The Good Student: Subjectivities and Power in Secondary Schools

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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.
ABSTRACT: THE GOOD STUDENT: POWER, SUBJECTIVITIES AND SCHOOLING

Schooling has become one of the core, generalisable experiences of most young people in the Western world. This study examines the ways that students inhabit subjectivities in school through the normalising vision of the good student. The idea that schools exist to produce good students who become good citizens is one of the basic tenets of modernist educational philosophies that dominate the contemporary education world.

This study takes a different position, arguing that the visions of the good student deployed in various ways in schools act to produce various ways of knowing the self that are ultimately concerned with behaviour and discipline rather than freer thought and action. Developing the postmodern theories of Foucault and Deleuze, this study argues that schools could be freer places than they are, but current practices act to teach students to know themselves in certain idealised ways through which they are located, and locate themselves, in hierarchical rationales of the good student.

Part of the promise of schools lies in the ways that students become negotiators and producers of their subjectivities, albeit in narrow and limiting ways. By pushing the ontological understandings of the self beyond the modernist philosophies that currently dominate schools and schooling, this study problematises the ways that young people are made subjects in schools. Part of this modernist tradition is found in the institutional tendency to see students as fixed, measurable identities (beings) rather than dynamic, evolving performances (becomings).

Schools and schooling largely appear to make sense to us because we think we understand what happens and what should happen in schools. The good student is framed within these aspects of cultural understanding. However, this commonsense attitude is based on a hegemonic understanding of the good, rather than the good student as a contingent multiplicity that is produced by an infinite set of discourses and experiences. I argue that this understanding of subjectivities and power is crucial if schools are to meet the needs of a rapidly changing and challenging world.

This study utilises socially critical case study research across multiple sites to investigate those micropractices of power in schools that produce the normalising vision of the good student. Data from three school sites was gathered using a variety of techniques including interviews and focus group research.
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Introduction

Our year is sort of split up into two groups – the Cool Group and the Squaries. The Cool Group hangs out on the Great Court which is down some stairs. My group hangs on the stairs. Close but not quite. I can’t get down to the stairs to sink to their level.

Sometimes you just shut up with them. You know that nothing you say is going to change the way they are going to teach you because they have the authority. Sometimes their values kind of seem contradictory. For example, Ms Jones is a good teacher. I wouldn’t say she was opinionated but she has got very strong values and sometimes when I am watching something I think about it and I think she’d hate me for watching this. You learn not to say or do anything that challenges her opinions.
INTRODUCTION

I am interested in the lived experience of young people in secondary schools. As a secondary teacher of some 12 years experience, I have had a great opportunity to witness, and participate in, various practices within schools that shape and produce the subjectivities that students will carry with them, in some form, for the rest of their lives. This experience led me to question the awareness of what school life is like for young people, and how well educationalists understand how young people are made subjects through the day-to-day conduct of the school. After completing my Masters research in 2004 I was left with further questions about how students make sense of schools, how they make sense of the ‘scripts’ we accept as being ‘commonsense’ or ‘normal’.

This dissertation examines the ways that the good student is written and performed as scripts for young people in schools to enact. These scripts are often contradictory and competing – for example, some teachers may promote a rationale of a good student as a well-behaved, cooperative student, while some students may promote the good student as a popular, athletic student who engages well with other students socially. These competing discourses of the good force students to become negotiators and performers as they seek to maximise their return from social and institutional consequences. Problematising the good student requires the examination of these competing discourses and the ways that they encourage students to inhabit specific subjectivities that accord different forms of status and privilege within the institution and life after school.

It is through these discourses and practices that students are taught to comport themselves in appropriate ways as they move from childhood to adulthood, from students to citizens. The

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central premise of this dissertation is that notions of the good student are heavily imbued with binarised thinking, and that young people know themselves through complex hierarchies that normalise what a student could possibly be. These binaries are used as a technology to govern the student, and are deployed in ways that seek to make the student complicit in their own governance. This premise extends to some secondary thoughts. Firstly, the binary logic that grounds the institutional deployment of the good student means that it becomes a tool for normalisation. Combined with the technologies of surveillance and measurement found in schools, this normalisation influences how the student relates and thinks about themself as they move through school. Such normalisation often extends to creating a docile, hierarchised subject who acts in fairly rigid and limiting ways. Secondly, what room, if any, is there for students to act in freer ways within these relations of power? The problematics of freer action for students in schools is a complex yet compelling philosophical possibility that could offer radical possibilities for the shape and delivery of education in the 21st century. Lastly, by questioning the normalising vision of the good student in select schools, some small sense of how aware students are of the forces producing and shaping them in their day to day schooling will be obtained.

I argue that schools need to be places where freer possibilities exist for students. I see this as an imperative as the world looks to new ways of thinking and as significant social, economic and environmental challenges loom in the 21st century. The good student is one of the technologies deployed in the school that teaches young people to govern themselves in heavily regulated and normalising ways. When this self-governance extends to life after school, the creation of a disciplined population may not be the best means to deal with the complex realities of the future as we grapple with issues of knowledge, sustainability and equality evident in curriculum change.

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This dissertation moves to ask different ontological questions of technologies such as the good student as a means to begin the process of problematising commonsense notions within school to re-evaluate what it is that young people are learning in schools. This dissertation is about the “crisis of the subject” as it occurs in contemporary Western society and the flow of power relations that the individual is governed within, and taught to govern themselves, often in diverging and contradictory ways.

Writing in regards to the change in sexual behaviour from Ancient to early Christian times Foucault argued:

The reflection on the use of pleasure that was so directly linked to the close correlation between the three types of authority (over oneself, over the household, and over others) was modified. We need instead to think in terms of a crisis of the subject, or rather a crisis of subjectification – that is, in terms of the difficulty in the manner in which the individual could form himself (sic) as the ethical subject of his actions, and efforts to find in devotion to self that which could enable him to submit to rules and give a purpose to his existence. 4

The crisis of the subject lends itself to asking ontological questions about being and the self to offer new ways of thinking about this crisis. It also considers schools as key institutions where this crisis is produced and maintained through a variety of technologies of power such as the normalising vision of the good student. However, and somewhat paradoxically, it also sees in this crisis of the subject the possibilities for freer action for young people. It addresses schools and schooling because these are increasingly common experiences, albeit in contingent and contextual ways, for the majority of people in the Western world. Schools and schooling largely appear to make sense to us because we think we understand what happens and what should happen in

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3 Curriculum Council, Curriculum Framework, Osborne Park: Curriculum Council, 1998, p.16 The Curriculum Framework identifies five core values that are mandated to be addressed in Western Australian schools. They are:

1. A commitment to the pursuit of knowledge and achievement of potential
2. Self acceptance and respect of self
3. Respect and concern for others and their rights
4. Social and civic responsibility
5. Environmental responsibility

schools. The good student is framed within these aspects of cultural understanding. However, this commonsense attitude is based on a hegemonic understanding of the good, rather than the good student as a contingent multiplicity that is produced by an infinite set of discourses and experiences. Within the multiplicity, the good student is a complex, dynamic negotiation between competing and often contradictory truths that is highly significant in how young people come to know themselves as certain types of people.

Schools are places where students are immersed into a world of complex social rules and regulation, with expectations regarding behaviour, morality and actions. This intricate world is further clouded by various academic and vocational discourses, all of which are deployed from a variety of different perspectives and vantage points. The exact impact is impossible to measure, but what is clear is that students must constitute themselves within this swirling set of discourses. This creative act is, I believe, part of the crisis of the subject. Within a school, how is the self taught to ‘know’ and relate to the various elements of the self? How does this help to frame an understanding of being and becoming? I see the normalising vision of the good student as central to constructing technologies of the self that measure and evaluate the worth and value of the self and teach each student to locate themselves within these complex social worlds. I argue that this is one of the biggest challenges for education in the 21st century, to move conceptions of the student from the passive, disciplined self to a more dynamic and freer self. This challenge must begin by problematising the normalising vision of the good student to open up new and freer possibilities of the self as a particular kind of ethical subject.

The crisis of the subject goes deeper than the formation of the individual. I see the world as quickly approaching a number of difficult social, economic and environmental impasses. Issues such as overpopulation, world poverty, starvation, and access to fresh water become increasingly urgent when married with environmental concerns such as climate change and diminishing fossil
fuels. These issues, amongst many others, haunt the landscape in which the individual is increasingly exposed to ethical dilemmas that they are ill-equipped to deal with. Schools have been places where what is often valued is docile behaviours and attitudes and vocational goals that do not help the individual deal in problem solving and ethical action. In short schools are places where what is learnt is often more about the types of authority and appropriate behaviours and attitudes, rather than equipping young people with the skills to meet the requirements of a changing world.

What is needed is a problematising of the crisis of the subject, of examining institutions such as schools to unmask the ways in which the student is made subject. The good student is heavily imbued with binarised notions such as success and failure. There is a performative aspect where being seen to do the right thing is more important than behaving in an ethical way. There is a productive aspect, the good student is produced and shaped by particular discourses, macro in deployment but local in flavour. By this I mean that from school to school there are differences in the productive vision of the good student. For example, some of these may have a class basis, others may have a gendered basis. The importance is that schools are historically contingent as normative places that evaluate, judge and exist to produce particular types of person that are perceived to be best suited to meet the needs of a late capitalist economy. Hunter maintains that schools are ethical places “responsible for the moral and social training of the population”, that schools are about governance and production.

The change that needs to be made is twofold. Firstly, schools need to become places where the self is valued differently, where what is taught is more about ethics and the self rather than docility and obedience. Secondly, schools need to be places that help students learn new ways of

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6 Ian Hunter, Rethinking the School: Subjectivity, Bureaucracy, Criticism, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 1994, p.xxii
relating to and comporting the self. Schools must become freer places where the normative and constraining discourses give way to an ethics of the self that is more concerned with the care of the self, and through this care, the care of others that offers greater possibility for freer thought and action. By doing this, the crisis of the subject becomes the centre of the scope of inquiry, and new and freer ways of being and becoming are more possible.

Chapter One: Foucault and the Good Student

The first chapter develops the work of the French theorist Michel Foucault. In this chapter key theoretical positions for this examination of the good student emerge. Foucault’s writings on power, and the ways that the self is coerced into disciplined subject positions become the starting point for problematising the good student in the late capitalist world. As Foucault’s analytics of power becomes more sophisticated, the theory of governmentality emerges. Governmentality refers to the ways in which the subject is governed and made governable through the discourses and power relations that are operant on the soul, body and freedom of each self. Through governmentality the individual becomes self-governing or self-policing and through these micro-practices of power, a particular citizenry is encouraged to flourish. When thinking of institutions such as schools, it is this transformative set of processes that include the discursive spaces and practices producing the good student, which are central to how individuals come to know themselves in certain ways.

The chapter finishes with some possibilities that Foucault identified as a means of dealing with systems of thought that caused the self to be trapped within quite restrictive ontological frames. These restrictive frames focused on action rather than being, and necessitated certain relations with the self that made freer action within these systems of thought difficult, if not impossible. Part of Foucault’s solution to this problem lies in the knowledge and practices that are concerned
with relating to the self. For Foucault, while ultimate freedom was an impossibility, freer ways of thinking and being could result if the self became not the focus for governable action but for ethical self-creation, where an “arts of existence” allowed the self to think, feel and act in freer ways. The self could be a creative being if ‘self-evident truths’ were challenged and destroyed. It is this notion that I develop as I problematise how the normative good student functions in schools, how it is deployed, negotiated and ‘played with’ by the students. The commonsense notion of the good student, rooted as it is in binary thought, becomes a powerful governing and self-governing set of discourses that each young person takes with them when they leave school and informs how they see their role as members of communities and citizens. I argue some of the challenges confronting the global community in the 21st century need more than a disciplined and docile response from its citizenry to solve.

Chapter Two: Pushing Foucault

One of the issues for many researchers using Foucault’s work is his vagueness about how one may best deal with a disciplined and disciplining society. The problem of resistance is a contentious one – are those who resist conforming or acting in disciplined and disciplining ways as they resist the dominant discourses of power? This second chapter is designed to deal with the problem of agency and schools, and to look at ways that there is space for students to ‘move’ in schools in ways that speak of moments of freedom rather than the carceral domination so powerfully articulated in Discipline and Punish. To do this, I have examined the work of authors that have ‘pushed’ Foucault in new directions.

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7 Foucault, Care of the Self Op Cit. p.238
Nikolas Rose looks at the ways that the soul is governed through the institutions and knowledges that have become widely accepted as the cornerstones of a ‘correctly’ functioning democracy. Amongst these are the school and the ‘science’ of pedagogy that measures, assesses and produces the conduct of the student – the governmentality of the school (and all who have a vested interest in the school) and the student, enmeshed in a dynamic relationship of governing the self and governing others. Rose goes on to argue that it is the elements of freedom found in Western liberal democracies that allow this governance to take place. Governmentality relies on the ability for the citizen to act, albeit in heavily inscribed and disciplined ways. Part of the challenge, I believe, is to use research to help people act in freer ways.

Ian Hunter writes of schools as places heavily imbued with notions of pastoral power, where the student assumes membership of a flock, led by a quasi-spiritual guide – the teacher. For him, schools are places that are ‘assembled’ to meet the supposed needs of the wider community. It is this pastoral training that Hunter argues is central to the governing of the self in Western liberal democracies, in particular Australia. Rose and Hunter develop particular views of the ways that the individual is governed. I have used this information to look at the literature on the good student as a means of locating the accepted discourses of the good student. Other theorists such as Nancy Lesko, Philip Wrexler, Julie McLeod and Lyn Yates have written on student subjectivities and the creation of certain types of students, and their work has been used to frame the argument of the normalising vision of the good student, and in some cases, to push further into the realm of ontology and freedom.

This chapter addresses the idea theoretically that schools could become better placed to meet the specific challenges that living in the 21st century will increasingly require. The promise is the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, and his often difficult and provocative philosophy that
challenges us to think rhizomatically, live machinically and philosophise creatively as a way of opening up the ontological possibilities of the self.

**Chapter Three**

In Chapter Three, the methodological basis for the study is outlined. Using a socially critical case study approach, data are gathered at different schools from a variety of different sources. The data gathering comprises focus group interviews, principal interviews, field research and discourse analysis of key documents. The purpose of these data is to provide evidence of the variety of ways that schools construct visions of the good student, often competing and seemingly arbitrary, within which the students are forced to negotiate how they see and relate to themselves. Data gathered on the competing visions of the good student examine power and subjectivities in each school, and the ways that the students have and/or experience moments of freedom.

**Chapters Four - Six**

Chapters Four, Five, and Six report on results from specific school sites. The purpose of these chapters is to provide detailed evidence of the material setting of each of the three school sites and to open up the practices and discourses that make up the discursive space of the good student within each school. Most important in this opening up is the echoing of the voices of the students as they manoeuvre within complex, contradictory and changing discourses as to what and who a good student should be.

Chapter Four investigates Tuart College, a Catholic secondary school on the urban fringe of Perth. Tuart is a low fee-paying co-educational school. This school was situated in an area that is best described as having a low-medium socioeconomic catchment.
Chapter Five investigates Jarrah College, a Catholic secondary boarding school situated in a major regional centre. Being a boarding school there is a diverse range of students found at Jarrah.

Chapter Six investigates Marri College, a school in an inner city suburb close to Perth. This school is a state school with a reputation as being a difficult school.

**Chapter Seven: Discussion**

In Chapter Seven the data from the three results chapters are combined to develop a picture of how each school presents a vision of what a good student should be and how this vision is enacted by the students. This chapter reports on the similarities and subtle differences across the sites to argue that schools are places that are more concerned with how one might act – an ontological positioning that has students relating to themselves as particular types of subjects. I argue these processes of subjectification tend to continue after school – the good student is really a precursor to the good citizen.

The findings show that there are a number of facets to the play of the good student in secondary schools. Firstly, the data show that there are a number of competing and contradictory expectations of the good student which can depend on perspective and social expectations. These competing discourses require the student to become a negotiator, a producer of the self in the complex play of power relations in the school. The student is encouraged to know themselves as certain types of people, and then to govern themselves within the umbrella of this knowing. One of the results of this is the creation and maintenance of a hierarchical sensibility that locates students within complex social systems that in turn constitute how the self acts, behaves and
thinks. This set of processes tends to judge the individual and trains them to police themselves to act in normative, rather than freer ways. The normative value communicated to the student is how they relate to the multiple possibilities of the good student they display. This leads to a notion of performativity where the students are seen to conform to certain expectations of type. However, it is evident that this performativity is rarely creative, rather it conforms to accepted hierarchical expectations that act to limit the possibilities for the self to act and think in freer ways.

The hierarchical discourse of the good student also means that students become skilful at classifying themselves against idealised forms of the good that they play with and within which they negotiate their positionalities. The strategies of power to watch and evaluate, to normalise, to individualise and to categorise continually function in creating these positionalities. The strategy is to locate the self in such a way as to maximise the return from its comportment – the complexity is to play off contending, contrasting and contradictory claims on goodness. This is the play of power that coalesces around the normalising vision of the good student in secondary schools.
Chapter One:
Foucault and the Good Student

Like ... we got ranked today in our Maths class, and that’s how we sit like the people who got the lowest marks sit at the front and the people behind say “You are just sitting there because you are stupid. You are dumb. That’s why you are in front of me.” So students get really cruel if you get less than them.

Sometimes having a reputation is good, sometimes it’s bad. When the teachers joke around with you because they think that you are one of the tough ones, it is cool. Other kids respect that reputation. The flip side is that you always get blamed for things.
CHAPTER ONE

The Good Student

Schools and schooling are generalisable as one of the few core experiences of most young people in the Western world. Since the late eighteenth century, education has become a key concern of Western society as the complex task of governing and producing citizens has led to the creation of institutions that Western society has come to accept as appropriate and commonsense – in short, ‘normal’. One of these institutions is the school. Schools are places where a multitude of functions and relationships continually shape and reshape the attitudes and experiences of those who become the citizenry desired by the state. However, schools and the processes that underpin schooling are anything but ‘normal’. I advocate thinking about schools and schooling as places where power is manifestly at work in a multitude of ways to create certain kinds of subjectivities deemed suitable for that governable citizenry. My aim is to better understand some of these processes that occur in schools and to look at ways these processes leading to certain kinds of subjectification could be opened up and new possibilities created. In particular, I am interested in those normalising discourses of the ‘good’ student.9

In this chapter I intend to do three things. The first of these is to introduce the body of theory that will underpin both the conduct and analysis of the research. In doing this I will be examining in some detail the writings of Michel Foucault over the period of his life. I undertake this detailed analysis of Foucault as his theories on power, subjectification and care of the self are central to how I see the possibilities of the good student deployed in schools. I also maintain that it is the body of Foucault’s work that constitutes his ethic of the effects of power on the individual, and

9 The term ‘good’ is a word laden with meanings and assumptions. I am using it in its general sense, and seek to explore the ways that the good has been deployed as a technology of the self in schools.
the potential strategies that the individual could utilise to act in freer ways within this nexus of power relations. In my mind, Foucault’s work on power and subjectivities needs to be understood through the admonition to care for the self.

Secondly, I would like to draw on the body of work that some theorists call the ‘later’ Foucault. I see this as crucial for my work in the ways that Foucault develops an ethics of subjectivity as a move beyond his earlier analytics of power where the disciplined subject was largely constituted through external discourses and relations of power. Rather, I lean towards Foucault’s attempt to understand how the self could be freer as an ethics of care of the self. It is these ethics that I see as informing my attempt to problematise the good student, to move beyond the disciplined and disciplining subjectivities that currently dominate much of the ways that the student is envisioned within mainstream education. Through this problematisation I see this study as opening up possibilities as to the construction of student identities that lie at the heart of the good student. I argue that the good student as it is currently acted, enacted and understood in schools is a technology of the self that is narrow and rigid in its production of student subjectivities. I would like to see schools and school communities as places where freer identities are possible. Part of this is to argue for an optimism in Foucault’s work that centres around possibilities for freer selves and a better society – as a rebuttal to many of the criticisms aimed at Foucault over a number of years.

Finally this chapter presents a preliminary examination of the good student through the lens of Foucault. In particular, I want to create a link between a critique of the good student and the ontological possibility of living as freer selves within a post-capitalist world. I see this as a way of creating an art of the individual that offers new ways of dealing with social challenges and

11 See for example the “Conclusion” in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993, pp.206-207
inequities that are historically constructed and institutionally deployed. I see schools and schooling as crucial reference points in the ways that individuals are disciplined, but also as significant sites of possibilities that could offer new ways of being and becoming - in short, new arts of living.

**Foucault**

It is important to acknowledge that this introduction of some of the more significant ideas of Foucault is not intended to be either exhaustive or biographical. Rather, it is intended as a guide to the ways that Foucault's work can be understood, particularly in relation to the school and the idealised good student. Locating Foucault is a necessary, and at the same time, daunting task. Few thinkers have perplexed scholars as much as Foucault, largely because he refused to name himself in a traditional sense. In an interview published in 1988, Foucault stated that he did not “feel it necessary to know exactly what I am. The main interest in life and work is to become someone else you were not in the beginning.”

12 This puzzlement is found in the words of Clifford Gertz, who wrote: “He has become a kind of impossible object: a nonhistorical historian, an antihumanist human scientist, and a counter-structuralist structuralist.”

13 Faubion takes this a step further, when he asks:

> Who, or what, is Michel Foucault? The possibilities already seem endless: structuralist, idealist, neoconservative, post-structuralist, antihumanist, irrationalist, radical relativist, theorist of power, missionary of transgression, anaesthetist, dying man, saint, or, if nothing else, “postmodern”.

14 However he is described, Foucault remains one of the most original thinkers to examine modern lives in the last century. Dean argues that we should be less concerned with “recuperation and

13 Dreyfus, *Op Cit.* p.xviii
integration” of Foucault’s work and instead focus on the “limits and possibilities of how we have come to think about who we are, what we do and the present in which we find our selves”. His questioning of how people have become who they are today has opened up debate along lines of his enquiry. His work on power, subjectivities and the governing of the individual has created new ways of thinking about the present epoch.

What does distinguish Foucault’s work is his suspicion of the autonomous agent, freely acting through the development of Enlightenment ideals such as logic and rational thought. His work is also suspicious of sweeping explanations of human experience per se. It is the local and the micro-practices of human interaction that fascinated Foucault. Foucault rejected the logic of dualism found in Enlightenment thought, “such as mind/body, thinking/feeling, nature/culture and so on”. In a description of his own work, published under the pseudonym Maurice Florence, Foucault chose to describe his work as a “critical history of thought”, where that entailed “an analysis of the conditions under which certain relations of subject to object are formed or modified”. Foucault wrote this in the early 1980s towards the end of his long writing career, organising a sometimes baffling body of work which moved from medical science to a history of sexuality, from exploration of the construction of madness to the birth of the clinic. Because Foucault wrote over a long period and his output was prolific, there are shifts in the focus of his work. It is these shifts, I argue, that make it difficult to define Foucault as a structuralist, postmodernist or poststructuralist. Foucault is a postmodernist in that his rejection of metanarratives such as Marxism signals a philosophical shift ending the modernist hold over intellectual debate. However, Foucault’s work is heavily influenced by thinkers such as

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16 Symes and Preston, Op Cit. p.31
17 Ibid.
19 Dreyfus, Op Cit. p.xi
Nietzsche, Husserl and Heidegger, themselves part of the Enlightenment tradition. Whilst Foucault’s work bears some similarities with poststructuralism, he is not sufficiently concerned with grammatology, semiotics and language games to be a poststructuralist “rock-star”, as some believe. By trying to define him, we run the risk of forcing him into a classification in which he does not fit, and this limits the effectiveness of Foucault’s work and its ability to unmask those commonsense processes that have become accepted as governing who we are today.

Throughout his career, Foucault moved from an examination of discourses to an examination of subjectification. His early work examines how the individual is constructed as an object through the creation of the ‘human sciences’. Foucault came to a thesis that the human sciences could be considered as having their own internal self-regulation and autonomy. Many human sciences, which include systems of knowledge such as anthropology, psychology and criminology, have constituted the human being in a discursive space able to be measured and quantified. For example, in *Madness and Civilisation* which was published in 1961, Foucault was concerned with the evolution of internment as a means of control, as a way of isolating and observing whole categories of people. One example cited was over a seven month period in 1656, one out of every 100 Parisians was confined in what Foucault labelled “The Great Internment”. In this period of internment, houses of confinement were set up across Europe to isolate the poor, the unemployed, the prisoners and the insane from the rest of society. Foucault argues that this objectification and classification of the individual is symbolically represented by the “Hopital General”. The Hopital General “had nothing to do with any medical discourse. It was an instance of order, of the

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20 Ibid. p.xxi
21 Symes and Preston, Op Cit. p.29
22 Dreyfus, Op Cit. p.xix
24 Ibid. p.36
25 Ibid. p.37
monarchical and bourgeois order being organised in France during this period.”26 Foucault held that this internment constituted one beginning of the human sciences, where the isolation and observation of masses of people laid the foundation for the systems of thought that became modern medicine and psychiatry. This confinement of people unified “a new sensibility to poverty and to the duties of assistance, new forms of reaction to the economic problems of unemployment and idleness”.27 Across Europe, Foucault argued, there had emerged a new “social sensibility” of institutions concerned with the welfare of the person. These represented a new form of discourse and a new rationality of the human being as an object of concern to the state. The works that followed *Madness and Civilisation* continued this examination of institutions as places where the human being was objectified by these new rationalities. Whilst many of these works were later criticized as ‘structuralist’, Foucault’s concern with those discourses that begin to know the nature of human beings begins to merge.

The confinement of the population has great significance as a tactic in that it places a physical consequence on the ways that government constructs order and what is correct. Incarceration meant that the body was the new space on which the contestation of discourses of normalcy would occur. As well, incarceration represents a shift in the way that power has previously been deployed in that it begins to see the individual as an object. During this period, Foucault argues that we begin to see the rationale of the human sciences such as modern medicine and psychiatry beginning to emerge that play a crucial role in the control of human beings through systems of classification, normalisation and evaluation.

Foucault’s early work is often read as being influenced by the structuralist wave that was sweeping France in the 1960s. In *The Birth of the Clinic*, for example, Foucault wrote that “the

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27 *Ibid.* p.46
figures of knowledge and those of language obey the same law”.28 With *Madness and Civilisation* and subsequent works, Foucault developed a methodological style that he called ‘archaeology’ to describe how the individual was governed by the “codes of knowledge” that infused the structures of society.29 In *The Order of Things*, Foucault’s acceptance of the structuralist paradigm is evident when he wrote:

> The fundamental codes of a culture – those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices – establish for every man, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home.30

*The Order of Things* was published in France in 1966. Like his previous works, this was considered an important work, yet its impact was hardly global. If Foucault had stopped writing at this stage, there is little doubt that he would have been remembered as a significant structural thinker, who wrote about the analysis of discourse.

Many commentators nominate 1968 as a pivotal year in contemporary social theory. Prior to 1968, traditional modernist theories such as Marxism tended to be the dominant social theory. After 1968 and the student revolts in Paris, some commentators argue that this signalled the end of modernism, and the rise of the postmodern.31 My purpose is not to examine 1968, but rather to contextualise what I see as a significant shift in the work of Foucault. In 1971, Foucault published an essay entitled “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” that signalled a break with his archaeological method. This break marked an epistemological shift for Foucault away from the analysis of discourse and discursive systems to an examination of the forces that contribute to the subjectification of the individual. The genealogical method “rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for

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29 Ibid. p.90  
31 Symes and Preston, *Op Cit*. p.xv
‘origins’”.\(^{32}\) Part of those historical origins is a construction of truth that Foucault calls “positive knowledge” – a form of knowledge that attempts a certainty of its truthfulness. Rather, Foucault advocated the examination of a possible field of knowledge that opens up knowledge to be considered as “the point where the truth of things is knotted to a truthful discourse, the site of a fleeting articulation that discourse has obscured and finally lost”.\(^{33}\) Part of the project of genealogy is to understand knowledge, not as a form of truth, but as a form of power. The shift in Foucault’s work after 1968 can perhaps best be simplified as a focus on those institutions and practices of power that work to locate and know the individual as a process of certain forms of knowledge – amongst them the prison.

Foucault published arguably his best known work *Discipline and Punish* in 1975. Whilst it partly examined the genesis of the prison system in Europe in the eighteenth century, the book really focused on the ways that the body becomes a site through which an individual is subjectified by modern practices of power. Foucault wrote about a “certain ‘political economy’ of the body” that modern society utilised to punish and control the individual.\(^{34}\) This political economy replaced the older system of the “body and the blood” and replaced it with a newer “masked” spectacle of punishment.\(^{35}\) Whilst the site is the prison, Foucault is critiquing the creation of new kinds of subjectivity, those masked spectacles that work to control the population to make them productive. The body, under these new rationalities of punishment, “is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination”.\(^{36}\) Foucault asserts that for the body to be useful and productive to the modern society at large, it must be caught up in a “system of

\(^{32}\) Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” in *Aesthetics Op Cit* p.371

\(^{33}\) Ibid. p.372

\(^{34}\) Foucault, *Discipline Op Cit*. p.25

\(^{35}\) Ibid. pp.16-17

\(^{36}\) Ibid. p.26
The body becomes useful only when it is both productive and subjected. In this sense, the body becomes a site where power is deployed, contested and produced in various ways at various times.

In developing his analysis of the body, Foucault advocated thinking of power exercised on the body as a strategy rather than a property. This allowed Foucault to open up the knowledge of the body, not as an entity but as a process of power.

We should rather admit that power produces knowledge; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.

This domination of the body resulted in a disciplinary society, where the individual was governed through the “meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility which might be called ‘disciplines’”. These disciplines, whilst many had existed in many forms previously, changed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to reflect an economic utility linked to the docility of the disciplined body. Foucault wrote:

The historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the body was born, [which was directed] at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A ‘political economy’, which was also a ‘mechanics of power’, was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others’ bodies… Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced ‘docile’ bodies.

The modern age located the body, measured it, controlled it, enclosed it with the desire of making the body docile, more productive and therefore more ‘useful’ to the state in its desire for a

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid. pp.27-28
40 Ibid. p.137
41 Ibid. pp.137-138
disciplined workforce and citizenry. It is through the modern institutions and the modern systems of power that parts of this utility-docility are deployed, through the “meticulousness of the regulations, the fussiness of the inspections, the supervision of the smallest fragment of life and of the body”.42 The institutions that Foucault named as highly significant were the “school, the barracks, the hospital or the workshop”.43

Foucault identified three techniques of power that formed the basis of disciplinary power in the above-mentioned institutions. These were the powers of hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement, and the examination. The power of hierarchical observation is also called surveillance. The purpose of this technique of power was to organise disciplinary power into “an integrated system, linked from the inside to the economy and to the aims of the mechanism in which it was practised”.44 Institutions became places where the individual was watched and carefully broken down into a set of practices and behaviours. The space of these institutions became carefully organised to ensure that the disciplinary gaze was able to see clearly what the individual was doing, monitoring and coercing through the use of inferred surveillance. In this way, “the disciplinary institutions secreted a machinery of control that functioned like a microscope of conduct; the fine, analytical divisions that they created formed around men(sic) an apparatus of observation, recording and training”.45 Hierarchical observation became a power based on measuring through observing. It places the individual in a matrix of power that records and reports on the conduct of the individual. In this sense, it is a coercive power, communicating to the individual that there are acceptable forms of conduct which are endorsed and rewarded. It acts as a disciplinary tool because it often functions as a ‘discrete’ set of processes “for it

42 Ibid. p.140
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid. p.176
45 Ibid. p.173
functions permanently and largely in silence”.\textsuperscript{46} However, it is also indiscrete because “it is everywhere and always alert”.\textsuperscript{47}

The normalising judgement can be considered that of the action, and threat to action of punishment within the disciplinary institution. If the hierarchical observation recorded the individual, the normalising judgement was the imposition of correction as a means to punish “the whole indefinite domain of the non-conforming”.\textsuperscript{48} For it to be effective, it needs to be corrective, because corrective punishment has the express purpose of narrowing the gap between the non-conforming and the conforming, by making the non-conformist more like the conforming – the ‘normal’. Foucault states:

Discipline rewards simply by the play of awards, thus making it possible to attain higher ranks and places; it punishes by reversing this process. The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchises, homogenises, excludes. In short, it normalises.\textsuperscript{49}

For example, we see this process in schools in the awarding of grades. Disciplinary power invests the individual with the characteristics to make the individual useful and productive to the state.

[Disciplinary power] does not link forces together in order to reduce them; it seeks to bind them together in such a way as to multiply and use them. Instead of bending all its subjects into a single, uniform mass, it separates, analyses, differentiates, carries its procedures of decomposition to the point of necessary and sufficient single units.\textsuperscript{50}

For Foucault these relations of power can be linked with the moment that the individual becomes ‘known’. By asking when the individual becomes known, there is a focus on when the individual becomes a thing, an object, a site where power is deployed and discourses contested. When is the category of the individual created, so that it can be used as a tool to normalise the ways that

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid. p.177
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid. p.178
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid. pp.181,183
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid. p.170
people see and govern themselves? In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault identifies a moment where “Man-the-Machine” can be seen as a crossover between the “anatomico-metaphysical register” and the “technical-political register”.51 These disciplining powers constituted the body; controlled, coerced, and seduced the body. Foucault wrote about this as the creation of the disciplines: “The historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it.”52 There is an implicit assumption underlying much of *Discipline and Punish*. This assumption is that those forces and ways of knowing that categorised the subject as groups of normalised bodies effectively constructed a set of discursive practices that constructed modern understandings of the individual.

We can surely accept the general proposition that, in our societies, the systems of punishment are to be situated in a certain ‘political economy’ of the body: even if they do not make use of violent or bloody punishments, even when they use ‘lenient’ methods involving confinement or correction, it is always the body that is at issue – the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission.53 Foucault looks at power not as an object set up by an individual but as sets of social practices.54 Foucault’s focus on power has the effect of challenging the discourse of ‘unchanging truths’, to be replaced by an examination of ‘strategies of domination’ that contest the spaces in which subjects exist. Foucault writes:

That effects of domination are attributed not to ‘appropriation’, but to dispositions, to manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity.55

A significance of this deployment of disciplinary power lies in the way that it enacts both the normalising judgement and the hierarchical observation through the process of the examination.

Foucault argued that institutions did this through the technology of the examination by utilising a

51 *Ibid.*. p.136
53 *Ibid.*. p.25
54 *Ibid.*. p.108
55 *Ibid.*. p.26
“normalising gaze”, where the process of surveillance results in the differentiation of the individual in relation to a loosely defined but well understood category of the “normal”. In the school, Foucault wrote that the examination became one of the central technologies, but the examination was far more pervasive in the experiences of the student than just the formal testing of knowledge:

The school became a sort of apparatus of uninterrupted examination that duplicated along its entire length the operation of teaching. It became less and less a question of jousts in which pupils pitched their forces against one another and increasingly a perpetual comparison of each and all that made it possible both to measure and to judge.

There were many facets of this kind of examination. One of them was the desire to turn an individual like a student into a “whole field of knowledge”. Part of the power of the examination is its ability to coerce the individual to become something that they may not have been previously. Thus it created a normalising gaze that “manifests the subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected.” The field of knowledge transforms not just the body of the individual, but their thoughts and actions as well, what they see as appropriate and inappropriate, the correct way to respond, to desire, to live – it normalises the potential of the individual through training the body and the mind. It is in this way that the examination is crucial in establishing the lens through which the subjectification of the individual occurs. The examination turns the gaze into an exercise of power, it documents individuality, it makes each individual a case to be studied and worked on, it reverses the “political axis of individualisation” which had occurred in previous eras. For this reason, Foucault advocated thinking of power not only as a repressive set of processes, but as a productive set of processes because power produces the realities and the domains that construct the sensibilities of the individual, and normalises the spaces in which an individual may operate.

56 Ibid. pp.186-187
57 Ibid. p.186
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid. pp.184-185
60 Ibid. p.192
In this sense, the knowledges generated around the individual are also forms of power, as they seek to reduce the individual to a set of common practices and experiences – a continued critique of the ‘human sciences’ found in Foucault’s earlier work.

In Foucault’s genealogies there is an explanation of the subject and subjectification, and the creation and maintenance of the space where this subjectification takes place. To understand these effects of domination, Foucault advocates understanding them through the institutions engaged by the state, such as schools, to create the docile bodies required for governance. I would take this further and argue that not only is it important to look at how institutions such as schools govern through docile bodies, but to begin to look at how those same institutions create certain kinds of psycho-social subjectivities. As Rose puts it, “technologies of subjectivity are established that enable strategies of power to infiltrate the interstices of the human soul”.61

**Bio-Power, Governmentality and Pastoral Power**

Bio-power, governmentality and pastoral power are three related explanations of the subjectification of individuals in modern society. After *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault sought to develop an analytic of the macro practices of power. Foucault was not discarding the significance of an analytic of micro practices of power contained within *Discipline and Punish*, what he was attempting was to link these micro practices with the big deployers of power such as the state and the political. For example, in his introductory remarks in the lecture that introduced governmentality, Foucault said:

> How to govern oneself, how to be governed, how to govern others, by whom the people will accept being governed, how to become the best possible governor – all of these problems, in their multiplicity and intensity, seem to me to be characteristic of the

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sixteenth century, at the crossroads of two processes: the one which leads to the establishment of the great territorial and administrative states; and that totally different movement which raises the question of how one must be spiritually ruled.\(^{62}\)

Foucault is attempting to apply his genealogical method, not just to individual subjects at local sites and institutions, but to wider analyses of power and the state. Foucault is reiterating his claim that power and the relations of power are experienced at all levels and in all forms of modern society, and that they are in a constant state of tension and activity.

Foucault developed the discourse of bio-power in his text *The History of Sexuality* which was published in 1976. Foucault developed the discourse of bio-power to explain how these modern forms of power became concerned with the governing of populations in the increasingly industrial world. This bio-power encapsulated the complex synthesis of the body, the individual, truth and power within the modern episteme. For Foucault, bio-power is:

The idea that man(sic) is the true object of the state’s power, as far as he produces a surplus strength, as far as he is a living, working, speaking being, as far as he constitutes a society, and as far as he belongs to a population in an environment, we can see the increasing intervention of the state in the life of the individual.\(^{63}\)

Bio-power is Foucault’s theoretical attempt to demonstrate that the macrophysics and microphysics of power could be understood through the same analytic of power. What Foucault is arguing is that while the technologies of power may change, the rationality of power is the same across sites and institutions. In other words, the intelligence of power can be understood whether one is examining an individual, an institution, or a society as a whole.

Also of importance in Foucault’s critique in *The History of Sexuality* is the shift in emphasis from objectification of the individual to the subjectification of the individual, where the individual

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\(^{63}\) Dreyfus, *Op Cit.* p.138
becomes an active participant in their own subjectification. He posited that this was achieved through the use of disciplinary technologies that desired a normalisation of people’s values, attitudes and expectations which were often self-regulatory. Foucault holds that bio-power is concerned with the technologies of the self, which:

Permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immorality.  

A significant part of this technology of the self is the examination of how individuals are taught to take ‘care of the self’. Foucault traces the care of the self to Ancient Greek society, where the admonition to care for the self was “one of the main rules for social and personal conduct and for the art of life”. Foucault argues that early Christian societies maintained this focus on the care for the self whereas modern societies moved away from the care of the self to the moral principle “know yourself”. Foucault cites two main reasons for this shift. Firstly, Christian morality requires the individual to renounce the self as a condition for salvation. To do this, the individual needed to know oneself in order to be able to renounce it. Secondly, “in theoretical philosophy from Descartes to Husserl, knowledge of the self takes on an ever-increasing importance as the first step in the theory of knowledge”. Care of the self has been supplanted because it is a system of thought that promoted a semi-autonomous self. The admonition to know oneself inherently opens the individual to the discursive knowledges and practices that characterise the modern subject. Foucault is not saying that the care for the self frees the subject. What he is suggesting, however, is that many of the current forms of subjectivity that are encountered in contemporary society could be challenged by individuals who place prime importance on caring for, not knowing, the self. In this sense, the care of the self, and the discourse of pastoral power.

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65 Ibid. p.226
66 Ibid. p.228
67 Ibid.
are themselves strategies of power that rely on self-examination as a means to coerce the individual. The significance is that pastoral power relies on self-examination, on mastery of oneself as a means of the instilling in the individual the idea of the correct training.

In a series of lectures given in 1979, Foucault sharpened his critique of bio-power by focusing on the ‘pastoral’ nature of power. For Foucault, pastoral power represented part of the project of individuality. Pastoral power represented “the development of power techniques oriented towards the individual and intended to rule them in a continuous and permanent way”. Pastoral power was that form of power that focused on the individual, with the intention of seeing that individual govern themselves. Governmentality, as will be discussed later, is the power concerned with the population, or the “centralised and centralising power”. Pastoral power is, in effect, that governing principle applied not to the population, but to the individual. The flip-side of pastoral power is the power of the state. Both governmentality and pastoral power reflect Foucault’s interest in the macropolitics of power:

Our societies proved to be really demonic since they happened to combine those two games – the city-state game and the shepherd-flock game – in what we call the modern states.

The third part of Foucault’s examination of the intersection of the macropolitics and micropolitics of power is found in his work on governmentality. Foucault argued that in the 16th century, there began to emerge a new rationality of the state concerned with what was appropriate, and in what form, to govern. As part of this, a new sense of government was needed to create the individual as object; to define, to label, to categorise and through this to promote certain types of subjectivities. In a series of lectures, Foucault coined the phrase ‘governmentality’ to describe

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69 Ibid. p.311
70 Ibid.
how the ‘art of government’ changed as the problem of an increasing population forced the state to alter its tactics. For Foucault, governmentality can be understood as:

The tactics of government which make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not, the public versus the private, and so on; thus the state can only be understood in its survival and its limits on the basis of the general tactics of governmentality.71

Governmentality is a neologism, a play on the words government and mentality. Foucault’s development of governmentality implies a number of significant points. Firstly, Foucault defined government as the “conduct of conduct”.72 The word conduct conveys many meanings; to conduct is to lead, yet conduct is also a word expressing our behaviour and comportment in relation to accepted conventions and expectations. Conduct is a word that implies the notion of self-examination and self-regulation. The ‘conduct of conduct’, then, can be taken as the government of our behaviours and values set against a variety of norms and expectations. The significance of this is that for Foucault, a sense of government implies a sense of morality, or that government itself is a moral, and therefore a contingent, practice. More importantly, government rests on the moral imperative to regulate oneself – a strong link to bio-power and the care for the self. In later work, Foucault simplifies his definition of governmentality to be the “encounter between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self”.73 To understand governmentality:

Is to open up the examination of self-government or cases in which governor and governed are two aspects of the same actor, whether that actor be a human individual or a collective or corporation. Thus the notion of government extends to cover the way in which an individual questions his or her own conduct.74

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71 Foucault, “Governmentality” Op Cit p.103
73 Foucault “Technologies of the Self” Op Cit. p.225
Secondly, governmentality utilises the language of the economy to shape the population. Foucault wrote that part of the art of government in the early modern era was its invention of the population as a group that could be measured, controlled and engaged in new forms of subjectification.

This, I believe, is the essential issue in the establishment of the art of government; introduction of economy into political practice. To govern a state will therefore mean to apply economy at the level of the entire state, which means exercising towards its inhabitants, and the wealth and behaviour of each and all, a form of surveillance and control as attentive as that of the head of a family over his household and his goods.  

Thirdly, governmentality implies a link between rationalities of power, between the rationalities of sovereignty and discipline, between the state and the individual, between the “individualising” and the “totalising” aspects of power. Power is highlighted in its complexities and multiplicities, in its overt forms and the subtle machinations that tell individuals who they are, and who they should be.

The significance of both pastoral power and governmentality lie in the amalgamation of the microphysical and macrophysical play of power relations. It was these power relations that both created the individual as an object, and developed technologies that were implicit in the subjectification of the individual. Foucault’s objective has been “to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects”. A major focus of this research is the uncovering of how power operates to control certain kinds of students at the secondary school level. Part of the purpose of this study is to put into place Foucault’s desire to see an analytics of power. Foucault’s desire is to see enquiry move “less toward a theory of power than towards an analytic of power: that is, toward a definition of a specific domain formed by power relations and toward a determination of the instruments that will make possible its

75 Foucault, “Governmentality” Op Cit. p.92  
76 Foucault, “The Subject and Power” Op Cit. p.326
This analytics depends upon a Foucaultean understanding of the school, and through this an understanding of the political technologies that occur within the school that work within and on the student.

**Foucault and the School**

For Foucault, the school was one of the most obvious examples of the disciplinary institution. Whilst he never devoted an entire text to an examination of the school, he did lay out a persuasive analysis of schools, schooling and pedagogy. When Foucault considered the school, he saw it as a machine composed of forces aimed at gaining the most efficient, disciplined group that would then work to maintain that machine. In this sense the order and operation of the school should be seen as an array of techniques designed to create certain kinds of subjectivities. Foucault talks about schools as places where order was maintained through a precise system of command, which had the effect of creating an individuality dependent upon the human sciences to be explained. In this sense, we see the power/knowledge interplay at work. Foucault remarked:

> The school system is based on a kind of judicial power as well. One is constantly punishing and rewarding, evaluating and classifying, saying who’s the best, who’s not so good. Why must one punish and reward in order to teach something to someone?  

The school is a place of training, a place where that training had as its purpose the correct comportment of the person; moral, obedient, qualified, healthy, competent and docile. The school is significant in a disciplinary society because its chief objective is to order individuals from a variety of subject positions that would have some form of connection with the institution. Foucault argued that to do this, the school must be a site of calculation, a place where calculation

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78 Foucault, *Discipline Op Cit.* p.164
80 Foucault, *Discipline Op Cit.* p.172
was made through the “microscope of conduct”\textsuperscript{81}. This microscope of conduct can be understood as a range of micropractices that attract some form of penalty or reward. Foucault nominates a number of areas that attracted micropenalties:

Time (latenesses, absences, interruptions of tasks), of activity (inattention, negligence, lack of zeal), of behaviour (impoliteness, disobedience), of speech (idle chatter, insolence), of the body (incorrect attitudes, irregular gestures, lack of cleanliness), of sexuality (impurity, indecency).\textsuperscript{82}

These educational practices are small and seemingly insignificant. Yet in a disciplinary institution such as a school they become significant because they demonstrate the omnipresence of power, concerned with the minutiae and inconsequential. It is this concern with the petty acts that demonstrates the power of the normalising gaze as the student is coerced into the ‘correct’ comportment of the self. It is through this coercion that the school becomes a site “for making useful individuals”.\textsuperscript{83} Not only this, the school exists as a site for “the swarming of disciplinary mechanisms” that at the same time are rewarding, punishing, coercing, controlling, measuring, knowing and creating desires in each individual, and it is these mechanisms that contribute to the docile subject often valorised in schools.

**Ethical Self-Formation and Care of the Self**

Many theorists seem bemused by Foucault’s later work on ethics and the care of the self. At first glance, it appeared that Foucault was advocating a return of the subject that much of his earlier work had been at pains to unmask. As well, his avocation of freedom as a possibility seemed to recant his condemnation of the ‘truths’ of humanism and the Enlightenment. My purpose in this section is to consider the care of the self as a set of processes designed to allow the individual

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{81} Ibid. p.173
\item \textsuperscript{82} Ibid. p.178
\item \textsuperscript{83} Ibid. p.211
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greater access to moments of freedom as they set about what Foucault termed “ethical self-creation”. Secondly, I aim to build this into a critique of the processes of schooling and the ways that individuals become subjects through those processes.

In Foucault’s earlier work, his examination of power and subjectivity is often understood as a nihilistic situating of the subject within such a complete deployment of power as to render individual freedom impossible.¹⁴ When Foucault began to write about the care of the self, many theorists were taken aback because it appeared that Foucault was advocating an autonomous subject that he had been at so much pain to repudiate. For example, Christopher Norris wrote:

> It is hard to comprehend how the subject could achieve any degree of autonomy, given the extent to which, on Foucault’s own submission, this freedom is necessarily shaped or constrained by existing structures of regulative control.¹⁵

For this reason, the idea of the care of the self as a practice of freedom has been labelled by many as an example of Foucault’s inconsistency, and as such, used to seriously undermine the development of a discourse of freedom within a postmodern framework. My intent is to construct an explanation of how the self has potential to arrive at some level of contingent freedom within a postmodern framework. I contend that this has serious ramifications for education as it exists in its current guise. Wain suggests that Foucault’s later work may best be seen as “defining the spaces for freedom society permits its members”.¹⁶

Foucault refuted the criticism that his later work conflicted with his earlier work on power and subjectivities. Rather, he saw his work on the care of the self as complementary with his examination of power deployed within institutions.

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¹⁴ Eric Paras; *Foucault 2.0: Beyond Power and Knowledge*, Other Press, New York, 2006, p.151
I have always been interested in this problem [that of the formation of the self] even if I framed it somewhat differently. I have tried to find out how the human subject fits into certain games of truth, whether they were truth games that take the form of a science or refer to a scientific model, or truth games such as those one may encounter in institutions or practices of control.  

For Foucault, what changed was the analytic of liberalism in the modern state as a form of power relations whereby the centre recognises that it cannot control all the nodes of power, and the nation-state functions best when those processes that augment the state function best when left alone to deploy and produce power. Central to this is the idea that modern liberalism emerged because of the incompatibility of economic visions of the individual against the juridical vision of the subject. This incompatibility highlights one of the key themes of Foucault’s work on the subject – the idea that there are multiple, competing strategies of power that play about the individual. The individual, then, is actively engaged in negotiating within these competing discourses, albeit as “prisoners of certain conceptions of ourselves and our conduct”. A misunderstanding of the issue of domination and liberation is at the crux of this criticism. For Foucault, some semblance of liberty was essential for ethical action. Foucault uses the example of traditional conjugal relations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to illustrate his point:

We cannot say there was only male power; the woman herself could do a lot of things: be unfaithful to him, extract money from him, refuse him sexually. She was, however, subject to a state of domination, in the measure where all that was finally no more than a certain number of tricks which never brought about a reversal of the situation.

Thus, for domination to exist in a disciplined and disciplining society, there needed to be an element, maybe just a possibility, of liberation and freedom. The issue with these processes of power is that the action of resistance was rarely transformative because it amounted to little more

88 Paras, *Op Cit*. p.106
89 Ibid. p.107
90 Michel Foucault, “Foucault Examines Reason in Service of State Power” in *Campus Report 6*, October 24, 1979, pp.5-6
91 Mark Olssen, *Michel Foucault: Materialism and Education*, Bergin and Garvey, Connecticut, 1999, p.144
than “tricks”. The answer, for Foucault, was that “we should liberate our subjectivity, our relation to ourselves”. The language of liberation leads to the important point that Foucault, without drawing a blueprint, was actively interested in envisioning freer subjects, that his work is engaged with ontological questions regarding being and becoming in freer ways. Foucault stated:

Why, in what form, in a society like our own, does such a strong link exist between the exercise of power and the obligation for individuals to make of themselves, in procedures for the manifestation of truth essential actors? What relation [exists] between the fact that one is a subject in a relation of power, and a subject by whom, for whom and through whom the truth is manifest.

Foucault’s answers to these questions are contained within his three part series *The History of Sexuality*. These texts looked at the ways that ancient cultures developed “arts of living” as a set of counsels “on how to be”. For Foucault, these arts of living offered possibilities for the individual to relate differently to themselves as a process of liberation, or as a possibility for the creation of freer subjectivities. This led Foucault to argue that merely focusing on the arts of domination in the creation of subjectivities ignores the “other types of techniques which permit individuals to transform themselves”. For Foucault, freedom is not a freedom from oppression, it is a freedom to know and relate to the self differently, to act and enact different truths about the mind, body and soul of the self, in short, to tell different stories. For Foucault this was the art of living.

Foucault argues there is a direct link between the arts of living and a search for a modern morality. This relationship was concerned with how one might be and become as the individual utilised new transformative techniques. In an interview Foucault states:

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92 Ibid.
93 Paras, *Op Cit.* p.115
94 Ibid. p.124
95 Ibid. p.122
96 Ibid. p.130
The art of living is the killing of psychology, of creating with oneself and with others unnamed individualities, beings, relations, qualities. If one can’t do that in one’s life, that life is not worth living.97

The art of living, then, was a creative technology of the self that sought new ways of knowing and being the self, of crafting freer truths, of telling stories about the relationship to the self. This imperative in Foucault’s work stands as a call to unmask ways that the individual is made subject through institutional practices (among others) such as the binary of the good student which classifies, individualises, produces and normalises a range of subjectivities for contemporary school students. In his preface to Deleuze and Guattari’s Anti-Oedipus, Foucault congratulated the authors for writing a text about ethics that could show us how to free ourselves from the “fascism” that dominates the thoughts, language and actions of the modern subject.98 The answer, according to Foucault, was to develop a modern ethics that was non-fascist in its “way of thinking and living”.99

In The Uses of Pleasure, Foucault differentiated between two types of morality. There was the morality as a moral code that referred to “a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies such as family, educational institutions, churches etc.”100 Foucault argued that what was more significant was the morality of behaviours, or how the individual puts in place this moral code. It is not enough to reduce action to relating to a moral code. Rather, Foucault wanted to see how one formed oneself as a subject of particular kind of moral codes. He called this ‘ethics’. Focussing on sexuality, Foucault argued that in antiquity there was a very different ethic of the self than was developed in Christian times. In Christian times, Foucault argued that the moral code was emphasized.

97 Ibid. p.129
98 Michel Foucault, “Preface” in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983, p.x
99 Ibid. p.xiii
However, in ancient times, what was significant was the way that the individual practised the rudimentary moral laws on the self as an “exercise of power and the practice of its liberty.”  

Foucault continued this examination of the ethics of the self in the third text, *The Care of the Self*. Foucault’s contention is that through the ethics of the care of the self, there is potential for the individual to be recast in new possibilities of being. Foucault argues that contemporary society has inherited the values of the Christian moral tradition with its emphasis on self-sacrifice and self-renunciation and the tradition of a law that all behaviour can be ruled by. Against this tradition, the care of the self has been seen as an immorality. Against this tradition, the care of the self has been seen as an immorality. Foucault argues that through the care of the self, a different form of ethics is developed. These are the ethics of practice, of the permanent training of the self by the self. This is what he understands by the term the ethical subject.

For Foucault, philosophy is concerned with the self. This concern challenges what had been the dominant regime of philosophy – philosophy as a progression through the history of ideas. Foucault argued that it was the central concern of philosophy to find ways for the individual to think about themselves in new and challenging ways.

The movement by which, not without effort and uncertainty, dreams and illusions, one detaches oneself from what is accepted as true and seeks other rules – that is philosophy. The displacement and transformation of frameworks of thinking, the changing of received values and all the work that has been done to think otherwise, to do something else, to become other that what one is – that, too, is philosophy… it is a way of interrogating ourselves.

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101 Ibid, p.23
102 Ibid, p.223
103 Ibid, p.28
104 James Marshall, “Michel Foucault: Philosophy, Education and Freedom as a Practice of the Self” in Michael Peters (Ed) *Naming the Multiple: Poststructuralism and Education*, Bergin and Garvey, Westcourt, 1998 p.68
Foucault asserts that there exist possibilities for philosophy to alter the way that the individual is constructed and coerced to be a certain kind of person, dependent upon the discursive frames within which he/she has been immersed. It is often claimed that Foucault envisaged the individual as being completely caged by those discursive formations that he examined in texts such as *Discipline and Punish*. I argue that Foucault sees potential to challenge those regimes of truth that have constructed certain kinds of individuality as normal, and therefore, correct.

This means prioritising the care of the self where the production of the self that results is seen as a constant process of critical awareness. Foucault wrote: “You have to worry about your soul – that is the principal focus of caring for yourself. The care of the self is the care of the activity and not the care of the soul as substance.”\(^{106}\) For Foucault, this ideal of philosophy was translated into what he termed ethics. Ethics are best considered as a practice, or set of practices, designed to focus the individual on the self as a site for political action that challenges accepted modes of being.\(^{107}\) In this way, Foucault imagined that ethics consisted of the component of reality that reflects the self’s relation to the self. Foucault labelled the ways that the self related to the self as the ‘technologies of the self’. Foucault defines technologies of the self as those technologies that “permit individuals to effect by their own means a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being.”\(^{108}\) These technologies were about the government of the self – or the ways that self is constructed through relationships: to others, those relationships become inscribed in pedagogy, in spiritual conduct, in the correct comportment of the self. Ethics, then, can perhaps be best understood as the potential sites and spaces for the individual to act in a freer way.

\(^{106}\) Foucault, “The Ethics of Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom” *Op Cit.* p.230-231
\(^{108}\) Foucault “Technologies of the Self” *Op Cit.* p.225
This is not to say that ethics is about the individual discovering their true nature. Foucault was adamant that there was no true human nature. Like other truth statements, the idea of a true human nature can be best understood as set of statements about power and which versions of the self have been constructed as most correct. However, for Foucault, ethics constituted a range of creative possibilities for the individual to transform the self and it is in this space that the possibility for an analytic of the good student offers new ways of looking at institutions such as schools and the whole philosophy of education. These spaces in between truths are where freer action is possible, and freer selves made a legitimate potential within relations of power.

For Foucault, ethics and freedom were two complementary realms that were about the individual’s ability to act in a world dominated by discursive frames and normalised regimes of truth. Towards the end of his life, Foucault asserted that ethics is “the deliberate practice of liberty”. In earlier work that focused on power and the subjectification of the individual, an important point that Foucault made was that within the modern episteme, the possibility of freedom as action is a necessary precursor to the subjectification of the individual. If the individual does not have the ability to act, then there is no corresponding field of subjectification. Foucault wrote:

One sometimes encounters what may be called situations or states of domination in which the power relations, instead of being mobile, allowing the various participants to adopt strategies modifying them, remain blocked, frozen. In such a state, it is certain that practices of freedom do not exist.

Marshall thinks of the care of the self as resistance to governmentality and the regimes of truth associated with the human sciences. I extend this to argue the care of the self is a radical attempt to change the ways that we see ourselves and others, and a challenge to the truths that we

109 Foucault, “The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom” Op Cit.
110 Foucault, “Technologies of the Self” Op Cit. p.283
111 Marshall, Op Cit. p.73
have come to see as self-evident in our ways of thinking. In this sense, it presents further possibilities above resisting the ways we are governed.

It is only the care of the self that allows an individual to act as an ethical person. It is this care of the self that requires the individual to engage in the process of considering how they are reading, and are read, by the world in which they find themselves. It is important to note that in this sense freedom is considered as an active set of processes that are continually evolving, rather than as fixed goals achieved. In this sense, freedom is something that is produced through the processes of the ethics of the care of the self that should be the condition of “one’s education”.\textsuperscript{112}

Infinito advocated the process of ethical self-formation as a way in which this ethic of the care for the self could best be conceived. If care of the self should be practised as a resistance to subjectification and the normalising process of power as identity, then “it can be reasoned that freedom entails having a say in the formation of the self”.\textsuperscript{113} This is a challenge to the normalising processes that construct positionalities for identities and possibilities within the life of the individual. Foucault described this process as:

\begin{quote}
… the development of an art of existence that revolves around the question of the self, of its dependence and independence, of its universal form and of the connection it can and should have with others, of the procedures by which it exerts its control over itself, and of the way in which it can establish a complete supremacy over itself.\textsuperscript{114}
\end{quote}

Foucault found this ethic of the care of the self in the writings of ancient philosophers such as Seneca, and the reported speeches of Socrates. He argued that what was significant in these philosophies was the admonition to be an ethical person by making sure that the self was richly

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Wain, \textit{Op Cit.} p.165}
\footnote{Infinito, \textit{Op Cit.} p.158}
\footnote{Foucault, \textit{Care of the Self Op Cit.} p.238}
\end{footnotes}
nurtured through a series of practices and processes. This is in contrast to what happens within the modern society, where the:

moral systems define other modalities of the relation to self: a characterisation of the ethical subject based on finitude, the Fall, and evil; a mode of subjection in the form of obedience to a general law that is at the same time the will of a personal god; a type of work on oneself that implies a decipherment of the souls and a purificatory hermeneutics of the desires; and a mode of ethical fulfilment that tends towards self-renunciation.\textsuperscript{115}

Foucault maintained his rejection of an essentialised subject, or a definitive human nature. Rather, he identified the subject as a form, or as a strategy of forms, constantly shaping and re-shaping subjectivities according to the matrices of truth games the individual is contending with. Foucault wrote about this as the ‘play’ of the individual as they shape certain types of subject positions in relation to certain types of truth games.\textsuperscript{116} Subject positions, and therefore forms of subjectivity, are created by the self in the light of those normalising regimes of truth that the individual identifies with. These “are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group”.\textsuperscript{117}

This creation of the subject also raises the potential for the individual to create a self freer than many of the normalising truth games allow room for. Foucault maintained that the care of the self “concerns all of the problems of political practice and government”.\textsuperscript{118} The normalising vision of the good student becomes a political discourse as it seeks to shape the subjectivities of young people, both in schools and in their lives after.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{115} Ibid. pp.238-239
\item \textsuperscript{116} Foucault, “The Ethics of Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom” Op Cit. p.290
\item \textsuperscript{117} Ibid. p.291
\item \textsuperscript{118} Ibid. p.291
\end{itemize}
The good student

The ideal of the good student is one of the key organising principles of mass, compulsory schooling in the Western tradition. By this, I mean it is a clear goal implicit in the organisation and rationale of schools. The discourses of the good student are often defined in opposition to the supposed ‘bad’ student. However, I intend to move beyond such a simple binary of good and bad to advance the notion that the good student forms an idealised norm against which all student subjectivities are compared, contrasted and measured. In this sense, whether a student is defined as being good or bad, they are being compared to an idealised set of discursive practices. McLeod and Yates argue that in schools this form of the good student is best referred to as the ‘hegemonic’ good, or the good student that the broader culture would widely recognise

My research interrogates the hegemonic good to argue for contested and evolving discourses of the good that impact on how young people produce their subjectivities within schools. I advocate thinking of the good student as a contested space that contains multiplicities and contingencies that young people are forced to negotiate and produce themselves within. The paradox is that this production of subjectivities is based on the premise that students are free to act, as long as those acts on the self fall within accepted social and cultural expectations. In this sense, the discourses that centre around what is to be a good student systematically work to position subjectivities constructed through that ideal or good student. The good student is a technology of normalisation of the self produced through complex sets of discourses and deployments of power and relationships of power that have as their design the rendering of a governable population. I see the idealised norm of the good student as part of the era of governmentality, heavily involved with the ways that the population becomes controlled in the modern era.

By unmasking the relations of power in schools, this study advances a wider understanding of those relations of power and subjectivities that stand at the centre of modern society. Foucault argued that power in contemporary society was more than the commonsense idea of the sovereign power residing in the body of the king (what can be called the hierarchical or sovereign view of power). Contemporary expressions and experiences of power are far more dynamic and pervasive than this hierarchical view, and its strategies and effects were much more invidious. In Foucault’s view, power may best be understood as having gone ‘underground’ therefore becoming more discrete, to such an extent that it is omnipresent in every facet of life. Foucault went further, positing that knowledge itself, and the associated truth claims were related to the forms of power deployed in a range of institutions. This shift in the politics of power manifestly altered how people saw themselves, and therefore, how they managed or governed themselves. This occurred at the same time as the art of government changed, and institutions such as schools became central tools in the deployment of power. Foucault stated: “The aim of all these institutions – factories, schools, psychiatric hospitals, hospitals, prisons – is not to exclude but, rather, to attach individuals”. ¹²⁰ Part of the success of the deployment of power has been to govern not through fear, but through shaping the desires of the individual. Notions of the good student provide a powerful set of discourses because they have created within the individual a desire to conform to restrictive and limiting notions of the good student. To problematise the good student is to locate the good student in the context of pedagogy – one of the human sciences that Foucault maintained was involved in “objectivising” the subject.¹²¹ How has the ‘science’ of pedagogy created the discursive spaces into which the knowledge that outlines the good student manifested itself in different contexts? Perhaps one of the key achievements of pedagogy has been to make the good student an object of desire in schools.

¹²⁰ Foucault, “Truth and Juridical Forms” Op Cit. p.78
¹²¹ Foucault, “Subject and Power” Op Cit. p.326
For a school to function there needs to be some commonsense understanding of what the good student is and should be. Against this, all other student subjectivities are judged. Foucault wrote:

In discipline, punishment is only one element of a double system: gratification-punishment. And by the play of this quantification, this circulation of awards and debits, thanks to the continuous calculation of the plus and minus points, the disciplinary apparatuses hierarchised the good and the ‘bad’ subjects in relation to one another.122

The act of this judgement is to locate the individual within a spatial matrix of power. The location of the individual within this matrix prioritises certain kinds of positionalities whilst alienating others. Therefore, positionalities are constantly in a state of flux within this matrix, swirling through moments that evaluate the student as sometimes good, sometimes not so good, but always in the context of hierarchies. I seek to understand these micropractices of power that operate in constructing the commonsense notions of the good student.

Part of the purpose of understanding the power relations that create the possibilities for the good student to exist in schools is to examine these techniques of surveillance and examination which work in multiple ways at multiple places. Rose argued: “The examination combined the exercise of surveillance, the application of the normalising judgement and the technique of material inscription to produce calculable traces of individuality”.123 The ingenious deployment of power in schools lay in the construction of the examination as a tool for teaching the individual to discipline themselves. This self-examination that Foucault called the ‘technology of the self’ made the play of power more subtle than that of the sovereign power mentioned earlier.

This process of surveillance that created the examination allowed the institution to collect information and measure the individual, and, along the way, ‘normalise’ the individual as a

122 Foucault, Discipline Op Cit. pp.180-181
123 Rose, Soul Op Cit. p.7
standard against which the individual could be judged. A key facet of this standard is the notion of the good student, held up as a symbol of what schools and schooling should be. Foucault examined Bentham’s Panopticon as an example of how normalisation was the achievement of these institutions of surveillance.\(^\text{124}\) To return to the earlier point, power and knowledge interplay with each other, and schools as institutions are concerned with power, control and ‘knowing’ the individual as a tool to create certain types of people necessary for a disciplinary society. The development of notions of the good student is part of this normalising process. In a variety of ways norms of the good or ideal student are articulated and valorised from a multitude of school processes. This deployment of power rewards certain behaviours and attitudes whilst punishing others. The articulation of the good student occurs from a variety of perspectives and stakeholders. I do not see there being a single, fixed notion of what constitutes the good student. Rather, I see a competing array of discourses given voice in different institutions. I want to understand how students feel about these versions of the good student as a way of better understanding the relations of power within schools. Foucault argued:

> We should rather admit that power produces knowledge; that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. These ‘power-knowledge’ relations are to be analysed, therefore, not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system, but, on the contrary, the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations.\(^\text{125}\)

It is for these reasons that I see the good student as one of the more potent examples of what Foucault called the ‘dividing practices’. The dividing practices are those practices that objectivise the individual. Foucault wrote: “The subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others. This process objectivises him. Examples are the mad and the sane, the sick and the

\(^{124}\) Foucault, *Discipline Op Cit.* pp.200-208

\(^{125}\) *Ibid.*. pp.27-28
healthy, the criminals and the ‘good boys’.”[126] Part of the political effect of the idealised norm of the good student is to create divisions, both within the student body and within the body of the student. Foucault argued that it is these dividing practices that need to be problematised in order to move beyond the current possibilities of individuality.

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Chapter Two:
Pushing Foucault

Teachers they sort of decide that maybe they will follow this person really closely because they are doing something that they don’t like. Once it starts it kind of keeps going because its kind of a reputation each student gets that lasts for years. Whether it is good or bad, it seems to keep going and you get stuck with that type of treatment.

One time they thought I wasn’t at school because the teacher had missed me on the roll. Because the teacher missed me on the roll and they don’t look for you at school, they ring home and said she’s not at school. When I got home they said “Why weren’t you at school?” and I said “I was at school”. They just forgot me on the roll. I felt unnoticed and pretty worthless. The teacher even said “Hi” to me so how could I be missed off the roll?
CHAPTER TWO

Introduction

The last chapter finished with a call for schools to become places where freer ways of being could be opened up in schools through problematising commonsense assumptions surrounding discourses of the good student. This freer action is a considered move away from Enlightenment notions of freedom as an expression of individual, utopian existence to a sense of freedom as contingent, evolving and multiple in its applications and possibilities. I flag my intention to locate the good student within an ontological frame that examines notions of being and becoming as a way of investigating possibilities for freer action within schools. To do this, I develop the theories of a number of writers who add to Foucault’s work on subjectivities and freedom in a number of ways as a means to a stronger understanding of the self in the contemporary world and a more developed range of possibilities for that world.

One of the criticisms made of Foucault is that he wrote very little about the contemporary world, preferring to examine either the ancient, early Christian or early industrial worlds and using these as a tool to hint at possibilities in the postmodern world. After his death, theorists such as Luc Ferry and Alain Renault began to argue that Foucault did not speak to the contemporary world, and that his body of work was both erratic and contradictory and devoid of positive social potential that humanist perspectives offered. Whilst I reject this position, I argue that Foucault’s silence on the contemporary world is both a strength and a weakness. It is a strength because it would have been folly for Foucault to draw up an extensive, essentialising project for liberation. However, the weakness lies in the charge that Foucault could be seen as increasingly

127 Paras, Op Cit. p.150
128 Ibid. pp.150-153
irrelevant in a world that has moved beyond the carceral to the global. It is this criticism that necessitates, I argue, consideration of those theorists who move beyond Foucault in different ways, who challenge and stretch his theoretical positions as a means to interrogate contemporary society. Chief amongst these will be Nikolas Rose, Ian Hunter and Gilles Deleuze.

**Foucault and the Ontological Self**

May posits that the philosophy of ontology has gone through three distinct periods that centre on the examination of three distinct questions. In the ancient tradition, philosophers such as Socrates framed the ontological questions as “How should one be?” In the modern period, the question shifted to ask “How should one act?” The project of postmodern philosophers such as Foucault and Deleuze is to ask “How might one live?” May argues that this third question is in the Nietzschean tradition that is a “gauntlet thrown at the feet of those whose lives are too narrow.” For Foucault and Deleuze, who take up this challenge in different ways, what is important is to undertake an examination of the self that seeks to “free us from the grip of the structures and forces that produce and reproduce our conformity.” May argues that what is important in the work of Foucault and Deleuze is that they frame their work within the question of “How might one live?” in ways that are freer than the narrower forms of epistemological enquiry that focus on how one should act. Foucault wrote:

> My role – and that is an emphatic word – is to show people that they are so much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes that have been built up at a certain moment during history, and this so-called evidence can be criticised and destroyed.

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130 Ibid. p.7
131 Ibid.
132 Ibid. p.9
For Foucault, this involved seeing the self as produced and constituted by dominant forms of knowledge that are historically contingent and no more or less true than others that do not have the same contemporary currency. Much of this production focused on the body – which makes sense if the ontological question that drove philosophy in the modern era was concerned with ‘correct’ action and conduct. For Foucault, freer action was only possible when the self became acknowledged as a site for the creative in the form of his admonition to care for the self as a step towards ethical self-creation, beyond pastoral power and governmentality that ‘narrow’ the possibilities of the self.

Dean argued that there was a tension between the two types of governed citizen, the “legal and political subject encapsulated in notions of the citizen, and the living individual who is the target of pastoral power”.\footnote{Mitchell Dean, Governmentality, Op Cit., p.76.} Dean goes on to argue that these two ‘games’ of power conceive of the governed actor in different ways, as both an equal citizen and a unique individual.\footnote{Ibid. p.82} One of the effects of these competing claims on the subject is to make the capacity for the individual to act with certainty and conviction more difficult, so a lack of action is an easier strategy within these competing games. This is one of the ways that docile subject positions are created within contemporary systems of power that limit the possibilities of freer action. To put it in a simpler way, pastoral power (the shepherd-flock game) creates a field where action is possible, but only particular, normalised forms of action that negate the possibility of freer action, or action outside the realm of the proper conduct of conduct. The ‘city-citizen’ game creates possibilities for action, but within accepted legal and political norms that are often different to the ‘shepherd-flock’ game. The challenge, as Foucault sees it, it to explore the spaces he saw as being found in the creative act of ethical self-formation. It is this creative act of the self that is the ‘space’ for freedom in a post-Enlightenment sensibility. May posits:

\footnote{Mitchell Dean, Governmentality, Op Cit., p.76.}
\footnote{Ibid. p.82}
Far from [human existence] being determined by immobile “anthropological constraints”, we are instead moulded by historical and political forces that can be modified, changed, perhaps even overthrown. The problem – the philosophical problem – is that we fail to recognise the historical character of these constraints, and so fail to recognise the freedom before us. We are unable to ask ourselves, in any but the most constricted fashion, how one might live.\textsuperscript{136}

Part of this inability to ask is due to a paucity of language and thought – to place it in the context of schools and the good student – students lack the language and the stories to change their own lives and to ask transformative questions about their situation. The result of this constriction of language and stories is that students fail to see and enact the ethics and conduct of freer selves – to care for the self as a creative practice of the art of living.

This chapter argues that the effects of discursive ‘truths’ of the good student need to be considered through the lens of governmentality – or the “conduct of conduct”. Governmentality is a set of strategies that creates a realm of what is to be governed – the student, and a mentality towards that student. This mentality constructs discursive spaces around the student that are concerned with ‘normal’ and ‘appropriate’ values, attitudes, behaviours, morality and ways of positioning within the system. I hold that this assemblage of discursive spaces of the self is powerfully deployed against the young person in a variety of ways, and coalesces around the normalising vision of the good student. After exploring these dynamics, I develop a vision of schools and schooling, not as inherently oppressive places, but as places where there are possibilities for freer action and ways of being that cannot be reduced to the binaries that dominate the ways that students are thought of and think of themselves. Schools are places that are productive of certain kinds of students that become certain types of citizens based on certain hierarchies and meritocratic principles. This acts to create a disciplined society where the possibilities of the self are constrained through contemporary regimes of truth. These limits are a

\textsuperscript{136} May, Op Cit. p.9
challenge to a vision of a freer world posited on notions of ethical self-formation informed through Foucault’s care of the self.

My purpose in this chapter is wide-ranging. Firstly, I intend to challenge those regimes of truth that favour the binary over the multiple. By this, I mean that much Western thought is dominated by a use of opposites that move from a desirable position to a less desirable position - from the ‘good’ to the ‘bad’. I maintain that this binarisation forms the basis of much thinking about the good student. Secondly, problematising predictable subject positionings of students in schools is a way of asking how freer action is possible. Thirdly, this work articulates the drive to see the good student, not as a commonsense goal of educational institutions, but as a dynamic composite of how the individual sees themselves and is seen by others (identity), how the individual strategically places themselves in order to gain maximum currency through their identity (positionality) and how the individual is taught to evaluate themselves and are evaluated in other ways in the school system. These micropractices of power are best seen as subtle producers of identity in that they communicate what is normal and appropriate conduct for the student in numerous ways in a variety of situations. It is important to note that these technologies of power are hardly linear or clear. They swirl around the individual in a multitude of forms with a multitude of possibilities. The individual becomes an interpreter, often unconsciously, of competing discourses, often referring to how they have positioned themselves and been positioned to see themselves. To conclude the chapter I push past a simple analysis of the power relations found in schools to argue for a view of the school as a place where some freedoms are possible, and where freer action is a potential inherent within the structure. I argue for a more creative and contingent sense of freer action that challenges the Enlightenment notion of the rational, autonomous agent who operates within the realm of a utopian freedom. To do this, I advocate moving beyond the current preoccupation with the moral and pastoral authority of the school to consider schools as ethical places in a Foucaultean sense. The ethical subject is much
more than the stated good student as there are multiple forms of the good which offer a potentially freer subject in our current milieu. This ethical subject is more able to care for the self through an ability to create the self within a wider range of possibilities that challenge the discursive ‘truths’ that constitute the narrow or hegemonic good student.

‘Commonsense’ Schools

Schools exist to produce good students. This statement seems to be commonsense. Symes and Preston suggest that when thinking and writing about schools:

> It is enough to indicate that this means that school processes are always transformative in their impact on the lives of individuals, but mostly these processes are directed towards disciplining and controlling individuals or subjects in a way that reproduces rather than reconstructs society.\(^{137}\)

What this good student should look like, how they should behave, what they should obtain through their schooling are just some of the ways that schools construct differing visions of the good student. It is important to know that these discourses are interpreted by students in a myriad of ways, but that they are acted on and they produce a variety of responses and attitudes that are wrestled into a cohesive ‘face’ despite their contradictory performance or conduct.\(^ {138}\) The normalising vision of the good student is interpretive. The link between identity, subjectivity and positionality is not really a rigid, definable causal chain where positionality evolves into identity which evolves into certain forms of subjectivity. Rather, it is perhaps better to see these three as intertwined facets of the ways that individuals become objects, and then subjects, through a variety of institutional practices and discourses that create the range of possibilities through which an individual is seen, and sees themself. The normalising vision of the good student is one

\(^{137}\) Symes and Preston, *Op Cit.*, p.xii

\(^{138}\) The Deleuzean idea of ‘faciality’ is explained in further detail on pp.86-87.
of the ways that the science of pedagogy constructs rationalities about what it means to be a student within the institution of the school.

In her essay “Disciplining Bodies”, Jennifer Gore researched the types of power found in different educational sites: a feminist reading group, high school physical education classes, a women’s discussion group and a first year teacher education cohort. What Gore identified was that there were eight major types of techniques of power deployed across educational institutions, regardless of context and purpose. These eight techniques were: surveillance, normalisation, exclusion, classification, distribution, individualisation, totalisation and regulation. Whilst linked, I see practices and processes of classification, normalisation, individualisation and surveillance as crucial in establishing and maintaining many of the discourses within which the vision of the good student is produced. It is these techniques of power deployed in institutions such as schools that produce the ways that people see themselves and others in the context of what it is to be ‘normal’ or ‘good’ in a multitude of ways every day of their school lives. The effects of these techniques of power shape how people see themselves and their place in the world after they leave school. Problematising notions of the good student firmly locates this study within philosophical debates concerning agency and freedom in contemporary society.

Schools are productive places, and I hold that one of the things they produce is a ‘place’ for each student, a niche in which certain ways of being are open for students. To put it another way, each school no matter what its context, has a group of students that are largely perceived as good within that school community. I also posit that these ways of being are historically situated in notions of what it means to be a child, an adolescent or a moral being who becomes a good and self-governing citizen. The fact that what constitutes the ‘good’ is a contested space contributes to

the school operating as a place of classification and distribution where different ways of being are categorised and distributed among the individual students in disciplinary ways. The current practices of schooling are so concerned with surveillance, classification, normalisation and individualisation that they have become the covert and creeping core business of schooling. The issue with these practices is that they are productive of limited possibilities for students. Unmasking these strategies of power involved in school processes is essential for schools to become places of critical engagement with the material challenges of an increasingly globalised world.

**Hunter and the Contingent School**

Ian Hunter argues schools are often misunderstood and have been historically framed within a moral mission to ‘save’ the child and adolescence from their inherent lack of goodness, whether this salvation is in form of knowledge, behaviour or values and attitudes. He argues school did not come into being because of some set of principles based on the emancipation of the masses, or principles of “democracy, equality, rationality, liberty [that] all cohere around the notion of an ideal formation of the person”, that lead to the well-developed person.\(^{140}\) He argues that schools have been measured against this developed person through the two dominant theoretical positions of educational research: the leftist/Marxist and the liberalist tradition. He states:

> It is most clearly visible in liberalism’s self-reflective individual subject, but we also find it in the collective personae favoured by Marxism and dialectical thought: the emancipated class, the self-governing community and the rational ‘public sphere’.\(^{141}\)

When compared to either of these principled positions, the school, and in particular the state education system in Australia, is deemed to have failed to deliver its promise of ‘emancipating’

\(^{140}\) *Ibid.* p.xv  
\(^{141}\) *Ibid.* p.xv
those who attend it.\textsuperscript{142} However, Hunter is at pains to point out that this supposed failure is largely due to poor understanding of the historical emergence of the school and how success at school is measured and achieved. He argues that: “Both Marxian and liberal theories derive the principles of education from a certain image of the person. This is a conception of the person as a self-developing subject who ‘learns’ through freedom.”\textsuperscript{143}

Hunter proposes thinking about the genesis of the school as depending upon the varying tasks of governance that the state set about between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries.\textsuperscript{144} Hunter locates the various discourses that occur in schools as dependant on the rise of governmentality in the same period. He maintains that there existed the similar imperative of “Christian pastoral guidance” in the school system.\textsuperscript{145} I extend this argument to posit that this pastoral guidance became one of the key features of the school that has continued to this day, even in state schools where religious affiliation is not part of the core business of the school. This pastoral guidance has a number of features: it positions the teacher as the moral guide to the ‘flock’ of students, it encourages students to be confessors – that is, to become adept at seeing areas of weakness and transgression within themselves and others. It teaches the individual to measure and evaluate against and with a range of qualities of the ‘good’ amongst other discourses. The sense of self and the construction of the self becomes a means to deploy relations of power that coalesce into certain ways of being. Students become adept at reading this complex world, and act in ways often commensurate with how they see their ‘place’ in the school.

In Australia, Hunter’s genealogy identifies a number of discourses that permeated the establishment of public schooling in the nineteenth century. The first was the importation of

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{143} Ian Hunter, “Assembling the School”, in Naming the Multiple Op Cit. pp.145-146
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid. Rethinking the School: Subjectivity, Bureaucracy, Criticism, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 1994, p.xvii
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid. p.xviii
British cultural values that meant the school system developed in British colonies such as Victoria was “taken directly from the system of popular education that the British state had been building since 1839”.146 This manifestation of governmentality is demonstrated by the clamouring Australian colonists made for the State to intervene in education to enhance “corporate wealth and prosperity, and therefore the wellbeing of its citizens”.147 This imperative needs to be read through an understanding of the philosophical distinction that writers such as Hobbes made between the citizen and man[sic].148 The effect of this was to construct the citizen as opposed to the individual, where the citizen was “defined by public obedience to the law which was the condition of social peace”.149 The individual, however, could chose to follow their conscience, which meant that they could act in a way contrary to the overarching goal of a governable civil society. For Hunter this political imperative developed independently of another manifestation of power – pastoral power.

Alongside the mandate for a governable society exists the state’s desire to create a morally upstanding population. Initially powered by the Christian churches one of the key imperatives for the setting up of a mass school system in Britain, and transferred to Australia, was the moral guidance of the masses, particularly that of the working classes. This middle-class salvationism is demonstrated amongst other things in the democratic surveys of Manchester and London.150 This sets up a number of things: the persona of the teacher as the moral ‘shepherd’ of the ‘flock’, the surveillance of behaviours and habits, and the examination of conduct, to name a few.

The pastoral and the bureaucratic coalesce in the school as forms of power that informed policies and guided practices within education. Both the pastoral and bureaucratic elements contained

146 Hunter, “Assembling the School”, Op Cit. p.150
147 Ibid. p.151
148 Ibid.
149 Ibid. p.152
150 Hunter, Rethinking Op Cit. p.xiii
competing visions of the good student in schooling such as an attention to detail, punctuality and neatness offset by politeness, deference to superiors and a sense of right from wrong to name but a few possibilities that inform and construct school life. For Hunter this alliance represents the “bureaucratic administration and pastoral-disciplinary pedagogy” that forms the primary characteristics of schools today.\(^{151}\) It is these discourses that permeate the fabric of the school and the way that it is experienced by the student. One of the ways that these discourses manifest themselves is in how students are subtly trained to see themselves and others as being certain kinds of people complete with intrinsic capabilities and potentials and distinctly without others, and therefore to act in ways that are not as free as they could be and are seen to be. The good student is one example of how students are trained to classify and regulate their body, conduct and sense of self in comparison to other ways of being. Through this, competing and contradictory hierarchies that construct idealised norms are established and students become enmeshed within complex matrices of power.

**Binaries and Hard Lines – Literature on the Good Student**

In much educational literature there has been a tendency to binarise the identities that students appear to form. For example, Thomas Popkewitz wrote that the binarisation of the schools along the lines of “knowledgeable/not-knowledgeable, successful/unsuccessful, and reasonable/unreasonable” is significant in establishing a field that positions “the child as different and divided from what is normalised as the ‘reason’ and the ‘reasonable’ students of schools”.\(^{152}\) Certainly, this is in no small part due to the modernist assumptions that privileged certain discursive forms through opposites, seminally found in the work of Descartes, Hegel and

\(^{151}\) Hunter, “Assembling the School”, *Op Cit.* p.163

beyond.\textsuperscript{153} This binarisation worked in certain ways, privileging whiteness over blackness, maleness over femaleness and thinking over feeling among other discourses of being. Symes and Preston write about this as the “dualism that is an inherent part of Western thinking”.\textsuperscript{154} The disciplinary subject is enmeshed within these binaries, and is taught to think of themselves and others within these frameworks. It is this binarisation of discursive systems that promotes rigid subjectivities that deny the creative, fluid and dynamic possibilities of being and becoming.

One result of this normativity and binarisation can be an imposition of seemingly hard lines surrounding student life where, in fact, edges are much more blurred and dynamic than they appear. For example, in \textit{Jocks and Burnouts}, Penelope Eckert undertook an ethnographic study of students that focuses on social categories and identity in a number of US High Schools. Eckert argues that high school social structure is an oppositional one between the ―Jocks‖ and ―Burnouts‖.\textsuperscript{155} Eckert argued that schools were places where students organised themselves into either an alienated or an accepting subculture in relationship to the values of the school hierarchy. Jocks were students:

\begin{quote}
… whose lifestyle embraces American ideals of athletic fair play and competition, The high school Jock embodies an attitude – an acceptance of the school and its institutions as an all-encompassing social context, and an unflagging enthusiasm and energy for working within those institutions.\textsuperscript{156}
\end{quote}

Burnouts, on the other hand, were students who defied rather than embraced the values of the school. They were stereotyped as being:

\begin{quote}
… from a working class home, enrolled primarily in general and vocational courses, smoked tobacco and pot, drank liquor, skipped classes and may have had occasional run-ins with police. The Burnout had an adversarial relationship with the school.\textsuperscript{157}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[153]{May, \textit{Op Cit.} p.53}
\footnotetext[154]{Symes and Preston, \textit{Op Cit.} p.31}
\footnotetext[155]{Penelope Eckert; \textit{Jocks and Burnouts: Social Categories and Identity in the High School}, Teachers College Press, New York, 1989, pp.2-4.}
\footnotetext[156]{\textit{Ibid.} p.3}
\footnotetext[157]{\textit{Ibid.}}
\end{footnotes}
These rigid social identities were used, Eckert argued, to “mediate social class and control change in the adolescent world”.\textsuperscript{158} It is their adversarial opposition that constitutes each group to behave in certain ways and influence and manipulate the other group at all times. Eckert sees this as a reflection of the class tension between the working and middle classes in the United States. The choices of affiliation can be seen as defining each individual as a social being and as a subject who has a certain, finite set of practices as to how they comport themselves. Eckert reports that those people who are neither Jocks nor Burnouts, the ‘In-betweens’, define themselves as having either Jock or Burnout characteristics and “tend to describe their social identity in terms of traits shared with each of the categories, sometimes even indicating their place in terms of a linear distance between the two”.\textsuperscript{159} The delineation of Jocks versus Burnouts is because schools are places that exist to “perpetuate cultural and social systems” by positioning students, and encouraging them to position themselves within hierarchical assemblages.\textsuperscript{160} Inside these institutions the Enlightenment notion of the autonomous individual extends to how students socialise and with whom:

… school ideology views category affiliation as a matter of individual choice. There is an implicit understanding that the school itself provides individuals with the means to make choices, and that the maturity of adolescence entails the responsibility to make the ‘right’ choices.\textsuperscript{161}

Part of the critique of work such as Eckert’s lies in what could best be described as the challenge to the essentialising nature of subject positions such as the ‘good’ adolescence. Eckert challenges the view that there exists a presupposed view of what it is to be an adolescent, and critiques those assumptions that are made based on what is desirable and appropriate.

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid. p.5
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid. p.5
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid. p.7
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid. pp.6-7
In Wexler’s text *Becoming Somebody*, Wrexler argues that: “class difference is the overriding organising code of social life that sets one school apart from another”.\(^{162}\) Class distinction is a prime force in the becoming of a particular person because:

Against the background of a seemingly shared mass culture, what students struggle for in becoming somebody in that interactional life project during high school, is different depending on where their school is located in the larger societal pattern of organised social differences and inequalities.\(^{163}\)

I like the language of becoming because it promotes a sense of the arbitrariness and dynamic role of the assumption of identity roles in high school by students in certain times and in certain contexts, often beyond their control. However, to locate class distinction as the overriding factory in the ways students become certain kinds of citizens has a number of drawbacks. Firstly, it assumes that schools are places that attempt to produce the same kinds of students institutionally in the socioeconomic order. This macro view lends itself to the idea that all students in a school share a similar identity dependant upon what socioeconomic status they inhabit. I argue that this is not the case – that schools produce a range and diversity of identities that students are encouraged, through a variety of practices, to locate themselves within, but these are subject positions which are arranged hierarchically and equate to different experiences and life opportunities for students. These practices need to be understood as beyond social class positioning. For this reason, I advocate thinking of power and technologies of power as a more ‘beneficial’ analytic tool to examine the ways that students become certain types of persons. By beneficial I mean that it creates a frame to consider subjectivities in more complex ways and in multiple contexts, to furnish a more advanced analytic problematising of subjectivities and identity within schools and other institutions.

\(^{162}\) Philip Wexler; *Becoming Somebody*, The Falmer Press, London, 1992, p.8

\(^{163}\) *Ibid.*
Secondly, this view of identity promotes identity as an imposed construct that renders individual action as often antithetical to the ways that students see themselves and are seen by others. There is some value, as Wexler states, in seeing schools as the critical agency in assigning identity: “In each school, types of selves are set by the central image of the school and the organisational devices used to achieve its image, whether of ‘school spirit’ or college ‘prep’.” 164

However, students do not meekly subsume their sense of self into these types of self that the school has constructed. Wexler argues:

I aim to show [students as] an organised production process of subjective value. The ‘product’ of this process is identity, selfhood, the ‘somebody’ which the students work to obtain through their interactions in school.165

While schools are places that produce certain kinds of students, students themselves are much more involved in the process of determining who they should and should not be. This is the becoming student, complete with the dynamic tensions between how an individual is seen and sees themselves, and the ways that this tension is negotiated and acted upon in productive ways. These tensions often make contradictory demands on the student within which the student must interpret and negotiate. These contradictions make impossible the kinds of freedom and autonomy that the school promotes as ‘valuable’ and ‘legitimate’. However, there is an element of freedom within the negotiation that needs to be better understood and examined – a clear call for a more considered appraisal of the possibilities of the Foucaultean ethical self. On the one hand, I see that students are made subjects through their experiences at school, but only so much as they allow themselves to be coerced by discourses and truths that they identify with, sometimes in unconscious and invisible ways. This understanding is a crucial extension of the workings of governmentality. It is the ways that these students comport themselves amongst these ‘truths’ that constructs positionalities and identities that have social and material currency and are

164 Ibid. p.9
165 Ibid. p.8
historically produced. Notions of the good student provide a useful lens through which to see how students comport themselves as certain types of students, and how they respond to the ‘truths’ that institutions such as schools disseminate as ‘normal’ and ‘appropriate’, and those kinds of ‘freedom’ they enact. This set of processes will be explained later in a Deleuzean frame as ‘living machinically’.

Nancy Lesko, in her text *Act Your Age*, takes a different theoretical perspective in addressing the ways that teenagers are constructed in other educational research. Arguing from a cultural studies perspective, Lesko posits that being a teenager involves dealing with the ways that society constructs certain desirable characteristics for its citizens. She writes:

> As part of the move toward a new modern society, citizens needed to become more self-determining, individualised and reasoning. Adolescence became a social space in which to talk about the characteristics of people in modernity, to worry about the possibilities of these social changes, and to establish policies and programmes that would help create the modern social order and citizenry.¹⁶⁶

It is institutions such as schools that were instrumental in legitimating the study of the self through human sciences as a ‘correct’ form of knowledge for the school and leading to a range of ‘correct’ subjectivities, often contradictory and transient. This construction of the self had significant political ramifications as the modern nation-state dealt with the demands of population increase amidst the Industrial Age. What Lesko is describing amounts to how the individual is governed, and taught to govern themself, through constructing a normalising process around such ideas as the ‘adolescent’ or the good student within a range of subject positions that meet the needs of a complex social and economic order.

Intrinsic to these technologies that coalesce around the adolescent is a moral frame that often sees adolescence as a sort of aberrant classification, neither child nor adult, innocent or responsible but

‘other’. Lesko develops four particular discourses of the adolescent to demonstrate the ways that the discursive space around the adolescent conjures up a ‘mentality’ towards the subject, and therefore a space within which governance can, and should occur. These four ‘confident characterisations’ of adolescence are that students are at the threshold of an evolution into adulthood, that adolescents are controlled by raging hormones, that they are strongly peer-oriented and that age signifies levels of adolescence. Lesko argues that these characterisations have been utilised, historically, to suggest that there is a “natural adolescence” which underpins social and political practices around the young person in institutions such as schools. These confident characterisations created a desire to ‘save’ the adolescent from their ‘nature’. This is an example of governmentality deployed in the school. Lesko argues that:

Adolescence can be considered part of a move to a modern nation-state. By seeing the ways that the social sciences and psychology were involved with knowing and making modern individuals for a changing nation-state (and how these practices were taken up by modern, rational, self-governing individuals), we can begin to see how adolescence is part of very broad networks of knowledge, policy and reason.

This position is supported by Hultqvist, who argues that the notions of childhood found in Sweden were “constructed in a time of dissolution as modernisation swept away the old – customs, traditions, the order of authority, indeed everything connected with small-scale society”. For Hultqvist, this process of normalising discourses about childhood lay in deploying power in such a way as to produce “the kind of individual that freely conducts him/herself in accordance with the laws and social norms of the community”. These discourses traverse knowledges about what is deemed appropriate behaviours, actions, values and attitudes that underpin the institution of the school. The significance of Hultqvist’s work is that it shows how far the normalising visions of childhood have permeated the fabric of schooling, from British

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167 Ibid. pp.2-5
168 Ibid. p.7
169 Ibid. p.9
171 Ibid. p.99
colonial schools articulated by Hunter to the Swedish kindergarten articulated by Hultqvist to construct powerful visions of the good citizen.

**Nikolas Rose and the ‘Soul’ Business of Schooling**

Rose’s work is largely based around Foucault’s work on the human sciences, governmentality and the deployment of pastoral power in modern society. For Nikolas Rose, the soul is the internal, private subjectivity of the person where the play of discursive truths is translated into actions and judgements.\(^{172}\) Rose argued that the sciences of the psyche installed new regimes of truth that constructed fields and hierarchies that constituted what it was to be normal. This normalisation occurred in a variety of institutions in the modern age. These strategies of power, Rose argues, are premised upon the idea of the free subject who has been continually shaped to see themself as agents in a world as the arbiters between binaries such as success/not-success, right/not-right, and good/not-good.

Rose maintained that the soul of the individual has become one of the central sites through which power has been deployed by the state and the subject made governable. The state is focused on the soul through the human sciences because it can create forms of subjectification commensurate with the aims and rationale of the governing practices that are legitimated by society. This is particularly true of those social institutions such as schools where the governance of the child is accompanied by a set of moral imperatives that the child is evaluated against.

Educate, cure, reform, punish – these are old imperatives no doubt. But the new vocabularies provided by the sciences of the psyche enable the aspirations of government to be articulated in terms of the knowledgeable management of the depths of the human soul.\(^{173}\)

\(^{172}\) Rose, *Soul* Op Cit. p.6  
This is against the backdrop of how students should see themselves in the social order. Rose links the soul to processes of the government of the individual. Developing Foucault’s theory of governmentality, Rose posited that institutions such as schools have come to:

fill the spaces between the ‘private’ lives of citizens and the ‘public’ concerns of rulers. Offices, factories, airlines, colleges, hospitals, prisons, armies and schools all involve the calculated management of human forces and powers in pursuit of the objectives of the institution.\textsuperscript{174}

Linking Foucault’s concept of governmentality to the human soul is central to Rose’s critique of the modern world. It is this intertwining that is responsible for the ways that humans are produced as moral beings. Morality is not a personally developed code, arrived at through the tenets of Reason, rather it is a subtle manipulation of the ways that the individual is made to ‘know’ themselves, offset by a desire to conduct themselves in the appropriate or normal ways. Rose states that the citizen of a liberal democracy:

… is not to be dominated in the interests of power, but to be educated and solicited into a kind of alliance between personal objectives and ambitions and institutionally or socially prized goals or activities."\textsuperscript{175}

This alliance becomes powerful because the sciences of the psyche inform many of the practices of the school and the state, committed as both are to creating governable citizens able to conduct themselves in productive ways in a disciplined society. Rose states: “The psychological sciences are intimately bound up with programmes, calculations, and techniques for the government of the soul.”\textsuperscript{176} It is not hard to find the evidence of these psychological sciences, and the new languages that accompany them, in schools. Students are constructed as measurable objects and enmeshed within power games that differentiate between their relative success or lack of it in the classroom. They are counselled and evaluated at all stages, not just for their academic success, but for their ability to conduct themselves in ways deemed appropriate and reasonable by often competing set

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid. p.2
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid. p.10
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid. p.9
of discourses. This is a set of processes that has been occurring for centuries. Luke posits that childhood is itself a discursive space that is historically contingent and that this discursivity is intertwined with the ways that schools have evolved over time as well. She states that this relationship can be seen in “the emergence of a discourse on childhood and education at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the ‘birth of the school’ at mid-century, and finally the full institutionalisation of the child by the close of the century”.

Lesko extends this argument, stating that there is a precise shaping of the possibility of the individual along certain, clearly defined positions.

Adolescents occupy border zones between the mythic poles of adult/child, sexual/sexual, rational/emotional, civilised/savage, and productive unproductive. On the terrain of adolescent bodies is a struggle for what will count as an adult, a woman, a man, rationality, proper sexuality and orderly development.

The significance of this lies in the idea that schools are places where children are not only taught and evaluated, but places where they are enlisted to be agents in their own subjectification as good and governable students. Schools and other social institutions are places where very complex technologies are deployed in the process of making the child, and therefore the adult, governable by the state. Rose states:

Technologies of subjectivity thus exist in a kind of symbiotic relationship with what one might term ‘technologies of the self’: the ways in which we are enabled to act upon our bodies, souls, thoughts, and conduct in order to achieve happiness, wisdom, health and fulfilment.

Central to these technologies was the development and deployment of schools as places where moral technology was central to the science of pedagogy. Schools as moralising institutions have been a central rationale for mass, compulsory schooling in the nineteenth century, whether this was temporal in the early religious schools or largely secular as state administered systems have

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178 Nancy Lesko, “Past, Present and Future Conceptions of Adolescence” in *Educational Theory*, Fall, 46 (4) p.455

179 Rose, *Soul Op Cit.* p.10
evolved today. The deployment of moral technology depends upon the deployment of pastoral power in the school, where students were encouraged to emulate the comportment of the teacher in a variety of ways. This pastoral power was utilised 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”.

There is a significant component of this moral technology found within the idealised norm of the good student. This could manifest itself in a variety of ways in schools, however, what is significant is that the good student is seen as needing to comport themselves in the appropriate way in relation to those things that we can’t see – namely the soul. Rose states: “Government thus depends upon the production, circulation, organisation and authorisation of truths that incarnate what it is to be governed.”

It is these truths that lie at the core of the school amongst other social institutions. One of the most effective practices of this governing of the soul has been the arsenal of technologies deployed upon the child, (techniques of power such as surveillance, classification, individualisation and normalisation) with the express intention of shaping the soul of the child in such a way as to normalise the experiences, attitudes and expectations of the wider population. Rose states:

The most obvious manifestation has been the complex apparatus targeted upon the child: the child welfare system, the school, the juvenile justice system and the education and surveillance of parents.

Important to this complex apparatus is the ideal of the autonomous individual who is located at all strata of liberal democracies because they are ‘free to choose’. Eckert makes the point that schools tend to view students as autonomous choosers of their own positionalities within the system. This autonomy is predicated on the idea that the student is able to freely choose their identity within the school and the consequences of power relations that are deployed as a result.

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180 Ibid. p.223
181 Ibid. p.6
182 Ibid. p.2
183 Eckert, Op Cit. p.6
The ‘Becoming’ Student

McLeod and Yates, in a text that builds on the work of Rose and Foucault amongst others, argue that the modern individual has become the site for theoretical debate over the “prominence and problematisation of the ‘subject’”. They argue that schools are places where the disciplinary population is created, and where the individual is taught how to be a competitive consumer through a variety of techniques such as grading, reporting and selection for various programmes within the school. These selections then tend to translate into life choices for young people.

Young people enter a world that is competitively structured, one in which final outcomes, particularly entry to prestigious universities and courses, cannot be achieved by everyone: the system is set up to be selective. Indeed as the form of work changes, and as certification escalates, students and their parents face heightened awareness of the competitive arena, an inflated sense of schooling’s significance in mediating life chances. Competition exists between schools and between young people in school.

The statement that competition exists between schools and between young people in schools needs to be expanded. Competition is a discourse that operates at all levels of schooling. Foucault held that the art of the institution was in its development of the micropractices of power. The micropractices, amongst other things, measured the individual, rated and assessed them in such a way as to locate them, and lead them to locate themselves, amongst a wider body of individuals. In this way, schools became institutions that measured success, and created an institutional environment that rewarded competition built on the notion of intrinsic values such as the worthiness of the ‘successful’ and the unworthiness of the ‘not-so-successful’. These discourses have continued largely unchallenged within school as the ‘right’ and ‘normal’ way of operating.

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184 McLeod and Yates, Op Cit. p.84
185 Ibid. p.52
186 Florence, Op Cit. p.462
McLeod and Yates investigate the social milieu known as “New Times”. By this, they are referring to theory and research that suggests that in a post-capitalist society new subjectivities are being produced as the social, economic and political world changes. The argue that while “some of the assumptions and expectations” that young men and women may have had have changed, “the constant theoretical and political focus of ‘change’, ‘New Times’, and new forms of identity has been overdone. When talking about the subjectivities of young people, while there may have been some change, the research suggests that there is largely continuity between the ways that young people saw themselves and their worlds and that of preceding generations. This supports the view that schools have not changed in the types of citizens they produce, despite decades of pedagogical investigation and initiatives.

McLeod and Yates frame a vision of the good student widely accepted in contemporary culture. They call this the “hegemonic good student”, “a student who is good at doing what examinations require; who applies him or herself to the necessary study to succeed; and who does in fact succeed.” This hegemonic good student’s success masks, however, a dynamic and conflicting space, with a range of behaviours and attitudes rewarded in a variety of ways. This hegemonic good student relies on expectations to comport oneself in appropriate ways - an impetus to ‘behave’, to conduct oneself in such a way as to be seen as supporting the dominant values and attitudes prevalent through that institution and wider society. The point is well made that schools present themselves as being in the business of producing good students, and the good student who is often seen as a ‘successful one’ in a range of practices and disparities is presented as the most likely to become a good citizen. This hegemonic good student is deeply embedded within those hierarchical opportunities that mark contemporary education.

187 McLeod and Yates, Op Cit p.1
188 Ibid. p.4
189 Ibid. p.52
190 Ibid. p.51
In their work, McLeod and Yates developed a longitudinal study that followed a number of students for a period of up to six years through their high school education. This study focused on the student as the prime focus of their research, a qualitative method meant that there were a number of interviews with each student that examined how the student experienced school. One major difference in my research is that for me the school, not the student, is the key site for investigation as it deploys power in a variety of productive ways. I argue that it is this deployment of power that students negotiate within and during their experiences of school, and it is highly significant in the ways that students live the competing versions of what the good student is. This strategy also sets up the possibilities to speak differently about a range of practices found within schools that speak of different subject positions based on the positional characterisations and values associated with different schools.

What is significant in the work of McLeod and Yates is their postulation that student identity in school, whether it is the good student or otherwise, is best to be framed as a ‘becoming’. By this they intend to see identity in schools as both a “project of making a specific identity” and “an ongoing process – shaping and being shaped”. Framing identity in school this way, they argue: offers an alternative to essentialist discourses of ‘being’ and ideas of identity as fixed, and emphasizes identity as productive, fluid, dynamic yet also historically and socially located – the process of ‘becoming’ obviously does not happen in a cultural or material vacuum.

The good student, then, is both a specific identity, with normalised roles, behaviours, values and attitudes and a continual performance of those same roles, behaviours, values and attitudes. To become the good student is to be enmeshed within discourses and relations of power that produce ways of being and thinking that are continually performed and evaluated.

191 Ibid. p.77
192 Ibid. p.78
193 Ibid. p.77
My work extends on that of McLeod and Yates in two highly significant ways. Firstly, McLeod and Yates explain their work on subjectivities as being informed by two distinct traditions. There is the study of subjectivity that is “responding to broad social and cultural changes”.\textsuperscript{194} There is also the study of subjectivity as “a continued development of a range of theoretical, practical and political attempts to address ‘difference’”.\textsuperscript{195} For my work, what is significant about studying subjectivities is not to understand difference, but to open up freer ways of being and becoming. This necessitates seeing subjectivities as productive but also as possibilities, not a violence done on the self, but a considered set of operations done by the self on the self that result in comportments, conducts, dispositions and actions that currently are less free than they could be. Part of this lies in their understanding of postmodern theory, particularly that of Foucault. They discuss Foucault’s work on subjectivities in this way:

Many scholars influenced by the work of Foucault provide a different and less optimistic vision of this process. They see it in terms of ‘government’ of the self and ‘technologies of the self’.\textsuperscript{196}

I argue that a reading of later Foucault is heavily imbued with optimism, a belief that those “self-evident truths” that are deployed to construct and produce subjectivities, can be challenged and destroyed and new ways of being and becoming, a new “arts of existence” are made possible.

Secondly, McLeod and Yates’ work is heavily skewed towards a gendered reading of the good student. Whilst I am not attempting to relativise or minimise the significance of a gendered reading of the good student, I seek to push beyond this analytics to encompass other discourses and technologies that are equally powerful and productive in the multiplicity of subject positions possible for young people in schools. I examine hierarchies and positionalities that exist outside,

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid. p.3
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid. p.6
and are supplementary to, gendered readings of the good student. This examination leads my work into positing types of rationales of the good student that are deployed within schools through which students are governed and govern themselves as a means of unmasking what I see as restrictive understandings of the multiple positionings of the good student.

**Becoming Wolf and Spatial Politics**

McLeod and Yates utilise Bourdieu’s theory of habitus as a lens through which to examine the ways that individuals form themselves in social situations. By habitus, Bourdieu meant the ways that individuals form themselves in social situations through those “principles set up for the individual about what matters, what is noticed, how one comports oneself physically, socially, emotionally”.\(^{197}\) Another useful lens is offered by Deleuze, who suggest that identity becomes a political act in a consumer driven world where how we are seen and see ourselves is linked to spatial, spiritual and material possibilities. Deleuze was a prolific writer and theorist (often with the French psychiatrist Felix Guattari) in a number of disciplines who is increasingly coming to be seen as a contemporary of theorists such as Foucault and Derrida.\(^{198}\) However, for the purposes of this dissertation I intend to use Deleuze as a theorist sympathetic with the works of Foucault who pushed beyond the disciplinary society to think of the subject and identity in ways that could be seen as opening up freer possibilities for individuals to act in a consumer society.\(^{199}\)

Colebrook argues that Deleuze is best considered as a post-structural writer who was intensely interested in the “questioning power of life” and how this questioning is expressed in “smaller

\(^{197}\)Ibid. p.90

\(^{198}\)May Op Cit. p.9

\(^{199}\)In his work *Foucault*, Deleuze talks about attempting to ‘draw a picture’ of a friend who has died. There is little doubt that their friendship is based on a mutual admiration for their work, although there was a period where they had a ‘falling out’. Foucault wrote of Deleuze that he thought that the period in which he wrote would eventually be remembered as being ‘Deleuzean’.
organisms and their tendency to evolve, mutate and become”.\textsuperscript{200} For Deleuze, his philosophy argued that there was no external, unifying founding knowledge and therefore there could be no normative standard such as human nature or experience through which the world could be rendered explicable.\textsuperscript{201} According to Deleuze, this shattering of the modernist forms of knowledge was not a cause for pessimism but optimism, where the absence of a grounded knowledge means that there is the possibility to transform life from the ‘governed’ to the ‘free’.\textsuperscript{202} It is this optimism for freer thought and action that requires us, I believe, to examine the discourses of the good student as a site for possible transformation within schools.

The history of Western thought has been based on questions of being and identity.\textsuperscript{203} Deleuze postulated that it was impossible to have a discussion based on being and/or identity because it assumed that there was some external structure of knowledge through which being could be differentiated and through this static differentiation the world could become known.\textsuperscript{204} Deleuze referred to this as the “transcendental illusion” which systematically sees difference as a subordinate process of identity.\textsuperscript{205} For Deleuze, identity is a concept that functions to ‘manage’ difference through a presupposed essence or nature.\textsuperscript{206} Deleuze repudiated essentialising forms of philosophy, arguing for a radical re-reading of Enlightenment philosophers such as Spinoza to accentuate their potential to transform life rather than maintain dominant ideologies and ways of thinking and acting. For Deleuze there was no ontological Being that existed outside or above the self that could universally know the self, rather the life of a person was a continual becoming of different images of the self. This becoming, as opposed to a static Being, led Deleuze to argue

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[201] Ibid. p.2
\item[202] Ibid. p.4
\item[203] Ibid. p.2
\item[204] Ibid. p.3
\item[206] Ibid. p.43
\end{itemize}
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that there was a creative tendency in life that modernist and structuralist philosophers had overlooked.\textsuperscript{207} He stated:

Hegel substitutes the abstract relation of the particular to the concept in general for the true relation of the singular and universal in the idea. He thus remains in the reflected element of ‘representation’, within simple generality. He represents concepts, instead of dramatising Ideas: he creates a false theatre, a false drama, a false movement.\textsuperscript{208}

This ‘representation’ of difference as a part of identity means that ontological discussion of the self are littered with essentialising terms that entail a static, grounded Being when the self is continually the becoming of being.\textsuperscript{209}

One of the powerful pieces of imagery that Deleuze delivered was that of the rhizome. Contesting the image of knowledge as the predictable growth of a tree, with disciplined root, trunk, branch and leaf growth, Deleuze instead opted for a theory that there is no unified knowledge such as a tree, rather knowledge shoots off in a myriad of directions to inhabit a multitude of spaces and possibilities that cannot be pre-determined or foretold. The rhizome is multiple, unpredictable and multi-directioned. Rhizomatic knowledge, then, is more arbitrary than systematic, and it is a dynamic set of forces that shapes how people see the world. The tree represents the dominant “image of thought” that has stopped people from thinking in anything more than narrow ways.\textsuperscript{210} This tree is hierarchical and centralised, while the rhizome is segmented and proliferating.\textsuperscript{211} This proliferation causes the rhizome to spread out in ways beyond the possibility of the tree to offer creative knowledges that are not bound by rigid rules of form and comforting certainties of an organised system of knowledge. Deleuze argues that thinking rhizomatically opens up new ways for people to live in the world. If we return to May’s exposition on the history of ontology, perhaps challenging dominant ways of thinking that have become more concerned with discipline

\textsuperscript{207} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{208} Gilles Deleuze, \textit{Difference, Repetition}, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, p.10
\textsuperscript{209} Ibid. p.48
\textsuperscript{211} Ibid. p.45
(How should one act?) than with possibility (How might one live?). It is this creative aspect that I see as adding to Foucault’s work on subjectivities and governmentality in a positive sense, something Deleuze thought philosophy should be.\textsuperscript{212}

Thinking rhizomatically is an important strategy that allows the self to be free from the restrictive logic of thinking through normality and recognition.\textsuperscript{213} This means that thinking rhizomatically is a creative act, one that opens up new ways of thinking. For Deleuze, there is no separation between the world and life. Colebrook explains it this way:

Deleuze insists that the world is not something outside thinking that is simply there waiting to be represented. We cannot separate thought from life, or the act of thinking the world from the world itself. Like any other mode of life, thought creates its own ‘worlds’.\textsuperscript{214}

Thinking rhizomatically means moving beyond a philosophy of the world that is based on binaries to one that accentuates the multiplicity of thought and the creative possibilities inherent in thinking. In embracing multiplicity, Deleuze argues that he is moving beyond an ethics of good and evil to an ethics that concerns the self understanding their world in its own specific, sensible and singular ways.\textsuperscript{215} This is done by destroying the logic of thought that sees the world as simply ordered, where that order can be understood, explained and shared by all. Rather, “we need to look at how we compose our perceptions of the world, the force of those perceptions and how we create decisions, judgements and concepts”.\textsuperscript{216} By thinking this way, a freer self is possible by accepting the challenge of the questioning power of life – that what constitutes life at all levels is the ability to come up at solutions to the problems that life poses.\textsuperscript{217}

\textsuperscript{212} Colebrook, \textit{Op Cit.} p. 2
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid. p.26
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{215} Ibid. p.27
\textsuperscript{216} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid. p.2
Part of Deleuze’s project was to reject philosophies of humanism and transcendentalism for a philosophy that has no grounded, essentialising knowledge that props up the system. One of his key concepts is that of the machine which he uses to rethink ethics. Philosophy tends to think through problems from the perspective of a presupposed whole – ‘man’, ‘nature’ or an interactive universe to name a few. These presupposed wholes cause ethics to be reactive, that is, they are based on a grounded sense of some being or structure through which sense can be made of right and wrong. This reactive ethics leads to a binarisation of knowledge that causes judgements to be made on positive versus negative attributes. Reactive ethics are limiting and narrow, and they tend to be applied universally. Thinking of life as a machine, however, opens up possibilities to create an active ethics that does not presuppose some end, intent or identity.

The machine signifies a production that is immanent, both ungrounded and untimely. Deleuze means that there is no reason for the machine, its becoming has no meaning outside the system of its production. A machine is “no more than the connections and productions it makes” and therefore has no end, intent or closed identity. The machine is not a metaphor for life, life is a machine. Colebrook adds that machines only work (make meaning) when they are connected to other machines. In a school, for example, the ‘person’ is made real through the interaction with other ‘persons’. The school is actually a complex assemblage of machines that are productive in multiple and dynamic ways. Without going into Deleuze’s development of all parts of the machine as machines themselves, this shows that life as a machine is creative when it interacts with other machines. Thinking machinically involves thinking of life as a becoming, where that becoming is continually produced through connections with other machines. This implies that life is untimely – it is not the progression of chronological sequences, but rather the creation of an ever expanding network of possibilities. Deleuze and Guattari refer to life’s production as ‘lines

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218 Ibid. p.55
219 Ibid. p.56
of flight’ where these lines represent different possibilities of becoming.\textsuperscript{220} For Deleuze and Guattari, these lines of flight are given body by the incorporeal sense.\textsuperscript{221} Sense is a productive power in that it “expresses not what something actually is but its power to become”.\textsuperscript{222} This allows forms of becoming to be given being along the lines of national, sexual, ethnic, racial and gender identities to name a few. For Deleuze, this production is creative of new lines of flight, new ways of becoming that are not possible in reactive philosophies that claim some grounded whole such as ‘man’, ‘woman’, ‘homosexual’ that is a normalising knowledge that limits the ability of the self to be creative. Rather, in a Deleuzean sense, life is a chaotic series of foldings, where each cell or organism creates an exterior and interior from the machinic connections that folds and refolds as further connections are made.\textsuperscript{223}

Deleuze’s concept of the fold owed much to Foucault’s work on sexuality and subjectivity. Deleuze argued that Foucault’s work on subjectivities could only be understood by recognising that “each human being thinks as a result of an ongoing process of living in the world and by gaining consciousness and agency through a constant give and take of perception, affect and cognition”.\textsuperscript{224} In an ontological sense, Deleuze argues that being is measured on an axis of knowing, where Being is determined by what is visible and accepted, and the matrices of power that shape the subjectivities of the self.\textsuperscript{225} However, this Being is doubled over or ‘folded’ by thinking, that is historically contingent and productive of other ways of being. Deleuze argues that thinking is to both to see and to speak, and as a result is folded into the “interstices of visibility and discourse”.\textsuperscript{226} Thinking then, means “folding, doubling the outside with its co-

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\item \textsuperscript{220} Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia}, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987, pp.
\item \textsuperscript{221} Colebrook, \textit{Op Cit.} p.60
\item \textsuperscript{222} \textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{223} \textit{Ibid.} p.75
\item \textsuperscript{225} \textit{Ibid.} p.173
\item \textsuperscript{226} \textit{Ibid.} p.174
\end{itemize}
extensive inside".\footnote{Deleuze, \textit{Foucault Op Cit.} p.116} For Deleuze it was this folding that created the singularity of thought, or the possibility for agency to occur within these interstices that are often seen as coercive or disciplinary. Rather, for Deleuze everything is folded within the folds of everything else, and it is in these folds that the continuous and vital production of being and becoming is staged. It occurs in an untimely sense, swiftly, slowly and swirling as it produces evolving subjectivities that are creative and full of possibility.\footnote{Conley, \textit{Op Cit.} p.180}

If lines of flight are productive, so too are the desires that are positive results from the connections made between organisms. For Deleuze, desire is the positive and productive expression of the self as “life strives to preserve and enhance itself” through connection with other desires.\footnote{Colebrook, \textit{Op Cit.} p.75} Deleuze and Guattari wrote:

> There is no such thing as the social production of reality on the one hand, and a desiring-production that is mere fantasy on the other … The truth of the matter is that \emph{social production is purely and simply desiring-production itself under determinate conditions}.\footnote{Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, \textit{Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia}, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983, p.29}

What we see as identity is, in fact, a network of desires that produce and continue to produce the self as a desiring machine. It is desire that creates the social person, the good citizen or the good student as it is produced through connections and assemblages that entail some way of reading ‘truths’ in the world.

Deleuze advocated moving beyond the Foucaultean disciplined subject to a subject who resides within a corporate epoch. By this, he argued that societies have moved from disciplinary societies to “societies of control” that present “the brashest rivalry as a healthy form of emulation, an excellent motivational force that opposes individuals against one another and runs through each,
Deleuze suggested that this change had been gradually occurring since the end of the Second World War. What is replacing the disciplinary society is a more individualised model. In disciplined institutions the body moved from institution to institution and was continually confined and disciplined anew. In a control society, the individual is monitored continually and progressively. In societies of control modes of domination are internalised within the individual. There is not necessarily a new confinement that results in new knowledges that produce new ways of being. Rather, the individual is exposed to endless seminars, organised along the diktats of the “stupidest TV game show”. One of the forms that this shift takes in education is the shift in emphasis from the monolithic school to emphasis on schools as places that compete, and where knowledge shifts from the body of the school to emphasise notions such as lifelong learning.

This shift to societies of control posits that there are no clear transitions between the spatial confinement of the self (that includes both body and soul) and the subject, because control is not exercised as a finality, rather it is constantly evolving and changing and the self is continually being reconfigured and reconfiguring in multiple ways. Deleuze called this multiplicity the “limitless postponements” of the subject. This means that subjectivity is not only the disciplining of the body and soul but is also the creation of the subject through “artistic, or aesthetic and ethical moments”. Deleuze argued that it was wrong to see identity as an isolated and isolating process. Rather, it is produced through a process of individuation that is already

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231 Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Society of Control”, in *October*, 1992; 59 (1), p.4
233 Ibid.
235 Marks, *Op Cit.*, p.122
collective or ‘populated’. It is important to see subjectivities as dynamic processes that occur in multiple ways and require the subject to become multiple individuals at different times in different places. The importance of this distinction is that it allows the possibility for the subject to act in ways that may be freer than can be supposed in a disciplined society in a Foucaultean sense. This agency is highlighted by Deleuze and Guattari when they wrote:

In becoming-wolf, the important thing is the position of the mass, and above all the position of the subject itself in relation to the pack or wolf-multiplicity: how the subject joins or does not join the pack, how far away it stays, how it does or does not hold to the multiplicity.

There is a spatiality in identity, a sense that identity is located through markers and indicators, not only in terms of what one is, but also in terms of what one is not. Another dimension added is how the individual is seen by others and how that person sees themselves. This dynamic approximation of self is perhaps best thought of as a way of unmasking how the individual desires to be seen, and the discourses and truths that interpret this desire in a multitude of ways. We tend to see identity as a constant inhabiting of a certain way of being seen and seeing the self. Part of this is no doubt because identity is often, almost unconsciously, linked to notions of ‘human nature’. The idea that our identity is static and constant and is who we ‘really’ are is linked with the idea that there is an autonomous self that is being revealed through how we are seen by the world.

The image of the wolf is an interesting one. Wolves are territorial pack animals that range over a large area. At the same time they are both pack wolves (members of a plural identity) and single wolves (having an individual identity). They locate themselves in relation to the single and the multiple in a variety of ways. Deleuze and Guattari talk about this negotiating as ‘becoming’. One is never completely wolf, one is always in a state of becoming that wolf. One is never the good

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239 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus Op Cit.*, p.29
student or the good citizen, there is always the continued becoming of that normalising ideal. This implies that there is a continued performativity in how the negotiated identity is formed. This performativity is highly sympathetic to Lyotard’s examination of language and the self. Lyotard argues that the self is performed in that it “exists in a fabric or relations that is more complex and mobile than ever before.” This means, then, that performativity is the way that the self is continually and multiply located or positioned in a relational way through the language games that produce a negotiated identity. Lyotard describes this negotiated identity as being “always located at specific ‘nodal points’ of specific communication circuits.” Thus, the good student can be considered as one of these ‘nodal points’ in the experiences of students in secondary schools.

Deleuze advocates thinking of becoming not as achieving a goal, but as being continually in the middle of becoming. “This indefinite life does not have moments, however close they may be, but only meantimes, between moments”. The subject continues to negotiate a twisted path through how they are seen and see themselves. What is significant about this quote is that it posits a spatial aspect to identity – a physical displacement of power along lines of a hierarchy. They talk about “how far away it stays” from the multiplicity, a sense that there is a distribution of space dependent upon how one sees themselves and is seen by the multiplicity. An example of this is when Wexler identifies that students carefully work to construct an image at school, and that image allows certain types of becoming:

The image is constraining, takes work, and is not always salutary. The struggle for this image is thought to bring the reward of self confidence. The image is made apparently unwillingly in encounters with the apparatus and in association with peers. But it is also made in self-constructive, even self-mythologising work.

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243 Wexler, *Op Cit.* p.23
This performativity of identity underscores the need to see the student as engaged within a very complex production of how they are seen at school, and how they see themselves. The normalising vision of the good student is one of the key factors in how students rationalise the world and their place in it. Understanding this means opening up some potentially confronting thoughts. Schools can be read as productive institutions that actively work to construct certain kinds of selves who accord with pre-conceived notions of what is means to be ‘successful’ and/or ‘good’. These notions allow for very little ‘play’ within the normalising vision of the good student as students struggle to find their place in the system. Many of the possibilities for identity in school are largely pre-determined, and that the school tends to be a place where students are located and taught to locate themselves as certain types of people. Schools structurally require certain groupings to exist for their continued operation through traditional and various hierarchies. No matter the context of the school, for example, there needs to be an adversarial group so that the school can function as a disciplinary and normalising machine. Wexler talks about the students who come from an urban under class attending a predominantly middle-class school as that adversarial group.\textsuperscript{244} Eckert talks about the Burnouts as students who challenge the project of the school.\textsuperscript{245} Schools need not only adversarial groups, but many other groups for the processes of normalisation, classification, surveillance and individualisation to produce and deploy the hierarchical understandings that shape the governable self. Without these groups, processes of surveillance, normalisation, classification and individualisation, become less powerful and possibly lack a language to make sense of the institutional world.\textsuperscript{246} Correspondingly those designated as the good students experience similar processes but with different results. Paraphrasing Foucault, one of the skills of the disciplinary institution is the way that it attaches the individual to that view of themselves that other people tend to hold and

\textsuperscript{244} \textit{Ibid.} p.8
\textsuperscript{245} Eckert \textit{Op Cit.} p.22
\textsuperscript{246} Gore, \textit{Op Cit.}
presents this as the normal or correct way of being and thus being ‘seen’ or understood in the larger social order. This attachment is one of the key ways that the individual is made governable and makes themselves governable.

In societies of control, the modes of production shifts from confining institutions to internalised subjectivities that are carried with the individual through differing social and institutional settings. One of the modes of internal production in a society of control is ‘faciality’. In societies of control, the production of a dominant mode of subjectivity is described as ‘faciality’, or the imposition of certain types of appearance upon the body, and the subsequent internalisation producing the subject. In the social game this means that a person is recorded in terms of the face that they are given, and then participates and is normalised according to the way that they perform the roles associated with their faciality. This participation is a type of performativity, and requires the individual to locate their ‘face’ in dynamic and productive ways. In social machines such as schools, this explains how the subjectivity is informed and informs the actions and activities of the individual. Deleuze and Guattari speak of social machines as a range of machines connecting at a particular level of complexity. A school is an example of a social machine – a place where other machines make connections. These connections within social machines involve the social machine taking charge of production – or governing those connections and disjunctions that are permissible. Social identities such as ‘teacher’ or ‘student’ denote a place in a certain arrangement of the machine. Deleuze argued that faciality is organised through the individual assigning each face a place in relation to a constant set of norms. Overcoding is the result of faciality and the ways that the subjectivity is internalised. In this set of processes, the faciality

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247 Michel Foucault, “Truth and Juridical Forms” Op Cit. p.78
248 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus Op Cit. pp.167-191
249 Deleuze, Op Cit. pp.167-191
251 Goodchild, Op Cit. p.107
252 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus Op Cit. pp.167-191
of the person carries such powerful meanings that the individual wearing that face increasingly becomes produced by it. Teacher, student, child, mother, are just some of the examples of overcoded subjectivities in the Western world.

What this leads to is an understanding that the self is always fragmented and is passing between states of being:

... the subject consumes and consummates each of the states through which it passes, and is born of each of them anew, continuously emerging from them as a part made up of parts.

Thus the good student is an example of the fragmented self that is really an expression of the governance of the social machine. In this view, the good student is really a consumer of the connections and disjunctions that make up an endorsed social positioning within the social machine.

Importantly, Brown and Lunt argue that an essential task of social research is to ask questions concerning “how, under particular cultural and historical conditions, subjects become ‘captured’ by forms of identity promoted by a social machine”. The good student becomes not so much an expression of the governing power of the school nor of the practices of power that run through the institution or social machine, as much as it becomes the ways that the individual is allowed to make sense of the experiences of those discourses and relations of power.

Colwell argues that Deleuze develops Foucault’s conception of the creation of the individual, moving from a position that each identity is assembled from the whole genealogic history of what it means to be a person, to a position where the “multiplicity of databanks and their

253 Goodchild, Op Cit. p.92
254 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus Op Cit. p.41
255 Brown and Lunt, Op Cit. p.15
interconnections” makes it possible to create more than one individual out of one person. Understanding this, however, means that within this Deleuzean analytic, identity becomes an arena of possibility as much as it can be seen as a locus of control and repression. There becomes a possibility for people to become different types of people at certain times, in certain places, in certain ways. This challenges the essentialising of student identity within schools that is normalised under the auspice of shaping the good student. Within schools opening up those power relations that essentialise what students should be is a means of challenging the deployment of identity as a means of control that currently describes the self-formation that is occurring in secondary schools in much of contemporary Western society.

**Problematics of Freedom**

Freedom is a word that carries with it a legacy of hundreds of years of writing, political action and theoretical consideration. Nikolas Rose wrote in 1990 that “Over the past two decades the value of freedom has become the principle of so many dreams and projects.” Freedom as leading to truth has permeated the possibilities of the individual, the free market, the free world, the ‘buy one get one free’ sale, free time, free kick, free thinker, the free person, free from persecution. All of these represent some tacit assumptions about freedom and its place in the liberal state. In short, freedom has come to mean so many things, it has lost its element of possibility, of philosophical inquiry as to how, if at all, one can be free and resists a single notion of what is means to be free. Rose asserts that “the ethics of freedom have come to underpin our conceptions of how we should be ruled, how our practices of life should be organised, how we should understand ourselves and our predicament.” This ethic that Rose identifies is embodied

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256 Ibid. p.212
258 Ibid.
within certain regimes of truth that are concerned with how the individual locates, and is located, within the relations of power that construct a range of possibilities within societies.

Utilising Foucault’s theory of governmentality, Rose advocates thinking of populations “governed through their freedom”, despite this seeming to be a contradiction. In this sense, freedom is one of the key tenets of liberalism as it exists in various forms in Western countries. Rose stipulates that “only a certain way of understanding and exercising freedom is compatible with a liberal arts of rule” that are found in contemporary liberal governments.260 This articulation of freedom is heavily imbued with the notion of liberty – that is, freedom from particular things such as oppression, discrimination and tyranny. The irony is that liberal governments have been most persuasive in convincing the population that freedom is only possible by subjecting the individual to various forms of compulsion, such as compulsory schooling and universal legal systems.

It is these discourses of freedom that have infiltrated the institutions that govern conduct in such a way as to enlist the individual as agents in their own subjectification. Rose examines freedom as a discursive practice to better understand the ways that power is deployed in society. As he states in Governing the Soul: “If the studies that follow have one underlying aim, it is to contribute to the genealogy of freedom.”261 This problematising of freedom centres on the idea that we are governed through our freedom, or more precisely, the discourses on freedom that we have come to accept as true.262 Rose also flags this problematisation of freedom as necessarily being a study of “power at the molecular level”; in prisons, clinics, schoolrooms and other places.263

259 Ibid. p.62
260 Ibid. p.63
261 Rose, Soul Op Cit. p.11
262 Nikolas Rose, Powers of Freedom Op Cit. p.62
263 Ibid. p.5
Contemporary thinking on freedom is dominated by this idea of freedom as liberty. Correspondingly, it is largely this version of freedom that has been deployed in Western societies through the various strategies manifested within the art of government. Rose states:

Strategies and techniques of authority have been regulated by ideals of freedom or have sought to produce freedom. We have acted upon ourselves, or been acted upon by others, in the wish to be free. Freedom has been an objective of government, freedom has been an instrument or means of government, freedom has inspired the invention of a variety of technologies for governing.264

Deleuze argued that much of Western thought centres on the negative possibilities – freedom can be understood in terms of what it is not. For him, this thought is dominated by “binary logic”.265 Using the tree as metaphor, Deleuze and Guattari argue that philosophical enquiry has been dominated by this binary logic, with one of the results being “this system of thought has never reached an understanding of multiplicity”.266 They argue for a way of thinking that is positive rather than negative, and that “talk(s) about multiplicities, lines, strata and segmentaries, lines of flight and intensities, machinic assemblages and their carious types”.267 This version of freedom that underpins the contemporary individual is also rendered problematic through its evocation of the individual as the person of reason. By this, I mean the assumption that each individual inhabits a shared reality where concepts such as fairness, equality and freedom are the same for all – a meritocratic definition of freedom that implies that people deserve to be free because it is the ‘right’ outcome for society. This assumes that freedom is a natural state that society is moving towards uncovering. In this sense, freedom can be considered as a static, utopian place that is logically attained through reason and education. This version of freedom is an impossibility, and it is this that has frustrated theorists over many years as they struggle to explain why society has not advanced the freedom of this individual in any concrete ways. I call this freedom, freedom as invisible power.

264 Ibid. p.67
265 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus Op Cit. p.5
266 Ibid.
267 Ibid. p.4
Freedom as invisible power is found at all levels in our society. It occurs particularly in institutions such as schools. Freedom as invisible power exists particularly in those places set up by the state that coerce the individual, whilst either promising delayed freedom or by educating the individual to think that they are free to act within the confines of the institution. In this sense, autonomy forms a key platform of what I have termed freedom as invisible power. I see this as particularly important in considering the ways that we are governed through our freedom. There is an assumption in schools that the student is free to choose who they are and therefore are responsible for who they are perceived by others. Social groupings are such that there is often an inevitability about how those perceptions occur. Marshall argues that freedom as rational autonomy has been “an aim, if not the aim of education”.  

I advocate thinking of freedom as less a fixed, monolithic entity and more of a range of negotiated, contested unique possibilities. Freedom is a far more dynamic set of processes than the utopian possibilities envisaged under the vision of freedom as rational autonomy. For this reason, I see freedom as a contingent set of practices. I say this for two reasons. Firstly, if freedom is contingent, it is able to encapsulate a range of possible freedoms that are constantly being remoulded and reshaped according to the unique experiences of each individual. Secondly, contingent freedom allows us to see freedom not as a monolithic whole, but as a process or an “enterprise”. This then opens us up to see freedom less as an endpoint and more as a moment or a set of moments before the individual is exposed to other forms of subjectification, a Deleuzean reading of freedom that encourages us to look at the middle rather than the endpoint to see the fluid and dynamic possibilities within ways of seeing possibilities for the self.  

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269 Ibid. p.600
corporate. A fluid, dynamic understanding of freer ways of being requires a problematisation of
the ways that the individual is coerced, both as a body and as a soul within a corporate structure
that values certain regimes of truth that promote competition, material success and the
autonomous self.

To open up the notion of freedom, I believe we have to begin to consider what truths we accept
about our being, where they are told and how they create particular senses of self whether these
are about being governable, good citizens, good students or simply seen as ‘normal’. McLeod and
Yates argue that schools “do enter into the making of the self and the production of
inequalities” 271 I would stress that schools are involved in the production of certain kinds of
selves and it is these selves that produce many of the inequalities in society. Along the length of
schools, through all of the processes and technologies of surveillance and examination, what is
being constructed is certain ways of being and seeing the self. Taking Foucault’s work on power
and subjectivities a step further to incorporate his work on the art of living and the ethical subject
entails unmasking some of those technologies of power that are deployed in the production of
these selves.

The following chapters begin the process of unmasking some of the truths that underpin how
students experience and act within certain regimes of truth. These construct sensibilities as to
what it means to be ‘good’, ‘normal’, ‘appropriate’ and ‘desirable’ within the school. Often, these
can be quite different for different students. This dissertation is framed within wider questions of
freedom and agency because it seeks to create wider possibilities for students to be certain kinds
of ethical subjects. Within schools there are possibilities for different kinds of subject
positionalities that are often unrecognised and unvalued, and these may lead to different ways of
being and becoming ‘good’. This study is the first part in challenging schools to become more

271 McLeod and Yates, Op Cit. p.218
aware of how they assess and locate individuals against normalising visions of good studentness. By getting students to discuss how they experience schools and schooling, and in what ways they see themselves and are seen by others as good students, hegemonic notions of the good are challenged. Schools could be, and I think should be, places where young people can explore these moments of freedom as they are ‘schooled’ to be ethical subjects in a Foucaultean sense, not ‘good students’ in a pastoral and moral sense. In the classroom we see students who are ‘free to choose’, and their actions, behaviours and attainments are carefully modified through intervention by parents, teachers, psychologists and others in the educational milieu. This freedom to choose, based as it is on the idea of the autonomous agent, is specifically translated into the belief that students deserve the results they get, or that they have to accept responsibility for the success/lack of success binary. The sense that good students are responsible for their place in the school is often paralleled with the belief that the not-good students deserve sanctions because, at a deep level, they have chosen to conduct themselves in such a way as to not measure up the various principled positions of schools.

**Conclusion to the First Two Chapters**

The first two chapters have established a frame through which to better understand the education world that young people are immersed within. The frame provides some answers to questions that are philosophically inclined and ontologically directed. At the core is an enquiry regarding what education is really for, and how is it that it has become, in practice, a tool for vocational and further academic outcomes, where what is valued is the ability of the individual to be self-governing and contribute to a late capitalist society in a variety of disciplined and disciplining ways. A market-oriented education-world is not enough; and new ways of thinking of and about the self are needed to meet the demands of an increasingly complex and hyper real world. What is clear through the work of Foucault, Deleuze and others is that the ways of thinking of and about
the self have become a means of controlling and ordering the institutional citizen. These strategies of power have become the centre of a core of knowledge that collects, evaluates and judges what it is to be ‘normal’ or ‘good’ and to control and predict a nation’s citizenry. This knowledge shapes the individual’s relation to the self and the world beyond – and trains each self in governable ways. These knowledges with their corresponding power relations have meant limiting and narrowing the understanding of the potential of the self to ways of acting and behaving – the ontological admonition May phrases as “How should one act?”272 One of the key effects involves teaching the self to govern itself in normalising ways so as to create a self-governing population that was most useful to late capitalist society. Institutions such as schools play a central role in shaping the self as a governable and self-governing commodity. As a result schools have become places that normalise behaviours and attitudes rather than create an awareness of how one might live. This institutes a narrowness of possibility; it limits the ability of the self to be creative about acting in freer ways in a heavily regulated society and one in which freer and creative action are necessary for human sustainability at a crisis point in history. It is useful to think of these limiting processes of schooling as scripts that the students are forced to read from, immersing them in strategies of power that position them in narrow and constraining ways.

In Foucault’s earlier work he explored the ways that the self becomes subjectified through institutional practices such as the internment and disciplining of the body through the art of the examination. I argue that much of Foucault’s later work wrestles with this theoretical and material problem. For Foucault, what is needed is an aesthetics and ethics of the self that challenges the ‘commonsense’ discourses that produce and normalise behaviour in absurdly narrow ways. Rather, he advocates an “art of existence” that focuses not on behaviour and the frailty of the body, but on the form and processes of the relationship with the self.

272 May Op Cit. pp.4-5
It is the development of an art of existence that revolves around the question of the self, of its dependence and independence, of its universal form and of the connection it can and should establish with others, of the procedures by which it exerts control of itself, and of the way it can establish a complete supremacy over itself.”

For Foucault, this position is an ontological imperative, a call for new ways of thinking about the self, so that this will flow onto better ways of relating to others, of dealing with complex and divisive issues, of becoming more than we currently are.

The ontological challenges that Foucault presents resonate in the work of Deleuze. I see Deleuze as someone who ‘pushes’ Foucault by taking his work that focused on the ancient and the modern and extending it to deal with the hyper real complexities of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The significance of Deleuze is his insistence on thinking in new ways because thinking rhizomatically means opening up systems of knowledge through the philosophy machine to unexpected possibilities and connections. For Deleuze, there is no possibility to organise life into closed structures. Rather, Deleuze argues that philosophy is the rhizome/machine that holds the opportunity to transform life by inventing, creating and experimenting with ways of thinking of the self that have hitherto been unthinkable. Part of this transformation entails living the self in ways that are not entirely prescribed through governmentality. For Deleuze, the self was not a being but a continual becoming where life as a machine only has meaning in that it connects with other machines. Thinking machinically means reappraising the ways that the self is understood and performed. It may be that this is the best way to prepare people to think ontologically differently about the world, where forms of freedom, shifting, contingent and speculative, may be the most promising way to deal with the incredibly confusing and demanding late capitalist world. For schools, thinking machinically means stepping beyond the visions of the good student and the good citizen to recognise the self as a machine that is constantly changing and mutating in

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273 Foucault, Care of the Self Op Cit., p.238
response to connections made with other machines, however fleeting and momentary or concrete and lasting. The lived experience of students becomes more than a destination in the narrative of their lives. Rather, it becomes a continual possibility to transform life, to teach them/us to ask new questions about themselves/ourselves and their/our world, to create new possibilities for controlling and caring for the self, and through this, caring for others in freer ways. It is time for schools to push beyond institutional practices aimed at governing behaviour and action to focus on providing the setting for young people to equip themselves with practical and ethical ways of thinking that are both creative and transformative, both of the self and their world.
Chapter Three: Methodology

When you stand in front of people they judge you. The fear is that they judge you as being too good a student and that you are betraying them in some way. It is usually the lower achievers who tease and make fun.

It’s kind of like gaol. If you take out the big guy, no one is going to start on you. Most of the time at least one of the people in a fight have pissed a couple of people off. People like seeing someone get what is coming to them.
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological frame used for this study. In short a socially critical multi-site case study approach has been used to collect the data from the three school sites. One of the challenges for this study is to devise a methodological plan that adds to the examination of those practices of power that render the self governed and governable. It would seem inconsistent to me to advocate a Foucaultean analytics of power without considering how best to construct a study that would have at its basis the examination of these micropractices of power. This involves adopting the best methodological frames that allow this study to problematise commonsense notions of schooling while delivering an analytics of power that is local and informative.

The methodological frame that I use in my research is predicated upon a socially critical view of the world and those institutions that we have come to accept as part of the landscape of contemporary life. Kendall and Wickham make the point that looking at the school in a Foucaultean sense means seeing it as a result of chance: “Out of a chaotic set of possibilities for the organisation of popular education, modern forms of schooling came to gradually take a shape they still possess today.”274 Investigating the normalising vision of the good student entails problematising the organisation and processes of contemporary schooling. Methodologically it is this practice of Foucaultean problematisation of commonly accepted truths that is the core of this study. This strategy of problematisation requires asking questions of those practices that seem ‘normal’ or ‘commonsense’ but are really contingent and dynamic – those “accidents of history” we have discussed earlier.275 Choosing an approach that best allows this problematisation of the

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275 Ibid. pp.5-6
good student to occur is crucial in creating an authentic study, a study where the theory matches the methodology.

**Research Aims**

This research is about subjectivities and freedom as they occur, or could occur, in secondary schools. The aim of this research is twofold. Firstly, this work unmasks strategies and technologies of power that coalesce around the good student that function in productive ways in schools. To do this, it is important to allow students the opportunity to recount their experiences of schools and schooling as a means to better understand how the normalising vision of the good student deployed in schools is experienced by students and how they negotiate their subjectivities within the social machine.

Secondly, this research problematises the ways that students become governable through schooling in order to highlight possibilities for young people to ‘know’ themselves in freer ways with the school.

**Orientational Research – Coming Clean**

Patton names forms of critical qualitative research as orientational, because it “begins with an explicit theoretical or ideological perspective that determines what conceptual framework will direct fieldwork and the interpretation of findings”.\(^{276}\) My focus on education, as has been explained previously, is because I think it is one of the core experiences in constructing the way people think, and the values and attitudes that are seen as “commonsense”. My experiences of schooling begin as a student, continue as a teacher and develop as a researcher. Throughout these

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\(^{276}\) Patton, *Op Cit.* p.129
different, but linked, careers, I was always driven by the question “Why?” Why do schools tend to look and operate the same? Regardless of which school you go to, why is it that there is always certain groups of students who are perceived as trouble, and what is the purpose of this grouping? Why is there so little room to move in schools, to think outside the square, to challenge, to ask new questions? Why as teachers do we inevitably find ourselves becoming versions of those who taught us years before? Why is educational change often equated with curriculum change? What do young people think of the processes and practices of schooling within which they find themselves enmeshed? These have been some of the questions that have formed part of my orientation to educational research.

My educational history is neither unique nor stereotypical from an Australian perspective. I was educated at state and Catholic primary schools. My mother was a primary school teacher and thus I came from a family that valued education in an aspirational way. As a result, I was sent to an exclusive boys boarding school, where I both excelled and disappointed on a variety of scales, often at the same time. For me, school was about both frustration and exhilaration, and I was both rewarded and marginalised by the complex play of power in the school I attended. I look back now, not in anger, but with a need to question the monolithic façade of schooling that dominates so much of what we see as ‘commonsense’. In part, this was what motivated me to study teaching after finishing my Honours degree. What I recall about this study was an intense dissatisfaction with those instrumental and process knowledges that seemed to dominate my university coursework in education. This dissatisfaction continued into my teaching practice as I became increasingly aware of the governmentality of the school for both teachers and students. The idea that began to intrigue me was to wonder how students experienced school, what would they say about the ways that they were made subjects through a bewildering array of discourses and knowledge. This questioning continues to inform my orientation to education, and is found in my problematising of the discursive spaces of the good student.
Theoretically, this problematising imperative in my orientation found voice in the postmodern theories of writers such as Foucault and Deleuze, and a desire to explore what these theories offered the modernist educational world. Popkewitz advocates thinking of critical traditions in education as “a social room of different groups of people”. This room is divided into groups who follow many different theoretical traditions of critical research. These traditions range from the “pragmatic-empiricism” approach, to the “critical modernist” approach that has been advocated by some Marxists scholars. This critical approach was reinforced by the Frankfurt School, and their “Hegelian notions of change that stress struggle, conflict and contradictions”. The last major group that Popkewitz acknowledges are the “new kids” that appeared during the 1980s. These new kids “were later called ‘postmodern’, ‘poststructural’ and ‘postimperial’”. I locate my critical examination of schools and schooling within this tradition. My position is informed by researchers such as Patti Lather, who advocates “a postmodernism of resistance” as a way of ensuring that postmodernism does not become a cynical tool that denies social action. Rather, research informed by postmodernism needs to “interrupt hegemonic relations and notions”. Lather’s postmodernism of resistance corresponds with an awareness that “decentring the author” is an imperative in research to ameliorate the inscription by discourses of the author or researcher. To do this, Lather advocates the researcher becoming “multi-voiced”. This, she argues, challenges the tendency to see the author as “a singular, authoritative voice”. I incorporate this strategy in my research, by giving voice to the unvoiced, principally by creating

278 Ibid. pp.2-3
279 Ibid. p.3
280 Ibid.
281 Ibid. p.10
282 Ibid. p.1
283 Lather, Op Cit. p.9
284 Ibid.
285 Ibid.
spaces for students to be heard and to tell their own stories that are central in their self-governing.

Symes and Preston point out that schools are a moral technology, a:

technology of the self, instrumental in generating a disciplinary society, a society of subjugated subjects who enact their own subjugation in their daily practices. But the production of this society has also been accompanied by the production of difference for, schooling has been a technology concerned with the selection and categorisation of human beings.  

Research supports the notion that schools are places where social inequities are produced, reinforced and deployed in a number of ways. I see the institution of the school as one that has been set up to create certain kinds of students as a means of maintaining the status quo, of inscribing and reinscribing the forms of privilege and disadvantage that dominate so much of Western society. In this sense I agree with critical researchers such as Carspecken and Apple, when they argue:

Education does not stand alone, a neutral instrumentality somehow above the ideological conflicts of our society. Rather, it is deeply implicated in the unequal cultural, economic and political relations that dominate our society. Education has been a major arena in which dominance is reproduced and contested in the creation of the common sense of a people.

By examining power relations in schools through a socially critical theoretical perspective, I am advocating “not just to study and understand society but rather to critique and change society”.

Through problematising the vision of the good student, I want my research to become part of a body of literature that advocates social and institutional change to address problematics of privilege and disadvantage. I see schools as places where certain types of power are deployed to maintain this status quo, and where the rhetoric of the good student is placed within a nexus of

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286 Symes and Preston, Op Cit. p.273
288 Patton, Op Cit. p.131
power relations that construct certain kinds of subjectivities. Through unmasking these notions of the good student, I seek to understand how different sites construct these sensibilities. Like Popkewitz, I conceive of research that seeks to challenge the common sense assumptions behind current practices, and challenge conventional views of schooling. Interrogating the dynamics of power relations through the construct of the ‘good’ student is part of this challenge. This position reflects Foucault’s work that problematised power and subjectivities. Foucault argued:

I would say that we try to bring to light what has remained until now the most hidden, the most occulted, the most deeply invested experience in the history of our culture – power relations. In this series of lectures, I would like to show how the political relations have been established and deeply implanted in our culture, giving rise to a series of phenomena that can be explained only if they are related not to economic structures, to the economic relations of production, but to the power relations that permeate the whole fabric of our existence.

The vision of the good student is a complex and challenging topic to investigate. Power is constantly changing, evolving and producing new experiences amongst all players in schools. Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that there is not a single, stable locus of power. Rather, there is an infinite number of experiences of power in schools, and the challenge is to adopt a methodology that allows these multiple realities and experiences to be investigated. As well as this it is important to select a methodology that can be informed by the theoretical frame previously articulated. For this reason, I have adopted a qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative research “emphasises conducting detailed examinations of cases that arise in the natural flow of social life.” As relationships of power are manifestly about social relationships that produce and negotiate power, a qualitative paradigm best fits an investigation of these relationships.

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290 Foucault, “Truth”, Op Cit. p.17
Case Study Research

Case study research is a form of qualitative research that involves prolonged engagement at the site by the researcher. Case study research is not, in itself, a clearly defined ‘method’. Rather, it is “a way of bounding a variety of approaches to provide a detailed picture” so that the research is flexible, informative and useful. The cases to be examined in this research are the three school sites. Case study research provides extensive data across fewer cases, where the cases can be “an individual, an event, an institution or even a whole national society.” This methodological approach allows a rich and detailed snapshot of the lived experiences of power at the three school sites. Because case study research allows flexibility in devising data collection methods, I believe it the most appropriate to unmask the ways that the normalising vision of the good student as it is produced, deployed and contested in a variety of school sites. I see case study research as essentially “expansionist” research. By this I mean that the detailed data collected on a few sites opens up the issue to further inquiry. With the schools as the cases, varied methods and information collecting strategies were used and the data collected is richer for these multiple collecting strategies.

Case study research is imbued with a sense of social critique, that it asks questions about the structures of social groups and groupings, and that it contains a “need to have an impact on social problems.” Whilst there is not a rich tradition in qualitative research of socially critical case studies, many socially critical researchers have adopted similar fieldwork methodologies such as

292 Jennifer Bryce, “Reflections on Planning a Case Study” in Green et al. (Ed) Slices of Life: Qualitative Research Snapshots, RMIT University Press, Melbourne p.50
293 Ibid. p.51
294 Ibid.
295 Martyn Hammersley and Roger Gomm, “Introduction” in, Roger Gomm, Martyn Hammersley and Peter Foster (Eds); Case Study Method: Key Issues, Key Texts, Sage Publications: London p.3
ethnography to understand and potentially change areas of injustice. However, ethnographies explain cultures and the detail and level of immersion required makes it extremely difficult to do a multi-site ethnography. For this reason, I have constructed a research methodology that combined the socially critical theoretical tradition with the flexibility of case study research.

The case study has a rich history in disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, education and psychology. However, along with this tradition has come a sense of confusion as to what actually constitutes case study research. Defining case study research is something of a problem when addressing issues of qualitative research. For too long, the term ‘case study’ has been equated “with all forms of qualitative research”. However, I believe that this conflation of case study research with qualitative research detracts from our ability to utilise case study research as a more focused tool for social enquiry. Bryce says that part of the reason for this confusion is that there are no fixed rules for what constitutes a case study. “It is important to stress here that ‘case study’ is not, in itself, a research method. It is a way of bounding a variety of approaches to provide a detailed picture of a site for a particular purpose.”

For Stake, there are a number of significant characteristics of case study research. Firstly, “the case is a specific, a complex, functioning thing”. The case is selected because the researcher seeks to understand it, because “we will have a puzzlement, a need for general understanding, and feel that we may get insight into the question by studying a particular case.” What we seek to understand determines the type of case study that we do. Typically, the case study researcher is an observer who uses observation as a tool to “probe deeply and to analyse intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view to establishing

298 See for example Peter MacLaren’s *Schooling as a Ritual Performance*, as a critical appraisal of the culture of a school.
299 *Bryce, Op Cit.* p.49
300 *Ibid.* p.51
302 *Ibid.* p.3
generalisations about the wider population to which that unit belongs”. My concern is with the ways that commonsense notions such as the good student are productive of certain types of citizenry that may not best be suited to the challenges of the post-capitalist world: Knowable, governable, disciplined and self-monitoring. Through my use of case study research, I intend to examine how the functioning of the good student is instrumental in creating students as subjects.

Cohen and Manion differentiate between two kinds of observation in case study research, participant and non-participant. As the name suggests, the participant observer engages in the very activity that they set out to study. This can mean going undercover with the group, or it can mean in some way demonstrating a membership with the group being studied. Non-participant observers “stand aloof from the group activities and eschew group membership”. Some researchers advocate the participant observer, because it is “eminently suitable to many of the problems that the educational investigator faces”. However, I contend that there are two serious issues with the notion of the participant as observer in my research. Firstly, I believe that students would not accept a grown man (myself) as a part of their world in its entirety. I would not be able to be a participant in their world because, clearly, I am not a school student. However, if we take the idea that the participant researcher is involved in their world, and in some way constructs a relationship with the participants, then by interviewing them, I am in some limited way participating in their experiences. For this reason it is also not possible for me to claim to be a non-participant observer. I see the binary of participant and non-participant as too rigid to be useful in my research. Secondly, there are ethical considerations regarding participant disclosure. Whilst I acknowledge that naming myself as researcher interested in examining relations of power found in schools have an influence on the responses I get from the students, pretending to

304 Ibid. p.106
305 Ibid.
306 Ibid.p.107
be doing something else is tantamount to deception. As Bryce says, “I feel uncomfortable about this sort of perception at a site where data gathering could become intrusive.”307 For this reason, I name myself, what I am doing and for what reason throughout my stay in each of the sites. The argument I make parallels that made by the feminist researcher Anne Oakley. When writing about interviewing from a feminist perspective, Oakley stated:

A feminist methodology of social science requires, further, that the ‘mythology’ of the hygienic research with its accompanying mystification of the researcher and the researched as objective instruments of data production be replaced by the recognition that personal involvement is more than dangerous bias – it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives.308

Like Oakley I do not see how I can be anything else but involved in the research. Naming myself as a non-participant is more an intent than a reality. I chose not to attend classes with the students, so I was not a participant. I did, however, ask them to give me information about their worlds, and this makes me more than a non-participant.

The Collective Case Study

Stake advocates three types of case studies: the intrinsic case study, the instrumental case study and the collective case study. For the purposes of my research, I utilise the collective case study as a way to understand the relations of power in schools by looking at three case study sites, schools both alike and different to each other in certain ways. To understand this, I need a diverse group of schools. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, I believe that a collective case study provides richer information because it comes from three sites rather than one. The research is more generalisable because the data gathered is from more than one site.309 The three sites also

307 Bryce, Op Cit. p.55
allow richer triangulation of the data, to make it more likely that the student voices being heard articulate some sense of a shared body of experience across the sites. Whilst all schools are different, and all students are different, the opposite is also true. All schools share some similarities, and each student shares one common experience, that of mass, compulsory schooling itself. The perspective of that experience is unique to each student, but by voicing that experience, a better sense of the types of lived realities found in schools can be gained. In this sense, a collective case study is more advantageous because it gives a wider understanding of the concepts studied than a single case or ethnographic research. As my research is linked to my socially critical perspective, I believe that the richer the information collected, the more powerful the critique of the ways that student subjectivities are produced, negotiated and contested in schools.

**Criticisms of Case Studies**

For many years case study research has been criticised by researchers, many of them quantitative researchers, for being too ‘soft’, little more than interesting stories that lack the rigidity required of serious research. Wellington identifies three objections to case study research. They are; generalisability, validity and sampling. Generalisability is the extent to which the findings of the case study may be applied to, and have meaning for, other groups and individuals in society. This is sometimes called external validity. Woods argues that:

> Accounts emerging from observation work are often accused of being impressionistic, subjective, biased and idiosyncratic. Interestingly … much so-called ‘hard data’ is suspect in that often statistical accounts have been accepted as data without seeking to uncover the criteria and processes involved in the compilation.

Stoecker suggests that the reason that many researchers are suspicious about generalisability from case study data is because there is no instrument to measure the external validity claimed by

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310 Wellington, *Op Cit.* p.97
Many researchers are also uncomfortable with the idea that findings drawn from the study with a small number of participants, or even individual cases, lack the breadth to be able to say much about the wider population.

Internal validity is the extent to which what we discover is as genuine as possible. As a researcher, the methods and instruments that we use all have inherent faults that could tend to corrupt the usefulness of the data that we collect. Also, case studies have often been criticised for containing the bias of the researcher, because the results are developed retrospectively. Lastly, sampling is the way that the participants were chosen, bearing in mind that different people often have different perspectives and experiences.

In response to these three charges, I would like to explain how my study design contains attempts to make the information as genuine as possible. Firstly, Yin suggests that the way to deal with issues of generalisability is to do case studies at more than one site. By choosing to examine three schools, my study has a higher degree of generalisability. Stoeker argues that “we can more confidently generalise if we can show our generalisations apply to a diverse array of cases”. The research design adopted by this study calls for multiple perspectives as a way of ensuring many voices are heard. As well as this, the use of three sites has the added bonus of being able to triangulate the data. Triangulation is the idea found in qualitative data “that it is better to look at something from several angles than to look at it in only one way”. This was done by utilising a range of sources of research, investigating three school sites and grouping students into four groups at each site.

312 Stoeker, Op Cit. p.91
313 Ibid.
315 Stoeker, Op Cit. p.92
316 Neuman, Op Cit. p.124
317 Ibid.
The internal validity is a more challenging design problem, because often we do not know how our presence in the field is having an impact on the information gathered. The first part of this problem is dealt with the use of focus group research. Diffusing the asymmetries of power by having a group of similar interests answering open questions, the tendency to give what the researcher wants to hear is much less of an issue. As well as this, during the conduct of the study I was at pains to adopt an open, friendly attitude that was intended to make the students feel comfortable giving their opinions.

The sampling issue is in my mind an issue of perspective. By having four focus groups of three students who are identified as belonging to a group who share similar characteristics, I got different perspectives. As has been stated earlier, I have borrowed from a protocol I did earlier in naming the groups; the Sports, the Rebels, the Achievers and the Quiet students. This was highly significant in providing varying experiences and perspectives about the normalising vision of the good student. For these reasons, my research design is able to answer the challenges to provide rich data that are both authentic and thought-provoking.

**Conduct**

Wellington identifies three distinct stages in the case study.\(^ \text{318} \) The first is the case data. The case data is the totality of the data collected, including pages of notes, complete transcripts of interviews, documents and photos. The case record is the second stage, “a lightly edited, ordered, indexed and public version of the case data”.\(^ \text{319} \) The case study is the “product of the field

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\( ^{318} \text{Ibid} \ p.96 \)

\( ^{319} \text{Ibid.} \)
worker’s reflective engagement with an individual case record”. The case study should be easy to read and accessible for a wide range of audiences.

In the collective case study, Wellington argues that there is a fourth stage in the case study. After the case study has been written up, there is the seeking of “generalisations across case records”. This is one of the potential benefits of doing collective case study research. By generalising I am not attempting to compare or rank the school sites, rather focus on those practices, technologies and discourses that occur across the sites, or appear uniquely at one of the sites. Traditional comparison has at its base a determination to evaluate. This research is not aimed at looking at the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ schools. Rather it is about understanding unmasking powerful notions like the ‘good’ student that we have accepted as self-evident. To do this, student voices need to be compared across schools, not to evaluate but to enumerate practices and experiences. If there are similar findings at all three sites, chances are higher that these could be common in many schools. Doing each site independently also provides the opportunity to reflect on research procedures, what is working and what is not, so that the research design can be further developed at each site.

Sites

The research was conducted at three co-educational schools. The selection of case sites was based on two criteria. The two criteria are that the size of the schools is similar, and that they have enough systemic variation to offer different perspectives on the visions of the good student employed at the school. In my previous research, the size of the student body and the school as a whole was nominated by students as the most significant factor influencing their feelings towards

320 Ibid.
321 Ibid.
their school. Selecting schools with divergent characteristics is intended to provide more generalisable data. When examining the issues of power in schools, the literature tends to suggest that as most schools are basically structured the same, power should be largely articulated and experienced the same way in schools. I investigated how the rhetoric of the good student is subtly different at each of the three sites, if at all and how this is experienced by the students.

Each site was examined over an extended period. Familiarising myself with the school community required three to four weeks of fairly constant exposure to each school community. The interviewing process took anywhere from three to eight weeks depending upon a diverse range of factors. The time spent in each school varied from slightly less that a term to two terms.

For logistical reasons, each school was visited separately. The study began in 2005, and one school was studied at the beginning of Term Two, while another was studied at the end of Term Three and the beginning of Term Four. This five month gap between the sites at first glance appears to present a problem to the internal validity of the study. The charge could be levelled that as the maturity level of the students changes, as they become more comfortable with the challenges of Year 11, their responses to the questions could also change. In response to these possible criticisms, it is obvious that a researcher can only be in one place at one time. Schools are such dynamic, changing environments that no two schools can ever be entirely comparable, even if they are approached on the same day at the same time. Each school is unique, so any attempt to manipulate an exact comparison is pointless. However, given the nature of case study what is important is that the context of the school is explained, so that significant events and influences can be taken into account when the data are being interpreted. This contextualising is

322 Thompson, Op Cit. pp.14-15
crucial in creating the flavour of each school. The third school was examined at the beginning of 2006.

**Structure**

If we return to Bryce’s position that the case study is not a method, but rather a bounding of approaches, then the research boundaries I set become crucial in the types of information I gather. This idea is also informed by the work of Lidell who argues for a case study design that prioritises “the use of multiple sources of evidence [that] enables a wide range of issues to be addressed.”323 In my case study approach, I identified six forms of data collection:

1. Field notes
2. Discourse analysis of key school documentation
3. Focus group interviews of students
4. Interviews with the principal
5. Discourse analysis of the physical architecture of the schools
6. Situational analysis of the geographic areas of the schools.

**Field Notes**

The field notes taken focused on the examples of the lived realities of the ‘good’ student. By this I mean those technologies and comportments of the self that seemed at play within visions of the good student. My field notes focussed on the students in their natural setting. I looked at where the students congregated and how they congregated, how students interacted with each other and

323 Margaret Lidell, “Identifying Research Themes through Progressive Analysis”, in Green *Op Cit.* p.61
with staff, what actions drew approval and/or censure and from whom and how were students presenting themselves to the machines of surveillance at their school. The purpose of these field notes was to get a sense of how the students comport themselves, or what they consider to be good and appropriate in their social negotiations at school. Carspecken and Apple advocate this as being the first stage of the research, what they call the monological.324 At this stage, the researcher passively observes, as a way of entering the setting of the student world. These field notes were condensed and included in the results chapters.

My immersion into each school generally began the same way. The first stage was to make contact with the principal, and through a meeting to outline the purpose of my study and the potential benefits for the school community. If the principal was receptive, then I asked the principal to write a letter that gave me permission to use the school as a site for my research. These letters were also needed to meet ethical guidelines established by Murdoch University. After my study was approved by the university, I then asked to speak at a staff meeting for a short period of time where I introduced myself and the parameters of my study on the good student. I asked at this meeting for volunteers who would be interested in allowing me to visit their Year Eleven class to observe the classroom and students. In each of the three schools I was made welcome by the staff and was able to pick and choose the subjects that I observed. One of my criteria was to try to divide my time in each school equally between TEE and non-TEE classes.325 I observed various classes to build an idea of what kind of school each site is; what discourses emerged as powerful, what subject positions were valorised and rewarded. As I was observing these classes, I noted those strategies and practices that Kemmis, Cole and Suggett suggest represent different ‘codes’ or orientations that schools deploy that reveal “different views of the

324 Carspecken, Op Cit. p.513
325 In Western Australia, post-compulsory education is divided into two strands, Tertiary Entrance Examinations (TEE) and subjects assessed without an external examination (non-TEE). Generally, TEE is considered to be more academic while non-Tee is considered to be more vocational.
role of education in society”. A description of these orientations to the curriculum has been attached as Appendix A. Through this, valuable information was gathered as to the strategies of power that were deployed in a variety of settings at different times. At lunch times and at recess I spent time in the yards with the students. If they approached me to talk to me (which happened on six occasions in the three sites), I was honest with them and told them I was a researcher from Murdoch University who was studying the ways that schools construct visions of the good student.

**Discourse Analysis of School Documentation**

The official documents of institutions can provide useful information about the structures, cultures and values of each institution. Schools are places where there is a myriad of documented policies, each of which can be analysed. The reason for examining these documents is to understand the relationships between the formal goals of these schools as related to student attitudes and experiences at each site. Woods identifies three types of documents in schools; official, personal and questionnaires. In my research I restricted myself to examining official documents that exist in the public domain, because of issues of privacy and access. Confidential student records were not considered as data for these reasons.

Woods identifies many types of official documents: “registers, timetables, minutes of meetings, planning papers, lesson plans and notes, confidential documents on pupils, school handbooks, newspapers and journals, school records, files and statistics, notice boards, exhibitions, official letters, textbooks, exercise books, examination papers, work cards, blackboard work,

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photographs”.328 This is a near exhaustive list, and it is impossible to examine all of these. I investigate the following forms of official documentation; school handbook, Vision Statement, school web page and the official school policies such as the Discipline Policy, Homework Policy and Uniform Policy. I have chosen these four because I feel that they provide rich information on the school as a case. Woods makes the point that it is these types of documents that “clearly set out a school’s aims and rules, and provide a yardstick for estimating what constitutes normality, and what deviance”.329 What is also important in this document analysis is that much can be learnt from omission as well as what has been included. As well, these documents present a version of the truth, a way that the school authority is carefully articulating how it wants to be seen by the wider community.

When examining these official records, it is important to remember that rarely are school documents complete, and also rarely do they tell the whole story. These documents are useful in outlining how the school views its role in the creation of the good student, and the ways that student are encouraged to become policers of their selves – self-governing, self-regulating and self-aware. Perhaps what these documents give us is an awareness of how the school wants to be seen in how it presents itself – the comportment of the institution if you will (and if such a thing is possible). Critical discourse analysis was used to highlight these visions as contained in the official documents. This approach to discourse analysis “pays much attention to power relations and ideologies which are precipitated in discourse”.330 In this light, official school documents were invaluable in revealing “institutionalised modes of thinking and social belief” that are produced through the relations of power in any given school.331

328 Ibid.
329 Ibid. p.95
Focus Groups

The focus group interview is an integral part of developing a study that gives information on the lived experiences of students in schools. It is a form of research that is largely qualitative. This means that the emphasis of the study is less on an objectivist experimental methodology of research and more on specific cases and examples examined in context. As Neumann says, “The language of qualitative research is one of interpretation.” Focus group research is based on a special style of interview in which the researcher gathers together people in small groups to discuss one or more issues for about an hour or two. The group is gathered to focus their attention on a collective task, whether it is viewing a video, examining documents, discussing a specific set of questions, or some other task. What is important about the focus group is that it encourages participants to talk to other members of the group about their ideas and experiences of the issue that focuses the group. This allows the participants to generate their own questions, develop the frames and concepts at issue and challenge and extend those issues through the process of group interaction. For this reason, focus groups were used to allow respondents to explore their perceptions, attitudes and experiences of the ‘good’ student at each site.

There are a number of advantages to using focus groups as a research method. Firstly, it allows groups to explore complex thoughts and experiences in an interesting and stimulating way. Secondly, it is a useful technique to gain information from those members of a community that are often disempowered by the context that they are in. This is obviously useful for student-

333 Ibid. p. 144
334 Ibid. p. 274
centred research involving school students and other school community members in a hierarchical school institution. Thirdly, focus groups can also be empowering for the participants, promoting a friendly and engaging atmosphere. Morgan and Krueger state that: “Focus groups convey a humane sensitivity, a willingness to listen without being defensive, and respect for opposing views that is unique and beneficial in these… environments.\textsuperscript{337} The significance of this is that focus groups can either help to reduce tensions in emotionally charged situations or can make respondents feel positive about their shared experience through the research method.

Not only does the focus group method have benefits for the participants: it also has benefits for the researcher. Perhaps the most logistically important benefit is its efficiency. It allows a significant amount of information to be gathered in a relatively short time frame. Focus groups can de-centre the power asymmetry between researcher and the researched, by making the researcher less significant than in other forms of research, such as in the face-to-face interview. It is hoped that this advantage of focus group research helps to circumvent the problem of my being a teacher within the school context and, as such, being seen as a representative of the hierarchy of the school who expects certain predetermined responses to questions.

Traditionally, focus groups range in size from four to ten participants, but it is not unusual to have only three participants.\textsuperscript{338} For the purposes of this study the number of participants in each focus group is restricted to three. Krueger identifies that the smaller the social group, the greater the ability for the respondents to have their voice heard. However, he does go on to say that smaller focus groups can result in a smaller pool of ideas for the group to consider.\textsuperscript{339} In terms of logistics, however, the smaller focus group can be much more easily accommodated in terms of

\textsuperscript{337} Ibid. p.18
\textsuperscript{339} Ibid.
space and time. It also assists in more accurate transcriptions of the tape-recorded data. Because of the nature of the research being conducted, and the age of the majority of the participants, I contend that smaller groups allow individual voices to be heard in a non-threatening environment. This is particularly important given that some groups of students being interviewed may not be used to having their opinions about their schooling experiences valued.

The literature on focus groups recommends that focus groups are conducted in series. This means that multiple groups should be used to allow researchers to explore patterns and trends across groups. By conducting focus groups in series it alleviates the potential of the researcher getting a ‘cold’ group – that is, a group that in some way is not prepared to participate. As well as this, focus groups can be influenced by a number of external and internal factors that can seriously undermine reliability. For example, a dominant individual can influence the reactions of the participants in a single group. Over a series of groups, however, the impact of these internal and external threats to validity can be minimised.

Role of the Group Moderator

In the focus group research I was the moderator of each focus group. In focus group research, the role of the group facilitator is very important. Krueger prefers to use the term moderator rather than interviewer in focus group research. This is because of the special function of the moderator within the group, namely “guiding the discussion.” The purpose of the moderator is to let the conversation flow in the focus groups. According to Krueger there are a number of important skills that the moderator must possess. Firstly, they must have experience of, and be

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340 Ibid
341 Ibid. pp 100-101
342 Ibid. p.100
able to interpret the language, terminology and gestures of the cultural group(s) being moderated. Secondly, moderators should avoid appearing judgemental or favouring particular opinions within groups. Thirdly, the moderator needs to be prepared to sit back and allow the group to moderate themselves as much as possible.\footnote{Barbour, \textit{Op Cit.} pp.12-14}

Perhaps most significantly for this focus group research is the persona I adopted as moderator. According to Barbour one of the reasons for adopting the focus group method is that it: “may ‘dilute’ the effect of the researcher’s own persona because group participants are usually addressing each other as much as (if not more) than the researcher.”\footnote{Ibid. p.14} This should enhance the reliability the study. It is expected that the nature of the focus groups should allow students to feel comfortable, and it should work to negate any of the repercussions of the Hawthorne Effect.

The Hawthorne Effect is a well-known phenomenon in certain forms of social research in which the subjects respond to the influence of the researcher and seek to give what they perceive as the correct answers.\footnote{Neuman, \textit{Op Cit.} p.240} This form of reactivity is an issue in this research. However, two things should work together to prevent this having too great an effect. Firstly, as stated above, the social dimensions of the group dilute the impact of the researcher. Secondly, as there are no correct answers to the interview questions participants were required to draw from their own experiences to respond to the questions. The open nature of the questions increases the authenticity of the responses given by the interviewees.

**Sampling and Sample Size**

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\footnote{Barbour, \textit{Op Cit.} pp.12-14}
\footnote{Ibid. p.14}
\footnote{Neuman, \textit{Op Cit.} p.240}
In each school I interviewed four focus groups of three Year 11 students, using purposive sampling to get specific groups from the student cohort. By purposive sampling I mean a process where the researcher “wants to identify particular types of cases for in-depth investigation”. Purposive sampling allowed unique cases, perspectives and experiences to be targeted, enriching the quantity of the data gathered. Year 11 students formed the population for a number of reasons. Firstly, by Year 11 students have had extensive experience of the secondary education system, and this enables them to be aware of issues such as power and discipline within the school. Secondly, by Year 11 the majority of students have a well-formed view of their schooling experiences that they have been developing since early childhood. I believe that they are at least beginning to be critical of their world and the values and attitudes that they hold or are held around them. Thirdly, they do not have the time constraints of Year 12 students and are generally still connected to their school rather than Year 12s who are often already in the process of separating themselves from their school.

To decide which students to interview, I used a protocol I developed in a previous study. When communicating to the case sites about the types of students that I wanted to interview, I nominated four groups, Those groups were the ‘Sporting Achievers’, the ‘Rebels’, the ‘Academic Achievers’ and the ‘Quiet’ students. I utilise these names of groups of students, not because they provide an exhaustive list of student positionalities within schools, but because it is most likely that in some way schools recognise certain students as having some of these characteristics. As well, choosing a divergent set of groupings increases the width of the perspectives of schooling. Each of these groups inhabits a different space in the nexus of power relations that makes up schools. These groups are not meant to be definitive or exhaustive. Rather, they offer a way to

346 Neuman, Op Cit. p.198
347 Thompson, Op Cit.
gather information from students who represent a cross-section of the population, to give breadth to the subjectivities that are then able to recount their experiences of school.

A variety of perspectives gives stronger data. I have advocated going for this approach to delineate student groups whereby I allow the school authorities to select those students for each group because this is an important and powerful example of how students appear to be positioned within the school. In my mind, the choice of groups is less of a value judgement and more of an awareness of the multitude of experiences and realities that intersect each student’s life. By using this purposive sampling, the students selected at each school provide a comparison point for the practices and strategies deployed in each school. This is a way of comparing student responses between the sites.

To choose the individual student participants, each site set up a small group of staff to choose potential students for each group. In each school, members of the panel were either the Principal or Deputy Principal and the Year 11 Coordinator as these people have a good working knowledge of the ways that students perform in each school – their ‘faciality’ as Deleuze would argue. Selection of students is another way that the micropractices of power can be examined and the contextual ‘flavours’ of each school emerge.

Once students were selected, approached and had given their consent, the focus groups were scheduled to appear in class time. There were three participants in each focus group. The same questions were read and answered in each of the student focus groups. These questions are attached as Appendix B.
At the same time as the student focus groups were being conducted, there was a detailed interview with the school principal, asking questions that were largely similar to those of the student focus groups. A list of questions is attached as Appendix C.

As these research methods were being completed, the case record was written up. Once this was done, the process began of sifting through the information to construct a case study, giving the information required to build a rich and informative account of each of the three cases.

**Physical Architecture**

The physical space of the school can be a useful tool in gaining information about the educational philosophy of the school and the ways a school views its obligations to the wider society in light of those educational principles. Symes and Preston discuss the spatial values associated with the buildings in which schooling is conducted:

> Space manifests itself in various ways within the school setting. The first and most obvious of these is the architecture of the school … We shall suggest that the technology of modern schooling that has developed in the early modern age and which is primarily associated with the invention of the classroom as a regulated form of educational space, not only facilitates the surveillance of the student body, but is also instrumental in creating difference and deference among that body.\(^{348}\)

In the examination of the physical architecture of the schools, I obtained copies of the school blueprint, and analysed how the spatialisation of the school building reflected on the nexus of power within the school. Then a visual description of the types of buildings was developed, to examine the underlying “spatial values” that informed each building.\(^{349}\) Lastly, an after-hours tour of the school was used to audit each classroom, looking at how the physical spaces of the

\(^{348}\) Symes, *Op Cit.* pp.196-197  
\(^{349}\) *Ibid.* p.195
classrooms are ordered. From this, a sense of the hidden values, discourses and technologies emerges.

**Situational Analysis**

Using sources such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics, a socioeconomic picture of the drawing area of the school emerge. This allows the case to be contextualised so that a clearer understanding of the community expectations emerges. Whilst the evidence gathered can never be complete, this explanation is useful in locating the school within a broad social and economic generalisation. Data gathered focuses on indicators such as unemployment percentage, percentage of types of occupations, average weekly earnings and level of education to contextualise the area that each school draws most of its students from.

The significance of the contextual analysis is to give a snapshot of the area in which the school is situated to provide a flavour to the reader. It is not intended to draw large-scale assumptions and generalisations.

**Ethical Considerations**

The prime ethical consideration in this research is that none of the participants are adversely affected in any way by this research. To ensure that this is the case, a number of safeguards have been built into the research. Firstly, the names of the schools and the participants have been altered so as to protect their anonymity. These names were protected, so that only the researcher knows their true identity. Secondly, each participant will had an opportunity to read through their
interview, so that they could check that their response had faithfully captured the intent of their answer.

Participation was voluntary. Each participant was required to sign a consent form, and if they were under 18, their parents or guardians have to sign for them. Attached to the consent form is an informative letter that spells out the strategies taken to ensure that the participants receive no adverse effects. This letter has been included as Appendix C. Each participant knew that they could withdraw consent at any time with no repercussions whatsoever. One student at Belmont took advantage of this clause and asked to be released from the study and was relaced by another student. Further, all the research conducted conformed to Murdoch University’s Ethics guidelines for research on human subjects.

All of the focus groups were recorded and the audiotapes were transcribed by a professional secretarial service. Participants were notified of this in the consent letter. They were also told that their privacy was assured, there would be no information given in the study that would allow them to be identified. All of the records will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office and destroyed after a period of five years after publication.

Participants were also informed that the results of this research study would be disseminated in various forms to the different participants. At each case site I offered to go through an brief summary of my findings for the student cohort of Year Eleven students. At no school was this option taken up. The principal of each case site was given a written summary and the offer was made to present this data to the staff of each school as a form of Professional Development. Currently this option has been utilised by two of the three schools, albeit in presentations to the School Executive consisting of the principal, deputys and interested others such as school chaplains or year coordinators. One school has to this date not taken up the offer in any form
is hoped that this research benefits the local school community in their planning and their pedagogical strategies.

Summary

Case study research is a form of qualitative data that has a variety of forms. Collective case studies are research where more than one case is studied as a way of improving generalisability. Case study research involves using a variety of methods to gain a rich context of the case being studied. Whilst there is a limited tradition of socially critical case study research, being socially critical in qualitative research is a research tradition that has many advocates in the wider research community. By doing socially critical case study research, I hope to understand relations of power as they occur in schools. This research is about entering the domain of schools and schooling and asking questions about privilege, marginalisation and equities. By collecting data examining discourses of ‘good’ students in schools, I aim to advance a vision of schools as places where more possibilities for freedoms occur for both students and the wider school community.
Chapter Four:
Tuart College

The historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the body was born, [which was directed] at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A ‘political economy’, which was also a ‘mechanics of power’, was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others’ bodies... Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced ‘docile’ bodies.\textsuperscript{350}

In discipline, punishment is only one element of a double system: gratification-punishment. And by the play of this quantification, this circulation of awards and debits, thanks to the continuous calculation of the plus and minus points, the disciplinary apparatuses hierarchised the good and the ‘bad’ subjects in relation to one another.\textsuperscript{351}

\textsuperscript{350} Foucault, \textit{Discipline Op Cit.} pp.137-138
\textsuperscript{351} \textit{Ibid.} pp.180-181
CHAPTER FOUR

Introduction

Tuart College is a Catholic Secondary School located in the South East Metropolitan area of Perth.\textsuperscript{352} It is currently undergoing a transition from a five stream to a six stream school. In 2005 there were approximately 100 staff members at the school and 922 students from Years Eight through to Twelve. In Year Eleven there are 153 students. There are no Aboriginal students in Year Eleven. The College motto is “Christ my Light”, a personal expression of spirituality in line with its Catholic ethos. The school was commissioned in 1984 in what was then the urban/rural fringe to the East of Perth. Surrounding the school are large homesteads that run horses and some agriculture. Over the years the urban sprawl has overtaken Tuart College, but it is still possible to see the transition from semi-rural living to urban living.

The school is located within the Town A, an area 20 kilometres inland from the Perth GPO.\textsuperscript{353} In the 2001 Census, there were 16,432 persons living in Town A. The median age of the population was 32. The median age of the state-wide population was 33. The unemployment rate in Town A was 10.7\% compared with a state rate of 7.5\%. Of the Town A population, 2.7\% held a Bachelor degree and only 0.2\% held a postgraduate degree from a tertiary institution. Across the state, 9.4\% held a Bachelor degree and 1.5\% held a postgraduate degree. The median family income was $700-799 per week. Across the state this figure was $800-999 per week. These statistics, while incomplete, do present a picture of a suburb that could be described as being below the state average according to a variety of economic indicators.\textsuperscript{354} This is further reinforced by real

\textsuperscript{352} To protect the identity of the school and participants, the school has been given the pseudonym “Tuart College”, named after a type of tree indigenous to Western Australia.

\textsuperscript{353} The name of the local government area has also been changed to “Town A”.

\textsuperscript{354} All information gathered was from the 2001 Census information gathered at the web address http://www.abs.gov.au. Date accessed 4/7/06
estate information that put the median house price in Town A at $212,000 compared with the state average of $353,000.\textsuperscript{355}

**Architecture**

The newness of the school is reflected in the buildings and architecture of the school. It is set on a large 20 hectare block of land with much space on the property not being used.\textsuperscript{356} The school is still in the process of expansion. In 2006 site works began on a Performing Arts Centre which was opened in 2007.

There are three entrances to the school. The main entrance is a windy driveway of about 600 metres through some straggly bush to the front of the school. It would be a stretch to say that the grounds are manicured. There is a staff car park to the left. The driveway ends at the Administration Block. There other two entrances are off a side street. These are predominantly for student set down and pick up. One entrance takes the students to the back of the Manual Arts rooms. The other takes students past the Gymnasium.

After the staff car park that runs off the main entrance, the grounds become more formal, with manicured lawns and rose bushes the dominant feature. To the left of the Administration Building is the Chapel. One of the things that stands out about the Chapel, and about all building at Tuart College, is they are functional rather than impressive. They are all single level buildings built out of a dark brown brick with corrugated roofing. Each building comprises a number of classrooms and offices. There are covered walkways connecting buildings. These buildings are roughly arranged in a hexagonal shape with the Library forming the centre of the hexagon. There is a


\textsuperscript{356} Tuart College Website
distance between each building of around 100 metres, giving the sense that each building is a self-contained space. Each building houses a subject area. For example, B Block contains the Society and Environment classes while C Block houses the English classes. These buildings also double as House blocks where homerooms are. The overall effect of the architecture of the school is to promote a sense of functionality, of order, of control. One gets the sense that the buildings promote a ‘technicist’ educational approach and that the architecture reflects an ethic in the school more aligned to the needs of the workforce than that of the aesthetic of the classical school aimed at more conservative educational philosophies.357

What is most obvious is that the structure of the school promotes a sense of controlled space, always open to the panoptical effect of the ‘gaze machine’.358 Schools are obviously places where the individual is measured, but they are also places where the individual is observed. This potential for observation has the effect of leading the individual into the correct comportment of the self. I read that Tuart College is a school whose architecture highlights the sense of the gaze for those in large, potentially uncontrollable groups, yet also allows many places for small groups to hide away from the swagger of the more dominant groups. What I see is that Tuart is a school aimed at controlling the students in a particular way, with the aim being to manage the student population into being disciplined – a prerequisite for a controlled and controllable population.

The College Organiser

One of the distinct features of Tuart College is the College Organiser which is distributed, in slightly different forms, to each student and staff member of the College. This document carefully sets out the mission of the college, and establishes what is considered acceptable and

357 Symes and Preston, Op Cit. p.177
358 Ibid. p.189
unacceptable within the school. The organiser has a variety of functions: it communicates the school’s expectations regarding behaviour, homework and uniform. It codifies the potential ways that each student can be disciplined in the school. It also acts as a homework diary where students record the tasks that they must complete. It acts as a tool of communication between staff and parents, with parents of lower school students expected to sign the organiser weekly. For the school, the Organiser is an official document which “will help you in the organisation of your study programme”.\footnote{Tuart College Student Organiser, Tuart College 2005, p.2} Students are “expected to take their organiser to class with them” so as to ensure that all of the above-mentioned practices can occur.\footnote{Ibid.} In this sense, I find it useful to think of the Organiser as a document that outlines what is to be governed and how this governance is to take place. There are sections set aside for governance of the body such as the Uniform Policy, there are sections that outline the correct comportment of the self such as the Behaviour and Discipline Policies, and other sections that outline how and what the individual is to learn such as the Study Skills section. There is also a section that deals with the spiritual dimension of the individual through a selection of prayers and hymns.

For the students, however, the Organiser reflects some of the tension contained within that governance – a site of potential contestation. Students are admonished that: “This Organiser should not be defaced or be subject to graffiti.”\footnote{Ibid.} In practice however, students stake their claim on their Organiser by decorating it with personal photos, band names and song lyrics. They were seen to reduce it to a tatty sheaf of papers or leave it at home, despite the threat of punishment if this happened. Students were also seen to use the Organiser as a means to protect their rights when they perceived that they were being disciplined unfairly. If it was not clearly stated in the Organiser, then it was unreasonable for students to be punished for uniform infractions, for example.
It is assumed that the student who uses the Organiser well, who familiarises themselves with the requirements of being a student, will be more successful than those that do not. In a Foucaultean sense, it is a document concerned with the pastoral care and guidance of the flock, and establishes a vision of what this guidance entails and how the successful individual will comport themselves.\(^{362}\) It carefully constructs a normative view of both the school and the student, and established expectations as to what the business of a school and schooling should be. It also constructs a normative view of what the good student should be. The following section is intended as a discourse analysis of some of the key features of the Organiser. The policies analysed have been placed in the order they appear in the Organiser. It is significant that the Discipline Policy is first, a sense that to those who created the Organiser, perhaps discipline is the bedrock for all other policies – that it lays the foundation for policies such as homework and uniform.

**Discipline Policy**

The Discipline Policy is succinct. It advocates a school as a place of ‘good order’ for all of the community and develops a rationale for how that good order is to be maintained.\(^{363}\) Infractions of the policy reflect a failure of the students to act in a ‘reasonable’ way, because “we believe that students should be self managing and responsible for their own actions”.\(^{364}\) The Discipline Policy is a technology concerned, through a variety of techniques, with how the individual comports themselves and the ways that the staff can act to encourage this means of correct comportment. Like many technologies it is largely punitive – it is difficult to tell when a student is comporting themself in the ‘appropriate’ ways, but policies such as detention make it easy to tell when the

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\(^{362}\) Foucault, “Afterword” in Rabinow and Dreyfuss, *Op Cit.* p.214

\(^{363}\) Organiser, *Op Cit.* p.50

individual is comporting themselves in an inappropriate way. This reminds us of Foucault’s admonition that all institutions have a “small penal mechanism” designed to create the disciplined subject.\textsuperscript{365} The generalness of the Discipline Policy opens it up to the individual judgement of the staff, placing them in a very privileged position as regards to determining what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, and how that is to be remedied and policed. Thus, the staff become the judges of what is normal through observation and assessment. Students are trained, through the aegis of the staff, in how to comport themselves through the punishment of the abnormal. This construction of the teacher as spiritual, cognitive and moral guide is deployed through their expectations of what the idealised form of the good student should be, and how remedial action should be taken to ensure that all students are located within this vision. It speaks of the influential deployment of the pastoral aspect of power that is deeply ingrained in discursive spaces such as professionalism and duty of care.\textsuperscript{366}

The Discipline Policy essentially locates the teacher as the shepherd, the person who deals with most infringements immediately. If we consider Foucault’s analysis of the Panopticon, this locates teachers as those empowered to deliver, through correction, the means of correct training.\textsuperscript{367} They are the watchers, those charged with ensuring normalised and appropriate responses and attitudes are fostered. On the other hand, it also places the teacher within the gaze of the school community as those who know what that correct comportment is, and therefore, expect that to be one of the central cores of their pedagogical practice. Thus, the gaze focused on the teacher also entails normalising judgements as to how a teacher should comport themselves as shepherds of their flock.\textsuperscript{368}

\textsuperscript{365} Foucault, \textit{Discipline Op Cit. p.177}
\textsuperscript{366} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{367} Ibid. p.195
\textsuperscript{368} Foucault, “Afterword” in Rabinow and Dreyfuss, \textit{Op Cit. p.214}
Uniform Policy

The Organiser reveals that the College has an extensive and strictly enforced uniform policy. There are separate codes for summer and winter as well as the PE uniform. Year Twelves are given some special leeway with the wearing of a Leaver’s Jumper permissible in place of the school jumper. The uniform codes are very prescriptive, with requirements down to the type of hair styles appropriate for boys and girls. These rules cover the large items of clothing such as shorts/skirts and dresses, but also mandates smaller items of clothing such as sock colour, types of hair ties used and types and amount of jewellery worn. As well, the uniform policy extends to how the uniform is worn. Infractions in the uniform policy result in the issuing of uniform slips that result in the House of the student being deducted a House Point. These House Points contribute to the champion house for the year. The third Uniform Slip results in the student being given an after school detention.

The Uniform Policy is highly policed and a site of tension within the school. It has a prominent place within the Student Organiser. The Uniform Policy makes up a big part of this document, entailing some 5 A4 pages of detail. This policy clearly states that “Full support of the College Uniform and Grooming Policy is essential in ongoing enrolment at Tuart College.”369 The uniform is predicated upon the belief that as secondary students, they should “be self-responsible for their good grooming and for the maintenance of high standards of dress and uniform”.370 The way that a student wears their uniform, in this sense, could be seen as a student’s attitude towards their schooling. The uniform is imbued with a number of discourses. Firstly, it speaks of the need to regiment the student, to control their body as a means of controlling their mind. It constructs the body as the ‘Other’ the antithesis of the soul and the potential impediment to education. Put

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369 Organiser Op Cit. p.56
370 Ibid.
simply, the body is regulated as a way to ensure that it does not prevent the governing of the soul that Rose articulated as the function of the modern institution.\textsuperscript{371}

When walking through the school, what is interesting is to note how some students attempt to ‘play’ with the Uniform Policy. This manifests itself in a number of ways. For boys, it is either wearing the shirt tail out or having another T-shirt underneath. This T-shirt usually represents some aspect of youth culture, often a band name that in some way challenges conventional expectations. For girls, it is wearing the dress/skirt shorter than regulations allow. As well, they may push their socks down into their shoes so that they are almost invisible or wear non-uniform hair ties. Make-up is completely banned by the uniform code, but it is obvious to see that girls do wear it to school. Teachers on lunch and recess duty carry Uniform slips to hand out for students who do not toe the line. It is also interesting to see those students who do not play with the uniform, who accept that it is a commonsense aspect of schooling and respond by adhering to the policy. This policy has the effect of deindividualising students, of discouraging individual expression and action. It adheres to a moral technology based on sameness, or versions of equality that point to a school designed to be a meritocratic institution.\textsuperscript{372}

**Homework Policy**

The Organiser is a key tool in organising student time to ensure academic success. This is predicated on the idea that the student is responsible for their own success – a view of the student as a rational learner located within a level playing field of opportunity. When used appropriately, the organiser would become a tool to aid success – there is an implicit assumption that academic success is available to all and deserved by those who attain it. The Organiser sets aside significant

\textsuperscript{371} Rose, *Powers of Freedom Op Cit.*

\textsuperscript{372} Elizabeth Hatton, “Social and Cultural Influences on Teaching” in Hatton (Ed) *Op Cit.* p.7
space for the recording of homework. Each school week of school is assigned two A4 pages carefully divided into the days of the week. At the end of each week, except for the first week, a small area was named the “Communication Corner: Parent/Teacher Comment”. Underneath this is a space for the parent to sign.

The Homework Policy entailed a minimum standard of study that each student should do each week. For example, Year Eights should devote a minimum of 10 hours a week whilst Year Twelves should devote a minimum of 16/18 hours a week. Success, in this rationale, is earned through hard work and it is by hard work that each individual will achieve academically.

The Homework Policy is the second policy outlined in the Organiser, after the Discipline Policy, College Calender and forms for notes from teachers to parents concerning behaviour, attitude and homework. This indicates that the school places a lot of importance on attaining academic success, an interesting slant considering the location of a school in a suburb that has not had a high degree of tertiary aspirations in the past as the Australian Bureau of Statistics figures demonstrate. This indicates that the school sees itself working to achieve social outcomes greater than expected by the wider community. This shows that the school views education as a means for professional and social advancement for the student; it is the business of the school to give students the opportunity to compete in a more privileged world.

**College Website**

The first thing that is apparent in the website is that it is a polished production. It appears professional and competent – an image that the school is trying to present about itself. This site is
an important marketing tool for the school, and as such promotes an extremely positive picture of
the school and community. However, in presenting such a positive picture, there are certain
discourses that are made evident; as the school attempts to market itself in the most advantageous
way. The web address opens with a “Welcome Page” that is dominated by pictures of staff and
students smiling and sharing what are meant to be learning experiences. There is also a picture of
students crouched on the blocks in a swimming race, thereby linking sporting success with
academic success. The staff shown are presented as young, cheerful and friends of the students.
The students selected appear well-groomed, happy and confident with the staff and other
students. The students represent a range of ethnicities, as the school is portrayed as an inclusive
environment where each individual is valued and encouraged to do their best.

Underneath the photos is a slogan “Striving for Excellence” which maintains that the school’s
focus on excellence “enables our students to do ordinary things extraordinarily well”.

This focus on the ordinary presents what I term a commonsense view of schooling. This view sees the
processes and practices of schools and schooling as ‘normal’ and ‘everyday’ and in consensus
with wider community values and expectations. The idea of excellence is an interesting one. It
engages students in a struggle, both with themselves and others, in order to demonstrate and
achieve excellence. Excellence is the goal, but it is the striving that is important, the continual
attempt to be better and to compete against others to excel. It leads the readers of the motto to see
the school as a place where students are able to achieve ‘excellence’ notwithstanding the
perceptions of a community in a lower socioeconomic context and with higher than average
unemployment.

The website is divided into four key sections. The first is titled Tuart College. It provides

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375 It is impossible to give the reference for the website without betraying the identity of the school. For this reason, all
references will be limited to the phrase College Website.
information about the History of the College, the Curriculum, Staff details, the Grounds and important events known as College Life. There is a separate section for students that contains curriculum information. Parents have a designated section that gives advice on parenting, information on who to contact to deal with parenting issues and an explanation of some of the structures of the school such as the Pastoral System and the House System. Perhaps the most detailed elaboration of the school’s expectations is found under the Vision and Core Values. The Vision Statement codifies many of the discourses that are central in constructing pedagogical goals for the school. The Vision is detailed as follows:

Tuart College seeks to provide opportunities that allow each student to grow. A pastorally caring and supportive community based on the teachings of Christ create a positive environment in which all can learn and grow. Enriched by the heritage of Catholic Education Church College is dedicated to preparing students for the challenges demanded in daily life. Particular focus is given to the ever increasing complexity of technology and communication systems. Our vision provides the central direction for all College activities. This is underpinned by a number of core values which on a day to day basis enable staff to live out our mission to ‘provide a complete education for all our students.

This vision for the school seems to be centred on a number of discourses about education and the self. Firstly, it locates the student as a body through which the school acts so as to “become the best person he or she can possibly be”. It holds with the idea that acting on the self in normalising, moral ways is one of the key functions of schools. Being a Catholic school, this moral and personal betterment is couched in terms of a Christian vision – through the “teachings of Christ” the student will be able to best become this moral citizen.

A second noteworthy sentence is that “Particular focus is given to the ever increasing complexity of technology and communication systems.” This no doubt reflects the impact that technological change has had on the education world. I also wonder if it reflects the change that technology has wrought in wider industry and the job market. Given that Church College is located in a lower

376 College Website
377 College Website
socioeconomic area, I think it is reasonable to suggest there is a strong push to prepare students in the school for the workplace in jobs that reflect their current status. In this sense, it appears that education could be about maintaining current status rather than challenging disadvantage and inequities within the system.

A third goal is the Core Value that asserts staff are committed to “providing equality of opportunity”. This claim is based on the view of education as a level playing field, where each individual should have the same chances as other individuals, and relative success, or lack of it, is the responsibility of the individual. Within this statement there is a sense that success is deserved, that the cream rises to the top, or that the best education is at its base meritocratic. It is important to state, however, that discourses are rarely singular, rather they exist alongside and compete with other discourses that can be contradictory, conflicting or seemingly oppositional. It is these contradictory spaces that present some of the most telling insights into the ways that the good student is deployed in schools.

**Observation**

My observation of the school occurred over a four week period at the beginning of Term Two, 2005. During this time I walked around Tuart College and paid particular attention to the students, their interactions and the ways that they used the physical spaces of the school. One of the first things that I noticed was that the students tended to interact happily with each other and with the staff. Many students I saw said “Hello” when they passed a teacher that they knew. The students tended to walk in small groups of two or three, and chat animatedly to each other. As in all schools, there were a number of students who seemed to spend most of the time on their own or who did not seem to have the positive interaction other students had.
Class Observation

As part of my research, I spent a week observing the school and its programmes for Year Elevens. A significant part of that was detailed class observation. In order to get as broad an understanding of the school as possible, I divided the observation into two distinct groups of people. In Western Australia, Years Eleven and Twelve are roughly divided into a Vocational stream and a University stream. These courses are called VET and TEE respectively. I divided my observation of these classes into equal halves – one half with students in VET classes, and one half with students in TEE classes. As well, I observed classes in many of the nine learning areas to gain a general feel of what classroom processes were like. All of the classes were co-educational with boys and girls given equal standing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Behaviours/Abilities Valorised</th>
<th>Curriculum Orientations/ Pedagogies³⁷⁸</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Biology</td>
<td>◦ Rote learning off an Overhead Projector</td>
<td>◦ Traditional classroom structure with chairs and desks facing the front and the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introductory Calculus</td>
<td>◦ Achievement based on assessment results</td>
<td>◦ Heavily imbued with vocational/neo-classical views of knowledge and a hierarchical teacher/student relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◦ Competition between class members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◦ Meritocratic view of education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◦ Working quietly and independently</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◦ Relaxed authority structure where students were self-regulators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Literature</td>
<td>◦ Sitting quietly and paying attention to the teacher</td>
<td>◦ Small group meant that it was run in a tutorial form where the students were encouraged to participate but defer to teacher opinion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◦ Relaxed authority structure where the students were largely self-regulators</td>
<td>◦ Teacher sat with the students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

³⁷⁸ Kemmis et al, Op Cit. pp. 142-143
Students were expected to contribute to a set discussion led by the teacher rather than at the front

Heavily liberal-progressive

Economics

- Students highly motivated by marks and grades as measures of achievement
- Lecture format dominated by teacher talk
- Some interaction between teacher and students but very little student to student interaction

Dominantly vocational/neo-conservative, students ‘empty vessels’ waiting to be filled with the correct knowledge imparted by the teacher
Teaching to the examination is crucial in understanding the class

In the TEE classes each class was dominated by the formal examination that tested the ‘correct’ knowledge. Authority rested with the teacher, and was unchallenged by the students. Students in these classes were dominated by meritocratic discourses that measured success as deserved. This was an omnipresent reality for all students who fretted about results and assessments coming up. These classes seemed to be driven by assessments, a formal expression of the surveillance each student was enmeshed within. This supports Foucault’s theory of the examination as one of the techniques utilised to ‘know’ and therefore govern, the individual.379 The students exhibited behaviours and attitudes commensurate with the belief that they were normalising themselves through the examination – comparing themselves to others and continually judging their place within the hierarchical system that represented the TEE class.

### VET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Behaviours/Abilities Valorised</th>
<th>Curriculum Orientations/Pedagogies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food Production</td>
<td>♦ Student participation, organisation and teamwork</td>
<td>♦ Heavily vocational/neo-conservative, students required to follow and complete set tasks albeit in pairs that allowed interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ Following a recipe</td>
<td>♦ Teacher a very powerful authority figure in this class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ Successful completion of a task/recipe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td>♦ Playing as part of a team</td>
<td>♦ Skill based, performances valued according to completing complex tasks rather than enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studies</td>
<td>♦ Specific sports skills such as catching/throwing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ Playing ‘hard’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ Taking on opponents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

379 Foucault, *Discipline Op Cit.* p.184
In the VET program knowledge focused on demonstrating specific skills and processes. However, the teacher largely acted as the authority figure that transmitted knowledge and structured and sequenced that knowledge. These ranged from issues such as uniform and grooming, to wider notions of what constituted acceptable effort and/or behaviour. What was clear was despite the notion of independent learning, the teacher maintained an extremely powerful position as the guardian of what the ‘appropriate’ classroom should look like. Spatially, these subjects tended to have non-traditional classroom set-ups. This varied from the outdoor setting of the Physical Education Studies lesson to the industrial kitchen set-up of the Food Production lesson.

The vocational/neo-classical orientation to the curriculum dominated the classes that I observed at Tuart. This enshrined teacher authority and approaches to knowledge that saw the student as an ‘empty vessel’ waiting to be filled with sanctioned knowledges. The use of the examination was evident in the ways that it causes students to see themselves and others as hierarchical subjects. Kemmis et al. suggest that this orientation perceives a deficit model of the student, and it is the job of the teacher to correct absences in the intellectual, moral and behavioural development of each young person.\textsuperscript{380} Part of this orientation involves a vision of the good student as an autonomous chooser who is responsible for their own success or lack of it – the idea of schools as places of opportunity.

\textsuperscript{380} Ibid. p.143
Principal Interview

Principal A was an articulate and considered interviewee. He responded to the questions (attached as Appendix A) thoughtfully and with detail. When analysing his responses to questions, it became clear that there were a number of competing discourses in Principal A’s view of the school and his vision of the good student. Principal A saw his role comprising a number of different components. Firstly, he saw himself as the leader of the school community, the person who had to take responsibility for the running of the school. He also saw himself as the person who was responsible for managing the school to promote the mission of the school.

So my job is to be the motivator, the encourager, the enforcer, sometimes the interpreter but I would like to think that I’m working with the key stakeholders in making sure that we are living the mission so again I come back to the mission, back to the thing which guides us and some ways perhaps, I’m also a bit of a salesman. It’s my job to sell the mission, to articulate the mission.

This quote demonstrates some of the competing roles, and discourses, that Principal A negotiated in his principalship. These ranged from being the salesman to the ‘Chief of Police’ in a disciplining institution. Overall, Principal A saw himself as less of an autocratic leader, and more of a team leader of the school community. He saw his role in the school as helping others, primarily stakeholders such as parents, staff and students through a variety of different ways, to create a school that lived up to its mission. When asked to define the mission, perhaps the salesman in Principal A paraphrased the College Vision Statement.

Our mission really is very holistic so educating the whole person is critical in terms of making sure that our kids are getting the best education they can.

The key characteristic of the good school for Principal A was that it created opportunities for students to engage with spirituality. “I would probably say that what we are trying to give our kids opportunities to live our spiritual ethos being a Catholic school to enable them to be the best people they can be.” In Principal A’s view, the spiritual dimension was crucial in allowing
students to engage with their world in a positive and constructive manner. Whether the child was Catholic or not, Principal A suggested that it was important that “they also have some understanding of their personal relationship with their god. That’s really important.” For Principal A, it was this spiritual focus that was crucial in forming the character of the good student. He proposed that it was the development of “Christian values” and morality that enabled students to be truly happy within themselves, and therefore more likely to develop resilience and a sense of connectedness to the community after they left school. This spirituality was important in creating the scaffolding through which these other characteristics would emerge.

We want them to be confident, self aware, have a quest for lifelong learning; be happy; be able to value and appreciate diversity; be righteous and honest; be a role model for younger students; have developed skills to enable them to be contributing members of society; have a love of life and all creation; be able to experience success by setting realistic goals; be trustworthy and responsible; be reflective and have an ability to appropriately challenge; have respect for society’s rules and norms; be capable of making sustainable and meaningful friendships and relationships; have the ability to make informed and right decisions; be witnesses to truth and to stand up for what is right and just; be independent and interdependent; be able to realise their own limitations while rejoicing in their personal gifts; and a commitment to personal health and wellbeing.

This quote shows that the school wants students who are highly normalised subjects in an extensive range of areas. It also demonstrates, albeit in positive language, some of the normalising, classifying and individualising discourses that each student subjectivity is produced through and within.

Principal A recognised that Tuart College was in a low socioeconomic area and considered that the school could contribute more than just intellectual knowledge. There was a real sense that the school had an obligation to educate students to be good citizens after they left school. Principal A felt that it was through stressing academic success students could gain greater opportunity for success in life after school. Principal A nominated working with parents as one of the key areas in
which the school could improve. Through this sharing of values, Principal A felt that the school would be better able to create opportunities for the students. For Principal A, it was core business to give students the opportunity to succeed at school, because it was this success that would enable them to be successful in life after school. It is this articulation of the link between the good student and the good citizen that Principal A saw as one of the key purposes of schooling. He stated:

Just because a student has left Tuart doesn’t mean that they should stop giving to the community. That is probably what sets the really good student apart – the high flyer is disciplined; they’ve got their sport, they’ve got their job, they’ve got their study. I think we are making progress but we’ve got a long way to go to produce more of these students.

For Principal A, the good student is a self-regulator able to negotiate disparate roles easily such as that of the student or that of the employee. Principal A’s comments promote the good student norm as a product of the processes of schooling. When asked how the school was planning to work with the students and parents to create these opportunities, Principal A nominated the pastoral care structure as a key strategy:

I’d like to think that through our pastoral care structure though we are picking up some of those little waifs and try to support them, because clearly for some of our kids this is the only normal place that they know. They are starting one hundred metres behind the start line so we have to be trying to work with them.

The image of the waif is an interesting one, lost and alone in a threatening world and needing salvation. This Dickensian imagery is replete with the urge to save the unfortunate child from poverty and neglect of various kinds. Running through Principal A’s interview seemed to be the deficit model discourses of schooling, where schools attempt to fix problems they construe in the wider community. In this model, the impetus to change came from immersing disadvantaged children in middle class values through schooling to make the child more educable, and therefore
more successful in school.\textsuperscript{381} It is these valued that are construed as ‘normal’, with the commensurate idea that many students come with either abnormal backgrounds or experiences that need to be rectified. This vision resonated strongly with Hunter’s argument that the origin of the school is heavily influenced by “its relation to the institutions of Christian pastoral guidance”\textsuperscript{382}. Thus, the policies that Principal A described at Tuart College often seemed to be focused on perceived gaps in a student’s socialisation or readiness for school. This manifested itself in such things as the pastoral care system that seemed to attempt to provide safety and security, whilst also attempting to discipline the child to make them employable in the future. The evidence of the deficit model partially explains some of the conflicting discourses evident in Principal A’s vision of the good student at Tuart. On the one hand, he saw school as being above all a community where everyone could belong and was free to become the best person they could be. On the other hand, he placed an emphasis on excellence and competitiveness which could be seen to run contrary to a budding sense of community.

The pastoral care system was crucial, Principal A believed, in educating the students to “behave responsibly and fit in with the appropriate norms”. Through this pastoral system, students were encouraged to achieve their potential. To do this, Principal A believed that occasionally tough love was needed to achieve the best results:

\begin{quote}
\textit{I see our discipline policy as a subset of pastoral care. For me pastoral care means creating an environment that enables each person to be challenged, to be supported, and to reach their potential. Within that then clearly you have to have a discipline policy. I’d like to think then that kids understand that they have decisions – so they are in control of their life. That concept of tough love is really, really powerful. If I have to suspend a kid or kick a kid out it’s not that I don’t like them but I might not like what they have done or for the good of the larger community we might have to ask a kid to move on.}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{381} Elizabeth Hatton, “Social and Cultural Influences on Teaching” in Hatton \textit{Op Cit.} p.5
\textsuperscript{382} Hunter, \textit{Rethinking the School Op Cit.} p.xviii
Part of Principal A’s vision of the school and its community was a desire to see the situation of the school as unique, and develop a community that is able to support each individual regardless of their strengths and weaknesses so that they have better opportunities in life after school.

This entailed dealing with areas of the school that Principal A felt were preventing this from happening. Principal A felt that one of the crucial challenges for the school was dealing with the relatively low socioeconomic status of the area, and the problems that are often associated with this. This manifested itself in many ways Principal A believed. One of them was a form of ‘cultural cringe’ amongst the whole school community, a sort of an inferiority complex.

Some of our kids I believe suffer a bit from the cultural cringe. Some of the kids believe that because this is Tuart, because this is Town A we can’t really hope to be competing against other people.

This frustrated Principal A because he saw it as an impediment in allowing the school to maximise the potential of the ‘whole’ student. He felt that this cringe was communicated to the students in a variety of ways, mainly outside of school, and it was these discourses that prevented the school from delivering on its focus on excellence. In addition, Principal A maintained that it was these types of barriers that set the values of the school in opposition to wider community values.

In Principal A’s thinking, there is a strong correlation between the good student and the good citizen. Those students who are given the correct training, and are exposed to the skills associated with being a good student are those most likely to become productive members of society after school:

So, clearly as a school, we have a responsibility to provide opportunities so that students have developed skills to enable them to be contributing members of society; have a love of life and all creation; be able to experience success by setting realistic goals; be trustworthy and responsible; be reflective and have an ability to appropriately challenge;
have respect for society’s rules and norms; be capable of making sustainable and meaningful friendships and relationships.

For Principal A, the school affords opportunities to succeed, and it is up to the student to make the most of those opportunities. The school is an institution set up to provide the correct training that produces a productive and good citizenry in a post-industrial age. One of the key elements of this is a form of moral training that prepares students for later life in a competitive world. Correspondingly, good students are those who are seen to maximise these opportunities and therefore integrate themselves into the school community:

I believe the students are totally responsible for their own transformation. What I believe the school is responsible for is to provide opportunities and opportunities for empowerment.

This meritocratic vision is typical of more traditional pedagogies, as they rely on a vision of the individual as autonomous and freely choosing their life through the choices that they make. The language of the student who is responsible for their own transformation implies an adherence to a liberal-humanist notion of the freely choosing subject. This seems at odds with the more evangelical dimension evident in Principal A’s earlier comments. This sense of competing discourses is further highlighted by a key tenet of Principal A’s principalship entangled in the discursive net, the introduction of an admonition to strive for excellence in all that they do:

Principal A’s interview revealed many insights. His answers highlight an opinion that it is the business of schools to produce good students because these students are the most likely to become good citizens. How they do this is dependent upon a number of sometimes contradictory desires. The belief at Tuart is that students need to be educated to be ‘good’ and while this may manifest itself in many ways, the school has an obligation to create good citizens through the programmes and policies it undertakes.
Student Focus Group Interviews

Each of the student participants were interviewed in a focus group of three students. They were asked a common list of questions (attached as Appendix B). Each student was also given a pseudonym to protect their identity. These students were selected by the principal and the Year Eleven Coordinator under the headings of Academic Achievers, Sports Achievers, Quiet Students and Rebels. For ease of reference, each student has also been given a code to differentiate them from students in other case sites. This code has been attached as Appendix D.

Achievers

Paul (#1AMT1), Elizabeth (#1AFT2) and Miranda (#1AFT3) were selected by the staff because they were considered to be academically successful students. All of them had achieved a number of awards and commendations during their middle school years. They also belonged to a variety of groups such as the Student Representative Council that reinforced staff perceptions of them as good students.

One of the dominant discourses motivating their school experience was that of success. Paul (#1AMT1) said: “I think the good student does do well. They do what the teacher wants them to.” This success was of a particular kind. The good student did well as evidenced through a range of academic measurements and also demonstrated behaviours that teachers and other members of the school community valorised. This behaviour incorporated characteristics such as obedience, involvement and exhibiting an expectation that teacher opinion and counsel should be valued. As Elizabeth said:

*The good student always shows a positive attitude, not a negative one. For example, if you get homework you don’t grunt, you accept it that the teacher is doing what is best for*
These students understood their school experience through opportunities to succeed in things such as assessments or other forums, such as the Student Representative Council. This sense of academic achievement was crucial to be considered a good student, largely promulgated by the teachers and parents. These students invoked this dominant discourse when they revealed a belief that academic success was due to positive characteristics such as determination and hard work. Elizabeth stated:

*I do my homework because I’m learning from it. It’s teaching me. I’m going to benefit from it. I’m thankful that I have the chance of an education, to become something. That’s what gives me the drive to become successful. That’s why I think the middle class, smart people actually do better, because they have this drive.*

Doing homework meant that the student was viewed positively by the staff in the school. The success she achieved was deserved because she worked hard for it. Students articulated that the good student exhibited a set of demeanours that reinforced the docility of the student in their interaction with teachers. All of the students in this focus group nominated obedience, responsibility, ‘correct’ behaviour in class, and respect for authority as key behaviours in the ways that teachers identified the good student. Interestingly, the student referred to the academic achievers as middle-class. In her mind, this had less to do with a socioeconomic statement of class distinction, and more to do with recognition of the hierarchy of students within school. In her mind, academic achievers occupied the middle place of the hierarchy of students. They were neither as popular as some groups, nor were they as ostracised as others. In these students’ eyes academic success did not translate into either popularity or admiration from their fellow students. Paul argued:
I think in terms of popularity if you are more sporty than brainy that makes you more popular. I think students would think a good student has more to do with sport but parents and teacher think it is more towards intelligence and grades. (#1AMT1)

The inference that Paul made was that the good students were the popular ones. Most students aspired to be valued by their peers for attributes other than academic success. Being good at school could lead to conflict directed at the student who was seen by other students to be too good. Miranda (#1AFT3) stated: “Students don’t really like ‘teacher’s pets’. ‘Teacher’s pets’ are bad.” These students felt that this meant that being a good student was about balancing competing claims from different groups as to how they behaved and conducted themselves.

Elizabeth supported Miranda, claiming that students valued:

Not someone who knows they are a good student. You can have people who have a good mark and they will be happy with themselves. Not people who stand up and shout it out to everybody and make the people who try their best feel bad. (#1AFT2)

Elizabeth commented that when she disagreed with teachers, she remained quiet because it is their role to teach, and her role to learn. Disagreeing with this ‘faciality’ could alter the balance of this relationship.

Sometimes you just shut up with them. You know that nothing you say is going to change the way they are going to teach you because they have the authority. Sometimes their values kind of seem contradictory. For example, Ms Jones is a good teacher. I wouldn’t say she was opinionated but she has got very strong values and sometimes when I am watching something I think about it and I think she’d hate me for watching this. You learn not to say or do anything that challenges her opinions. (#1AFT2)

These students were very aware that being labelled a good student involved being continually measured and assessed against criteria that were largely imposed on them by groups outside of their control, particularly teachers. Paul (#1AMT1) stated: “I am a good student because teachers and parents have the view that I am.” This view was constructed through a proliferation of techniques of surveillance; the teacher evaluating behaviour in class, performance in tests and the
written report. These students believed that these were inextricably linked to the ways that they negotiated the power games with teachers, parents and their peers. Elizabeth said:

*I was late for class, for Science in Year 9. I was with a girl, a nice girl. Teachers stopped us to talk to us and we were about ten minutes late for class. The girl got a detention, but I didn’t. I spoke to the teacher after the lesson and she got let off the detention. The funny thing was, she kind of blamed me for it. It’s not my fault that the teachers have an opinion of me. It was interesting to see that teachers already judge us before we have done anything.* (#1AFT2)

It is this ability to negotiate these relations of power that allows these students to maintain their status as being among the good students in the school. This then has flow on effects for the student. Miranda described this effect as follows:

*I think with marks as well ... if you are the type of person who gets the top marks I think it is harder to mark you if you do a bad test or a bad essay. I think they are more reluctant to give you a bad mark and if someone else that usually gets bad marks did a better essay well they are still going to get marked lower than us.* (#1AFT3)

One of the critical points that this research shows is the fact that students are continually managing the relations of power that underpin the subjectivities they are allowed or encouraged to inhabit and that exclude certain kinds of behaviours and ways of becoming. These students were very aware that schools were places where being certain kinds of students resulted in certain kinds of possibilities and treatment. The quote above demonstrates that students believe even the marks they get correspond in some way to how they are viewed by the teacher doing the marking. In this sense, they are articulating recognition that the surveillance they are under is subjective and constant and that it is possible to use this in more productive ways within the school environment. This awareness flows into how they comport themselves in everyday situations in the school. It brings for them what they believe are some positive repercussions. Paul (#1AMT1) stated: “If we talk in class it’s okay, but if other people talk in class there’s trouble.” Miranda agreed, but stressed that this preferential treatment could result in conflict with other students.
Teachers definitely give preferential treatment. Last year in maths I didn’t do my homework; it doesn’t matter for what reason we didn’t do it for, because the teacher let us get away with it because we were us [good students]. But other student who didn’t do it on the same day, who didn’t do one question like Jim they got detention and blasted in front of the class. (#1AFT3)

In talking with these students they showed their awareness that to be the good student, they had to trade off certain other positionalities within the school such as some elements of popularity. One got the sense that the students were wistful about the knowledge that at Tuart College you could not be both popular and good. Elizabeth recounted:

In Year 8 when I got Dux it felt good, I was really happy, mum was really happy. But the aftermath, school was a lot different. And then getting it in Year 9, Year 10 and then people come and say things like I am a square, or that I have no social life. You want your parents to be proud of you but every time you are in a class you wish students would also be as proud and accepting. As a result, I know that now, I don’t have any privacy at all. You get Dux you are really happy about it but then it feels like no one else is. Before no one knew who you were. Like you’d sit in a classroom and the relief teacher would call the roll and look and see which one I was and I was seen as the girl who was good at school. I wasn’t seen as me. Because it was Year 8 and everyone is getting to know you and they didn’t get to know I was. I’m not the little girl who sits in class and does all the work, I’m a lot different. Like they stuck me in a little box and said that’s who you are. And then some people who get judged like this, I know it didn’t happen to me, but they try to prove themselves and they think they have to rebel against everything else, like go to a party or whirl up in a shorter skirt or something. Like it’s sad and frustrating they have to do that. (#1AFT2)

There was a sense that there was an expectation of performativity in being the normalised good, an expectation that the good student was ‘on show’ in the school community. Being on display was not always what the students wanted, however. In part, I believe that this can be explained by Elizabeth’s feelings of being trapped within powerful, competing discourses that all students had to contend with in some way. Elizabeth, Miranda and Paul desired to experience success and to be judged as ‘good students’ in the eyes of teachers and parents. They recognised that this positionality offered rewards and benefits. At the same time, they also recognised that this positionality conflicted with competing discourses – among them the desire to be ‘cool’ or popular. The result was an internal conflict because of their experience that the good student
valorised by staff and parents was often not valued highly by their peer group. Their peers, they thought, valued a relaxed, social person who was good at sport, went to lots of parties and had lots of romantic relationships. This sense of frustration is perhaps best explained by a comment from Elizabeth, who outlines what it is like to be judged as a good student among your peers:

_Every time I go up there to receive an award I'm embarrassed. I don't know I just see people looking at me judging me. I shouldn't feel embarrassed, I spent hours doing all that work. You just want to scream. You get a test result and you get 80% but there might be an error and you mention it to the teacher everyone says you are just trying to get extra marks just because you are a good student, you already did better than everyone else, sort of like that._ (#1AFT2)

Paul (#1AMT1) concurred, asserting that: “It’s bad to be noticed.” This attention though, really meant that it lowered the esteem you were held in by the students when you were noticed in a positive way by the staff for academic success. Miranda (#1AFT3) stated that this was because: “It’s showing in front of everyone else that you’ve done better than everyone else.” They felt that the student cohort continually worked to ostracise successes except for certain accepted pursuits such as sport or romantic conquests. Whilst these students valued highly the success they achieved at school, they felt that this success alienated them from certain possibilities and experiences at school, particularly with reference to the expectations of popularity and sporting success they thought that the students admired.

**Sports Stars**

The group nominated as Sport Stars by the school consisted of one female and two male students. They came across as confident and engaging young people who appeared generally happy in their outlook. Chris (#1SMT1) was a high achiever in the sport of Australian Rules Football, while Sinead (#1SFT2) was a successful netballer. Mike (#1SMV3) was a talented hockey player. Each of these students had, in some way, achieved notable success in their sporting endeavours,
whether it was winning selection in a state team or representing the college with aplomb in interschool events.

Each of these students held a clear opinion as to what kinds of students they felt were valued within the school as good students. For Mike (#1SMV3), the good student was someone who followed the school’s Uniform Policy to the letter. “You can tell the good student by the way they dress. They always dress well – they never get uniform slips.” Chris (#1SMT1) agreed, and argued that behaviour in the class was highly significant in constructing the good student. “They don’t muck up in class. They are quiet people they just get in and do their work.” For Sinead, it was students who achieved high academic results that were good students. This list promotes a sense that the good student is one that comports themselves in obedient, passive ways.

This group of students was very aware that different groups within the school held different expectations as to what the good student was like. They argued that parents, teachers and students each held strong opinions as to what constituted a good student, but that these opinions could be widely different. They argued that parents placed greater emphasis on effort and application because they were conscious of the future ramifications for their child. Sinead commented:

*Parents want someone who doesn’t get into trouble, tries their best and get good grades. They worry about our future. They want us the get the best education as possible rather than do nothing in later life.* (#1SFT2)

Mike (#1SMV3) agreed, stating: “My parents would want me to be just trying my hardest.” On the other hand, these students felt that teachers wanted academic success as well, but prioritised ‘appropriate’ behaviour in the classroom and the grounds. Chris stated:

*Teachers want you to work hard and not get into trouble and just be getting average or above average all the time. They ask questions if they need any help. They have to be really into school like school spirit and stuff.* (#1SMT1)
For students, the emphasis was on the social aspect of the good student. Mike (#1SMT1) thought that what was important to students was their ability to maintain positive relationships with a wide range of students. “It is important to have a good social life. Students like someone who spends the weekends out socialising not at home doing homework all the time.”

The first thought that struck me during the focus group was how socially aware these students were and how sophisticated was their understanding of the social dynamics of schooling. For these students, schools were places where differentiation between different groups occurs – they viewed this as the ‘natural’ order of things. Chris viewed it this way:

*It’s like the good students and the popular student and there is everybody else. I think you could put the sporting group in there as well. I think there are those three groups and everybody else is trying to find that recognition as well.* (#1SMT1)

These students nominated three main discourses as being significant, based on either popularity, school success or sporting success. In their experiences they argued that each student in some way was shaped in response to one (if not more) of these discourses. Every student was in some way negotiating how they saw themselves in relation to how these subjectivities allowed possibilities for their identity. For example these students defined the popular students as the risk-takers and those who were able to stand out in acceptable ways that other students looked up to. Sinead stated:

*I reckon the most popular student would be the person who goes out on the weekend and gets trashed or like everyone wants to be like them but they don’t. Like everyone looks up to them going out, taking the risks and stuff. But no one else will do it because of getting into trouble if they do it.* (#1SFT2)

These students were acutely aware of the social hierarchies in schools and their place within it. They saw schools as places that actively sought to establish and maintain hierarchies of student
subjectivities. Popularity was an example of the social hierarchy. However, there were competing discourses as to what constituted the good. There was a view that teachers also attempted to establish a hierarchy based on academic performance. Mike explained how disciplinary norms are invoked over students’ bodies and their work:

> Like ... we got ranked today in our Maths class, and that’s how we sit like the people who got the lowest marks sit at the front and the people behind say “You are just sitting there because you are stupid. You are dumb. That’s why you are in front of me.” So students get really cruel if you get less than them. The person who got the lowest in the test sits at the front and it works its way to the back, which I think is pretty cruel because you don’t want to share your grades with everyone. (#1SMT1)

Mike articulated that extremes of academic valorisation can be cruel for those who do not satisfy the criteria. It is the visibility of this categorisation that was most confronting for Mike, a sense that his academic performance is also ‘on show’. This quote demonstrates that schooling is as much a spatial/body deployment of power as it is an exercise on the mind and identity of the student. What I find most interesting is that this hierarchy is instituted by the teacher, but the negative or positive experiences are enforced by the students themselves. It would be wrong to suggest that the maintenance of subjectivities in schools is done solely by the staff. I suggest that students are responsible for a lot of the ways that subjectivities are assigned and maintained with the school community. However, it does appear that they are acting on codes and values transmitted to them from a wider context. The case of the ordered classroom demonstrates the way that the students respond to the discourse of academic valorisation that is being transmitted by the teacher. Chris volunteered the following as an example of how students respond to the classificatory nature of schooling:

> When people from J Block (where the good students sit) go and do something like drinking, it’s like “Why are they drinking”? Because they don’t do it like every weekend. (#1SMT1)
When students deviate from normative behaviours, the student group acts quickly and in a variety of ways to communicate that this behaviour is unacceptable from someone who is not meant to take up such social positions. This demonstrates that there are separate spheres that students must operate within. This operation involves meeting the wider expectations of identity in normalised ways.

The good student was defined as much by their body as by their academic success. Mike (#1SMV3) stated: “They don’t muck up in class. They are quiet people they just get in and do their work.” This docile behaviour in the class was matched by an acceptance of the school rules regarding uniform. Mike (#1SMV3) went on to say: “The way they dress. Always dress well – they never get uniform slips.” It would seem reasonable to posit that the sport achievers would generally have active bodies and that they may find the constraints of the traditional classroom difficult. The projection of the good student as docile is a significant perspective on the ways that schools shape subjectivities. Academic success was also a significant characteristic of the good student. This academic success, in contrast to the previous group, was constructed very much as an inherent ability rather than a process of hard work. In this way, these students perhaps sought to explain away their perceived failings at not being the good student that they felt teachers admired. The end result of this they believed was a special kind of relationship between the good student and teachers. Sinead (#1SFT2) said: “They appear to be really good friends with all the teachers. They can just walk up to them and have a full conversation with them.” When it was time for these students to nominate the groups of students found in the school, the students fed off each other and were able to give a large list of the different groups. Interestingly, they spoke about how the groups were spatialised throughout the school so that the ‘good’ students sat in one area, the different sub-groups that formed the popular group sat in another. Chris spoke about these divisions:
There are one or two people that tend to mix, but groups are pretty clear. You have got the popular group and the other group and you’ve got the skate people with the punks and all that. Then you have got the J Block people they always stand around and J Block and they all form their own groups. They are all pretty good kids in a way. That’s what we think. I think they do nothing but stay home and study. (#1SMT1)

This makes the boundaries very clear between groups, which has the effect of hardening student subjectivities and making it more difficult for students to manipulate the identity subscribed for them or to skip between groups or inhabit a range of subjectivities.

These students tended to define the school’s perspective on the good student as being from a teacher’s perspective. According to Mike:

*The good students always talk to their friends and teachers. All the good people are in one group and they (the teachers) have all the not so good people in the other group.* (#1SMV3)

In the eyes of these students, teachers saw students as belonging to either the ‘good’ or the ‘not-so-good’ group. These students argued they were mainly associated by others as a part of the ‘not-so-good’ students. They felt that this was largely the doing of the staff, that the ways that the school perceived them had been chosen according to rules that were invisible and indecipherable. They considered that there was a perception of themselves, a subjectivity that they were forced to work within, that they did not always see themselves in. Similarly, these students felt caught between these traditional discourses of the staff and the less accepted, but equally powerful values of the students. Chris summarised these protocols:

*If you are good and you get rewarded you get a certificate or a badge or whatever. If you are not then the teachers will just talk to you and a lot of times the teachers will have like empty threats like “Next time you will get detention”, but the good person doesn’t. But it is not cool to get rewards, people kind of look down on you. It is better to be good at sport, or pretty or a real rebel.* (#1SMT1)
Sinead agreed, explaining that there was a lot of pressure to not be successful in the traditional sense.

If you do well in your tests, you get called ‘squid’ or ‘nerd’ or ‘dork’ by certain people. Like there is only a small group of people that say you’re a squid because you are smart or you are good or whatever, but a lot of people look up to them and listen to what they say. (#1SFT2)

One of the ways that these students saw themselves was manifested in their sense of attachment to the school. Each of them could recall a number of times when they had been rewarded for being a good student, and many of these rewards came as a result of representing the school at co-curricular events such as in a sports event and doing well. Sinead stated:

I am a good student because of my extra curricular stuff. I’m not the above average academic person but I do SRC sport and stuff. I just play netball and the swimming teams and I would do athletics carnival but I am not allowed to. (#1SFT2)

Significantly, they also placed a great deal of emphasis on academic success, and could recount experiences of achieving academic success. This is despite the fact that they were not necessarily identified as high achievers academically. Mike outlined his experiences as follows:

I got 80% in the Maths test and I got House points for it. But the teacher called my parents as well to say that I had got 80% and I had failed the test before. Only two people had got 80% or higher so I felt really good. I felt that I showed up all the people who had teased me for failing the first one. The House point tag is still on the fridge. (#1SMV3)

The end result of this was that the student felt an attachment to the school through a feeling of pride in sporting success. However, this attachment was itself a contested experience, relying on students being able to manoeuvre how they saw themselves in relation to the competing discourses and experiences that coalesce into a vision of the good student. Mike added:

I was happy I was away when my report arrived. Because you might not be failing anything but if it is lower than the average in the class then it is the end of the world. You
Mike felt that his report placed him as below average in some classes, and that this meant that he was not living up to the expectations of some people, notably his parents and teachers. As well, his focus on achievement and success, as well as sense of self, was challenged by his report that placed him as lower than average in the hierarchy.

**Quiet Students**

The quiet group certainly lived up to their name. Amy (#1QFT1), Carol (#1QFV2) and Trevor (#1QMV3) were quite reserved in this interview, and tended to give many non-committal answers such as “I don’t know” or sat in silence. It appeared more that they had no real reference point to answer many of these questions. While it appeared that they found it difficult to relate their experiences to being a good or not-so-good student, there is also the possibility that they refused, quietly, to speak of their experiences. There may be a number of reasons for this. Firstly, I think the most obvious reason is that they were chosen by the staff at Tuart College because they tended to blend in, to say or do very little that would bring them to the attention of either the staff or the students. Perhaps motivating their subjectivity was not a disrespect for authority or sporting or academic success, rather it appeared to be a desire to escape notice. There is also the possibility that they desired safety, and voicing opinions could have seemed a high risk strategy to them. It is as though they had developed strategies that were focused on avoiding the gaze of staff and students.

Good students for them were intelligent and who succeeded academically in school. Amy (#1QFT1) posited: “A good student is someone who does well.” These students did not only
identify intelligence, they also spoke about work habits as a key attribute of the good student. According to these students, academic success only came as a result of the student’s work ethic. This manifested itself in a variety of ways – the good student was a punctual, organised student who brought the correct material to class and submitted assessments on time. The good student was one who was compliant and docile, and who avoided confrontation. There is also a sense that the good student was only active in passive ways, such as study and exhibiting the ‘right’ behaviours in the classroom. Carol stated:

*I think the good student is someone who works hard with effort. They are on time. They do their homework. They hand things in on time. They remember what they are supposed to do.* (#1QFV2)

The good student was also someone who had a clear sense of what they wanted to achieve, both in school and in later life. Trevor (#1QMV3) commented: “*They have an ambition. They have something that they want to do, and they work hard to achieve that.*”

Another significant characteristic of the good student was that of behaviour. Trevor (#1QMV3) stated: “*Good students are the students who don’t upset anyone, who always avoid arguments. Especially with teachers.*” The behaviours described tended to prioritise a docility of behaviour, particularly towards teachers. He went on: “*The good student is someone who will sit down and shut up.*” For them, the good student was a student who was barely noticed and agreed with the values and attitudes of the teaching staff. Amy (#1QFT1) said: “*I reckon the teachers want someone who they can teach. Someone who sits there and doesn’t make stupid remarks.*” These students saw that there was a link between behaviour in the classroom and experiences of success.

In their view, there was a solid correlation between what teachers, parents and students thought was a good student. At home Amy (#1QFT1) believed that parents wanted someone who would “*do what their parents want them to do.*” This sense of obedience was transferable between the home and the school. These students argued that students identified with sporting success
primarily, but that the behaviours demonstrated by the good student were in keeping with the passive, obedient academic success story. For Carol (#1QFV2): “They are good at sport.” Apart from being good at sport, these students believed that there was a consensus as to what the good student was like. This came, in part, from seeing student, teacher and parent expectations as being largely similar. This focus group identified that success was important in defining the good student, as was docility, obedience and demonstrating ‘normal’ behaviours both inside and outside the classroom. Amy (#1QFT1) stated that students expected the good student to: “be a good achiever, like they do well”. Earlier, Amy had stressed that teachers wanted a good student who was “successful” and easy to teach. For Carol (#1QFV2), this meant that teachers, parents and students saw the good student as someone who has a “Positive attitude to students and teachers.”

One of the key themes that ran through this interview was that these students felt that what teachers and parents wanted from the good student was what they perceived as ‘normal’ behaviour. There was a view that the good student was one who acted in a way that was both ‘reasonable’ and ‘appropriate’ at all times. Trevor (#1QMV3) argued: “The good student is someone who acts normal”. This ‘normal’ behaviour went beyond the classroom so that Amy (#1QFT1) felt the good student was also one who was “sensible in what they do in the playground”.

Each of these students found it more difficult to decide what a good student was as opposed to what they construed as the opposite – the bad student. The bad student was all the things that the good student wasn’t: disobedient, lazy, tardy, unsuccessful and difficult to teach. The significance of the discourse of the bad student is, I believe, an important way that these students made sense of their schooling experiences. They saw themselves as ‘not bad’ as opposed to being ‘good’. This manifested itself in the difficulty each student had recalling a time when they felt valued as a good student and how they felt. On the other hand, they were more forthcoming about the bad
student. Carol (#1QFV2) argued that: “Some students have a reputation of being a bad student.”

This reputation, Amy further developed, meant that these students were treated differently in class and judged differently:

*If a teacher says this is a bad student all of the teachers believe that, like in a class they treat them differently to a good student. They don't take them seriously like if they are known to ask stupid questions, when they ask a serious question they think it is another stupid question. These people never succeed. (#1QFT1)*

In their experience, I detected a sense of defining themselves in opposition to the bad student where normal was good and behaviour and values that fell outside the majority view (to them) meant that the student was bad and deserved to be treated as such. For two of them they could not remember a time when they did not see themselves treated as good students. Amy could recall a difficult time, however, an experience where she thought she was treated unfairly. Seeing herself as a quiet, good student, Amy perceived that it was the bad students who should have been punished, not her.

*I don’t know why. Like sometimes I leave homework at home and the teachers say “My god you have left your homework at home!” It’s like it is such a bad thing whereas someone else who never does any work at all doesn’t even get told off at all. It’s really annoying. (#1QFT1)*

Perhaps what made it more annoying to Amy was that she saw herself as being one of the good students in terms of behaviour and work ethic, and expected to be treated positively by the staff as a result. The other students could not recall a time that they were judged not to be a good student. In fact, both Carol and Trevor found it difficult to think critically about their experiences at school at all.

Perhaps most tellingly, these students were the least aware of the social dynamics of their peer group. They were aware of student groups, but struggled to give them names and to nominate behaviours and values that each group appeared to endorse. When asked to nominate groups,
Trevor (#1QMV3) stated: “I don’t know they are all different. They hang out in different blocks.”

What made them different he was unable to say. Carol chose not to name any groups at all. This tactic, employed largely by Trevor and Carol but also by Amy at various times in the interview, was an interesting one. It appeared that often these students adopted the strategy of making no comment so as to avoid any potential conflict. I would argue that these students had learned to avoid situations where they were forced to act in a way that would compromise their sense of safety and anonymity in the school. As a result, they often answered noncommittally. When it came to identifying the social groups, the act of naming could be seen as a challenging one because it involved making judgements about other students. It could also require these students to reflect on where they were located in terms of the social strata of the school. This is further demonstrated by Amy, who argued that there really weren’t big groups, there were small friendship groups of two or three. This meant that she could remain unaware of there being any real group politics in Year Eleven. Amy (#1QFT1) said: “There could be lots of group politics. I don’t know. I have never really seen it.” None of these students felt that there was either a popular or a cool group in their year.

Finally, I asked these students whether a good student in school was most successful in life after school. They argued that this was not true, what made a person successful was their ability to work towards a goal. Amy (#1QFT1) stated: “If you have a goal you can work towards then you can achieve it. If the good student doesn’t have a goal then they do not know what they are going to achieve.” Intrigued, I asked the students if the good student, by definition, had to have a goal anyway as this was something Amy had said earlier. Trevor (#1QMV3) responded: “I don’t.” Trevor saw himself, and the others as well, as good students. However, I maintain that their vision of the good student was very different to that idealised hegemonic good.383 These students

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383 McLeod and Yates, Op Cit. p.52
take up their position as student differently from how others do and they have differing beliefs about how the position of teacher ought to be taken up.

**Rebels**

The group classed as rebels were chosen by the staff because they were those students who they felt had exhibited the most confrontational behaviour in the school. Their school record was littered with incident reports, detentions and suspension for a variety of behaviours. All of the participants were male. In interviewing this focus group I was intrigued at how these students experienced their schooling, and in what ways responded to the idealised norm of the good student. I found the three students, Totti, Travis and Geoff to be lively interviewees who were not afraid of advancing an opinion, or causing offence to particular groups. Of these three students, Travis (#1RMV1) and Geoff (#1RMV2) were the most responsive, while Totti (#1RMV3) was a little less vocal.

These students felt that the good student was one that exhibited attitudes and behaviours that they did not necessarily see within themselves. Travis (#1RMV1) said: “Someone who studies hard. Does all their work on time. Is nice to the teachers.” Geoff(#1RMV2) concurred, saying: “Good students stay out of trouble.” The trouble that Geoff referred to was confined to school. For Totti (#1RMV3), however, the good student was also someone who conducted themselves well out of school. “The good student is not someone who parties all of the time.” This did not mean that they aspired to being a good student, rather that they were aware that being a good student involved accepting a set of behaviours that governed behaviour out of school. Interestingly, it was not intelligence that was important, but the associated work ethic that enabled them to be organised and to complete all of their work. Success at school could best be defined as a set of docile behaviours rather than a level of academic success. Doing work on time has a very
different emphasis to that of achieving well in assessments. As Travis (#1RMV1) noted: “Being a good student is about being willing to work hard to achieve. Not give up, just keep trying.”

Travis, Totti and Geoff said that parents, teachers and students saw different things in the good student. Geoff argued:

*Parents want an A+ student. Someone who does not have much of a social life because they spend most of their time studying. Teachers want students they can be friends with, talk to them, ask them how they are. They think the same way. Students want a popular student, but someone who keeps their mischief to after school. (#1RMV2)*

It became very clear in this interview that these students recognised that there were different possibilities for identity in school that came with different expectations and experiences. Geoff (#1RMV2) saw that certain kinds of behaviours attracted certain kinds of responses from other groups, whether it was students, parents or teachers. “The teacher’s favourites get treated differently all of the time.” However, these students could suffer from a loss of esteem in the eyes of their peers. Travis was highly critical of the Student Representative Council because he believed they were students who were given an easy school life by the teachers despite the fact that the rest of the student body did not respect them.

*It’s like the SRC. It is just a gay club for people to go to so they don’t get hassled at lunchtime. No one listens to them. They are not the leaders of the school. (#1RMV1)*

This quote also demonstrates the hypermasculine attributes that these students appeared to model, where being labelled ‘gay’ was one of the worst slurs on their masculinity. These masculine discourses were evident throughout this interview, much more so than any other group.

In Travis’s view, the other students placed groups such as the one he belonged to at the top of the social tree and looked up to them. Travis added:
In the F Block there is like a supergroup, the Wogs, the Surfies, the Punks that are like the popular group that don’t do that well at school. We are the cool group because we are so big and we can look down on the other smaller groups. (#1RMV1)

This difference further highlighted their opinion that what teachers wanted was the ability to be able to maintain positive and friendly relationships with students. However, these relationships were dominated by the ability of the student to meet the teachers’ expectations regarding attitudes and behaviours. Travis (#1RMV1) stated: “Teachers want students they can be friends with, talk to them, ask them how they are. They think the same way.” These students were very aware that different stakeholder groups held different expectations. They believed that parents wanted academic success and students valued popularity above other things, particularly in relation to after school activities such as parties and socialising. This view supported the attitude of the sports stars, that it was an element of risk-taking and social success that students looked up to. This caused problems, however, because the expectations of popularity often conflicted with the teacher’s desire for a controlled learning environment. For example, Totti (#1RMV3) said that students admired a student who was “funny. Cracks the class up, although this can get you in trouble with the teacher.” There is a sense that there is an expectation of performativity, an activity that is central to being a rebel. There is certainly an opposition to the docility adopted by certain players in the school social strata.

By positioning themselves as rebels, these students were aware that they compromised their relationship with teachers. The significance is that these students were being active, albeit in ways that may not have endeared them to the authority structures in the school. However, by doing this they believed that they gained popularity from students – a trade-off that they were prepared to make. Geoff said:

*Sometimes having a reputation is good, sometimes its bad. When the teachers joke around with you because they think that you are one of the tough ones, it is cool. Other
kids respect that reputation. The flip side is that you always get blamed for things. (#1RMV2)

These resistant behaviours meant that these students were able to consider themselves as part of the popular group. What characterised these groups was a disrespect for authority and demonstration of certain behaviours, both inside and outside of school, which could be seen as socially inappropriate such as drinking and illegal activities. These students had many stories of feeling victimised by their experiences at school, particularly from the staff. However, in their opinion this was worth it because they believed that they sat at the top of the social hierarchy, and that the rewards that this brought far outweighed the negative consequences. Travis recounted this experience:

This one time in class a student set the projector on fire and we had to leave the class because of all the smoke. When we got back in there I made a stupid comment like “Next time burn the teacher’s desk down” and I got sent out of the class and got detention. The guy who set the projector on fire didn’t even get in trouble. (#1RMV1)

One of the ways that this attitude manifested itself was in the ways that they talked about other groups within the school as being inferior to them. They positioned themselves in opposition to many of the values and attitudes of the school, and felt that those who exhibited service or demonstrated allegiance to the school were at the lower end of the social hierarchy.

Discussion

The first group interviewed was that of the Academic Achievers. These students were selected because they had demonstrated behaviours and accomplishments that had earned them many awards and accolades from the school. It was interesting that they saw the good student as exhibiting what could be termed docile behaviours in the school. There was an opinion that what was rewarded at school was not so much independent thought as agreeing with the teacher.
Elizabeth argued that this often took the form of agreeing with a teacher’s opinions, even if they ran contrary to her own. Being seen to agree with the teacher that was more important than demonstrating independent thought, an example of performativity influencing the public opinions of students. These students argued that the good student rarely challenged teacher authority openly, and when they did, they carefully negotiated any potential confrontation so that it could not escalate into conflict. The ability to operate within these constraints was a feature of the Academic Achievers.

For these students, it was future opportunities that counted, so completing homework, studying hard and obeying teachers were necessary factors contributing to success in later life. There was a sense that they trusted that success came to those who were diligent, avoided confrontation and maintained positive relationships with the staff. Any hardships they endured in their schooling were worth it because they were being prepared for success after school. These students in some ways reflected the hegemonic good student, they were “passive, docile, conscientious and co-operative”.384

These students spoke of ways that being a good student enmeshed individuals in different types of relationships that had their own potentialities. Being seen as a good student meant that the student was treated differently by teachers. They got away with more, could push the boundaries of what was acceptable in the classroom and were treated positively by all staff. They felt that they even got marked a little more leniently sometimes, that teachers tended to mark the name rather than the student. They were very aware that different types of students were not afforded these types of relationships. In their minds this was a naturalised occurrence. After all, it was ‘normal’, or a payback for the hard work they had to put in to be academically successful.

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384 Symes and Preston, Op Cit. p.222
These students’ experience suggested that the good student prized by the staff and parents was not as highly valued by the students. In fact, they argued that the very nature of success that the good student attained led them into conflict with many other groups of students. They felt that being a good student attracted attention, and this notice was rewarded by the staff. However, they maintained that students did not respond to the staff setting up what was an imposed hierarchy. Rather, they articulated that the students wanted equality, and tended to take drastic measures against those students who were placed above them. This took the form of verbal bullying, of belittling student academic achievement and ostracism of those students. Elizabeth spoke of the way that being rewarded in Year Eight had taken away her privacy – she was expected to inhabit a certain positionality that became a claustrophobic identity. There was a sense of shame at receiving awards in front of the school, almost as if they felt they were betraying their peers by being noticed in a positive way by the staff.

Paul, Elizabeth and Miranda saw themselves as the ‘middle-class’ in the school imbued, as the middle-class is, with dominant moral values and expectations. I do not think that the students intended to define themselves in class terms, rather they sought to clarify where they sat in terms of the ways that power relations constructed certain types of possibilities for the students. They did not see themselves as popular, nor did they see themselves as extremely unpopular. They saw themselves as somewhere in the middle, continually juggling the possibilities of identity within a highly contested space. There was a wistfulness about their views on the popular students, a desire to be accepted, to be recognised not for the roles that they played but for the success they had achieved by the wider student body and to be seen in different ways by both teachers and student beyond the hegemonic stereotyping, or ‘faciality’, that they felt was often directed at them.

The Sports Stars vision of the good student was different. They constructed a vision of the good student that relied heavily on docility. This docility was reflected in the idea that the good student
wore their uniform correctly, was always neat and on time, and tended to move around the school in an orderly manner. Often times, these students felt that they struggled with the requirements to sit still, to move quietly and to behave in a less exuberant way.

However, it was academic success that these students attributed to the good student. Like the Academic Achievers, I detected a sense that they projected the good student as having characteristics that they did not have, but wished that they did. In particular, they wanted to experience the rewards of academic success, of being valued by the staff and their parents because of their successes at school. They believed that the good student had a special relationship with staff that they excluded from, and they wanted that opportunity.

These students saw in themselves two key attributes of the good student. The first one is best termed attachment. Because of their sporting prowess, these students represented their school in a variety of sporting endeavours. When they did this, they were proud of their school and felt an affinity with the school community. They considered this involvement as a key characteristic of the good student. The good student is an example to the community that Church College has got it ‘right’, because its students are successful in the public eye. The second attribute they believed that they possessed a good work ethic. The good student tried hard, and this was an attribute they felt that they demonstrated.

One of the key points in this group was their sense of competitiveness. These students wanted to be the best – they wanted to be considered the good student. They were very aware of their place in the hierarchy, and phrased their attempts to negotiate their world as a need to be better than average in all things. This group of students demonstrated high level description and awareness of the social hierarchy at Tuart College. They understood who the groups were, where they sat and what kinds of behaviours typified each group. They located each group in a hierarchy from most
popular to least popular, and tended to locate themselves towards the top or better than average. These students were socially aware, and seemed able to negotiate the social world better than most.

However, these students also articulated a sense of frustration at the different expectations as to what the good student should or should not be. As stated earlier, they felt that they wanted a more positive relationship with the teachers, but they also needed to be well located within the student positionalities they took up. These two worlds often collided, leaving these students frustrated at their inability to reconcile the two. Their parents’ expectations were another set of desires that they had to negotiate.

The Quiet Students presented an interesting dynamic. In the interview they were friendly and courteous, but it was a difficult task to get them to volunteer opinions based on their experiences of school. There was a sense that they had relinquished a sense of critical agency within the school for a certain type of positionality. These students developed a vision of the good student as actively docile. In other words, the good student chooses to comport themselves in such a way as to reflect the dominant values found in their school. Variously, these students articulated a vision of the good student as a ‘normal’ student. This normalised student adopted compliant behaviours which were necessary they believed to achieve the highest level of success within the school. To these students, it was a commonsense notion that schools were about academic success and the good student was one who earned their success through behaving in certain ways.

At Tuart the quiet student adopted a set of behaviours that constructed them as docile because they believed that the good student was one who avoided conflict at all times. Whether it was teachers, parents, or other students, this group maintained that what was most important was that the good student avoided any form of negative attention, particularly from the staff. These
students presented a view of the school as a place where teachers held authority, both structurally and morally so being a good student meant behaving in a way that agreed with what they perceived that authority demanded. Characteristics such as being hard working, punctual, well behaved, sitting quietly were valorised because it avoided conflict with teachers. Primarily, this group tended to follow the motto that Trevor seemed to follow “don’t upset anyone”. By doing this, these students adopted behaviours that meant that they tended to blend in to the background of the school. For these students there seemed to be a fear of the potential of the surveillance that they were under. By adopting strategies such as obedience and docility, these students seemed to think that they were avoiding any negative repercussions of that surveillance. In this way, they were acting upon themselves in such a way as to avoid attention. By doing this, they assumed a key identity within the social fabric of the school – that of the quiet student.

They saw this set of obedient behaviours as ‘normal’ – it was normal behaviour that defined the good student. Moreover, these students had developed a binary view of the school where the good students were those that behaved ‘normally’ and the other students were bad students because they would not adopt compliant behaviour in the school. Hence these students presented a view of the ‘normalised good’ – that is a view that the good entails the appropriate and acceptable way that students behave and comport themselves. It is this avoidance of conflict that manifests itself as the quiet identity. Students who chose to avoid bringing attention to themselves could be seen as assuming the identity of the quiet student as a strategy designed to place the students at the greatest advantage in the school system.

There was a real sense that these students, far from powerless, had acted to align themselves with what they perceived as correct values. These values reflect what they thought the teachers wanted in students. From this they expected to share in the positives of being members of the normalising good. When Amy told of her experience of being frustrated at being punished for forgetting her
homework, her frustration was not that she was scolded, but that the negative attention from the teacher separated her from the other good students. It is almost as though Amy thought there was a contract between her and the school where obedient behaviour was meant to ensure that there was no rupture in the contract. Her story suggested awareness that different types of positionalities in schools could expect different types of treatment. She felt that the teacher had behaved in a way that was neither fair nor reasonable. At another level, it is interesting to posit that Amy’s experience demonstrated one of the technologies used to reaffirm or maintain the status of the good student through surveillance and the concern of the shepherd for one of his/her flock.\textsuperscript{385}

Out of the four focus groups these students appeared the most socially unsophisticated. They struggled to identify other groups in their year, and felt that there were really only two groups, the good students and the bad students. Assuming the identity of a quiet student brings with it some positives in the eyes of these students. However, the obvious drawback seemed to be that they ostracised themselves from the social life of a great percentage of the students. The way that these students operated within the school was such that adopting the dominant values commonly associated with the staff meant that they were seen to be repudiating many of the social values that their peers held. As a result, they became ‘invisible’ to the other students, and were located at the very bottom of the social strata. These students did not seem to want to be treated any differently. They did not project attributes of the good student that they did not have. Rather, I think they saw themselves as a form of the good student, and were generally satisfied with how their positionality placed them in the school.

For the group that were selected as Rebels, school was a very different place for than that of the Quiet students. If the Quiet students appeared to be the most directly influenced by a binary

\textsuperscript{385} Foucault, “Afterword” \textit{Op Cit.} p.214
distinction between the normalised good and bad student, it was the rebels who appeared to have the most sophisticated view of the play of social power concerning identities and positionalities at Tuart, even though this awareness often led to conflictual behaviours. Like the Quiet students, these students nominated the good student along the lines of the hegemonic good projected so successfully by the institutional school. This normalised good promoted a sense of the good student as a docile, obedient student. These students saw that being this type of student opened up certain benefits. Amongst these were included academic success, positive recognition from staff and parents and a belief that these students would be more successful after they left school. However, these students nominated conflicting discourses that challenged this normalised good and presented different ways of being in the school. These alternate identities were fuelled by differing expectations as to what constituted a good student.

The Rebels rejected the good student as a docile body and developed a view of the good student as a popular student who is active in the social life of the school, even when this led to conflict with staff. By setting themselves up in opposition to the staff, through what could be perceived as negative behaviours, these students drew negative attention to themselves because of their behaviours from the staff. The flip side of this was a degree of student notoriety that culminated in popularity amongst the students. This was a specific form of popularity, based on risk-taking, disrespect for authority, a hypermasculine identity and a sense that around them things would happen – a challenge to the docile body of the good student. The Rebels saw this as a type of game, and they recognised the potential benefits versus the potential costs of behaving in certain kinds of ways. Being a good student opened up certain types of positives, but being a rebel also presented a range of positives. Chief amongst these was a sense of social power, a belief that being seen as a rebel by the school gained the student admittance to a group held in high regard by the other students. These students saw themselves as the popular students, and as such, saw themselves as having a high social currency amongst their peers that they saw as a form of power.
This power and prestige afforded them, they believed, offset any of the negative treatment they received from the staff as a result. This is not to say that they were immune to the lure of the normalised good. Each student wanted to be successful, they wanted to achieve highly and they wanted to establish good relationships with teachers. However, by Year Eleven these students maintained that they were set in their roles assumed in lower school, and not much would change. It was also true that they placed more importance on their popularity and social currency than they did on the rewards gained as conforming to the normalised good. Even their notoriety brought with it a sense that they were treated differently by the staff and this was not always bad. Whilst it was true that they often felt victimised, they also saw that teachers took them more seriously, worked harder to understand them and often looked to them to be leaders amongst their peers. It is crucial to state that these students maintained that it was not possible to be both a good student and popular. In their experience, the two were mutually exclusive because the expectations of the staff and of the students constructed very different discursive spaces.

Perhaps more than any other group, these students identified some of the strategies that they were placed under at school, and acted in such a way as to locate themselves within these strategies of surveillance to advantage. Whilst they had multiple stories of the use of surveillance by the staff, they were also aware that they were under scrutiny from their peers, and the ways that they comported themselves corresponded with ways that other students saw them and acted towards them. This corresponded with a sense that they were playing a role, and that they were always ‘on’. By this, I mean that they were always performing because there was as much expectation of how they should behave outside of school as there was in it. These students carried their sense of self in the school to activities out of the school. They went to parties where they exhibited behaviours such as underage drinking, drug taking and sexual promiscuity that could be labelled as “at risk”. The stories of this out of school behaviour are imbued with currency at school. There
is a sense that there is no public/private split for these students, they are always on and as such they live their identity out of school or bring their out of school identity to the school.

These students were not hostile to school. There were things that they did not like about it such as the routine and the academic and behavioural surveillance they saw themselves under, but they enjoyed the social nature of the school, they enjoyed their sense of power and social prestige and the weight that their opinions had with other students. There was also a sense that they enjoyed some parts of the conflict with the staff, particularly where they saw the staff according them a sense of respect that they felt they were due. What they enjoyed about school was the ways that they saw themselves as good students, supported by their peers and by various social codes and expectations that permeated wider society. For example, they posited that their sense of independence and their sense of humour were characteristics of the good student that they exhibited.

The pastoral care, then, has a productive quality that seeks to produce and affirm students who submit to certain ways of being within the school. Primarily, all students nominated passive characteristics such as obedience and punctuality to demonstrate the way that the pastoral concern of the school shaped student subjectivities. Part of this is due to the philosophy of the deficit approach that was visible in the school. This deficit model focused on areas of supposed abnormality in a lower socioeconomic setting and identified ways that the school should operate in order to rescue the student from their situation. This deficit model frames the ways that students think of themselves, and how they respond to what they see the school as attempting to achieve. An example of this is Paul’s view of homework (#1AMT1), that it was important because it was making him a better person who would be rewarded in the long run.
Being a good student involved negotiating within the parameters of what different groups expect. The study asked students to differentiate between how teachers, parents and other students defined the good student. This they were generally able to do. Each group of students interviewed was able to articulate a strong sense that there were competing discourses as to what the good student was and should be. All groups identified a set of discourses that constructed the good student as an academic achiever, someone who was successful in a range of evaluative activities such as tests, examinations and assignments. This set of discourses was heavily imbued with the idea that students deserve success because they earn it through hard work. A set of discourses that seemed to move in a parallel direction was the idea that the good student demonstrates a set of behaviours that is instrumental in their success. These behaviours involved being organised, neat, well presented, punctual and able to sit quietly. Students argued that the construction of the good student as a docile body was a set of discourses driven largely by the staff. The students in some groups such as the Quiet Students presented a sense that while they may not be able to share in the academic success of the high achievers, if they demonstrated these docile behaviours they would be afforded some of the privileges of the good student. It is these discourses that construct the good student as a normalised ideal that each student is measured against by the technologies of power within the school. The Rebels were able to articulate experiences where they were not afforded the same treatment because they were seen to move outside what was ‘normal’ and ‘appropriate’.

Many students, particularly the Rebels and the Sporting Achievers, were clearly able to differentiate between hierarchies of student identity. This meant that students were aware that there were certain types of behaviour that were acceptable to one group and not acceptable to another, and students were categorised and evaluated by other students because of how their group identity positioned them. This normalising of identity is one of the ways that students exert some power over the subjectivities that they assume. An example of this is the teachers ‘pet’.
These were students who were believed to actively campaign to get noticed by the teacher in an attempt to win the trappings of positive attention: praise, leeway with late homework or assessments and better treatment within the class. Paul (#1AMT1) stated: “Students don’t really like ‘teacher’s pets’. Teacher’s pets’ are bad.” However, the good student received all of these trappings without overstepping the boundaries as to how a student should comport themselves, according to the other students. This brings to mind the quote from Elizabeth (#1AFT2) who saw herself and her friends, not as good students, but as “middle-class”. There was a sense that at Tuart these competing discourses made it impossible for any student to be both popular and good, that they were opposite positionalities that so contradicted each other that no student could hope to reconcile the expectations associated with the two. The end result, I maintain is that it is not possible to be completely good – in effect the normalised good becomes the negotiated good as each student wrestles with the divergent and sometimes conflicting expectations of what constitutes the good student and makes sense of it their own way.

This concern with status and hierarchies extended to the ways that the students dealt with the problematic of success. Each student was very aware that there was a social hierarchy of groups at Tuart, and what they did reflected the ways that they were judged in those hierarchies. Whilst I believe that many students genuinely desired to be known as good students and receive the resulting rewards, they were very aware that this inevitably led them into conflict with what they perceived as some student opinion of the good, the socialising rebel who was popular because of their risk-taking behaviour. This manifested itself as what the principal called the ‘Tuart cringe’ or what students felt as extreme embarrassment to receive rewards in front of the group. Part of this was expressed as an awareness that receiving these awards announced the student becoming a particular type of student –the good student with a commensurate loss of social prestige and value.
The issue of the public versus the private student was a continual reference point for these students. The public student was those moments and spaces where the student was performing, fitting in with how they read their world, and the behaviours, values and attitudes that they felt they were expected to display according to the social position they saw themselves in. The Rebels seemed to be a group that were always ‘on’. By this I mean that they were always performing in such a way as to maintain the dominant expectations of their identity. This performance involved strategies designed to oppose the expectations of authority figures such as teachers in the school. On the other hand, the Quiet students also gave the impression that they were always ‘on’, but their performativity involved much more passive and obedient behaviours. Perhaps these students saw themselves as smart operators within an institution they saw as rewarding those who avoided conflict.

Tuart seemed a school where faciality dominated the ways that students saw themselves and others. The ‘faces’ that students were associated with resulted in differing expectations that were deployed and policed through a variety of technologies. What was valorised at Tuart depended upon competing discourses that were so powerful many students saw themselves as having certain characteristics of the good student, but that none of them saw themselves as the idealised vision of the good student. One of the characteristics that was highly valued (except by the Rebels) at Tuart was that of the good student who behaved appropriately and regulated their and other’s conduct in obedient and docile ways. The ways that students negotiated their positionalities at Tuart depended upon discourses of the good that constructed hierarchies of faciality, and the negotiations forced students to become hierarchical subjects.
Chapter Five:
Jarrah College

Why, in what form, in a society like our own, does such a strong link exist between the exercise of power and the obligation for individuals to make of themselves, in procedures for the manifestation of truth essential actors? What relation [exists] between the fact that one is a subject in a relation of power, and a subject by whom, for whom and through whom the truth is manifest.\textsuperscript{386}

\textit{In becoming-wolf, the important thing is the position of the mass, and above all the position of the subject itself in relation to the pack or wolf-multiplicity: how the subject joins or does not join the pack, how far away it stays, how it does or does not hold to the multiplicity.}\textsuperscript{387}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{386} Paras, \textit{Op Cit}. p.115
\item \textsuperscript{387} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus Op Cit}. p.29
\end{itemize}
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CHAPTER FIVE

Introduction

Jarrah College has a unique history, being both a new school and a school with a long tradition. It is the amalgamation in 1994 of a boys Catholic secondary school and a girls Catholic secondary school. The girls school was founded by an order of nuns in 1891, while the boys was founded by a religious order in 1926. The school was combined due to a shrinking school population and the costs associated with maintaining two separate schools. In 2005 there were approximately 880 students at the college from Years Eight to Twelve.

City B is a regional centre some 400kms from Perth on the coast. Key industries in the area are largely primary such as mining, agriculture and fishing. In 2005 there were more than 28,000 people inhabiting the area, with males slightly outnumbered by females. Approximately 8% of the population was Aboriginal. 91% of the population spoke English at home, with other statistically significant language groups being Italian, Vietnamese and Indigenous. The unemployment rate for the period was 11.6%, significantly higher than the state average of 7.5%. The median age for the population was 32, as compared to the state average of 33. The median family income was similar to the state average of $800-$999 per week. Less than 0.4% of the population held a postgraduate degree, while 3.9% of the population held a Bachelor degree. The median house price for the period was $275,000. These economic indicators seem to indicate a

388 College Website, date accessed 15/11/06.
389 Ibid.
390 All information gathered was from the 2001 Census information gathered at the web address http://www.abs.gov.au. Date accessed 4/11/06
391 Ibid.
392 Ibid.
393 Ibid.
site where there exists some comparability with the state averages. However, closer examination lends itself to the opinion that City B is an area that has a large percentage of disadvantaged people. Firstly, the unemployment rate is significantly higher than the state average. Secondly, only 21% of the population held any qualification outside of secondary schooling awards. 7% of the population had only received an eighth grade or lower education. 49.5% of the population had received an education of Year 10 or lower. These statistics present a view of an area where there is economic prosperity but also indications that some groups would experience economic disadvantage.

**Architecture**

Jarrah is located on the site that used to be the girl’s secondary school. Access to the school is through one of two entrances. The main entrance runs up to the Administration area via a tree-lined driveway. On one side of the driveway are some tennis courts, and on the other is the oval. There is limited parking at the front of the school, just for key personnel such as the Principal and some visitor parking. The front of the Administration building is impressive – around four stories high and dominated with a statue of the Virgin Mary. The other entrance is at the back of the College. This is where the staff park. By today’s standards it could be considered a relatively small parcel of land for a secondary school, wedged as it is between the cathedral and a completely separate primary school. There is only one oval for school activities. The land is dominated by the four storey Neo-Gothic building built in the 1920s that houses the Administration, Principal and Deputy Principal’s offices and the staff room. It has a rendered sandstone finish, small turrets and arched balconies that look over the oval. Symes and Preston remark that this style of architecture symbolises a religious affiliation, copied as it is from so
many cathedrals and churches. On a level below the administration, but built into the original building, is the Manual Arts Centre. Above the Administration in what used to be the girl’s boarding area, are two levels of classrooms and offices for the school psychologist and others.

Forming a ‘U’ shape are two wings of classes added later, in the 1950s and 1960s. Each of these wings consists of four levels of classes and offices with the majority of the staff housed on the bottom level of one wing, jokingly referred to by the staff as ‘The Dungeon’. The standard classroom at Jarrah is very traditionally structured. The teacher’s desk is up the front of the room on a dais raised about 30cms above the floor. The whiteboard is located next to the teacher’s desk, thus ensuring that all of the ‘action’ occurs at the front of the room where the teacher is isolated on the raised dais – a symbolism heavily imbued with religious connotations of the pulpit and the teacher as the moral guardian attempting to ‘raise’ children to salvation.

One of the key features of the architecture of the school is the ‘Great Court’ which lies in the middle of the three buildings described above. This court is completely paved except for some trees planted in raised beds. It is here that most of the students, particularly the upper school students, tend to congregate. Before school, at recess and at lunch time the Great Court is densely populated with students who seem to congregate in the same area each time. Proximity to the centre corresponds with some element of social prestige, as students seem to jockey with each other to be at the very centre of the Great Court. Other groups of students position themselves in groups that move outwards of the centre. There appeared to be a certain fluidity that one would expect of a large group like this, students leave one group and ‘journey’ to another a few paces away. The group that does not appear to journey are those male and female students at the very centre of this social space. Territory appears to be guarded jealously. On one occasion I heard a Year Eleven student tell younger students that they were not to sit there, this was a Year Eleven.

\[395\] Symes and Preston, Op Cit. p.178
spot. Out behind The Dungeon was another grassed area where students sat to eat. This area seemed much quieter and the students sat and spoke in small groups, rather than the large, vibrant interaction that took place on the Great Court.

One part of the architecture that stood out was the way that the student movement between areas was constrained by a series of narrow stairwells and corridors. On some of these major stairwells, for example, it was impossible to move more than single file. At the end of recess and lunch, these areas became very congested although the students responded generally with good grace, not pushing and fighting but waiting their turn. It is an interesting counterpoint to the throngs of students that interact with such vibrancy on the Great Court.

There are visible reminders of the spiritual legacy of the College. In various areas there were large religious statues celebrating Christian icons. Each classroom had both a cross and a picture of Mary. Next to the Administration building is a separate building which is still in use as a convent for retired nuns, next to that is the cathedral. This area is out of bounds to the students. Whilst no nuns work at Jarrah any longer, the nuns can still be seen going about their business at certain times of the day.

The last portion of the school is the single oval where students play ball sports at lunch and recess. This area is always teeming with groups of students playing. The majority of students are male, with female students making fleeting appearances across the oval to talk for brief periods to male students. The older students take up the majority of the space. The games are often played at a frenetic pace and students are often sweaty and dishevelled when they leave the oval at the end of lunch.
Homework Diary

Jarrah has a homework diary that is considered to be a specific learning tool to help the students organise their study habits. It consists of a B4 sized book with the College Motto and Logo across the front. There was room for the students to write their name and homeroom. Each week took up two B4 pages, or one A4 page folded in half. There was room for the student to record homework for each day. Parents were expected to sign the diary weekly in lower school. However, by Year Eleven it was expected that students could take control of their own homework requirements and parents no longer had to sign it.

Interestingly, the diary contained little in the way of content other than space to record the homework. There was room for parents and teachers to contact each other, but little in the way of rules and regulations. It was a simple, functional tool that was intended to help the student plan and organise their homework commitments. It conjured up images of a laissez-faire approach to discipline as a part of education where, rather than being prescriptive, education should adopt a more consensus oriented model. There were unspoken rules and values that it was accepted were widely understood by the staff and students. There was a sense that this consensus was based on the premise that the wider school community understood that Jarrah worked as schools should – a pragmatic vision of the purpose of the school.

Discipline Policy

This impression was further reinforced by an experience I had while trying to get the College’s Discipline Policy. The staff initially could not find a copy because they referred to it so rarely. When I did obtain a copy, the discipline policy was from 2000 and set for review in 2005. I asked
about this review and was told that they were unaware that it was up for review in 2005 and no thought had been given to revisiting it.

The document consists of two pages. It is neither accessible to the students or the staff as it is not in wide circulation. In a sense, it is an invisible document. It adopts what many would consider a very pragmatic approach to discipline. Rather than being prescriptive, setting out possible consequences for behaviour, it is rather open, leaving a lot of room for staff and student to manoeuvre within the system. There is no mention of what types of transgressions correspond with the levels of sanction. It is this desire to ‘leave it alone’ that makes me think of it as a laissez-faire policy. This general approach is based in part on the belief that the discipline policy was one that would be recognised, and viewed as appropriate and ‘commonsense’ by the wider community. Because it was commonsense, it did not have to be either explained or overly referred to because it was assumed that there was a consensus of opinion supporting it. This consensual discipline did not represent a radical approach, rather, it would be better viewed as a disciplined community accepting the intrinsic value and nature of what ‘good’ discipline represents.

The document itself is fairly standard. It begins by linking discipline and student behaviour in the school with “the goals of the College’s Pastoral Care Policy”.\(^{396}\) One of the aims of the document is to create an environment where learning can be pursued in an appropriate and reasonable way.\(^{397}\) The policy talks about students “behaving responsibly” so that all students can “pursue their learning without interference and in security”.\(^{398}\) This document positions the student as the autonomous, freely acting individual who chooses to act in certain ways at certain times. These actions can be either ‘responsible’ or ‘inappropriate’, but either way, the actions are construed as

\(^{396}\) College Discipline Policy, p.1
\(^{397}\) Ibid.
\(^{398}\) Ibid.
markers of the character and possibility of the student – a variation of the good citizen. The student’s moral character is being judged, and governed, through their behaviour.

There are six steps in the document that represent the different levels of infraction, and the different sanctions that can be imposed by the school. What types of behaviours result in which step remains unclear. Step 1, the least serious, involves classroom misbehaviour on a small scale. The discipline utilised will be deployed by the class teacher and is defined as strategies “to improve the student behaviour”. 399 If this behaviour continues, the teacher may move to “isolation within class, community service, parent contact”. 400 Community service normally involves the student picking up rubbish at lunch time. As these steps continue, more people become involved. At Step 4, the student is withdrawn from class; the House Leader is notified and is involved in counselling the student and negotiating return to class. At Steps 5 and 6, the student is dealt with by the Principal, who has the authority to suspend or expel the student. These escalating steps continue until the student modifies their behaviour.

The document makes the point clearly, in the last line, that the reason for this Discipline Policy is to “provide the opportunity for the students who transgress to take responsibility for their actions”. The sentiment expressed is that to take responsibility is to mend behaviours so that the student conducts their conduct in ‘reasonable’ and ‘appropriate’ ways and these help to construct certain types of normalised behaviours and attitudes amongst students. The students are responsible for their own conduct, they are governed through their conduct and the ways that they comport themselves in a variety of situations. Discipline exists at Jarrah to make the student disciplined – that is, to make the student modify their conduct in normalising ways. In this way,

399 Ibid.
400 Ibid.
the student is being attached to the institution, and comporting themselves in various ways that have repercussions and present possibilities for students.

**College Website**

The website is framed in the colours of the school. Atop each page are the College crest and the motto ‘For Others’. The Jarrah website title page is dominated by a picturesque representation of the front of the College. Stone and iron gates open up onto a tree lined drive. At the end of the drive is the neo-Gothic façade of the Administration building of the school. This photograph highlights the traditional aspects of the school as contained in the Administration building. There is a central tower that rises up to the ‘heavens’. This is an image of the moralising and traditional quality of the school’s identity as presented to the public. Central to that tower is a statue of Mary that looks down benevolently over any who enter the school. This emphasises the religious mission of the school. The photograph is neat and ordered, and the gates could be seen to symbolise both safety and the value of what is being taught inside. The open gates denote a welcome to a place of privilege, where learning occurs and knowledge is produced.

The school website has a number of dropdown menus that the individual can navigate. This site was under construction as there were a number of areas with little or no information. Primarily, these were the curriculum areas, whilst the more prosaic areas such as fees and contact details were presented. Perhaps this could be seen as entailing the belief that few people access the web to look for curriculum information. Another interpretation is that the individual teacher assumes much of the responsibility for curriculum, and as such they are positioned as the ‘expert’, adopting a somewhat unquestioning view as to what a ‘good’ school should be.
The “School Performance Data” reports on school performance information each year. It reports on staff retention, student and staff attendance at school, expenditure on Professional Development for staff, and results from Year 9 standardised testing which are compared to the state average. These results indicate that the school is performing above the state average in Reading, Writing and Mathematics.

**Classroom Observation**

Eight different Year Eleven classes were observed in this phase of the research. The subjects observed were Human Biology, Discrete Mathematics, Metals Technology, Physical Education Studies, Religious Education, Economics, Geography and Senior English. There were a number of observations that I made that were highly interesting across the subject areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEE Subject</th>
<th>Behaviours/Abilities Valorised</th>
<th>Curriculum Orientations/ Pedagogies⁴⁰¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Biology</td>
<td>♦ Rote learning from textbook ♦ Sitting and working quietly and methodically ♦ Little group work, interaction between students and teachers was individual ♦ Knowledge was objective and students were directed by the teacher</td>
<td>♦ Traditional classroom structure with chairs and desks facing the front and the teacher ♦ Heavily imbued with vocational/neo-classical views of knowledge and a hierarchical teacher/student relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrete Mathematics</td>
<td>♦ Students working from textbook ♦ Highly individualistic learning ♦ Teacher sat at front of class and helped student who were having ‘problems’ ♦ Students regulated their own behaviour, there was no imposition of authority from the teacher indicating that they were ‘well-trained’</td>
<td>♦ Traditional classroom structure with chairs and desks facing the front and the teacher ♦ Elements of the vocational/neo-classical in the way that the class was run ♦ Highly individualistic approach to learning, but students helped each other with problems and then took them to the ‘expert’ teacher who provided the ‘correct’ solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>♦ Sitting quietly and paying</td>
<td>♦ Small group meant that it was run</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁴⁰¹ Kemmis *et al.*, *Op Cit.* pp. 142-143
The TEE classes were dominated by the vocational/neo-classical orientation to pedagogy that saw the students as empty vessels that needed to be filled with the ‘correct’ knowledge. Students were the receivers while teachers were the authorities who maintained the hierarchies of power in the classroom.

<table>
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<th>Curriculum Orientations/ Pedagogies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td>♦ Bus trip to tennis courts to play tennis&lt;br&gt;♦ Teacher referred to by nickname&lt;br&gt;♦ Skills based lesson, students learnt by doing&lt;br&gt;♦ Teacher played with/against students and used this as a tool to encourage/exhort students</td>
<td>♦ Liberal-progressive orientation where students learn through experience&lt;br&gt;♦ Skill based emphasis has elements of neo-classical&lt;br&gt;♦ Authority structure more of a mentor than an expert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>♦ Achievement based on assessment results&lt;br&gt;♦ Students worked on computers individually&lt;br&gt;♦ Highly individualistic lesson&lt;br&gt;♦ Working quietly and independently</td>
<td>♦ Traditional laboratory structure with students sat in an oval shape facing outwards – a reverse Panopticon&lt;br&gt;♦ Elements of the vocational/neo-classical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* Op Cit. p.213
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior English</td>
<td>♦ Relaxed authority structure where students were self-regulators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ Students working on tasks in an active way, talking to other students and engaging with the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ Relaxed authority structure where the students were largely self-regulators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ Students were given the opportunity move and discuss with other students – a very active class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ Teacher pulled students back in if they went too far of task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ Clearly liberal-progressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ Teacher sat with the students rather than at the front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ Students were given some autonomy and allowed to explore different ways of learning in the class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Education</td>
<td>♦ Students seemed disengaged with this class, the only class where there were discipline issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ Teacher was an authority that used discipline and penalties as a tool to create a quiet, docile class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ Teacher talk dominated lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ Dominantly vocational/neo-conservative, students ‘empty vessels’ waiting to be filled with the correct knowledge imparted by the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>♦ Discipline and the ‘correct’ comportment, values and attitudes heavily policed by the teacher as authority</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The classes in the VET programme were roughly split as to whether they deployed a neo-classical or liberal-progressive approach to learning. This split seemed dependent on the personality and disposition of the individual teacher. There did not seem to be a considered aim of using the classroom and pedagogies to create learners who were “self-actualising, reflective and potent as a human being.”

The classroom observation gave an impression of a school environment that largely utilised traditional pedagogies that placed the teacher at the centre of the learning process and assigned a place within hierarchies for each student. The teacher was responsible for imparting the ‘correct’ knowledge, but also policing ‘correct’ behaviour. The students appeared to accept this position, and often acted in such a way as to maintain this authority. The students were self-disciplined; they conducted themselves in generally ‘appropriate’ ways. They appeared to accept the

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403 Kemmis et al., Op Cit.
organisation and conduct of the school and the classroom as appropriate and normal and welcomed the certainty of this traditional approach.

**Principal Interview**

The interview with Principal B was friendly and relaxed, and he seemed at ease as he answered the questions. Principal B had been the principal of Jarrah for ten years, and his principalship was coming to an end in 2005. He was a member of a religious order that had been significant in Catholic education in Australia, and was one of the last religious principals in Western Australia. Principal B had been principal of Jarrah since it had amalgamated in 1995. He presented as a confident, cheerful man who was interested in the education of young people.

Principal B made a number of interesting answers in the interview that led to a particular view of the school. When asked about the good student, Principal B responded by seeing it as a manifestation of the good citizen:

> I suppose you could use the mission statement expression that each student is fully developed in every possible way – academically, socially, spiritually, emotionally and physically. So that when they leave they leave the school they are developed in every possible way.

This quote highlights a liberal-progressive philosophy of education that sees all students as individuals and fails to locate them in any social order or hierarchy. The school should be a place where the individual is trained to be a certain kind of person that is most able to meet the needs of society after they leave school. Fully developing the student reflects the discourse that for society to prosper, well-adjusted and competent students are required. This rhetoric of educating the whole person reflects a dominant discourse in contemporary education. Educating the whole person is one of those vague terms that can mean so much or so little depending upon how it is
implemented. For Principal B, I believe he was reflecting the belief that schools have a duty to educate more than academically. In his view, he talks about educating the students socially, spiritually, emotionally and physically as well as academically. This could mean that it is possible to shape a vision of the good student as a certain kind of athlete, friend, character and spiritual individual. It also demonstrates a sense that the school is considered to be a place where the individual is trained to think and act in acceptable ways. In this view, the idealised norm of the good student corresponds to a vision of the good citizen that values compliance and docility coupled with support for traditional views of social order and hierarchy. Largely these values of the good citizen represent dominant values that reflect commonsense notions of what society should be about. This vision of the good citizen is predicated upon the Enlightenment vision of the good as an autonomous agent free to choose right from wrong, good from bad and ultimately through these rational choices, a better society.

Principal B was aware that there were multiple possibilities for the good student depending upon different discourses and expectations. This led to Principal B wrestling with a number of possible definitions of the good student:

*The term good student is a little bit unclear. Does it mean someone who is academically good, some one who is a good student in terms of behaviour, or some one who is a good student, a good person or a good member of the school?*

This list that Principal B developed demonstrates some of the competing discourses and possibilities that exist and tensions between those possibilities. It also shows an awareness of the ways that students are pushed and pulled by a variety of forces that are productive of certain subject positions. Principal B’s response indicated that there were a number of negotiations that the normalised good student had to make in their school life.
One of the key platforms of Principal B’s vision was the significance of the community in deciding who or what constituted the good student.

> I think the idea of a good student is a person who – can I say he [sic] in the generic sense – is in everything to the best of his [sic] ability whether that be study and that is not referring to his academic ability, give his [sic] best study wise who gets involved in all sorts of activities around the school; who is part of the community and particularly someone who treats others with courtesy, consideration and care.\(^{404}\)

This quote encapsulates a variety of discourses that construct visions of the good student. The most obvious one is the maleness of the good student. Some of the characteristics prized by this principal reflect a gendered good student. However, there is also another list of discourses found in this statement. Firstly, there is the discourse of the good student as a success because of the effort they put in. This endorses the meritocratic discourse of school as a place where the cream will rise to the top due to intrinsic factors within the student. Secondly, there is a strong sense that effort is one of the key values of the good student because it prepares them for a competitive world after they leave school. Thirdly, the emphasis on community and involvement in a variety of activities implies a sense of positive contribution. The good student is one who is involved and active within official elements of the life of the school. These activities could include leadership roles, sporting involvement or involvement in various cultural activities or any of the other co-curricular possibilities of the school. Lastly, there is sense of the good student as a compassionate member of society who demonstrates Christian values in dealing with other people. These Christian values have been presented in a secular light, perhaps indicating that the school sees a role in presenting these values in a less overtly religious way. There is a vision of a good student who is active within accepted limits – an active compliance that is heavily imbued with notions of

\(^{404}\) The use of the personal pronoun ‘he’ to designate all of the student body is an interesting one from a perspective of gender. One wonders whether in the mind of the principal maleness is constructed as the norm and femaleness a relational term to the male. Certainly, Principal B had spent some 35 years as an educator within all male schools, and it was only with his arrival at Jarrah in 1995 that he was involved with the education of female students.
personal autonomy firmly rooted in . Enlightenment notions of freedom that currently dominate
the understandings of education.  

Principal B further reinforced this presentation of community and society when he said:

Really what the good student is about isn’t school but life. What applies in school in that
sense applies in the community too. I see the good as being active citizens, like good
citizens of the world. That is reflected in the school motto “For Others”.

The idea of the active, involved citizen is crucial for Principal B when he thinks about how
schools should work with students to promote a harmonious society. The mention of the school
motto reflects a sense of the good student as someone who does good works for the benefit of
others. This motto was developed with Principal B’s input when Jarrah was first commissioned in
1995. It demonstrates, I believe, a key value of Principal B’s vision for the school. For Principal
B a key characteristic of the good student is that of the self-sacrificing individual, where that
sacrifice can be seen to bring about a greater good for the wider community.

Principal B nominated pastoral care as the most effective way through which a school can
facilitate these types of student. This technology of governmentality operates best when schools
“guide and encourage” the student to transform themselves into a student who comports
themselves in appropriate ways. In this he hints at a tension between what is good for the self and
what is good for the community:

We help students by putting a very large emphasis on pastoral care. Pastoral care being
seen in its very wide sense of being for the whole person. Going back to where we stated
from, assisting the person to develop in all facets of their being.

Marshall, Op Cit. p.592
For Principal B, the pastoral care of the students involved the staff engaging with the students in a positive and friendly manner. Through this, the staff would be both role models and guides for the students as they negotiated their identity in a challenging world. For Principal B, this relationship was crucial in shaping the individual into a constructive member of society:

*I think the transformation of the individual comes back to counselling. And counselling is only effective if there is an atmosphere of mutual respect. If the counsellor has a rapport with the student the student tends to listen. I think that that relationship between the students and staff in general plays a very important role. The sanctions you mentioned have their place too, but when you get that far you do not have a real big expectation of success.*

The idea of mutual respect fosters a sense of students as partners in the pastoral care of the school, where their perspective is valued by the staff. For Principal B, it was this relationship that was central to the mission of the school, to produce students who would engage in society in a compassionate and caring way. In Principal B’s view, the good student develops through a relationship with the good teacher, who work together to create the good school. This symbiotic relationship presupposes an element of equality within the complex student-staff relationship.

Central to Principal B’s vision of the good student was an emphasis on the good student as a person who shares a moral view of the world that can perhaps best be described as the accepted moral conventions of society. Earlier, he spoke of things such as courtesy, care and consideration as key attributes of the good student – an approximation of dominant social values often associated with middle-classness. I think these notions of respectability and obedience are exemplified in how Principal B nominates a certain form of moral conduct as pivotal in defining the good student.

*I suppose I am thinking not so much of rules as of moral issues like how the good student treats people and honesty; even some of the less important rules like uniform rules, the good student keeps them in terms of how they reflect on the school.*

406 Symes and Preston, Op Cit. p.49
This identification of moral issues presupposes a sense of agreement from the student that the dominant moral code is the correct moral code. In this sense, much relies on how the moral code is defined and communicated to the student body. It also projects a vision of the good student as a compliant student who demonstrates an adherence to accepted notions of what is correct and appropriate. This also raises the notion of the good student as one who is a strategic student – and the possibility of students actively choosing to be docile students because it suits their purpose and they see opportunity and benefit from that docility.

An interesting point about Jarrah is that it tends to eschew formal punishment structures in favour of more immediate and personal interventions. There was a sense that the school tended to avoid seeing the docile student as good, rather there was an emphasis on an active, involved student. This student was expected to be involved in the life of the school, while accepting the legitimacy of the school as an authority structure.

They could be nerdy followers to the letter of the law, but my experience of people like that are a little bit short on the characteristics like initiative and resourcefulness and so on. Not totally ... I suppose I am saying that my ideal good student would keep the rules but not meticulously. There would be times when there might be short cuts taken but not the serious ones, not those that are going to reflect on him the person.

This interplay between authority and activity challenged the discourse of the good student as totally docile and obedient. Rather there was a sense that there was room for the student to manoeuvre, to test themselves as long as they accepted the serious rules of the school. What these serious rules were was open to interpretation, but they hinged on things such as illegal behaviour and violent conduct. This sense of play could act to free the student up within some of the parameters of the school. On the other hand, the openness of the rules could mean that students perhaps lacked certainty as to where the lines were that they could cross. This play within the rules was further reinforced when Principal B stated:
We don’t go in a lot for formal punishment, things like yard duty and community service. Interestingly we have never had detention there has never been any push from the teachers or the parents for detention. There is suspension as you mentioned but this is really a last resort. I suppose that one of the very powerful but a subtle thing is the students wanting to be thought well of by the staff, and this is a major influence on how they behave.

Principal B accepted that the school validated a clear vision of what the good student should be, and felt that the majority of students accepted that vision as appropriate.

I think that there is a very good correlation. Obviously there is always the marginal group, those who are opposed to everything that the school is on about. Generally I think that there is coherence between what the school sees as important and what the students respect.

For Principal B, the skills and attributes that defined the good student were the same that defined the good citizen:

I think that those students who have the qualities that we have been talking about are held in high regard in the community generally. They are usually the ones who do get on better in life because they relate with others better and things tend to work for them because of their ability to make the most of all situations.

This interview indicated a principal whose vision of the good student relied much on accepted moral codes and conventions, who valued involvement and engagement as much, if not more, than the traditional value of academic success. This vision relied upon a tension between the student as active and the student as docile. By this I mean that the students were encouraged to be involved and engaged with their schooling, and were allowed areas of freedom to play with the power relations within the school. On the other hand, this was done within a framework that relied upon acceptance of certain values that could be described as dominant social values. Paradoxically, I posit that this idealised vision of the good student uses the activity of the students as a means to shape their expectations and values.
Achievers

The three students who were selected as academic achievers by the Principal and two Deputy Principals (because Jarrah does not have Year Coordinators) presented as bright, cheerful students who thoughtfully considered questions and responded in detail. The Principal and two Deputy Principals selected students who were both academic achievers and who demonstrated elements of community service or spirit in their school lives. Brad (#2AMT1), Kate (#2AFT2) and Sarah (#2AFT3) appeared to feel comfortable with the format of the interviewing. They tended to respond in impersonal ways, and to use a voice that appeared to represent the wider student body. This could have indicated a subconscious view that they were the spokespeople for the wider student body, the leaders if you will, and as such they tended to want to consider schooling from the experience of the majority.

These students’ responses correlated strongly with the views and values expressed by the principal. They valued involvement in school community, leadership and effort. The good student was one who was involved in the life of the school. Brad (#2AMT1) stated: “They try. They get involved in stuff.” This involvement was in the life of the school, in the variety of functions and events that make up the co-curricular aspects of schooling. The good student was also one who made the effort at all facets of school life including the classroom. They demonstrated leadership of their peer group. Kate (#2AFT2) said: “The good student shows leadership qualities and helps other students out.” For these students, the good student was one who demonstrated capabilities in a variety of areas. Sarah (#2AFT3) opined:

I probably see a good student as an all rounder. They are successful, but it depends on how you measure success. Generally someone who puts in whenever they are needed or if they are asked to do something they pretty much say yes.
This comment highlights a key debate – to what extent is the individual able to freely act to position themselves in a variety of favourable ways. There is a sense that students are complicit in the various ways they are positioned, and consequently, how they are seen within the school. This permission often seems to discipline the students to quite docile positions that lack autonomous action. The crux of this relies on the active docility, that is, choosing to display conduct that conforms to expected norms because it advantages the student in some ways. Brad (#2AMT1) further articulated this sense of active docility, arguing that success in one area such as academic was less important than a competence and willingness to be involved in a number of areas:

I don’t think academic success is as important. You can still have all those qualities of leadership and honesty and not be a high achiever. Like you can be good at a range of things and not stand out in any of them. Some people are good at just one thing, like really good at one thing, but are not good at anything else. I don’t think this makes them a good student.

One of the views that emerged in this interview was the sense that the good student and the staff shared similar values, and successful students interacted with staff and each other in friendly and non-authoritarian ways. Brad (#2AMT1) stated: “The good student and teachers respect each other. Lots of students don’t have respect for the teachers, that’s why they are disruptive in the class.” This mutual respect was based on a set of passive behaviours adopted by the student to conform to the expectations of the staff. These students nominated such behaviours as politeness, punctuality, responsibility, organisation and being “not too loud” as important in gaining the trust and acceptance of the teachers. The characteristics of the good student could be seen as rites of entrance to a traditionally adult world. These included values such as trustworthiness, honesty, maturity and responsibility. Sarah (#2AFT3) included an admonition that it was important that the good student was: “Not like everyone else.” This sense of separation was not one of marginalisation, but of advantage. These students articulated a view where the good student had an elevated stature in the school, and this elevated stature meant that there were different
possibilities for these students. An example of this is Brad’s admiration for the student positions of Head Boy and Head Girl or House Leaders that were voted on by the students and staff:

If you are a good student that’s kind of what the House Leaders and Head Girl and Head Boy goes on. It doesn’t matter if you are sporty or academic it’s how people think of you. You get more responsibility, but also more opportunity. All of the students look up to you and you get on really well with the teachers. (#2AMT1)

These students articulated that the good student was given more opportunity and that these opportunities were desirable in a number of ways. One of the important rewards of being a good student was access to positive social outcomes both with staff and students. There was also a reminder that there were a number of ‘gatekeepers’ of the good. The teachers are positioned as the gatekeepers, but students are also seen as conferring status to the normalised good. This demonstrates complex negotiations between competing discourses of what the normalising vision of the good student involves.

The good students were identified early, and were encouraged to continue to be successful. This manifested itself in a feeling that the staff were actively involved or were participants in the success of the students normalised as good. Brad (#2AMT1) argued that with good students “if they underachieve the teachers get disappointed”. Conversely, these students ventured the opinion that the school was a place that catered for all sorts of students through the different possibility of teacher relationships. Sarah stated:

Stoners get on worst with the teachers. But it depends on the teacher again. If you misbehave you spend more time with the teacher so you actually get along with them as well. It depends on how smart the teacher is. There are some teachers who appreciate more intelligent conversation or humour and there are teachers who laugh at bad jokes. There are also teachers who like to find out the gossip as well. So they hang around with the cool group to find out what’s going on. (#2AFT3)

Kate also felt that being identified as a good student corresponded with different expectations, pressures and treatment.
If you normally hand assignments in on time they are more likely to give you an extension if you need it. If the teacher decides you are working with them they are more likely to cut you some slack in terms of assessments. (#2AFT2)

The use of the examination as a tool to reward the good student seems to rely on there being a sense of agreement between the staff and the good student, a sense that these students and the staff are working together as a team to share success. There was a sense that they accepted the vision of the school as appropriate and reasonable, and this is why these students reported a vision of the school very similar to the principal. Interestingly, none of these students nominated intelligence or academic success as a key characteristic of the good student. On the other hand, these students spoke of the disadvantage of not being seen as a good student, and how hard it could be to break perceptions. Sarah said:

Some students don’t even get recognised at all by the teachers. It affects their confidence so maybe they don’t try anymore. They think that they can’t get to that standard so they stop caring and get worse. (#2AFT3)

These student experiences underline the competing discourses that they were forced to negotiate in their school. They believed that parents, teachers and students wanted different things and these discourses converged and diverged at various times and in various ways. It was success at these negotiations that could be seen as central to being a good student. Brad argued that parents wanted:

Someone they can trust - like they like their kids to hang around with them like they would be happy for their kids to be happy with them. Someone who they see as responsible friendly and mature. (#2AMT1)

On the other hand, Kate stated that students value the good student as someone who is successful in social situations across a variety of interaction.

They are fun to be around, you can have a conversation with them. They won’t associate with some groups like they won’t be cool enough or might not like what they do. They respect them. We see things not necessarily academic but things like music and sport and things done outside school. (#2AFT2)
They agreed that parents, teachers and students identified the good student as trustworthy, honest, a hard worker and involved in sanctioned activities within the school community. They felt teachers wanted a student who exhibited passive behaviours in the class, but active behaviours outside the class, as long as those activities reflected the values of the school itself. This passive/active identity is one of the ways that power is deployed in contradictory ways within the school. For example, Kate (#2AFT2) argued that teachers wanted: “Good manners. Being responsible in class; getting their work done. Not too loud. Punctual. Have a go and participate in class.” There was a sense that teachers promoted a class that they “control” and that good students acknowledged that control and worked within its parameters. As Sarah said:

The teacher doesn’t have control of the class when people act up. It means that when one person disobeys one little thing someone else can take it further. Doing what the teacher wants is very important. Disrupting others learning is not right. (#2AFT3)

Furthermore, Sarah argued that being a good student was, in many ways, an act that enabled the individual to control the self in ‘positive’ and ‘productive’ ways.

If you are a good student you might be less stressed. You can handle things in your time; you have got things under control in class. You have more control over things outside of the class. So you are not always whining about what is going to happen, because you are more responsible for what you do. (#2AFT3)

All of these characteristics could be seen as passive characteristics. On the other hand, these students identified a strong push from the teachers for the good student to be an independent student who is capable of thinking for themselves and actively demonstrating the College Motto “For Others” albeit in highly individualistic and competitive ways. Sarah stated:

You should be able to work independently because that’s what you have to do out of school, a good student will learn to think for themselves. Teachers want students who are independent. The teacher doesn’t have to hold their hand all the time. (#2AFT3)

There is significance in the academic achievers discussing independent learning in terms of their positionality in the school. This stress on independence from the teacher is limited to acting
within the construction of what is normal and appropriate. This lends itself to a critique of what kinds of roles these academic achievers are being set up to play after school. Brad stated:

_Sometimes the good student might be more of the teacher’s pet and actually could depend on the teacher a bit. But if you are independent – we said that a good student was independent - but once you leave school as long as you are independent you should be able to be successful. I guess a good student should be successful because they try and can think for themselves._ (#2AMT1)

Another area of individual negotiation for each student lay in the area of popularity. Popularity was a double-edged sword because to be popular with the students often led to the student losing popularity with the staff. A good student, Kate (#2AFT2) argued, was one who “_got involved in everything. They are not too cool._” The emphasis on being too cool was an interesting one. These students spoke of popularity as something that often required withdrawing from the community involvement central to their experience of the normalised good student. Brad, talking about a group of popular female students stated:

_There is the scraggy slush core group. They go out on the weekends, worry about who is hooking up, who’s hot at the moment. They hang out with older 20 year olds. They deal in gossip._ (#2AMT1)

Sarah went on to give voice to the power of self-surveillance within the school because of the power embedded within the different social coteries that students formed:

_Do something wrong and they find out about it. They don’t do much at school, they are not good students, but they can be pretty mean sometimes._ (#2AFT3)

To these students, this form of popularity ran contrary to the mission of the school, and therefore the good student. To be a good student also required establishing positive social relationships with other students. As Kate said:

_If you don’t have a good relationship with people then there is no point in doing work all the time. No one is going to go up and talk to you or work in a group with you._ (#2AFT2)

Sarah continued, stating that one of the things that made her a good student was her ability to deal socially with others in a caring way:
I try to help everyone out, try to cheer them up if they are a bit down. If anyone needs to borrow anything I give it to them. I say hello to everyone, regardless of if I am friends with them or not. I am polite, well mannered and caring. (#2AFT3)

At Jarrah, good students were rewarded for behaving in ways that the school community desired. These rewards took the place of Letters of Commendation that would be sent home to the parents, or through academic awards at end of year ceremonies. These students referred to these fleetingly. What they focussed most on, however, were the leadership and community rewards for manifestations of the good student. Kate stated:

When I was in Year Eight I got the Christian Leadership Award. I thought that was pretty good because everyone thought that I was a good Christian leader. I know that it doesn’t go to the smartest person and it doesn’t go to the person who goes to church all the time – it usually goes to some one like Head Girl or House Captain who has those sorts of leadership qualities; like the good student qualities. I think back to being a Christian leader I feel good that people liked me back then. (#2AFT2)

All of these students entertained thoughts of being placed in leadership positions within the school, and they looked forward to that possibility. They saw that there were a number of leadership positions that students could be rewarded with that they saw as proof that a student was good. These leadership positions were a measure of the good student because they reflected the values of the school. This is evidence of powerful discourses within Jarrah positioned students in terms of who they were becoming. Election to these positions gives the good student a prestige, a social status that reinforces the normalising project of the good student. However, there is also a strong sense that the school motto “For Others” entailed competing visions arranged to govern the conduct of the students. The motto nominates a sense of self-sacrifice for the greater good of the wider society. The traits that are rewarded appear highly individualistic and based on a sense of classifactory power, that is, a power that locates students in hierarchies that correspond with different possibilities within the school.
At Jarrah, the good student seemed to be rewarded with a social prestige among their peers. While they may have lacked the social advantage of the more rebellious students, they were taken seriously by their peers, and were advantaged socially in comparison to their peers. Brad saw it this way:

*I think part of being a good student has to do with relationships with people and not being restrictive. Like some people have only got a couple of really good friends that they know really well and can’t interact with other people because they don’t have their respect or people can’t trust them or they secretly don’t like them. They only have a few close people so they only do things with those people. They can’t step outside their comfort zone. I can say I kind of know those people so I’ll hang around with them for a bit and I don’t mind joining in with them because I know that most people like me.*

(#2AMT1)

This aspect of the good student as socially connected is contrasted with the idea that popularity could force students to alienate themselves from being seen as a good student. These students were very aware of the social positionality of groups, and the ways that groups interacted. Brad (#2AMT1) saw himself as belonging to the popular male group, an insightful comment considering he was chosen by the school as an academic achiever. “We are the cool group. We always play sport. In the cool boy’s group there are the punks and the surfers and there are also the boarder boys.” However, Brad (#2AMT1) went on to say that there was a spatial distribution that reflected degrees of ‘coolness’ amongst the student body.

*Our year is sort of split up into two groups – the Cool Group and the Squaries. The Cool Group hangs out on the grey court which is down some stairs. My group hangs on the stairs. Close but not quite. I can’t get down to the stairs to sink to their level. There’s another group who sit in the St Pats store. They are the ones who always hide.*

This quote demonstrates a view of the school as a very structured and formalised social community that spatially distributes certain types of people in waves emanating out from the centre – the Great Court. The closer one sits to the centre, the more social value one is seen to have. Conversely, distance away is seen as ‘hiding’ – an avoidance behaviour imbued with elements of shame and humiliation.
Sports Achievers

The school selected three students who all excelled at a chosen sport. Ben (#2SMV1) played football, Peter (#2SMT2) played hockey and Philip (#2SMT3) was a cricketer. The students selected were all male and excelled in sports that could be considered mainstream. These students interviewed well as a group, and gave the impression that they socialised together relatively frequently. They presented as confident and eager to be involved in the interview process.

The first thing that emerged from these student responses was the centrality they afforded the teacher in construction of the discursive practices that constructed the good student. By this, I mean that they phrased their answers largely in terms of the relationship that the normalised good student supposedly had with staff. Peter (#2SMT2) argued that the good student was one who: “is polite and does their homework and does their work at school.” These students argued that the student body admired the good student and supported that student who was able to best negotiate the social, behavioural and intellectual roles of the good student. Peter (#2SMT2) stated: “I think everyone respects the good students and I know I try to congratulate someone when they have done something well.”

This normalisation of the good student promoted a sense of the good student as a docile and passive individual within the school. Peter (#2SMT2) stated: “Teachers want a good student who makes their job easy so they don’t have to work too hard, just be the teacher and sit back and mark students.” This sense that the good student was a technology that allowed the teacher to classify the student was taken by these students as common sense. The successful students, then, were ones who were strategic players of the game as they negotiated their positionality within their relationships with teachers. They argued that it was appropriate and reasonable for the teacher to be an examiner of the student. When I asked what characteristics the good student had
for teachers, Ben (#2SMV1), Peter (#2SMT2) and Philip (#2SMT3) all contributed to a list of what could best be described as obedience characteristics.

*The good student is respectful, hard working, helpful, and trustworthy. They apply themselves, and they always try their best in all activities. They are well mannered and polite.*

For Philip, what encapsulated the normalised good student was living the school motto. This involved a strategic negotiation of identity within the school community.

*The good student will follow the motto: “For Others”. But it is important to not be too goodie-two-shoes, like you follow the rules but you don’t ‘suck up’ to the teachers. Not many people like them (suck-ups) after a while because they know what they like and they are not genuine.* (#2SMT3)

This comment underscores the point that good students are located, and locate themselves, within complex power relations that delineate what is appropriate and acceptable. These power relations are deployed from a number of vantage points and construct differing discourses as to how the student should behave. Parents placed emphasis on “*doing their best*” according to Philip (#2SMT3). Students placed emphasis on the social aspect of schooling, admiring students who were academically successful but who tempered that with a social humility: Ben phrased it this way:

*Students admire someone that they could get along with, not people who down people and tease them because they did not do as well in a test or something. They like the student who is nice to them no matter who they are.* (#2SMV1)

Peter (#2SMT2) agreed, arguing that some of the good students were valued for academic success alone, and that this was not always a great indicator of the value of the individual. “*You have some good students who don’t have any sense of humour or personal skill.*” The point is made that schools are classificatory places, and that students are acutely aware of how this classificatory power locates them. Ben’s (#2SMV1) quote details how academic results are used as a way of understanding individual abilities and worth – a judging of the self through the
academic processes of schooling. These students were of the opinion that academic merit was highly valued by the teachers. Philip stated:

*I think a teacher approves of a student more if they are smart and they only have to teach it once whereas the not so smart kids they have to repeat and stuff and they get a bit frustrated. I think they enjoy teaching the more successful kids. They feel better themselves that they have done well themselves and it is reflected in how they treat the students.* (#2SMT3)

These student experiences lend themselves to a critique of the school where the formal and informal modes of surveillance construct student sensibilities in powerful and lasting ways, particularly academic ones. Philip argued that there were two kinds of outcomes of the surveillance, positive or negative treatment from the larger school community.

*A good student gets mentioned in the newsletter. You can get mentioned for Sports, subjects like English Literature, Politics, poetry writing, English competitions, anything really. House leaders also acknowledging you in house meetings for the good things you have done. They used to reward you in sport if you came first or places in swimming or athletics they would take you down to compete in the Interschool Carnivals. They didn’t do it this year in athletics so it was a bit of a let down because I would have competed in four events.* (#2SMT3)

These formal modes were supported by more informal modes where the student’s relationship with the individual teachers resulted in certain possibilities. Ben commented:

*If you do stuff that is not bad they won’t pick on you, they just try and leave you alone and then you just breeze through school and you can work at your own pace. Teachers don’t really notice you when you behave, but it’s the bad stuff you do that gets their attention.* (#2SMV1)

Ben argued that what students received through doing what the teachers wanted was a sense of freedom to do what they wanted, as long as that freedom was deemed appropriate and conformed to the boundaries set by the school. This oxymoronic freedom gave the students both security and easy space within which to operate to maximise their enjoyment of and freedom in their schooling. The end result of this was a sense of security within the school – it was functioning as it should and this certainty reduced a lot of the anxiety and uncertainty from the students.
When the teachers are being nice to you and get off your case pretty much, you don’t have to worry about it when you wake up each morning and come to school. You just go to school to have fun and you don’t dread school. (#2SMV1)

It is important to stress that for these students, it was their compliance or passivity that resulted in this relaxation of tension between the teachers and the students. However, when the gaze of the staff cast students in a negative light, the repercussions were less rewarding and harder to escape. The formal modes of surveillance involved communication from teachers to the parents. Ben listed these possibilities:

If you don’t behave, you can get community service, or a blue note (Letter of Concern) or the teacher will just phone your mum. You can also get suspended or expelled, but that does not happen much. (#2SMV1)

What these students saw as the most powerful deployment of power was the ability of the staff to act on the surveillance that students were under, to work together to isolate and ‘ride’ a student who was not conducting themselves in appropriate ways. Ben spoke of seeing this happen to other students and argued that what it did was enmesh students with a positionality that was very difficult to escape.

The worst way is when the teachers just pick on you. Teachers they sort of decide that maybe they will follow this person really closely because they are doing something that they don’t like. Once it starts it kind of keeps going because its kind of a reputation each student gets that lasts for years. Whether it is good or bad, it seems to keep going and you get stuck with that type of treatment. (#2SMV1)

This normalising gaze is deployed at all levels of the school experience as a means of training the student to comport themselves in the ‘correct’ or ‘appropriate’ ways may flow on to life opportunities after school. Ben (#2SMV1) is giving voice to one of the ways that the idealisation of the good student enmeshes all of the students with its possibilities, and positions them according to a subjective assessment of many factors. However, this gaze is not limited to the students. Teachers themselves are also constructed through the normalising gaze, and the judgement of the student is crucial in establishing what kinds of relationships will occur between individual staff and students. Peter stated:
Sometimes I talk too much and get told to be quiet. We have a teacher who is not very experienced and I think because he tries to act like the kids’ best mate so he lets you do stuff like and get away with it a lot more. Often people takes the teachers the way the teacher acts from like kids around the school say they act and you go in there and think she is crap or she’s good and sometimes the other way around. Some teachers are stereotypes and you think they are bad and they are good. This teacher gets a kid that they have not taught before maybe Yr 11 for example and they have never taught them before and walk in and say I have heard about you. (#2SMT2)

The student’s social world is also heavily constructed by discourses as to what is acceptable and appropriate from certain positionalities. This was also true of the social world that bound the Year Elevens together. On the one hand, the students identified their cohort as being a close group. Philip (#2SMT) stated: “Mostly all the Year Elevens go up there (the Great Court) and we all socialise together. We are a pretty close year group.” It is possible that those students who were positioned close to the centre of social success were unaware of any real social disadvantage. On the other hand, the students were acutely aware of divisions, boundaries and markers that separated groups and delineated appropriate conduct. In particular, this group located what they termed the ‘Jocks’ as the dominant social group in the school, and described very stereotypically male characteristics in defining what is meant by the good. Philip said:

The jocks think they are pretty cool. They have a good sense of humour. I think that also depend on who you are, as to how they treat you. They are pretty macho. You have to just get on with the blokes and be easy going, otherwise school could be a difficult place. (#2SMT3)

The interesting thing was that Philip (#2SMT3), despite the staff selecting him as a sports star, did not necessarily see himself as a ‘Jock’. For him, there was an element of macho culture central to the ‘Jock’ group that he did not necessarily see in himself. This group wielded a lot of social power amongst the students, and dominated the social spaces by placing themselves at the centre of the Great Court. This social hierarchy reflected some dominant discourses in Australian culture – the advantaging of white, middle-class, athletic males through a variety of technologies. Other groups positioned themselves spatially against the ‘Jocks’ - the closer a

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407 Ibid. p.113
student group sat to the Great Court, the more popular they were. Peter (#2SMT2) agreed with Philip (#2SMT3), saying: “Some groups go with other groups. Like the Jocks like the hot girls or the pretty girls. The boys that like the nice girls sit on the steps near the Great Court.”

However, being identified as belonging to a specific group could mean that individually students were prone to being stereotyped by both staff and students. This entailed being expected to conform to certain expectation both in the classroom and out of the classroom. Peter stated:

> And the people that hang around each group are classified as the same type of people. You could hang about with rebels and you could be a good student and be treated just like they are being treated a bad student. People just expect you to be one way. (#2SMT2)

This classificatory deployment of power had a range of effects. On one hand it acted to endorse certain expectations of groups in terms of behaviours and values. These maintained structures that created certain kinds of hierarchised subjectivities for students. Also, it served to divide the student group into more manageable and identifiable parts. These parts were located within a hierarchy of expectation as to what the normalised good student could, and should, be. It also marked out territory, areas and realms of influence that each group, and by association, each individual had to comport themselves within. These students argued that teachers were instrumental in constructing some of those expectations because of the differing ways that they treated students, and the different emphasis that led them to detailing what the good student should be. Philip said:

> It depends on the teacher. Like if you have a sport teacher who loves his footie he will get along with the jocks, but them if you have a little computer, a computer smart person then they will get along with the physics teacher. (#2SMT3)

There are different normalising views of the good, and these views produce a student who is a code-switcher, able to create themselves as a variety of different individuals in different contexts. This quote reveals that Philip (#2SMT3) and the other two students had quite developed sets of
expectations as to what characterised certain kinds of students. However, students were also highly involved in the shaping and maintenance of these realms of difference. This point was made by Philip (#2SMT3), who was interested in why groups operated at Jarrah as they did. “One of the things I think is important is the way that groups treat other groups. Why is it that everyone is not the same?” This sense of social awareness lends itself to a critique that the social world was highly significant for these students. They were highly aware of the deployment of social power, and how this deployment impacted their standing in the student community. Philip’s (#2SMT3) question also indicates an awareness of others, a projection of the care of the self into the wider community. Peter (#2SMT2) felt that the groups at Jarrah were synonymous with ownership of a particular territory, and it was this group positionality that often accounted for the different ways that the students act to create certain kinds of subjectivities.

One of the things I wonder is that maybe some groups are in competition with one another, while other groups kind of go together. You can only have one party group. It you have got two then they are always fighting with each other to see who has the biggest car, or the hottest girl, or the biggest muscles.

Interestingly, this was the only time in these interviews that competition was mentioned. Competition was not of an academic nature but of a social one. In this explanation, things such as the ways that groups are positioned in the school could be seen as a result of the competition for social prestige – the ‘coolness’ these students speak of.

**Quiet Students**

Emma (#2QFV1), Steven (#2QMT2) and Jo (#2QFV3) were chosen as students who could be described as quiet by the Principal and two deputies because they demonstrated largely compliant and passive behaviours that often made them less visible than other students. The students began the interview shyly, but as it progressed they seemed to become more engaged and their
interrogation of their schooling experiences became clearer. I feel that they appreciated the opportunity to talk about their experiences and to be heard on a range of issues. Jo (#2QFV3) and Emma (#2QFV1) were boarders at the College and this experience of boarding impacted on their visions of the good student.

One of the first things that caught my attention was the selection of the students, in particular the selection of Steven (#2QMT2). Steven (#2QMT2) presented as a quite, well mannered student but one who seemed to have a self-confidence, albeit a quiet one, that belied his selection as one of the quiet students. Also, he had experience of sporting success in Lawn Bowls, representing the state at Junior level. His non-selection as a sporting achiever was perhaps based on the idea that Lawn Bowls was not considered an ‘important’ sport. Steven stated:

> With the boys there are two main groups like the boys that hang out on that side part just over there. They are into computer and stuff like that. They are not really that kind of sporty. Some of them do play sport but they are not really the sporty group. Then there is the group that plays soccer out there. And then there’s like the other group of boys and some of them go out and get drunk and party every weekend and then there is the footie Jocks and some guys play hockey and then there’s me - I’m pretty individual, I play lawn bowls. Some guys do surfing. We sort of are named according to the sport we play like footie Jocks, soccer Jocks … (#2QMT2)

According to Steven, the consensus operation of the school could be seen to be predicated on a strong sense of competition as ‘normal’ and ‘appropriate’. This discourse creates certain hierarchies of competition, where dominant sports such as football are seen as more valuable than low status sports such as lawn bowls. Adherence to these discourses and expectations was rewarded with a favoured social status. Students who fell outside these normalising parameters risked forms of alienation and judgement that could be seen to reinforce these dominant competitive discourses within the school.

These students’ vision of the good student at Jarrah centred on the discourse of success. The good student was one who was successful in a variety of endeavours that could be arranged
hierarchically. Firstly, and most importantly, the good student was an academic success story. Secondly, the good student was successful in various sporting pursuits. Thirdly, the good student was able to be popular with both the students and the teachers because they were socially aware and respected. Steven stated:

*They are intelligent; they get good results in tests and in exams. If they are sporting types of person they do well in sport and get into state teams. Their behaviour at school gets them the respect of the teachers, but they are friendly to all of the students.* (#2QMT2)

The good student was visibly ‘successful’ and received various accolades for that success. This success was identifiable based on what the student achieved – being selected in a state team was more valuable than just playing club sport.

These students recognised different discourses competing in schools, however, for them it was largely a consensual vision where students, teachers and parents valued similar things. They thought that parents, teachers and student idealised the good student in similar ways. For example, Emma thought that both teachers and parents valued the good student as someone who behaves, inside and outside of school, in the ‘correct’ way.

*Personally my mum and dad value trying your best; you can only do what you can do as long as you try your best. The behaviour comment on the report is the most important part to your parents. Teachers want a student who behaves as well.* (#2QFV1)

For Steven parents and teachers were similarly focussed on achievement. He argued that the good student is one who is successful through demonstrating desired attributes such as intelligence, studiousness, organisation and docility and adherence to the rules of the school.

*If you are a good student, your behaviour is good and your results are good as well. And you are doing your homework and your study.* (#2QMT2)

There was a sense of shared expectation, teachers and parents held similar perceptions and values about what makes a good student. This discussion presented the possibility that for these students, there was a sense of consensus between home and school – that teachers and parents wanted the
same things out of students, and that there was a similarity between the values and attitudes of these stakeholders.

However, unlike other students, these students did not present a contradictory set of discourses that challenged that consensus. These students did not see a sense of rebellion as central to student visions of the good. Rather, they developed a sense of students admiring those characteristics that could be seen as actively docile as outlined above. For example, Emma stated:

*I reckon that the students that are ideal are the ones who are smart and always jump to do things in class and always have their say. I think the students look up to these people.* (#2QFV1)

Jo (#2QFV3) agreed, stating that the good student was admired if they were a “*friendly, fun person that gets good marks as well*”. For these students there was no mention of the rebellious student that is admired because of their attitude towards authority. What they present is a unified vision of the good student where there is large overlap between teachers, parents and students as to what the good student should be. Jo (#2QFV3) went on to say that students characterised a good student as: “*Someone who is focussed, not out at parties and things like that.*”

The real tension in the school was between being visible and invisible. On the one hand, Steven (#2QMT2), Jo (#2QFV3) and Emma (#2QFV1) each presented an opinion that being a passive student was central to being a good student. On the other hand, these students spoke of their frustration at being invisible at certain times. For example, Emma recounted a story from her schooling where her passiveness resulted in her becoming invisible.

*One time they thought I wasn’t at school because the teacher had missed me on the roll. Because the teacher missed me on the roll and they don’t look for you at school, they ring home and said she’s not at school. When I got home they said “Why weren’t you at school?” and I said “I was at school”. They just forgot me on the roll. I felt unnoticed and pretty worthless. The teacher even said “Hi” to me so how could I be missed off the roll?* (#2QFV1)
School, they believed, was a place where invisibility could easily come to those students who did not draw obvious attention to themselves. These students spoke of school as a place that polarised student subjectivity. On the one hand were students who gained attention because they received formal accolades for success. On the other hand, there were student who experienced attention because they challenged that value of the passive student. Jo spoke about the ways that students were selected after volunteering to do various tasks as an example.

Like when you get chosen to do something, there’s a type of order, even although the teachers say it is not - the first volunteer will be selected. In reality, it is the loud ones and those who get good marks that get chosen. The ones that get good marks get chosen first, then the loud ones. People who are well-behaved and do their work always get ignored even if they volunteer. People who are average and sit in the middle don’t get much at all. (#2QFV3)

Emma (#2QFV1) agreed arguing: “Well it’s not really an order; they don’t say you’re in the average group. But in practice, I know that I will not be chosen by the teachers.” These views support the idea that the school acts as a place where students are classified and ordered into loose groups that receive different types of attention.

Steven (#2QMT2), Emma (#2QFV1) and Jo (#2QFV3) were highly aware of the significance of groups at Jarrah. Identification with a specific group often resulted in differing treatment, depending how that group was viewed. Emma spoke of how she was judged by the groups that she associated with, and this judgement often resulted in certain kinds of treatment.

You have friends at home and friends at school as well. The teachers judge my friends at school just like my parents do. Teachers are always on the lookout for students say who have their top button undone. They will give one person a hard time but not another person depending upon what their friends are like. They kind of don’t see the other person. (#2QFV1)

Steven (#2QMT2) agreed, arguing that perception was everything. If a student is perceived to behave in a certain way, they will be treated accordingly. “If the teachers think you are a good student, you are free from negative judgement and it stays this way your whole school life.” Jo
(#2QFV3) agreed, saying: “If someone is continuously getting into trouble the teachers will automatically tell them off.” The impression that these students gained was that school was a place that rewarded student groups who were seen to be at opposite ends of the spectrum of student positionalities. Good students were rewarded by getting recognition in the form of awards and trophies. This led to teachers giving these academic and sporting students special attention. As Steven (#2QMT2) said:

*I think teachers feel good too when you get good marks with the things they have taught you and you are actually learning.*

At the other end of the scale, loud, confident students who were popular with the year group also tended to receive favourable attention because they were seen to be leaders of the community. Emma (#2QFV1) said: “It is hard to understand teachers. They like the more popular students as well as the smart students.” However, the popular students that got on well with the teachers were those who accepted the jurisdiction of the teachers in the school. Those students who challenged this authority were punished in a variety of ways. One example of this is that teachers could withdraw their approval. Jo (#2QFV3) stated:

*I think the not ideal student, even after handing in assignments, get labelled and judged by the teachers. For example, when the teacher asks them about their weekend, it’s like they really don’t want to know. You can tell they are not as genuine as with the good students.*

For Emma (#2QFV1), Jo (#2QFV3) and Steven (#2QMT2), they saw themselves as average students, and this meant that they were easily ignored because they were in the middle. As a result, there emerged a keen awareness of how visible/invisible they were at certain times. When Jo (#2QFV3) received a Letter of Commendation for some school work she did she was pleased more with the attention than the success. She stated: “*I think it is good that teachers actually notice that I have done something good.*”
This issue of invisibility presented a dilemma for these students. They recognised that visibility could have benefits for their experience of school, but they also recognised that the wrong kind of attention could be to the detriment of their school experience. On the other hand, invisibility had some benefits such as security and the absence of conflict. These students seemed unsure of how they should position themselves as either visible or invisible. This had ramifications for all facets of their schooling, including the social sphere. They valued students who, as Steven (#2QMT2) said: “are friendly and will talk to you.” However, being friendly involved taking social risks and moving beyond the familiarity of small groups. This was a step that Jo (#2QFV3) and Emma (#2QFV1) in particular found hard to do. When asked about different social groups, these girls divided the school into several groups including the troublemakers, the popular students and those who were positioned on the periphery of the social spaces of the school. Emma (#2QFV1) responded to a characterisation of the ‘nerds’ by defending them, saying:

> I look at them differently to what other people do, I just look at them as friends. Everyone knows different sides to people – so you know their different personalities, so you think of them as more individuals. When you first get to know them you judge them and when you get to know them more you judge them as something else.

These comments gave the impression that these students were located on the social periphery of Jarrah, and were forced to accept positionalities that located them in less ideal social relationships. In this way, the social aspect of the school could be seen to reinforce the standing of certain types of students; confident, sporting and intelligent students who participated in the ‘correct’ way in the ‘correct’ activities that were central to the good student.

Part of the significance of the interviews was that Jo (#2QFV3) and Emma (#2QFV1) were boarders, and as such, were at school in a form all of the time. This meant that they continued to be placed under surveillance by the school staff even after school. When asked what was one of the most difficult things about school, Emma responded with reference to the boarding school.
The supervisors will get a note from our teachers if we don’t do our homework. As soon as you get one of them they kind of judge you and say we have to be on your case the whole time. They are very judging, the supervisors. Because you live with the whole time and as soon as you do one thing wrong they think you are doing badly at school, she’s not a good person. (#2QFV1)

Jo agreed, arguing that being a boarder meant continually being categorised and judged by the staff. This meant that she felt that she was always ‘acting’ or fulfilling the expectations of others.

Parents have a bit more of an understanding of how hard school is than what the supervisors do. My parents always say “Why didn’t you do it?”, whereas the teachers or supervisors say you didn’t do it and you are in trouble. It’s like you always have to be a school student, even when school is over. Sometimes I get sick of them judging me. (#2QFV3)

This normalising judgement extended to an assumption that all students came from similar backgrounds, and as such, could be expected to deliver similar educational outcomes. Emma found this one of the most difficult experiences of Jarrah, that she was expected to conform to values and attitudes that were alien to her experience. As a result, she reported that she often felt unable to meet those expectations and was letting people down both in the boarding house and in the school. Her experiences of schooling were dominated by her experiences of being categorised because she felt continually under surveillance in a school environment that was substantially different from what she had perceived as ‘normal’. She stated:

My biggest thing is because I come from Cue which has a very small aboriginal population and all our classes were combined into three year groups. All the school work got pushed to the lower students level, for example when I was in Year Seven I was in a Five/Six/Seven class so we were all taught the Year Five work because most of the population was not as smart. So coming from that in Year Seven, I had never done an essay, never done an assignment in my whole life and coming into Year Eight and doing really badly in Maths and English was really hard. In Year Eight I was stressing – I was no good because I was failing everything. (#2QFV1)

These students saw the benefits of being good, and for them it became an aspiration, to move closer to the ideal so as to enjoy more of the benefits. This desire to be good is one of the key ways that the student is shaped within these technologies of power and produce certain kinds of students.
Rebels

Tom (#2RMV1), Mary (#2RFV2) and Paul (#2RMV3) were selected by the staff at Jarrah because they were often caught transgressing the rules at Jarrah. Each of these students was studying a VET course at Jarrah. These students had been given numerous community service notices, written warnings and suspensions for a variety of behaviours that could be seen as challenging the accepted authority of the staff at the school. In interviewing it became clear that these students held a very clear opposition to many of the practices that are often taken for granted as good school behaviour and were students who would voice their opinion strenuously.

Tom (#2RMV1), Mary (#2RFV2) and Paul (#2RMV3) held similar opinions about school, and agreed and supported each other’s opinions throughout the interview.

Tom (#2RMV1), Mary (#2RFV2) and Paul (#2RMV3) held a differing view as to what constituted a good student than they perceived parents, and in particular the staff, held. They saw that parents and staff prioritised the vision of the good student as a compliant person who exhibits a docility of both body and behaviours. Mary (#2RFV2) held that the good student “obeys the uniform code. Teachers don’t like when you are not in uniform.” This was the first comment to open the interview and indicated how strongly Mary (#2RFV2) opposed this control mechanism. Tom (#2RMV1) agreed stating: “They don’t like it when you have got a ring or something that you are not meant to.” Paul (#2RMV3) identified the control of the body as one of the things that made it almost impossible for him to be seen as a good student. He stated: “The teachers want you to sit down and be quiet. I find it hard to sit down for a whole class.” Mary continued to say that the vision of the good student transmitted by the school had to do with undertaking activities that the school staff valued.
The good students are the one who suck up. This is so stereotypical but the people who are in the choir and on the literacy committee and the Wavelength committee (the school creative writing magazine published yearly) and everything and all the teachers know what they do all the time are the ones the school promotes. (2RFV2)

One of the key ideas conveyed in this quote is the notion of teachers ‘knowing’ or ‘seeing’ the good students undertaking the behaviours that defines them as good. In this view, the teacher is the central judge of what is good and is ideally located as the centre of the power deployment. This notion of being seen or known is highly evident in the responses of each of the interviewees, indicating their awareness of the apparatus of surveillance they were continually exposed to. Tom (#2RMV1) maintained the view that the good student was the all-rounder, the student who was able to exhibit success across a range of key areas: “An ideal student is someone who is good at sport and good at school they do all the work that teachers set them.” This view was similar to the view expressed by other groups, indicating a persuasive discourse that is highly individualistic and seem contradictory to the motto of “For Others”.

However, for Paul the good student could be perceived in a different way. For him, there were possibilities for the more rebellious students to shine at school because of those very characteristics that drew negative attention to them in the first place. He stated:

I mean not all students are good. As if they all want to come to school and just behave, that would be just boring for everyone. The teachers wouldn’t have any work to do. (#2RMV3)

This notion argues that rebels fulfil an important function in the school and the way it operates, allowing teachers to act as teachers and conferring authority to the staff. It also underscores the teacher as the one who watches and judges the student. Upon reflection, Tom agreed arguing that it was this potential for lively interaction that could make a classroom an interesting place where it was easier to learn:

Some teachers like it when someone who is not a goodie mucks around and makes it fun and the class more interesting. It is easier to do your work in a class that is fun like that.
Sometimes you get rewarded, not rewarded but you get to go out of class and go for a walk. That is what I find rewarding when I get told to go out of class – not for being good I can just go to the library and read the paper. (#2RMV1)

Being judged as rebels created opportunities, some teachers responded positively to the more lively interaction that they shared in the classroom.

The deployment of surveillance was central to these students understanding of how school operated, and how individual positionalities opened up certain possibilities for each student. On the one hand teachers like students who were seen to be conforming to a vision of the good student as a hard working achiever who obeys rules, can sit quietly and is involved in the school community. Paul stated:

If you are seen to be studying that makes the teachers happy. Or if you are seen to be doing some kind of work that makes them happy. It doesn’t matter how much you learn, being seen to be doing the right thing is important. (#2RMV3)

This encapsulated the rules of the game. Being seen to be acting in accordance with the dominant values and attitudes meant that the students would be positioned as good students, and receive certain favours and possibilities for action that this positionality offered. For Tom, the good student served the purpose in the school of being a comparison point – a role model offered to other students so that they could aspire to similar success. On the other hand, teachers seemed to value a very different set of student subjectivities. This comparison only made these students resent teachers, students and the subjects that they were studying because they were made to feel inferior.

Teachers give the good students everything, they just look after them. They say to everyone else: “Look at this person here he is doing everything right.” They compare a lot of people – oh look at him he is doing all this stuff right look at her she is good at that. Everyone is good at different subjects and in the subject you are not good at you want teachers to encourage you not make you feel crap and you can’t do anything. The mark you get in a subject shouldn’t rate how good you are. (#2RMV1)
Paul agreed, arguing that school was a place that rewarded intelligence rather than diligence, no matter how much they claimed to reward hard work.

One thing I hate about the awards is that it is not the people who put in the most effort and try the hardest to achieve well it’s the people who have the highest marks. (#2RMV3)

In fact, only Tom had ever received a “Goldie” (Letter of Commendation) from Jarrah. For him, this was a positive experience that made him, and his family, feel good about their relationship with the school.

When you do you usually get a gold note. When you are not a good student they don’t expect you to get recognised for that. So it feels pretty good. (#2RMV1)

Neither of the other students stated they had ever been officially rewarded by the school. In fact, Paul (#2RMV3) asked what they were, and said: “I never even knew we had one.” For Paul, school was a place that lacked value – he was at school because his parents made him, and he seemed very hostile towards the school. He stated:

I am leaving at the end of this year because school is just a waste of time. There is way too much work and I hate the whole idea of it so I am trying to get into a course at TAFE. (#2RMV3)

One of the key features of this interview was the repeated assertion by these students that school was a place that made them feel worthless and unvalued, or “Crap” as Mary (#2RFV2) said. In particular, they felt that school was unfairly biased towards students who were naturally intelligent and found it easy to concentrate in the class – a highly meritocratic approach to schooling. These students argued that they were continually made to feel inferior because of the way that school valued attributes that they did not have. The end result of this was often behaviour that drew negative attention from teachers, continuing to make them feel inferior. Paul stated:
They think that by making you do lines and sending you out of class and victimising you in front of the class that is going to make you put more effort into in and it just makes you hate them and try even less. (#2RMV3)

These students felt like they were always in the eye of the teacher and always being judged, usually in a hostile way. This sense of hostile surveillance often led to them feeling trapped and unfairly singled out. Tom reported:

They just hound the students they don’t like all the time. Like I got suspended the other day for doing nothing. I roughed up someone’s head and someone pushed me and the guys head hit the wall. And they said that I had pushed him into the wall. I got sent to the Deputy and I told him the same story and I said “You can go and ask the bloke who pushed me if he did and he would say he did it”, and they just wouldn’t even hear about it – didn’t want to know about it. They just suspended me. (#2RMV1)

For Mary, this frustration manifested itself in the ways that the school punished those individuals who did not, or could not, conform to the idealised norm of the good student:

Some of the things they do are pretty stupid I reckon like they just pick on people who are just like individuals. The things we don’t do that other people do we shouldn’t get punished for it. Like teachers don’t really notice if you do work, they just notice if you don’t. (#2RFV2)

For Paul, this meant that teachers turned a blind eye to good students who were misbehaving, while waiting for other students to step out of line. In this way, teachers position students as certain types of subjects, either by inferred or overt practices.

You can be talking to someone smart, someone I think is a good student, and then they like wait for it, wait for it until they stop talking and you just go on and they just like say, “Come up the front”. And they kick you out and you just like “I wasn’t talking to myself”. “It doesn’t matter I heard you talking”. They just wait until you are talking by yourself so that they don’t have to tell the good students off. (#2RMV3)

For these students, there was a clear alienation from the staff, and a belief that school was a place that was constructed by the power and authority of the teacher. In their experience, the teacher was primarily responsible for shaping their experiences of school through the deployment of technologies of power such as evaluation, comparison and surveillance. Mary stated:
Teachers reckon that we put people into groups but it’s more them. Like they have their little group of students that they like and their little group that they don’t like. And the people who they reward are the people they don’t have to take their jewellery all the time or tell them off in class. (#2RFV2)

This interview was filled with little anecdotes of altercation that each student had had with individual teachers that they felt was either unfair or unreasonable. What separated them from other students, they believed, was how teachers saw and treated them. Their school experience was based, in their opinion, on the ways that they then lived up to the expectations of the staff through behaviour and attitude. This often took the position of open defiance against some of the teachers. This created conflict as in some situations, students were forced to comply, regardless of their individual will. Mary recounted:

I do fight with teachers. Like one time a teacher asked my opinion of her class. I was telling her what I thought of this lesson and she like went mental. In my next class (Religious Education) the whole class had to write an opinionated article on a piece of paper, for the school paper and I chose to tell my group how pathetic her lesson was and she happened to be the teacher of my other class that I was writing about and she just stood there for about half an hour fighting with me about my opinion so I was rude back to her and she just sent me out of her class. She kicked me out and I had to write a 300 word essay saying why I should be allowed back in her class. And then she kicked me out of her other class saying that she didn’t want to talk to me because I had a bad attitude. I was like “Whatever!” The teacher is such a cow. It was so funny because I ended up writing all this crap in the letter just like personal goals and all this shit. (#2RFV2)

These students did not reject school completely. They found that there were elements within the school that they liked. Some of them liked certain teachers, particularly, as Paul (#2RMV3) said, teachers who were able to teach the student “at their level”. Mary agreed, stating:

The best teachers teach towards you. They bring in stuff that we do like into their lessons and it makes understanding them easier. There seems to be a point to what we are doing. (#2RFV2)

What was highly frustrating for these students was not understanding what was expected of them, and how best they position themselves to take advantage of the possibilities that school offered. They tended to also locate this at the feet of the teachers, arguing that there seemed to be a game with rules they were either not participating in or could not understand. It was pretty clear that
they thought that those students who the staff judged as good were playing that game. This point is highlighted by Mary, who said:

> It is very difficult to know what they want because is you go into a class and it is more relaxed and laid back. You do your work and you have fun and you go into another class which is completely different the atmosphere is like hell strict in there. Because you have been laid back in another class you are just not ready for all of these rules. (#2RFV2)

Paul (#2RMV3) agreed, saying enjoyment in school for the students “all depends on the teachers -they can be very split personality I reckon.” The point being made is that in a school where these students saw a visible/invisible set of power relations deployed, they saw an invisible deployment of power that they struggled to come to terms with. This bewilderment also manifested itself in a feeling that they were out of their depth and poorly prepared for the rigours of Year Eleven. Mary said:

> I think that the biggest change in your whole school life is when you come into Year 11. I don’t think it should be. I think it is ridiculous that you spend the first three years of your school life bumming around and seeing what you can do to annoy teachers without going too far and you toe the line and that’s all you really do unless you are a big square. And then suddenly you get to Year 11 and you hit the TEE and five page essays that you have to do in a week and we should be prepared for that the whole way through Year 8, Year 9 and Year 10. (#2RFV2)

This all left these student feeling fairly alienated from school. In fact, they argued strongly that school struggled for relevance and that success in school was not necessarily a key indicator of success in life after school. Paul stated:

> Some people just don’t go along with school; it is just not for them. But once they get out into the workforce they pick up something they are good at they are pretty good at it and they go far. (#2RMV3)

This sense challenged the mantra that school was about preparation for life. These three students refuted that notion, arguing that school set a false standard as to what constitutes success.
Discussion

Through analysis of the interviews and other data gathered some key themes emerged at Jarrah in regards to the way that it valued the good student. But perhaps the most obvious theme was what I have termed a laissez-faire approach to education. By this I mean a type of approach to such issues as discipline that is framed as commonsense and that the wider community would recognise as ‘appropriate’ and ‘normal’. There is a very real sense within the school that they are held in esteem in the community as a place where the ‘right’ values and attitudes are being communicated. At times it appeared that the school ran on micropractices of discipline. It appeared individual teachers dealt with issues as they saw fit, rather than referring to a school based policy or to other staff members. The students seemed to respond to this as an appropriate or at least commonsense way for the school to operate.

The student responses indicate a strong correlation between the values of the school and the values of the wider society. Students spoke of the good student as a member of the school community, who demonstrated their affiliation with the school through their active participation in the life of the school. The discourses that the students named centred less on the academic success of the good student and more on the good student as an active citizen within the school community. This active citizen could be identified as the ‘all-rounder’ that students spoke of. This all-rounder was a person who was competent in a wide range of activities and utilised this competence for the benefit of the school community. The competencies of the all-rounder included leadership, social intelligence, community service, sporting ability and academic ability. The significance of these characteristics was that they needed to be utilised to make the school a more successful community. For example this meant that sporting prowess was more significant when it was employed in a school context such as a carnival. The repeated emphasis of the school motto “For Others” by the principal and students demonstrated that there was a clear vision that
the school community required active participation to be successful. However, this participation was along narrow lines of what was ‘appropriate’ and ‘normal’ conduct within the school for the students. Many student voices spoke of a highly individualistic discourse being valued that sets up students as competitive people who are positioned within a range of hierarchies that were isolating and exclusive for some students.

The emphasis on school community and active participation helped to create a disciplined school population. Students prized relationships with teachers that were based on mutual respect, and largely identified any problems with the relationship as stemming from a lack of maturity from either teachers or students. This tapped into one of the key facets of the good student as a version of a ‘mini-adult’. This mini-adult was described at various times as a ‘good member’ of the school community, or as ‘fully developed’. The emphasis on ‘pastoral care’ was a way of shaping students who would be ready to be citizens capable of functioning in appropriate ways after school. It was this sense of guiding the flock that placed so much emphasis on the relationship between staff and students.

There was a sense of the appropriateness of the project of the school from the perspective of some of the students interviewed. They agreed with how the school was operating and saw the long-term benefits to themselves and the wider community. These students engaged with the expectations because they saw this as being of benefit to them. Problems were presented as either aberrations (young, immature teachers) or as minor problems (uniform transgressions). The school largely made sense to many of the students, and it appeared that they valued similar things to the principal. However, as in all communities, there were lines of disadvantage. The Rebels were the obvious group who explained what it was like to be seen as contrary to that image of the good student. Largely, their negative experiences seemed to fall into two categories. The first was their refusal or inability to be docile and disciplined. Whether it referred to being opinionated in
opposition to the teacher, or simply being unable to sit still for a whole lesson, these students spoke of the ways that they felt excluded from the wider student body that got on with teachers. The second category of experience seemed to do with their resistance to the vision of the school as to what constituted the good student. This point was made by Paul (#2RMV3), who spoke of his desire to leave school because he saw it as a waste of time. His experience indicated that not fitting into the mould of the good student made school a hostile experience.

One of the key themes from the data was that many of the students spoke of a desire to be seen to be a good student. In particular, this was voiced by those students who saw themselves as outside the realm of what was valued. One of the Quiet students, Jo (#2QFV3), demonstrated this desire when she spoke of coming from a rural community and immediately feeling alienated from the expectations of the school community. This feeling of alienation left her determined to ‘improve’ so that she could be free of the ‘negative judgement’ that follows student around who do not fit in. Desiring to be seen as ‘normal’ and ‘appropriate’ within the school community was one of the key productive forces at work within Jarrah. This desire was used as a key technology to shape student attitudes and expectations.

One of the key features of this case site was the subtle way that social groups manifested themselves, yet were always considered against the backdrop of the homogeneous community. They were spatially arranged around the school, certain groups sat in certain places, acted in certain ways and interacted with other groups in certain ways. However, these groups tended to be more dynamic and fluid than in other schools, and many students identified themselves as a year group first (the community) and a social group second. An example of this is the social interaction that occurred around the Great Court. In this area, a wide range of groups of students interacted at lunch times and recess, and the edges of the groups blurred as there was a constant toing and froing of students. However, what was most obvious was that there was a centre to the
group, and this centre looked out at the other students, who located themselves in a spatial relationship to how close they felt to the centre. The centre of this group were not necessarily hostile to the wider school community. Whilst some of the rebels sat here, some of the academic achievers and sports achievers also sat in this large group. Other students spoke of sitting on the steps, close, but not quite at the same level. The architecture of the school meant that the centre of the group looked at over all the other groups, while these other groups looked in at the centre. In essence, this was very similar to Bentham’s Panopticon that was discussed earlier. The issue of surveillance, of watching and being watched, is critical in constructing a highly normalised vision of what it means to be a good student. Perhaps this is why there did not appear to be an oppositional flavour to the student groups at Jarrah, they tended not to set themselves up as the antithesis of the school. Rather, students who did not conform spoke of feeling isolated and alienated and made plans to leave school entirely.

This ties into a deeper philosophical notion – the idea of actively choosing. I would argue that many of the students at Jarrah were aware of the benefits of being seen as good, and attempted to strategically position themselves within the nexus of these discourses. By doing this, they could be seen as docile and disciplined. One of the key manifestations of this was the prevalence in discussion of the school motto “For Others”. Many of the students who could be seen as ‘successful’ viewed the school through the lens of the school motto, despite promoting a vision of the good student as highly individualistic and competitive. This sense of contradiction is important because it underscores how schools are places that often reward values and behaviours that seem to contradict a mission or purpose. This becomes one of the key strategies that influences how the good student is perceived and understood, and constructs a realm of the good that incorporates the good student as a strategic social game.
The students I interviewed presented a view of the good student as a docile body, but also as a docile soul, adhering to the values and attitudes of the school. The school held for the good student as a certain type of good citizen was largely accepted by the students as ‘normal’ and ‘appropriate’. One wonders to what extent this was influenced by the relative isolation of this rural centre and the importance of the community in the lives of those outside of the school. However, I would argue that at Jarrah the good student was one who was seen to perform as a good student, and was one who exhibited both a docile body and enacted the correct values and attitudes that reflected wider societal values.
Discipline rewards simply by the play of awards, thus making it possible to attain higher ranks and places; it punishes by reversing this process. The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchises, homogenises, excludes. In short, it normalises.\textsuperscript{408}

The subject consumes and consummates each of the states through which it passes, and is born of each of them anew, continuously emerging from them as a part made up of parts.\textsuperscript{409}

\textsuperscript{408} Foucault, Discipline and Punish Op Cit. pp.181,183
\textsuperscript{409} Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus Op Cit. p.41
CHAPTER SIX

Introduction

Marri College is a public, co-educational high school that operates within City C. It is the amalgamation in 1996 of two smaller high schools ‘Jones’ Senior High School and ‘Smith’ Senior High School. The school was combined as part of the state government’s rationalisation of school that occurred in the mid-1990s. In this period, many smaller state schools were closed or amalgamated to form larger schools as a means of cutting costs and providing better resourced schools to a wider population. In 2006 there were approximately 576 students at the college from Years Eight to Twelve. This represents a significant drop in student numbers from 2003 when there were some 745 students at the school. In 2006, the attendance rate at Marri was 81.1%, significantly lower than the state average of 88.0%. Only 6 students, which represents 12% of the Year Twelve cohort in 2006, were studying the required number of TEE subjects to qualify for direct tertiary entrance. 84% of the Year Twelve students were studying three or more non-TEE subjects. Almost 20% of the student population were classified as Aboriginal, and the school ran specific programmes for Aboriginal students such as Aboriginal School Based Traineeships in conjunction with the Education Department.

City C is an inner city suburb less than five kilometres from the Perth CBD. In the 2001 census there were more than 10,000 people inhabiting the area, with males outnumbered by females.

410 Education Department of Western Australia – School Online Web site http://www2.eddept.wa.edu.au/schoolprofile/
411 Ibid.
412 Ibid.
413 Students must study a minimum of four TEE subjects to qualify for university entrance.
414 Ibid.
415 Ibid.
416 Ibid.
Approximately 12% of the population was Aboriginal. The unemployment rate for the period was 8.3%, slightly higher than the state average of 7.5%. The median age for the population was 37, as compared to the state average of 33. The median family income was significantly lower than the state average at $589 per week. Less than 1.8% of the population held a postgraduate degree, while 15% of the population held a Bachelor degree. The median house price for the period was $239,000. Statistically the residents of the City C area are below the state average indicators in most areas, indicating this is an area of economic disadvantage.

**Architecture**

The first thing noticed when entering Marri is the relative size of the school. It is a large, relatively new school divided into 13 separate buildings. Each of these buildings has a specific function, either to house a Learning Area such as Science or Mathematics, or to group particular people together. An example of this is the Student Services building that houses those staff such as the chaplain involved in supporting the students pastorally. The majority of the buildings consist of four or five classrooms surrounding staff offices. The architecture appears utilitarian and functional. There is little in the way of architectural flourish and the grounds reflect that simple approach with functional spaces such as ovals and courtyards lacking aesthetic touches like fountains and art works. One of the things that did strike me was the space – the school seemed only sparsely populated and many classes were empty or had room desks for more students than were attending. As I moved around the school I noticed that the students took everything with them, they each had a large backpack that they moved around the school with rather than a locker that they returned to.

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The classrooms in each building are clustered around a central area, which may contain staff offices or a meeting area. Each of the classrooms is arranged in traditional fashion with chairs and desks facing the teacher at the front. In the laboratories, long, flat benches face the front and students sit on stools. At the rear of the campus is the Student Services where students go to check out sports equipment and receive food rewards for good behaviour or service.

The focal point of the school is the Administration Building. Entrance is gained through the main carpark and there is only a short walk to the front doors. Inside there is a relatively standard reception area, and a waiting room similar to a doctor’s surgery. In this building are the offices of the Principal and Deputy Principals, and the staff room is on the floor above. In the waiting room is a large plasma screen TV that has a video playing on a loop with no sound. This screen shows Marri students engaged in a number of activities outside the traditional classroom. These include dance recitals, sporting contests, mountain biking and ‘clowning around’ with teachers. The emphasis is on happy, involved students who get on well with the staff and are given many opportunities to excel. The absence of the classroom in this representation is interesting – almost a devaluing of the academic project of the school. Around the walls are posters with slogans such as “Do your best at Marri”. These posters depict students engaged in a number of activities around the school such as woodwork but once again the traditional classroom is not shown. These posters accentuate the vocational aspects of the education programme, students are shown attaining skills that are transferable to a number of trades and skilled occupations.

**Homework and Communication Diary**

The Marri College Homework and Communication Diary is chiefly an organising tool for the student and a means of communication between the home and the school. It is a slim B4 sized book with a blue cover. The cover has the school logo, motto and in black set against the blue
cover. On the inside cover is the Semester One Timetable and inside the back cover is the Semester Two Timetable. The majority of the diary is given to recording homework and assignments. There is a week on each page with a section down the bottom of each page for teacher and parent comments. The dates on the diary begin at the first week of the second term, indicating the diary as a new initiative at the school. One of the most obvious inferences concerns the fact that there is not very much space to record homework and assignments – perhaps because these students are not expected to do as much homework as other schools.

The communication function of the diary was highlighted by the introduction in the first two pages of the diary of key school personnel such as the Year Coordinators. These teachers were framed as the first point of contact for parents or students concerned with a pastoral aspect of their schooling. The other function of the diary was also to communicate key policies and codes for the students and their parents. The diary contained the following policies and codes: Student Behaviour Policy (called the Discipline policy in other schools), the Code of Conduct, the Choose Respect Program, and the College Dress Code.

The first page of the diary is titled “Welcome to Marri College”. After initial contact information, the welcome goes on to outline the “Purpose Statement” of the college. This statement is significant in that it describes what the school sees as its core business and the type of students it seeks to produce. One of the chief aims of the college is to produce “lifelong learners who have the skills and knowledge to be able to take a pro-active and productive part in meeting their own needs whilst respecting the rights of others in society”. Central to this is the aim to “develop and maintain a safe and caring learning environment”.

419 Marri City College, *Homework and Communication Diary 2006*, Marri
The Purpose Statement sees the good student as one who takes “responsibility for their own learning” and has “engaged successfully” with the course of learning that they have chosen to undertake.\textsuperscript{422} This statement is a reflection of contemporary pedagogical theories that prioritise collaborative learning and ownership of the curriculum through student-centred practices. However, it also promotes a view of the student as an autonomous individual that enters an educational world that is inherently equal and success or failure depends on the intrinsic abilities and choices of that individual.

Another programme that is significant in the school and is found in the diary is the “Choose Respect” programme. This programme is a version of an anti-bullying policy that encourages each student to treat other people “with care and consideration”.\textsuperscript{423} The name itself is interesting, once again promoting a vision of the individual as freely choosing those actions that impact on others and, as a result, responsible for the consequences of those actions. The programme has a page devoted in the diary, and that page is dominated by a list of behaviours that could be seen as bullying, including “name calling”, “hitting out or kicking others”, “negative comments” and “throwing items at another student”.\textsuperscript{424} The list finished with the following admonition: “You are responsible for your own behaviour and we expect that you will do nothing that makes another student uncomfortable because of your behaviour.” Part of the premise of the autonomous individual is that they are self-governing, and able to respond in appropriate ways in a variety of situations and contexts. This governing of the self carries with it moral connotations – choosing respect because it is morally right both for the individual and for the wider community. The invisible ‘we’ gazes at those individuals and judges how they comport themselves in accordance with those moralising values.

\textsuperscript{422} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{423} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{424} Ibid.
Discipline Policy

At Marri, the discipline policy is called a number of things, the Student Behaviour Policy or the Student Code of Conduct. In the preamble the Student Behaviour Policy is described as the “College’s discipline policy” so in the interests of uniformity, it will be referred to as the Discipline Policy. The Discipline Policy in the diary is broken into two parts, rights and responsibilities. This division separates how the individual should be treated (rights) and how they should treat others and property (responsibilities). On first reading, this language of rights and responsibilities conjures up images of legal frameworks and charters. The language of rights and responsibilities is also indicative a view of the morality of correct conduct – a link to modernist assumptions that locates the individual as the centre of the struggle between freedom and governance from external forces. This vision extends to see the good student as an example of the good citizen who, when given the responsibility, conducts themself in such a way as to make the world a better place for all.

One of the most interesting points about this policy is that it extends to staff and students. It states:

The Marri College’s discipline policy revolves around the Student Code of Conduct and the accompanying Rights and Responsibilities. To ensure that staff and students show courtesy, consideration and cooperation one another [sic], it is expected that members of the College community behave according to a set of rights and responsibilities for the benefit of all.

The wording of the statement posits an equality between staff and students – an idea that all are equal within the school community because rights and responsibilities are universal regardless of position within that school community. This universality is very similar to documents that deal

425 Ibid.
426 Ibid.
with ‘human rights’ or ‘civil rights’ and entails a humanist discourse of the person as a rational and moral being that has certain inalienable rights conferred on them.

The rights focus on ‘every person’ and their rights to “learn and work without being disrupted”, “to be treated fairly and equitably”, to be treated with common courtesy and good manners” and “to express their opinion politely and at an appropriate time”. The responsibilities reflect the need to behave in such a way as to protect the rights of others, “to treat others the way they would like to be treated”. This policy does not spell out what types of sanctions could be implemented for transgressions or the differing forms of behaviour modification that the school could implement.

The “Code of Conduct for Students” is a more practical expression of the Rights and Responsibilities. It is a list of ten points that concern how a student would respect the rights of others within the school community. These ten points cover a number of issues: wearing the uniform appropriately, staying within the school grounds, attending and remaining in scheduled classes, being punctual and on time, eating and drinking at appropriate times in appropriate places, turning mobile phones and audio technology off in classes so to minimise distractions to others, treating others with respect, using courteous and appropriate language, refraining from using tobacco, alcohol or drugs at school, respecting property.

Together these policies construct the normalised vision of what the good student should be. This student would at all time behave in appropriate ways that protect the rights of others, and would be courteous, considerate and compassionate of the needs of others. They would also be an organised and punctual learner that will use school time to learn and work without disrupting

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427 Ibid.
428 Ibid.
429 Ibid.
others. The continuing reference to the responsibilities of the individual rather than the responsibilities of the community promotes the discourse of the school as a highly individualising place where the individual is responsible for governing the self in normalising and appropriate ways.

**Web site**

Like many websites the function of the Marri College Website appears to be largely promotional. On entering the website, the home page begins with a bold picture of the college crest, motto and contact details. From here, the screen repeatedly scrolls through a series of pictures that show a variety of different types of experiences that each student could have. The first page contains the motto “bold . caring . creative” written in lower case beneath the name of the school perhaps to appeal to a generation brought up on the text conventions of the mobile phone. This motto is written in dark blue on a white background. Next to the motto in a banner swathed across the left hand of the page is another motto “Do Better at Marri” written in mustard set against a light yellow background, certainly less striking than the other motto. The reasons for two mottos are unclear, but it does seem that the mottos appeal to different sentiments. The first presents the school as different, exciting and open to new ideas within education that centre around the student. The second is a more traditional slogan aimed at reinforcing discourses surrounding achievement and success within the school. The fact that this motto is less striking creates the impression that this traditional discourse is less overt within the school community than a more student oriented approach.

The first page shows two studious students in a classroom with a piece of scientific equipment that they are using in an experiment. The female student is reporting results while the male student is recording them. Behind these students is a male teacher who is talking with other
students. These students seem happy and focused on their work. The next page that is scrolled through shows two fencers in a position ready to commence a bout. They are fully masked and stand ‘en garde’ with foils ready for use. This refers to the status of Marri as a specialist fencing school. The next screen shows a young male student investigating a model of the human body with a smiling, enthusiastic teacher leaning over his shoulder teaching him the correct placement of the internal organs. Behind the student is a shelf with rows of what appear to be chemicals.

These screens reveal a number of discourses constructing what a student should be at Marri. Firstly, the students are shown as interested, studious and focussed. There is an expectation that students are learners of ‘appropriate’ knowledge. It is interesting that this knowledge is scientific, logical and rational. The same teacher is shown in both pictures and is wearing a white laboratory coat. He is interested in the students, but in each picture he is standing over students who look up to him in a symbolic way as they prepare to learn what he has to teach. This legitimation of knowledge implies that there is a ‘correct’ body of knowledge that the teacher as expert has control over and disseminates this to the student. In each of the frames, the student is perceived as a docile, disciplined body, constrained by discourses surrounding appropriate conduct and expected behaviour. Even the fencing students are constrained through their protective clothing and rules of engagement. Whilst they are active, this is a constrained activity, a formalised and ritualised comportment of the self according to formal rules. These images conflict with the notion of Marri as a student-centred, collaborative school that many of the College policies seem to indicate.

When the “Enter Site” icon is clicked, a new page opens up that offers a variety of options ranging from “About Us” to “Partnerships” within the community. However, these pages are obviously under construction as they contain very little or no information. The only page that contains information is the “Planning and Reviews” page that contains the Annual report for
2004-2005. Framing each of these options is a photo of the school leadership team, the principal and his three deputies. The camera looks down on them and they smile up at it, perhaps a visual technique to make them see less threatening and more welcoming to the school community.

Classroom Observation

Watching classes at Marri proved to be a logistically difficult exercise. Part of this reason was no doubt because of the timetable at Marri and the amount of time that students spent outside the school doing courses that involved workplace training. As well, the school seemed involved in many projects that involved students spending time away from the school. The classes, and their teachers, were selected by the Deputy Principal and it appeared the selection was filtered by public relations and presentation expediencies. Finding teachers who were prepared to be observed was extremely difficult because many teachers were resistant to allowing observers in their room. According to the deputy, this was partly because the school had been studied before by other researchers and the perception amongst some of the staff was that very little had changed – if anything, their jobs had been made more difficult. As a result I was only given access to five classes at Marri.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Behaviours/Abilities Valorised</th>
<th>Curriculum Orientations/ Pedagogies⁴³⁰</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Human Biology | ♦ Very small class  
♦ Students passive class members, teacher dominated the learning  
♦ Heavily focused on the examination  
♦ Organised around the teacher asking questions that were ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ and the students copying down the correct answers  
♦ Student ability was ranked according to the 50% line, above it was | ♦ Orientation dominated by vocational/neo-classical approaches  
♦ Students empty vessels, teachers transmitting the ‘correct’ knowledge  
♦ Actively fostering hierarchies as the appropriate order for the class |

⁴³⁰ Kemmis et al, Op Cit. pp. 142-143
Physics

- Very small class
- Students passive class members, teacher dominated the learning
- Heavily focused on the examination
- The language of the class was about ‘maximising’ marks, and how when students did this it made the teacher ‘happy’
- Language of hierarchies used: “Now a question for the smarter students in the class”

Orientation dominated by vocational/neo-classical approaches
- Students empty vessels, teachers transmitting the ‘correct’ knowledge
- Actively fostering hierarchies as the appropriate order for the class

The TEE classes that I observed were typified by small groups of students who tended to sit passively in desks while the teacher lectured them in the subject knowledge required to do well in exams. Perhaps because of the time of the year that I observed these classes (after the end of Semester One examinations), each class was dominated by learning that centred on passing examinations. The external Year Twelve TEE examinations are held over the students’ heads, presumably as a motivational tool. In the Human Biology class, the teacher continued to refer to passing and/or failing as markers of academic success. There are right and wrong answers, and the teachers in these classes acted as the purveyor and examiner of this objective knowledge. For example, in the Human Biology class the teacher said to the students that they got the marks they deserved, a clear indication of the powerful meritocratic vision that was in operation in his class and how hierarchies were deployed as a governing and self-governing tool.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Behaviours/Abilities Valorised</th>
<th>Curriculum Orientations/ Pedagogies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woodwork</td>
<td>Manual Arts room with students working individually at benches on various projects</td>
<td>Elements of liberal-progressive in the ways that the students learnt through doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher controlled access to various tools and equipment</td>
<td>Teacher as the authority structure heavily neo-classical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students continued to have their work ‘checked’ and advice was given to proceed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students worked quietly and independently, but in highly structured</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The VET classes at Marri were heavily imbued with vocational discourses. There was also an essentialising of subjectivities, the staff seemed to have predetermined the some wider social outcomes for their students. For example in the Early Childhood Studies class, the teacher who had been a student at Marri in the 1960s remembered her school days as being dominated by strict discipline and demanding study – things she saw as lacking at Marri. She felt that the students that she saw at Marri lacked resilience and application and gave up at the earliest opportunity because they did not see that school offered opportunities to change who they were and they were resigned to sharing the disadvantaged lives of many of their parents. This manifested itself, she saw, as many students adopting a victim mentality whereby there was always someone else to blame for their lack of traditional (such as academic) success. Rather than trying and risking failure, she argued that the majority of the students avoided risk and conducted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Studies</th>
<th>Students task focused, working independently on computers</th>
<th>Students went off task often, teacher largely ignored this and continued to mark other work</th>
<th>The teacher did not tolerate students moving around the class or yelling, but was prepared to accept students that chose not to do the required task</th>
<th>Some students seemed to be testing how far they could ‘push’ the teacher</th>
<th>One student was removed and sent to another class because she was talking too loudly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood Studies</td>
<td>Class was entirely female, reflecting gendered expectations</td>
<td>An assessment was due, and more than half the class was away (which the teacher expected)</td>
<td>Only two of the eight students in the class had completed the assignment</td>
<td>Teacher left theses students alone and allowed them to use the class time to continue to work on the assignment</td>
<td>Very difficult to assess, the teacher seemed to see the lesson as occupying the time of the students rather than ‘teaching’ them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
themselves in such a way as make school safe by utilising strategies that made them fit in with the bunch.

**Principal Interview**

The interview with Principal C was a very different experience from that of the other two principals. He gave the impression from the start that he was an advocate for a very specific view of schooling that focussed on schools changing to meet the needs of students set in specific sociocultural contexts. For this reason he questioned the usefulness to schools of ideas concerning the good student because they seemed concerned with measuring individuals against an impossible ideal. He seemed to be frank and open about his school, less the spokesperson for the school and more a critic of the school and its functions. I would suggest that this was largely to do with his position as a principal of a school with a poor community reputation in a low socioeconomic area and his relatively recent appointment as a principal. He made mention in the interview that he had extensive experience as a teacher to students from disadvantaged backgrounds and gave the impression that he was passionate about education for those who came from areas of disadvantage. Principal C also spoke candidly of becoming principal of a school that was in ‘crisis’ in a number of ways when he took over as principal. Issues such as absenteeism, bullying and a poor community profile were some of the challenges that he nominated.

One of the key manifestations of this for Principal C was his desire to see the school as primarily a safe place where individuals are valued and value each other regardless of markers of disadvantage. He felt that this was not his initial impression of Marri. To him, it seemed a school in crisis, continually dealing with and engaging in conflict situations that did not meet the needs
of the students. He explained that the core business of schools was not learning in a curriculum sense, but in providing a safe, nurturing environment:

So when I became Principal I started off with the goal that I wanted this to be a place where kids came where it was a controlled environment, it was orderly, people behaved themselves, where people were treated with consideration. Basically before that time the place was in crisis – everything was in total disarray. In that you’ve got nothing. You don’t even have a safe environment, let alone a place where people can learn.

Principal C nominated himself as having a reform agenda that focussed on what he saw as the most important outcomes for “a very diverse range of students - absolutely the full range”. This reform agenda extended into the curriculum, where he advocated extending knowledge past the traditional curriculum and subjects. Part of that involved critiquing what is taught and how it is taught. He stated:

For me the requirement is to provide a full range of programmes that respond to the needs of those kids. In educational terms that is my fundamental goal. More broadly what I what do I want the kids to do – I want them to come here and be happy and feel good about what they are doing and get some satisfaction out of it and learn stuff. That’s about life’s opportunities in the fullest sense not necessarily the start of a career but about other things like just being able to live a life that gives you some satisfaction, a sense of purpose.

For Principal C, this reform agenda meant that there were a number of confrontations with specific groups within the school that opposed change, particularly teachers who were very traditional in their approach. He stated:

I feel completely responsible, as a teacher I always felt absolutely responsible. I am appalled when I see things like recently every kid in a class was awarded a “D” or “Fail” for a Semester’s work. As a teacher I would never have accepted that. I would never have allowed that to happen and the excuse that will be applied there would be those kids didn’t do what they should have done. So kids are entirely responsible for transforming themselves we as teachers are entirely responsible for giving them the opportunities for transforming themselves, sometimes even persisting when it seems to be against their will to keep giving them the opportunity to not give up; to keep finding the way that is going to work for each kid and that is a big ask.

This was one of the ways that he thought that the school was operating within a very narrow range of possibilities for the students. This extended itself to a critique of how the normalising
vision of the good student limited the outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds. When responding to a question about what characteristics he thought the good student had, he stated:

That’s an example of a question that I really have some trouble with because by good student what do we mean? There are some teachers who will say that a good student is one who causes them the least trouble or is the most compliant, so it will be about things as you suggested – behaviours, attitudes, actions, academic performance. It’s about conformity. Now I accept that I have set some minimum standards of behaviours and things like that so a certain measure of conformity is required when you get a bunch of people together that’s what you’ve got to do but I don’t actually see those as being the characteristics of a good student.

One of the key tensions that Principal C spoke about in his principalship was the juggling of the needs of the individual offset against the needs of the wider population. On the one hand, schools needed to be places that could work to transform the individual so that they could “live a life that gives them some satisfaction, a sense of purpose”. On the other hand, they needed to be places that drew boundaries and acted to establish a disciplined student body where the needs of the population are paramount.

I have some sympathy for the troubled student but in the end my argument is always give me the choice between the good for one kid and 499 others, while I see my job to do everything for the one kid, if that still doesn’t work then the 499 win.

Perhaps one of the key features of Principal C was that he felt that it was the role of the school and its staff to be agents of change to the life possibilities of students. He stated:

I am trying to work on the teacher end to modify the teacher behaviour. At the end of the day, people have to change their own behaviours. You can’t make a kid be different. You can make them look like they are different but you can’t make them be different. But what you can do is change their environment, which we have been doing, and you can change yourselves which we are trying to do. But, I think we have a long way to go.

He seemed to have a critical attitude towards the teaching staff. He did not feel that all of the staff were working to promote his vision of school as a place where kids from a diverse range of backgrounds are given opportunities to transform themselves through the creation of a caring, secure environment that maximises life chances after school. Principal C opined:
But the biggest change ahead for us is to collectively change some of the teaching practice so that it does mean that we tend to the needs of our students to give everybody strategies to engage the students.

Principal C located the individual teacher at the centre of the creation of student attitudes and values. There was a sense that he felt that teachers were not really working to provide opportunities to allow students to succeed in ways that challenged the traditional emphasis on compliant academic success. He stated:

I’m not really sure that we have got the message through about what we think maybe still there is not a shared vision by the staff let alone the students about what that means.

This conformity to the adult view of the world was what Principal C saw as being at the core of much traditional pedagogy, and he felt it failed to meet the needs of the students at Marri. Yet he was only too aware of the limits on him and his attempt to effect change in the school community of Marri. He wondered whether teachers had become immune to his attempts to change the school for what he saw was the benefit of the students.

This shared vision was a central platform of Principal C’s reform process. Change for the better could only occur when staff, parents and the wider community joined with the students in working together to maximise outcomes for each student. For Principal C, reform of the school meant reform of the teacher’s strategies and conduct because “one of the most significant things that can account for change is how teachers behave and operate” and this was an area that he felt he had some control over.

I have taught in a number of difficult schools, and I know that from my own experience that teaching disadvantaged students doesn’t mean that you can’t be effective. But schools get into a cycle where it is not happening. So what I see happening now is we are into a five-year reform project that is seeking to remedy poor teaching strategies of the past. The next part of it is developing the quality of teaching in the school; some shared strategies, shared approach to study, some model approaches to how to approach things, some common language to break through some of the barriers. This is about teaching the stuff that’s important to learn often the stuff, the basic stuff, they have missed out on in the past.
For Principal C what was more important was creating a broader range of possibilities for the good student. What is interesting, though, is this strong sense of there being a contribution to a less troubled society through particular forms of relationships and conduct that he saw as being more productive, both for the individual and for wider society.

So academically successful students are good students, but equally the guy who rocks up to TAFE each week does his few days at school each week, does his best, goes off to a work place where he is working in building and construction or motor mechanics and he is highly regarded in the work place, as well as by his school teachers and TAFE teachers - that’s a good student. I would be anxious about trying to say that this is the optimum student.

There is a strong sense through the interview that Principal C saw the good student as one who is useful to society, particularly as an employable citizen but also as someone who is able to socialise in positive ways. For Principal C, the good student was one who:

I think the ideal student that I’ve tried to describe to you probably are the people who get along with others, they have some level of achievement, they have some level of self confidence, they have some idea of how to make their way in the world.

One of the key pillars of Principal C’s view of the school was on problematising notions of success to move beyond the traditional view of the academic success story. Visions of success had to move beyond this traditional view because he saw it as alienating whole sections of young people who did not fit that narrow vision of the compliant, well-behaved student. When asked why he thought schools were places that rewarded docile students, he stated:

From a teachers point of view they are the people who are easiest to deal with. I suspect that is the biggest part of it. I think also that it is a tension between adolescents and adults. So young people do seem to be bewildering to adults because of their behaviours and appearance. Some of these are really dangerous things but some of them are pretty harmless. I think it often works that the kid that is highly conformist is recognised as being therefore mature.

This often entailed a repudiation of the world of the adolescent as somehow ‘abnormal’ or ‘deviant’ and constructed many facets of youth culture as things to fear. This binary that privileges the adult over the adolescent is responsible for many of the inequities that need to be
addressed in schools. Principal C argued that: “there are aspects of adult behaviour that are equally questionable.” The deployment of this binary meant that a narrow vision of the good student dominated people’s perceptions and expectations.

For Principal C, this vision of the good student had a lot to do with the way that the current educational climate valued academic success. The media was instrumental in promoting this through the publication of TEE awards and tables that ranked how each individual school fared. He stated:

*I think it is a bit of that and when it comes to that classic, extreme model that you see splashed over “The West” once a year when the results of the TEE come out. The end result is that people seem to value only private schools, if you pay for it, it must be good.*

This media image of the good student as an academic success story, often from a private school, prompted Principal C to muse about the ways that these students are ‘packaged’ to appeal to dominant notions regarding success and the meritocratic school system. He posited:

*The lesson being taught is that appearances really count, how you look is more important than what kind of person you have become, and where you have come from to get there. The reality is that down the track the appearances really do not make that much of a difference. I have given a pretty glossy answer to a pretty complex question but I think it is because of our inbuilt prejudices as adults and in particular as teachers.*

Principal C challenged the notion that the students who were often held up to be the good student in schools were most successful in life after school. He stated:

*The kind of classic idea of what teachers have tended to think as the good student is compliant. I dismantled some programmes that were meant to be for academic extension and when we looked at them the kind of kids who were in there and the kind of results they were getting it was all wrong. The kids were not being chosen for the real capacity to achieve. But those kids were predominantly female, white, quiet, and conformist. If you said to a teacher what is your ideal student they are not going to say to you they are going to say female, white, quiet, conformist. The reality is that what lies behind that classic ideal of the good student is the sort of kid I have just described. I have serious doubts that being one hundred per cent compliant is going to make anyone successful in the world.*
Achievers

The three students selected by the staff as academic achievers were very forthcoming with their thoughts and experiences. In fact, this focus group produced roughly twice as much data as any other group in the same time. They seemed confident expressing their opinions and fed off each other’s responses to add detail and differing points of view. This group seemed to be able to disagree with each other in such a way as to engage in debate rather than argument. The three students, Cynthia (#3AFT1), Stewart (#3AMT2) and Ashlee (#3AFT3) seemed very comfortable within the focus group, perhaps reflecting the idea that they were used to engaging with adults and having their opinions asked and listened to. In various ways they represented the school at official functions as members of the Student Council and groups such as the school band.

These students spoke of a vision of the good student that embraced the meritocratic ideology. They saw the good student as one who is successful, and who has earned this success through the merit of hard work and discipline, both in the classroom and at home after. Cynthia (#3AFT1) stated that the good student was one who: “Does their work, tries their best.” Ashlee (#3AFT3) agreed, seeing the good student as one who “listens to the teacher”. Cynthia argued that the good student was one that was docile in the class and tended to defer to the attitudes and values that the teacher held.

The good student is meant to be quiet, like they are not meant to have opinions towards things that could be controversial. They tend to agree with what the teacher says. (#3AFT1)

Ashlee (#3AFT3) and Stewart (#3AMT2) disagreed, saying that the good student was one who “had an opinion” but had the social ability to read situations and recognise when it would be appropriate to voice these opinions. Stewart (#3AMT2) said: “They would have an opinion, but they don’t spit it out at the worst time.” Cynthia (#3AFT1) agreed, saying: “They don’t like you
disagreeing with what they say.” This promotes a sense that the good student is one who negotiates their positionality within the confines of expectation and hidden codes as to what was ‘appropriate’ and ‘correct’ conduct. This negotiation of conduct led them to surmise that teachers did not generally favour students who were too quiet. Stewart argued:

> They don’t like too quiet pupils, those ones that sit in the class and don’t say or do much, because they are not presenting their thoughts. They like people in the middle area that do have opinions but don’t shout them at the top of their voice. (#3AMT2)

These students argued that it was easy to be ignored, particularly if the student was not prepared or able to play the ‘game’. Ashlee (#3AFT3) argued: “Those quiet students don’t really make much of an effort with teachers or students, so they are easily overlooked. They just sort of blend in.” It could be argued, however, that this quiet demeanour is one way of negotiating within the normalising vision of the good student. For the academic achievers, this set of behaviours was difficult to fathom as their positionality seemed to rely so much on being noticed in the accepted ways.

Cynthia (#3AFT1) argued that the good student was one who was “close to the teachers”. By this she meant that they were students who were prepared to “suck up to them” by asking them questions about their lives outside of school, commenting on their fashion or try to have conversations with the teacher that focused on life out of school. In doing this, she felt that she was maximising the benefit out of the teacher/student relationship by positioning herself to be seen favourably. She stated:

> Of course teachers favour students that they like. They get heaps of recognition and benefits like rewards and stuff. It is just human nature, teachers are no different from any other person and you have to try to stay on their good side. (#3AFT1)

This favour corresponded with possibilities that many students may not get. These students received awards and spoke of many favourable relationships that they were able to have with teachers. Stewart stated:
Everyone seems a lot nicer. A lot of the teachers seem a lot nicer because the teachers talk to each other about you and they see you as being worthwhile. It is a little strange when some random teacher comes up to you, that you have never met before and starts talking to you like you are old friends. Some of the other kids don’t take the better treatment very well because they don’t get rewarded themselves. They tend to call you a nerd or something. (#3AMT2)

One of the subtle deployments of power seems to be the creation of spheres, or realms, of attachment for the individual to one of the facets of the good student. These students could easily speak of ways that they were privileged over other students, and that this privilege made it easier to achieve further recognition. These students wore the faciality of the good, and as such they increasingly perpetuated these subjectivities. Ashlee (#3AFT3) picked up on this when she said: “They just give certificates and rewards to the students who always get them. Stewart, you always get them.”

Each of these students made attempts to play down the awards that they had received – a seeming cringe response to be noticed in ways that other students may not have valued. In reply to Ashlee (#3AFT3) nominating Stewart (#3AMT2) as receiving a lot of awards, Stewart (#3AMT2) responded by blustering “I used to but not so much now.” When I asked Cynthia (#3AFT1) how she had been rewarded, she said: “I haven’t been rewarded for anything to be honest.” Ashlee (#3AFT3) gave the most interesting response. After seeming to single out Stewart (#3AMT2) for getting a lot of awards as if this were a bad thing, she stated: “I don’t mind that I am not rewarded because I know that I am doing the work.” However, the other students reminded her that she had received a major award that came with a $350 cheque for academic excellence. When I tried to question her about this, she said:

I don’t know really. It was this thing called some club or other. It was a certificate and attached was a cheque for $350. I don’t know what it was for. I just had it. Teachers chose me for it. I was more interested in the money. (#3AFT3)
This reticence to discuss this award is explained when later in the interview, Ashlee spoke of her feelings of humiliation when she received the award.

_I didn’t much feel like walking up to get it, in front of everyone. In the assembly you are sitting down, the whole school is there and you have to get up and you have to walk all the way to the front. It is so hard because everyone is watching you. It is humiliating. I just don’t want people staring at me. I would like to be rewarded separately._ (#3AFT3)

Cynthia (#3AFT1) agreed, stating: “It is awful when you walk up the front because everyone is watching. All the attention is on you.” These students found themselves in a very complex situation at Marri. The most obvious conclusion to draw is that they were aware of the ways that they were being judged through the various distributive technologies found in schools. At times, they felt that they were able to negotiate themselves within this nexus of power relations so as to maximise their advantage within the system. At other times, however, they found it very difficult to maintain this understanding of the rules of the game, and therefore where unable to position themselves favourably. This explains their feelings of humiliation at being singled out in front of their peers, because this made them feel as though they were being placed at a disadvantage from their peers. This balancing of the peer world and the teacher world seemed to collide when these sort of awards were given out – a recognition that there are multiple perspectives on what a good student should be in each school. In part, I believe that this explains why these students wanted to see themselves as inhabiting the middle group of the social hierarchy, a location that is most likely to bring both security and prestige from a multitude of vantage points within the school. The fear that they articulated was that they were being judged when they stood in front of their peers in ways that they could not control. Stewart posited:

_When you stand in front of people they judge you. The fear is that they judge you as being too good a student and that you are betraying them in some way. It is usually the lower achievers who tease and make fun._ (#3AMT2)

Part of the positionality of the good student involved students having to identify which facets of being a good student were acceptable and which were unacceptable in a variety of situations from
a variety of perspectives. Placing them in front of staff and students meant that they were unsure of which identity they were meant to assume, and therefore how they were being judged as a result.

These students saw parents and teachers as having similar attitudes towards the good student that focused on academic success. Stewart (#3AMT2) stated: “They get above average marks. They get good reports from teachers and have a good circle of friends.” Ashlee (#3AFT3) agreed, stating that “a good student always does their homework.” These students nominated that students held a vision of the good student that corresponded with teachers and parents, one that focussed on achieving academic success through hard work and dedication. This could be interpreted as a social naivety, an unawareness of some of the intricate social dynamics of the school as evident in the idea that there was not really any popular groups in the school. Cynthia (#3AFT1) argued: “I actually don’t think there are any specific groups that are popular – there are just different groups of people.” However, what these students did talk about was a “school yard hierarchy” that resulted in intense competition between students. This hierarchy was not based on academic attributes but on elements of confidence and power that enabled some groups (the confident and powerful) to see themselves as superior to other groups (the less confident and possibly disempowered). Stewart (#3AMT2) stated: “In the school yard hierarchy everyone is about the same level, but some people think they are better than others.” This led these students to argue that it was the students in the middle of this hierarchy that got on best with teachers, rather than those at either extreme. Stewart (#3AMT2) went on to argue that: “The students in the middle get on better with teachers. The people on top seem to think they are better than everyone else and the people on the bottom think they are worthless.”

These students nominated themselves as belonging to the middle of the school yard hierarchy. Cynthia (#3AFT1) stated: “I am in the middle and I don’t get along with teachers.” However, she
changed her view when Stewart (#3AMT2) challenged her and stated: “You don’t have any teachers who are after you – you get along ok.” These students saw themselves as in the middle of the social hierarchy that was dominated at either end by the alienated and the powerful. This seems to contradict earlier comments on popularity, but perhaps for these students it signals a clear distinction in their minds between popularity and social power. The currency at Marri seemed to be strength rather than popularity and it was this that was valued and organised the pecking order. Cynthia (#3AFT1) raised an interesting point when she said: “Loser people want to be more like the middle people and the middle people are just the middle people and the top people just look down on everyone.” What interests me in this quote is that Cynthia (#3AFT1) does not voice a desire to be one of the top people. This may be because she felt that being one of the middle group suited her purpose, it gave her protection whilst also facilitating positive relations with teachers. Ashlee (#3AFT3) disagreed, arguing that there were many people in the middle group “who want to be like the top people, like they are sheep.”

There was also a sense that the good student was a marketable quantity – a representative of the school who was seen to be an example of what was good at the school. Stewart stated:

The good student is a positive role model to the outside, they are friendly and neatly presented. They are not all scruffy and ripped clothes and everything. They try their best and do their bit for the school. (#3AMT2)

At Marri, these students felt that it was difficult to be seen as a good student in any way than in the classroom because of a lack of programs, teams and clubs that could be seen to support the ethos of the school. Rather they spoke of a sense of frustration that the majority of the programs were focused on students who did not meet the criteria, as they saw it, of being good students. Stewart spoke of a Mountain Biking Team that was meant as a program to help at-risk students that was not reasonably open to all students.
They have got a mountain biking team. But it is not a good example because it is for at risk students. They say that other students can join, it’s just that some of us are too busy with study and things to take time off from school. It’s a shame, I think it would be fun. (#3AMT2)

This sentiment seemed to run through this interview – a belief that the school was focused more on attending to the needs of those ‘at-risk’ students at the expense of their possibilities. This manifested itself in the ways that the students tended to characterise the good student in terms of what it was not – the ‘bad’ student. These students nominated the bad student as having the following characteristics: “always loud”, “distract the teacher”, “they always swear”, “they are always opinionated”, “they don’t usually do their work”, “they talk all the time”, and “they disrupt the class and make others get into trouble for not doing their work”. They found this list much easier to make than what constituted a good student, and tended to argue that the good was the opposite of the bad. This seemed to indicate a binary understanding of the world, an either/or approach to considering important questions regarding the self.

One thought that these student shared was the idea that those students who are good at school tend to be offered more opportunities in life after school, and these opportunities corresponded with a greater possibility for happiness. Ashlee argued:

To be successful you have to be happy. There is no point having money and a career if you are not happy. But happiness only comes from doing what you love, and that takes work. The best way to do what you love is to make the most of the opportunities that school gives you. (#3AFT3)

This tied in with the students’ belief that the way to be successful was to adopt the accepted conventions surrounding conduct, and to operate in such a way as to be seen as supporting the project of the staff where this was not seen to bring unwanted attention their way. The skill of the good student seems to be about negotiating through the possibilities that the normalising judgement of the institution offered each and every student so as to maximise their benefit from a variety of different perspectives.
The three students selected as sports achievers by the school were male and came from a diverse range of sports. Jarrod (#3SMV1) was a keen surfer, Dick (#3SMV2) a soccer player and Harry (#3SMV3) was a cricket player. Each of these boys knew each other quite well and interacted comfortably within the interview. These students actively avoided representing Marri in any sporting events because they felt that it lacked prestige and there were not that many opportunities.

Jarrod (#3SMV1) and Harry (#3SMV3) shared a meritocratic vision of a good student. For them, the good student was one that tried hard and deserved the success that they got. Harry (#3SMV3) said: “I see a good student as one who studies hard. I am not sure how many there are at Marri right now, but that is what I see it as.” Jarrod (#3SMV1) agreed, seeing the good student as one who is always well behaved and tries their best. He said: “They just behave. The good student is someone who tries.” These students nominated a good student as someone who is successful, both in an academic sense as well as a social sense. Dick (#3SMV2) argued that teachers and parents judged success on the achievement of a normative grade that indicated he was passing. “With teachers and parents it is all about the grade.” Harry (#3SMV3) concurred, saying: “Teachers want good results more than good behaviour. It is what everybody wants out of life.”

This meritocratic vision of school implied that students who were well-behaved and did their best to achieve as highly as they could would be rewarded. However, Jarrod (#3SMV1), Dick (#3SMV2) and Harry (#3SMV3) argued that this was not the case, that Marri was a school that ignored the achiever to reward those who were classed as deviant in some way. Harry stated:

_I am an academically good student. I am getting decent grades like B’s and A’s. Even in my bad subjects that I absolutely hate I still work at them and I am passing. But teachers don’t treat you any different because you kind of get forgotten a bit. This makes it hard to_
Jarrod (#3SMV1) argued that a key factor in the success of each student at school was their ability to construct positive relationships with teachers so that “if you have trouble with your work they will listen and help you. You are not like good mates but you actually trust them.” Harry (#3SMV3) was frustrated that by being well-behaved he was actually avoiding the attention of the teacher and thus missing out on some of the intrinsic rewards of being a good student. All three students voiced an opinion that at Marri the students who were rewarded were those who misbehaved the most. Jarrod stated:

“A lot of students that are badly behaved they get good things happen to them. I remember in Yr 9 the bad class used to go on camps and get stuff handed to them. In class they would go and play basketball and stuff while all the other mainstream students are working. It makes you feel like being bad so that you can get the benefits.” (#3SMV1)

For Dick, however, this notion of an academically successful student was not evident in his experience of schooling at Marri. He stated:

“That is just like the stereotypical student. There is not really very many students like that anywhere. You barely see any student do work in class. They say “I’ll go home and do it there” to the teacher and muck around in class instead. Socialising is very important.” (#3SMV2)

Dick’s (#3SMV2) vision of the good student challenged what he saw as a stereotype. Rather, he nominated a good student as one who had “a good sense of humour”. However, with this sense of humour needed to come the ability to apply it in the correct situations with the ability to recognise boundaries and expectations. He stated: “Some teachers really love a student with a good sense of humour. You can actually have a joke with them, but you have to know when to get back to work.” In Dick’s (#3SMV2) view, the good student was one that was able to have a positive relationship with teachers and students within the expectations of what was ‘appropriate’ and ‘reasonable’. This socially intelligent student was able to negotiate competing expectations.
and desires from the teacher and student worlds and work within them to position themselves favourably. The important thing, according to Dick, was the ability to move between the competing expectations by recognising the limits of each context and situation. He stated:

> I think I am a good student because I have a good sense of humour. I don’t really try, it is just natural. But I also know where the boundary is and how not to step over the mark and actually do my work. (#3SMV2)

For the students, there needed to be a similar recognition of what was ‘appropriate’ conduct in a variety of situations. He went on to say:

> A lot of people don’t like braggers, or people who draw attention to themselves. You have to be careful that you don’t step on people’s toes at this school because you can get yourself into a lot of trouble. (#3SMV2)

One of the most disturbing parts of this interview was how these students lived, comfortably, with the threat of physical intimidation and violence. They accepted it as ‘normal’ conduct, perhaps not to be valorised but certainly not vehemently opposed. Part of this is their exposure to a set of very ‘macho’ normalising discourses of males in the schoolyard. A lot of their discussion centred on fighting at school. Jarrod (#3SMV1) said: “Most of the people at the school love a fight. People will go out of their way to watch a fight.”

Fighting in the schoolyard was a particularly potent symbol of masculinity. Jarrod (#3SMV1) nominated himself as someone who has “been in heaps of fights.” What dominated his thinking about fighting was that it was a test of the person, and if that person was to refuse the challenge, they would have failed in some way and have lost the status of being acceptable. He stated:

> You can’t be hell wimpy, because then people will just step over you. Most of the time you can’t just walk away. It’s Marri. They will just come back for you the next day. You might walk away and then they’ll see you in the streets and want to fight you with more people. You’re just better off getting it over and done with. (#3SMV1)

Dick agreed, seeing that fighting was almost an onerous duty of a young man in a school. In it, he saw many values that he felt should be rewarded: competitiveness, effort, bravery and the ability
for the gifted to rise to the top – similar to a meritocratic view of the school. He spoke of feeling frustrated at being suspended for fighting when it was an acceptable response to a difficult situation:

Even though you explain to teachers and parents what it was about, they won’t listen. You automatically get suspended for fighting, but if he brang it on me, what was I meant to do? Just sit there and take it? At school if you don’t fight someone you are classed as a wimp. You get everyone teasing you and everyone lines up for a go because you are an easy target, even small guys and stuff. If you fight the person and lose you just say: “I lost”, you clean yourself off and get on with it, you can’t do much about that. But at least you gave it a go, it’s like life, you have to give everything a go. (#3SMV2)

The act of fighting showed worthy characteristics. Not backing down was seen as a sign of strength or of value. This signifies a ritual that establishes certain ways of being seen and seeing the self as worthwhile and valuable. This involved a positioning of the self within discourses concerning masculinity and the correct comportment of the young man. However, the expectation not to be judged as a wimp by his peers led him into conflict with his teachers and parents. In a sense, the frustration that Dick gives voice to is what I would term being trapped within the binary. In Dick’s eyes, there are only two possibilities, being ‘normal’ or being a ‘wimp’, and these positionalities corresponded with different status within the social structure of the school. This meant that he could see no other option than engaging in violent confrontation when a situation arose. Being seen to demonstrate appropriate conduct to his peers was more important than being sanctioned from teachers and parents.

The sense of ritual extended further to include rules for the fighting that made certain actions reasonable and certain actions unreasonable to these students. Jarrod said:

I like seeing a good fight, but if there is a fight and there is some big dude fighting a little dude, or a hell tough guy fighting a wimp and he is getting a flogging, I will jump in and say he has had enough. (#3SMV1)

The sense of action meant that all participants were involved – whether it was cheering or getting involved. The fight broke the passive expectation that permeated the class experience of these
students. Harry (#3SMV3) said: "Fights are interesting because school is all the same. It mixes it up a bit."

On the other hand, there were levels of fighting that were deemed to be inappropriate and outside the boundaries of correct comportment. Dick stated:

You can’t back down. That’s why you have people bringing knives and stuff to school because they are scared of the repercussions of walking away from a fight so a knife is one way of protecting yourself and stopping the fight by scaring them. I’ve seen pretty dangerous weapons at this school like bricks being thrown at teachers and baseball bats. (#3SMV2)

It would be easy to see this culture of violence as aberrant and abnormal. For these students, however, it represented a facet of the school that they lived in as real and normal. Jarrod (#3SMV1), Dick (#3SMV2) and Harry (#3SMV3) described a set of school experiences where violence was an extreme example of the discourses that permeated the social world that they positioned themselves within. It is the hyper-masculine example of a student group that has negotiated a subject position within the nexus of gender expectations and stereotypes. Variously, these students argued that using weapons in fights was beyond the realm of what was acceptable. The development of a hidden code, despite the best efforts of the school’s anti-bullying programme, that prioritised stereotypically masculine qualities such as strength and not giving in, was one of the ways that these students were engaging with identities and ways of being that run contrary to what is widely socially acceptable. This violence was used as a tool to regulate the social interaction of competing groups in a complex social hierarchy. One of the things that made it so complex was that at Marri students tended to form small, tight-knit groups that identified closely with each other and were in competition with other groups for social status. Jarrod stated:

Some people go out and they must get jealous or something and they try to fight you or whatever. If you are popular they try to fight you because you are popular. But if you are
Dick agreed, arguing that a fight became a way to either maintain or create status within the group and for others to demonstrate allegiance. He said:

_It’s kind of like gaol. If you take out the big guy, no one is going to start on you. Most of the time at least one of the people in a fight have pissed a couple of people off. People like seeing someone get what is coming to them._ (#3SMV2)

One of the effects of this comportment of the self in these ‘macho’ ways was a diminishing of stereotypically feminine traits such as academic success. As well, this seemed to create a binary view of the school as an us versus them mentality. Contained within this mentality was a variety of ways of thinking that corresponded with a classificatory power – classifying students as other than the self and the immediate group that the individual saw themselves as belonging to. Jarrod blamed a lot of the violence on the ‘other’, in this case Aboriginal students who had since left the school. He said:

_It’s gotten better. There hasn’t been a massive fight (using weapons) like that in ages. That’s because the Aboriginal students have left the school. There don’t seem to be race troubles at the school anymore._ (#3SMV1)

This creation of the Aboriginal students as the other meant that they were seen as the instigators of ‘race troubles’. The removal of these students meant that the ‘normal’ code of conduct was reinstated and that the relations of power at the school were made more commonsense. In this form, the racist attitude of Jarrod (#3SMV1) is an extension of a binarisation of the social world into positive and negative groups. This binarisation extended to an almost tribal identification of social groups, particularly the social group that the individual most identified with. Harry stated:

_Most groups tend to stay the same. You have the same friends and you look after each other. They need to watch your back because things can get out of hand pretty quick. There are not many students who mix with all groups, you tend to stick to your own kind._ (#3SMV3)
Harry (#3SMV3) also argued that to be a successful student at Marri, the good student had to quickly learn how to comport themselves in appropriate ways so that they did not draw any hostile attention. He said: “The good student is a good actor. You don’t notice it but you are putting up a shield around what you say and what you do.” The level of surveillance that these students identified in their school was extreme, but the majority of it came from their peers. This led them to be constantly ‘on’, always performing in accepted ways so as to maximise the benefits of how they were positioned within the social hierarchy of Marri. More than any other group, these students spoke of the contingency of that positionality and therefore the identity that they saw themselves as possessing. It was continually being tested and performed in a variety of powerful ways in a multitude of situations and contexts. Thus, for these students, identity was about continually ‘becoming’ – contested and contingent upon a range of powerful discourses that permeated Marri.

Quiet Students

There were a number of things that I found fascinating about this interview. The first concerned the students selected. These students were selected by the Deputy Principal and Year Eleven Coordinator as students who could be considered as quiet students – that is, students who could be seen to escape attention in many of the dynamic ways that schools function. However, two of these three students Chris (#3QMV1) and Shanayah (#3QFV2) presented as having charisma and confidence while the third, Tracey (#3QFV3), appeared shy and vulnerable. On reflection I wondered whether the reason for this apparent selection anomaly was due to a definition of the quiet. Perhaps I assumed that the quiet student is that wallflower, easily ignored and often overlooked. Perhaps from the perspective of the Deputy Principal and Year Eleven Coordinator they were quiet because they had never needed to be disciplined. This is a subtle difference, but I
think that it does point out the element of conflict that dominated many of the relationships found in this school.

These students nominated a vision of the good that was traditional and based on meritocratic values. They saw the good student as an academically successful student who deserved success because of the work put in. Intelligence was not as significant as an indicator as hard work and discipline. Shanayah (#3QFV2) stated: “A good student is someone who shows up at school, does their work and gets good marks.” Tracey (#3QFV3) agreed, saying: “A good student does their work in class quietly and hands their assignments in on time.” The emphasis is on docile indicators of success – working quietly, being organised and through this organisation achieving success. Tracey (#3QFV3) went on to argue: “The more effort we put in, the better marks we get.”

One of the factors that contributed to this success was the relationship that they had with individual teachers. Chris (#3QMV1) said: “If you have a good relationship with the teacher, the teacher will be good to you.” When asked how a student could maintain a positive relationship with a teacher, he suggested “being respectful” as well as “behaving in class”. Tracey (#3QFV3) agreed, maintaining that if a student had a good relationship with teachers: “the teacher will cut you some slack and you can get away with a bit more. This makes school easier to handle.” Perhaps this was one of the key motivators for this group – making school easier to handle by adopting a variety of strategies allowed them to escape situations that could cause conflict with teachers. This is one of the key strategies or negotiations that students can choose to make – they have positioned themselves to escape punishment from the authority vested in structures of the school. They are caring for the self, albeit in limited ways, through attempting to maximise their return through adopting this attitude towards teachers.
This interpretation is reinforced in the opinion that Chris (#3QMV1) and Shanayah (#3QFV2) had in regards to personal responsibility for success in school. Put simply, they argued that the individual is wholly responsible for how the school sees them and how they are treated as a result. Chris (#3QMV1) argued: “I think people choose to be a good student or not.” Shanayah agreed, saying:

_Teachers expect students to put in the effort. They always tell you if you don’t put in the effort then you won’t do any good. So every student could be a good student if they want to be. The kids want to do the work they do._ (#3QFV2)

This language of the freely choosing autonomous student is very powerful. It posits that there is a shared reality that encompasses all students and that they are the arbiters of choice within that reality. This vision is a dominant discourse in contemporary education that explains why these students are at such pains to avoid conflict with staff.\(^{431}\) To paraphrase their thinking, relationships with teachers are central to success. If you want to be successful, then you must choose to maintain those relationships through your behaviour and effort in the class. In this way, the pastoral power of the teacher is highly effective in shaping the subjectivities of students.

These students spoke compellingly about schools as places that provided vocational opportunities for young people. Chris spoke of about his experience of school-based traineeships.\(^{432}\) He was studying a traineeship in the construction industry:

_My parents think that I should be studying every night but I don’t have to. My traineeship suits me well. Three days school, one day TAFE and one day work experience. It opens up opportunities for me._ (#3QMV1)

By staying at school, Chris (#3QMV1) felt that he was in a better position than if he left and got an apprenticeship. He stated: “I think the traineeship opens up opportunities to bigger and better places. School is a stepping stone.” Chris’s view of education is dominated by this vocational

\(^{431}\) Marshall, Op Cit.

\(^{432}\) These traineeships were implemented by the State Government in 2005 as a way to keep young people in training longer. They consist of a school component, a TAFE component and a work placement component.
discourse, an idea that the school is a place that provides opportunities for later life and where it is the responsibility of the individual to make the most of those vocational opportunities. This, in part, explains his emphasis on the relationships with teachers. Also, he prioritised maturity as one of the key pillars of those relationships.

As a Year Eight, your teachers treat you like daycare. That is because you are not mature. From Year Eight to Year Eleven you mature heaps. Your teachers take you more seriously for sure. Year Eleven has been the best year for me. (#3QMV1)

This maturity is premised upon the correct comportment of the self in ‘appropriate’ ways. For Chris (#3QMV1), this meant conducting himself in a mature way because this was what was expected in the workplace. This vocational imperative meant that he presented himself as a compliant student so that he could maximize the benefits, as he saw them, of his school experience. His experience suggested that acting in that more mature manner corresponded with better treatment from the teachers – a way that the relations of power subtly position the individual in becoming a certain type of person. Chris recounted a time when he had been rewarded for acting in that more ‘mature’ manner:

This year there was a fight between a couple of boys and I knew about it. When there came a time to sort it out I confronted one of them in that toilets and asked, “Why did you have to sort it out like that, why did you have to go and belt them”? And Mr. Jones the Deputy came in and sort of realised what was going on he just walked out to leave me to deal with it. He trusted me to sort out in the right way. The reward for me was the respect from the teachers and all that and the deputy who walked in gave me a letter about what happened which was signed by the two deputies and the principal. (#3QMV1)

For Chris (#3QMV1) this extended to being very aware of the ways that the normative judgement at school could impact on career chances after. He said: “The comments on your report are important. When you go for a job they look at the comments from the teachers.” The mechanisms of surveillance are arrayed so that students are continually measured and judged and taught to see themselves as certain subjects. In this instance, Chris has accepted that this surveillance has a powerful role in alerting others as to the potential of each student when set against normalised expectations.
Shanayah (#3QFV2) argued a similar position, that the good student was one that had goals and ambition to become “something”. She stated: “Good students are ones that want to go somewhere in life. They have some goals.” These students tended to define success through a vocational lens. If the good student in their eyes deserved success, there is little doubt that the worth of a person out of school was determined through their career after school. This continuation of the meritocratic ideology after school shows the power of the discourse and the way that it was a force that shaped how these students saw themselves and their world.

These students maintained that to be successful at Marri, behaviour was more important than intelligence. Tracey (#3QFV3) stated: “Teachers value behaviour more than academic performance.” For Chris (#3QMV1), this translated to “just normal behaviour”. By this he meant behaviour that did not attract any negative attention from the teachers. This behaviour demonstrates the ways that the awareness of surveillance corresponds with a ‘correct’ comportment of the self. This correct comportment involved recognising limits and boundaries and behaving accordingly. Chris stated:

*You can have a bit of fun, but you have to remember you are in school. In Design and Technology you can’t muck around that much. A bit of fun now and then is OK but kids who take it too far and don’t know where the line is are eventually told to get out.* (#3QMV1)

The boundary setting, in keeping with the sentiments expressed earlier, was defined as the responsibility of the student, an example of the student negotiating ways of being and becoming within structures and dispositions of power. Shanayah stated:

*If people like to joke around all the time they like to have a good laugh but people who can’t control themselves and stop others from doing their work won’t get along. They don’t know when they over step the lines.* (#3QFV2)
There was very little discussion among these students about the lines or boundaries. I argue that this is because they accepted the right of the school and the staff to set these boundaries and saw them as fair and reasonable expectations of students. The consequences for these students who stepped over the line, according to Chris (#3QMV1), was that they were “treated like shit” by the staff and often other students.

These students gave voice to a big issue at Marri, that of truanting. For Tracey this represented a period in her life when she deliberately absented herself from school because she was uncomfortable with “being noticed” in school. She stated:

*I didn’t really work in Year Nine. Then I started getting a lot of negative comments from teachers and other people and I started to hate school. I used to wag a lot of the time. I just hated feeling like I was dumb or a freak or something. (#3QFV3)*

For Tracey (#3QFV3) the surveillance that is the core business of schooling left her feeling bewildered and abnormal. This forced her to retreat from the institution as a means to hide from the consequences of the normalising gaze that too often were negative in their impact. The fact that these were delivered from a multitude of perspectives left Tracey (#3QFV3) feeling that she was under attack or threat because she was designated as ‘abnormal’. Because Tracey (#3QFV3) felt that the student was ultimately responsible for their success, both in a social and an academic sense, perceived failure was also a reflection of the person. This meant that when she began to experience negative consequences from others, she was left feeling abnormal as a sign of who she was. The classificatory power of the normalising gaze can be seen here – in particular the imperative for the young person to see themselves as others see them. The ways that these relations of power shaped the self was particularly damaging for Tracey (#3QFV3) who spoke of how hard it was to re-enter the school. Tracey (#3QFV3) continued to present as a shy, timid student who continually had to be asked for her response. Whilst the others were more forthcoming, Tracey (#3QFV3) seemed much happier to escape attention even in the interview.
For Shanayah, being seen as a bad student was due to the academic world, particularly in regards to effort in work being handed in. This continuation of the meritocratic discourse situated the individual as the chooser of the possibilities that the school has for the individual and the way that the student positions themselves within a complex social network of power relations. She stated:

_There have been times when I was seen to be a bad student because they could see that I wasn’t trying. The teachers thought I was going nowhere. But then when you are acting good, doing all your work and getting good marks, then they have hopes for you; you can do whatever you want. At that stage I didn’t care what they thought. I didn’t want to do work. I wanted to be a bad student so that’s it._ (#3QFV2)

This limited understanding of the school as a place of possibilities reflects, in part, a deficit model that reflects the mentality that the teacher is the educated person that the students should aspire to emulate if they want to be successful.

**Rebels**

The three students selected as rebels all had a history of suspension, expulsion and absenteeism that had continued for a number of years. Roger (#3RMV1), Candice (#3RFV2) and Walter (#3RMV3) were students that had a number of run-ins with the school hierarchy. They were an interesting focus group. They tended to give their answers freely, but spoke to me as the interviewer rather than to each other. Each of these students were participants in a programme named Fast Track that was designed to keep students “at-risk” of dropping out of school in school longer. The aims of this programme were to encourage socialisation and to promote skills that would make these students able to participate in the job market after they left school.

The most striking of this interview was the students articulation of a school experience based more on confrontation rather than conciliation. Candice (#3RFV2) developed a view of the school
as a place where docile behaviours were valued and teachers tended to victimise students who did not exhibit the desired traits of “being punctual, organised and well-behaved”. Walter (#3RMV3) identified the good student as a “nerd”. For Walter (#3RMV3), nerds were students that “just sit there and do their work. They sit on the computer all the time.” Candice (#3RFV2) agreed with Walter (#3RMV3), stating: “Yeah. Doing all their work at school and at home and that kind of stuff.” These three students exhibited a sense of hostility towards these ‘nerds’ based, I argue, on their identification of these students as opposites to them. Coupled with their oppositional view, this meant that these ‘nerds’ were targets who were looked down on and deserved rough treatment. Walter (#3RMV3) stated: “I don’t think anyone looks up to anyone in this school. It’s a tough place.” This set of experiences directly challenged the school’s anti-bullying programme “Choose Respect”. For Walter (#3RMV3), school was about carving out your own place and dealing, as best as you can, with whatever consequences came, even if it was expulsion.

These students saw themselves as perpetrators rather than victims within the school. They saw the school as having a legitimate authority to set boundaries and discipline students, and defended their actions by saying that school was not a place for them. It seems appropriate to suggest that by positioning themselves as rebels they received some benefits despite sanctions imposed by the school. Roger recounted an incident that led to him being suspended. He said:

*This teacher couldn’t speak properly and he was very strange - he was an angry type of guy. He wasn’t from Australia he was from Iraq. Being from a different culture we had our little fun and stuff. He tolerated it but too much is too much and started just going off and he was always looking at me when he went off. So it was like “What have I done?” Then I just reacted really badly cause last year I wanted to do my work but I can’t tolerate people going off at me. So I started lashing out and swearing and all that and I got two days suspension. With that scenario I felt horrible because I got suspended and the whole class was giving him crap. It felt it was unfair in one way and fair in another. It was unfair because the whole class was giving him crap and I was singled out. Plus he was staring at me the whole time. And the way it was fair was eventually I did lash out and deserved my punishment.* (#3RMV1)
There are a number of points that this quote lends itself to. Firstly, Roger (#3RMV1) spoke of his class’s tendency to adopt a monocultural view of the world. This teacher was a highly visible example who did not speak to student expectations of what a teacher should be. Secondly, Roger (#3RMV1) spoke of his frustration at an apparent singling out by the teacher when he felt he was part of a larger group who were “having a go” at the teacher. This speaks of his awareness of how he was being placed under surveillance and judged according to norms that he felt were not ‘fair’ or ‘reasonable’. Thirdly, Roger’s (#3RMV1) comment that his treatment was both fair and unfair demonstrated an acceptance of the school as a disciplining machine, where there is authority conferred that is both legitimate and reasonable. It would appear that this legitimacy is derived from the wielding of power within the ‘fair’ and ‘reasonable’ expectations that Roger (#3RMV1) had. Later in the interview, Roger spoke of himself in this way:

*I always stick up for the person that is getting a hard time. I am a role model to the younger ones and I can choose to look after them. This has a ‘shiny affect’ where I shine above everyone else and they all look up to me.* (#3RMV1)

With Roger (#3RMV1) there was a sense that he was creating a vision of himself within the interview, not as an antisocial student but as a strong, caring student who was powerful within the social hierarchy of the school. Perhaps this was how he wanted to see himself as there is a certain romance associated with this vision, but there is little doubt that he saw being a rebel gave a social currency outside the classroom. Later in the interview, Roger (#3RMV1) identified his group as being the group that had been responsible for doing a lot of the bullying in the school. “*There is not much of a bully group anymore because that used to be us.*” It is this behaviour that led to Roger (#3RMV1) coming to the attention of the school hierarchy as a rebel, not for looking after students.

There was often a sense of pride at being a person who transgressed these boundaries –they were powerful because they acted outside the bounds of ‘normal’ behaviour. Walter recounted an
incident that led to his expulsion (before he was re-enrolled next year) with a sense of almost masculine pride in his strength and resolve. He recounted:

There were plenty of times I was judged not to be a good student. I had a fight out on the oval when I was in Year Ten and he was in Year Nine. I bashed him good. The teacher came and grabbed me off him. It took three teachers to grab me. And I got expelled. (#3RMV3)

One of the major inferences gleaned from this interview was the ways that being a good student was given feminine, passive characteristics, and being a rebel was given masculine, active characteristics. Roger (#3RMV1) disparaged students who cared for others (even though he earlier nominated himself as one) as being ‘girls’. He stated: “Some girls would want a caring person who cares for others and doesn’t fight and all that crap.” Walter (#3RMV3) looked down at a group of students that he defined as ‘Emo’s’. “They think they are popular but they aren’t. They are just girls really.” This valorisation of physical strength meant that labelling someone a girl was one of the worst forms of insult possible. Through these insults, Candice (#3RFV2) sat quietly and did not seem to object to the identification of ‘girl’ as an insult. This silencing of Candice (#3RFV2) speaks of a hegemonic masculinity that underpins much of the school culture and the ways that students become certain types of people. At Marri one of the dominant discourses shaping the individual is how they are located, and locate themselves, within this hegemonic masculinity.

All of these students spoke of two different experiences of school, delineated by year level. For Years Eight to Ten they spoke of school as a place where they were controlled and disempowered. Roger stated:

In Year Eleven we are getting treated like we are young adults. In Year Ten outside of school I was treated like a young adult but inside school definitely not. I was treated like a school student and that means you always get looked down on. But in Year Eleven and Twelve teachers put that extra effort because you are going to move out of school soon and get a job and be like them. (#3RMV1)
These students articulated a neo-vocational vision of education – the idea that it is the business of school to train students to be productive members of society, able to work within the demands of an industrial society. Roger (#3RMV1) wanted teachers and students to have a relationship based more on the business model rather than the pastoral model. He said: “They should try and communicate with you like an adult, more like business people.”

These students spoke of experiences of school that focused on transgressions in a variety of situations. These experiences shaped how they constructed what a ‘normal’ school should be, and therefore what a good student should look like. One example came from Walter (#3RMV3) when he was asked what characteristics a good student would have for teachers. He answered “honest”. When I prompted him to ask in what ways a good student was honest, he answered: “When the teacher says who threw that paper plane you own up.” This point was further emphasised by Roger whose experience of school led him to surmise that teachers were less concerned with rewarding students and more concerned with punishing them. He stated:

I don’t think they really reward students, or I don’t have any that do. My teachers don’t reward students for doing good work. The reward is meant to be at the end of the year in their final grade. But when it comes to punishments most teachers have their own separate punishments. Some teachers just say get out of the class because they just can’t stand you because you are being an idiot. (#3RMV1)

In part this explains the difficulty that these students had in explaining what they thought a good student was like beyond fairly rudimentary comments concerning behaviour and organisation. For Roger (#3RMV1) and Walter (#3RMV3) in particular, school was a place where the opposite occurred – and that was an experience of the binary other of the good student. This other was vocal, disrespectful, confrontational, violent and continually being judged as abnormal or defective by the teachers.
Candice (#3RFV2), however, adopted a different tactic to the overt confrontational comportment of Roger (#3RMV1) and Walter (#3RMV3). For her, school was not a place that she felt comfortable in for a variety of reasons, so she adopted a pattern of truanting behaviour, particularly in lower school. Candice (#3RFV2) said: “The good student goes to school every day. They are well-behaved and they have everything organised. I used to wag school every day.” For Candice, school was a place that was confrontational and unrewarding. As a result, she chose to manage this by not attending. She stated:

I was good when I was younger but now I am not so good. I hardly come to school at all now. I used to come all the time but now I just get angry at the teachers so I don’t come. Teachers just bust me and are always in my face. Like when I walk into the class Ms Brown gets into me for being late. I just feel so angry. (#3RFV2)

School had become a place that was oppressive and frustrating. By absenting herself, she felt that she was minimising these frustrations. This pattern of behaviour demonstrates a desire to avoid difficult situations. She recounted an occasion where she was in trouble from a particular teacher and had to go back to negotiate re-admittance to the class. Rather than doing this, she decided to stop coming to school for a few months until it blew over.

I remember that the teacher kept arguing with me and kicked me out. Then she said she wanted me back in her class but I had to apologise and stuff. When I went to the deputy he said I had to go and talk to her. I just stopped going. I would rather be on my own. (#3RFV2)

This method of dealing with conflict positioned Candice (#3RFV2) as a marginalised student within the school. Her conduct led her to be nominated as ‘at-risk’ and a student that needed to be watched and treated carefully.

This view of the world as a transgressing place extended to the social hierarchy of the school. Walter (#3RMV3), Roger (#3RMV1) and Candice (#3RFV2) described a social mix that was intensely group-based and competitive. These groups tended to form rigid boundaries and view outsiders with suspicion. Correspondingly, they felt it was important to belong to a group for
safety in the school yard. These groups could be formed based on cultural or racial lines or even the course that the student was studying. Fast Track student tended to socialise with other Fast Track students. Walter stated:

*There is the biker boys. They ride their bikes everywhere and think they are rebels. I reckon they are more like bum-buddies. Then there is PPFFD and that is some group they just made up – I don’t know what it means. And then there is the Aboriginal group. And then there is the goodie-goodie group and then there is the smokers group. Those groups don’t get along and keep to themselves. (#3RMV3)*

This tribal approach to the social structure at Marri served to maintain students’ perceptions that other groups somehow had it better, and needed to be “sorted out” so that they did not get ahead of themselves. Roger said:

*By Year 11 we all seemed to separate and now some of our people have left our group cause there is the hospitality course have grabbed some of our people as well. There is not so much of a bully group any more that sort of went when we went to Year 11 because we were doing the bullying. Every group consists of three or more people and they hang about each other all of recess and lunch. Your group sticks up for you and if there is a smash they back you up. (#3RMV1)*

Your group was your people, and this meant that you were expected to behave in certain sorts of ways so that you could be seen to be a member of that group. However, there is also an expectation that all groups are roughly equal and needed to behave accordingly. This sense of social equilibrium could be thrown out of balance, and when it did, the groups acted to restore that equilibrium.

For these students they readily agreed that those students who did well in school were most likely to be successful after school. These students were in a specialist programme designed to help students who were labelled ‘at-risk’ in schools. They knew this, yet they continued to support the meritocratic ideal. This shows how powerful the discourse of the meritocratic school is in influencing the ways that students see the world and their ability to act on their selves.
Discussion

For Principal C, Marri was a school in need of change, a process he saw as ongoing at the school. Primarily, he saw Marri as a school that needed to change in key areas to meet the needs of a diverse student population. Despite Principal C’s goal to see Marri as a school that caters for all students, regardless of ability and background, the student experiences of the school, judging by the data gathered from the students, centred on a set of discourses that were antithetical to the vision Principal C held. Part of this may be, as Principal C himself recognised, due to the staff resisting his agenda for change. In the class observation, what seemed to be valorised was the traditional notion of the good student, a docile body in a classroom who was able to regurgitate the accepted knowledge delivered by the teacher. This student was generally quiet, worked on the tasks set by the teacher and demonstrated punctuality, organisation and perseverance. The vocational vision was pushed at the school. The students were pushed more to succeed in skills based subjects in the VET stream that could be seen to lead directly into the workforce. TEE was given less of a profile and it certainly attracted less students, accounting for approximately 11% of the Year Eleven cohort. This vocational vision corresponded with certain discourses about what it meant to be ‘good’ or a ‘success’ that saw the student as a docile employee more than a student bound for university courses that valorised independent thought and action. This ethic of the vocational speaks of early pedagogies that sought to diffuse “Protestant values to the working classes” as a means of preparing students for their place in society.433 One of the ways of maintaining this lies in the discourse of the meritocratic school and student.

The discourse of the meritocracy was a powerful one at Marri. All of the students spoke of a vision of the good student as one who achieves academic success because they are determined and work hard at tasks set for them. These students used the language of choice to support their

433 Symes and Preston, Op Cit. p.49
affirmation of the good student – a good student chooses to put the effort in and therefore they deserve the success that they receive. This, however, is offset by the opinion that there are not many (if any) good students at Marri because people choose not to do the work. This leads to the assumption that all of the students actively choose to not be successful in an academic sense at Marri. The good student as autonomously choosing success is heavily imbued with traditional notions of education that have been drummed into generations of students and teachers since mass compulsory education became an imperative in the late 18th century. One of the things that this does is absolves the school from responsibility – they provide the opportunity, but it is up to the students to choose to take advantage of this opportunity. The problem with this is that it is a system of thought that maintains elements of social disadvantage, often through generations. What it shows is a particular level of docility – the docile acceptance of mainstream discourses that value compliant behaviours such as doing homework, completing assessments on time and learning the knowledge that is deemed worthy of inclusion in a school curriculum. There is also the docility of the soul, an acceptance of the values and attitudes of the wider community such as teachers and staff as being the ‘correct’ way for the individual to comport themselves.

The students interviewed spoke of not being able or not being bothered with the level of work a good student needed to do. Many teachers had very little expectation of them doing homework, so they rarely completed, or saw the point in doing, much of their set work outside of school. The result was a set of behaviours that did not conform to what they said was important. The meritocratic discourse was not an empowering discourse in that it seemed to alienate students because they felt that they could not conform to the standard required to be successful. The result of this seemed to be the development of a counter-identity that ran parallel for the students. This took two forms, the passive and the active. The passive students spoke of how they could not see the sense in school and how they frequently truanted. The active students developed a highly 

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434 Ibid.
macho identity that involved frequent testing of boundaries including fighting in the school yard. These identities represent some of the characteristics of the good student, but overall they acted as hegemonic forces that worked to make school seem largely unrealistic for many of the students. These active and passive roles were often split along gender lines – the girls tended to withdraw and the boys tended to cause conflict.

This hegemonic masculinity was in evidence during the interviews in a number of ways. The school chose students to suit the groups, and the majority of the students except for the quiet group were male. This was particularly evident among the Sporting Achievers who were all male and the Rebels who had two male students. Firstly, in the interviews it was the boys who dominated. In the Quiet group, despite there being two female and one male student, it was the male voice that dominated discussion, while the girls spoke less often and seemed happier to follow the lead of the male student. In both the Rebel and the Sporting Achievers groups, the term ‘girl’ was used as a putdown, and none of the girls spoke against it. This silencing of many of the female students could explain strategies that were about withdrawing from the normalising gaze such as truanting and absenteeism.

For the boys, there was a performativity in their masculinity that centred on being active and confrontational, often at the same time. This performativity constructed a very ‘macho’ expectation where boys were expected to demonstrate their worth through confrontational practices, particularly fighting. These boys interviewed paid lip service to idea that violence was wrong, before launching into recounting tales of fights with a sense of pride and enthusiasm. In fighting they felt that they were demonstrating attributes that were worthy; bravery, determination and strength to name a few. What was significant was less winning the fight and more that it symbolised a test of masculinity. At all times, the male students were aware that they were fighting to confirm their standing in the social hierarchy of the school. The normalising
judgement was at work as the students were fighting within the gaze of their peers who were deciding what they were – ‘girls’ or ‘normal’.

One of the effects of this normalising gaze was a desire to ‘hide’ from trappings of success that cause a student to be seen as better than their peers. Many of these students went to great lengths to avoid notice because of the negative reactions that they could receive from their peers. There was a sense that attracting attention inevitably led students to receiving ‘what they deserved’ in the form of violence or ridicule. What emerged was the individual continually positioning themselves in ways so as to avoid being seen as different from the peer group.

This awareness of the politics of difference extended to social groups, where students spoke of forming small, close groups that were used to defend the individual based on appearances of similarities. This meant that some students saw social groups as ‘gangs’ and felt that these were formed along racial or ethnic lines. These groups were based on perceptions of sameness and became arbiters of the social hierarchy of the school as territory was held, protected and claimed in opposition to other groups. This model of social interaction normalised antagonism between the groups and made the comportment of the individual a way of demonstrating allegiance and affiliation to particular standards and expectations. One of the results of this manifested itself in a continual proving of the self through fights and confrontations. Another was that they were always expected to demonstrate this performativity even after school – a sense that they were always acting as the subject they positioned themselves and were positioned by others at school.

This conflictual model for many became the tool with which they attempted to maximise their return for their comportment. Not surprisingly, this made it difficult for many students to engage with the school and particularly the staff. The accounts that these students gave, with the exception of the academic achievers, focussed on conflicts with teaching staff and a belief that
traditional school offered very little to them because they felt largely antagonistic towards teachers. The other option that these students identified was the option of withdrawal to avoid this conflictual space.
Chapter Seven: Discussion

The school system is based on a kind of judicial power as well. One is constantly punishing and rewarding, evaluating and classifying, saying who’s the best, who’s not so good. Why must one punish and reward in order to teach something to someone?435

The development of an art of existence that revolves around the question of the self, of its dependence and independence, of its universal form and of the connection it can and should have with others, of the procedures by which it exerts its control over itself, and of the way in which it can establish a complete supremacy over itself.436

435 Foucault, “Truth and Juridical Forms” Op Cit. p.83
436 Foucault, Care of the Self Op Cit. p.238
CHAPTER SEVEN

Introduction

This dissertation began with a desire to look at the ways schools govern, and teach students to govern themselves, in powerful and productive ways. The normalising vision of the good student encompasses a set of discourses that produce ways that students see themselves, others, and their place in the world. It promotes a range of subjectivities that become core truths as students negotiate their comportment in the school. I argue that these governing strategies that students are learning in schools become the tools that they utilise in later years to address ontological possibilities. This work problematises the ways that commonsense notions such as the good student conceal power relations that produce, control and differentiate certain kinds of students and encourage students to become key players in the ways that they are made subjects. It is crucial to stress that Foucault’s work on governmentality encourages us to look at micro-practices of power in the institution, and the ways that the self becomes a self-governing entity that comports itself in appropriate and normalised ways. How then, with this impressive institutional array of discourses, power and governing practices, does one become freer?

I see in schools a far greater possibility for freer student sensibilities. Postmodern theory suggests that while schools are places where subjectivities are produced and enacted, they could also be places where freer action, thought and subjectivities are possible. While schools are places where students are disciplined and made docile, they are also places where students are forced to be active, to negotiate, to produce and to create more sophisticated and emancipatory understandings of themselves within the institution. However, while schools continue to trade in epistemological practices within modernist traditions that May posits creates a narrow view of the

437 Symes and Preston, Op Cit. p.56
world, these rationales that inform student subjectivities will continue to prevent students from thinking and acting in freer ways.\textsuperscript{438} Freer thought and freer action becomes more likely when the problematics of the Foucaultean self, how one constitutes oneself as an ethical subject, becomes a matter of concern in institutions and their practices such as schooling. To put it another way, the way a person ‘knows’ and acts on themselves becomes the machine that drives how they think and act. Freer thought and action are inextricably linked to the care of the self as an ethical practice. It would seem to me that schools will continue to shape students within narrow subjectivities until the care of the self as an ethical concern becomes a core business of schooling.

This chapter will examine the three school sites and pay attention to differences and similarities in the ways that student subjectivities are produced. Guiding this examination will be an interrogation of the ways that students are measured against the normalising good student and how they act on themselves as a result. Much of the evidence in this and other research suggests practices and technologies of power that create docile and disciplined students in each school.\textsuperscript{439} However, my programme is the unmasking of these strategies so that what begins is the movement of debate beyond the modernist tradition implicit in what it means to be a good student. Part of this is a call for schools to be places that are more aware of how these practices of power produce the ‘arts of existence’, or ways of addressing ontological questions about the self that suggest possibilities rather than constraints.

Choosing three sites was a strategic choice. I wanted to consider the good student from a variety of perspectives, but I also wanted to be able to draw more informed conclusions than doing the traditional ethnography at one school site allowed. In choosing to look at the normalising vision of the good student, I expected to see that whilst each school was culturally unique, in practice

\begin{footnotes}
\item[438] May, Op Cit. p.7
\item[439] See for example McLeod and Yates Op Cit. pp.52-55
\end{footnotes}
the relations of power that underpinned the institution would be fundamentally the same, and as a result, would produce similar kinds of student subjectivities and experiences. I expected to see that schools were places that evaluated students and prepared them for certain kinds of lives after school. I expected to see and hear stories where the good student who was docile, compliant and cooperative was privileged within the institution, treated differently, rewarded differently because of what they were, not what they did. Whilst in some cases these expectations were met in the data, the overwhelming finding was that many students were engaged in complex power ‘games’ that involved negotiation and production of contingent subjectivities along a range of competing and contradictory ‘visions’ of the good student.

The three sites, Tuart, Jarrah and Marri, were chosen because they offered unique perspectives and experiences that could best tease out similarities and differences in the normalising vision of the good student as it impacted on the lives of secondary students. The similarities included that they were all traditional school structures where traditional governance and power structures were easily visible. They were all what I would term medium size secondary schools with numbers between 600 and 850 students. All were coeducational schools. The core curriculum being taught was similar in each school and the educational experience and expectations of the staff were also largely similar. To put it another way, no matter what school you went into, there is no doubt that an observer would recognise the classroom and the methods of instruction because they were appropriate and normal.

However, each school had some noted differences. Tuart was easily the largest school at around 850 students. It was also the largest in space, with the buildings being sprawled over a large area with extensive grounds and bushland. This school was a low fee-paying Catholic school in an area of Perth that is often seen as being of lower socioeconomic status. Tuart was a school built fairly recently in a semi-rural area that had once been dominated by farming but was now
representative of suburban living. All of the students that attended Tuart were drawn from the local area. The second school, Jarrah, was also a fee-paying Catholic secondary school, however, this school was located in a major rural centre some hundreds of kilometres from both Tuart and Karri. Jarrah had about 760 students of which approximately 80 were boarders. These boarders lived on site, and were drawn from a wide area that included mining towns, remote cattle properties and nearby farms. This school had an interesting history as it was a fairly recent amalgamation of two single sex schools run by religious organisations. Jarrah was easily the smallest in size of the grounds, with the result that the school consisted of multi-layered buildings up to four levels in size. The last school, Marri, was a government run non-fee-paying secondary school. This school was the smallest in terms of student numbers, yet had the grounds and facilities for many more students. It too was a recently amalgamated school but one that had the reputation of being a difficult school located in a low socioeconomic area.440

**Powerful and Productive Discourses**

One of the most significant conclusions drawn from the data is that there is much currency in the good student in secondary schooling. Across the three sites, students spoke of the good student as a fact of schooling. Whilst they experienced this normative vision in different ways, no student really challenged the idea that schooling is about producing good students. They spoke of different evaluative criteria and judgement, different discourses that informed this normalising vision, but the consensus was of the appropriateness of schools as places where good students are marked, shaped and produced for life after school. This is one of the ways that young people are taught how to ‘know’ themselves, and through this knowledge to become self-governing where what is governed are their thoughts and actions.

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440 The principal spoke of the difficult perception many people had of Tuart. This school was also listed as a “Difficult to Staff” school by the Education Department of Western Australia.
Each school pushed a vision of the good student that was complex and made up of a multitude of discourses. Within these, there were some discourses and experiences that were common across all three sites. One of the key similarities across each of the sites was that for the students, the staff in each school are more centrally involved in the deployment of the vision of the good student than any other group, including their parents. Across the three schools the teachers were seen by the students to be the gatekeepers of the good student who managed and maintained access to the good. Teachers could use a number of techniques and strategies to reward those they saw as good students – and nearly all of the students felt that the good student was given favourable treatment from the staff because of who they were.

The vision of the principals for each school was similar in that they saw the school as a place that provided opportunities for young people, and that schools should be places that prepared young people to contribute to society in a variety of ways, not least vocationally. In each school students were able to recount experiences that reinforced Gore’s identification of the eight forms of power in institutions. Students recounted experiences where powers of surveillance, normalisation, individualisation and classification were deployed in the case sites and how this resulted in students learning to respond in appropriate ways to a variety of situations and possibilities. An example of this is found at Jarrah when Paul (#2RMV3) says: “It doesn’t matter how much you learn, being seen to be doing the right thing is important.” Being seen – the surveillance – is classifying whether or not students are doing the right thing, a judgement based on normalising discourses. The effect of these processes of surveillance is to communicate to the student that they are being watched and judged, and therefore to modify or adjust what they do and how they do it in such a way as to produce self-governing student sensibilities that further reinforce

441 Gore, Op Cit.
commonsense notions and attitudes. However, it is significant to note that Paul is actively pursuing a strategy aimed at best placing him within the social machine of the school.

Across the three sites, there were some interesting trends. Firstly, at each of the three schools, those students selected as Academic Achievers by their school all studied a TEE course. Those students selected as Rebels all studied a VET course. It is a moot point to ask which comes first, academic success feeding into university aspirations or university aspirations leading to the achievement of academic success. The flip side also needs to be asked, does academic underachievement lead to some young people behaving in a way that leads to conflict with school authorities, or do these patterns of behaviour lead to students failing to achieve academically as well as some others? Whilst these are highly difficult and contentious questions to answer, two things appear most obvious. Firstly, that no school selected a student studying a VET course as an Academic Achiever. Secondly, there was not one student selected by each school as a Rebel who was studying a TEE course. These facts make powerful points about the power of the ‘hegemonic good’ as referred to by McLeod and Yates in the ways that school authorities engage with and order those parts of the education world that they have an influence over. It would appear that there is a powerful undercurrent in schools that adopts a narrow view of success, or what it means to be good, and deploys this in productive ways. It must be emphasised that these undercurrents are experienced by students in the form of discourses that are used to shape the views of the world and their place in it.

Technologies of power intermingle and often enhance other forms of power. Thus there is no linear thread, but rather a web of micropractices where power augments power. This augmentation is sophisticated and productive and it is crucial in recognising that young people are being made subjects through a web or matrix of power. By this I mean that strategies of power such as surveillance become tools that evaluate and normalise, classify and distribute. These
micropractices of power can be seen in the ways that schools become places that classify students against certain idealised norms. In the data gathered, students make reference to classificatory hierarchies in terms of popularity, academic success, sporting success, physical appearance, behavioural characteristics, friendship groups, gender, socioeconomic status, sexuality or an amalgamation of all of these classificatory terms. Brad (#2AMT) stated:

_Our year is sort of split up into two groups – the Cool Group and the Squaries. The Cool Group hangs out on the Great Court which is down some stairs. My group hangs on the stairs. Close but not quite. I can’t get down to the stairs to sink to their level._

This quote shows many layers, but it is indicative of all of the sites in the ways that students are classified and then turn this form of power on themselves to become self-classifiers. Whilst he only identified two groups, there was a range of subjectivities that decreased in popularity from the ‘Cool Group’ to the ‘Squares’. Brad had learnt how to classify himself and his group in terms of these criteria – ‘close but not quite’. These forms of power are productive, and Brad is giving voice to ways that he is subjectifying himself, or knowing himself in a particular way with reference to particular social discourses. The productive effect of this classificatory power extends beyond considerations of dress, language and other markers of sub-group dynamics to the spaces that the students inhabit. It is through strategies such as these that students become invested with a reading of the social world as competitive and organised into hierarchies in which they must find a place. This equips young people for a competitive social world after school, but does little to challenge hegemonic attitudes and expectations. This reinforces Symes and Preston’s argument that schools and schooling are more involved in reproducing rather than reconstructing society. Brad is demonstrating one of the ways that he knows and governs himself in relation to idealised norms. Knowing himself as a student who is ‘close but not quite’ becomes a governing tool that informs how he sees himself and comports himself as a certain

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442 Symes and Preston, _Op Cit._, p.xii
type of student at school. It is this comportment of the self that produces and maintains many of
the subjectivities that currently dominate our society. In this sense, Brad is giving voice to a
subjectivity that evaluates and classifies, that knows itself in terms of complex markers, and this
knowing is a perpetuating power. It is interesting that Brad knew himself as a ‘close but not quite’
student and that this played itself out in everyday actions such as where he and his friends chose
to sit. Brad is producing himself because of how he sees or knows himself set against complex
social hierarchies. Whilst he is active in negotiating a place for himself in this hierarchy, I find it
impossible to argue that he is acting in freer ways. Rather, his actions reflect how he has learnt to
know himself, classify himself and then act on himself as a certain type of student. Brad is
continually re-negotiating, re-producing and comporting himself but only in narrow, hierarchical
ways. That is not to say that it is not possible for Brad to act in freer ways, rather that his
awareness of those possibilities for freer action seem non-existent.

Whilst the multitude of discourses that coalesce around the good student are many and varied, it
is useful to identify some of the more powerful discourses found in each school. Whilst it is true
that the discourses covered in each school are too numerous to name, some discourses appeared
so powerfully in the context of the school that they inform much of the flavour of the good
student at that particular site. One of the features of the deployment of the normalising vision of
the good student concerns the ways that similar discourses appear in each school, albeit with
different emphases and different receptions from the student body. The following paragraphs seek
to tease out some of the more powerful discourses that feature in each school that could be used
to differentiate the three. This is not so say, however, that the discourses are found only in that
school. For example, whilst Tuart is perhaps best characterised by the meritocratic discourse of
success, powerful elements of this discourse can be found in Jarrah and Marri as well. Fleshing
out the discursive context of each school is important in beginning the process of unmasking
those relations of power that normalise and make subjects of the students in each school.
Discourses never operate in isolation, they swirl around the subject in complex and multiple ways that are experienced uniquely in different settings.

At Tuart, one of the dominating discourses was that of the good student as a docile body who displayed a set of compliant and obedient behaviours that contributed to their academic success – an embedded discourse of the ‘hegemonic good’. This vision engaged a moral dimension to the good that resonates with Luke’s view that the dominant ascription of childhood is heavily imbued with moral notions and expectations. The implicit assumption communicated to the students was that academic success was deserved and that the lack of it was in some way a reflection of their character. This reinforces the discourse that there is a particular type of morality central to the good student that is based on accepted practices and beliefs. This meritocratic discourse, entailing the belief that educational success as a measurable hierarchy is a function of academic talent, informed much of what the students spoke of at Tuart. This school was dominated by this meritocratic vision so that many of the students spoke of their desire to be more successful compared to others around them where that success was measured by their attainment of academic markers and grades. One of the consequences of this meritocratic discourse was the creation of a heightened sense of competition amongst the students that served to individualise them as separate from their peers. When Mike (#1SMT1) spoke of his experience of being ranked, and sitting in order in his Mathematics class dependent upon test marks, his experience was shaped by technologies of surveillance, classification, normalisation, and individuation. What frustrated him the most was that students would know what he got and this gave them the opportunity to taunt him for his grades: “So students get really cruel if you get less than them.”

The testing process in this class was used as a form of surveillance, and the seating plan served to classify Mike in a hierarchy set against some normalising goal – perhaps a mark of 100%.

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444 Hatton, *Op Cit.*
seating plan then set Mike up as an individual who felt he was being judged by others in his class. This shows that this meritocratic discourse was both policing student sensibilities and being policed by the students themselves. These practices of normalising evaluation imbued the ways that these students saw their schooling life, and possibly the world after. For them, success was relative to comparison to those around them, and this sense of competition becomes a powerful governing tool in the ways that students see themselves.

At another level, students spoke at times that being seen as academically good meant that they were treated in more positive ways by the staff. This treatment could mean that they were resented by some of their peers, so much so that they were singled out and victimised in certain social spaces. Elizabeth (#1AFT2) said:

*I was late for class, for science in Year 9. I was with a girl, a nice girl. Teachers stopped us to talk to us and we were about ten minutes late for class. The girl got a detention, but I didn’t. The funny thing was, she kind of blamed me for it.*

Elizabeth’s experience fed into one of the key problematics of the good student - that being academically successful did not guarantee social prestige and in most cases it appeared to be quite the opposite. Some students felt victimised because they were successful, because when they were singled out for praise or rewarded by teachers, other students took steps to make them feel alienated. At Tuart this desire to be successful often led students to talk down others who were successful. The irony of the push for success creating a disincentive to achieve is based, I believe, on a narrow definition of success that is being communicated to each student and feelings of frustration at the systematic and institutional contradictory discourses that act to both rank and normalise students in different ways in different spaces and moments. This may partly explain why students at Tuart also spoke of the shame they felt at being singled out as successful, even though students such as Elizabeth (#1AFT2) recognised that it was deserved. “*I shouldn’t feel embarrassed, I spent hours doing all that work. You just want to scream.*” Much of this
frustration is because the students are caught in the grey area between discourses, and this forces
them to negotiate a subjectivity that is informed by competing and contradictory discourses that
shape the normalising vision of the good student.

At Jarrah, many of the dominant discourses centred on the good student as a student who is seen
to display values and attitudes that resonate with the wider community. In this sense, Jarrah was
not a school seeking to challenge the social norms and expectations, rather it was a school
seeking to provide concrete expression of those values to the wider community. This meant that
the good student was one who could be seen to participate in the wider life of the school and the
community. The good student was an “all-rounder” who was a leader of the school community
and lived the motto “For Others”. In this sense, a particular version of docile behaviour was
advantaged where actively supporting the motto, gaining attention and acting out in certain
situations and in certain prescribed forms was rewarded within the school community. This
community focus meant that social intelligence was highly valued because it allowed the
individual to work in the community as part of a whole. Kate (#2AFT2) said that the good
student was one that was able to move between social groups: “They won’t associate with some
groups like they won’t be cool enough or might not like what they do. They respect them.” This
emphasis on social intelligence extended to teachers, where it was felt that the teachers responded
to the good student who had some personality, rather than those who were overly compliant. One
of the results of this community discourse was that students tended to promote social success over
academic and sporting success. This performativity, however, was usually in controlled and
regulated ways – action was possible as long as it was a form of action that was expected and
accepted. This normalising power meant that student actions were referential rather than creative.
To put it another way, at Jarrah the vision of the good student as a socially successful student
became a powerful discourse that shaped student behaviours, expectations and attitudes which
produce arts of the self that are self-governing and self-regulating.
Set against the idea of the ‘hegemonic good’, one of the things that stood out about Jarrah was the students nominating more possibilities of the good student than in other schools. It was not just academic success, as sporting success, cultural success and social success were also highly valued. The emphasis on leadership and involvement of students stood out at Jarrah. Steven’s (#2QMT2) quote demonstrates a wide range of possibilities of the good beyond just that of academic success:

They are intelligent; they get good results in tests and in exams. If they are sporting types of person they do well in sport and get into state teams. Their behaviour at school gets them the respect of the teachers, but they are friendly to all of the students.

A school that is able to furnish greater possibilities for the student to be seen as good challenges those hierarchies of the ‘hegemonic good’ that dominates many of the student experiences recounted in this study. This could mean that Jarrah is potentially more capable of providing possibilities for freer thought and action. However, whilst there may be greater possibilities to be seen as good, Jarrah is a school that is still highly evaluative and punitive for those students who do not meet expectations. One of the ways forward to freer selves may be to value multiple positionings of the good student that are creative rather than evaluative and/or punitive.

At Marri, the vocational discourse was one of the more powerful discourses that emerged in the data. This vocational discourse that centred around the good student was most probably motivated by a perception of the good student as one who makes a meaningful contribution to society, and therefore their own lives, through the employment that they undertake. More than the other two schools, Marri was a school were vocational courses easily accounted for those students who undertook TEE courses at a ratio of more than 10:1. Operating in tandem with the vocational discourse was the meritocratic discourse. There was a strong belief in choice – that hard work and application could enable anyone to be academically successful, but that there were very few
students who chose to demonstrate these characteristics. Instead, what was generally agreed on was that school should be a preparation for work, and that most students were going to work in the trades or in various retail jobs. Through this discourse, students were taught to see themselves as workers whose aspirations were shaped by the context of their lives. Chris (#3QMV1) stated: “My traineeship suits me well. Three days school, one day TAFE and one day work experience. It opens up opportunities for me.” These opportunities centred around the notion of employment. For Chris, the opportunities presented were to get a job, earn some money, and achieve some level of economic success after school. Symes and Preston’s charge that schools reproduce society is borne out through these vocational discourses – what Chris wanted was the chance to live the style of life that he saw everyone else around him living. Limiting aspirations such as this reflects one of the ways that a governable and disciplinary society is maintained – reproducing rather than reconstructing social norms and expectations. An example of this is the ways that gender was played out within the school.

The vocational discourse hid a quite specific gendered divide at Marri, that was perhaps more obvious than at the other schools, although there is evidence to suggest that it was found at each site. There appeared to be a romanticised notion of the good student as gendered, where male students were valued for active, masculine attributes whilst female students were expected to be more docile and submissive. This is in keeping with the findings of McLeod and Yates, who argue that schools continue to see “boys as normal or the norm”. Student responses suggest that teachers and students policed these gendered expectations. In many cases boys got away with being loud and disruptive in class whilst girls were expected to sit quietly and act in less overt ways. At Marri, these discourses produced a vision of the good student that tended to reinforce dominant gender stereotypes rather than challenge them. The importance of gender in the normalising vision of the good student will be discussed in detail later, however it is important to

445 McLeod and Yates, Op Cit. p.63
flag it as a highly productive set of discourses that construct student subjectivities in schools. Tsolidis, looking at ethic minorities, argues that gender is one of the key markers that constructs expectations of what a good student should be, and that these processes impact on notions of success and the aspirations of individuals after they leave school.\textsuperscript{446}

**Surveillance, Normalisation, Individualisation, Classification and the Good Student**

One of the things that surprised me from the study across the three sites was the sheer scale of the data gathered, and the variety and complexity of the responses. I had expected fairly linear responses. By this, I mean that the different groups of students would answer in fairly predictable ways dependent upon how they were selected by the school. I expected the Academic Achievers in each school to endorse those discourses that established privilege for the academically gifted student, I also expected the Rebels to challenge those discourses that left them feeling marginalised and disenfranchised within the school community. To an extent, these expectations were met in the data.

However, what I did not expect to find was the extent to which each student was able to talk about conflicting and contradictory experiences of school that challenged my expectations of privilege and/or marginalisation. Academic Achievers spoke of ways that they were marginalised within the complex play of power within the school. Quiet students spoke of ways that they felt rewarded by the deployment of power within the schools. I explain this by stressing that discourses that produce subjectivities are contingent and momentary in the lives of each student. At the same time, a student can be rewarded by his/her peers whilst receiving the opposite treatment from the staff of the school. At an even more subtle level, the normative gaze that so

\textsuperscript{446} Georgina Tsolidis, *Schooling, Diaspora and Gender: Being Feminist and Being Different*, Open University Press, Buckingham, 2001, p.85
typifies the disciplinary power of institutions often reflects the perspective of those viewing. The surveillance that a student is under is multiple in its points of origin and thus throws up a myriad of possibilities as to how a student is positioned that are transitory and contingent. In part, one of the cautions to this study lies in understanding that the data gathered reflect a snapshot of a moment in a young person’s school life, rather than an essentialising truth of the entirety of that life. The significance of surveillance is that it lends itself to other functionings of power – it is acted upon in schools in ways that normalise, individualise and classify students.

Rebels spoke of times they were rewarded, and felt a connection with the school and the people there. Part of this is explained by the fact that there are more discourses, opinions and perspectives that feed into what we see as the good – so much so that in many ways the term itself is so vague and general it hides much more than it reveals. The work of Deleuze offers the suggestion that the ontological meaning that is made of the self is a more contingent and creative set of circumstances than has been communicated to many students.\textsuperscript{447} Deleuze argued that the disciplined subject is part of what we are, but also part of what we are ceasing to be.\textsuperscript{448} If one considers the students interviewed, what emerges is the necessity of those students to negotiate their way through these swirling, competing and contradictory discourses – an example of what Deleuze terms living reactively.\textsuperscript{449} Deleuze challenges us to find in institutions such as schools the shift from the reactive to the active as society changes from the disciplinary to the control. Living actively means living creatively, or encouraging students to explore new ways of becoming, rather than reducing them to knowing themselves as certain types of subjects set against evaluative and normalising visions such as the good student. Amidst these discourses that students are actively negotiating and producing their subjectivity within, exists the potential for students to cast new meanings that create, through these negotiations and productions, moments

\textsuperscript{447} Marks, \textit{Op Ct.} p.120
\textsuperscript{448} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{449} Colebrook, \textit{Op Cit.} p.19
of freedom for new meanings to be made. Living actively thus means doing more than merely reproducing contemporary social norms and expectations.

What the experiences that students recounted reinforced to me is that the normative gaze is arrayed at a variety of instances from a multitude of perspectives. By this, I mean that the vision of the good student is not deployed by a unified, consistent staff at the student body. Rather, staff, students, parents and others construct, evaluate, and enact a variety of discourses of the good that can be at the very least contradictory, if not downright confusing. In particular, many students responses spoke of the multiple ways the student body police certain discourses of the good. When set against the expectations of those interested in the education of young people, the normalising vision of the good student becomes not a monolithic constant predicated on a binary opposition of good versus not-good, but rather a swirling nexus of power games that is contingent, momentary and shifting in a variety of ways in the school life of the young person.

**Performativity and Rationales of the Good Student**

Deleuze’s work on transcendence suggests that within the school what is reproduced is an emphasis on the illusion of thought whereby all acts of thought and life can be explained. However, in the process of this transcendent thought, the individual acts, thinks and imagines in various ways, but then becomes enslaved to those forms that are created by those actions. For Deleuze, the process of philosophy, of writing or of undertaking research such as this should be “to free life from what imprisons it”. I argue that it is idealised norms of the good that students are taught to measure themselves against and position themselves hierarchically in, often in competing and contradictory forms that limit their ability to act in freer ways.

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450 Colebrook, *Op Cit.* p.148
451 Deleuze, *Negotiations Op Cit.* p.143
There were a number of forms of the good student that emerged in the data. These forms reflect the ways that subjectivities are produced, experienced and negotiated within schools. Whilst these may present as individual characteristics, they need to be read as facets of the complex play of power as it operates on the young person. These forms are fed by the discourses, and experienced in some way by all students, who then negotiate and produce a self that is governed and governable by the rationales that underpin these forms. Students are not exposed to these ‘truths’ in linear or constant fashion. Rather, they form a web or matrix through which the young person is taught to see, and know, themselves. Hunter argued that when we see a self-reflective person such as someone who is judged and sees themselves as a good student, what we should be at pains to do is critique the ways that their “ethical capabilities” have been trained as a “remarkable fact of ethical labour and civil government”.452 Part of this remarkable fact lies in the ways that students act within the nexus of those power relations that swirl around them. I call this performativity.

**Performativity**

Across the three sites, similar stories emerged of the behaviours often associated with the good student. They were diligent, they were organised, and they completed their homework and assignments. The good student was also seen to be one that behaved in appropriate ways in the various public places of the school – the classroom, the grounds, the canteen area to name a few. This strong emphasis on seeing meant that for many students the good student was a performance – an ability to exhibit those behaviours that were powerful and productive in each unique situation that the student found themselves in. An example of this was that of Elizabeth (#1AFT2) at Tuart who spoke of learning to keep quiet when she felt her thoughts would be conflictual with

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452 Hunter, *Rethinking Op Cit.* p.143
those of her teacher. This submissive strategy could be seen as an example of the ways that the self becomes disciplined through the micropractices of power deployed in the institution of the school. Equally, this strategy could be seen as productive in that it gave Elizabeth (#1AFT2) access to a set of privileges and rewards through being seen to display the right values, attitudes and behaviours. In this sense, exhibiting docile, disciplined behaviour may, for some students, be a political act designed to maximise their positioning within the hierarchy of the school. Being seen to be good is so powerful because of the institutional compunction to measure and evaluate. Evaluating values and attitudes is extremely difficult, however, evaluating behaviour which is much more visible becomes a more persuasive tool. Part of the unmasking of the good student is to unmask the idea that behaviour is a visible demonstrator of the moral self.

This notion of performativity explains a number of things. Firstly, it demonstrates that there is a set of processes that measure, albeit in dynamic ways, the technologies that govern the ways that students see themselves and are seen by others. This then means that students often govern their behaviour in such a way as to maximise their return from comporting themselves according to expectations of the good student. Students are conscious of being measured and evaluated in terms of their behaviour, not just by teachers and parents but also by other students, and they learn to conduct themselves in a variety of ways dependent upon a variety of competing and contradictory discourses. This lack of cogency often requires an almost schizophrenic range of faces that a student could wear. Success means weaving together a self that is ideally positioned within a number of rationales. An example of this is the articulation of the good student as an “all-rounder” at Jarrah. Secondly, this shows that students are actively making sense of the connections – they are negotiating within the play of power relations in ways they feel will maximise their return on a myriad range of competing and diverging discourses. To extend this further, in a Deleuzean sense what this shows is that these students are making meaning, as transient and contingent as it might be, from the interaction that this performativity demonstrates.
Thus, this making of meaning through the connections is an example of one of the ways that they are living machinically.

Performativity is part of what Deleuze and Guattari called faciality. It is part of the way that the student internalises the play of power that produces subjectivity. Inside the social machine of the school, ‘teacher’, ‘student’, ‘rebel’ and so on are really descriptors of a place within the social machine that advertises the prior relations, experiences and connections that they are embedded within. In the following pages, some examples of these embedded student subjectivities will be examined to demonstrate how the social machine operates and the importance of the normalising vision of the good student for this operation. The following represent some of the rationales of the good student that become deployed as ways that young people measure themselves, and negotiate and produce themselves, as they become aware of different “spheres of living” that require governmental decision making.453

**The Docile and Disciplined Student**

One of the similarities between the three sites was the way that the normalising vision of the good student promoted a controlled subjectivity. By this I mean that each of the schools construct powerful discourses of the good student that focus on behaviours that require and reward docile and disciplined comportment. These behaviours are linked to a meritocratic vision of society, where the good student is a form of this disciplined and disciplinary behaviour. To put it simply, the meritocratic vision implies that academic success is deserved, and a result of intrinsic attributes coupled with cooperative behaviours and a diligent work ethic. The students interviewed saw success as both desirable and deserved and largely accepted this vision. Furthermore, they accepted that academic success was proof of the diligence and work ethic of

453 *Ibid.* p.177
the good student. This reciprocal argument grounded many student understandings of school, and as a result, became one of the key ways, over a period of time, that they were coerced into policing themselves, or comporting themselves, in ways that could be seen to preserve narrow expectations and definitions of success and merit.

It is this sensibility that the pastoral power of the school is largely deployed to reinforce. The care of the student by the institution is, in practice, aimed at instructing them to comport themselves in appropriate ways, and to become the regulators of their own comportment – the meritocratically enslaved, responsible student. One of the findings that emerged in the data was that traditionally structured schools that utilised a hierarchical system of authority inevitably transmitted their faith in the hierarchical system to the students. The students at each school became masters at evaluation of others in relation to the self, and through this constructing a judgemental social gaze that would be carried with them after they left school. The competitive urge, the individual focus, the oppositional impulse are all manifestations of this judging gaze.

The students interviewed spoke almost as one about a vision of the good student that focussed less on innate intelligence and more on process skills such as organisation, punctuality and study habits as hallmarks of a good student. These process skills were matched with behaviour models that saw the students see the staff of the school pushing a vision of the good student as a compliant and cooperative student. This emphasis demonstrates that what is important is not necessarily the values and attitudes of the students, rather it is seen that they are comporting themselves in such a way as to demonstrate their acceptance, and possibly support of, normalising standards and expectations that govern student behaviour. The significance is that in the processes that ‘educate’ the good student to be docile and disciplined, they become enslaved by those forms that have been created through their actions.
For example, at Jarrah the students, with the possible exception of the Rebel students, spoke in positive terms of the expectations of the staff as being both appropriate and acceptable. The continued repetition of the motto “For Others” as students explained their experience of the normalising vision of the good student is an example of the power of the institutional vision of the good student. The normalising vision of the good student acts in a variety of ways. One of the more significant of these is the attachment to a visual and/or behavioural performativity. Being good is not as significant as being seen to be good. Part of this may be cause by the crisis of measurability. It is exceedingly difficult to measure values and attitudes, but is somewhat easier to measure behaviours as an exemplar of those values and attitudes.

The Pastoral Student

In part, performativity and/or faciality ties into the pastoral power that Foucault and Hunter see as being a key strategy of power involved in the subjectification of the self. Adopting the analogy of the shepherd and the flock, meant that schools became places where what was being evaluated was the moral realm as much, if not more so, than the academic realm. The pastoral discourses also served to both amass and individuate the person, to teach them to comport themselves as part of a ‘flock’ while evaluating themselves as individuals. This set of discourses is the reason that schools are permeated with the notion that success is deserved, that in some way academic or sporting success is a measure of the character of the person. In the study students continually made reference to the idea that success was an intrinsic expression of the self. This point was demonstrated by Paul (#1AMT1) when he argued that homework was making him a better person. Doing homework meant demonstrating commitment and dedication. It meant showing desirable characteristics of hard work and independence. It meant that by doing homework, the student was performing as a good student, and that success was assured as a correlation with the

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454 Marks, Op Cit. p.122
moral dimension of these values. Homework is also an example of a group experience that is shared by the class – a levelling activity that designates the student as needing to perform certain expected tasks and functions. The pastoral student is a vision of the good that prioritised the good student as a moral self, a student who displayed the correct values and attitudes. Linked to the notions of performativity, the pastoral student was one who was seen to hold accepted and acceptable values and attitudes. There was clearly a sense that success was intrinsically deserved, that academic success in particular was some form of measure of the moral worth of the individual.

This meritocratic pastoral vision that informed much of the practices of the schools in regards to the good student, was clearly based on a sense that the good student was really the good citizen in training. This meant that there was a strong link between desirable student characteristics and an effective, self-governing and governable civil society. The students interviewed, however, were roughly split as to whether or not the good student was more likely to become the most successful in life after school. On the one hand, many students argued that the good student was one that had deserved their success, and this would guarantee them success in life after school. On the other hand, many students in the Rebels groups in all three schools argued that what students learnt through being a good student was how to behave, and this skill did not necessarily transfer to a more demanding life after school. These students seemed to take great heart from stories of families or friends who were always in trouble at school, or who dropped out of school, only to carve out successful careers in a variety of occupations.

This general sense of student docility can be explained by relations of power that constituted the student as a member of a pastoral flock. As has been stated earlier, the pastoral power is that which both amasses and individuates the students. Through these technologies of power, the pastoral student is one who is controlled through their internalisation of the dominant reality. This
is an example of the overcoding of the subject, where the commonsense answers to questions that social machines such as schools teach means that students never learn to ask those questions that could change the ways that we think.\textsuperscript{455} This was highlighted by discourses that focussed on behaviour and values. The pastorally docile student was one that behaved appropriately in a variety of instances and accepted that this behaviour made sense and was appropriate. They also demonstrated accepted and acceptable values and attitudes. Alongside this, they accepted their subordinate position to authority figures such as teachers within the school. One key factor of the pastorally docile student was their acceptance of the ‘rightness’ of school, and their engagement with a sense of mission or purpose that acted to bind individuals together into a community.

When Sarah (#2AFT3) said:

\textit{The teacher doesn’t have control of the class when people act up. It means that when one person disobeys one little thing someone else can take it further. Doing what the teacher wants is very important. Disrupting others learning is not right.}

she was really giving voice to this overcoding of the subject. Doing what the teacher specified was important because it was linked to moral imperatives of care for others, while Sarah’s quote also contained discourses that centre on control and respect for authority as desired characteristics in schools. These attitudes symbolise some of the ways that dominant discourse are presented as commonsense and above reproach or review. Goodchild, paraphrasing Deleuze, makes the point that: “Education is a process of incorporation into the dominant reality, so that whatever face one may have, one is forced to think like a majoritarian.”\textsuperscript{456} Sarah’s quote may seem expected as she was a student nominated by the school authorities as an academic achiever. However, this process of incorporation suggests that despite the faciality of the subject, they all hold similar ‘majoritarian’ opinions. Tom (#2RMV1), nominated as a rebel, stated: \textit{“An ideal student is someone who is good at sport and good at school they do all the work that teachers set them.”}

\textsuperscript{455} Goodchild, \textit{Op Cit.} p.109
\textsuperscript{456} \textit{Ibid.} p.110
Despite the fact that Tom knew he was not one of these students, he accepted as commonsense the notion that the ideal or good student performed as such in a variety of ways within the school.

This overcoding vision of the good student was given particular voice through the school principals. What typified their response to questions was a tendency to talk, if not in clichés, then in terms best described as representative of mainstream educational thought. The principal of Tuart spoke of “educating the whole person” as a means to get the best education for the individual as a way of ensuring social harmony and progress. For Principal B from Jarrah, community values were what schools needed to impress upon young people so that they could be “active citizens, like good citizens of the world.” In this vision of the good student, identification with a larger body was significant because it communicated to the individual the rightness of being ‘shepherded’ by wider values and belief systems – a code for what is right and correct. For Principal C, this meant a vision of the school as a place where young people learn how to “live a life that gives you some satisfaction, a sense of purpose.” This satisfaction or purpose was best demonstrated by young people engaging in the life of community in some way, through contributing and being a part of the whole who shared in a sense of purpose. In the social machine, the lessons that these three men had learned over years of education reinforced the dominant or majoritarian practices that so typify the structure and operation of the school. These lessons were then recycled and retransmitted so that students are continually exposed to notions that occur within an “historical framework”.

In this pastoral vision of the good student at Jarrah College, students spoke in a way that best reflected the principal’s pastoral vision of the good student. This manifested itself in a variety of ways. Firstly, the students tended to see that the school valued involvement and leadership more than it valued academic performance. Sarah (#2AFT3) stated that the good student was “someone

457 Symes and Preston, Op Cit., p.xiii
who puts in whenever they are needed or if they are asked to do something they pretty much say yes.” The significance of this is that it shows a sense of the students accepting that they are there to be ‘called on’ and that there is a need for students to demonstrate their agreement to the mission or shared purpose. The success of this strategy was that it engaged the students themselves as those who policed the norms of the pastoral community. They actively worked to demonstrate their allegiance through how and what they involved themselves in. Those who did not demonstrate this allegiance could be isolated and victimised in various ways. It is these micropractices of power that Rose sees as creating “a kind of alliance between personal objectives and ambitions and institutionally or socially prized goals or activities.”

Thus, the good student becomes a vehicle for affiliation, for linking internal desires to institutional objectives concerned with control and/or governmental outcomes.

Rose’s critique is further reinforced at Jarrah through the prominence of the college motto. The college motto “For Others” demonstrates the vision of the school as a place where highly anti-individualistic pastoral discourses competed with an individualistic curriculum that prioritised individual success and achievement. Students felt pushed and pulled between the desire to fit in, to be equal with others, and the desire to stand out as a success whether it be in the academic or sporting sphere. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than the problematic way that students discussed concepts of school leadership. On the one hand, student spoke of leadership as a way of keeping faith with the wider community, of signalling agreement and allegiance with the right way of thinking and acting – of governing the self in appropriate ways. This point is reinforced by Steven (#2QFT) who argued: “If the teachers think you are a good student, you are free from negative judgement and it stays this way your whole school life.” On the other hand, students also spoke of ways that conforming could be seen as creating conflict with sections of the student community. No-one likes a “teachers pet” was an admonition shared by Sarah(#2AFT3), one of

458 Rose, *Soul, Op Cit.* p.10
the academic achievers. Thus this specific form of leadership involved negotiations, it involved performing in student and teacher expectations, in ways that caused students to become interpreters of normalising expectations. Not surprisingly, these leaders tended to be either academic or sporting achievers, perhaps those who already were seen to be exemplars of the good amongst the student body by the staff. At other schools this was equally problematic. Stewart (#3AMT2) spoke of being rewarded by the staff for whatever reason as creating a sense that they were crossing boundaries and betraying the student world. “The fear is that they judge you as being too good a student and that you are betraying them in some way.” This shows the complexity of the school world for young people, but also shows the diversity and multiplicity of the ways that students are known, and know themselves, by various groups over the time that they are at school.

At Jarrah, I found the relationship between the staff and students fascinating, the interaction was much more informal than other schools, and students in the focus group spoke of a mutual respect as one of the keys to understanding life as a student at Jarrah. Perhaps this informality was used as a tool by those student leaders who attempted to move between the normally conflicting teacher and student worlds. In such a formal setting, the informality and level of cooperation was palpable, but perhaps more than at any other school, being a student who was on the outer was a more total experience, bringing with it isolation from both the teachers and the students. However, it would be wrong to suggest that the pastoral student is a singular entity or set of experiences. Whilst it is a powerful form that students are often measured against, it often complements the governmental powers and the ways that the students are trained to comport themselves in governed and governable ways that I call the bureaucratic student.
The Bureaucratic Student

The bureaucratic student is one of the visions of the good student that emerged in each institution. In this idealised vision, the student is measured through their performance of discourses that promote notions of order and organisation. This bureaucratic student was neat and well-ordered. They exhibited traits of punctuality and organisation. The homework was always done, assessments were done on time and they conducted themselves in the classroom in a serious yet cooperative way. Largely, students nominated these attributes as highly favoured by the staff at each school because they made the teacher’s life easier. Being self-regulators meant that they reflected the bureaucratic imperatives found within many pedagogic moments within the classroom. At Tuart, this was a discourse strongly encountered by the students. For example, Carol(#1QFV2) nominated a set of behaviours that included working hard, handing work in on time, doing homework, and working to a schedule so that work was always done in advance in a neat and orderly fashion. What Carol gained from this, she saw, was an anonymity that promised reward and success through not gaining negative attention. In Carol’s world, being noticed usually meant some form of negative repercussion, whether it is from the teacher “telling off” students, or from other students teasing and bullying the academically successful.

The bureaucratic student is one who operates in the classroom and the playground by avoiding the spotlight and finding safety in being organised, meticulous, and not too obvious. The strategy “to not upset anyone” meant acting in a cooperative way that allowed the students to avoid the judgement of the normative gaze by being so ‘normal’ that this acted as a form of camouflage. The strategy of being bureaucratically docile sets these students up to be malleable, well-behaved citizens who govern themselves in ways that maintain dominant values and attitudes after they leave school. However, there was also a sense that some of these students had a feeling that they were missing out on some of the possibilities of schooling through conducting themselves this
way. The bureaucratic student may have gained security, though, in this camouflage, but there was a sense that they were missing out on some of the positives that attention in the school may bring. Strategies of anonymity may not be the best way to achieve social prestige or even teacher recognition in the day to day operation of a schooling environment. An example of this came when Jo (#2QFV3) spoke of her frustration at being overlooked for things she volunteered for:

*People who are average just sit in the middle and don’t get noticed. Well it’s not really an order, they don’t say you’re in the average group but it means you never get picked.*

Whilst Jo felt she deserved the opportunity, she seemed to indicate that those ‘loud’ students gained the attention of the staff and were rewarded. The bureaucratic student was one vision of the good that students were continually evaluated within. This meant that there was a set of expectations for the good student to be a docile student, despite the fact that some of these discourses were contradictory to other imperatives of the school. The governable and self-governing student was a negotiated subjectivity – a strategy designed to position the student most favourably, whilst minimising the potential for negative consequences from all vantage points and perspectives.

However, the bureaucratic student is a version of the good student. It offers the students safety and security and often positive relationships with some teachers, but it also has drawbacks. Safety and security is gained through avoiding attention, yet this attention in schools can be used to reward not just from the perspective of the staff, but also from the students. When Sinead (#1SFT2) said that students look up to and admire those students who are risk-takers, she was inferring that the bureaucratic student is one who is less likely to be admired socially by their peers. For many students this manifested itself as a cringe about being rewarded in front of your peers. Being seen by others to be good often meant that the student felt judged to be in some way less authentic to other students. In this was the evaluative power of the school that works to
separate the individual from the masses – to differentiate and therefore to control the ways that they are seen and ultimately see themselves. It was interesting that in all schools, students spoke of negative feelings about being rewarded in front of their peers. Perhaps much of this is because students are aware that by receiving an award they are being opened up to new gaze, new discourses and new subjectivities over which they may feel they have very little control. This corresponded with feelings of embarrassment or humiliation when receiving awards in front of other students, strikingly similar to the pastoral student.

**The Gendered Student**

One of the key conclusions drawn from this student is that the male and female students interviewed shared different experiences of school, and that they had differing expectations of what the good student should represent. Whilst caution should be followed when dealing with generalisations in regards to gender, some interesting conclusions suggested themselves. Put simply, girls tended to nominate a good student as an obedient, docile student who prioritised social success, but the boys prioritised lively and active characteristics and sporting and academic markers of success. The girls tended to operate in more restrictive and silenced spaces, whilst the boys tended to speak of more dynamic and active experiences of schooling. McLeod and Yates argue that during the process of schooling gender is highly significant, and that contemporary theory does not “capture the complexity, unevenness, and double-edged quality of ‘gender changes’ today”. One of the things that they do find is that despite the focus on ameliorating gendered inequities in schools, girls and boys were still largely shaped by gendered discourses. These discourses continued to be powerful forces in their lives after they left school.

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459 McLeod and Yates, *Op Cit.* pp.6-7
460 *Ibid.* p.8
The data suggested a number of conclusions. Many of the male students spoke of teachers who enjoyed ‘lively’ students, regardless of their status as academically successful. These male students also felt they were valued for displaying risk-taking and oppositional behaviours, not just by the students but sometimes by the teachers themselves. Geoff (#1RMV2) stated:

*Sometimes having a reputation is good, sometimes it’s bad. When the teachers joke around with you because they think that you are one of the tough ones, it is cool. Other kids respect that reputation.*

These gendered experiences encompassed the entirety of the school realm, from relations with teachers to relations with peers and expectations of success after school. This gender bias can even be observed in the ways that the schools selected students for the focus group process. Firstly, in the three schools, only two girls out of nine students were classified by the school as being exemplars of types of behaviour as befitting the groups known as Rebels. On the other hand, girls made up more than half of the students in the Achievers group. The Quiet female students outnumbered their male counterparts 6 to 3, yet the Sporting Achievers tended to be male at the same ratio. Whilst it is not possible to draw concrete conclusions from these data, it does appear that girls tend to be seen as performing those roles that prioritise obedience, compliance and becoming what I earlier termed ‘actively docile’ as a way of maximising their return from the complex power relations that they worked within. On the other hands, boys seem to be more represented in the performance of those roles that could be seen as being more active, particularly in those who are seen to challenge authority in a variety of ways. I am not arguing that schools necessarily create these gendered differences, as it would seem reasonable to suggest that wider social, cultural, political and economic dominant ideologies are operant on the beliefs and expectations of young people long before they attend secondary school. However, I am suggesting that schools, in practice, often do little to challenge those dominant discourses that underpin much of the gender inequalities that many students appear to leave high schools with.
Whilst these facts are no doubt examples of systemic gender inequities that are currently a hot topic in educational research, one of the things that became increasingly obvious in this study was that girls and boys tended to talk about the good student differently. What I would like to do is to look at two examples of the ways that the students are hearing those dominant discourses of gender and acting in ways they see as correct and appropriate. Much can be made of this word ‘appropriate’. In a variety of different contexts, appropriate means different things dependent upon vantage, perspective and context. For example, in the grounds of Marri during lunchtime a very different set of behaviours emerged dependent upon gendered notions of what is appropriate. The boys interviewed spoke of needing to demonstrate their masculinity through not backing down in physical confrontation. As a result, the boys interviewed spoke of fights as an authentic performance of maleness. In a sense there was a ritual performance of gender; by accepting the physical challenge, they demonstrated that they were not ‘girls’, rather they were being brave, courageous and determined. Being labelled a girl was one of the most serious insults that could be directed at a male high school student. A student who backed down from a fight could only be scared and therefore not be a male. There was also a sense that the schoolyard fight served an important measurement too as it was often used to maintain hierarchies and social positioning. It was a tool used to maintain social standing and demonstrate allegiance – fights very rarely involved only one person, rather they escalated into involving groups. This point is made in Jarrod’s (#3SMV1) comment:

*If you are popular they try to fight you because you are popular. But if you are popular you don’t really back down because you have a lot of people to back you up, so the fight explodes.*

Deleuze argued that the use of violence is one of the ways that power is acted out in social arenas. Moreover, social repression often operates through the threat of violence. Violence is one
example of a “universal machinic process for the production of expression”. These processes typify a society. For Deleuze and Guattari, this sort of violence, destructive and antisocial as it may seem, is an example of the regime of signs that inscribe the life of the young person. In all social interaction, people interact with each other through primitive communication or expressivity. These forms of expression act to create an alliance between the individual and the group, to demonstrate allegiances and to mark the individual in some way. In a physical way, these rituals of violence, of performing ‘manly’ acts, signify the shift from the mode of confinement to the mode of faciality that typifies the educational processes known as the school. These acts are not repressive acts – they are powerful and productive but in ways that move beyond the disciplined subject found in institutions.

At Tuart they spoke of boys as more likely to exhibit those risk-taking behaviours that other students admired, and as a result were respected and valued by many of their peers as a form of hero worship. This perception confirms Martino’s view that a rejection of academic achievement is often tied to “acting out ‘cool’ forms of masculinity”. This rejection becomes one of the ways that students enact those techniques of the self that the individual makes sense of the world through external criteria provided by others. At Tuart, this meant that the normalising judgements of masculinity built an imperative to “act, think and behave as that sort of person”. This ‘cool’ masculinity was particularly evident in those three male students who were interviewed as the Rebels. These three boys acted, thought and behaved as students who challenged the normalising vision of the good through the lens of an expectation of what manliness should be and should look like. What was set up and being played out at this school was a competing and contradictory imperative based on normalising notions of masculinities that challenged some of the

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462 Goodchild, Op Cit. p.90
463 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, p.142
465 Ibid. p.104
commonsense notions of schools as places that normalised the vision of the good student. Travis (#1RMV1) said:

> It’s like the SRC. It is just a gay club for people to go to so they don’t get hassled at lunchtime. No one listens to them. They are not the leaders of the school.

Travis was really giving voice to the competing set of claims that prioritised certain forms of masculinity over the claims of the good student as typified by service to the school community or academic and cultural success.

The girls, however, often spoke of different performances. At Marri, they expressed opposition to the fighting but did not really see that there was much that they could do. This was the boy’s world, and not for them to interfere. One of the behaviours that many of the girls tended to demonstrate in each of the focus groups was a tendency to defer to the male opinions. The opinions they expressed tended to be voiced in submissive ways, such that they appeared to be less powerful than those (mainly male students) who subscribed to the dominant masculine culture in the school. This silencing tended to cast the female student interviewed in docile social roles, and reinforced that traditional stereotype as women who needed to be ‘rescued’ through ritual performances of violence and protection. The significance lies, I believe, in the institutional surveillance that each student knows they are placed under and the ways that students learn behaviours that they appropriate as normal. In the Rebels focus group at Marri, Walter (#3RMV3) branded one group of male students as “girls” because he thought they were demonstrating emotional behaviours that were not masculine. Sinead (#3RFV2) agreed with him that they were being ‘girls’, clearly not recognising the derogatory way that this positioned girls, including herself, within her school.
This pattern of docile and submissive behaviours tended to continue in the interviews. The girls gave voice to experiences where they were often rendered voiceless and silenced. For Sinead (#3RFV2), negative experiences at school caused her to escape the conflict as a means of dealing with it. She stated:

*I hardly come to school at all now. I used to come all the time but now I just get angry at the teachers so I don’t come. Teachers just bust me and are always in my face. I just feel so angry.*

One of the ways that this performance manifested itself was in the tendency of some of the girls to absenteeism as a way of escaping the structures of power that represented their experiences of school. This also offers some explanation as to why Tracey (#3QFV3) spent much of Year Nine absent from school. At some level she found it very difficult to deal with the social and academic requirements of the school, so she dealt with this problem by staying at home for most of the year. The fact that she directed her anger in more passive ways through absenteeism reflects the nature of her gendered subjectivity.

**The Conflictual Student**

There is a tendency to see conflict in schools as a set of behaviours that is ultimately obstructive to the aims and objectives of the school. However, I argue that it could be seen as a governmental act by students in schools, particularly when it is deployed in a concerted effort to create a certain kind of identity or persona. I argue that conflict is deployed by students not as a form of frustration, but more as a tactic or strategy designed to create some form of social currency from particular groups. One of the criticisms of Foucault’s work on power and subjectivities, particularly early in his career, is that it does not allow for the problematics of resistance and
opposition. If the forces of power arrayed against the subject are so powerful, subtle and omnipresent, what opportunity does a person have to resist or oppose these relations of power? Part of the problem with this criticism is the oversimplification of Foucault’s case. Whilst power attempts to ‘fix’ subject positions, the multiplicity of power relations and discourses means that subject positions are more fluid and dynamic, allowing the opportunity for subjects to conduct themselves in oppositional or resistant ways in response to some elements of the play of power. Thus, “there is no transcendental Archimedean position from which we can become ‘empowered’, but only particular discursive positions” within the institutions that discipline and govern the populations. The act of resistance is formulated within a paradox – discourses empower by creating active subjects but at the same time disempower by objectifying subjects, teaching them limits and self-regulation. In other words, resistance in schools can take many forms, yet this resistance is never monolithic or monopolistic. Resistance, like the vision of the good student itself, is essentially a process of normalisation in that its capacity for action requires a knowing of the self that limits, rather than produces freer action. However, values and actions that “disrupt, challenge and change” communicate to us the ways that power is being deployed and subjectivities arranged within the social machine and the possibilities that may exist for freer action within schools. Sometimes, those students designated as Rebels may be those with the best vantage position on how power is operating at their school and what is wrong about that. I argue that this can best be described as an emerging critical awareness that often leads these students into further conflict.

An example of this is the Rebels from Tuart. These students spoke of themselves as having adopted a range of behaviours that were seen by many staff at the school as being rebellious

466 Peter Dews, “Power and Subjectivity in Foucault” in Smart (Ed) Michel Foucault: Critical Assessments Volume V, Routledge, London, pp.163-165
because they placed more emphasis on the positive feedback from their peers than they did the negative feedback and consequences of their parents and staff. This point was made by Travis (#1RMV1) who said:

In the F Block there is like a supergroup, the Wogs, the Surfies, the Punks that are like the popular group that don’t do that well at school. We are the cool group because we are so big and we can look down on the other smaller groups.

These students spoke of ways that defying the conventional expectations of what a good student should be encouraged other students to admire them for their opposition to the school. This opposition was largely directed at the staff and at the students they saw the school as valuing, particularly the students who were members of the Student Representative Council. In return for the antagonistic relationship that they recognised they had with many staff, they felt they stood at the top of the student popularity hierarchy. The social prestige they received compensated for the strategies devised by the school to discipline them. However, the paradox is that these students who felt empowered as an alternative authority group in the school became increasingly individualised within the mode of their conflictual relationships. Thus, they detailed a list of examples of ways that they were singled out and ‘victimised’ by the staff at the school, practices that isolated them and increasingly distanced them from the school staff.

What fascinated me about this interview was the way that these students had negotiated a positionality within different hierarchies that allowed them greater capacity to act than many other students. In previous research one of the things that I have contended is that some students who are classified as rebels may have an emerging critical awareness of the play of power and how they are constituted within those micropractices.469 These students spoke of their experiences of schooling in positive ways because they knew themselves in different ways than what was

469 Thompson, Op Cit. pp.76-79
expected. In Deleuzean terms, they refused their faciality and negotiated a self that was ideally positioned, in their eyes, to extract the most out of their schooling.

Rose makes the point that in liberal democracies, “To govern is not to crush their capacity to act, but to acknowledge it and use it for one’s own objectives.”\footnote{Rose, \textit{Freedom}, Op Cit. p.4} One of the features of the school is the success it has in communicating strategies, technologies and discourses that evaluate and classify the capacities of the individual, who then acts out these in order to evaluate and classify the self and others. This objectification of the subject only works because the individual has the capacity to act – the freedom to do and behave in certain ways. The paradox of resistance is that it is an essential part of the play of power, a reference point that informs the types of positionality that the individual is free to adopt. Consider the following quote: Paul (#2RMV)

\begin{quote}
I mean not all students are good. As if they all want to come to school and just behave, that would be just boring for everyone. The teachers wouldn’t have any work to do.
\end{quote}

Implicit in this comment is an awareness that there is a need for resistance, for opposition within the social machine, because it allows the maintenance of the multitude of normalising discourses within which young people negotiate their positionalities. In this example, the paradox of the active self is exposed – by being ‘free’ to act, students become even more firmly entrenched in subjectivities that reproduce rather than reconstruct the social machine.

This is why it is difficult to argue that these students were acting in freer ways through their confrontational approach. Whilst people are positioned in a variety of subject positions, often in multiple ways, this process is never complete or entirely successful.\footnote{Usher and Edwards, \textit{Op Cit.} p.97} It is through the multiplicity of determinations that struggle and change become possibilities. Foucault suggests

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\footnote{Rose, \textit{Freedom}, Op Cit. p.4}
\footnote{Usher and Edwards, \textit{Op Cit.} p.97}
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that resistance is actually the product of power.\textsuperscript{472} As power produces knowledge and ways of understanding the self, it also produces the subject that is self-regulating and self-governing. Thus, the system of power relations both empowers and disempowers the self. The Rebels at Tuart were thinking, acting and behaving in ways that were regulated and policed by attitudes learnt through the social machine. Thus, opposition to the normalising vision of the good student in schools is a form of the relations of power and the ways that subjectivities are produced. The evaluative and normative function of school life means that students are taught to be acutely aware of status and become actively involved in the regulatory processes that govern themselves and others. For this group of students, the normalising vision of the good student created the web and capillaries of power that made their resistance possible – they were enacting subjectivities inherent in the discursive space and practices that schools currently adopt. However, I would go on to stress that this emerging critical awareness could be fostered and developed so that rather than merely being and becoming oppositional, what could emerge is the beginnings of new ways of knowing and acting on the self – a new arts of existence if you will.

Currently, I argue that this conflict model is essential for the production and maintenance of the discursive space around the good student, that conflict and resistance are necessary for the classificatory and evaluative nature of schools and schooling to function as powerfully as they do. For the normalising vision of the good student to be effectively productive, it constructs possibilities and subject positions for resistance and conflict. However, it requires free subjects for this to happen, and it is at this juncture that freer possibilities could emerge. All students, in some way, are engaged in subtle processes that oppose certain discourses. This means that they have some facility, but little awareness, of their capacity to act in freer ways. In this case, those students nominated as Rebels are often responding to discourses that prioritise other normalising

\textsuperscript{472} Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, “Michel Foucault: Crises and Problemizations” in \textit{The Review of Politics}, Spring 2005; 67 (2), p.338
visions, whether it is that of the ‘slacker’, the ‘anti-authoritarian’ or the ‘cool’ student. Currently these student subjectivities are productive in that they help to make the normalising vision of the good student such an effective governing tool because they offer a counterpoint against which idealised forms can be measured. However, I argue that these moments of resistance could be the catalyst for developing new arts of existence.

The Affiliated Individual

In the three schools studied, one of the noted phenomena was that of the ways that the school acted as a place that both attached and separated individuals. On the one hand, in each school a number of different strategies were employed that were designed to create a sense of allegiance between the student and the institution. At Jarrah, students spoke of activities that they participated in outside of the usual curriculum that they saw as a particularly significant event in their schooling. Central to this was “St. Pat’s Day”, a day celebrating the life of St. Patrick that saw the students participate in a day of fun activities that were designed to promote school unity whilst raising funds for various charities. This day was organised and run by Year Twelve students. The students interviewed saw this as an opportunity to show their appreciation of the school and the staff.

At the same time, students in each school were able to list a number of strategies that operated to individualise the student. These sentiments were most classically demonstrated by those students who were designated as Rebels within their schools. The common theme running through their interviews was that they were singled out and treated differently by the staff because of reputations that they had rather than what they did or did not do. Interestingly, however, this sense of marginalisation was a powerful current that moved through other groups in each school.
At Tuart, Elizabeth (#1AFT2) spoke of what it was like to be known as an academically successful student and how this coloured both staff and student expectations of her. The result of this was that she felt isolated and controlled and unable to connect with others in more organic ways. Part of this occurs because of the nature of the institution and the ways that the individual is evaluated and taught to evaluate themselves through the process and strategies of power that have come to be seen as the normal conduct of the school. The impact of these practices is such that those discursive practices that construct docile bodies also instruct the young person in ways of thinking about themselves that are ultimately anti-creative.

What these tactics of power seem to do is to limit the ways that young people can make connections, and as a result, make meaning of their selves and lives beyond that of the traditional roles and behaviours so familiar to anyone who has been a student in a secondary school. Part of this is the creation of a hierarchical understanding of the self, and a constant policing of the self against a set of normalising expectations and behaviours that serve to construct docile sensibilities and subjectivities. So the secondary student thinks of themselves, and therefore carves out a meaning for that self in the world, along hierarchies that include academic success, popularity, classroom behaviour, risk-taking behaviour, dreams for the future and relationship with staff and parents. The list of characteristics that are evaluated and self-evaluated is almost limitless, so much so that students are forced to become interpreters and negotiators of the self within those competing and often contradictory discourses that claim authenticity on knowing the young person. What does happen, however, is that those interpretations and negotiations become reactive processes, rather than the active and creative processes that Deleuze sees as essential for freer selves.

Paradoxically, the swirling set of discourses that inform the epistemology of the self also perhaps offer the best possibility for the Deleuzean creative self. While schools are ordered and ordering
spaces that construct sensibilities and positionalities used to locate students, and teach them to locate themselves and others, in various hierarchical systems, they also offer possibilities for students to act in freer ways precisely because of the ways that students must negotiate with the productive relations of power. Thinking machinically means recognising that meaning is made through the connections that students make. Pushing this, I would argue that a hierarchy, amongst other things, is the expression of students attempting to order, as they have been taught in a logical and structured way, the various positionalities, displacements and subjectivities that they have been told they need to control. In this sense, a hierarchy is really the expression of the learned impulse to see the world as a set of binaries that can be bent to the will or understood through logic and reason. It is this governing of the self that sets up subjectivities that maintain advantage and disadvantage, subtleties of self and being that often render the individual subordinate to dominant values and attitudes.

**The Care of the Self in Secondary Schools**

Across the three sites one of the powerful features was the ease with which students became ‘confessing animals’ through the focus group interview process. This confession involved detailing powerful personal experiences and opinions in front of not just the interviewer, but also two of their peers. This highlighted the way that the self becomes the technology through which the world is measured and known. To put it another way, schools are confessing institutions that act as “witness, accomplice, recipient, mediator, judge and enabler”.  

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other confessing animals that themselves are involved in the “deep-seated cultural practice” of confessing to reveal some truth that lies concealed beneath the subjectivities each self has adopted.\textsuperscript{474} The ways that the self confesses in school hints at certain types of care of the self being prioritised. For example, despite the discourses that emerge in the interviews of schools as places where social equality is significant, the majority of opinion of the students interviewed was that schools were individualising places that measured, evaluated and arranged student subjectivities that led them to competing against other students.

On reflection, the confessing that took place was of a nature that forced students to know and measure themselves against normalising visions and discourses of the good student. These students have learnt to tell the truth about themselves in relation to narrative discourses that create, maintain and sometimes reconstruct the self. When Roger(#3RMV1) stated:

\textit{I always stick up for the person that is getting a hard time. I am a role model to the younger ones and I can choose to look after them. This has a ‘shiny effect’ where I shine above everyone else and they all look up to me.}

His view of himself, or the way that he saw, measured and knew the truth of himself, was different to the opinion of the staff who saw him as fitting the tag of a Rebel student. Roger’s narrative was that of a strong student who was a highly valued by his peers because he stood out as a leader who held power (the reference to choosing) over those students that he located as being somehow lesser than himself.

\textbf{Living Machinically}

Thinking of schools as social machines where meanings and understandings of the self are made through the myriad of connections with other machines means re-evaluating the purpose and

\textsuperscript{474}\textit{Ibid.}
achievements of education and schools. In societies of control, the self takes the subjectivities, or ways of knowing themselves, with them for the rest of their lives. An examination of the data has suggested that students are being taught to know themselves, and position themselves, through a range of competing discourses that will continue to shape their connections with others, or as Foucault would argue, their “arts of existence” long after they leave the institution. The students spoke of a variety of practices that ordered their bodies and souls in schools, and the impact of normative discourses taught them to classify and evaluate their selves and others on an almost continual basis. These discourses that coalesce around the good student are ultimately control discourses. They teach the students to be docile, to be normal and to normalise others, to think, speak and act in appropriate ways and to be self-policers and regulators of hierarchies, competitive frameworks and subjectivities. However, it is not possible for the institution to control the connections that a student makes, so what tends to happen is that the processes of schooling train young people to know themselves in governed and governable ways. It is this knowing that often limits the potential for young people to rise above subjectivities that reproduce rather than reconstruct social practices and expectations. Student experiences in secondary schools suggest subtle ploys of power that govern young people through the apparent freedoms that they possess in a liberal democratic state. What is important is to unmask these strategies of power so that they can be understood and utilised in ways that best advantage young people as they move into wider society. Ontologically, this could be improved by advocating the self as a contingent production that can be challenged, produced, altered and even destroyed, or known in different ways that promotes different and possibly more advantageous subjectivities.

The Becoming Self

The different forms of students that the data revealed are all examples of idealised visions of the good student that occurs in multiple ways in schools. Within this multiplicity, students are
constantly engaged in the process of becoming, rather than ever arriving as a fixed being. This means that the ways that students see themselves is in itself a creative act – an opportunity for freer knowing of the self. However, the system and the functioning of power within the institution of the school teach young people to know themselves in those forms that enslave them as Deleuze suggested.

One of the ways that this operates is through the lack of awareness of the potential for freedom that each student has at their disposal. Within the school, students construct an experience that centres on the ways that they are forced to behave by the teachers and their peers. In particular, the students interviewed assigned much greater power to the teachers in their lives than what probably exists. This is part of the Deleuzean process of overcoding, a feature of control societies. In effect, this communicates to students that they have less freedom, that their actions and behaviours are being monitored and evaluated against a set of norms and expectations that becomes increasingly internalised as the young person becomes more grounded within the system. The point does need to be made that power is productive rather than repressive and that all students actively produce their subjectivities, albeit too often in narrow and controlled ways. Rose’s argument that freedom is a necessary precursor to governmentality, or that “we are governed through our freedom”, communicates that there is the capacity to act, to be freer, but that schools and other institutions subtly communicate to young people the need to live reactively. Encouraging living creatively means changing how young people are taught to know and act upon their selves.

Part of this goes back to May’s theories concerning the modernist ontological questions that currently inform much of the practices of schools and schooling. Teaching young people to focus on their comportment as a measure of their citizenship creates a citizenry that is governed and governable but ‘knows’ themselves in limited and limiting ways. These knowledges of the self
are one of the key effects of governmentality as it is deployed in institutions such as schools. Another effect is that young people never fully learn to ask those questions that could create a new arts of existence, or new possibilities of freer thought and action. This needs to be one of the changes that schools implement in the coming millennia, to become more aware, and therefore more concerned, of how they limit the ways that students can see or know themselves.

In each of the three schools young people constructed some vision or visions that held the promise of this contingent freedom, yet they seemed unaware or unable to translate these into an altered ontological awareness. This is the crux of Foucault’s later project – how the care of the self could lead to freer selves set against the organised and institutionalised discourses that construct the self in the ways that it is known. The normalising vision of the good student teaches students to know and evaluate themselves in a variety of ways. This knowing appears largely based on a multitude of factors. However, the continual reference by the students interviewed to hierarchical positionings seems to be the chief strategy that normalises and classifies the subjectivities of young people. What is produced in each young person is a reactive self, or an ethical self that is reactive to the relations of power that they are constituted within. The circular relationship of this knowing of the self continually produces subjectivities that are reactive to discourses and power relationships – an ethical self that is trained to be continually reactive to norms and expectations. Rose argued that we are governed through our freedom because the ability for us to act is continually referential to how we are expected to behave, where this knowledge then shapes the normative judgements that produce the knowing of our selves.\footnote{Rose, Freedom Op Cit. p.?} This point was made by Tom (#2RMV):

*Teachers give the good students everything, they just look after them. They compare a lot of people – oh look at him he is doing all this stuff right look at her she is good at that. Everyone is good at different subjects and in the subject you are not good at you want...*
teachers to encourage you not make you feel crap and you can’t do anything. The mark you get in a subject shouldn’t rate how good you are.

The normalising vision of the good student is one of the technologies of power that positions the self to know and be known in evaluative and comparative ways. Students know themselves and produce themselves in reference to competitive norms. Schools, then, are places where the subjectivities produced are reactive in that they force the individual to know themselves in terms of measurement and evaluation. As an arts of existence, this outward measuring inward governing self will continue to remain a key product of the evaluative technologies of the self that remain at the core of the Western schooling tradition.

In its place, I advocate a shift in focus in schools where student development is recognised as contingent and identity is less a being and more a becoming. To paraphrase Foucault, we are freer than we think but we have been taught through institutions such as schools to accept truths about ourselves that produce the disciplining subjectivities discussed in this chapter. To become freer, schools need to become places that deal not in discipline and knowledge, but in the arts of the self and resist seeing student identity as a fixed reality, rather as a work of art that is continually shifting and changing. These truths that the students discuss in relation to the good student are deeply rooted in modernist ontological notions of the self that ‘know’ the self as a disciplined subject. While schools persist in these practices and technologies of power, freer thought and action remain hidden possibilities. Foucault’s turn to parrhesia as exemplified in the Greek world constitutes a theoretical attempt to craft a new ethical relationship to the self that constructs freer ways of being in the post-capitalist world.
Conclusion

My role – and that is an emphatic word – is to show people that they are so much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes that have been built up at a certain moment during history, and this so-called evidence can be criticised and destroyed.\footnote{Michel Foucault, quoted in Ball, \textit{Op Cit.} p.1-2}
CONCLUSION

This study began from a position that the world in which we live is changing, and that there are new economic, social and environmental imperatives that will pose increasingly complex and difficult decisions for those who live in that world. I see education as part of the hope for change in this world. However, my experiences of schools and schooling have led me to question what it is that schools do – what and how student subjectivities are produced and how these processes of production are experienced and articulated by the students. I posit that these subjectivities become highly significant in the ways that young people see themselves, not just in their schooling but also in their subsequent activities as citizens in contemporary society. For these reasons I see the unmasking of the play of power in the production of student subjectivities such as the good student as a crucial step in beginning to understand how it is that we have become the kinds of subjects that we are today. This is a means of challenging and moving beyond accepted truths and commonsense notions that are static, narrow and limiting. I advocate schools becoming places more aware and concerned with the ‘arts of existence’ rather than the idea of the student as an empty vessel that is waiting to be filled up with accepted knowledges.

This study has examined those practices of power that coalesce around the normalising vision of the good student found in one of the core experiences of Western societies; mass, compulsory schooling as experienced by students. Part of the significance of this work lies in its aim to continue to explore, as Foucault advised, those micropractices and assemblages of power that are productive of the types of selves that we become. As this work has argued, schooling is one of the ways that the self is taught to know and relate to the self, to set limits and possibilities, to think act and behave in governable and governed ways. The visions of the good student deployed in schools involve the strategies and technologies of power of surveillance, normalisation, individualisation and categorisation. However, the discursive space that surrounds the good
student is populated by discourses of the good that can be complementary, competing or even contradictory. Into this nexus of power relations is placed the student who becomes a ‘player’, or one who negotiates and performs against certain rationales of the good student.

By developing and pushing those theories often designated as ‘later Foucault’ through the self and the ways that its production becomes linked to certain knowledges and practices, serious ontological questions have been part of the core focus of this work. This study has been guided by the quote from Foucault that argues that “we are freer than we think” but that through accidents of history we have come to accept truths and practices as commonsense and normal, when they are in fact anything but. That schools exist to produce the good student is one of these commonsense truths that has been accepted and presented in many institutions. This vision of the good student is far from a dynamic and creative construct, rather it is a normalising discourse that is static and monolithic and usually representative of the ‘hegemonic good’, a student who is typically good at assessments, is well-behaved at the correct times and articulates the appropriate attitudes. Part of my research has been to point out that the good student means wildly different things to different groups and this necessitates the student having to be a negotiator and a performer of these competing and often contradictory discourses.

By problematising the visions of the good student in three contemporary schools in Western Australia, data have emerged that suggest that students are far more active in producing and performing versions of the good than that currently presented as the ‘hegemonic good’ relied on as commonsense in schools in so many ways. What the data do suggest is that these productive negotiations are accompanied by a set of knowledges of the self that are deployed by the school and performed by the students that become increasingly narrow and constraining. Part of this deployment lies in the ways that students become increasingly aware of rationales of the good student that are based on hierarchies that they locate themselves in.
active in negotiating their subjectivities, students are governed through their very freedom to act because in schools the ways that a student comports themselves becomes linked to knowledges about the self. Schools deal in the modernist ontological question “How should one act?” and it is through this that knowledges of the self are continually referential to comportment that manifests itself in an obsession with behaviour and conduct. Foucault and Deleuze ask us to consider “How might one live” as a means of challenging this emphasis on behaviour. The shift from an imperative - ‘should’ - to a possibility - ‘might’ - encapsulates the crux of this project. The good student needs to move beyond the realm of behaviour to consider how other forms and possibilities could be included, other ways of knowing the self as good and therefore creating more dynamic and fluid possibilities.

This study has found a number of things. It is important to acknowledge that these findings are in no way meant to be read as truths. Rather, they are best read as contingencies, as possibilities, as moments of truth that speak of their uniqueness as much as they speak of their certainties. They offer different readings and emerging potentialities that, like any research, lead to further questions for investigation. The data collected suggested that in the experience of students schools are places that continue to push the notion of the hegemonic good, and that those who fulfil these criteria are rewarded in various ways through the operation of the school. Students often repeated the institutionalised view that saw the good student in terms of those commonsense truths that prioritised behaviour and academic success. However, they also spoke of visions of the good student that competed and often contradicted this hegemonic good. Among these were social intelligence, opposition to authority and risk-taking behaviours that meant that students often had to negotiate a subjectivity within these contradictory spaces. It is these contradictory discourses that perhaps offer the possibility for freer action if students could begin to think of possibilities outside the hegemonic good without necessarily being taught that this was going to compromise their life opportunities.
At all stages of the experiences of students in schools technologies of power such as surveillance, normalisation, classification and individuation are evident and operant, both on and by the students, in any given school at any given time. These technologies produce student subjectivities that locate the self in particular, hierarchical ways. In this study, particular rationales of the good student continued to emerge. These rationales were the ways that students measured and located themselves against powerful discourses about what it meant to be good. The docile and disciplined student refers to the good student as one that comports themselves in appropriate ways. The pastoral student refers to the good student as one who accepts the guidance and wisdom of the ‘shepherd’ and who conducts themselves as a member of the ‘flock’. The bureaucratic student refers to the good student who is organised, neat and avoids the spotlight. The gendered student refers to the good student who performs according to dominant gender values. The conflictual student refers to the good student who, when judged from a different perspective, is valorised because they challenge authorities, demonstrate risk-taking behaviours and who often appear as ‘cool’ to their peers, although they often receive negative attention from the staff. The affiliated individual refers to the good student who demonstrates allegiance to their school, who feels that they belong and are valorised because of the contribution they make to the cocurricular life of the school. Whilst there are no doubt many others that occur in schools, across the three schools it was these rationales that emerged as highly significant in the ways that students evaluated themselves and others. However, time, logistical and space constraints mean that there are significant questions still to be addressed. In Jarrah the significance of the religious order deserves further investigation. In Tuart, the impact of normative assumptions of race and ethnicity, particularly in relation to the Aboriginal students, also demands further attention.

The rationales of the good student represent powerful discourses that swirl around each student forcing them to comport and govern themselves in contingent and often contradictory ways. They
act as hierarchies against which the students learn to judge and locate themselves. Students produce their own subjectivities, but these subjectivities often become narrow and reactive whereas I argue they could become more dynamic, open and freer. This may be the best way to prepare people to respond to the imperatives of the 21st century rather than the maintenance of the docile and disciplined citizenry. Part of this means addressing those institutional practices that ‘fix’ students as certain types of beings rather than a becoming where student subjectivities are not fixed and constant, rather they are evolving and dynamic, constantly being reshaped, re-evaluated and reconfigured in unique and multiple ways. The normalising vision of the good student acts to attempt to fix student subjectivities to make it easier to discipline and govern young people, not recognising that that is most likely a major barrier to developing a critical awareness of the self and the world.

Students are more aware of the ways that they are being positioned and continually act in ways that they see as maximising their return in various social currencies. Students recognised that various behaviours often drew rewards from teachers, but could also come with negative feedback from their peers. At the same time the opposite was also true, positive feedback from their peers could attract negative attention from teachers. In this play of power, students are active, but governed through their freedom. They are free to act, to position themselves in certain ways, but there are corresponding effects of their positionality that ultimately act to limit their choices and positionality. It is in this way that education is used as a tool that often limits that freedom rather than opening up possibilities for students.

The good student is far more than the hegemonic good often presented and endorsed by schools. Rather, each student had some experience of being seen as a good student, and by extension, this infers that the good student is a contested space where swirling possibilities are enacted in a multitude of ways in a variety of instances. Part of this lies in the ways that students are often
seen, and taught to see themselves, as fixed subjectivities – as beings if you like. I argue that part of the process of institutionalisation involves the student gradually coming to see themselves as they have been designated by the school. Being designated as a good student often became a totality that followed students around and coloured how they were seen by others. This became a technology that then governed how they saw themselves and others.

Methodology

The methodology served its purpose in providing rich data across a number of school sites. The focus group method of interviewing students was particularly effective in allowing students to discuss their experiences of schooling and feed off each other as they articulated their responses. Sometimes, however, it appeared that the students took the opportunity to present themselves as avatars of themselves, as idealised images of who they thought they could be or should be. In particular this seemed to merge within those focus groups that perhaps received the least positive attention in their schools. At various times the Quiet students and the Rebel students in each school nominated perceptions of themselves quite removed from those of the staff who selected them.

Another feature of this methodology lies in the way that students were selected. Overall I would argue that the majority of the students who were selected and gave their consent were students who fulfilled the expectations of the group. Having the school select the students was an invaluable tool because it provided another level to the examination of the ways that subjectivities operate in schools. However, occasionally there was a student who seemed out of place in his or her group, such as Chris (#3QMV1). The motivations of the school in these situations were uncertain, perhaps it was because they wanted to continue to present their school in the best
possible light or perhaps it was because they wanted to cooperate so much that they nominated some reliable students regardless of what group they were meant to fit into.

**Final Thoughts**

As has been stated earlier, this study is neither exhaustive nor is it definitive. Nonetheless, the research reported has unmasked the strategies and technologies of power that produce, and allow young people to be productive, in three schools at a specific time in a specific place. Having said that, it offers those in the education world a new lens through which they can consider how they are meeting, if at all, the needs of wider society through the practices of schooling. Subjectivities will always be produced through powerful discourses, so becoming freer involves offering different rationales or possibilities of the good that are made significant in how young people ‘know’ themselves and others. Perhaps rationales of the good student could incorporate critical thinking, empathy and social justice to name a few possibilities that would open up subject positions valorised in schools.

This study also serves as a tool through which those involved in education can re-examine what it is that they seek for students. Holding a mirror up to the practices of schooling, particularly in the ways that students recount their experiences, offers insight into the ways that student perform amidst the swirling nexus of power relations, and the possibilities they can deploy as they are set up through schools to become certain types of citizens after they leave school. Part of the next step may well be to examine how ethical self-creation may be deployed in schools, and how this deployment alters, if at all, the ways young people ask: ‘How might one live?’
References & Appendices
References


Appendix A

Kemmis, Cole and Suggett’s Orientations to Curriculum

For illustrative rather than evaluative purposes, I intend to adopt an approach to curriculum orientation advocated by Kemmis, Cole and Suggett. The reason for adopting this approach is to provide a further source of contextual information that gives the reader a better understanding of the case site. This is not intended to imply an in-depth evaluation of the curriculum orientation of the school. It is based on two days spent trailing certain Year 11 classes through the school process and my impressions on the ways that these classes operate. Kemmis, Cole and Suggett see schools as places where “profound disagreements about what education is” are played out daily. These disagreements manifest themselves, amongst other things, in the form of the curriculum adopted and strategies deployed in each class across the school. Kemmis, Cole and Suggett are at pains to stress that rarely is there one distinctive style, rather, that “the curricula that schools present are practical compromises between positions”. Kemmis, Cole and Suggett recognise three “internally consistent and conceptually distinct” orientations, the vocational/neo-classical, the liberal/progressive and the socially-critical.

The vocational/neo-classical orientation is one in which “education is understood as a preparation for work”. In this orientation, students are selected early to participate in certain types of curricula that reflect where they will most likely gain jobs. This orientation is based on a view that the world is hierarchically structured, and the ‘best’ students inevitably finish in the ‘best’ professions. Knowledge is presented as a public matter of skills and information. Students are receivers of knowledge who are located in subservient relationships with the authority figures - teachers.

The liberal/progressive orientation advocates preparing the student for “life rather than work”. In this sense, it sees education as about equipping the student with a set of skills that will enable them to lead a happy and productive life. Education must prepare in each student a sense “of the

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478 Ibid. p.139
479 Ibid.
480 Ibid. pp.139-141
481 Ibid. p.140
482 Ibid. p.142
483 Ibid.
good, true and beautiful in every child”.\textsuperscript{484} It is only in this way that society can expect to overcome the inequalities that currently undermine the capacity of each individual. Knowledges are more personal and intrinsic, possibly in the forms of experiences or life contexts.\textsuperscript{485} The student is an active constructor of knowledge who learns through opportunities provided by teachers who act as facilitators or mentors.\textsuperscript{486}

The socially-critical orientation is far more radical. Like the liberal/progressive orientation it sees society in need of change. However, unlike the liberal/progressive orientation, the socially-critical advocates the radical change of social structures are instrumental in creating the seeds of this disadvantage. This view of education “must emphasise social and critically-reflective processes, not only what history throws up as worth knowing”.\textsuperscript{487} Knowledge is seen as a construct of the social world and as a site for emancipatory possibility. The student is seen as a co-learner with the teacher who is placed in more equal relationships with students.\textsuperscript{488}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{484} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{485} Ibid. p.142
\item \textsuperscript{486} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{487} Ibid. p.141
\item \textsuperscript{488} Ibid. p.143
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Appendix B
Principal Questions

I am interested in the idea of the ‘ideal’ or ‘good’ student found in schools in Western Australia. I think that there can be a range of ‘good’ students depending upon different circumstances in each school. I would like to ask you some questions about the range of these ‘good’ students at your school.

1. As the principal, what are your goals for the education of students in your school?

2. In your mind, what are the key characteristics of a good student? (dress, behaviours, actions, attitudes, academically etc).

3. To what extent are students responsible for transforming themselves? To what extent is the school responsible?

4. How do you see your school working at creating the opportunities for these ideal students to develop?

5. What strategies have been implemented to work with students who may not necessarily demonstrate the characteristics of the good student? In your opinion, how successful are these?

6. Describe the types of student groups that are prevalent amongst your student body.
   - Which ones get along best with the teachers?
   - Which ones get along worst?
   - How do you account for these differences?

7. What are the ways that students can be rewarded in your school? (academically, culturally, sporting, socially)

8. What are the ways that students can be punished in your school?

9. How well do you think the school’s vision of the ideal student is accepted by the students?

10. What are the moral values that characterise ideal students?

11. Do you think it is true that ideal students are the most successful in life after school? Why do you think this?

12. Is there anything else that you would like to add to these questions on the ‘good’ student?
Appendix C
Student Questions

I am interested in the idea of the ‘ideal’ student found in schools in Western Australia. I think that there can be a range of ‘good’ students depending upon different circumstances in each school. I would like to ask you some questions about the range of these ‘good’ students at your school.

1. What kinds of things make an ideal student at this school?

2. Do parents, staff and students have different ideas of what an ideal student is?

3. What characteristics does the best student have for parents?

4. What characteristics does the best student have for teachers?

5. What characteristics does the best student have for students?

6. In what ways does your school reward ideal students, and how does it deal with those students who are not seen to be ideal?

7. In what ways are you a good student? What happens when you act like a good student? Tell me of a time you were rewarded for being a good student and how that felt.

8. Tell me of a time when you were judged not to be a good student, and how that felt.

9. What names of groups of students can you think of in your school? Which ones get along best with the teachers? Which ones get along worst? How do you account for these differences?

10. Do you think it is true that good students are the most successful in life after they leave school? Why do you think this?

11. Is there anything else that you would like to add to these questions on the ‘good’ student?
Appendix D
Student Coding

First character: A number reference to the school. The students in this chapter belong to the first school, so they will all begin with the number ‘1’.

Second Character: This character refers to the focus group that the student was in. Thus, ‘A’ stands for Academic Achievers, ‘S’ for Sports Achievers, ‘Q’ for Quiet Students and ‘R’ for Rebels.

Third Character: The characters ‘M’ or ‘F’ designate the sex of the student.

Fourth Character: The characters T (TEE) or V (VET) are used to show which course of study the student is pursuing.

Fifth Character: The fifth character is a number that designates the order in which the members of the focus group spoke. Number ‘1’ shows that they spoke first, ‘2’ second and ‘3’ third.