

# **Doxa School West Melbourne: Outcomes for Students 2000–2006**

Bern Murphy  
Sarah MacLean

At Doxa I could be myself and not pretend. If I got angry about things they helped me to not blame everyone around me. (Graduate)

Doxa gives kids a second chance, but it's a second chance with safety nets and lots of assistance. (School-based mentor)

You get young people coming to Doxa who don't trust any adults because their experience is that adults let them down or have never been consistent. They are very wary, but as time goes on they begin to trust adults again because a day wouldn't go by without one on one time with an adult. (Volunteer)



**Australian Youth Research Centre**

**Faculty of Education  
The University of Melbourne  
Vic 3010**

# Contents

Acknowledgements .....	4
Summary .....	5
1 – Introduction .....	9
This Research .....	9
The Doxa School .....	10
History .....	10
Target group .....	10
The School Program .....	11
Transition back to school .....	12
2 – Research methodology .....	14
Research survey .....	14
Research interviews .....	14
Case studies .....	15
Research limitations .....	15
3 – Literature Review .....	17
Students at risk of leaving school early .....	17
Alternative education .....	19
Reintegration and support .....	22
Some problems in alternative education settings .....	24
Good practice in education for ‘at risk’ students .....	25
Conclusions from the literature .....	26
4 – Research results .....	27
Demographic information about the Doxa School enrolment .....	27
<i>Student enrolments</i> .....	27
<i>Gender of graduates</i> .....	28
<i>Age of participants</i> .....	28
<i>Geographic location of students</i> .....	28
<i>Types of schools from which students are drawn</i> .....	29
Outcomes for graduates .....	29
<i>Outcomes for 2000 graduates</i> .....	30
<i>Outcomes for 2001 graduates</i> .....	30
<i>Outcomes for 2002 graduates</i> .....	31
<i>Outcomes for 2003 graduates</i> .....	31
<i>Outcomes for 2004 graduates</i> .....	32
<i>Outcomes for 2005 graduates</i> .....	32
<i>Outcomes for 2006 graduates</i> .....	33
<i>Outcomes for students</i> .....	33
Reflections from graduates .....	33
<i>Proportions of participants experiencing positive outcomes</i> .....	34
<i>Proportions of participants experiencing negative outcomes</i> .....	34
<i>Proportions of participants who enjoyed their time at the School</i> .....	34
<i>Proportions of participants whose relationships improved</i> .....	35
<i>Proportions of participants whose self-understanding was enhanced</i> .....	35
<i>Proportions of participants who developed new skills</i> .....	36
<i>Proportions of participants who benefited from relationships with adults</i> .....	36
<i>Proportions of participants who experienced attitudinal change to school</i> .....	37
5 – Discussion .....	38
Age of participants .....	38
Gender of participants .....	40

Aggregating groups of ‘at risk’ young people .....	41
The program .....	42
Staffing .....	46
Mentors and outreach visits: transitioning back to school .....	47
Likley impact of an 18 month program.....	48
6 – Conclusions and key findings .....	50
Outcomes for students.....	50
Recommendations for future directions .....	51
7 – References .....	53
Appendix 1 - Survey sent to graduates (includes raw data).....	55
Appendix 2 – Interview schedules .....	57

## **Tables**

Table 1 – Doxa graduates, 2000-2006 .....	27
Table 2 - Gender of participants, 2000-2006 .....	28
Table 3 – Age of participants, 2000-2006.....	28
Table 4 – Area where students lived 2000-2006.....	28
Table 5 – Students’ school of origin type 2000-2006 .....	29
Table 6 – Graduates from 2000.....	30
Table 7 – Graduates from 2001.....	30
Table 8 – Graduates from 2002.....	31
Table 9 – Graduates from 2003.....	31
Table 10 – Graduates from 2004.....	32
Table 11 – Graduates from 2005.....	32
Table 12 – Graduates from 2006.....	33
Table 13 – Positive outcomes.....	34
Table 14 – Negative outcomes.....	34
Table 15 – Enjoyment .....	34
Table 16 – Relationships .....	35
Table 17 – Self understanding.....	35
Table 18 – Skill development.....	36
Table 19 – Staff/ mentors .....	36
Table 20 –Attitude toward school .....	37

## ***Acknowledgements***

This report draws on opinions and experiences of many people involved in the Doxa School West Melbourne. In particular we would like to thank the School Principal, Megan Moore, and the staff of the program including the teachers, youth workers and volunteers. We interviewed teachers from many schools and parents and are grateful for the time and ideas they generously shared with us. Of course the biggest thanks go to young graduates of the Doxa School from 2000-2006 and their families who filled out surveys and participated in research interviews.

This research was funded and commissioned by Doxa Youth Foundation. Julie Rolfe has been actively involved in the design and coordination of this project. We are grateful for her support and advice. Thanks also to Helen Stokes at the Youth Research Centre for assistance with locating appropriate literature.

## **Summary**

The Doxa School West Melbourne (Doxa School) provides an alternative time-limited education program for 11-14 year olds who face various forms of disadvantage that make staying at school challenging for them. The purpose of this study is firstly, to obtain information on educational and well-being outcomes of Doxa School graduates from 2000–2006 and secondly, to make recommendations on future directions for the school.

The Doxa School provides six months (two terms) in an alternative school setting where intensive educational and personal development support is available. After the student returns to mainstream schooling a further 12 month's follow up support is provided by the Doxa School.

It is anticipated that the study will be used for the following purposes:

- to provide a better understanding of student experiences of the Doxa School
- To provide input into future directions of the school
- To provide a resource for stakeholders interested in alternative models of education
- To support funding proposals for the establishment of more schools using the same model
- To help inform the directions the Doxa Youth Foundation's advocacy work on school retention.

Research findings in this report are based on:

- A review of the literature pertaining to early school leaving and school retention
- Doxa School program records
- A survey sent to 98 Doxa School graduates from 2000-2006
- Interviews with
  - Four graduates of the The Doxa School program
  - Four parents of The Doxa School graduates
  - Six teachers or school counsellors based in the schools of origin (and in some cases also return) for Doxa School graduates
  - Three school principals
  - Three Doxa School staff

- Two Doxa School volunteers.

Key research findings are as follows:

- The literature reveals that risks associated with leaving school before the age of 15 are very negative for both young women and young men. Outcome studies of programs for young people at risk of early school leaving indicate that these programs have the potential to assist students in remaining engaged in the education system.
- The Doxa School provides an excellent program consistent in most respects with principles for good practice in alternative education settings derived from the literature.
- Given the level of disadvantage experienced by young people referred to The Doxa School, it is remarkable that the majority of students stay at school for at least another two years after attending the program.
- Of the 98 graduates tracked through this research, 71 (72%) were either found to be still at school or were still in school on last contact with the school (usually at least 12 months after attending the school). Twelve students (12%) were working (eight in apprenticeships in building and construction).
- Only eight of 98 graduates about whom we were able to access information were known to be looking for work.
- Some barriers to school retention (for instance severe family conflict, learning difficulty or economic disadvantage) are not amenable to change within a six month placement in an alternative setting. The experience of many graduates was that while they greatly enjoyed their time at The Doxa School and had remained within the education system, they still disliked mainstream school and thought they were under-performing.
- Aspects of the program which were most appreciated by research participants include the mentoring program providing 12 months support to graduates after attending the Doxa School, and intensive and caring support provided by volunteers and staff. The opportunity for young people to connect and feel supported by a number of significant adults was seen as critical in The Doxa School's success.

- Participants were clear that what The Doxa School does particularly well is to work on the students' barriers to education. These include monitoring their behaviour in an educational setting, conflict and anger management.
- The research literature highlights a concern that aggregating 'at risk' young people in a common setting may function to compound behavioural problems, thus placing young people further at risk. Nonetheless this risk is well managed by the The Doxa School staff and program structure and participants report positive outcomes from the program.
- Only a small number of areas for program enhancement within current budgetary constraints have been identified. These include record keeping in relation to students who do not complete the program, increasing the proportion of girls accessing the program and enhancing professional development and referral networks.
- The program is highly regarded by graduates, parents and staff of other schools. It is significant that among a group of young people all of whom had difficulty maintaining school engagement, almost all survey respondents identified enjoying their time at The Doxa School and could identify achievements they felt proud of as a result of the intervention.

## ***Recommendations***

It is recommended that:

- 1. The Doxa Youth Foundation should continue to fund the Doxa School and to target students located in Melbourne's north west.**
- 2. The Doxa School should continue to provide an intervention for young people aged 11-14 as this is an age group that is not specifically targeted by any other similar service.**
- 3. The mixed-age grouping at The Doxa School should be maintained and participation of late-primary school students be encouraged where practical.**
- 4. Age and brief demographic data be maintained by the school on numbers of young people who do not complete the program.**
- 5. The Doxa School should endeavour to increase the proportion of girls referred to their program.**
- 6. Doxa School staff maintain their current efforts to manage the potential for negative peer influence among school participants.**
- 7. Doxa School staff should be provided with ongoing opportunities to learn about vocational options (such as school-based apprenticeships and community based Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning).**
- 8. The school should maintain and expand the referral networks they draw on when drug, mental health and other issues emerge for students or for students' families.**
- 9. The Doxa School should maintain the volunteer program and, where possible, attempt to recruit additional volunteers.**
- 10. The focus on mentoring and youth worker support be maintained as a central component of the Doxa School program.**
- 11. The Doxa School model is consistent with good practice identified in the literature in regard to providing education for students deemed at risk of early school leaving. In view of the need for similar programs in other areas of Victoria, the model might usefully be adapted to, and replicated in, other contexts.**

## ***1 – Introduction***

### **This Research**

The Doxa School West Melbourne (Doxa School) provides supported or alternative education for disadvantaged students between 11 and 14 years of age, who are experiencing difficulties maintaining their place in mainstream education.

This research was commissioned by the Doxa Youth Foundation Board to obtain information on educational and well-being outcomes of the Doxa School graduates from 2000–2006, and to make recommendations on future directions for the school.

The study uses multiple methodologies in order to develop an analysis of the intervention. This has been done through a combination of literature review and analysis, a quantitative survey to provide demographic details on 98 graduates from 2000–2006 and qualitative information that provided the basis for in-depth case-studies of the experiences of seven students. Detailed outlines of case studies are not included in this version of the report in order to protect the identity of those involved; we do, however, refer to case studies in our analysis.

The report has six chapters. The introductory chapter outlines the Doxa School program. The second chapter describes the research methodology. The third, a literature review chapter, summarises issues highlighted in research in the provision of education for students ‘at risk’ of early school leaving.

The fourth chapter details empirical findings of the research and is structured in three parts; demographic data on school participants, outcomes for students, and research participants’ reflections on the school. A discussion chapter is fifth, followed by a brief conclusion. Recommendations are made through the report and summarised above.

## **The Doxa School**

### ***History***

The Doxa School (formerly the Marist Transition School) was originally established by the Marist Brothers, with Doxa Youth Foundation becoming involved in 2000. The Doxa Youth Foundation is now the major funder of the school and the school is registered with the Catholic Education Office.

The school has been operating from its current site since 2004 and prior to this it was located in a church hall in Fitzroy. The West Melbourne School is situated in a converted three-storey warehouse located close to North Melbourne train station.

### ***Target group***

The target group of Doxa School students includes young people between the ages of 11 and 14 who are currently enrolled in and regularly attending school. Those aged 11 may come from the final years of primary school and the rest from early secondary school of both government and non-government schools. All are below the Victorian school leaving age of 15, recently changed to 16 years. The main target areas are schools in the inner, western and northern suburbs of Melbourne.

In line with the mission of the Doxa Youth Foundation all students come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Included in the definition of disadvantage are poverty, disrupted housing or homelessness, poor health, educational gaps and lack of educational opportunities, oppositional behaviours and social dislocation. Some students live in families or households characterised by one or two of these, while others experience many of them.

Other criteria for enrolling a student in the school include:

- The prime carer must agree to the student's enrolment and be willing to actively support the programs of the school
- The student must be willing to attend the school
- The student must demonstrate willingness to ongoing commitment to the programs of the school
- The student must be prepared to attempt the required changes necessary for successful re-integration into mainstream education

- The referring school must be committed to the support of the student both during and after enrolment at the school
- The behaviours of the student must be able to be addressed given the expertise of the staff. (i.e. not requiring psychiatric management or drug treatment)

### ***The School Program***

Students enrol for an 18 month program. The school employs a Principal, three fulltime teachers and two youth workers. Since its inception volunteers from the community (often ex-teachers) have supported the school by providing extra tuition to students on a weekly basis. Students from the Australian Catholic University also undertake placements at The Doxa School which adds to the further contact students receive from other adults. Support is also provided by the volunteers who often act as mentors to the students while attending the first six months of the Doxa School program. For the first six months students attend the Doxa School where they are engaged in an intensive education program. After this period students return to mainstream education to continue their schooling, where a mentor is appointed to monitor and support the student's reintegration, as described below. A Doxa School youth worker also continues to support the student for a further 12 months (the remainder of the 18 month program).

The group size attending the Doxa School has varied overtime with an average intake of 12 and recent intakes averaging 15 students. The first half of the day generally consists of the school education program where students work in small groups with a particular teacher or volunteer. During this time the students often receive individual tuition and assistance with school work including homework tasks. The afternoon program is more activity-based and moves away from the more formal structure of the classroom. This program is aimed at social development and usually involves group activities such as excursions and sporting opportunities, sailing and abseiling. Workshops including photography, cooking and other hands-on activities are run during this time. More recently the Song Room group conducted drumming sessions which have proved to be very popular among the students. The youth workers who run afternoon sessions use the mornings to visit students at schools.

Personal development issues take a high priority in the program and include a focus on emotional well-being, dealing with bullying behaviours, negotiating and resolving conflict and making and sustaining friendships. Friday mornings are devoted to Personal Development and include workshops led by Doxa School staff. Two staff specialise in one of the above areas and work with all students throughout the semester. The mornings also include a regular assembly time where reward points are distributed to those nominated throughout the week. The purpose of the assembly is to both give recognition to those students who have made an effort or improved in a certain area and to end the week on a positive note.

There is an established behaviour management policy in place which highlights both the expectations of young people and fosters the notion of consequences for any behaviours or actions by students. Completing tasks at home and keeping up to date with school work is an important part of the education program. An award system operates where students can be nominated for a particular action or achievement and points gathered can be traded for a reward at the end of the term.

### ***Transition back to school***

The aim of the Doxa School is for young people to return to either their own school or go to another more suitable school. An extensive transition/mentor program is set in place to assist this process, which involves outreach visits from a youth worker and regular contact with the school mentor. A mentor from the school may be the School Counsellor, Year Level Coordinator or classroom teacher. It is sometimes the person who arranged for the student to go to the Doxa School in the first place and knows the student well, but may also be a newly appointed mentor. All students remain connected to one of the youth workers who maintain contact on a regular basis for a 12 month period. This involves the youth worker visiting the student in their school setting on either a fortnightly or, in some cases, weekly basis. The meeting is formalised through recognition by school administration. Meetings are informal, lasting for 30 to 45 minutes and are not designed as counselling sessions. During these meetings youth workers ask how things are going, advise students on certain situations or offer support on other issues. The youth worker also remains in close contact with the mentor and the school administration. Where appropriate, contact between Doxa School staff and the young person's family is maintained throughout

this period. Further information about the transition process is provided later in this report.

## **2 – Research methodology**

This research provides information about the outcomes for Doxa graduates from 2000–2006. Mixed methods were used to access a range of forms of information about the effects of involvement for students. Ethical approval to conduct the research was acquired from the University of Melbourne’s Human Research Ethics Committee. False names are used to disguise the identity of research participants.

### **Research survey**

Names and addresses of the Doxa School graduates were initially accessed from the school. A survey was sent to all 98 graduates for whom the school was able to provide contact details. All graduates were advised of the survey by a letter from the Doxa School principal, prior to receiving it. The survey had two components. Firstly it sought information about what graduates had done after leaving the Doxa School. Secondly, questions were asked about what graduates found helpful or unhelpful about their time at the Doxa School. Graduates were asked to reflect on the impact of their involvement in the school on their subsequent educational, social and emotional capacities, and to identify what aspects of the school were most effective in assisting them to remain engaged in education. (The survey is attached at Appendix One).

Surveys were sent to the last known address with a reply paid envelope. Fifty-one of 98 surveys were completed and returned. Five of the remaining 47 were returned uncompleted as ‘not known at this address’. Information regarding outcomes of other graduates was compiled from interviews with the principal and youth workers. This means that some information regarding outcomes of 98 of the 111 Doxa School graduates may be reported on here, although more detailed and recent information is available only for the 51 who returned surveys.

### **Research interviews**

Research interviews were conducted with:

- Four graduates of the Doxa School program
- Four parents of Doxa School graduates
- Six teachers or school counsellors based in the schools of origin (and in some cases also return) for Doxa School graduates

- Three school principals
- Three Doxa School staff
- Two Doxa School volunteers.

The sample of interview participants was selected purposely to include a range of perspectives on the Doxa School program. Mentors and school principals (excluding the Doxa School principal) were selected to provide information on young people chosen for case studies (see below). Informed consent was obtained from participants prior to interviews. Interviews were of 20-30 minutes duration and utilised a conversational approach (Bourdieu, 1996). All participants were interviewed on a one-to-one basis. Some interviews were conducted in person and others on the phone, depending on the preference of the interviewee. Most interviews were recorded (with permission from participants) and subsequently summarised by the researcher. Interview schedules for research participants are included at Appendix 2.

### **Case studies**

While the case studies are not contained in this version of the report, the information gathered from the research participants to compile case studies provided much of the knowledge about the Doxa Program upon which our analysis is based. Interviews with at least three people involved with the graduate were undertaken in relation to each case study. This usually included the graduate and/or the parent, the mentor and youth workers.

### **Research limitations**

A major limitation related to the majority of returned surveys coming from graduates who had attended the Doxa School between 2004-2006. Schools do not maintain contact details for past students and once young people leave school it becomes difficult for researchers to track them. We found it increasingly difficult to access information about graduates the longer the period since their leaving the Doxa School. In many cases graduates had moved address. Mentors associated with them had also moved on from the school at which they were employed during involvement with the Doxa School. Additionally, written information held at the Doxa School was also less comprehensive for older students' cohorts.

Another limitation related to the collection of case studies. While the research team relied on the Doxa School Principal to suggest appropriate case study participants, no

graduate was put forward who might be regarded as having accrued little benefit from their time at the School. This was no doubt in part because the school is less likely to maintain contact with young people whose experience of the school was generally negative (if indeed this was the case for any graduate). Other difficulties related to tracking down students, with many having left school.

A further difficulty related to the inclusion of young women in the case study sample. Only a small proportion of Doxa School graduates are female. Of the two young women recommended by the principal, one did not agree to participate and the other had moved school and house and was therefore uncontactable. This made it impossible to include a case study involving a young woman graduate.

A further limitation is that young people find it easier to discuss issues associated with their schooling than family issues which may, in fact, underlie their educational disadvantages. One-off interviews such as those conducted for this study do not tend to provide in-depth information about the complex life difficulties facing many Doxa School students. It should be remembered that the Doxa School is only one of many factors influencing a student's educational and life pathway. Additionally some information was highly sensitive and would easily identify students involved. Sensitive information about individuals has generally been excluded from the report and names of schools have been altered. Nonetheless it is likely that some Doxa School staff reading the report will recognise the young people on whom the case studies are based. For this reason the report is confidential and should not be disseminated outside the Doxa Youth Foundation Board.

### **3 – Literature Review**

The purpose of this literature review is to summarise findings from other reports and publications that are relevant to this study of the Doxa School. Where such information is available, the review provides details of student outcomes associated with these programs.

#### **Students at risk of leaving school early**

‘At risk’ is a term that describes young people who are considered likely to experience difficulty in making a range of life transitions (Department of Education, 2001). In the context of education, students ‘at risk’ have been defined as ‘those who are likely to fail, drop out, or not successfully complete school or its equivalent, and consequently are unlikely to possess sufficient skills or qualifications to acquire well paid secure employment or become integrated into an accepted pattern of social responsibility (Australian Centre for Equity through Education & Australian Youth Research Centre, 2001, 22). Some researchers refer to early school leaving as prior to the minimum school leaving age. Others refer to it as not completing Year 12. As Teese points out leaving before Year 12 can be positive for young people where they go on to an apprenticeship. Leaving school before age 16 is, however, far less likely to be associated with positive outcomes and this is the sense in which we refer to ‘early school leaving’ here.

Students at risk of early-school leaving are a diverse group (James, St Leger, & Ward, 2001). Stokes (2000) argues that students leave school early for three primary reasons. Some leave because their behaviour led to conflicts with staff or even expulsion. Others feel themselves to be struggling academically. A third group experience difficulties within the contexts of their lives (for instance homelessness, poverty, family conflict, or their own or parental drug use or mental health difficulties). Many students experience a combination of factors (Boss, 1998; James, St Leger, & Ward, 2001).

Strong regional patterns in school retention have been observed. Areas where high proportions of blue-collar workers live record lower levels of school completion (Teese, 2002; Teese & Polesel, 2003). In 1998, the north west region (where the Doxa

School is situated) had the lowest levels of school retention for boys of any Victorian region, with only 40% of male students completing Year 12 in 1998 (and 55% of girls). Teese concludes that special efforts to address school retention are required in the north west.

More young men are considered at risk of early school leaving than young women, although some authors comment that this is because school staff tend to identify boys exhibiting disruptive behaviour as 'at risk' rather than young women (Australian Centre for Equity through Education & Australian Youth Research Centre, 2001). While boys are twice as likely as girls to leave school before completing Year 12, outcomes for girls who do so are worse than those for boys, for whom far more apprenticeships are available (Teese & Polesel, 2003). Teese found that in 2000, 27% of 15 year old girls who left school early were unemployed, compared with 14% of boys: 'not only are girls more vulnerable to labour market relegation, but they are less likely to be undertaking training that will help them reverse this'(2002, 33).

Young people who leave school early are at increased risk of a range of negative outcomes such as long term unemployment, involvement with the criminal justice system and social marginality (Boss, 1998; Teese & Polesel, 2003; Wyn, Stokes, & Tyler, 2004; Wyn & White, 1997). A recent study of young people who left school in 2003 found that young people who left school before completing Year 12 were four and a half times more likely to be unemployed or out of the labour force than those who did complete Year 12 (Teese, Robinson, Lamb, & Mason, 2006). Early school leaving is associated with significant social as well as personal costs through social security and health expenses (King, 1999). Studies repeatedly point to the need for programs which will assist disengaged students to remain within mainstream schooling or else to engage them in alternative vocational training or qualifications: 'unless the issues of under-achievement and disengagement are effectively tackled during school, there will continue to be a group of early leavers who are in "flight from school" and who will not invest in further education to improve their economic and social well-being over the long term' (Teese, Robinson, Lamb, & Mason, 2006, 33).

Some authors have emphasised that early school leaving should not be causally attributed to factors within individual students, but rather to the characteristics of institutions (Smyth et al., 2000; Stokes, 2000). School-based factors such as poor linkage with the wider community, lack of support within the school, inadequate referral to appropriate agencies to address particular needs, and negative student-teacher relationships where young people are treated as children rather than responsible members of the school community have been identified in young people's decisions to leave school early (Holden & Dwyer, 1992). Low school attachment due to these factors is often exacerbated when young people perceive that the school culture is inappropriate to their needs or that the school's response to difficulties they have encountered has been inadequate (Stokes, 2000). Attitudes towards school and one's own chances of completing it also vary according to socio-economic status. Young people living in affluent suburbs report also the highest levels of satisfaction with school and intention to remain at school until Year 12 (Teese, 2002).

Some research has been conducted on the education aspirations of students deemed at risk. A large Australian study of early-school leavers and students classified as 'at risk' of early school leaving found that many students wanted education that is directly related to employment, minimal text-based learning and high levels of choice in their learning. Students stressed the importance of relationships with other students and teachers in giving them a sense of connectedness to school (Australian Centre for Equity through Education & Australian Youth Research Centre, 2001).

Few viable alternatives exist for young people who are unable or unwilling to sustain engagement within the mainstream school system. Employment opportunities for young people aged 11-14 are non-existent, as is income support. In the past TAFEs did not generally enrol young people who are less than 18 years of age (Stokes, 2000). However, over recent years the Adult and Community Education sector and TAFEs have increased its provision of education and training to young people aged 15-19 who are at risk of early school leaving.

### **Alternative education**

School leaving is a process rather than an event, allowing a critical time period within which interventions may be implemented (McFadden & Munns, 2000). 'Alternative'

schools emerged in the 1960s to offer students who were struggling within mainstream school settings (Hadderman, 2002). Among these, some schools have been established specifically to provide alternatives for young people assessed as at risk of early school leaving. Hadderman (2002) writes that alternative schools tend to have higher student-staff ratios than in mainstream settings. They provide more individualised programs, unconventional teaching approaches, often based on a particular philosophy and a 'sense of community and personal caring' (Hadderman 2002, 2). Such programs are frequently also orientated to teaching practical skills. They are also more often able to address individual students' welfare needs (Holdsworth & Moffat, 2000).

Alternative education settings is a broader term that encompasses a range of programs and approaches, including one-on-one programs, special learning units within schools and community based programs settings (Holdsworth & Moffat, 2000). Students at most alternative schools are not expected to return to the mainstream education system (Australian Centre for Equity through Education & Australian Youth Research Centre, 2001). Some programs, however, are designed to 'recycle' students back into mainstream schools (as does the Doxa School) (Cole, 2004).

For students in year 11 or 12 in Victoria the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) provides an alternative to mainstream academic education. VCAL was developed to provide post-compulsory education that young people disengaged from the mainstream school system are likely to perceive as relevant to their lives (Stokes, 2005). Some VCAL programs are community based. This means that students are enrolled and attend a community-based program but get a certificate from the school for completion of a qualification. One example of a community-based VCAL program is auspiced by Bairnsdale Secondary College. The Changing Lanes VCAL program operates off-campus but is largely staffed by teachers from the school. Students are referred to as 'workers' and each has a 'workplace agreement' with the program. Participants undertake a range of competency-based certificate courses and a three week work placement; most do not reintegrate into mainstream school. The school records good attendance rates (85-90%). Some students have re-entered mainstream education but the most are in work placement. Interestingly, police have recorded a 30% drop in casual crime since the instigation of the program (Dalton, 2004).

Alternative education may be situated within a larger school or otherwise consist of a smaller 'autonomous' school operating on its own, as in the case of the Doxa School. For instance, The Island operates as a separate campus of Collingwood College in Victoria (Zyngier, 2005). This school takes young people from all over Melbourne who are considered at-risk of early school leaving. The Island is staffed by trades-people and young people are taught technical skills. This program reports very successful student outcomes. A review of the program (Zyngier, 2005) found that of 100 students enrolled each year approximately 25% continue at the school the following year, 20% take up apprenticeships, 12% enrol in TAFE, 25% find employment, 6% return to mainstream schools and 6% are unemployed.

The Dickson College Alternative program in the Australian Capital Territory is based within a larger school and offers students in the middle years an educational alternative. Students at this program have experienced high levels of mental illness, family dysfunction, low reading ages, suspension and behavioural difficulties. Two thirds had previously been asked to leave another school (Holdsworth & Moffat, 2000). Responsiveness to student needs is identified in an evaluation as an important aspect of the program. Of 58 students attending the program at some time in 1999, 13 gained the ACT Year 10 certificate. All students interviewed reported significant improvements in their school attendance during time at the program. Reading ages in tested students also jumped by up to three years and three months.

Reviewing the literature on alternative education, Raywid found that there is some evidence of improvement in academic performance and self esteem and reductions in behavioural issues and early-school leaving for young people in alternative education settings (cited in Boss, 1998). Australian research also indicates that young people 'at risk' of early school leaving have more success in remaining in the education system in alternative settings, with behavioural improvement and self-esteem gains also observed (Dalton, 2004; Holdsworth & Moffat, 2000). While attending alternative programs, students achieve more consistent attendance as well as improvements in behaviour and educational attainment (Holdsworth & Moffat, 2000).

Only a small number of programs where students are removed from mainstream schooling, provided a specific program and subsequently reintegrated into mainstream

settings with support (as in the Doxa School model) are available in the literature. Little detailed information about student outcomes is available for these programs and few such schools take students in late primary years.

In New Jersey, a school offering alternative placements for middle-school students provides mentoring from college students. This school has reduced suspensions and disciplinary incidents (Hadderman, 2002). St Joseph (Missouri) School provides students with aggression-related problems with behaviour management. Those returning to mainstream settings showed academic improvement and fewer disciplinary referrals (Henley, Fuston, Peters, & Wall, 2000).

In Victoria, Operation Newstart (Operation Newstart, 2006) offers a program of activities for young people at 'educational risk' run by teachers and police officers. Activities provided are intended to help young people develop vocational goals, improve their relationships with others, develop emotional and behavioural control, self esteem and self efficacy and promote health and well-being. Young people attend Operation Newstart four days a week for a term, maintaining contact during this time with their original school by attending one day a week. Student and parent follow up is provided for two years after program completed. Of 168 young people who commenced the program during 1999-2005, 132 completed it and 36 did not. This program has been effective in improving health, social and educational outcomes for completing students. It reports reduced rates of depression and increased self-esteem in course completers, alongside long term reductions in numbers of offences committed when comparing completers with non-completers and improved educational and vocational outcomes. Seventy-seven percent of program completers were enrolled in school one term after completing the program. After a year this dropped to 40%, however nearly half were involved in training, apprenticeship or employed.

### **Reintegration and support**

Little research is available that considers young people's re-entry to mainstream schools (Wyn, Stokes, & Tyler, 2004). Young people who spend time out of education and return tend to have low completion rates (Department of Education, 2001). Boss (1987) suggests that students who have difficulty in maintaining school

attendance do better in smaller individualised settings. This indicates that young people are likely to experience difficulty reintegrating into mainstream schooling where this is an expectation of programs. Holdsworth (2003) quotes an unpublished paper by Handley as arguing that therapeutic programs focusing on changing individual students rather than offering new forms of education for all have mixed results, with many students finding difficulty in reintegration into mainstream settings. Some young people returning to school after time out find it difficult to comply with uniform requirements or to be on time for classes. This indicates that re-entry might be facilitated by adjusting requirements made of students in the original school (Australian Centre for Equity through Education & Australian Youth Research Centre, 2001).

Young people re-entering mainstream schools may experience a range of difficulties; financial, social (reintegrating with peers), emotional (adjusting to routines and the student role after different life experiences) and expectations. St James et al. (2001, 41) argue that ‘the literature on at risk youth identifies case management and advocacy as a key component of any initiative to reduce early school leaving or to prevent those who do leave early from “falling through the cracks”’. This they suggest consists of advocating for young people with social services, linking them with appropriate other agencies or opportunities, building capacity and self-determination within clients and assisting them to clarify goals. Cole (2004, 10) suggests that ongoing support is essential to the reintegration process, writing that ‘some programs we observed provided ongoing support to individual students for 18 months to 2 years after a return to school, helping to resolve problems, negotiating relationships with parents and teachers and encouraging students to continue with their education’. Case management appears to function most effectively when a holistic perspective is provided, consistent staff provide support over extended periods, individuals are comprehensively assessed and a plan is devised, coordinated and followed up (Department of Education, 2001). Similarly, Stokes (2000) argues that long term support from a worker or counsellor is extremely valuable for young people at risk of early school leaving. Young people also report benefits from less formal mentoring arrangements (Department of Education, 2001; Figgis, 2001).

### **Some problems in alternative education settings**

A review of alternative education conducted at the University of Oregon in the United States lists a number of potential problems for education alternatives (Hadderman, 2002). These include

- Masking problems in the larger education system
- Segregating poor, disabled and minority students from mainstream school settings and thus reinforcing the ‘problem’ status of these young people
- Diminishing the mainstream education system’s sense of responsibility to care for young people who do not do well in the environments they provide.

As a program that returns young people to mainstream schooling, segregation is potentially less of a likely outcome for Doxa School students than in most other alternative settings. Nonetheless some alternative schooling settings become options of ‘last resort’ for students with extreme behavioural, personal and social problems, histories of school absenteeism, inappropriate behaviour and suspension (Holdsworth & Moffat, 2000). Clustering such young people together can compound problems such as drug use and anti-social behaviours. The acute nature of difficulties experienced by many students at such schools must be considered in any assessment of student outcomes.

Short term programs are frequently unable to address long-term disadvantage. Some researchers have argued that when dealing with students who have multiple high level needs, short term interventions may leave the young person feeling abandoned once more by the system (Cahill, Murphy, & Hughes, 2005). Cahill et al. argue that short term programs should therefore be accompanied by mechanisms for ongoing support or changes in the schooling system.

When young people have multiple, high level needs, there is a need for multiple modal programs or a holistic approach to addressing their needs. Community support approaches are more likely to assist in addressing problems for high needs young people. (Cahill, Murphy, & Hughes, 2005, 65)

Another study (Cole, 2004) found that staff at alternative schools felt a lack of recognition for their work within the wider education sector, and that this was reflected in inadequate funding allocation.

## **Good practice in education for ‘at risk’ students**

Given the diversity of educational settings that may be termed ‘alternative’ to mainstream schooling it is difficult to make clear prescriptions about what approaches are most likely to be effective for students. Nonetheless there is widespread agreement from the literature that programs targeting young people at risk of early school leaving should:

- Address both risk factors for early school leaving (lack of family support, disruptive behaviours, learning difficulties) and at the same time build resilience by increasing protective factors (e.g. build better relationships, improve sense of school connectedness) (Cahill, Murphy, & Hughes, 2005)
- be relevant to the young person’s life and linked to the goals of that young person (Wyn, Stokes, & Tyler, 2004). Programs that are directly relevant and replicate the cultures of employment rather than education are attractive to some young people (Zyngier, 2005)
- Include within the program both individually based tasks and group work in order to address both academic and social skills (Wyn, Stokes, & Tyler, 2004)
- operate within a climate of adult learning. Participants want to be acknowledged as the young adults they see themselves to be. Young people at some programs are referred to as ‘workers’ or ‘trainees, rather than students, in recognition of their adult-learning status (Cole, 2004; Dalton, 2004; Zyngier, 2005)
- programs should address young people’s underlying problems (such as homelessness, drug and alcohol issues or mental health problems (either their own or their parents) (Cole, 2004; Wyn, Stokes, & Tyler, 2004). Parental involvement. is also advised (Department of Education, 2001)
- reinforce student learning and build self esteem (Department of Education, 2001)
- be adequately funded to address the specific needs of students and to support higher staff ratios (Dalton, 2004; Holdsworth & Moffat, 2000)
- Programs require enthusiastic, flexible program staff who relate well to students. Resources must be provided to sustain and support these staff (Holdsworth & Moffat, 2000). Raywid (in Boss, 1998) is quoted as arguing that warm and accepting relationships with one or more adults at a school are the primary critical factor in assisting disengaged young people to maintain attendance. A significant factor identified in the success of some educational programs for ‘at risk’ youth is

mutual respect between students and teachers (Australian Centre for Equity through Education & Australian Youth Research Centre, 2001; Zyngier, 2005)

- connect to broader community agency networks and training. This enables young people to be linked with other services to address counselling and health or welfare issues or entry to apprenticeships or training opportunities (Cole, 2004; Dalton, 2004; Wyn, Stokes, & Tyler, 2004).

### **Conclusions from the literature**

Students deemed ‘at risk’ of early school leaving are a diverse group, many of whom experience complex social and personal difficulties mediated by the social and economic contexts in which they live. A wide range of educational alternatives catering to ‘at risk’ students are available internationally, however formal evaluations or student outcome studies are rare. As alternative education settings differ in the populations they cater for, as well as the programs they provide, it is problematic to compare student outcomes across programs. This is particularly the case in relation to the Doxa school because students are younger than in most alternative school settings.

The literature suggests that providing young people at risk of early school leaving with programs that are relevant to their lives, support their individual life goals, and are well linked into the community to offer diverse supports and educational pathways assists many to prolong school engagement and move onto further employment and education. While reintegrating students into mainstream schools reduces the risk of long-term marginality it also poses challenges and difficulties for students concerned, particularly in relation to school reintegration. These issues will be considered further through this report.

#### **4 – Research results**

This chapter outlines research results. Discussion of these findings is provided in Chapter 5 and the conclusion.

#### **Demographic information about the Doxa School enrolment**

The tables below have been compiled from school records.

#### **Student enrolments**

Table 1 – Doxa School graduates, 2000-2006

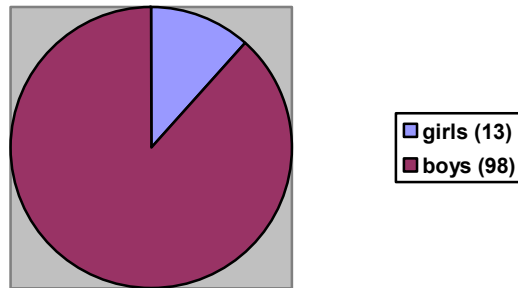
<b>YEAR</b>	<b>STUDENTS IN SEMESTER 1</b>	<b>STUDENTS IN SEMESTER 2</b>
2000	0	6
2001	*	7
2002	8	5
2003	8	8
2004	7	10
2005	10	14
2006	12	16
<b>Total = 111</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>66</b>

\* No records kept for this semester

In accordance with the school model only small numbers of students are enrolled at any time. Numbers have increased gradually over the years of operation. This was facilitated by a change in venue from Fitzroy to West Melbourne in 2004. School capacity has also increased as its program structure has been refined. Students who do not complete the program are not included in the above table. No data was available on students who did not complete the program.

### **Gender of graduates**

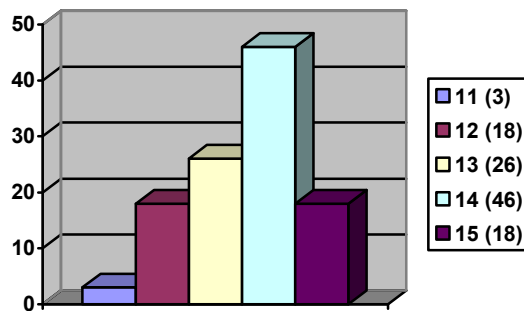
Table 2 - Gender of participants, 2000-2006



School participants are overwhelmingly male. 98 of 111 graduates were male, comprising 88%. This issue will be considered in more detail below.

### **Age of participants**

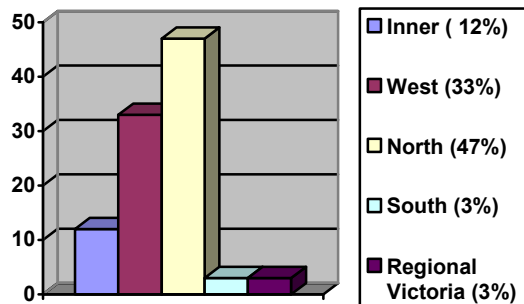
Table 3 – Age of participants, 2000-2006



More than half the 111 participants were either 13 or 14 and therefore in the early years of secondary school, with a much smaller number in the final years of primary school.

### **Geographic location of students**

Table 4 – Area where students lived 2000-2006



The Doxa School was initially based in Fitzroy and subsequently moved to West Melbourne. Its intention was always to serve the western and northern areas of Melbourne. This is an area where acute need for interventions addressing early school leaving has been identified (Teese & Polesel, 2003). It is very appropriate that the school be located within this region.

**Recommendation: The Doxa Youth Foundation should continue to fund the Doxa School and to target students located the in Melbourne’s north west.**

***Types of schools from which students are drawn***

Table 5 – Students’ school of origin type 2000-2006

<b>School Type</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>Number of schools</b>
Catholic Secondary	43	18
Government Secondary	43	20
Catholic Primary	9	7
Government Primary	6	6
Government alternative school	3	1
Unknown	7	
<b>Total</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>52</b>

\* Seven students came from schools that were not identified in the Doxa School database.

The Doxa School services almost equal numbers of students from government and Catholic schools. Two Catholic secondary boys’ schools are the source of approximately 10% of students.

**Outcomes for graduates**

The information provided in this section of the chapter is drawn from survey results and discussions with Doxa School staff. Results are provided by year, rather than aggregated. This is because outcomes for students aged 13-16 cannot be compared with outcomes for students who are now aged 17-20.

### **Outcomes for 2000 graduates**

Table 6 – Graduates from 2000

<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Age now</b>	<b>What are they doing now?</b>	<b>number</b>	<b>Year students left school - if known</b>
6	17-20	working	2	1 left year 10, 1 left year 11- working in maintenance
		looking for work	2	1 left Yr 8 1 did not return to school
		In juvenile detention	1	
		Not known	1	

These statistics reflect an early phase of the Doxa School program, when no mentor program was established. No entry criteria were established at the time. All students were male. This first Doxa School cohort was considered by staff to be a particularly difficult group.

Of those who were working at the time of this research, both managed to remain at school until minimum school-leaving age. It is not known what occupations they are in but it is significant that they are still in employment. Conversely, the two who were known to have left before school leaving age are not in employment, consistent with research findings outlined above that early-school leaving correlates strongly with subsequent unemployment.

### **Outcomes for 2001 graduates**

Table 7 – Graduates from 2001

<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Age now</b>	<b>What are they doing now?</b>	<b>number</b>	<b>Education outcome or occupation (if known)</b>
7	16-19	Still at school	1	Year 11
		working	4	Apprenticeships (joiner, carpenter, roof tiler & unknown)
		looking for work	1	
		Not known	1	

Again this data represents a small cohort of young people, all of whom were boys and considered ‘difficult’. It reflects the first year of the mentor program. It is interesting that at least one member of this cohort is still attending school. Outcomes for this group are positive, despite the small number of students involved.

### **Outcomes for 2002 graduates**

Table 8 – Graduates from 2002

<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Age now</b>	<b>Current situation</b>	<b>number</b>	<b>Education outcome or occupation (if known)</b>
13	15-18	Still at school (at last contact)	9	Year 10-12
		working	2	Apprenticeship (sign-writer) & unknown
		Not known	3	

This cohort is larger than previous enrolments, representing students enrolled over two separate semester programs. The mentor program was well-established and all students were now attending 6 months at the Doxa School and receiving 12 months follow-up. It is significant that only two students from this cohort were known to be unemployed.

### **Outcomes for 2003 graduates**

Table 9 – Graduates from 2003

<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Age now</b>	<b>Current situation</b>	<b>number</b>	<b>Education outcome or occupation (if known)</b>
16	14-17	Still at school	10 (at last contact)*	Year 9-11
		working	3	Carpentry Training apprenticeship
		looking for work	2	
		Not known	1	

Of sixteen graduates in 2003, 10 are still at school and three are working.

**Outcomes for 2004 graduates**

Table 10 – Graduates from 2004

<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Age now</b>	<b>Current situation</b>	<b>number</b>	<b>Current education or occupation (if known)</b>
17	13-16	Still at school	10	Year 8-11
		Left school looking for work	4	2 left after Doxa School 2 left Year 9 2 left Year 10
		Not known	1	

Most of the 2004 cohort were approaching school leaving age at the time this research was undertaken. Although well over half of the 2004 cohort were still engaged in school, six had left at Year 10 or earlier. Two of this six had not returned to any school after their time at the Doxa School. These two young people were both known to experience significant family disruption which made school engagement extremely difficult for them.

**Outcomes for 2005 graduates**

Table 11 – Graduates from 2005

<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Age now</b>	<b>Current situation</b>	<b>number</b>	<b>Year level/Occupation</b>
24	12-15	Still at school	22	Currently in Years 7-10
		looking for work	1	Left during Year 9
		Not known	2	

Most of these students returned to either their previous school or commenced at a new school after graduating from the Doxa School. 14 are still connected to the mentor program. Most are below school leaving age (15) and in the early years of secondary school.

### **Outcomes for 2006 graduates**

Table 12 – Graduates from 2006

<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Age now</b>	<b>Current situation</b>
28	11-14	Still at school (years 7-10)

All 2006 graduates returned to either their previous school or a new school and all are still connected to the Doxa School mentoring program. Most are below school leaving age (15) and in the early years of secondary school.

### **Outcomes for students**

Given that a criterion for entry to Doxa School is that students are at risk of early school leaving, overall figures suggest a high level of success.

- Of the 98 graduates tracked, 71 (72%) were known to be still at school or were still in school on last contact with the school (usually at least 12 months after attending the school).
- Twelve students were working with eight in apprenticeships in building and construction and some were employed in labouring jobs.
- Eight were known to be looking for work. Of these only one graduated within the last three years. Of the two graduates who did not return to a school after time at Doxa School, both had significant family disruption which constitutes a powerful barrier to schooling success.
- Detailed information on the remaining seven students was not available.

A discussion of student outcomes is provided in the conclusion to this report.

### **Reflections from graduates**

This section is based on feedback provided by 51 graduates who completed the survey. As observed above, these 51 respondents tended to come from later rather than earlier school cohorts. This is at least partially because the Doxa School was more likely to have correct addresses for recent graduates, and perhaps also because younger students were still in some instances living with parents who might encourage them to complete and return survey forms. Responses to the survey have been grouped to enable an overview of graduates' perception of the Doxa School program. Graduates' overall assessment of the program is outlined first; a thematic

analysis of responses is provided second. The dot points under each heading indicate the questions asked to determine graduates' assessments of outcomes they achieved.

The two tables below indicate the proportions of graduates who felt that they had experienced mostly positive or mostly negative experiences of the Doxa School program.

***Proportions of participants experiencing positive outcomes***

Table 13 – Positive outcomes

- Going to Doxa had positive outcomes for me

Strongly agree	28%
Agree	62%
Unsure	8%
Disagree	2%
Strongly disagree	

***Proportions of participants experiencing negative outcomes***

Table 14 – Negative outcomes

- Going to Doxa had negative outcomes for me

Strongly agree	
Agree	
Unsure	2%
Disagree	52%
Strongly disagree	46%

These two tables indicate that participants report overwhelmingly believing that they had benefited from their experience of the Doxa School. No participants experienced Doxa School as having negative outcomes. This is highly significant in the context that all graduates are young people who were assessed by their schools as being at risk of early-school leaving, a group characterised by high levels of school dissatisfaction (Teese and Polesel 2003).

***Proportions of participants who enjoyed their time at the School***

Table 15 – Enjoyment

- I enjoyed my time at Doxa
- I'd recommend to another young person to attend Doxa if they had the chance
- If I had my chances over again I would still choose to attend Doxa

Strongly agree	14%
Agree	68%
Unsure	8%
Disagree	6%
Strongly disagree	0%

Over 80% of graduates either agreed or strongly agreed that they had enjoyed their time at Doxa School. This correlated with a sense that they would recommend Doxa School to another young person and that they had made the right choice in attending the program.

***Proportions of participants whose relationships improved***

Table 16 – Relationships

- Doxa helped me to manage conflict
- Going to Doxa helped me to communicate with others
- I made new friendships at Doxa
- I felt part of the school community at Doxa
- Doxa helped me to get along better with the people around me
- Doxa helped me to get along better with the people around me including my family

Strongly agree	20%
Agree	56%
Unsure	12%
Disagree	10%
Strongly disagree	2%

Three-quarters of graduates report having improved communication skills, capacity to manage conflict and ability to make friends as a result of involvement in the Doxa School.

***Proportions of participants whose self-understanding was enhanced***

Table 17 – Self understanding

- I was able to understand my own feelings after going to Doxa
- The staff at Doxa helped me develop my personal goals

Strongly agree	14%
Agree	36%
Unsure	28%
Disagree	16%
Strongly disagree	8%

While 50 per cent strongly agreed or agreed that they were better able to understand their own feelings or formulate personal goals as a result of involvement with the Doxa School, nearly a quarter disagreed or strongly disagreed. This may have been a difficult question for some respondents to answer. Given that the average age of participants while at the Doxa School was 13 or 14 it is unsurprising that the process of learning to understand one’s feelings and clarify life ambitions was incomplete.

### ***Proportions of participants who developed new skills***

Table 18 – Skill development

- Doxa helped me to develop skills that made it easier when I returned to school
- Skills I learnt at Doxa helped me manage my school work
- I achieved things at Doxa that I still feel proud of

Strongly agree	18%
Agree	46%
Unsure	22%
Disagree	10%
Strongly disagree	4%

Nearly all graduates who responded to the survey were able to identify something they achieved at Doxa School that they still feel proud of. For many it may be something tangible such as a photographic piece, for others it may be making friends, a performance at graduation or successful completion. Respondents were less positive about skill development in terms of managing school work or returning to school. This is not surprising as both managing school work and returning to a school setting after a period of disengagement are extremely difficult tasks for any young person, as identified in the literature review.

### ***Proportions of participants who benefited from relationships with adults***

Table 19 – Staff/ mentors

- The staff at Doxa were approachable
- Having a mentor made it easier to go back to school
- Having visits from the youth worker helped when I returned to school

Strongly agree	44%
Agree	46%
Unsure	8%
Disagree	2%
Strongly disagree	

A very high proportion of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that staff including teachers, youth workers and volunteers were crucial. Given that many graduates came to The Doxa School with conflict issues it is very significant that they see adults as helpful and approachable.

***Proportions of participants who experienced attitudinal change to school***

Table 20 – Attitude toward school

- Doxa helped me feel positive about going to school
- Doxa helped me to stay at school longer
- My attitude about school changed after going to Doxa

Strongly agree	10%
Agree	42%
Unsure	30%
Disagree	12%
Strongly disagree	6%

Overall, the experience of the Doxa School program was viewed as positive by the graduates, as was their level of enjoyment. On more specific measures; skill development, communication skills and attitude to school, responses were more varied and less enthusiastic. This does not necessarily reflect negatively on the Doxa School program. Young people who are identified as having difficulties in these areas are likely to retain difficulties in attitudes or to their own capacities in regards to education even if they do manage to remain in the system.

## **5 – Discussion**

This section of the report considers issues that arose from thematic analysis of all data collected. This includes the survey materials outlined above, the case studies and also other interviews with teachers, parents, other school personnel including principals, volunteer community members and youth workers.

### **Age of participants**

The data of the age-range of students indicates that the Doxa School mostly provides a program for young people in the middle years of schooling when they are aged 13-14 years (years 7-9). There is currently a lot of focus within the research literature on the importance of keeping students engaged in school during these years (Boss, 1998; Teese & Polesel, 2003; Wyn, Stokes, & Tyler, 2004; Wyn & White, 1997).

We would argue that the Doxa School should continue to focus on providing an intervention for young people aged 11-14 as this is an age group that is not specifically targeted by any other similar service for disadvantaged young people. These young people are now required to attend school until age 16, bringing it in line with other states. This may put pressure on the School to take older students. At 15 young people who leave school have a few more options than younger students. These include The Island School in Collingwood, teaching units, community-based VCAL and other options through the LLENs.

**Recommendation: the Doxa School should continue to provide an intervention for young people aged 11-14 as this is an age group that is not specifically targeted by any other similar service.**

Young people at the Doxa School work with other students who may be two or three years older or younger than them. This is unusual in mainstream settings and creates opportunities for students to take on leadership roles. The opportunity to act as a leader figured strongly in Doxa School graduates' assessment of the benefits their involvement had lent them. Similarly younger students liked having older students take an interest in them. The benefits from attending Doxa School come from the dynamics of the group of students, rather than just from adults involved. Having few students in the younger age ranges raises the possibility that these students may feel isolated or will get negatively influenced by older students (one graduate was concerned that other students' 'bad language' was inappropriate around younger

participants). Research participants emphasised that staff were well aware of potential negative consequences of the age-mix and managed this accordingly.

Many of the research participants (particularly from the feeder schools) suggested that programs such as Doxa School work really well for younger students who are beginning to disengage, which is often in late primary school. Participants argued that it is often socio-economically disadvantaged students who begin to disengage at this stage and indeed such an argument is supported in the research evidence (Teese, 2002; Teese & Polesel, 2003). Some felt that targeting older students (14 or 15) was too late. At this stage a six month program was less likely to have an impact. Table 5 indicates that 15 of 111 students came during late primary school years. Most of these moved on to start secondary school directly after Doxa School. This was seen as enabling a good transition, without the awkwardness of returning to school after time in a special program. As one secondary school mentor said:

My concern is that by the time kids get identified and get into Doxa I just wonder if it  
If it may be too late or better if done earlier. Sometimes I think Year 5 or 6 would be  
better - I like the idea of second semester of Year 6 so that they go to a new school and  
get a fresh start

While it is likely that primary school-age students will accrue greater benefit from participation their engagement presents practical problems. Younger students are less likely to be able to travel to a school outside their area without a parent taking them both ways. They may find leaving a familiar school environment more difficult than older students. Younger students' behaviours are also likely to be more manageable within their original schools. For these reasons, other participants felt that targeting a higher proportion of students in late primary school may not be feasible.

**Recommendation: The mixed-age grouping at Doxa School should be maintained and participation of late-primary school students be encouraged where practical.**

As the Doxa School do not keep records about students who do not complete the program it is impossible to draw conclusions about how different groups cope with requirements of the program or the diversity of young people it caters for. This information should be maintained by the school as part of routine record keeping.

**Recommendation: Age and brief demographic data be maintained by the school on numbers of young people who do not complete the program.**

## **Gender of participants**

Table 2 on page 26 shows the gendered breakdown of students attending Doxa School. Approximately seven times as many students were male as female.

Many reasons for this gendered imbalance are beyond the control of the Doxa School program. Student demographics are a product both of entry assessment procedures and of referral by other schools. The target group of boys are more difficult to maintain in mainstream school settings than the target group of girls. Schools are probably more likely to refer boys than girls to an external program. As some participants also argued, girls are also more likely to seek help within the school that they are already attending. The active and applied nature of the Doxa School program is viewed by many participants as suitable for boys. Nonetheless the gendered breakdown at the Doxa School is pronounced.

Surprisingly, participants suggested that this gendered inequality does not necessarily present difficulties for girls attending the Doxa School. Some said that depending on the girl they would not be concerned about sending her to a predominantly male environment. Others indicated that the setting would be quite unsuitable for some girls.

I think Doxa should aim to include more girls where they can. If it's about the schools not referring girls then they need to be more proactive in their marketing.

The reason there are more boys here is because difficult girls are catered for better in the schools themselves. Boys' difficult behaviour can be much harder for schools to manage.

In the literature review above we observed that while boys leave school approximately twice as frequently before completing year 12 as girls, outcomes for girls who do so are poorer than those experienced by boys (Teese, 2002; Teese & Polesel, 2003).

It is unfortunate if the gendered enrolment of Doxa School participants precludes the involvement of young women assessed by their school to be unlikely to cope in this environment. No equivalent program is available that provides specifically for females. One way of addressing this problem is to actively target girls by educating schools on the adverse consequences of early-school leaving for young women and

the different signs those young women who are at risk of early-school display. For instance, broader marketing of the Doxa School to girls' schools and coeducational schools.

**Recommendation: The Doxa School should endeavour to increase the proportion of girls referred to their program.**

### **Aggregating groups of 'at risk' young people**

In the general literature (as detailed in the literature review to this report) concern has been expressed about the negative consequences of grouping 'at risk' young people together (Cahill et al 2005). Poorly managed or in the wrong setting this has functioned to entrench anti-social behaviour and intensify the marginalisation of already marginalised young people.

Interestingly research participants did not see aggregating the Doxa School students as problematic. This was because staff are well aware of the potential for negative peer influence and because of the high ratio of staff to students and the high level of supervision of students.

Staff appear to put energy into encouraging students to develop supportive relationships with each other. We asked one youth worker what helps young people to get along:

It's a small space and really they just have to and we constantly reinforce that.

Also, because of the distances students travel to attend the School and their relatively young age it is unusual for students to socialise outside the school setting. Participants saw this as important in undermining the possibility of facilitating young people's forming of peer social groups with a shared interest in problematic pastimes. While graduates reported enjoying their friendships with other participants at the school, it was unusual for these friendships to endure after the program ended. A youth worker commented that

It is common for kids to ask after each other during outreach visits but rarely do they keep in regular contact.

Regular contact with a youth worker also helps students reflect on their personal development and goals that have been the focus throughout the program, and

therefore to avoid a possible escalation of anti-social behaviour. As one Year Level Coordinator who had referred a number of students to Doxa School expressed it:

In a small setting in an intensive way it [placing a mix of students with behavioural difficulties] does work. Having [a youth worker] helped because she kept in contact with the family, the school and the young person.

A volunteer added that some young people who may be marginalised in the school setting often felt less alienated at Doxa School as they did not stand out as a 'problem' young people. This helped them feel more normal and provided a setting where they felt able to have achievements recognised. This, she felt, undermined a tendency for these young people to feel that their only avenue for recognition was through anti-social or disruptive behaviour:

I've been a volunteer since the start and its amazing how after a while children who felt alienated in their own school environment always find a way to fit in here. They know we care about them for who they are and what they can do.

**Recommendation: Doxa School staff maintain their current efforts to manage the potential for negative peer influence among school participants.**

### **The program**

The Doxa School program attends to academic, interpersonal and social skills and early vocational planning through emphasising the importance of school in young people's lives.

Four days a week, the mornings are devoted to academic education. Both volunteers and teachers work often on a one-to-one basis with students. Areas of academic difficulty are identified; for instance a maths specialist volunteer attends three days a week to work with students who need assistance in this area. Other volunteers are more generalist and often work closely with a young person they feel they are able to establish rapport with. Young people found individual academic assistance very helpful:

It is a very good school for kids like me to learn.

I appreciate what the Doxa School did for me and think I can go on to do well.

Concern about missing six months of their own school program was not considered to be a problem for any Doxa School graduate as their learning at the original school had already been highly disrupted.

Most kids who go to Doxa are underperforming academically anyway and Doxa helps to sort out or at least address some of these barriers.

Many young people were quick to identify that they weren't working well at their original school and found school work difficult, if not also tedious. What Doxa School appears to do best is helping students better manage some of the emotional or attitudinal barriers that impact on their academic performance and relationships with others at the school. Many of the mentors and student welfare coordinators interviewed made comments that are consistent with the view of the Student Welfare Coordinator cited below:

If young people have anger management, behavioural issues, welfare or literacy issues that Doxa are able to identify early and address them..... The benefits of sorting out some of their barriers to their learning such as those mentioned then the negatives concerns are outweighed.

For one young person with a learning difficulty described in a case study above, Doxa School provided the setting where it was possible for him to see himself as achieving new skills. For this reason he wanted to go to school. Prior to this his mother had faced a constant battle to get her son to attend school. This problem re-emerged when he left the Doxa School.

Conflict management and awareness of the impact of one's own behaviour in social settings are seen as particular priorities by the staff and within the school ethos. The first case study participant, Lewis, indicates that non-academic issues can interfere with a students' learning progress. Lewis was able to manage much better back in his original school after assistance from Doxa School with anger management, conflict resolution and self worth (this coincided also with moving out of a conflictual home). The outreach component of the program was extended up to 18 months to help him manage his home situation. Lewis now anticipates that he will be able to complete Year 12 and hopes to attend university. Just as importantly his teachers also have the same expectation for him. He now also has stable friendships at the school; before he was both a bully and victimised himself by other students. Although it appears likely that an improved living situation was also influential in this improvement Lewis' student welfare coordinator agrees with his assessment that 'Doxa turned my life around'.

Other students also noted that the most significant aspect of the Doxa School program was to help them improve their attitude to school and to get along better with both teachers and students. Sometimes simply having time out from mainstream school was helpful:

Doxa provided me with the attitude towards school I never had. It gave me a better understanding of the work and helped me not to judge so quickly. I give great thanks to Doxa and everyone there.

Not only did Doxa help me at school, it served as a much needed break from school.

The literature reviewed above emphasises the importance of structuring program around the individual needs of young people, and to assist them in finding areas of personal strength (Wyn, Stokes, & Tyler, 2004). Feedback from participants and their families indicate that students found having a curriculum tailored to his or her individual needs highly beneficial. Another factor in good practice identified in the literature review is to include both individual and group activities (Wyn, Stokes, & Tyler, 2004). Again the Doxa School program is structured to incorporate a balance of individual and social skill development.

Vocationally focused education is also emphasised in the literature as particularly important for 'at risk' students. As in the case study above where Carl discovered his passion for cooking and public speaking and is pursuing these interests in his new school. These were interests that were fostered and supported throughout his time at Doxa School. For many graduates photography provided an avenue of achievement. Graduates responding to the survey frequently identified skills in photography as something they felt proud of as a result of their Doxa School involvement.

Young people's feedback on the program was remarkably consistent and was marked particularly by highly favourable comparisons with their previous experiences of school. Some suggested improvements to the program including more sporting opportunities and excursions; nonetheless others commented that plenty of such opportunities were provided.

The curriculum model used by Doxa School (of academic education in the morning and activity-based learning in the afternoon) is more common within primary than secondary schools. Feedback suggests that this works well for keeping students

focused by acting as an incentive for students to complete homework and concentrate in the morning. Failing this they miss out on special afternoon activities, many of which are off-campus, which students love. This works especially well for younger students, as a Doxa School teacher commented:

In many ways the younger the kid the more able they are to adapt to our program because we run it on a primary school model, one teacher one class room etc.

In the literature review we provided a summary of good practice in education for ‘at risk’ students. The Doxa School program appears to address each of the qualities we outlined. The last area ‘connecting to the broader community’ is, however, something where the program might be able to further develop. Ongoing support for graduates returning to mainstream school is provided by youth workers who are not educationally trained and therefore not always able to provide young people with advice on alternatives if despite involvement in Doxa School, they still leave school before age 16.

Local Learning Employment Networks commonly known as LLENS are established across the state to specifically provide alternative pathways into employment, education and training for young people in the post-compulsory years. LLEN personnel argue that students need to know about alternative pathways at a very early age. Doxa School students are generally too young to be part of a LLEN, however, having an understanding of a possible pathway allows young people to feel more positive about future options for them even if they are in a mainstream school that has a focus on more traditional education outcomes.

**Recommendation: Doxa School staff should be provided with ongoing opportunities to learn about vocational options (such as school-based apprenticeships and community based Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning)**

Doxa School staff professional development activities are restricted due to small numbers and rely on staff undertaking professional reading. Staff do not receive professional development on a regular basis from external sources. Resources packaged for schools, for instance, are not routinely distributed to the Doxa School. Some participants felt that as staff were not in a large school setting and did not receive regular in house training, they were not as aware of referral networks available in the region as staff in mainstream schools. While the Doxa School

generally does not accept young people with serious mental health or drug issues these issues are likely to arise and come to the attention of staff during some students' period of enrollment. Often it is another family member with a drug or mental health issue that causes difficulties for the young person and in this instance the school needs to be well informed as to how to manage a range of complex situations.

**Recommendation: The school should maintain and expand the referral networks they draw on when drug, mental health and other issues emerge for students or for students' families.**

## **Staffing**

The literature on alternative education settings emphasises the importance of relationships staff are able to forge with students. Given the difficulties many 'at risk' students experience with conflict management it is remarkable that all of the comments about teachers and the Principal from young people and others were highly complimentary. Table 19 in this report indicates a very high assessment of Doxa School staff by participants. The optional written comment on the survey form generated numerous responses thanking staff for their support and help. For many it was a sense of belonging to something that made a difference. Graduates wrote:

Thanks to all the Doxa staff for helping me and making me feel part of their school.

Thanks to Sr Chris, I can do maths much better now.

Additionally all parents with whom the researchers spoke expressed gratitude to staff. Some parents felt that the mentoring relationships established for their child in school was a source of ongoing support and advice for the whole family.

As noted above, one of the positive aspects of the Doxa School program was the capacity for young people to receive one-on-one attention. Research participants argued that individualised attention was a key success factor for the school. The gradually increasing student numbers and corresponding increase in staffing at the Doxa School over the past four years does not seem to have undermined the ability of staff to provide specialist attention.

Very few programs offer this level of individualised attention, some of which was provided by volunteers, often ex-teachers. The volunteer program is a remarkably successful element of Doxa School. Three students (and two parents) interviewed

specifically commented that young people enjoyed and benefited from engagement with older people in this way.

The students respond well to the group of volunteers, they really appreciate that we don't get paid for what we do, it gives them the message that we really care about them.

One volunteer commented that it would be better if there were more volunteers as numbers fluctuate. In this regard, one strategy would be for Doxa School to expand their involvement with relevant tertiary institutions as a means of recruiting tertiary student volunteers.

**Recommendation: Doxa School should maintain the volunteer program and, where possible, attempt to recruit additional volunteers.**

### **Mentors and outreach visits: transitioning back to school**

We commented in the literature review above that a difficulty of taking students out of their school setting to attend a program (such as Doxa School) is that returning to mainstream settings is challenging. This is particularly so when the school environment is unchanged, or individuals with whom the student found it difficult to get along are still there.

A key strength of Doxa School is the combined support offered through youth workers and a school-based mentor. The support provided by the Doxa School youth workers and school mentors was highly regarded by all research participants.

Student support is provided for the first 12 months after a student attends the Doxa School program and is sometimes extended under special circumstances. Doxa School insists that schools make a commitment to mentoring a student when they return to mainstream settings. Having an identified mentor who will speak on their behalf to other teachers and keep in contact with parents buffers students from some of the stresses associated with the demands of school.

Youth workers provide a somewhat different role, working closely with the mentor. Youth workers focus more on the student's life, outside interests and family situation, and how this relates to their engagement in school. Graduates commonly reported that visits from the youth worker were something they looked forward to and helped them

feel ‘normal’ in the school setting. They particularly liked the informal nature of the visit:

It’s not like sitting in a room telling someone your problems or getting counselling. You get to go out of the school and have a hot chocolate and talk about normal stuff. It really helps.

Research participants stressed that mentoring works best when it is practical and activity-based. The youth workers agreed that

We prefer to see kids off the property. Often seeing kids in school is not effective.

A school-based mentor felt that having a consistent youth worker to support students was an effective strategy in reducing the isolation of some young people:

Another person in their sphere (the youth worker) says to them ‘I care about you, and I care about what happens to you and I want to make sure that you are okay.’ Often with these kids there isn’t anybody or those that are there are ineffectual or need high levels of support themselves. This provides another adult in the young person’s life that provides the message ‘I want you to do okay and I’m here to help’ – young people respond well to this.

Professional staff interviewed indicated that they preferred the Doxa School model to ‘Teaching Units’ available to ‘at risk’ students across the state. (Teaching Units provide four days per week assistance to a student for one term, with this young person returning to school one day per week and reintegrating at the end of the program.) The major difference is that Teaching Units do not offer follow-up after the period of intervention.

**Recommendation: the focus on mentoring and youth worker support be maintained and enhanced as a central component of the Doxa School program.**

### **Likely impact of an 18 month program.**

The literature reviewed above warns that any evaluators of time-limited programs such as the Doxa School should have realistic expectations of the impact such programs are able to have on student outcomes. Students who have problems such as conflictual family relationships, low-socio economic backgrounds, mental health problems or learning difficulties are likely to experience long-term difficulties in education. Young people who have supportive parents and a mentor they connected with appeared to have reaped the most benefits of the Doxa School

There is no doubt that for some an 18 month intervention such as Doxa School will not be enough to complete their schooling. As one mentor commented:

For some an 18 month period is not long enough to address long-term school issues.

As an example, Will, in the case study above enjoyed his time at Doxa School but still doesn't like school and would rather not be there. He is still regularly suspended from school. The difference he thinks Doxa School made is that he now sees a point in staying at school and hence is still attending school. This is significant for a young man who appeared at one point unlikely to complete primary school.

## **6 – Conclusions and key findings**

This research has two overarching aims. The first was to track graduates of the Doxa School program to determine the outcomes these young people had achieved. The second aim was to suggest future directions for the school. Accordingly the conclusion is structured around these two issues.

### **Outcomes for students**

As outlined earlier in this report the overall figures suggest a high level of success in terms of the outcomes for students.

Students from disadvantaged areas such as Melbourne's north west have low levels of participation in tertiary education (Teese and Polesel 2003). Young people who attend Doxa School are identified within this cohort as being particularly at risk of early-school leaving and often have parents with low educational levels. In this context we would not expect high levels of tertiary education. Levels of tertiary access by Doxa School students will not be assessable until larger cohorts have reached 18 years and above. Currently the older Doxa School graduates are still only between 17-20 and their numbers are few.

While not directly comparable to Doxa School, other outcomes data from alternative school setting indicates the potential of these kinds of interventions to assist young people to remain in the education system for longer and to move onto employment and other positive life outcomes. It is difficult to determine, in any outcome study such as this, what changes in a young person's life should be attributed to interventions such as Doxa School and what may be a result of a complex mix of other factors in their lives. For young people with acutely difficult family situations an intervention such as Doxa School is likely to only have limited effect in improving their capacity to remain in the education system.

Nonetheless the present study indicates that the overwhelming majority of young people who attend the program believe that their lives, skill levels and schooling outcomes have been enhanced through involvement with the program. This is a view that is reiterated by parents, teachers and Principals at other schools as well as Doxa School personnel interviewed for the research. Significantly everyone who returned

surveys stated that they enjoyed their time at Doxa School and everyone also was proud of something they did at Doxa School.

As identified in the literature review it is difficult for students who have been disengaged from education to return to a mainstream environment. Young people who attend Doxa School were disengaged from education well before they came to Doxa School. Some report ongoing difficulties in staying at school, but also claim that without Doxa School they would have been less likely to have remained within the education system. Doxa School staff are well aware of the difficulties young people face in returning to mainstream settings and the mentoring and youth worker support components of the program set it apart from most other interventions which remove young people from an educational setting for a period.

Doxa School is a sorely needed resource in the north west of Melbourne. Indeed it was not uncommon for interviewees who participated in the research to suggest that the model could usefully be replicated in other areas of Victoria.

**Recommendation: The Doxa School model is consistent with good practice identified in the literature in regard to providing education for students deemed at risk of early school leaving. In view of the need for programs such as Doxa School in other areas of Victoria, the model might usefully be adapted to, and replicated in, other contexts.**

### **Recommendations for future directions**

The second component of the research was to make recommendations as to future directions for the Doxa School.

The Doxa School provides an intensive program for small numbers of students, although enrolments have increased over the past few years to 15 per semester. The program incorporates areas of good practice in provision of school retention initiatives identified in the literature review. Key program areas that lead to success and the high regard that graduates, families and other professionals have for Doxa School include:

- The 12 months of support available to students after attending Doxa School including outreach youth worker visits and mentoring within the schools.
- Keeping young people connected to school is essentially about keeping them connected to key people. Establishing a supportive adult (school mentor) within the school setting is a very important part of the process.

- Increased one-on-one contact with adults is very important for both young people's communication skills and their self-esteem. Staff are warmly regarded and the extensive involvement of volunteers enables significant personal attention.
- The structure of morning academic work with afternoon excursions and activities keeps young people engaged. A mix of individual and group activities support students both academically and in developing social skills. Doxa School staff have a special skill in helping students identify something they are good at and from which they may garner a sense of achievement.

We identified few areas where we thought that Doxa School could be improved within current resources. These pertain to issues including record keeping of students who do not complete the program, increasing the proportion of girls accessing the program, enhancing professional development and referral networks and expanding the volunteer program where possible. Recommendations to this effect have been made throughout this report.

Mainstream schools clearly struggle to keep some disadvantaged young people (often boys) engaged and look to institutions such as Doxa School to assist them. Doxa School is highly regarded by these schools. There is a high level of appreciation among those in contact with Doxa School (graduates, parents, and staff from other schools) for this innovative and caring program.

## 7 – References

- Australian Centre for Equity through Education, & Australian Youth Research Centre. (2001). *Building Relationships: Making Education Work*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Boss, S. (1998). Learning from the margins. *NW Education, Summer*, 1-12.
- Bourdieu, P. (1996). Understanding. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 13(2), 17–37.
- Cahill, H., Murphy, B., & Hughes, A. (2005). *A Toolkit of Interventions to Assist Young People to Negotiate Transitional Pathways*. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.
- Cole, P. (2004, 24 June). *Learning in alternative settings: what makes a sustainable program?*. Paper presented at the Learning for Choices Expo, Sydney.
- Dalton, J. (2004). *Community based VCAL programs Gippsland*. Geelong: Faculty of Education, Deakin University.
- Department of Education, (2001). *Innovation and Best Practice in Schools: Review of Literature and Practice*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Figgis, J. (2001). *The Landscape of Support for Youth Transition*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Hadderman, M. (2002). *Trends and Issues: School choice*. Oregon: Clearinghouse on Education Policy and Management.
- Henley, P., Fuston, J., Peters, T., & Wall, L. (2000). Rescuing the troublemakers. *Principal*, 79(4), 33-36.
- Holden, E., & Dwyer, P. (1992). *Making the Break: Leaving School Early, Disaffiliated Early School Leavers Study*. Melbourne: Youth Research Centre.
- Holdsworth, R. (2003). *Good practice in learning alternatives*. Melbourne: Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne.
- Holdsworth, R., & Moffat, A. (2000). *The Eclipse Program and the Dickson College Alternative Program*. Melbourne: Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne.
- James, P., St Leger, P., & Ward, K. (2001). *Making Connections: The Evaluation of the Victorian Full Service Schools Program*. Melbourne: Department of Education, Employment and Training.
- King, A. (1999). *The Cost to Australia of Early School-Leaving*. Sydney: Report commissioned by Dusseldorf Skills Forum. Conducted by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, University of Canberra.
- McFadden, M., & Munns, G. (2000). First chance, second chance or last chance. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 21(1).
- Operation Newstart. (2006). *Operation Newstart Western: progress and evaluation report 1999-2006*. Melbourne: Operation Newstart.
- Smyth, J., Hattam, R., Cannon, J., Edwards, J., Wilson, N., & Worst, S. (2000). *Listen to Me I'm Leaving - Early School Leaving in South Australian Secondary Schools*. Adelaide: Department of Education, Training and Employment and Senior Assessment Board of South Australia.
- Stake, R. E. (1998). Case studies. In Y. S. Lincoln & N. K. Denzin (Eds.), *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* (pp. 86–106). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Stokes, H. (2005). *Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL): Changing Lanes*. Melbourne: Youth Research Centre.
- Stokes, S. (2000). *Out of Education: A Report for the Victorian Full Service Schools Program*. Melbourne: Department of Education, Employment and Training.

- Teese, R. (2002). *Early leaving in Victoria: geographical patterns, origins and strategic issues*. Melbourne: Educational Outcomes Research Unit, The University of Melbourne.
- Teese, R., & Polesel, J. (2003). *Undemocratic Schooling: Equity and Quality in Mass Secondary Education in Australia*. Melbourne: University Melbourne Publishing.
- Teese, R., Robinson, L., Lamb, S., & Mason, K. (2006). *The 2005 On Track Longitudinal Survey. The Destinations of 2003 School Leavers in Victoria Two Years On*. Melbourne: Office of Learning and Teaching, Department of Education and Training.
- Wyn, J., Stokes, H., & Tyler, D. (2004). *Stepping Stones: TAFE and ACE Program Development for Early School Leavers*. Adelaide: Australian National Training Authority.
- Wyn, J., & White, R. (1997). *Rethinking Youth*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Zyngier, D. (2005). *The Island: a small bastion of hope*. Melbourne: Education Faculty, Monash University.

***Appendix 1 - Survey sent to graduates (includes raw data)***

Thankyou for participating in the University of Melbourne evaluation of the Doxa School which you may know as – The Gap Program, Mews, Marist Transition School or the Doxa School. Please complete the following survey and return in the enclosed reply paid envelope.

What did Doxa achieve? We want to hear from you about what you did, but we also want to know what worked and what difference it made to you.  
Could you tell us as honestly and accurately as possible about these things. The survey is anonymous and should take between 10 – 15 min of your time.

---

Part A: Background information:

1. Your age \_\_\_\_\_
2. Male or Female \_\_\_\_\_
3. What year did you attend Doxa?  
Year: \_\_\_\_\_  
Level: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Did you return to school after Doxa? Yes  No
5. Did you return to the same school you came from or a different school?
6. The reason I returned to the same school was  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. The reason I went to a different school was  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. This Year I am  
(a) Full time school  Year level \_\_\_\_\_  
(b) Part time school  Year level \_\_\_\_\_  
(c) Training/apprenticeship  \_\_\_\_\_  
(d) Tertiary study  \_\_\_\_\_  
(e) Full time employment  \_\_\_\_\_  
(f) Part time employment  \_\_\_\_\_  
(g) Not employed/looking for work  \_\_\_\_\_  
(h) Other, e.g. caring for children  \_\_\_\_\_
9. If you have left school what Year level did you leave? \_\_\_\_\_
10. If you are still at school do you expect to complete Year 12? Yes  No

Part B: Place a tick in the box that most suits how you feel about the following statements.

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
1. I enjoyed my time at Doxa	18	74	6	2	0
2. Doxa helped me feel positive about going to school	4	48	32	12	2
3. Going to Doxa helped me.	28	62	8	2	0
4. Going to Doxa was not very helpful	0	0	2	52	46
5. Doxa helped me to manage conflict	18	64	10	8	0
6. Going to Doxa helped me to communicate with others	24	60	8	8	0
7. I was able to understand my own feelings after going to Doxa	14	30	30	12	10
8. I'd recommend to another young person to attend Doxa if they had the chance	12	78	6	4	0
9. The staff at Doxa were approachable	54	44	2		
10. I made new friendships at Doxa	16	68	10	6	0
11. DOXA helped me to stay at school longer					
12. Doxa helped me to develop skills that made it easier when I returned to school					
13. If I had my chances over again I would still choose to attend Doxa	16	66	12	6	0
14. Having a mentor made it easier to go back to school	42	41	6	1	0
15. Skills I learnt at Doxa helped me manage my school work better	2	38	30	8	6
16. My attitude about school changed after going to Doxa					
17. I felt part of the school community at Doxa	14	72	12	10	2
18. The staff at Doxa helped me develop my personal goals	14	42	26	20	6
19. Doxa helped me to get along better with the people around me	20	44	16	14	6
20. Doxa helped me to get along better with my family	28	48	14	12	4
21. Having visits from the youth worker when I returned to school were helpful.	54	42	5	1	0
22. I achieved things at Doxa that I still feel proud of	48	46	4	0	0

Comments(optional)

---



---



---



---

## *Appendix 2 – Interview schedules*

### **Interview questions for graduates of the Doxa School.**

1. What did you enjoy most about going to the Doxa School?
2. Why did you want to go there? Who suggested it to you?
3. Do you think the school made a difference to your thoughts about school?
4. What did you like most about the school?
5. What didn't you like?
6. While you were at Doxa what were some of the things that helped you?
7. Do you think Doxa made a difference to your school work?
8. At Doxa there were only 20 other students and six staff, what was this like?
9. Would you recommend to another young person to go to Doxa if they had a chance? Why/why not?
10. Can you describe what you did after completing your six months at Doxa.
11. Was it difficult/easy to fit back into school after you left Doxa? What helped and what made it more challenging?
12. If you went back to your school how was it different to when you left?
13. Do you think Doxa helped you to stay at school longer? Describe some aspects that helped you with this.
14. What would you change at Doxa?
15. What was the best thing about going to Doxa?

### **Interview questions for parents/guardians.**

1. Where did you hear about the Doxa School?
2. Why did you choose to send your child to Doxa?
3. What did you like about the way Doxa operated?
4. What were your initial concerns? Did they eventuate?
5. What worked well for your child at Doxa?
6. What didn't work so well?
7. How did your child's attitude to school change while they were at Doxa? What about when they returned to school?
8. In your mind did Doxa make a difference to your child's school work?
9. Do you think going to Doxa still has an impact on your child now? Explain
10. What things would you keep the same at Doxa and what would you change?

### **Interview questions for teachers/principals**

1. How does Doxa help students to manage school better?
2. What difficulties do students who attend Doxa face and how are they overcome?
3. What do Doxa students like most about the school? What do they like least?
4. How does Doxa assist young people to return to school after being at Doxa?
5. How does Doxa help young people with communication skills?
6. Do you think the experience has a long term impact on students?
7. What do you like most about the Doxa setting?
8. What things would you keep the same at Doxa and what would you change?
9. In your view does attending Doxa make a difference on a young person's academic performance?
10. Are there any other comments you would like to make?