
INNOVATIONS AND CONTROVERSIES: INTERROGATING EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

Interrogating Conceptions of “Vulnerable Youth” in Theory, Policy and Practice

Kitty te Riele and Radhika Gorur (Eds.)



SensePublishers

**Interrogating Conceptions of “Vulnerable Youth” in
Theory, Policy and Practice**

INNOVATIONS AND CONTROVERSIES: INTERROGATING EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

Volume 2

Series Editor:

Roger Slee, *The Victoria Institute, Victoria University, Australia*

Editorial Board:

Michael Apple, *University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA*

Andrew Azzopardi, *University of Malta, Malta*

Cheri Chan, *University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR, China*

David Gillborn, *University of Birmingham, United Kingdom*

Diane Mayer, *Victoria University, Australia*

Scope:

Education is a dynamic and contested area of public policy and professional practices. This book series identifies and critically engages with current responses to worldwide changes impacting education. It is a forum for scholars to examine controversies and innovations that emerge from patterns of inequality and social injustice in increasingly globalised contexts. This series is particularly interested in interrogating education through notions of social change, inequality, the movement and displacement of ideas and people, gender and sexuality, community, disability and health issues. Forthcoming books in this series will explore controversies and innovations (including but not limited to):

- education and social theories/frameworks
- changing approaches to, patterns of and policies for education research
- politics and policy
- economics of education
- curriculum, pedagogies and assessment
- technology and new media
- interdisciplinary research.

Interrogating Conceptions of “Vulnerable Youth” in Theory, Policy and Practice

Edited by

Kitty te Riele and Radhika Gorur

The Victoria Institute, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia



SENSE PUBLISHERS
ROTTERDAM / BOSTON / TAIPEI

A C.I.P. record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-94-6300-119-9 (paperback)
ISBN 978-94-6300-120-5 (hardback)
ISBN 978-94-6300-121-2 (e-book)

Published by: Sense Publishers,
P.O. Box 21858,
3001 AW Rotterdam,
The Netherlands
<https://www.sensepublishers.com/>

Printed on acid-free paper

All rights reserved © 2015 Sense Publishers

No part of this work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, microfilming, recording or otherwise, without written permission from the Publisher, with the exception of any material supplied specifically for the purpose of being entered and executed on a computer system, for exclusive use by the purchaser of the work.

CONTENTS

Foreword <i>Fazal Rizvi</i>	vii
Acknowledgements	ix
Introduction <i>Kitty te Riele and Radhika Gorur</i>	xi
PART 1: SETTING THE SCENE	
1. Vulnerability: Construct, Complexity and Consequences <i>Radhika Gorur</i>	3
2. Conundrums for Youth Policy and Practice <i>Kitty te Riele</i>	17
3. Experiencing Exclusion <i>Roger Slee</i>	33
PART 2: POLICY APPROACHES	
4. Youth Policy and the Problematic Nexus between Education and Employment <i>Johanna Wyn</i>	49
5. Juvenile Justice and Youth Vulnerabilities <i>Rob White</i>	63
6. Investing in Youth Health Assets <i>Lawrence St. Leger</i>	79
7. Learning in ‘No Man’s Land’: Policy Enactment for Students with Health Conditions <i>Julie White</i>	97
PART 3: PRACTICE NARRATIVES	
8. Beyond the Lens of Financial Vulnerability: Supporting Vulnerable Young People to Stay Engaged in Education <i>Anne Hampshire and Gillian Considine</i>	113

CONTENTS

9. Young People on or over the NEET Cliff Edge <i>Kristy Muir, Bridget Jenkins and Lyn Craig</i>	133
10. Learning at the Health and Education Interface: Personalised Learning at the Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne <i>Liza Hopkins and Tony Barnett</i>	151
11. 'Vulnerable', 'At-Risk', 'Disengaged': Regional Young People <i>David Farrugia, John Smyth and Tim Harrison</i>	165
12. Educating the Risky Citizen: Young People, Vulnerability and Schooling <i>Rosalyn Black and Lucas Walsh</i>	181
PART 4: YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICE	
13. Re-Presenting or Representing Young Lives? Negotiating Knowledge Construction of and with 'Vulnerable' Young People <i>Alison Baker and Vicky Plows</i>	197
14. Young People Speak <i>Geskevalola Komba, Jesse Slovak, Billy White and James Williams</i>	213
Notes on Contributors	223
Index	229

FAZAL RIZVI

FOREWORD

A community cannot regard itself as a moral community unless it has a clear sense of its social responsibilities to all of its members. Of course, we readily recognise the responsibilities we have to our family and friends. But what about those whom we might never meet, or who are not directly related to us? How do we determine our broader obligations to the community as a whole? Are there some within our community who have a greater claim on our sense of moral responsibility? What is the scope of our moral community? Does it include those who are not our compatriots? Is it possible to regard the humanity as a whole as our moral community?

These issues of morality are as complex as they are old. They have been central to ethical deliberations in every cultural and political tradition since time immemorial. Their complexity lies in the fact that our social and economic resources are always limited to meet the moral claims of everyone. Indeed, questions of distributive justice arise only in conditions of scarcity. In the context of limited resources, we have to decide how we might meet the needs of those who are more deserving. How do we determine who is deserving, in any case? And how should our limited resources be distributed in manner that is fair and equitable?

Over the years, moral philosophers, such as John Rawls and Robert Goodin, have suggested that vulnerability should be regarded as the main criterion with which claims of justice should be assessed. Those who are most vulnerable should receive our greatest moral attention. In socially democratic societies, policy makers have widely used this principle to allocate public resources. However, the translation of generalised moral principles into effective policy and programs has never been easy. Political interests have invariably intervened, leading to complex debates about how vulnerability should be defined, classified, measured and represented.

In recent years, these debates have become further complicated, as nation-states around the world have preached austerity – the mantra that the state should withdraw from many of the responsibilities it had once assumed to look after the disadvantaged. Moving beyond the redistributive principles associated with the Keynesian Welfare State, this neo-liberal ideology has attempted to shift the state's responsibilities to the vulnerable to their families or to philanthropic organisations – or indeed to the individuals themselves. The idea of collective responsibility has been eschewed. In a sense moral discourse itself has been 'individualised', with individuals now asked to become responsible for their own welfare – become 'self-reliant' – on the one hand, or develop an attitude of charity on the other.

FOREWORD

Of course, the state can never be in a position to entirely abandon the vulnerable. There has thus emerged in recent decades a language of ‘safety net’, which has substantially weakened the stronger sense of moral responsibilities that the state had once assumed. The neo-liberal state has increasingly sought to shift these responsibilities to the market, leaving the vulnerable to even greater vulnerability. This shift has accompanied an administrative technology of ‘managing’ vulnerabilities, rather than addressing them in the language of morality. In an era when a focus on self-interest and self-regulation has become supreme, the question of how the vulnerable might be protected has become ever more important and urgent.

This timely book suggests that the responsibility for protecting the vulnerable cannot be left to individuals, but demands collective action, through institutions such as education, health and welfare. It examines some of the ways in which public policies and programs represent those who are vulnerable, involving a range of assumptions about the social, economic and political conditions that produce their vulnerabilities. The authors are critical of the ways in which these assumptions, in recent definitions of vulnerability, have become narrowed with attempts to enforce ‘self-reliance’. In response, this book points to the need to enlarge our social and political thinking so that, in so far as this can be avoided, no one is forced into a vulnerable or dependent position. Even if this utopia cannot be realised, the book suggests, it should nonetheless steer our moral imagination.

Fazal Rizvi
Melbourne Graduate School of Education
University of Melbourne

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The genesis of this book lies in a workshop funded by the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia. The Workshop Program is a principal component in the Academy's promotion of research in the social sciences. Academy workshops are small gatherings of those working at the cutting edge of social science research. We are grateful to the Academy for their sponsorship of the workshop and recognition of the significance of our inquiry. More information can be found on the Academy website: <http://www.assa.edu.au/programs/workshop>

The preparation of this book was supported through the Australian Government's Collaborative Research Networks (CRN) program

We are also grateful to Professor Fazal Rizvi. His role as co-Convenor ensured we met the essential requirement that convenors must include a Fellow of the Academy. Far beyond that, however, we appreciate his wisdom, which guided both the workshop and the development of this book. Hendrik Jacobs provided his creative insights for the book cover, Freya Lance helped with the style formatting, and Luke Swain created the comprehensive index. In addition, Kitty would like to thank Stephen Crump, without whom none of this work would have been possible. Radhika would like to acknowledge her family for their support and encouragement.

INTRODUCTION

As a group, ‘youth’ have become a ‘matter of concern’ – the target of various policies, schemes, interventions and strategic attention. A review of 198 countries across all continents found that only 43 did not have a national youth policy (youthpolicy.org, 2013). In particular, the perceived vulnerabilities of youth are being elaborated in fine detail – physical and mental health, poverty levels, family support, engagement with community and school, education outcomes, even their spiritual lives and their sense of connectedness with the environment have come to be theorised, worried over, monitored and measured. However, the complexity, range and interconnectedness of the issues that appear to conspire against some groups and individuals are such that no clear-cut solutions are readily visible or even possible.

For youth who are vulnerable (or ‘at risk’, disadvantaged, marginalised or disenfranchised – terminology varies) the interconnectedness of various indicators of vulnerability are a phenomenon of life. They experience all of these mutually-reinforcing issues at once. But given the nature of administrative systems, a young person might be dealing with a variety of agencies and organisations, each with a different approach, a different philosophy, a different measure and a different preferred outcome. Such profusion of policies and confusion of approaches may serve not only to dilute the good that could come of interventions, they could also fail to reach many that require support. Of course, funds, too, are always limited – many services to youth are provided by non-government, not-for-profit and philanthropic organisations, usually with the help of volunteers. Competing for funds could mean that approaches might diversify, as each organisation feels the need to show how they are unique in their approach. Even with government services, policies change with government priorities, and this lack of consistency can be quite detrimental to young people who are already facing many challenges.

If there is little coherence between departments such as the health, education, justice and social services departments, there is also little communication across disciplines about the theories that could usefully inform policies and practices. In many cases, the requirements of numeric measures to monitor progress, allocate resources etc. lead to the development of thin and unsuitable measures which ignore the complexity of the situation, often reducing it to a single economic measure. Such policy practices not only fail to produce good solutions, they fail to harness the resources available to the youth themselves and to the community.

When developing policies for young people, there is now considerable agreement that it is important to listen to their voices – not only to elicit their perceptions and points of view, but also to develop interventions that are more likely to succeed in realising their objectives. Young people are often surveyed to

generate their understanding of the issues that affect them. However, because experiences of vulnerability are complex and often the particular mix of issues are quite individual, case study and qualitative approaches and narratives from young people themselves provide a much richer picture than a larger-scale survey. But the translation from such efforts to ‘give voice’ to actual policy influence does not always occur.

To sum up, we share concerns around three issues. First, while it is often emphasised that any effective policy that seeks to address the needs of vulnerable young people needs to be holistic, the various agencies and organisations and government departments that deal with young people have little opportunity to exchange notes, engage in interdisciplinary and cross agency deliberations to probe the underlying theories that inform their practices, or to explore the challenges and dilemmas they face. Second, academics, policy makers, practitioners and service providers all recognise the complexity of the issues involved – yet aspects of their practices ignore these complexities, particularly when critiquing policies or evaluating practitioners. Finally, while the voices of young people are considered vital to inform policy and practice, there is not adequate attention to how such elicitation of stories might occur in forums where they are most likely to have policy impact.

To explore (and perhaps even begin to address) these issues, together with Professor Fazal Rizvi we convened a forum in August 2013 where policy makers, people from philanthropic organisations, academics, service providers and young people could gather and inform and interrogate each other. This gathering was made possible by a grant from the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (Te Riele, Gorur, & Rizvi, 2014). Complexity was not a conclusion, but rather the starting point of the discussions. To that extent, there was a pragmatic focus on how we might ‘go on together’ (Verran, 2007). Exploration of such techniques as photovoice and a panel discussion provided examples of how we could go beyond tokenistic nods towards including the voices of young people, and elicit experiences and opinions that could enrich policy debates and practitioner actions. This book arises from that forum.

The book is organised in four sections. In Section 1 ‘Setting the scene’ Radhika Gorur explores the concept of vulnerability and Kitty te Riele analyses the conundrums posed by this concept in relation to policy and practice for young people. The final chapter in the section, by Roger Slee, paints the bigger landscape of exclusion within which the arguments outlined across the book take place.

Section 2 ‘Policy approaches’ includes four chapters analyzing relevant youth policy in different fields. Johanna Wyn focuses on policies that connect young people’s participation in learning with their economic productivity, and argues that this nexus is increasingly problematic. Rob White explains the understandings of risk and protective factors in policies and research regarding juvenile justice, and the relevance of broader social patterns. Lawrence St Leger and Julie White both explore health policies in their chapters – the former through a focus on health promotion and the latter through a critical analysis of policies in relation to the education of young people with serious health conditions.

Section 3 ‘Practice narratives’ similarly traverses various fields that are of relevance to ‘vulnerable’ young people, but the five chapters here take a practice perspective. Anne Hampshire and Gillian Considine outline how a major national Australian charity is moving beyond the concept of financial vulnerability in their work to improve the educational outcomes of disadvantaged children and young people. Kristy Muir, Lyn Craig and Bridget Jenkins tackle the concept of young people who are ‘NEET’, i.e. ‘not in education, employment or training’, and provide insights to better understand the experiences of such young people. Liza Hopkins and Tony Barnett explore the ways in which one particular service works across the intersection of youth, chronic illness and education. David Farrugia, John Smyth and Tim Harrison critically explore the intersections and disjunctions between the assumptions made by social policy regimes and differently positioned young people to show how these distinctions contribute to the construction of youth subjectivities in regional Australia. Ros Black and Lucas Walsh contrast approaches to developing young people’s active citizenship, with particular attention for those young people whose experience may include markers of marginalisation and exclusion.

Finally, Section 4 turns to ‘Young people’s voice’. Alison Baker and Vicky Plows discuss the ethical and methodological challenges for academics in representing the lives of the young people they research, particularly in the context of participatory research approaches. Four young people provide the final chapter: Geskevalola Komba, Jesse Slovak, Billy White and James Williams. They had been invited as experts for the workshop (see above), to offer us insights into the lived experiences of young people who might be considered ‘vulnerable’. The chapter is an edited version of the transcript of their contributions. For this book, it is fitting to give them the last word.

REFERENCES

- Te Riele, K., Gorur, R., & Rizvi, F. (2014). Workshop report: ‘Vulnerable youth’ in policy and practice: Conceptualisations, enactments and impacts. Available: <http://www.assa.edu.au/reports/workshop>
- Verran, H. (2007). The educational value of explicit noncoherence. In D. Kritt & L. Winegar (Eds.), *Education and technology: Critical perspectives, possible futures* (pp. 101-124). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books
- youthpolicy.org. (2013). The state of youth policy in 2013. Available: <http://www.youthpolicy.org/blog/2013/01/state-of-youth-policy-2013/>

Kitty te Riele

*The Victoria Institute for Education, Diversity and Lifelong Learning
Victoria University*

Radhika Gorur

*The Victoria Institute for Education, Diversity and Lifelong Learning
Victoria University*

PART 1

Setting the Scene

RADHIKA GORUR

1. VULNERABILITY: CONSTRUCT, COMPLEXITY AND CONSEQUENCES

INTRODUCTION

The term ‘vulnerable’ is now very widely used to describe individuals and groups in a range of academic disciplines and policy fields, such as economics, disaster management, health, education, social welfare, justice and environmental science (Alwang, Siegel, & Jørgensen, 2001). It is also widely in use in relation to children and youth in policies and practices in several OECD nations, including Australia. For instance, the Australian states of Victoria and South Australia both have a ‘Vulnerable Youth Framework’ as a guide to youth policy. OECD policy documents make routine use of the term ‘vulnerable’ in relation to youth who might experience unemployment or other negative economic outcomes.

As can be expected with any term so widely in use, the meaning and definition of ‘vulnerability’ are not stable across fields, or even within fields. How the abstract concept of vulnerability is understood, conceptualised and measured is of serious consequence to policy development, to those classified as ‘vulnerable’ and to those who are not. For example, if vulnerability is seen as an individual attribute, the target of intervention is the individual, and policy remedies might include attempts to increase the skills, capacities or outcomes of individuals. If, on the other hand, vulnerability is seen as the consequence of a complex, inter-related set of circumstances external to the individual, the targets of policy interventions might involve those external factors that are deemed to cause vulnerability. For this reason, it is important to understand and make explicit how vulnerability is conceptualised, constructed and measured.

Drawing upon theoretical resources from a range of disciplines, this chapter attempts to map out different conceptualisations of vulnerability, and explore the policy consequences of these understandings. It then focuses on ‘vulnerability’ as it relates to youth policies. The aim is to elaborate vulnerability as a complex issue and to evaluate its potential as an analytical device.

VULNERABILITY: DEFINITIONS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

Vulnerability in policy discourses is frequently associated with the notion of ‘risk’ and its management (Alwang et al., 2001). The World Bank, for example, has advanced the notion of ‘Social Risk Management’ as part of its Social Protection Strategy, and the Bank’s 2014 report is titled *Risk and Opportunity: Managing Risk for Development* (World Bank, 2013). With the advancement of contemporary

society as the ‘risk society’ (Beck, 1992) the notion of risk as a chronic and ever-present phenomenon has become pervasive in policy discourse. In tandem, efforts have proliferated at identifying, calculating, managing and minimising risk. ‘Vulnerability’, in this policy context, refers to the likelihood of harm from exposure to risk. In other words, vulnerability is the probability of an individual or group being affected by risk factors. An understanding of vulnerability therefore involves an understanding of risk, the ability to respond to risk, and the outcomes of the risk situation.

Vulnerability may be determined by environmental or economic factors as well as social and political factors that might diminish the ‘capacity to withstand and recover from adverse events’ (Bankoff, 2003, p. 8). The extent of the risk and the response to the risk determine the outcome of the risk (Alwang, Siegel & Jorgensen, 2001). Policy and governance may involve identifying and managing risks, identifying vulnerable populations and introducing measures to protect or insulate them from risks; alleviating the effects of harm from risks; increasing the capacities of vulnerable populations to protect themselves from harm; or increasing the resilience of vulnerable populations so that they are capable of withstanding the harm from risks to which they are exposed.

Vulnerability is understood in quite varied ways in different disciplines and policy fields. A framework that involves risk, response and outcome underpins both epistemic understandings of vulnerability as well as policy responses to it. In some cases, the focus is more on the ‘risk’ aspect of vulnerability, whilst in others the emphasis is on the ‘outcome’ (Alwang et al., 2001). By virtue of age, gender, particular behaviours or attributes or location (being homeless, HIV positive, a substance abuser or sufferer of a health condition), certain individuals or groups may be thought of as ‘vulnerable’. Those identified as ‘vulnerable’ may become the focus of policy interventions and institutional attention – perhaps of multiple institutions and agencies. These may include the provision of allowances, counselling, educational or employment support, the allocation of foster care, the provision of medical facilities and so on. The effort here could be to increase individuals’ capacities to identify and avoid risks; to develop the ability to withstand the risk; or to be resilient and overcome the exposure to risk.

Vulnerability is often the result of multiple issues – poverty, ethnicity, illness and homelessness, for example – which might reinforce one another. Vulnerability can thus be conceptualised in a more holistic or ecological sense, where the socio-political and historical aspects of vulnerability are recognised. Socio-political and historical factors, for example, may limit the capacity of individuals or groups to respond to risks. The degree of vulnerability is a combination of the exposure of individuals or groups to risk, and their ability to gather resources and assets, in the broadest sense, to respond to these risks. In this construction, addressing vulnerability requires a much broader scope and would involve efforts to address a wider range of actors and institutions. Indeed, they may call for sustained campaigns and long-term efforts. The two views – vulnerability as individual attribute and vulnerability as a socio-political and historical production – are not necessarily in opposition to each other – in many instances both views are

simultaneously held and efforts to address vulnerability include measures that address individuals as well as their socio-political contexts more broadly.

Alwang et al. (2001) provide a view of how ‘vulnerability’ is conceptualised in three disciplines: economics; sociology; and disaster management. They examine how different approaches result in different ways of measuring vulnerability. According to them, in economics, vulnerability is conceptualised ‘as an *outcome* of a process of household *responses* to risk (p. 5, their emphasis). As a result, economists measure vulnerability by examining the variability in outcomes, especially income variance. Whilst income variance, a metric premised on money, offers a convenient way to compare across different outcomes, Alwang et al. argue that this is too simplistic a measure, and it neglects important factors such as physical violence and illness, which contribute significantly to welfare losses to households. However, they concede that ‘a universal concept of vulnerability (one that aggregates all outcomes) might not be attainable, and instead we might need to settle with measures of vulnerability to different outcomes (vulnerability to measurable welfare loss, crime vulnerability, etc.)’ (p. 5). Even these single factor measures are not straightforward – efforts to develop indicators that attempt to translate a complex world into numbers are bound to face numerous challenges (Gorur, 2011, 2014). While a single metric has the advantage of facilitating comparability across contexts and time, such comparability comes at the cost of accepting a very narrow and inadequate conceptualisation of vulnerability, one that would provide little to guide any ecological or holistic policy approach to addressing vulnerability.

Because vulnerability is seen as *the probability of adverse outcomes*, identifying and quantifying vulnerability requires a benchmark to determine adversity of outcomes. One such benchmark is the poverty line. The probability of a household falling below the poverty line, for example, determines the vulnerability of a household to poverty. The convenience of such measurement of vulnerability is explained by Pritchitt, Suryahadi and Sumatro (2000, p. 1):

We define vulnerability as a probability, the risk a household will experience at least one episode of poverty in the near future. A household is defined to be vulnerable if it has 50-50 odds or worse of falling into poverty. Using these definitions we calculate the “Vulnerability to Poverty Line” (VPL) as the level of expenditures below which a household is vulnerable to poverty. This VPL allows the calculation of “Headcount Vulnerable Rate,” the proportion of households vulnerable to poverty, which is the direct analogue of the “Headcount Poverty Rate.”

The convenience offered by this simplistic metric is neutralised by its inadequacy – it does not consider any factor other than the monetary. Asset-based approaches describe vulnerability in terms of the *ability of populations to respond to risk*. Policies and remedies are thus focused on the use of ‘asset portfolios’ and the allocation of assets before and after adverse events (Alwang et al., 2000). These offer a more nuanced approach than one that is merely based on the poverty line.

Davies (1996) makes a useful distinction between ‘structural vulnerability’ (households with underlying characteristics similar to structural poverty, such as age, headship etc.), which makes poverty a chronic condition; and ‘proximate vulnerability’ in which vulnerability changes from one year to the next. The concept of ‘proximate vulnerability’ is important as it recognises the changing dynamics of vulnerability. For example, adaptations to vulnerability might see a brief respite from adverse outcome, but might lead to depletion of assets, which in turn could lead to structural vulnerability. Thus capacities and vulnerability are both emergent phenomena.

Sociology and anthropology, Alwang et al. note, offer ‘social vulnerability’ as an alternative to ‘economic vulnerability’. The concept of ‘social vulnerability’ allows for the identification of a range of individuals and groups as vulnerable using a variety of indicators beyond the monetary. Here, broad household characteristics, rather than measures of economic outcomes are in use. These characteristics might include ‘groups such as “children at risk”, female-headed households, elderly and disabled, and deal with intra-household relations’ (Alwang et al., 2001, p. 17). Sociologists also extend the definitions of assets to a broader notion of ‘social capital’ based on such factors as ‘strength of household relations’. The conceptualisations require the development of a range of indicators to establish vulnerability, capacity, resilience and risk. Such indicators may be based on assets and access to assets. Such measures offer alternatives to the economic common-metric models based on income and consumption.

The idea of vulnerability as a collective phenomenon is explored in the field of disaster management (for example, Dilley, 2000). They regard vulnerability as a function of social ties, institutional arrangements, social capital, environmental risk and social vulnerability. In disaster management, vulnerability is conceptualised as the pre-disposition to hazards such as famines or floods. In this sense the conceptualisation is of vulnerability as a structural phenomenon. The role of household assets, access to opportunity, and the resilience of groups are also factored into understandings of vulnerability in the field of disaster management. The concept of *resilience* gains prominence in disaster management, and it encompasses coping, which is composed of ‘the capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist, and recover from the impact of a natural disaster’ (Alwang, 2001).

The field of nutrition epidemiology expands the notion of vulnerability in a number of ways. A range of indicators of nutritional vulnerability have been elaborated which, aggregated over populations, allows for the development of nutritional profiles. In these measurements, the concept of nutritional vulnerability is linked not only to malnutrition, but to a range of other outcomes, such as educational attainment, probability of mortality, socio-economic status and productivity (Alwang, 2001).

This exploration of vulnerability in a variety of fields shows that vulnerability is a complex phenomenon and is difficult to measure. While simplistic understandings facilitate consistent measurement, such measures are conceptually impoverished and almost certain to misguide policy and planning. Vulnerability involves many factors which are difficult to quantify or ‘value’ and for which

indicators are difficult to develop. Because it is a complex phenomenon, multiple measures, which may not lend themselves to monetization, are required to quantify vulnerability.

YOUTH VULNERABILITY AND YOUTH POLICIES

Children and youth regarded as inherently vulnerable (Daniels, 2010). Children are recognised by UN Charter as requiring special protections. They are seen as vulnerable to abuse and neglect, and unable to protect themselves, and therefore, as a category, vulnerable. At the same time, youth are seen as the future of a nation and the well being of youth is seen as being of vital importance to the future prosperity and the well being of the nation itself. The influential annual *Youth Survey* by Mission Australia, for example, states:

The hopes and dreams of today's youth are a window to our nation's future. When young people dream big and believe they can achieve those dreams, the possibilities for our country are endless. But when our youth feel their dreams are out of reach and limit their goals for adulthood, Australia's future prosperity is at risk. (Fildes, Robbins, Cave, Perrens, & Wearing, 2014, p. 2)

As a result, youth are increasingly becoming a focus of policy globally. A recent survey on youth policy, *The State of Youth Policy in 2014* (Youth Policy Press, 2014) found that of the 198 countries in the world, 128 have a specific youth policy. Between 2013 and 2014, this number rose by 39, as more countries are developing these policies. The UN designated 2010-2011 as the International Year of Youth, and each year, August 12 is observed as International Youth Day, to draw attention to cultural and legal issues surrounding youth.

Since contemporary society is theorised as inherently full of uncertainties and challenges (Beck, 1992), all contemporary youth are seen as facing 'unprecedented challenges' and therefore at some level of risk. According to the *National Strategy for Young Australians* (Australian Government, 2010, p. 2):

For this current generation, being young involves tackling some unprecedented challenges including climate change, terrorism, ageing societies and infrastructure, changing job markets, technological advances, the increasing influence of popular culture and changing family and social structures.

If these factors point to wider social and political issues, such as climate change and terrorism, others point to more specific factors, related to the immediate experience of youth. Indeed, in such discourses, the 'risks' are not external, but closely associated with the youth themselves. These include considering adolescents as confused, full of self-doubt, prone to questioning authority and to experimentation – and thus exposed to – perhaps even inviting – a range of risks. In Australia's *National Strategy for Young Australians*, youth is described as:

... a period of enormous change in how young people relate to themselves, each other and the world around them. At this time, most young people

question their identity, values, interests and relationships. In the quest to find answers to these questions young people experiment and re-negotiate multiple relationships. They navigate transitions from home to independent living, school to work, single to partnered and form families of their own. (Australian Government, 2010, p. 2)

With the focus on the uncertainties and complexities of life in contemporary times, and of childhood, adolescence and youth as a period of questioning and transition, all youth are seen as inherently vulnerable. The cost of ‘making a successful transition to adulthood’ and becoming ‘self-sufficient’ are seen as challenging for some youth (Fernandes, 2010, p. 161). Based on research in the US, Fernandes finds that parents support children financially to a significant extent – providing about \$2,200 a year to their children between the ages of 18 and 34 ‘to supplement wages, pay for college tuition, and assist with down payments on a house, among other types of financial help’ (p. 161). Despite so much support, Fernandes asserts, ‘the current move from adolescence to adulthood has become longer and increasingly complex’. This transition to self-sufficiency is much more problematic for those without such financial support:

For vulnerable (or – at-risk) youth populations, the transition to adulthood is further complicated by a number of challenges, including family conflict or abandonment and obstacles to securing employment that provides adequate wages and health insurance. (Fernandes, 2010, p. 161)

Youth vulnerability is often associated with ‘disconnectedness’ from education and employment. Such disconnectedness is seen as producing poor outcomes not only for youth themselves, but also for national productivity and for society at large. The negative outcomes for these youth can be quite wide-ranging:

These youth may be prone to outcomes that have negative consequences for their future development as responsible, self-sufficient adults. Risk outcomes include teenage parenthood; homelessness; drug abuse; delinquency; physical and sexual abuse; and school dropout. Detachment from the labor market and school – or disconnectedness – may be the single strongest indicator that the transition to adulthood has not been made successfully. Approximately 1.8 million noninstitutionalized civilian youth are not working or in school. (Fernandes, 2010, p. 161)

These negative outcomes could also reinforce each other to create a complex set of inter-related responses and outcomes that could become stubborn and difficult to displace.

The year 2010 saw the UN launch the International Year of Youth. A significant feature of this year was the System-Wide Action Plan (SWAP) on Youth. Five thematic areas formed the core of this Action Plan: employment, entrepreneurship, political inclusion, citizenship and protection of rights, and education, including on sexual and reproductive health.

In youth policies, vulnerability appears to be quite loosely theorised and calculated. There is little explicit understanding in terms of risk, response and outcomes. There is little evidence that the complexity of the ‘assemblage’ of poverty – the interconnectedness and the ways a range of external factors impact and limit individuals’ capacity to respond to risks and challenges – is understood. Often the ‘risks’ in youth policies – substance dependencies and abuse, dropping out of school, being unemployed or suffering from certain types of diseases or disorders – are located within individuals. As a result, such risks – and their associated outcomes – may be seen as avoidable risks which youth almost voluntarily ‘bring upon themselves’. This view complicates the apportioning of responsibility for the alleviation of these problems.

Approaches to the vulnerability of youth range from therapeutic approaches involving the diagnosis of abuse and supporting the vulnerable through therapy, to a legal approach which seeks to establish a case for intervention (Parton, 2008). These approaches lead to a focus on safeguarding youth and the development of anticipatory and preventative measures to protect vulnerable youth from adverse outcomes.

Profiling ‘vulnerable youth’ helps policy makers and administrators to focus interventions and funding. In the US, for example, those who are deemed ‘vulnerable’ include:

- Youth emancipating from foster care
- Runaway and homeless youth
- Youth involved in the juvenile justice system;
- Immigrant youth and youth with limited English proficiency (LEP);
- Youth with physical and mental disabilities;
- Youth with mental disorders; and
- Youth receiving special education. (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2014)

Other groups identified as vulnerable include ‘young unmarried mothers, high school dropouts, and disconnected (e.g., not in school nor working) youth’ (Fernandes, 2010). Vulnerable youth may be identified by membership in a category (immigrants, those with disability) and by behaviour (substance abusers, runaways).

In Australian policy documents, factors that place young people ‘at risk’ of poor outcomes include ‘gender, Indigenous status, educational attainment, work status, income levels and health status’ (National Strategy for Young Australians, p. 2). Profiling vulnerable youth in this way allows policy and governance provisions to be instituted to focus on particular populations and protect them from adverse effects. On the other hand, it may also single out certain populations for policy intervention and perpetuate certain stereotypes and tropes in youth vulnerability, and so it has the potential of being detrimental and problematic

The need to respond to youth vulnerability is couched in the language of the rights of children and youth, with several private or government sponsored youth advocacy organisations in play. These activists and youth support groups promote the idea the policy makers must attend to the voices of the youth themselves to

develop policies which are both relevant effective. For instance, in Australia, Mission Australia has conducted annual surveys since 2001 to elicit the views and experiences of Australian youth to inform policy makers. Youth involvement is also sought in reaching out to other youth and to engage them in the priorities and programs being promoted by policy makers. Encouraging youth to be engaged citizens is also a policy priority in many countries.

VULNERABILITY AS AN ANALYTICAL TOOL: PROMISES AND PROBLEMS

Since 'vulnerability' is widely used as a basis for analysing a variety of social situations and phenomena in various disciplines and policy fields, it is important to assess its potential as an analytical tool. Cardona (2003) provides a comprehensive account of the contribution of the concept of 'vulnerability' to understandings of 'hazard' and 'risk', and also to the mathematisation of vulnerability and risk. He argues that despite the fuzziness and elasticity of the term 'vulnerable', the concept has proven to be useful in its capacity to clarify notions of 'risk' and 'disaster' in the field of disaster management. Tracing the historical development of the concept of 'vulnerability', Cardona argues that 'risk' and 'disaster' were both previously connected with uncontrollable physical phenomena, but the concept of 'vulnerability' provided a distinction between day-to-day difficulties and specific external hazards. He defines vulnerability as 'an internal risk factor of the subject or system that is exposed to a hazard and corresponds to its intrinsic predisposition to be affected, or to be susceptible to damage' (p. 37). This conceptualisation encourages a focus on 'the physical, economic, political or social susceptibility or predisposition of a community' to destabilising phenomena, and the capacity of particular social groups to adapt to or face challenges.

One outcome of this conceptualisation, Cardona suggests, is that both 'hazard' and 'vulnerability' can be mathematically expressed. Hazard is calculated as the probability of an event, of a calculated intensity, occurring at a particular geographic and temporal location. Vulnerability is calculated as the probability of a subject being exposed to the threat or hazard. Risk is calculated as the potential loss to the exposed subject. Importantly, in these conceptualisations, hazard and vulnerability are mutually constitutive. Damage from hazards are understood not only as a function of the severity of the external phenomenon, but a product also of the conditions of those exposed to the phenomenon. Damage from natural disasters such as earthquakes, for example, depend not only the severity of the phenomenon, but on the conditions of the exposed subjects. The concept of vulnerability enabled risk and disaster to be understood in a more holistic way.

Rendering 'vulnerability' and 'risk' calculable facilitated their participation in a range of fields such as developmental economics and the insurance industry. It has also provided new ways to think about reducing the effects of adverse conditions to exposed subjects. For example, where hazards themselves could not be controlled or modified, the focus shifted to risk reduction by changing the conditions that contribute to vulnerability. Factors contributing to the vulnerability of the exposed

subjects, such as the economic, social, cultural and educational conditions of the exposed populations, came into greater focus.

The field of disaster management saw calculations of risk and damage become more and more sophisticated, with notions such as ‘transfer of risk’ employed by insurance companies. This notion took into account technologies and systems devised to mitigate some of the effects of disasters. Such understandings followed the recognition that ‘disasters’ were not only ‘natural’, such as earthquakes, but also involved technological systems, particularly in urban locations.

Cardona suggests that empirical data as well as probabilistic statistics advanced understandings of risk and vulnerability. The mathematics around these notions, in calculating such things as estimation of potential loss in case of earthquakes in urban centres began to include ‘damage matrixes, loss functions or curves, or fragility or vulnerability indices’ (p. 42) which related the ‘phenomenon’ with the degree of expected harm.

The ramifications of such calculations of vulnerability, risk and harm are widespread and consequential. Cardona points out that quantification and probabilistic modelling, and the linking of such calculations to cost-benefit ratios, have allowed such calculations to participate in standard setting, benchmarks and codification of practices. In the case of earthquakes, for example, cost-benefit analyses could influence ‘building codes, security standards, urban planning and investment projects’ (p. 42).

It is, however, in the mid-20th century, according to Cardona, that the social theory of disasters came to life, following US government interest in the ‘behaviour of the population in the case of war’ (Cardona, 2003, p. 42, citing Quarantelli, 1998). This interest brought into focus the importance of attending to individual and collective perceptions in managing risk and disaster. The focus on perceptions, reactions and responses of those affected in applied social sciences, especially in the field of geography, he adds, provided the springboard for the concept of vulnerability.

As vulnerability came to be appreciated as a socially constructed phenomenon, more factors began to be considered in the make-up of vulnerability, including family fragility; access to social utilities; the collective economy; access to property and credit; ethnic, racial or political discrimination and oppression; literacy levels and educational opportunities (Cardona et al., 2012; Marskrey, 1998).

Conceptual models inspired by neo-Marxist approaches recognised vulnerability as affected by social pressures at global, intermediate and local levels. Thus vulnerability might be affected by ‘root causes’ such as the social, economic and political structures at the global level; ‘dynamic pressures’ such as population pressures, unethical practices or environmental degradation at the intermediate level; and ‘unsafe conditions’, such as poverty, social fragility and exposure to harm at the local level (Cannon, 1994). Such a conceptualisation assists in clearly addressing issues at multiple levels to reduce vulnerability and mitigate risk.

The differential effects that the same hazards have on different populations have led to a focus on the differential in access and capacities to withstand and respond

to harm (Sen, 1981). One issue with this understanding and focus is that there has been a tendency to link tropicality and development with vulnerability, so that large portions of the globe are written off and conceptualised as disaster-prone, poor and riddled with disease (Blankoff, 2001). The type of ‘profiling’ of vulnerable youth described in the section above is another example of the tendency to anticipate vulnerability perhaps pessimistically and in detrimental ways.

This historical account of the development of the notion of risk can be analysed as proceeding in two directions – a realist perspective, often adopted by epidemiologists and economists, that conceptualises risk as objectively measurable; and a ‘constructivist’ approach adopted by sociologists, that sees vulnerability as tied up with individual and collective perceptions. Understanding and assessing vulnerability is contingent upon which of the two perspectives is adopted.

Constructivist social scientists would seek to engage with young people themselves to understand their perceptions and the wider conditions in which they might encounter adversity, their capacities, the resources they access and the support they are able to draw upon to elaborate the extent of their vulnerability. However, these forms of assessment are also not infallible. Moreover, such assessments are expensive to make and so cannot be repeated to keep pace with changing perceptions and situations. Such assessments are not easily quantified – and as a result they are more difficult to utilise for allocation of resources and determination of the nature of assistance and care required, particularly in situations where resources are scarce. Moreover, vulnerability is a futuristic concept – it is the probability of being affected by future hazards – and by definition, this restricts the possibility of empirical work. The particular methods used in evaluating risk and vulnerability depends, then, on the context in which the decisions will be utilised, as Cardona clarifies:

The selection of appropriate vulnerability and risk evaluation approaches depends on the decision-making context (high confidence). Vulnerability and risk assessment methods range from global and national quantitative assessments to local-scale qualitative participatory approaches. The appropriateness of a specific method depends on the adaptation or risk management issue to be addressed, including for instance the time and geographic scale involved, the number and type of actors, and economic and governance aspects. Indicators, indices, and probabilistic metrics are important measures and techniques for vulnerability and risk analysis. However, quantitative approaches for assessing vulnerability need to be complemented with qualitative approaches to capture the full complexity and the various tangible and intangible aspects of vulnerability in its different dimensions. (Cardona et al., 2012, pp. 67, their emphasis)

Several epistemological and ontological issues arise in apprehending and understanding vulnerability as an issue in the field of youth policy. Translating understandings into policies to govern youth are even more fraught not only with issues with assessment and measurement, but also with moral and ethical dilemmas.

To begin with, there are issues of privacy and the rights of parents and children, which sometimes come in conflict with the government's obligation to protect children from harm and abuse (Daniels, 2010). Even if the moral mandate to protect children is assumed to be very clear, notions of 'adversity', 'risk' and 'vulnerability' are quite slippery when it comes to children and youth. This creates a problem for assessing and quantifying vulnerability. But assessment and quantification is imperative if there is to be a basis for making a decision about protecting children and youth, especially when the family's rights and the children's or youths' perceptions are in conflict with those of the protection agencies.

Indeed, the notion of 'childhood', 'adolescence' and 'youth' as specific, definable categories characterised by vulnerability is itself challenged (cf. Stainton Rogers, 2001). Designating certain categories such a childhood as inherently vulnerable casts those categories as problematic. The 'branding' of young people as 'vulnerable', dependent and needing care and support might itself be detrimental to their well being. Studies of 'resilience' challenge the fatalistic assumptions about developmental pathways and the predictability of behaviours and outcomes. Issues linked with youth vulnerability include mental and physical illness, poverty, homelessness, fragile family situations, being in foster care, poor educational outcomes, substance abuse and addiction and criminality, to name only a few issues. With such a wide range of factors involved, there are links to a variety of fields, so youth vulnerability is likely being approached by a combination of both realist and constructivist understandings, without a close examination of either the ontological and epistemological underpinnings or the consequences of adopting a particular stance.

However, unlike in the case of disasters such as earthquakes, where 'victims' are easy to identify, any potential intervention would require some sort of benchmarks or indicators that can assist in locating vulnerable young people and in assessing the nature and the extent of their vulnerability. That such an exercise is fraught is readily apparent. Realist approaches that require quantification and objective measurement will seek to develop a set of indicators to designate youth vulnerability. This could take the form of the typology used in Victoria's 'Vulnerable Youth Framework', where various combinations and degrees of poverty, unemployment, being a school drop-out, substance abuse and so on are used to create a framework to classify youth as minimally vulnerable to severely vulnerable (see Te Riele, this volume). Such efforts seek to assess, quantify and grade levels of vulnerability. These ratings are of great consequence as they could determine whether or not particular groups or individuals qualify for certain types of interventions, funding or care. Conversely, they may perforce bring certain groups or individuals under certain forms of care. The very classification is itself only possible if certain forms of surveillance are in place. These measures and classifications take little account of the perceptions of the concerned individuals or groups considered vulnerable. Moreover, many who might consider themselves vulnerable to particular harms may not fall into the classifications of vulnerability and thus they may not get the assistance they require.

A frequently raised issue is the effect on young people of being labelled 'vulnerable'. A tension is identified between identifying those needing special provision and the effect on already fragile subjects of such labelling. When vulnerability is extended to whole groups on the basis of colour, ethnicity and so on, this tension becomes even more acutely manifest. Assessments of vulnerability might also ignore or suppress understandings of the strengths and resources available to young people.

Risk and vulnerability have a predictive element, and policy and governance aims not only to address harm where it occurs, but also identify the possibility of harm and prevent it from occurring. Judgements with regard to the possibility of harm require an element of 'fortune telling' – and whether this is done subjectively based on experience by child protection workers and similar personnel, or on the basis of mathematical calculations, the results are often inaccurate and unreliable (Munro, 2007). Since vulnerability assessments are prone to error and inaccuracy, Munro suggests that a high level of institutional tolerance for inaccuracy is necessary.

Despite these drawbacks, the concept of vulnerability has been useful in a variety of ways. It has served to complexify notions of risk and harm and offered a range of factors as relevant to research and policy that were previously not available. It has served to enlarge the scope of intervention. The ways in which vulnerability is used and the ways in which it participates in policy and practice are elaborated in the chapters in this volume.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The preparation of this chapter was supported through the Australian Government's Collaborative Research Networks (CRN) program.

REFERENCES

- Alwang, J., Siegel, P. B., & Jørgensen, S., L. (2001). Vulnerability: A view from different disciplines. *Social Protection Discussion Paper Series* (Vol. 0115, 46 pp.). Washington, D.C.: Human Development Network, The World Bank.
- Australian Government. (2010). *National strategy for young Australians* (38 pp.). Canberra.
- Bankoff, G. (2003). Vulnerability as a measure of change in society. *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*, 21(2), 5-30.
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society: Towards a new modernity* (M. Ritter, Trans.). London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Cannon, T. (1994). Vulnerability analysis and the explanation of "natural" disasters In A. Varley (Ed.), *Disasters, development and environment*. Chichester, New York, Brisbane, Toronto and Singapore: John Wiley and Sons.
- Cardona, O. D. (2003). The need for rethinking the concepts of vulnerability and risk from a holistic perspective: A necessary review and criticism for effective risk management. In G. Bankoff, G. Frerks, & D. Hilhorst (Eds.), *Mapping vulnerability: Disasters, development and people* (pp. 37-52). London: Earthscan Publishers.
- Cardona, O. D., Aalst, M. K. v., Birkmann, J., Fordham, M., McGregor, G., Perez, R., ..., Sinh, B. T. (2012). Determinants of risk: exposure and vulnerability. In C. B. Field, V. Barros, T. F. Stocker, D.

- Qin, D. J. Dokken, K. L. Ebi, M. D. Mastrandrea, K. J. Mach, G.-K. Plattner, S. K. Allen, M. Tignor, & P. M. Midgley (Eds.), *A special report of Working Groups I and II of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)*. Cambridge, UK, and New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Daniels, B. (2010). Concepts of adversity, risk, vulnerability and resilience: A discussion in the context of 'Child Protection System'. *Social Policy & Society*, 9(2), 231-241.
- Davies, A. P. (1996). Targeting the vulnerable in emergency situations: Who is vulnerable? *Lancet*, 348(9031), 868-871.
- Dilley, M. (2000). Climate, change, and disasters. In A. Kerimer & M. Arnold (Eds.), *Managing disaster risk in emerging economies*. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.
- Fernandes-Alcantara, A. L. (2010). Vulnerable youth: Background and policies. In D. Neumann (Ed.), *Vulnerable and disconnected youth: Background and policies* (pp. 161-221). Nova Science Publishers.
- Fernandes-Alcantara, A. L. (2014). *Vulnerable youth: Background and policies*. Congressional Research Service.
- Fildes, J., Robbins, A., Cave, L., Perrens, B., & Wearing, A. (2014). *Mission Australia's 2014 Youth Survey Report*. Mission Australia.
- Gorur, R. (2011). ANT on the PISA trail: Following the statistical pursuit of certainty. *Educational Philosophy & Theory*, 43(5-6), 76-93.
- Gorur, R. (2014). Producing calculable worlds: Education at a glance. *Discourse: Studies in Cultural Politics of Education, Special issue on policy enactments, assemblage and agency in educational policy contexts* (Online). doi: 10.1080/01596306.2015.974942
- Marskrey, A. (Ed.). (1998). *Navegando entre Brumas: La aplicación de los sistemas de Información Geográfica al Analisis de Riesgo en América Latina*. Peru, Lima: LA RED and IT.
- Munro, E. (2007). *Child protection*. London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Parton, N. (2008). Towards the preventative-surveillance state. In K. Burns & D. Lynch (Eds.), *Child protection practices and perspectives*. Dublin: A. and A. Farmer Ltd.
- Pritchett, L., Suryadi, A., & Sumatro, S. (2000). *Quantifying vulnerability to poverty: A proposed measure, applied to Indonesia* (32 pp.). Jakarta: Social Monitoring and Early Response Unit.
- Quarantelli, E. L. (1988). Disaster studies: An analysis of the social and historical factors affecting the development of research in the area. *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*, 5(3), 285-310.
- Sen, A. (1981). *Poverty and famine: An essay on entitlement and deprivation*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Stainton Rogers, W. (2001). Constructing childhood, constructing child concern. In P. Foley, J. Roche, & C. Tucker (Eds.), *Children in society*. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave with the Open University.
- World Bank. (2013). *World Development Report 2014: Risk and opportunity – Managing risk for development*. World Development Report (344 pp.). Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.
- Youth Policy Press. (2014). *The state of youth policy in 2014* (84 pp.). Berlin: Youth Policy Press.

Radhika Gorur

*Victoria Institute for Education, Diversity and Lifelong Learning
Victoria University, Melbourne*

KITTY TE RIELE

2. CONUNDRUMS FOR YOUTH POLICY AND PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION

By virtue of their age, young people as a group are the object of both practice interventions and policy attention ‘done’ to them on premises based on adult perceptions. Sweeping generalisations about ways on which ‘young people these days’ behave badly have a long history. The quote below is commonly attributed to Hesiod, in the Eighth Century B.C.:

I see no hope for the future of our people if they are dependent on the frivolous youth of today, for certainly all youth are reckless beyond words. When I was a boy, we were taught to be discrete and respectful of elders, but the present youth are exceedingly wise [disrespectful] and impatient of restraint. (cited in Scales, 2013, p. 228)

As Bessant (2008, p. 347) points out with considerable dismay, more recently neurological science has been used to argue that young people as an entire cohort are “a ‘high risk group’ who are irresponsible, troublesome, rebellious, and even criminally inclined, and that this can be explained in terms of the biological development of the human brain”.

Of particular interest for this book, however, are the ways distinctions are made within the youth cohort: “a central problem, accepted broadly, is the marginalisation of *some* groups of young people” (Wyn & White, 1998, p. 27, my emphasis). In much research, policy and service provision, certain young people are identified as being more in need of support, more at risk, or more vulnerable than others of the same age. A policy document in the Australian state of Victoria exemplifies this: *Positive pathways for Victoria’s vulnerable young people: a policy framework to support vulnerable youth*. The framework uses a ‘traffic light’ approach to identify layers of vulnerability (Victorian Government, 2010, p. 4):

- Green: All young people (age 10-25). “The majority of Victoria’s young people cope well with vulnerabilities that arise during adolescence”.
- Yellow: Young people who “experience additional problems that require an early service intervention”.
- Orange: Young people who are “highly vulnerable” and “require comprehensive and coordinated interventions from a range of support services”.

- Red: “Young people who are at high risk” and “require intensive support services”.

The framework is a good example of politicians and public servants aiming to “ensure better coordination of services on the ground and to facilitate mechanisms for cross-portfolio work across government” and to support “vulnerable young Victorians achieve their full potential, within strong families and vibrant, inclusive communities”. It also highlights some of the conundrums of categorising young people in terms of vulnerability. In this chapter I discuss two core dilemmas, related to the locus of attention, and the focus on a minority. For the first one, I will return to this policy document. For both, the discussion also draws on my own (individually or with colleagues) research with flexible education programs across Australia. These programs typically provide education at secondary school level (with Year 12 being the final year of high school in Australia) for young people for whom conventional schooling has not worked well. Importantly, however, the discussion applies equally to other sectors that affect young people, such as health, housing and welfare.

LOCUS OF ATTENTION

The first conundrum relates to where attention is focused. For policy and service provision, that locus is usually the individual young person. For example, in *Positive pathways for Victoria’s vulnerable young people* (Victorian Government, 2010, p. 1) vulnerability is defined at the level of “young people who [...] are at risk of not realising their potential to achieve positive life outcomes”.

Human Rights

A potential benefit of focusing attention at the level of the individual is recognizing the right of each young person to a happy and fruitful life, enjoying what Fraser (2009) refers to as parity of participation in society. The Victorian Government (2010, p. 3) explains:

The actions contained in the framework seek to ensure that vulnerable young Victorians are supported to achieve the same outcomes that are sought for all young Victorians – that they have a strong sense of belonging, are motivated to create and share in opportunities and are valued for their contributions and influence in their communities.

The document explicitly refers to the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* as a key policy that underpins the framework “to ensure that the rights of vulnerable young Victorians, who are often disengaged and disenfranchised, are protected” (Victorian Government, 2010, p. 7). This connects with the finding of my recent national research on flexible learning programs (Te Riele, 2014) that a commitment to each student’s needs, interests and rights is a

foundational principle of high quality FLPs. Staff members from two different sites highlight this perspective:

For young people in South Australia, the SACE [Year 12 Certificate] is the core accreditation and not only should you do it, but it should be an entitlement. (Bill, staff, in Te Riele, 2014, p. 61)

I have a very strong belief that all young people have the right to a good quality education. (James, staff, in Te Riele, 2014, p. 61)

Identifying Barriers

Problems arise when the barriers to fulfilling these rights are perceived as being located at the personal level – within the actions and choices of individual young person (their behaviours) and their immediate context (their experiences). For example, risk factors listed for the ‘yellow’ category (see above, Victorian Government, 2010, p. 4) are:

- Low-level truancy
- First contact with police
- Emerging mental health issues
- Experimental alcohol or other drug use
- Family conflict
- Unstable peer group
- Isolated from community
- Pregnant/teenage parent

In the education arena, Australian policy identifying young people at risk of disengaging or disconnecting from school focuses on “issues with behaviour, educational performance, socialization” as well as “high rates of absenteeism” and “frequent suspensions/exclusions” (DEEWR, 2011, pp. 16-17).

These lists are a considerable improvement on explanations of the poorer outcomes for certain (for example working class or ethnic minority) young people that are based on their perceived lack of intelligence, deficient language, and low aspirations (Smyth and Wrigley, 2013). Nevertheless, such lists of attributes continue to locate problems at the personal level, borrowing a diagnostic model from epidemiology that is of limited usefulness in social fields such as education, housing and welfare (France, 2007). Yet such individualised perspectives on vulnerability or risk have become self-evident in contemporary developed nations, where “the discourses of youth at-risk seek to individualise the risks to the self that are generated in the institutionally structured risk environments of the ‘risk society’ (Beck, 1992)” (Kelly, 2001, p. 23).

The concern is that overlooked or underplayed in these accounts are the ways in which environments (including a more individualistic society, see Eckersley, 2011) actively generate vulnerabilities. This is not to deny the significant problems individual young people may face but rather to recognise that these problems often

have a wider social dimension (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001) based on external economic or social conditions that exert significant influence to shape the actions and choices of young people.

Young people do not simply possess low, medium or high vulnerability (as per the traffic light approach outlined above, in Victorian Government, 2010). Any person's real life is more complex than that, both at any one time and over time. Various 'risk factors' are likely to cluster together, operating together on one person at one time, and not at all at other times, as well as in varying complex sequences over time (Batten & Russell, 1995). Foster and Spencer (2011, p. 138) note that:

'disadvantaged,' 'disaffected,' or 'homeless youth' are not homogeneous categories. Each of the people we spoke to had different experiences, different ways of talking about and dealing with trauma, and different ideas of what constituted a good job and a desirable future.

In addition, there is no straightforward, causal relationship between risk factors and outcomes. France (2007, p. 5) points to the concept of false positives: young people whose experiences include various risk factors but who are nevertheless doing well. Others experience complex difficulties that evade capture in lists and frameworks. As Batten and Russell (1995, p. 50) emphasise: "Relationships need to be viewed as forming a dense and complex web of interrelated, interacting, multi-directional forces". This was recognised by Murray (2012), the then Director of the Youth Partnerships Secretariat in the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD):

One of the conundrums facing us is that state interventions, intended to improve young people's lives, sometimes miss the mark, failing to achieve the health, education or wellbeing outcome intended. Moreover, families, children and young people who experience multiple vulnerabilities are often unable to benefit from the available community resources and supports. They experience periods of intermittent or chronic disadvantage as a result.

In recognition of such complexities, many researchers as well as policy makers and practitioners prefer an ecological model (see the chapters in this volume by Hampshire and Rob White). The ecological systems theory conceived by Bronfenbrenner (1994) highlights the environmental and societal influences on child development, as well as the influence of changes over time. Similarly in the field of youth studies, Wyn and White (1998, p. 34, original italic) argue that: "If the issue of young people's marginalization is explored from a contextual framework, the first feature that becomes apparent is *complexity*". This contextual perspective connects the experience of youth to "wider relations of social division and of social control" (p.28). It means that vulnerability or marginalization does not simply reside within a young person, and that it is constantly being re-shaped in response to both external factors and young people's agency and change.

In my research with flexible learning programs (FLPs), a core question in different FLPs always is why young people attend the FLP rather than a

conventional school. The responses from adults (staff and community stakeholders) and young people (students and graduates) mention some of the factors listed above (see Victorian Government, 2010) but they tend to point to external circumstances. Overall, they locate vulnerability less within the young person and more within their environment. Schools figure prominently:

Because of bullying. And I kept getting in trouble for fighting back. (Kane, student, in Te Riele, 2012, p. 44)

If you ask them for help they'd be looking at you just saying 'I just explained it to you I'm not going to do it again'. [...] I just couldn't get it. Everyone else in the class could but he'd just move on and then there's me left there. Trying to do the work and I'm like 'I can't do it'. (Kelli, graduate, in Te Riele, 2012, p. 42)

Schools are commonly perceived as a component of young people's environment that offers a solution to vulnerability. The suggestion by the Victorian Government (2010, p. 17) is characteristic of this view:

Education is the most effective means to enable young people to thrive, learn and grow to enjoy a productive, rewarding and fulfilling life. It is also an avenue to break cycles of disadvantage and a powerful way to reduce exposure to harm or participation in risky behaviours or crime.

Kane and Kelli (above) represent young people for whom, in contrast, certain schools are part of the problem by "activating or enabling the risk of some young people" (Strategic Partners, 2001, p. 16). Tackling vulnerability requires substantial change in such schools rather than policy makers simply "link[ing] vulnerable young people into education" (Victorian Government, 2010, p. 17) as a 'one size fits all' solution.

Arguing for this shift in focus is not, however, an argument for shifting the blame from young people onto teachers and schools. Students' marginalisation in and by schooling can be "as much a struggle for the schools and teachers as it is for the young people" (Smyth & Hattam, 2001, p. 403) since this marginalisation is ultimately based in structural societal inequalities. This is evident in quotes from staff and community stakeholders in FLPs:

They're very much kids from often disadvantaged backgrounds so that there are normally multiple problems of a social type in their backgrounds, not the least of which is poverty. (Mr Pitt, community, in Te Riele, 2012, p. 47)

With the Aboriginal students, we find that some business people in the town won't take them on [for work experience]. (Mr. Lawson, staff, in Te Riele, 2012, p. 48)

Poverty and racism pose barriers that cannot be solved by intervention in young people's lives, their families and schools – but require substantial change in society both to reduce those barriers and to enable constructive work in schools (and other youth services) to endure into these students' adult lives. Despite widespread

concern about rising social inequality (see the popularity of the book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* by Piketty, 2014) there is resistance to enacting and financing the social responsibilities such change entails (Garner, 2014).

Moral Panic

Finally, a concern with identifying personal risk factors for vulnerable young people is that it may contribute to moral panic about the threats posed by these young people to themselves and society (Cohen, 1972; Roman, 1996). This is evident in relation to “earn or learn” policies for young people in Australia (also see Wyn, and Black and Walsh in this volume), with some young people perceived as making bad choices that impact negatively both on their own future life chances and on the nation’s economy. The current Prime Minister Tony Abbott (2014) has stated that:

... the interesting thing is that if a young person wants to receive a government benefit there’s a very easy way to do that and that is to actually go into further education or training. I say to people who are about to leave school: earn or learn. What is unacceptable to our community and what should be unacceptable to you is leaving school to go on a welfare benefit. That is no way to begin your life – it is no way to begin your life as a constructive contributor to the Australian community.

Expectations that young people will either be in paid employment or in education during periods of high (youth) unemployment ignore structural constraints (such as the availability of suitable jobs and affordable transport) and risk demonising young people who do not meet these requirements as ‘lazy’ and as (in the words of the current federal Treasurer) ‘leaners’ rather than ‘lifters’ (Hockey, 2014). This leads to concerns about stigmatisation, which are taken up in the next section.

FOCUS ON A MINORITY

The second conundrum is created by the common tendency to identify a minority of young people as vulnerable. For example, *Positive pathways for Victoria’s vulnerable young people* (Victorian Government, 2010, p. 3) notes that:

While the majority of Victoria’s young people are faring well, there is a small but significant number of young people aged 10-25 years who, through a combination of their circumstances, stage of development and barriers to participation, are at risk of not achieving positive life outcomes.

This fits with a tradition in policy that places the cut-off point for disadvantage so that it refers to a minority (Connell, 1994) and with research that aims to measure the size of the group that is ‘at risk’ (see Wyn & White, 1998). This approach enables provision of targeted intervention to the small number of young people who need support. An example is provided by the guidelines for Youth Connections providers, which were part of a national policy platform between

2009-2014 to raise educational attainment at upper secondary level in Australia. The guidelines distinguish between three connection levels. Providers had to assess the level relevant to a young person, and provide services relevant to that level. The levels were (DEEWR, 2011, pp. 16-17, original underline):

Connection Level 1 applies to young people who are attached to/attending school/education on a regular basis, but who are at risk of disengaging from school/education. [...]

Connection Level 2a applies to young people whose attendance record at school/education is poor and they are at risk of disconnecting. [...]

Connection Level 2b applies to young people who have been continuously disconnected from school/education for longer than three months.

The positive intention of this kind of identification of (small) groups in need, is that this will lead to better service provision. A common critique, however, is that it will lead to increased stigmatisation of young people. For example, Foster and Spencer (2011, p. 128) argue:

Social scientific knowledge has played an enormous role in responding to, facilitating, and legitimating the kind of thinking that makes ‘prevention’ a desirable way of governing populations (France 2007), and this has undoubtedly improved the lives of certain people at certain times. Granted, the language of risk and resilience does, in some ways, relieve young research subjects of responsibility for factors that might be beyond their control. However, this vocabulary is not much less stigmatizing or normative than labeling some young people ‘problems,’ ‘hoodlums,’ or ‘delinquents’.

This quote highlights the dilemma that focusing on the potential problem of stigmatisation may lead to a too cavalier dismissal of the potential benefit of better service provision. After all, those “certain people” whose lives were improved are real human beings whose experiences also matter. In this section I address both of these potentials: better service provision and stigmatisation – and also the counter-intuitive possibilities of targeted intervention leading to worse service delivery and to reduced stigmatisation.

Service Provision

The argument that the focus on a minority leads to better service provision is based, first, on a recognition that resources (funding, time, professional expertise) are scarce. Identifying some young people as vulnerable – rather than providing a particular service for everyone – enables these limited resources to be targeted at those who need them most. This is reminiscent of the practice in emergency medicine of triage: the decision-making process about the priority different patients should get for treatment. More generally, triage can be defined as a process aimed at making the best possible choices in a complex situation, to meet many people’s needs with limited means. For example in education, the problem of limited

resources in the face of much student need is well-established (see Gonski et al., 2011) and the issue of poor educational outcomes for specific young people has been persistent (Smyth & Wrigley, 2013). Diamond (2006) describes the use of triage to offer particular supports to supports students' literacy.¹

Distributive justice is served by targeting resources and services to those young people who most need them (Fraser, 1996, 2009). In our research on flexible learning programs (FLPs), my colleagues and I (Mills et al., 2015) recognise that "the benefits of schooling are distributed quite unjustly" (p. 157). We show that the provision of flexible learning programs goes some way to redressing this, since "many of their students would not be engaged in schooling if it were not for the existence of such alternatives" (p. 158). Similarly, in her research comparing views about literacy of children (aged 11) from affluent and poor backgrounds, Kellett (2009) found that the latter group had few of the opportunities available to the former. She concludes homework clubs are a "lifeline" (p. 405) for children living in poverty.

Secondly, service provision may be better when a minority is targeted if that means services are more suitable and relevant. Kellett (2009, p. 405) provides suggestions for running homework clubs in ways that address the importance identified by the children from poor backgrounds of "access to adult expertise and [...] reading opportunities that promote private confidence building and enjoyment". Drawing on Fraser (1996, 2009) we (Mills et al., 2015) refer to the recognition aspect of social justice that is fostered by flexible learning programs. Education in these FLPS was made more relevant because "curricula and structures took into account marginalised cultures" and more appropriate through "Flexible arrangements [which] ensured that the 'different' adversities that many of these young people faced could be accommodated" (p. 161). Students in FLPs highlight the way staff contribute to the quality of education, for example:

I was actually quite surprised to find teachers like this in a place like this, they say this school is, you know, you've got no hope or nothing, it's all the drop-outs and stuff. When you think about it, they've got some of the best teachers in this school (Ben, student, in Te Riele, 2012, pp. 55-56)

On the other hand, there are some risks that service provision may be worse when it is set up to target a particular minority of young people. Scarcity of resources reduces the sustainability of such services, no matter how beneficial they are. As an Australian review of educational innovation (Strategic Partners, 2001, p. 93) noted: "Without systemic change, effective practice that serves marginalised young people will mostly remain isolated, and eventually disappear when the personal energy or funding runs out". This requires policy reform, moving services from the margins of pilot programs, short-term tenders, and special initiatives, into comprehensive and continuing provision. In my research on flexible learning programs, the provision of systemic support and resources was also found to be a key condition for enabling programs to do good work (Te Riele, 2014). When funding depends on a snapshot of enrolments on a census date or on short-term

tenders, programs find they are “under more regulatory pressure to seek other funding” (Jason, staff, in Te Riele, 2014, p. 67). This is exacerbated when:

... even when it’s at full tilt, you’re still not receiving the same kind of funding a secondary school receives, while working with people who need much higher levels of resources. We do breakfasts and lunches and camps at no cost. We do not have student fees. (James, staff, in Te Riele, 2014, p. 67)

In addition, a concern is that when provision for ‘vulnerable’ young people separates them from their peers this may lead to stigmatisation of those young people (see below) and to a diminished democracy for everyone (Fielding & Moss, 2011; Slee, 2011). In his proposals for reframing the field of inclusive education, Slee (2011) refers to schooling as an “apprenticeship in democracy” (p. 154) which requires an inclusive community rather than segregation.

Stigmatisation

As Foster and Spencer (2011, see the quote earlier in this chapter) exemplify, a major critique of identifying some young people as ‘at risk’ or ‘vulnerable’ is that it leads to stigmatisation. Bourdieu (1990, p. 28) points out that “the logic of the classificatory label is very exactly that of racism, which stigmatises its victims by imprisoning them in a negative essence”. The concern is with a “false distinction” (Dwyer and Wyn, 2001) between a supposedly ‘normal’ mainstream and ‘problematic’ minority. In his examination of ‘special education’ for students with disabilities Slee (2011, p. 12, original emphasis) challenges the term ‘regular’ schools, because it is:

... code for the implied *normal school*. It follows that there must be *normal or regular students* for whom these schools exist. And, as the logic proceeds, there are other children who are not normal, regular, or valid.

Similarly, identification of vulnerable youth may be informed by normative assumptions (usually based on understandings drawing from developmental psychology) about what is ‘normal adolescence’ (Foster & Spencer, 2011; Kelly, 2001; Wyn & White, 1998). Foster and Spencer (2011, p. 128, original emphasis) suggest that while use of the phrase ‘youth at risk’ rather than ‘deviant’ is part of a broader impetus toward more sympathetic studies of young people’s lives:

The transformation of the language youth researchers and policy makers use to deem some young lives acceptable, and others in need of intervention, has *not* led to a redefinition of acceptability. It is no coincidence that the same kinds of behaviors, living conditions, choices, attitudes, and values that were once categorized as ‘problems’ are now considered ‘negative outcomes,’ with which ‘at-risk youth’ are correlated via statistical models.

Drawing on Bourdieu, a core part of the argument by Foster and Spencer (2011) is that the imposition of labels such as ‘at risk’ to some groups of young people is a form of symbolic violence.² As labels – and their implications of deficits

and individual blame – become “taken-for-granted in everyday life” (p. 132) service providers and young people themselves accept and reinforce them. This is illustrated by Farrugia (2013) in relation to homeless young people and also in my research with flexible learning programs:

You need to assume that every student here has come here because they’re having difficulties. And that is the case. Every student you talk to says they’re here because they’ve got problems of some sort. (Ms Hirst, staff, in Te Riele, 2012, p. 39)

Everyone comes here for a reason because they can’t cope in other schools, they all come here, some of them tell you why they’re here, some of them don’t. Some kids don’t seem like they’ve got a problem in the world, they just come here for some reason, who knows? There’s something wrong with them. Well, like not wrong with them physically and mentally but, I don’t know, problems with other schools, they just come here. (Ben, student, in Te Riele, 2012, p. 39)

On the other hand, the quote from Ben above also shows how separate provision for a minority may – counter-intuitively – lead to less stigmatisation. Within that setting the sense of all being ‘in the same boat’ can generate feelings of belonging, camaraderie and affinity. As another student in Ben’s program expresses it:

Just everyone’s perception of it at the moment is wrong. They look at it as being a school for those who can’t handle school which I guess in a way it is but people here are doing what they want to do, they’re doing their work, they’re doing it when they have to have it done by, they’re not here to bum around and do nothing, they’re here to do it. (Angie, student, in Te Riele, 2012, p. 50)

The benefits of recognition and belonging are also evident in an Anglicare (2014) survey of young people using their services, highlighting that “if we want young people on the edges to feel they belong to society, rather than suggest that they are simply not trying, we need to create welcoming and accepting places”. Moreover, within flexible learning programs it is common to adopt a strength-based approach, which works to counteract deficit perceptions that others (or young people themselves) may hold and embraces a diverse definition of talents:

These young people have such gifts to bring. (Sue, staff, in Te Riele, 2014, p. 62)

[Students] might express themselves in a physical way rather than in an academic way and that’s clearly their expertise”. (Peter, community member, in Te Riele, 2014, p. 62)

The second quote relates to a program that uses young people’s interest in sport as the hook to enable them to learn. Collaboration with high profile (state and

national) sporting organisations also means this program shows signs of not only countering stigmatisation but even replacing it with prestige.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

By their very nature, conundrums are not easily solved. The primary purpose for this chapter therefore is to make visible some of the particular issues for youth policy and practice that result from identifying certain young people as being vulnerable, and thus contribute to professional discussion and reflection. In addition, in this concluding section, I also propose some possible ways forward. I take as a starting point a commitment to distributive justice. Justice and fairness can be defined differently, as is well explained (in the context of research ethics, but relevant much more broadly) by the Belmont Report (DHEW, 1979, part B.3):

There are several widely accepted formulations of just ways to distribute burdens and benefits. Each formulation mentions some relevant property on the basis of which burdens and benefits should be distributed. These formulations are (1) to each person an equal share, (2) to each person according to individual need, (3) to each person according to individual effort, (4) to each person according to societal contribution, and (5) to each person according to merit.

All formulations except the first one above require a distinction to be made among people to decide who gets what. Distributive justice as I use it draws on the second formulation above, and this means it is necessary to identify young people's needs. The key question is: how can we capitalise on the benefits of policies and practices that target some young people (who have particular needs), while minimising the potential negative effects of such targeting? One promising strategy is to embrace Fraser's entire framework (2009), rather than only the distributive justice component. To illustrate this I will draw on the research on flexible learning programs by Mills, McGregor, Hayes and I (see Mills et al., 2015) which applied Fraser's framework of social justice.

Fraser (2009) argues that distribution, recognition and representation are interrelated components of justice, and that all three are necessary to achieve parity of participation for all people in society. Distribution focuses on the economic dimension of justice, and requires a redistribution of resources towards those who most need them. For young people experiencing adversity and marginalisation, distributive justice means they should have access to material goods (for example emergency housing, funding for textbooks and school uniforms, and health and youth work services) that enable them to participate in education, work or other activities. Applying this to flexible learning programs in our research (Mills et al., 2015), we highlight how these programs cater for basic needs, which conventional schools may assume have been met in students' homes:

They know that our school is a place where they can come and get fed. You know, if they're not too embarrassed they can have a shower, they can brush

their teeth, they can get a new set of clothes. (Julian, staff, in Mills et al., 2015, p. 160).

Recognition addresses the cultural dimension in Fraser's framework. She argues cultural injustice happens through cultural domination, non-recognition, and disrespect (Fraser, 1996, p. 7). Recognition involves acceptance and valuing of differences. For young people this means accepting that one person's 'normality' may be different from another's and (as demonstrated earlier in this chapter) recognising strengths rather than focusing on deficits. Young people often do not recognise themselves in labels or descriptions of 'vulnerable youth' or 'youth at risk' (Foster and Spencer, 2011) since these offer only a partial (and possibly skewed) perspective on their lives. An example of recognition from our research in flexible learning programs is provided by a staff member:

I think the other strength that this place offers is a place where difference is accepted, where alternative viewpoints are accepted, alternative lifestyles are accepted in a safe and respectful environment. (George, staff, in Mills et al., 2015, p. 162)

In Fraser's later work (2009) she added the component of representation, addressing the political dimension of justice. This requires that people have the opportunity to make representations on matters that impact on them. In youth studies, this is reflected in the well-established interest in enabling 'youth voice' and 'agency' (see Coffey & Farrugia, 2014; Fielding, 2007; Smyth & Hattam, 2001; Wyn & White, 1998). The suggestion by Foster and Spencer (2011, p. 139) to actively seek the input of participants in research equally applies to a role for young people in policy development: "In order to resist characterizing certain people as 'at risk' based on pre-determined risk factors for pre-determined negative outcomes". Building on Wyn and White (1998, p. 35), representational justice for young people means:

... the voices of young people need to be heard if we are to appreciate fully the ways in which social constraints and institutional structures both impinge upon them, and provide possibilities for personal and collective development.

In our research with flexible learning programs we found that young people's marginalisation was frequently caused or exacerbated by rigid structures in conventional schooling which inhibited their efforts to have a choice or make their views heard – for example in relation to preferred (by students) learning styles and activities or perceived (by staff) breaches of school discipline (Mills et al., 2015; also see Te Riele, 2014). In contrast, in flexible learning programs students tend to have more choice and input as well as a sense of equality.

Here you will choose what you learn about and then they'll support you and find ways to make that help you in the long run. (Aden, student, in Te Riele, 2014, p. 55)

They do the community group meetings and stuff, bringing everyone together and sorting out conflicts and everyone having their say. And these little meetings is a really good thing they do, because it lowers the chances of anyone having any sort of fights or arguments, so everyone has their own opinion – so it brings people together as one community. (Leanne, student, in Mills et al., 2015, p. 164)

Representational justice also shifts the focus of intervention from doing things to or for young people, to enabling and empowering them. Eckersley (2011, p.635) refers to “developing the social and cultural, as well as economic and material, resources available to young people” in order to improve young people’s health and wellbeing. In my research, a commitment to empowerment was evident in staff avoiding the temptation to solve issues for students but rather acting to support students to develop skills themselves so that:

... they can become independent and be able to overcome those barriers that are going to prevent them from continuing on in the course and then further in work. (Dionne, staff, in Te Riele, 2014, p. 65)

Applying Fraser’s framework to policy and practice aimed at supporting young people who experience adversity would enable meeting young people’s human rights and providing appropriate kinds of support where needed (especially through distributive and representational justice). It would also assist in reducing negative outcomes outlined above, such as moral panic and stigmatisation (especially through recognition), and worse service provision due to lack of sustainable funding (especially through distributive justice).

In addition, it is useful to explicitly address the concern that problems and solutions should not be located entirely at the personal level by focusing on what can be changed in young people’s environments, such as education and housing, not just in individuals and families to help them ‘cope’ within existing environments. Unfortunately, this can be perceived as just too hard. For example, in education the persistent “grammar of schooling” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 85); the “sequential assemblage of habits, traditions, beliefs, practices and organisational preferences” (Slee, 2011, p. 13) and the “widespread and resilient logic of practice” in schools (Johnston & Hayes, 2008, p. 110) are cited as obstacles to finding more democratic and just ways of schooling.

However, there is a history of successful reform in education as well. Wyn and White (1998, p. 30) point to the achievements of the Disadvantaged Schools Program in Australia during the 1970s and 1980s to foster more engaging school environments and “provide young people with a positive, relevant and appropriate school environment within which they would be successful” (also see Connell et al., 1992). A contemporary example of system-wide change is the South Australian strategy for Innovative Community Action Networks (ICANs) which support education for the state’s most disadvantaged students through case management and the provision of and Flexible Learning Options. The regionally-based ICANs “bring together young people, families, schools, community groups, businesses and

different levels of government to find solutions to local issues that prevent young people from completing their education” (DECD, 2013). Within service provision in education, flexible learning programs demonstrate approaches of changing educational provision to suit students, rather than trying to change students to suit conventional schooling (Mills et al., 2015; Te Riele, 2012, 2014). Such programs respond to the challenge posed by Blakers and Nicholson (1988, p. 46):

Schools [must] ask a different question about each student: not, as at present, Where does this student fit into our categories and processes?, but rather, How can we build on the interests, capacities and experiences which make her or him a unique individual?

Moreover, finding ways to improve societal environments can benefit all young people and all of society. In relation to health, Eckersley (2011, p. 635) suggests “recent ‘progress’ has harmed a substantial and growing proportion of young people” and therefore “a much broader effort is needed to change social conditions”. In relation to my research in flexible learning programs (Te Riele, 2014), reforms that make schooling work better for marginalised students in those programs can improve schooling for most students in conventional schools as well. As Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) demonstrate, equity is better for everyone in society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The data for this chapter are derived from three projects: 1) funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC) Schools and Social Justice [grant number DP120100620] (Mills et al 2015); 2) funded by a UTS early career researcher grant (Te Riele, 2012); and 3) funded by the Ian Potter Foundation (Te Riele, 2014). The preparation of this chapter was supported through the Australian Government’s Collaborative Research Networks (CRN) program. I am grateful to Stephen Crump for his insightful and constructive feedback on an early version of this chapter.

NOTES

- ¹ On the other hand, Hess (1986) and Gillborn and Youdell (2000) warn that triage can also be used to exclude young people with high levels of need because they are perceived as holding low promise of immediate improvement from support.
- ² Even supposedly positive labels, such as ‘gifted and talented’, can impose stress and inflict symbolic violence.

REFERENCES

- Abbott, T. (2014). Doorstop interview, Melbourne, 26 August 2014. Available: <http://www.pm.gov.au/media/2014-08-26/doorstop-interview-melbourne>
- Anglicare (2104). *Being a part. State of the family report*. Website. Available: http://www.anglicare.asn.au/site/being_a_part_state_of_the_family_report_2014.php

- Batten, M. and Russell, J. (1995). *Students at risk. A review of Australian literature 1980-1994*. Melbourne: ACER.
- Bessant, J. (2008). Hard wired for risk: Neurological science, 'the adolescent brain' and developmental theory. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 11(3), 347-360.
- Blakers, C., & Nicholson, B. (1988). *On the fringe. Second chance education for disadvantaged young people*. Canberra: The Youth Bureau (DEET).
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *In other words. Essays towards a reflexive sociology*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. In *International encyclopaedia of education* (Vol 3, 2nd ed.). Oxford: Elsevier.
- Coffey, J., & Farrugia, D. (2013). Unpacking the black box: The problem of agency in the sociology of youth. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17(4), 461-474.
- Cohen, S. (1972). *Folk devils and moral panics, the creation of the mods and rockers*. Oxford: Martin Robertson.
- Connell, R. (1994). Poverty and education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 64, 125-149.
- Connell, R., White, V., & Johnston, K. (1992). An experiment in justice: The Disadvantaged Schools Program and the question of poverty, 1974-1990. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 13(4), 447-464.
- DECD [South Australia]. (2013). *Innovative community action networks*. Government of South Australia, Department of Education and Child Development. Available: <http://www.ican.sa.edu.au/pages/aboutus/>
- DEEWR. (2011). *Youth connections: Program guidelines September 2011*. Government of Australia, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.
- DHEW [Department of Health, Education and Welfare]. (1979). *The Belmont Report: Ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research*. Washington: Author. Available: www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/belmont.html
- Diamond, L. (2006). Triage for struggling adolescent readers. *School Administrator*, 63(4), 10-14.
- Dwyer, P., & Wyn, J. (2001). *Youth, education and risk. Facing the future*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Eckersley, R. (2011). A new narrative of young people's health and well-being. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 14(5), 627-638.
- Farrugia, D. (2013). The possibility of symbolic violence in interviews with young people experiencing homelessness. In K. te Riele & R. Brooks (Eds.), *Negotiating ethical challenges in youth research* (pp. 109-121). New York: Routledge.
- Fielding, M. (2007). Beyond "voice": New roles, relations, and contexts in researching with young people. *Discourse*, 28(3), 301-310.
- Fielding, M., & Moss, P. (2011). *Radical education and the common school. A democratic alternative*. London: Routledge.
- France, A. (2007). *Understanding youth in late modernity*. Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.
- Fraser, N. (1996). *Social justice in the age of identity politics: Redistribution, recognition, and participation*. The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Stanford University, 30 April-2 May 1996.
- Fraser, N. (2009). *Scales of justice: Reimagining political space in a globalizing world*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Garner, B. (2014). Lifters and leaners: Why the idea of equality of opportunity is a big con. *The Age*, 17 June 2014. Available: <http://www.theage.com.au/comment/lifters-and-leaners-why-the-idea-of-equality-of-opportunity-is-a-big-con-20140617-zsa6d.html>
- Gillborn, D., & Youdell, D. (2000). *Rationing education: Policy, practice, reform and equality*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Gonski, D., Boston, K., Greiner, K., Lawrence, C., Scales, B., & Tannock, P. (2011). *Review of funding for schooling*. Final report. Canberra: DEEWR. Available: <http://www.appa.asn.au/content/gonski-report/Review-of-Funding-for-Schooling-Final-Report-Dec-2011.pdf>
- Hess, A. (1986). Educational triage in an urban school setting. *Metropolitan Education*, 2, 39-52.

- Hockey, J. (2014). Federal budget 2014 – full speech. Available: <http://www.smh.com.au/business/federal-budget/federal-budget-2014-full-speech-20140513-3887i.html>
- Johnston, K., & Hayes, D. (2008). ‘This is as good as it gets’: Classroom lessons and learning in challenging circumstances. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 31(2), 109-127.
- Kellett, M. (2009). Children as researchers: What we can learn from them about the impact of poverty on literacy opportunities? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 13(4), 395-408.
- Kelly, P. (2001) Youth at risk: Processes of individualisation and responsabilisation in the risk society, *Discourse*, 22(1), 23-33.
- Mills, M., McGregor, G., Hayes, D., & Te Riele, K. (2015). ‘Schools are for us’. The importance of distribution, recognition and representation to creating socially just schools. In S. Riddle, A. Black, & K. Trimmer (Eds.), *Researching mainstreams, margins and the spaces in-between* (pp. 152-169). London: Routledge
- Murray, D. (2012). Foreword. In Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Connect For: Improved outcomes for Victoria’s vulnerable young people. Conference program. Melbourne, 25-26 June.
- Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the twenty-first century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Roman, L. (1996). Spectacle in the dark: Youth as transgression, display, and repression. *Educational Theory*, 46(1), 1-22.
- Scales, P. (2013). *Teaching in the lifelong learning sector* (2nd ed.). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.
- Slee, R. (2011). *The irregular school. Exclusion, schooling and inclusive education*. London: Routledge
- Smyth, J., & Hattam, R. (2001). ‘Voiced’ research as a sociology for understanding ‘dropping out’ of school. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 22(3), 401-415.
- Smyth, J., & Wrigley, T. (2013). *Living on the edge. Rethinking poverty, class and schooling*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Strategic Partners. (2001). *Innovation and best practice in schools: Review of literature and practice*. Canberra: DETYA.
- Te Riele, K. (2012). Negotiating risk and hope: A case study of alternative education for marginalized youth in Australia. In W. Pink (Ed.), *Schools and marginalized youth: An international perspective* (pp. 31-79). Cresskill (NJ): Hampton Press
- Te Riele, K. (2014). *Putting the jigsaw together: Flexible learning programs in Australia*. Final report. Melbourne: The Victoria Institute for Education, Diversity and Lifelong Learning. Available: <http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/jigsaw/>
- Tyack, D., & Cuban, L. (1995). *Tinkering toward utopia: A century of public school reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Victorian Government. (2010). *Positive pathways for Victoria’s vulnerable young people: A policy framework to support vulnerable youth*. Melbourne: Victorian Government.
- Wilkinson, R., & Pickett, K. (2009). *The spirit level: why equality is better for everyone*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Wyn, J., & White, R. (1998). Young people, social problems and Australian youth studies. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 1(1), 23-38.

Kitty te Riele

Victoria Institute for Education, Diversity and Lifelong Learning
Victoria University, Melbourne