘codes’ to suit the school. Furthermore, many students who are
not familiar with using their own self management and decision making skills, will require some assistance in learning how to make this transition to becoming responsible and autonomous citizens within the school community. Cammarota (2008) engenders a mode of ethnographic praxis called ‘cultural organising’ which he uses to take students beyond their informal acts of resistance or passiveness by having them engage in the systems that dominate and oppress them directly and creatively. This helps students organise themselves with the explicit purpose of changing their school environment.

More time for collaboration and reflection between parents, teachers, students and school leaders in planning, assessing and administrating behaviour management policy is also a major consideration. By this, I do not mean the token representation that presently occurs, but genuine invitational action, whereby the needs and concerns of all parties is treated with seriousness and respect towards forming a truly representative council or group. Such a group would meet regularly, sharing and disseminating information with purpose and conviction and follow proposals for discussion, action and audit. Where schools have sought to collaborate with the school community and enlist all players – teachers, parents, students, school and regional administrators and their various representative organisations – in the policy process, there seems to be a greater chance of sustainability (Slee, 1992b, p. 195).

The obsession with behaviour management regimes as yet another ‘quick fix’ inhibits the development of other more sustainable and democratic social change. Typically, Peterson (1999, p. 95) argues, private profit trumps human needs thus preventing social change; “large class sizes, lack of teacher planning time and the broader problems of poverty, child abuse and unemployment” are glossed over.
Thus, if policy is going to improve schools it must be “linked to changes in society” (Peterson, 1999, p. 95). Schools do not stand alone as institutions of reform; they are a reflection of how society interacts and behaves. Alternative approaches to schooling will need to be inclusive of discourses in which “socio-cultural differences are mediated by social relations” (Gale & Densmore, 2000, p. 125), whereby policy is “inclusive rather than exclusive, compassionate rather than punitive and democratic rather than autocratic” (Smyth, 2005a, p. 229).

Finally, I conclude with a story from a fellow educator who felt like I did at the beginning of this thesis, when returning to the unfamiliar, troubling and foreign place that school had become. Barbara Brodhagen (1999) was also deeply dissatisfied as many teachers are with the unjust and often meaningless education practices being offered to young people. Teachers like Barbara become frustrated when they are unable to effect change at school level, let alone at a policy level. By forming partnerships with other likeminded teachers, Brodhagen was able at least to create a democratic learning community by collaboratively planning the curriculum based on questions that the students had about themselves and the world. This led to more collaborative governance, cooperative learning, and student led parent conferences. Importantly, she also admits that such successes do not come without their difficulties, obstacles and criticisms. This is difficult work that requires persistence, determination, confidence and belief in the significance of relationships. All too often these dedicated teachers work alone and do not realise that many others around the world are struggling with the same issues and concerns about how one can provide and therefore receive more positive teaching and learning experiences.
This research provides a space for sharing some of these stories, with a view to creating ongoing dialogue around understanding questions of poverty, discrimination and inequality. If nothing else, I trust this research triggers this process. As Smyth, Hattam et al., (2004, p. 195) explain “the growing alienation in our high schools will eventually force changes with or without official support”. This thesis is a pro-active, political and professional conviction and stance to bring important issues involving our young people in public schooling into the limelight that may have been forgotten, ignored or over looked in the race to be ‘efficient’.
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of permission from school principal

Research Topic: Behaviour management and school policy: Listening to student voices

Principal (Anchorage Senior High School)

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am writing this letter to request your permission to conduct student interviews at your school in order to gather data for my research project as part of my Doctorate thesis in Education at Murdoch University under the supervision of Professor Barry Down and Dr James Bell.

This research involves the investigation of Behaviour Management and Discipline (BMaD), its implementation within Secondary Schools in Western Australia and its evolution from the Behaviour Management in Schools Policy 1998. As you are aware, BMaD is an initiative of the Department of Education and Training and is aimed at enhancing a school’s capacity to ensure that all students achieve significant academic and social outcomes.

The purpose of my research is to find out how students themselves understand experience and respond to BMaD. By listening to the stories of students, I hope to add an important dimension to the way student behaviour policies and practices are conceived and enacted in education systems and schools.

My proposal is to firstly invite students to participate in the research. I could do this by conducting a brief familiarisation talk to the chosen sample age group cohort of Yr 10’s in whichever mode is least disruptive to your school. Once students have nominated and gained parental consent to participate, (I would require about 10-15), I would conduct individual interviews. These would be held in a quiet and private space nominated by you. These would take approximately 30 – 45 minutes each and not be conducted during structured lesson times. I have chosen the Yr 10 cohort of your school as the sample age group. Their participation would be entirely voluntary and they may withdraw at any time during the research.

You can be re-assured that confidentiality of each participatory student; staff, you
and your school community will be strictly adhered to at all times during and after the research process. All human ethics conduct, regulations, statements and principles outlined both by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee will be abided and adhered to.

I will also be available to you, your staff and school community for further questions and follow up any queries or concerns throughout the research process. I will also continually liaise with the Student Support officers and personnel at your school to monitor and support any emerging anxieties or apprehensions.

I envisage this study to be a very important and valuable one to not only your school but for many schools and communities throughout the state and further a field as we approach a complex and complicated time in understanding the impact and implementation of policy within education.

I wish to thank you in anticipation of your consideration of this proposal. Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions regarding this letter. My supervisor and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study will be conducted. If you wish to talk to an independent person about your concerns you can contact my supervisor, Professor Barry Down at Murdoch University in Rockingham on 9360 7020 or email b.down@murdoch.edu.au or Murdoch University's Human Research Ethics Committee on 9360 6677.

Yours sincerely,

Janean Robinson
PhD Candidate
Murdoch University
Appendix B: Invitational letter to students and consent form for parents

Research Topic: Behaviour management and school policy: Listening to student voices

To: YR 10 STUDENTS

Dear Students:

This letter is to invite you to participate in a research work that I am presently conducting at Murdoch University in Perth. I have been a teacher in Western Australian Secondary Schools for over 20 years. I am interested in understanding students’ perceptions of their school’s behaviour management policy. Your school has been chosen to participate in this study and I will be collecting data generally through informal style interview.

The first stage of this process is to invite you to participate in my research to gauge your perceptions and understandings of the Behaviour Management and Discipline Strategy. This was developed from the Department of Education’s (DET) Behaviour Management in Schools Policy 1998. You can be assured that confidentiality will be respected at all times by me the researcher both during and after the research. There are limits to this confidentiality and if a student either consciously or unconsciously discloses information indicating they or others are at personal risk, this must be conveyed to appropriate student services personnel.

The individual interviews will be conducted in a quiet private space. Typically these types of interviews will last anything between 30-45 minutes. There is no compulsion to continue with the interview process, once you have begun – you may withdraw at any time.

All information collated during interviews will be transcribed and confirmed with you for accuracy and amended if required. Sensitivity of your information will be considered throughout. I wish to assure you that your input to the research will remain anonymous. I would like to add, that your contribution to this field will be extremely valuable, and at no time considered threatening or test like in format. It will provide an arena for student stories and conversations to be considered and represented. It also has the potential for future understandings and considerations of student perspectives for the development of education policy.

If you would like to participate in any way with this research, and have any further questions please contact me. Study Ph: 9360 2171 or E-mail: J.Robinson@murdoch.edu.au.
My supervisor and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study has been conducted. If you wish to talk to an independent person about your concerns you can contact my supervisor, Professor Barry Down at the Murdoch University in Rockingham (93607020) or Murdoch University's Human Research Ethics Committee (9360 6677) or email ethics@murdoch.edu.au.

Yours sincerely,

Janean Robinson
PhD Candidate
Murdoch University

In order for you to be able to participate in this research, I will need your consent as well as a parent or guardian to sign the following consent form. Please post (in self addressed envelopes provided, or place into the designated ballot box at student services desk within the next few days.

I have read the information above and agree to participate in this study. I understand that all information provided will be treated with confidentiality within the limits described above and that I may change my mind and discontinue my participation at any time throughout the research process.

I agree for interviews to be transcribed and that research data gathered for this study may be published provided my name or other information which might identify me is not used.

Student Participant: ________________________________

Parent/Guardian: _________________________________

Date: __________________________

Please post this consent form to me or alternatively place in the ‘Posting Box’ for the purpose at the student services desk.

Janean Robinson, C/O ERAP Office, South Street, Murdoch University, Murdoch.
Appendix C: Letter of appreciation to students

School of Education, Professor Barry Down
City of Rockingham Chair in Education

Dixon Road, Rockingham W. A. 6168
b.down@murdoch.edu.au
http://www.murdoch.edu.au

Dear _______________________

This letter is to thank you and acknowledges your valuable contribution to educational research.

You have volunteered your time, and provided clear insights, understandings and interpretations of your experiences of behaviour management policies in secondary schools.

Your personal and professional manner and your honest and dignified approach are skills that will hold you in good stead for your futures.

On behalf of myself and the School of Education, I wish you all the very best in your future endeavours.

Yours sincerely

Janean Robinson, PhD Student, School of Education
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