



# ADULT PEDAGOGIES: ENGAGING EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS AT TAFE

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*I have been scratching around and interested in uncovering the elements that constitute an engaging adult pedagogy that engaged disengaged and early school leavers for some time*



# What do we already know

- Over the past decade there has been a **growing debate and concern** about the proportion of young people disengaging from the school system or leaving school early (Foley, 2005; 2007; Dyer & Wyn, 2001; Smyth & Hattam 2004). In an effort to **redress this concern a growing** number of out-of-school programs, community programs, vocational education and training (VET) and adult community education (ACE) programs have established in Australia to cater for an ever growing number of young people not attending any formal education or training setting. According to a longitudinal study survey of Australian youth commissioned by the National Centre of Vocational Educational Research (NCVER), as many as **one quarter of young** people aged between 15 to 24 years of age in Australia can be described as being disengaged from the schools system (Anlezark, 2009).

# Why do the project?

The project is significant because the school retention rates for students in **regional Victoria** are **lower than metropolitan centres**. Out of school programs and TAFE programs that cater for early school leavers play an important role in engaging and reengaging students back into schooling, education and training and employment.



# Project Aim



To provide an **enhanced understanding** of how TAFE and **adult pedagogies** and **practices** are used to engage early school leavers- with a view to describe and analyse these pedagogies and how they translate to students outcomes.

And will provide an enhanced understanding of young people's experiences in early school leavers programs and explore the young person's plans and aspirations after completing their TAFE program.

## **The research question:**

- What teaching strategies do VET teachers employ to engage young learners who have left school early?

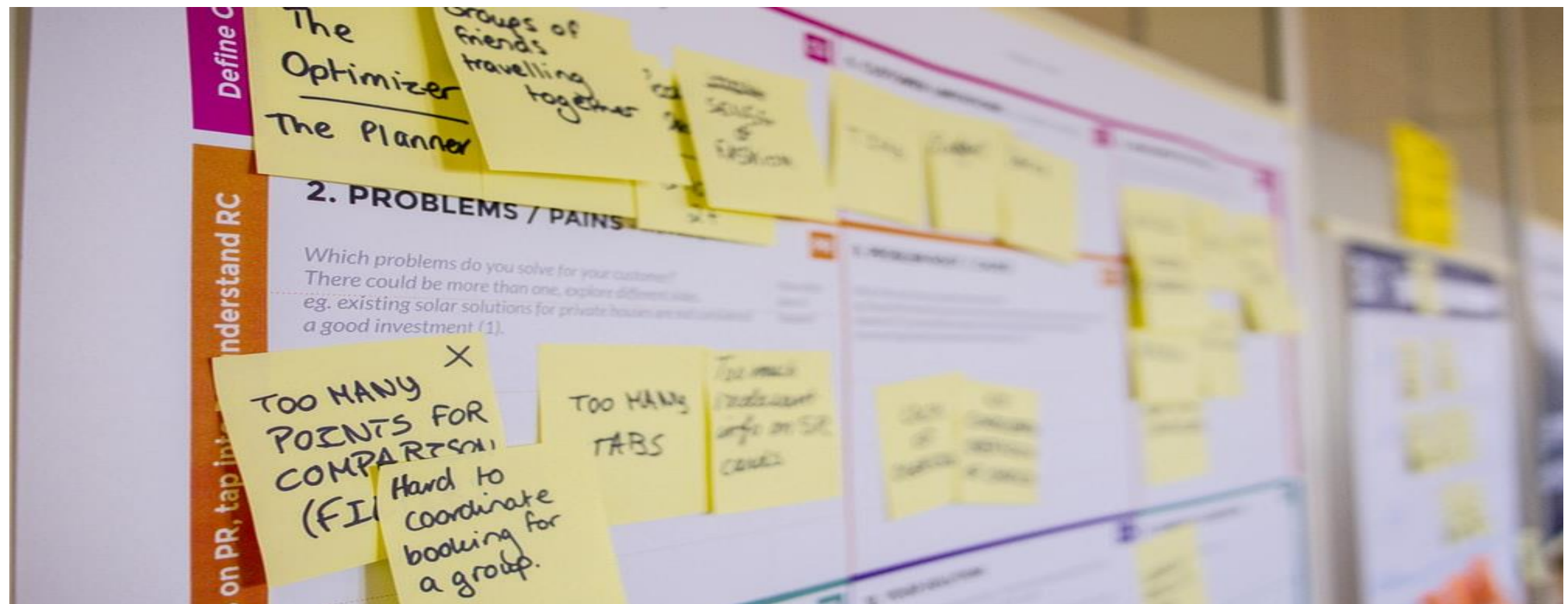
## Sub Questions:

- What are the pedagogies used in pathways programs?
- What other teaching strategies are employed to engage students who have left school early?
- What are the aspirations and plans of young people?

# The Project

- The research was carried out at a regional dual sector university at the 'College' where youth pathways programs, General Education and VCAL programs, study assistance and English Language programs are delivered. The Dual Sector institution is located in Regional Victoria.





- Open ended interviews with 5 youth pathways teachers
- Open ended interview with youth engagement officer
- Focus group interviews with 2 student focus groups of 8 and 9 students
- Total = 23 participants

# Findings ...the *Teachers*

- **Why do young people enrol?**

- *Diverse reasons*
- *Word of mouth*
- *Mainstream school doesn't work for them*
  - *'kicked out'*
  - *'pushed out'*
- *Can't relate to school and what is being taught*
- *Homelessness*
- *Bullying*
- *Family issues*
- *Emotional issues*





# Teachers cont ....

## ***What pedagogies and strategies work?***

- Set expectations
- Develop a rapport
- Mutual respect
- Relationships
- Individual learning plans
- The relational stuff
- Being 'readily available to students
- A sense of safety
- Make the learning relatable - 'contextual'

'I think the number one thing is relationships its really about getting to know the students and being able to build a rapport with them. We're in a really good environment here and its ok for us to be people'

# Is it a school or isn't it a school?

- The learning is like school but 'here we are able to manage the relationships because of lower numbers.' I don't know why schools can't do it more because its what these kids need.
- Yes and no.
- It's a safe environment here. No bullying!
- The space is different here - more relaxed.
- We treat students with respect and more like adults.
- We have a heavy focus on relationships.

## Other strategies ... *lets talk about smoking and the mobile phone!*

It's a contentious issue here at the college. They aren't allowed to smoke on the premises but mobile phone usage is allowed as long as it doesn't disturb others learning.

### **Is this an adult learning environment?**

My answer is that they are trying to learn to be adults.

Students go outside and have a smoke and it is debriefing for them...they chat with their peers

It sort of relaxes the, like listening to music on the phone with headphones on so they don't disturb the other students

We cant stop them smoking on the nature strip...the other adults smoke there.



# Findings ... the students

- **What were your experiences like at school?**
  - Terrible.
  - They cared more about the uniform and phones than anything else.
  - When you really needed help they were there for the student that didn't need it.
  - Favouritism.
  - Stressful.
  - Frustrating.
  - Annoying.
  - Pointless.
  - Some teachers are good and care about you.
  - Bullying.



How is it different here?

There is no bullying here, we're all friends

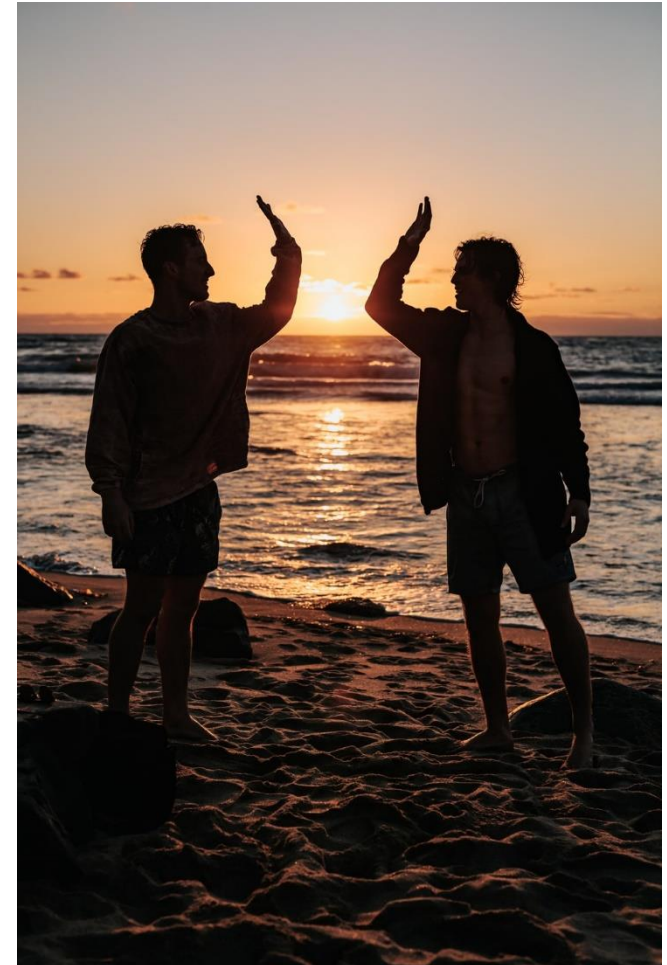
*There's no bad blood*

*It's better because there are smaller classes ... and teachers really get to know you...they build a relationship.*

*I trust the teachers here...they don't act all snobby and up themselves, they act like they're on your level.*

*They act like you, they're chilled and mellow, they're not like I'm older than you so you have to do what I say.*

*I think that mutual respect is a very important thing...we have that here.*



# So what? – this isn't rocket science or is it?

This research confirmed the importance of the **relational** in engaging early school leavers. Overall findings -

- Relationships and the importance of them were mentioned by all respondents as key.
- The need to balance learning strategies with pedagogies that treat students as adults while at the same time nurturing and supporting students as they build on their own learning.
- Nurturing confidence and providing achievable goals for students was a priority.
- Providing a space that is conducive to engaging students – break out spaces/food/quiet areas – all important
- Provided ongoing behavioural and emotional support.
- Build students confidence through cognitive, emotional and behavioural engagement – scaffolding their learning.
- The research also broached new ground in some areas involving the notion of 'adult' in the engagement of early school leavers and not being afraid to bend the 'rules' to cater for students needs. The mobile phone debate!

# What is good practice in engaging early school leavers? *The end story...or is it the beginning?*

- The balance of teaching and learning pedagogies that engage young students in processes of learning while at the same time fostering the 'whole person' through emotional and social support and development is the key to what could be called 'good engagement practices and pedagogies.'
- This form of teaching is successful in engaging students who leave school early, drop out of school and disengage **but this form of teaching and engagement is expensive and intensive** and relies on the teaching expertise of individual teachers who extend beyond mainstream to a welfarist approach.

## **What next: So we know this stuff**

- Analyse and describe adult engagement pedagogies or pedagogical repertoires in order to better understand and identify these pedagogies and how they relate to the outcomes of students once they leave the pathway program.

