Navigating VET: ‘at risk’ youth and re-engagement programs

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Dr George Myconos
BSL, Research and Policy Centre, Fitzroy, Victoria (gmyconos@bsl.org.au)
Youth disengagement: the nature of the problem

Risky behaviours

Unstable contexts
- Financial distress 51.3%
- Unstable living arrangements 20.6%
- Inadequate family support 42.1%
- Mental health/stressors
  - Critical life event 21.5%

Behavioural problems 39%
- Anger management issues 26.8%
- AOD misuse 17.1%
- Juvenile justice 7.9%

Unstable contexts and Risky behaviours

Learning issues
- Low literacy/numeracy 61.8%
- Disability 5.3%
- Bullying 28.5%
- Socialisation issues 49.6%
- Low self-esteem 71.5%

Interpersonal issues
The cycle of disengagement

School responds to symptom of problem rather than addressing the underlying cause.

Inappropriate disciplinary consequences or inadequate support.

Disengagement from any learning environment.

Student has an adverse reaction to precipitated event, truancy or exhibits challenging behaviour.

Negative perceptions of school environment.
Institutional support

- Higher Education
- VET (TAFE and private providers)
- Mainstream secondary schooling
- ‘Alternative’ (re-engagement)
- ACE

Support agencies:
- Centrelink
- Job Services Australia
- Employers, group training orgs
- Drug and alcohol support
- headspace and Orygen
- Juvenile justice system
Institution-sector overlap

VET
(TAFE and private RTOs)

‘Alternative’
(re-engagement)
Case study: Community VCAL and the VET connection

Location: Frankston
Student numbers/profile
Staffing
Curriculum framework
Attainments
Complexities and challenges
Organizational issues

Vis-à-vis:

- Schools and department regions
- Referral organizations and services
- State and government agencies
- Registered training organizations
“...the kind of knowledge that you learn in VET assumes that you’ve been through school; that you’re an adult; that you have a specific skill set already; and that you’re there to further that skill set or develop something new that’s kind of related to what you want to do...So if you put a young person whose 16; severely disengaged...into a classroom with another cohort of people who are completely different to him or her, with a curriculum that doesn’t fit their place at that time, I think that we’ve got a real [problem] on our hands” (teacher)
“I haven’t been to that [RTO] yet because I was scared…I was just scared to go…I was that scared, I made myself sick and I just didn’t go.”
“I actually did the whole test you do in TAFE and I got in, but then I was too scared to actually go and do TAFE because of my anxiety. That was quite a while ago so I haven’t actually been to TAFE”
Literacy and numeracy

“I could do a book in my two days...[but] I’m not - because it’s worded differently, they’re using bigger words, and it’s like I don’t know what that word is, and I have to keep going back to the dictionary...like it’s taking me extra time to do it, because I’m so confused at it, like it’s the same as what I’ve done, but it’s just so different. So I’ll read a sentence and I’ll understand two words in the whole sentence.”
“[hi] I’m at TAFE, and I’m still not learning anything… I asked her for help. She says ‘well maybe you should’ve been listening’ but I was listening. She just didn’t even give me a chance. I can’t do this. I wanna leave.”
“Even other students didn’t understand it. One of the other ladies, she was 24 or something. She didn’t understand the work...And then I go up, “Can I have help...I don’t really understand any of the work.” [trainer...]‘No, you have to do it yourself. ”
“The only time you ever get to talk to the trainer is if you actually go find them and ask them to come and look at your stuff.”
“I was doing bricklaying. I didn't really get my Certificate because I'd wake up...4.30 of a morning just to get there [by 8 AM] because it takes like I don't know, two hours from Frankston train station to Holmesglen. I was supposed to do that for four months or something and I couldn't cope”
“I paid for the course… travelling to and from the city every day, I was leaving at 6 in the morning, getting into South Yarra at about 7.30… then getting something to eat, catching the Sandringham Line to Windsor, and then walking. And I’d get there just on 9 o’clock. And then we didn’t finish until 4.30 pm, so I’d have to walk to Windsor, catch a train from Windsor to South Yarra, and then get the train back to Frankston, and then the bus back home. It was costing me $50 a week, and there’s food and stuff as well. And after a month, it just got too much.”
Repercussions and responses

Low completion rates
Program disorientation
Inefficiencies and waste.
Secondary disengagement
What we need

Program and service level
Sector level
Policy level
“What we need are small spaces in big places”