Holding Bays Or Pathways: Vocationalism And Physical Recreation

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Abstract
Accounts of vocational education suggest that it is classed and gendered. This is particularly so when the parent “industry” is heavily embodied (e.g. manual trades, physical recreation). In Queensland secondary schools, the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies is introducing the trialing of the Subject Area Specification in Physical Recreation (PR). This paper will report on how PR is positioned within the curriculum, which students are enrolled, and what sense students make of PR in terms of their ongoing experiences and post-school aspirations. Data are drawn from document analyses, in depth interviews, and observations of PR in two case study schools. Discourses surrounding governmentality, vocationalism, masculinities, and physicality are deconstructed to draw conclusions about the place of vocational education in young people’s lives.

When referring to discussions of vocational education, we are reminded of the words of (Richards, 1962) who wrote:
Our knowledge, if we allow it to be transformed within us, turns into capacity for life-serving human deeds. If knowledge does not turn into life, it makes cripples and madmen and dunces. It poisons just as food would if it stayed in the stomach and was never digested, and the waste products never thrown off. (p. 16)
Knowledge is a powerful tool, which can be used for many things. In the case of vocational education, it is argued that knowledge has been used to frame people as human capital (Knight, Lingard, & Porter, 1993). As such, vocational education historically has been considered as appropriate for the working class, immigrants and rural students; those deemed suited to technical and routine work to aid productivity (Rosenstock & Steinberg, 1999). More recently, economic reform in Australia and elsewhere, has broadened the remit of vocational education to now occupy an important role in senior schooling and the development of a skilled, certified, and flexible workforce.
Physical education is one area of senior schooling that has been represented in a form of vocational education i.e. “Physical Recreation”. Other areas of senior schooling that have been configured as vocational education are Business, Tourism, Hospitality Practices, Industrial Skills, Computer Studies, English Communication, Trade and Business Mathematics, Literacy and Numeracy, and Land and Animal Systems. This study aims to investigate how students in two schools experienced the newly created Physical Recreation. As such it is a study of curriculum innovation, implementation, and evaluation.

This paper firstly briefly critiques vocational education before introducing the PR subject. It then details the research process and how the data were analysed by mapping out common themes that constitute key discourses of PR. We conclude that PR is place
for “at risk boys” or elite athletes thereby reinforcing the claim that vocational education can be classed and gendered.

Research in Vocational Education

Research suggests that vocational education has not sufficiently met the educational needs of diverse and marginalized students (Angwin, 2000). Angwin (2000) found that:

For many young people the transitional pathways out of school into work or VET are not clear in theory and are extremely complicated in practice...[as the] sector is made up of a complex mix of public and private provision, standards and accreditation systems of diverse locations, courses, teachers and status. (p. 96)

While complex VET systems have emerged, at the same time there has been an increase in part-time work and a decline of full-time work or in career opportunities for the youth labour market (Sweet, 1998). Especially hurt by these trends are students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds. As results show, low SES students tend to leave school early, “select school subjects, subject clusters and post-school education and training that largely lead them towards low SES employment; and many more of them have lower school achievement” (Collins, Kenway, McLeod, & Australia. Dept. of Education Training and Youth Affairs, 2000, p. 7-8). Fullarton (2001) stated that:

Of the students who did not do VET in Schools, 28 per cent of those from lower socio-economic levels were at university in 1999 compared to 39 per cent of those from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Of those students who participated in VET in Schools, 8 per cent from the lower socio-economic parental backgrounds compared to 17 per cent from the higher socio-economic backgrounds were enrolled at university. The outcomes were similar for the 2000 data. (p. 43)

Furthermore, it is claimed that vocational education has been structured for men rather than for women (Kenway, Junor, & Willis, 1995). Apprenticeships show the greatest imbalances for gender as Fullarton (2001) documented:

More noticeable is that there are marked gender differences in the rates of participation in apprenticeships: for those who completed VET in Schools in either Year 11 or Year 12 the rate for males is 15 per cent, that for females 1 per cent. For those young people who completed two years of VET in Schools the rate for males is 14 per cent and for females 2 per cent, while those with no VET in Schools the participation rate for males is 6 per cent and for females 1 per cent. (p. 31)

With these concerns in mind, we were interested in questions of class, gender, and life chances with respect to the implementation of PR in Queensland schools. Which students are interested in PR? Why? What is the explicit and hidden curriculum of PR? How do they perceive PR? What is the nature of interactions in PR? Does PR meet their needs? The following section outlines the genesis of PR and key frameworks in the PR document that gives a backdrop to these questions.

Physical Recreation

During the early 1990s, three reports (by Finn, Carmichael, and Mayer) underpinned the creation of the Australian Vocational Certificate Training System which allows students to receive cross-certification between schools, TAFE, and industry (Carmichael & Employment and Skills Formation Council, 1992). As part of this system, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) writes National Training Packages which in turn provide guidelines for school-based iterations of vocational education. In
Queensland these documents are called Study Area Specifications (SAS). SAS subjects have units of competency and levels of achievements recorded on the Senior Certificate, but the SAS subjects, unlike mainstream Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (QBSSSS) subjects, do not count towards the calculation of Overall Position scores and Field Positions used for university entrance (QBSSSS, 2001a). In 1999, under the auspices of the QBSSSS, the Health and Physical Education Review Officer, outdoor training specialists, physical education specialists, and a parent representative worked with the National Training Package to write the PR document for Queensland schools. PR has been in open trial over the last two years.

The document divides PR into three strands that are designed to give flexibility to schools. Integrated within each strand is a Study Area Core of 15 hours study on the effects of recreation on individuals and on communities, the role of physical activity in maintaining good health, strategies to promote safety, and personal and interpersonal skills to achieve goals. There are also integrated units of work within each of the three strands that include four main aspects of a recreation pursuit: these are recreation and you, physical activity and healthy lifestyle, safety, risk awareness and health concerns, and interpersonal and group dynamics.

In Strand A, Recreation Practices presents students with the opportunity to gain a Certificate I in either administration or coaching and instruction. The students have to complete a set number of hours and modules to obtain the Certificate I (QBSSSS, 1999). Some activities involve students teaching sports such as bowling, volleyball, and touch to the class and participating and being assessed in games. In Strand B, Recreation Studies, the students receive a Certificate of Attainment with a list of modules from the Certificate I in Recreation Practices (see Figure 1) (QBSSSS, 1999). Students in Recreation Studies spend at least 50% of the class time developing an appropriate physique or fitness level in one to six recreational pursuits. Activities in Recreation Studies involve setting up a tennis tournament for younger students or developing a personal fitness program to improve their performance in a particular sport or physical activity. In Strand C, Recreation Pursuits, the Certificate I or Certificate of Attainment is not an outcome (see Figure 1). The purpose here is to simply get students active or exposed to PR. For example, students play games such as cricket, volleyball, and tennis.

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A QBSSSS evaluation of the trial of Physical Recreation showed that teachers responded positively to the PR document (Bell, Brennan, & Kelly, 2001). Bell et al. (2001) stated that for students it “offers unique opportunities to experience pursuits they would not otherwise be involved in, for example rock climbing, camping, lifesaving, and sports medicine” (p. 57). Few teachers seemed to think the possibility of employment in the recreation industry as a significant choice for students (Bell et al., 2001). Rather than seeing it as a pathway to paid employment, students regarded the subject as less academic and less theoretical than other “Board” subjects (Bell et al., 2001). One of the comments made by a teacher in the evaluation supported the claim that this is indeed a holding bay. It contributes to the “whole school social goals” and that students taking the subject can act as role models for younger students especially those who are the ‘cool ‘at risk’ boys” and who are taking on a “strong, positive, non-aggressive role within the school” (Bell et al., 2001).

From the work of Bell, et al. (2001), PR seems to be a non-academic subject for boys with behavioural problems and schools are using this subject as an outlet or a holding bay to contribute to the school’s social goals. In contrast to the QBSSSS evaluation of the PR document, we’ve attempted to examine PR as a field of practice. Thus, we endeavoured to better understand the motivations, content, and pedagogies employed in PR in the two different sites.

**The Research Process**

An interpretive case study design was used to present a “detailed picture” of the participants, social institutions, and documents involved with PR and “to interpret the data in an effort to classify and conceptualise the information and theorize about” discourses running through PR (Thomas & Nelson, 1996, p.333). Methods such as surveys, interviews, observations, and document analysis were chosen to create this “detailed picture” for interpretation in two school sites.
Participants and Settings

Purposive sampling was used to choose the case sites for the study. This allows the researcher to set up criteria from which to base the selection of participants and the case sites (Schwandt, 1995). The key participants in this study were:

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2. Teachers involved with the Year 11 and Year 12 students in PR

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The case sites consisted of approximately 19 student participants and four teachers selected from a private and a state high school. The two sites were purposefully selected for their diversity in sex, socio-economic status (SES), and ethnicity.

Case Sites

The two case sites were Bedrock, an all boys private school offering both Strands A and B and Rushmore a coeducational state high school offering Strand C to Year 11 and 12s. Teachers and 19 students, two girls and 17 boys, took part in the study. At Bedrock the students in Strand B were elite athletes hand picked by the teacher. Strand B is a space for the elite athletes to train for their various sports. One of the elite athletes was also taking the Strand A subject. In Strand A you have the elite athletes and the ‘muck around’ students. The ‘muck around’ students just want some time off from their true passions which are computers, hospitality, or farming, to go outside and play. At Rushmore there are two types of classes in Strand C that we are using for this study: the soccer of excellence class, which is for elite soccer players and the Recreation Pursuits class for students with behavioural problems and learning disabilities.

Ethical clearance from both Education Queensland and the University of Queensland was granted. Participants signed informed consent forms, which outlined the intent of the study and expectations of the participants. Pseudonyms were used for the two schools and for the participants to ensure anonymity.

Data Collection

During 2001, the first author observed and interviewed four teachers and 19 students (nine Year 11 students and ten Year 12 students, one was of aboriginal origin, and two of the 19 were females) using partially structured interview schedules and left room to “add questions or modify them as deemed appropriate” (Gay, 1996; Gay & Airasian, 1996, p. 221). The interviews were conducted in a quiet place convenient to the participants. The interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed for data analysis. Each student and teacher interview varied due to constraints on available time. The length of interviews ranged from twenty minutes to an hour. At least two interviews with teachers and one to three interviews with students were arranged during 2001.

Student interviews focused on their motivation, learning, and career pathways. Later the interviews shifted to become less formal conversations after class. We started talking about what was going on in the lesson, how they and their classmates were behaving in class, what kind of language was used, and how they behaved in their other subjects.

The teachers involved with the Year 11 and Year 12 students in PR were interviewed at least twice during 2001. One teacher (Mr. Slate) taught both Strand A and Strand B at Bedrock and three teachers taught Strand C at Rushmore (Year 11 Recreation Pursuits, Mr. Burns; Year 11 Soccer of Excellence Programme and Year 12 Recreation Pursuits, Mr. Kalash; and Year 12 Soccer of Excellence Programme, Mr. Ted). The interviews focused on their perceptions of why the students selected PR, what they were getting out...
of the subject, and what were their future career options. Then, the interviews shifted to less formal conversations about what was taking place during class to questions such as what atmosphere did they try to encourage, were all the students into the physical activities, which students, which activities?

The first author visited the two chosen schools to carry out non-participant observations of the students and teachers in the school context. Throughout 2001, 24 visits to Rushmore and 15 visits to Bedrock for observations of the teachers and students were made. During each visit, descriptive field notes were recorded with the date, time, and location listed at the top. Field notes were taken using a hand held tape recorder focusing upon key informants’ reactions to the content of the class, their learning experiences, and the social interactions between key informants and teachers. Observations gave greater insight of what was going on during class, so that more relevant questions could be asked. The field notes were later transcribed for journal entry. Also, to add depth to the data set and provide memory prompts for interviews, the classes were videotaped/photographed.

Further, documents were collected or copied e.g. the student achievement/grades and completed modules, course outlines and lesson plans, Subject Selection Handbooks, and school programs. The PR document was included in the analysis. This data was used along with interview transcriptions, field notes, and journal entries in the discourse analysis.

**Discourse Analysis**

The processes and structures within our society are organized through institutions and practices (for example the church, state, media, etc.) that are located in and structured by a particular discursive field (Weedon, 1997). Each discursive field has a language of its own, for example baseball players use words like strikes, balls, and outs that maybe unfamiliar to those outside of baseball. An identity is created within baseball that requires the use of language and tools such as mitts or gloves, bats, and uniforms, etc. This is just one of multiple discursive fields used to create multiple identities or to create one’s subjectivity. Michel Foucault introduced the concept of a discursive field as a way of understanding the relationship between language, subjectivity, social institutions, and power (Weedon, 1997). In this study, we are interested in the discursive field of PR that shapes students’ subjectivities as they engage with an array of sports, teachers, modules, assessment tasks, and ‘mucking around’. Preliminary analysis of the data set suggests that the discursive field is shaped by several discourses that include:

**Governmentality**- how the government uses schools to create the responsible citizen.

**Vocationalism**- how PR students understand the relationship between school and work and associated career pathways.

**Masculinities**- the attraction of boys to PR and how masculinities are constructed and reproduced in this field. Integral to the hegemonic masculinity was a commitment by teachers and students to physicality.

Each of these discourses shall now be introduced in more detail.

**Governmentality**

Governmentality is about schools placing the responsibility on individuals to fit into society (Dean, 1999). Governmentality is embedded within the PR document that in turn has created an educational space that acts as a holding bay for Year 11 and Year 12 students. Kelly (1999) explains:
The concept of youth, as a transitional process, emerges as a truth which dominates governmental horizons…. (O)ne consequence of these transformations is increased uncertainty and anxiety in relation to the regulation of large populations of youth. In a material and metaphoric sense, certain populations of youth occupy ‘wild and tame zones’ in the governmental spaces of the contemporary Liberal Democratic nations state. Drawing on the Australian context,…. the emergence of a Vocational Education and Training agenda in schools can be conceived in terms of governmental attempts to regulate the inhabitants of these wild zones. (p.193)

Governmentality is central to the PR document. For example, the rationale states: Today’s technological society supports a variety of lifestyles. We have more flexible working hours, more part-time employment, an increase in the number of people who are either unemployed or retired. The commercialisation of leisure has become significant in our economic structure. At the same time, our society is carrying ever-increasing health costs incurred by those who have inactive lifestyles (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, 1999, p. 9).

Embedded within the PR document is an agenda of international competitiveness with concerns of productivity and efficiency rather than looking after the future welfare of young adults (Maguire, Ball, & Macrae, 2001).

The PR document mentions career pathways in terms of the collection of “modules” or “unit of work” that students need to “perform” (QBSSS, 1999). Modules lists four learning outcomes (set career plan and objectives, undertake suitable education and training, undertake suitable employment activities, review and monitor career development) that students must acquire. Within these outcomes are performance criteria such as

- Evaluate career options based on participation profile
- Identify and compare personal position, capabilities and interests against career options
- Seek advice of professionals to provide an objective perspective on possible career directions
- Integrate career plan with performance requirements
- Effectively integrate education and training activities with work and performance requirements
- Ensure that employment facilities training and performance in industry events
- Manage contingencies to ensure minimal disruption to achieving planned objectives

Clearly the thrust is the accumulation of a series of workplace and technical skills and competencies directed towards a productive recreation industry.

Yet, the PR document leaves the responsibility of getting a job purely to the individual. It fails to take into account the “fundamental shifts in social and economic relations” which affect both year 11 and year 12 students (Wyn & Dwyer, 1999, p. 19). Somehow the student is supposed to seek a professional with an “objective perspective on possible career directions” and “Manage contingencies to ensure minimal disruption to achieving planned objectives” all of which s/he has no control over (QBSSSS, 1999, p. 235-236). These criteria are expressed in “reductionist terms” that oversimplify what it is to be a young person (Maguire et al., 2001, 199). The PR document relegates year 11 and
year 12 student to being “rational calculators—human capitalists” (Maguire et al., 2001, p. 199) by proposing that they need to self-manage risks by integrating a “career plan with performance requirements” (QBSSSS, 1999, p.235).

“Module COP001” (Career pathways module) was taught by Mr. Slate at Bedrock. His understanding of it was as follows:

I think um…the module that’s in there…the module we’ve talked about before called “Career pathways”. We’ve actually got a computer program um on the computers here that’s um…and the boys have to um…you know you can put in everything about yourself and the subjects that your studying and everything else and the computer will actually give you a print out of what your subjects are and what you are like as a person compared with…to the possibilities you could do so they all do that and they have to do an assignment on possible career pathways as well (21/05/01).

This, as Mr. Slate put it, is giving year 11 and year 12 students the: opportunity in class…to do a little bit of thinking about careers which is probably a little bit different to some subjects, but since career pathways is actually a module in that Recreation Studies and Practices that we’ve chosen to do…so they are doing a fair bit on career pathways in class (21/05/01).

The structure and intent of the PR document suggests an independent, self-managing student, rationally matching their self to a career choice. This discourse is based upon a “trait theory” which identifies traits such as personality, skills, interests, intelligence, etc. and matches it with a career (Kidd, 1984). Secondly it reflects a “rational choice analysis theory” that assumes people rationally make choices (Hindess, 1988; Hodkinson, 1998). Neither underpinning theory accounts for the complexity of young people’s subjectivities or the lack of unpredictable and choice in their lives (Maguire et al., 2001).

Vocationalism

Vocationalism is understood as the need to “occupy” young people in the school curriculum, to obtain credentials and work experiences, and instil workplace principles before they enter the workforce (Carmichael & Employment and Skills Formation Council, 1992). Embedded within vocational education is competency-based training (CBT), an educational approach that has been widely criticized (Cornford, 1999). For example, Winning (1993) argued about the assumptions upon which CBT is based by stating “it comes from an empirical-analytic paradigm…contains elements of programmed instruction, specified behavioural objectives, hierarchical beliefs about knowledge acquisition and social behaviourist assumptions about learning techniques (p. 109). Winning (1993) further, criticized CBT for its positivistic stance and that “it overlooks a dimension of teaching, and equates teaching with the transfer of discrete, inter-related skills or competencies” (p. 109). It also, promotes a Taylorized version of transferable skills to students (Broudy, 1990).

Nevertheless, the PR document is loaded with terms such as “transferable skills”, “modules”, “competencies”, and “performance criteria” in line with CBT (QBSSSS, 1999). In practice, during Recreation Practices at Bedrock College, Mr. Slate advised the class to “collect relevant information, produce a plan, make arrangements, provide activity information, and organise facilities and equipment” for a particular physical activity (28/05/01). “Why” the students were to undertake these tasks was not explained.
Further, “technical control resulting in efficiency and accountability” (Winning, 1993, p. 109) rendered the students somewhat passive and unreflective in their learning process. For example, Aaron, a Year 11 student said he was learning “how to coach teams properly so you can’t get sued and stuff and how to bok after a team [like] running through the drills and communicate to the group... get control over the group [by] swearing and raising my voice and pointing” (26/10/01). With regard to why Bambam, a Year 12 student in Recreation Practices was teaching boxing he said, “Just showing them how hard it is and how fit you need to be in boxing and just if they get in trouble they’ll know how to throw a punch or two” (14/11/01). Bambam may have learned transferable skills such as how to organize facilities and equipment, produce a lesson plan, etc., but his interpretations of why he was teaching the lesson were unimportant and not challenged as boxing was used to resolve personal conflict and show students “how fit you need to be” by over-exercising them (14/11/01).

With a focus upon skills and competencies, the “critical paradigm” that uncovers “the ‘hidden agenda’ of underlying assumptions and values in a given approach” (Winning, 1993, p. 106) had no place. This assumption that teachers ensure learning by just ticking off modules or competencies is ill-founded and presents a major problem with the PR document and how it was enacted at the two school sites.

Masculinities

Masculinity is defined within the context of this paper as the perpetuation or domination of male gender practices over feminine practices (Connell, 1995). Connell (1995) further defined this relationship as not just being between males and females but between males, thereby recognising hegemonic masculinities. Here we will report on the gendering of the PR document (having a preponderance of masculine sports listed as options) and overview the hyper-masculinized relationships between students and the male teachers and students in the enacted curriculum. Further, we will show how males resisted authority and perpetuated aggressiveness, emotional instability, competitiveness, in particular PR spaces.

In the PR document the physical activities are mainly examples of camping, bushwalking, adventure-based activities, and sports such as tennis, volleyball, soccer, and team handball (QBSSSS, 1999). Other more feminine recreation pursuits such as aerobics, dance, walking, or yoga are not highlighted in the document reinforcing claims that discourses of masculinity can dominate educational policy and school curricula (Dillabough, 2000). At both schools (Bedrock and Rushmore), the first author observed teachers training students as coaches in tennis, soccer, touch, rugby, and volleyball. In both the Year 11 and Year 12 Recreation Pursuits classes there was only one girl out of 29 students showing almost no participation for girls within the subject and a programme that was unlikely to attract wide interest from them.

However, it is unlikely that girls would want to participate as Otto, a Year 12 Recreation Practices at Rushmore said, “Um I don’t know. They’re not good at sport” and if there were more girls (than the one) in the class then the subject would be “pretty shit” (24/10/01). With these kinds of remarks from the boys it is no wonder that participation for girls is low at Rushmore. The classes were so highly physical, aggressive and competitive that some of the girls in the Soccer of Excellence class chose not to participate. Lisa, a year 12 Student in the Soccer of Excellence said in reference to
the other girls, “A lot of them sit out…[because if they think if they play] with the boys you can get injured cause they’re a lot more rough… (18/10/01).

Some of the boys in the Soccer of Excellence are not just rough with the girls, but also exclude them from practices. For example Lisa said:

Um ah you got some really nice guys there that sort of encourage you and they don’t put you down or anything but then you got some real assholes…I reckon they’re just sexist and they just don’t think that girls should be playing soccer. That’s the vibes I’ve picked up from them and how they’ve treated me. Some of them just refuse to pass the ball to you (18/10/01).

This overt and more subtle exclusion reinforces the claims made by feminists that “masculinities are both ‘structured’ in dominance and, in turn, help maintain or reproduce that dominance” over women and feminine practices (Edley & Wetherell, 1996, p. 98).

Not only were girls marginalized by the boys, but also the less aggressive males were picked on and teased by their peers (and one in particular by Mr. Burns). Coaching was seen as a space for domination and control as Aaron, a Year 11 student in the Recreation Practices has said. In the Year 11 Recreation Pursuits at Rushmore the first author witnessed Jack having difficulty officiating a volleyball game because his voice was too soft. A student yelled at him, “Get your man voice out! None of that little girl stuff!” (23/05/01). Later, Mr. Burns shouted at Jack, “Yep! You control the game mate!” (23/05/01). This is a subject for boys who are not weak or afraid to get physical and loud. thereby perpetuating particular masculinities that are being discouraged elsewhere in the school curriculum (Ghaill, 1994). Arnot, David and Weiner (2000) argue that within schools organised by “academic and vocational hierarchies” is a “continued presence of disaffected ‘macho lads’ who” are encouraged rather than discouraged” to celebrate “a powerful version of heterosexual machismo” (p. 144).

Arnot et al. (2000) continue to suggest that these “macho lads” are disenfranchised by being denied “access to higher qualifications and training”, “secure jobs and higher wages” and in response they become “the ‘cool guys’,,” challenging authority figures in the school by stirring up trouble (p.144). For those in the Year 11 Recreation Pursuits this was certainly true as there was constant resistance to and frustration with authority within the school. The following events occurred in the Year 11 Recreation Pursuits at Rushmore:

Bart: (Kicks the volleyball at Mr. Skinner. Hitting him in the face and knocking off his glasses)
Student: Ha! Ha! Yea! Ha! Ha!
Mr. Skinner: Come here Bart!
Student: Uh! Oh!
Student: Oh!
Student: You broke his glasses!
Bart: Oh!
Students: (laughing) Yea!
Bart: Did I do that?
Mr. Skinner: Yea! You know being a dickhead all your life needs to change sometimes doesn’t it?
Bart: I didn’t know it! Oh!
Mr. Skinner: Hey!
Bart: Yea. I know.
Mr. Skinner: You know you do stupid things Bart and sometimes Mate! They don’t go um they don’t go your way! And I don’t see the humor in this whatsoever! (23/05/01)

For Bart school is a place “to muck around in and have fun” but Mr. Burns and other authority figures within the school do not support him or his classmates. In an interview, Mr. Skinner said this about the Year 11 Recreation Pursuits class at Rushmore:

Mr. Skinner: Well! Well I think…I think that…I think people like Jack Maori um Jake Blues, Joel Rifkin…um David Puddy I think they’ve got…those kids have um too many negative features about them.
Seth: Like what?
Mr. Skinner: Uh…immature…an inability to be part of a team…um very low IQs…um no personality sort of thing.
Note: A few of those students were later expelled from Rushmore (16/05/01).

Such a teacher attitude was prevalent and PR was problematic is terms of which teachers were asked to work with PR classes and what were their motivations. According to a national survey, Year 12 students are taking more and more vocational orientated subjects, particularly boys (Fullarton & Ainley, 2000). However, a greater number of those students are from lower SES backgrounds that have parents with lower levels of education and academic achievement in literacy and numeracy (Abbott-Chapman & Kilpatrick, 2001). The PR document attracts and perpetuates particular kind of masculinities that are “aggressive, competitive, [and] emotionally inarticulate and oppressive” (Edley & Wetherell, 1996, p.103). In our case sites it does little to enhance the life chances amongst the boys who resist conventional schooling on the one hand but who are most in need of support to break out of a cycle of low-wage jobs.

Holding Bays Versus Pathways

This paper has argued that the structure of the PR document and its enactment have the potential to reproduce inequitable educational outcomes. We noted significant educational issues across all three strands in relation to class, gender, and pathways or life chances. The results indicate that the PR classes were, for students, less about learning or work and more about playing games and getting out of academic curriculum experiences. PR was viewed by most of the participants (across all strands) as a non-academic and sportist subject, not giving it much currency or status amongst students both within and beyond the subject. Given the generally lower academic and socio-economic status of those undertaking PR, it appears that the subject is reproducing educational inequalities on the basis of class as we argue it did not enhance most students education or career options (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997).

PR was also reproducing dominant versions of masculinities by not challenging students beyond coaching competitive sports,-condoning physical aggression, and excluding females as was seen in the Soccer of Excellence (Arnot, et al., 1999). Aggression and competitiveness were also used as forms of resistance to the teachers’ and schools’ authority in the Year 11 and Year 12 Recreation Pursuits, thereby further alienating some students from worthwhile educational experiences.

In particular these discourses affected the lower SES students attending the state high school. The subject failed to challenge hegemonic notions of physical recreation or
offer diverse forms of fitness or physical activity (for example yoga, tai chi, aerobics, etc.) to students that could give breadth to their post-school options. Exceptions to this were for a minority of students in Recreation Studies at Bedrock and in the Soccer Excellence Programme at Rushmore who intended to pursue professional sporting careers and athletic scholarships. For other elite sportsmen at Rushmore, PR provided a space for them to train for their representation in school sporting teams (Courtice, 1999) with minimal interference to their “real” academic work.

Regardless, the subject provided few and narrow pathways rather than enrich the educational experiences of year 11 and 12 students. While the PR document, and the experience of some students undertaking Strand A, reflected a form of governmentality designed to manage compliant and productive citizens, the majority of students treated the subject as a social space. In this space, the teachers’ and students’ practices and interactions were highly gendered under the guise of playfulness. In PR a potent interface of masculinity, vocationalism, and governmentality worked to keep wild boys (Kelly, 1999) in a holding bay.

References


