Non formal education provision in Australia for youth at risk

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The Australian experience is of issues surrounding youth 'at risk', their engagement or re-engagement into literacy learning, and their need for supportive networks.

Non formal education provision in Australia developed in parallel with formal education, where between 1872 and 1895 compulsory formal education was legislated in each of the Australian states for children up to the age of 12 (2005). However in these early years of schooling in Australia attitudes were fairly relaxed about compulsory attendance (Creighton, 1993). Non formal education was mainly for working men and women and later their children. Catering for cultural, vocational and social interests were the "schools of arts," "mechanics institutes," "night schools" and later various "clubs". The first three types of "informal" provisions continued into the 1970s when they were gradually absorbed into the Technical and Further Education system (Goozee, 2001).

After World War II the relaxed attitude to formal schooling and attendance disappeared. Secondary schools were established and youths were mandated to attend up till the age of 15. Additionally strict labour laws preventing full time work for children under 15 further enforced school as the only legal place for young people to be. Now in 2006 legislation is being passed in states across Australia compelling young people up to the ages of 17 or 18 to be in regular attendance at school/work/or training, or a combination of the three (Queensland Government, 2002a). So unlike youth 100 to even 50 years ago, in 2006 young people not permanently involved in formal education or work, are now constructed at best as "at risk" to themselves and to society, and at worst "law breakers".

Leaving aside the ethics of constructing a "risk", "deficit, or "criminal" identity – about which is an ongoing a robust debate – how to engage or re-engage these young people into education has become a focal issue, not only in Australia but globally. To this end in Australia several models of "informal" or "non mainstream" schooling have emerged. This paper examines three examples of these models along with the strategies and practices employed. As participating case studies in a four year PhD research project [investigating literacy practices at alternative education sites] all three models of alternative or non formal schooling reflect the more relaxed attitudes of earlier Australian formal and non formal spheres of education. They also tend to employ adult education principles of *andragogy* rather than school *pedagogic* teaching principles (Knowles, 1980; 1990).

Case Study Profiles

Information detailed below is based on individual interviews at each case study site with four embedded case study students and their teachers, as well as classroom

observations and work samples. The first case study is of the "Flexi school" model. Flexi schools have operated across Australia since the 1980s. Usually they are a stand alone facility operating out of a variety of buildings: community centres, scout halls, old houses, rented rooms. Their curriculum depends on the legislated requirements of the various states. In Queensland the state requires education curriculums to be delivered by accredited educators / teachers. Consequently in Queensland the Flexi schools have been using curriculum materials developed by Education Queensland's Brisbane School of Distance Education, which has served up to 500 at risk students at 50 alternative education sites (Sutton, 2002). Apart from marking and returning workbooks, up until the end of 2005 the Brisbane School of Distance Education also had a pastoral support teacher who telephoned and visited the Flexi sites, supporting both students and teachers alike. The case study Flexi site was attended by approximately 30 students aged 13 to 18, working from a single room approximately 12 meters by 8 meters beneath a building housing governmental offices, in the industrial sector of a small rural mountain town. Fortunately not all students attended at the same time. As self directed learners most students completed their workbooks at home, only coming in for a few hours once or twice a week for teaching and social support. Providing this support were two teachers and a para teacher. But unlike all the other Flexi schools in Queensland, this Flexi was line managed by the local high school and mainly funded by Education Queensland. The commonality for students attending this site was lack of attendance at mainstream schools. Of the four embedded case study students prior to enrolling at the Flexi: one had not attended school for two years, one had truanted on a regular basis from a series of three high schools, one had serious behavioural problems and had been suspended, while the last frequently truanted because of school bullying. Thus these students could be categorised as "educationally at risk", that is students who were "at risk" of failing to complete the now required 12 years of education (The Australian Centre for Equity through Education & The Australian Youth Research Centre, 2001; Luke, Allan, Elkins, Weir et al., 2002).

The second case study site, with an enrolment of around 20, in a rural city was one of five trial alternate, mostly off school campus sites set up and totally funded by the state education authority, Education Queensland (Queensland Government, 2002b). These sites were established with a mandate to provide individually tailored programs for at risk adolescents. The cohort at this site was of highly disengaged younger adolescents aged between 10 and 15. Often traumatized by domestic violence or school bullying many had had severe behavioural problems and/or were school refusals. The aim for students at this site was to be re-integrated back into their primary [elementary] or high schools; however, many students were long term attendees. Patterns of attendance were both unique for each student and flexible. Some students came just for an hour or two once a week, attending the rest of the week at their own primary or high school. Other students attended regularly every day from 9am to 1pm, and for others the day was lengthened or shortened to encourage re-engagement or to suit learning needs. There were two main teacher/directors, Mr and Mrs T, a husband and wife team as well as music, art, craft, woodwork teachers, two teachers aides and occasional volunteers.

To help re-integrate their students into mainstream social and learning practices, Mr and Mrs T have made Glasser's *Choice Theory* the foundational stone of all the teaching practices (Glasser, 1998; 2001), whereby they strive to fulfil the student's

"four psychological needs: belonging (which includes love), power, freedom and fun" (Glasser, 2001, p.15) thus enabling students *to choose* to place learning in their *quality world.* Of the four embedded case study students interviewed: one was a school refusal because of gender and bullying issues, and three had had severe behavioural problems and had refused to participate in any learning activities, while at their "normal" school. These students like those in the first case study site were "educationally" at risk, as well as at risk of future anti-social or criminal behaviours.

The third case study site was situated in the state capital. Providing a non school mode of education to educationally at risk adolescents aged 14 to 18, this suburban Technical and Further Education College [TAFE] ran a unique program *Certificate I Workplace Access for Youth at Risk*. Over a one year period, students in 5 classes attended the campus 4 days a week, with one day off campus work experience. They chose from two vocational strands: hospitality/office/retail or engineering/ horticulture/construction. On the successful completion of their strand, they would receive a *Certificate I, Workplace Access*. To receive this certificate they had to successfully complete each component of their strand, complete 200 hours of work experience, and participate in a Skills for the Future course, a personal development course. As part of their Certificate I, all students also had to attend Literacy and Numeracy classes and exit with a NRS level 3 [National Reporting Standard; Appendix 1] (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997; Aris Language Australia, 2002). As at the above two sites, the program at this centre also featured personal choice and self directed learning, particularly in the Literacy/Numeracy component. After a majority vote each literacy class was able to choose between a *theme* format or a *fundraising committee* format. The *theme* classes further brainstormed to choose subject areas to research and write about such as "music" and "drugs and diseases", while the *fundraising committee* classes voted on which charity they would fundraise for with the whole literacy program following the format and tasks of a fundraising committee. Apart from using choice and self directed learning, all students involved were experiencing many risk factors, including being "educationally at risk".

One of the four embedded case study students had not attended school for one year and had been homeless for most of that time. The other three all had had problems with truanting from high school, which had resulted in extremely low literacy levels for two. Additionally they had all had behaviour problems at school, and were referred to the program by either their high school counsellors or the principals, who had stressed the more relaxed atmosphere and flexibility of the program might better suit their needs. However of the original 80 students enrolled [in 2004] only approximately 36 finished the course at the end of the year. Reasons given by the program coordinator were these students were either too young, 14; or they were students with too many risk factors, such as homelessness, past sexual abuse, lack of parental support, and substance abuse. Also she felt with such high needs students there needed to be a higher teacher ratio, which was lacking. Nevertheless this site had the highest number of at risk students engaged in learning, and who completed their program.

Teachers' practices that kept at risk students engaged

Drawing on the 38 interviewed staff and students' perspectives as well as from classroom observations and work samples, four main differences emerged between

this informal alternative provision and the more formal mainstream schooling. These were differences that kept hitherto disengaged "at risk" student engaged:

- **First was the close relationship and support given by staff to students.** The difference was front of class formal lecture style delivery at the local high schools, and *sitting next to* [repeatedly stressed] the student in the informal relaxed atmosphere of the alternative non schooling "classrooms". Students expressed the view that they were able in this environment able to ask and have their misunderstandings clarified without humiliation or embarrassment, which had not happened in the formal school setting. Staff expressed the view that unlike in the formal setting, here they were able to get to know the students and their parents informally and build a strong relationship which kept the students engaged. At the Flexi and alternative schooling site teachers cooked and ate with the students and modelled good social skills during this time. At the TAFE site a specific social skills instructor was employed to help students work through their issues, and as at all sites constructive casual classroom conversation was encouraged rather than stifled.

- **Second was the Flexibility available to both students and staff.** Flexibility included curriculum materials, attendance patterns, teachers' attitudes and responses to student behaviours, and even student clothing styles.

- **Third was the importance of a high staff to student ratio.** At the TAFE site having 15 high needs students in one class was given as the reason for the high detrition rate, this was in spite of their very Flexible and student interest based curriculum. Even though their literacy classes had a teacher and a tutor, they were hoping to employ even more tutors in the classrooms the following year. At the alternative schooling site they set aside one day for 5 or 6 at the maximum highest needs students to attend, when they could receive greater teacher/tutor attention. All sites had much smaller class sizes by comparison to formal school sites, which averaged 30 students per class, with usually no extra support person.

- **Fourth: Literacy programming that targeted student interests and allowed for student input.** At the Flexi for students working at grade level, English units such as film, novel and oral presentations all targeted teenage interests, and for students working below grade level a series of explicit functional level literacy workbooks targeted needed everyday *English for Living.* Also at all centres a lot of "unofficial", "incidental" or "in the moment" literacy took place. Certain incidents exemplify this "unofficial" literacy: at the Flexi students designed personalized number plates, and using a digital camera illustrated an article for the town paper; at the TAFE apart from having a democratically designed curriculum, students learnt to write and send a properly formatted fax, particularly useful when a crisis incident occurred during the fund raising class; and at the alternative schooling site "seizing the moment" was exemplified when a truculent student watching other students make up radio ads asked if he could do one too. This lead to the student to co-produce a script, willing participate in repeated reading rehearsals, record the radio script, and then go on to co-produce a documentary on *Australian Idol* singer, Shannon Noll.

This overview shows that the more andragogic teaching practices were keeping at risk students engaged. These were practices that allowed for student interests and input in

non formal, flexible learning environments. As in the earlier experience of adult community education small numbers allowed for a closer and more responsive teacher/student relationship as opposed to the disciplinarian, teacher directed pedagogic practices of the much larger mainstream classroom.

Means of assessing students' literacy outcomes and teachers' practices

To obtain an in-depth analysis of teaching practices and resultant student outcomes at the case study sites, three analysis models were used. The first was a simplified version of the *National Reporting System (NRS)* (Coates, Fitzpatrick, Mckenna et al., 1996; Aris Language Australia, 2002) (Appendix 1) a method of obtaining a hierarchical level of literacy for four participating at risk students from each alternative site. The NRS is widely used across Australia particularly at Technical and Further Education Colleges (TAFEs) for assessing adult and adolescent students' literacy and numeracy levels. Using this measure the researcher was able to gain an entrance and exit literacy level for each student.

The second literacy analysis model was the *Four Resources Model* (Freebody, 2004; Nichols & Bayetto, 2004) used mainly in Australian primary schools [US grade schools]. It was chosen to give a broader spectrum view of students' literacy outcomes. Peter Freebody one of its originators described its purpose:

> It aimed to answer two … critical questions: 'what does it mean for my students to be members of a literate society – full members, not just with access, but also with a zest for participating and an instinct to exercise agency? and, in that light, 'what categories of practice should a literacy program include? (Freebody, 2004, p.4)

He identified these categories of resources as "code-cracking resources … text participating resources … text using resources … and text analysing resources" (Freebody, 2004, pp.6-7). For students at alternate education centres these four resources represent an integrated approach where adolescents with low literacy levels can still access all four areas of expertise, unlike in a hierarchical approach where, for example, critical analysis is only taught to higher level students.

The last analysis model *Productive Pedagogies* assists in the analysis of teaching practices and was developed by Education Queensland as a result of a three year longitudinal study of teaching practices in 975 Queensland classrooms at 24 Education Queensland primary and secondary schools, between 1998 and 2000 (The State of Queensland - Department of Education, 2001-2002). *Productive Pedagogies* was chosen because it minutely details the pedagogic practices needed for successful student engagement and learning. The four categories of teaching practices: *Intellectual quality, Connectedness, Supportive classroom environment, and Recognition of Difference* have been combined with the Four Resources Model to form a Composite Assessment Model. (Appendix 2). Both models are mutually supportive, in that the Productive Pedagogies are what enables students to become fully competent in the literacy practices of the Four Resources Model. The key elements of these two models are outlined in Appendix 2 combining to form a literacy analysis check list (or assessment model) of students' language acquisition and their teachers' pedagogical practices. Additionally many of the pedagogic practices allow

for student input and self-directed learning, which are in fact andragogic principles of teaching which this paper is advocating.

To view how these analysis models have been applied to a non formal education environment, the remainder of the paper will now focus on two students from one case study site, the Flexi School site.

Flexi School Student John, 14

The first student, John was 14, the youngest of five brothers with two older brothers also attending the Flexi school. He is also one of the youngest students at the Flexi school. Because his family lives on a boat and has moved around, he has had gaps in school attendance. For example, he attended primary school up to grade 6 but then missed a nearly two years, not enrolling at Flexi until grade 8. In 2004 the year of the study, he was in grade 9 and attended every day. In fact as alluded to by para teacher Jill' in the case site profile, John was one of the core group of students who daily attended throughout the Flexi's year long episode without accommodation, and sometimes sitting on park benches or seats in the main street.

JOHN'S LITERACY OUTCOMES

John's literacy course was *English for Living*, as previously described a functional literacy program, and as stated in March on his workbook *Unit Eight, Born to Shop* he was filling in forms, writing simple information from timetables, maps, advertisements, labels, and menus. Thus at the beginning of semester 1, 2004 John was successfully working within NRS level 1 (Appendix 1). At the end of that semester his BSDE teacher commented on his outcomes and approach to work:

> John should be pleased with a good semester's work. He has a sound attitude to his work. John shows sound comprehension and interpretation of written material and required set tasks. Writing is mostly logical, structured and appropriate for the particular genre, form, purpose and audience. John is a pleasure to teach. (Brisbane School of Distance Education, 2004)

By October, 2004 John was working within NRS Level 2: writing compound sentences, and able to read and understand passages of 500 words or more. However, keeping on task was an increasing problem, more than earlier that year and in his previous year at Flexi. His Flexi teacher reported "It's hard work getting him to do work. It's tough to get him to sit down." The para teacher also reported, "He has completed 20 pieces of BSDE work, which is a good result considering the efforts required by staff to encourage him to do any work. A lot of energy has been expended trying to keep John on task." As a researcher I observed the same thing. In a 16 minute interview, less than half the time all other students in the entire study spent responding to interview questions, it was hard to gain more than a yes/no answer, and he often spent time discussing personalized number plates with his friend who came and went throughout the interview.

Analysing John's literacy outcomes using the *Four Resources Model* (Table 1) reveals the following. John's linguistic or language acquisition has strengths mainly in the areas of factual or concrete literacy skills. From two assessment items, one from the beginning of 2004 and one from the end of the year, it was evident that his decoding

and grammar skills had increased. In the initial assessment piece "Unit 8, Born to Shop" from *English for Living* he was just filling in forms, obtaining basic information from text, and giving one to three word answers. However, by October in completing "Unit 20, Welcome to Antarctica" not only had his handwriting improved, he was now able to write in complete compound sentences, extending the sentences with phrases and subordinate clauses. John had also been able to extract the factual meaning from a 500 word passage on Antarctica and had used related vocabulary appropriately. Consulting the Language Model: 4 Resources Model, John had become a successful *Code Breaker* and a fairly successful *Text Participant.*

TABLE 1: *Composite Literacy Assessment Model-abbreviated*
FLEXI SCHOOL STUDENT: JOHN

Language Model:		4 RESOURCES MODEL (Freebody, 2004; Santoro, 2004)					55%
1. **Code Breakers**	2/2	**2.** **Text Participants**	3/4	**3.** **Text Users**	1/2	**4.** **Text Analysis**	0/3
i) decoding	✓	i) patterns of meanings …	X	i) Genres' form / function	✓	i) bias	X
ii) grammar	✓	- vocabulary	✓	ii) Genres' socio-cultural expectations	X	ii) author positions reader	X
		- clauses	✓			iii) gaps, constrain influence	X
		ii) Genres	✓				
Pedagogical Model:		PRODUCTIVE PEDAGOGIES (Ed Qld, 2001-2003)					58%
1. **Intellectual Quality**	1/6	**2.** **Connectedness** [K = knowledge]	3/4	**3.** **Supportive Classroom Environment**	3/5	**4.** **Recognition of Difference**	4.5/5
i) Thinking	X	i) KLAs integration	X	i) Student Control	✓	i) Culture	✓
ii) Knowledge	X	ii) Background K	✓	ii) Social Support	✓	ii) Inclusivity	✓
iii)Understand	X	iii) to the World	✓	iii) Academic Engagement	X	iii) Narrative	✓
iv)Substantive Talk	X	iv) Problem based Curriculum	✓	iv) Explicit performance criteria	✓	iv) Group Identity	
v) Problematize	X			v) Self-regulation	X	v) Citizenship	1/2
vi)Metalanguage	X						

The Brisbane School of Distance Education *English for Living* materials, unlike the integrated approach of the 4 Resources Model, takes a hierarchical skills approach to literacy, so students at the lower skills levels are not taught *Text Analysis* skills, with only the functional competencies as *Text Users* being developed. John therefore had not attained any *Text Analysis* skills and was only becoming aware of the formatting and use of different types of genres for reading and writing. The social contextualising and critiquing of genres, which is part of both *Text Participant* and *Text User,* was absent from his language skills acquisition. So he only received a 55% rating on the language model. This meant John was only halfway reaching what the originators of the Four Resources Model, felt was necessary for a fully literate person, as stated above by Freebody (2004).

IMPACT OF PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES ON JOHN'S LITERACY LEARNING

Applying the second half of the Composite Assessment Model, the productive pedagogies checklist, the researcher made the following observations. The pedagogies used to keep John engaged, as a regular attendee and in the literacy learning event itself, fell mainly into the areas of *Supportive Classroom Environment, Recognition of Difference,* and *Connectedness*. These three areas received a reasonably high rating because of the flexible nature of program delivery, where the BSDE materials were supplemented with "in the moment", "student interest based", "multimodal" literacy activities. Also the large amount of "relaxed", "laid back", "incidental talk" helped students explore a more in-depth understanding of many learning related issues, as well as modelling social skills and tolerance of different points of view. An example of this was observed by the researcher during her interview with John, who throughout the interview was absorbed in a parallel running conversation with a friend about personalized number plates. In the Flexi context this became one of those "flexible", "in the moment" student directed learning activities, where John and his

friend were using computers and the internet to investigate how to design a personalized number plate, initial information having been found in a magazine. This was the type of activities that the new coordinator Tom was working towards having recognized as a learning outcome. On the literacy questionnaire Tom has responded to the question regarding "Literacy with inbuilt flexibility" in the following way:

> Formal BSDE – No [no inbuilt flexibility], but [Yes] informal tasks, eg writing article for newspaper. Working on issues of recognising achievements in literacy that don't fit into formal programs. Maybe a folio approach and how this might demonstrate various skills.

Classroom teacher Jack spoke in his interview about the importance of the "unofficial literacy" that went on at the centre, apart from completing their set workbook tasks:

> So the literacy stuff is very important to those students. But you don't necessarily do it all the time through the programs, the BSDE. You know it can just happen in conversation. Talking about things generally, news items, things that are in the news. There's a lot of unofficial work that goes on too that's as important as the BSDE … technology – how things work, describing how things work. So I think there's a lot of incidental stuff that is also important.

A tentative conclusion could be that perhaps it was this flexible, tolerant attitude that kept John attending daily for the past two years, compared to his non attendance at the regular mainstream school two years previously.

Additionally, although the BSDE workbooks were inflexible in that they did not allow for student input, their explicit nature suited John's short attention span, and provided him with the opportunity to increase basic literacy skills. He also gained positive feedback and sense of achievement from the Distance Education school in Brisbane by way of returned, marked workbooks. The deficit in the teaching / learning experience was in the *Intellectual Quality* area: lack of deep thinking, deep knowledge and deep understanding of a subject. Also there was no problematising or embedding the learning subjects in an expansive metalanguage. The researcher postulates that this was as much caused by John's unresponsiveness to engage in any learning activities that were not self generated, as it was a result of the literacy teaching materials and their related pedagogies. So in the area of *Intellectual Quality* only 17% of the productive pedagogies were utilized in John's teaching. However, for the other three areas of *Connectedness, Supportive Classroom Environment, and Recognition of Difference* 71% of the productive pedagogies were utilized. The one area of weakness that was reported and observed in this set of pedagogies was on task and self regulating behaviours that should have resulted in the building of citizenship skills. Nevertheless, even though only 55% of all the possible pedagogical practices were utilized, for John those pedagogies that were used kept him attending and enabled him to improve his literacy acquisition – even if it was only at a functional level.

Flexi School Student Nicole, 16

The second student, Nicole had a different but similar story. She had been attending the Flexi school off and on since grade 8, in some part due to her father moving around. During this time she had also attended mainstream schools. The year previous

to the interview, 2003 she been enrolled in and dropped out of two high schools, a private high school and the local state high school. Of the private "Christian" school she said the "the kids were very, very judgemental. They judged you on everything." Of the local state school she said "I got into a bit of a bad cycle hanging out with older friends" and not attending. So like John, Nicole had had a problem with not attending school. Added to this was a recent problem of homelessness. In the year of the interview, 2004, at age 16 Nicole said she had moved seven or eight times, and in the process had lost a lot of her Distance Education workbooks; nevertheless by the year's end she had managed to "submit 17 pieces of work" (End of Year Report Card, 2004) and would be completing her Year 10 course at the beginning of 2005.

NICOLE'S LITERACY OUTCOMES

The literacy component she was enrolled in was the Year 10 Core English, which the para teacher said was not very different to the mainstream Year 10 English curriculum. This literacy component consisted of core English related activities such as book and film reviews, poetry, and news report analysis. The written assignments required at least 500 words. Nicole's practice was to work on her workbooks at home, but also to come in to the Flexi school at least twice a week. This way she was able to hand in completed tasks, get help with work she could not do herself, use the computers and internet access, and occasionally ring the Distance Education teachers in Brisbane. The para teacher commented that "she actually has fairly high levels, of literacy". The BSDE assessment sheets showed she had achieved an overall grade of "B" for English for that year. Nicole recounted what some of the literacy tasks entailed:

And English I'm doing on movies and how they have themes and why and that stuff, you know. How movies speak, yeah. … Watch movies, take notes and write essays like how a character's grown throughout the movie and why. And compare how two movies represent Australia. Which one represents it better. … And I'm reading a book now, *Z for Zachariah*. It's about a war.

So applying the first language component of Composite Assessment Model (Table 2) Nicole's linguistic competencies rate a lot higher than John's. Not only was she competent in the functional aspects of *Code Breaking, Text Participant,* and *Text User,* she also was able to socially and culturally contextualise different genres and determine their bias. This was evident in some of her written assessment tasks. However, her critiquing only

TABLE 2: *Composite Assessment Model-abbreviated* *FLEXI SCHOOL STUDENT: NICOLE*								
Language Model:	**4 RESOURCES MODEL** (Freebody, 2004; Santoro, 2004)						82%	
1. **Code Breakers**	2/2	**2.** **Text** **Participants**	4/4	**3.** **Text Users**	2/2	**4.** **Text** **Analysis**	1/3	
i) decoding	✓	i) patterns of		i) Genres' form /		i) bias	✓	
ii) grammar	✓	meanings …	✓	function		ii) author	X	
		- vocabulary	✓	ii) Genres' socio-		positions reader		
		- clauses	✓	cultural expectations		iii) gaps,	X	
		ii) Genres	✓			constrain		
						influence		
Pedagogical Model:	**PRODUCTIVE PEDAGOGIES** (Ed Qld, 2001-2003)						76%	
1. **Intellectual** **Quality**	4/6	**2.** **Connectedness** [K = knowledge]	3/4	**3.** **Supportive** **Classroom** **Environment**	3.5/5	**4.** **Recognition** **of** **Difference**	4.7/5	
i) Thinking	X	i) KLAs integration	X	i) Student Control	✓	i) Culture	✓	
ii) Knowledge	✓	ii) Student's	✓	ii) Social Support	✓	ii) Inclusivity	✓	
iii)Understand	✓	background K		iii) Academic	1/2	iii) Narrative	✓	
iv)Substantive Talk	✓	iii) to the World	✓	Engagement		iv) Group	✓	
v) Problematize	X	iv) Problem based	✓	iv) Explicit	1/2	Identity		
vi)Metalanguage	✓	Curriculum		performance criteria		v) Citizenship	3/4	
				v) Self-regulation	1/2			

extended to differentiating social or cultural practices. From the *Text Analysis* subset, there was no awareness in either her interview or in her work samples of critiquing

ideological or political positioning, nor an awareness of the impact of gaps or silences in a text (written, symbolic or audio). So although she received a rating of 82% competency in the ***Four Resources Model,*** she actually had a deficit in what is termed in Australia "critical literacy". Rather she possessed "higher order comprehension skills", which Luke explains is how critical literacy has been formulated in the North American context. He outlines these skills as ranging from "metacognitive reading strategies to reader-response orientation toward inferring endings, authorial intent, bias, or stereotypes" (Luke, A., 2000, pp. 49-50).

IMPACT OF PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES ON NICOLE'S LITERACY LEARNING

Again the pedagogies the Flexi school had used supplemented the fairly inflexible Distance Education materials' approach to teaching. The Flexi staff *recognised the "different"* situation [*Recognition of Difference*] Nicole found herself in, and became a buffer between the student and the administrative requirements of the distance education program. Teacher, Jack had explained, "the most important thing is the student. We push some of them as hard as we can. We ease up on some." To keep the students involved in the learning process each student's needs and external pressures were taken into consideration. So for students like Nicole with housing, work and transportation difficulties he said the following:

> If BSDE say they're behind. Well fine they're behind. We'll do something just to keep things ticking over. Not pressure them the way we would probably pressure other kids who aren't doing anything at all outside.

Regarding this recognition of individual student differences and flexible response, particularly in relation to Nicole, para teacher Jill added,

> Yeah, it's given her the freedom to make independent choices. That's what it has done for her. And to be able to feel <u>safe</u>, while she's making those choices, that she's not like kicked out because she didn't have a uniform on. Or kicked out because she wasn't at school every day, or, you know what I mean. It has given her that stability and a back up.

Which meant after a year of severe housing and income crises Nicole was still turning up at the Flexi school, submitting work and receiving both *academic and social support* [*Supportive Classroom Environment*] from the staff, even though the work was submitted somewhat behind schedule. Extra activities like writing an article for the affiliated high school magazine, allowed Nicole to have some *control* over her own learning, as she of her own initiative interviewed Flexi school participants and then wrote the article. The *explicit* nature of the literacy for lower levels that John experienced, at Nicole's level became less clear in that written instructions on task objectives were wordy and not as explicit as they could be. A result of this inexplicit instruction Nicole reported taking overly long to do more tasks than was required. Also she had to redo one assignment, because it was not until she had received a detailed explanation from her distance education teacher on the returned assignment, that she fully grasped the task objectives.

The English program did *connect* [*Connectiveness*] the individual adolescent interests and knowledge to the wider community issues. For example the novel studied combined the current issue of war with how rural Australian youths would respond if it happened in their town. In the film review unit, they were given some control in that

they were allowed to choose a second movie to analyse and compare with an initial compulsory film. Poetry, often an onerous task for teenagers was allowed to be assessed as an oral presentation, which in Nicole's case was an easy option. Then finally students connected into their communities by reading the local newspaper, analysing the articles and then writing their own report. All the assessment tasks were "problems" or real life tasks that take place in the adult world. The only way the English curriculum in this case was *disconnected* was the fact that it stood alone. However, a second subject "Skills for Citizenship" did combine Mathematics and English as students were taught the practicalities of the adult world: banking, renting, bonds, how to budget and write appropriate correspondence. Acknowledgement of this component has been made on the *Recognition of Difference* checklist. Since debating, and political critiquing was absent from the "citizenship" segment only a "1/2" score was awarded. In fact many aspects of critical literacy teaching were absent from the pedagogies, as they were from the student's language acquisition. As far as *Intellectual Quality* was concerned Nicole was enabled to write beautifully descriptive flowing prose that displayed a good knowledge and understanding of the unit tasks, recognizing a multiplicity of language, grammar and technical vocabulary suitable for each genre. However, she was not enabled to interrogate the texts, politically or ideologically contextualise beliefs represented, or produce a transformed version of literacy (Knobel, 2003; Healy, 2004). Instead she was directed to merely analysed the internal structure of the movies, books, news paper articles and poem, and then reproduce them. The result was even though the unit texts spoke about "empowering your language skills" and "the power of language" the literacy pedagogies therein only empowered Nicole to reproduce not transform her literacy practices.

Consequently an overall score of 75% has been allocated to represent implemented pedagogies. These are pedagogies that first of all provided a high level of classroom support, recognition of difference and connectedness, mitigated by the student's own personal situation, and a lack of direct teaching of critical literacy skills.

Conclusion

To conclude, what does this mean for the non formal education sites in this study? Each non formal site provided a place to engage on average annually 30, at risk students; students who had *previously* not been attending formal schooling. Although few sites were able to include many of the *Four Resources* "critical analysis" components of literacy into their students' literacy repertoires, on a hierarchical level of the diverse range of students interviewed all had improved their literacy levels, as assessed by the *National Reporting System*. Furthermore the pedagogic practices at these non formal schooling sites evidenced a need to return *to the roots of non formal education* – flexible, needs based, student directed. This type of andragogic non formal learning most certainly has a place for youth at risk, who are now compulsorily required to be in education in Australia.

APPENDIX 1

The National Reporting System (NRS), Australia [simplified]

[NRS based on the *International Adult Literacy Survey* literacy scale (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997)]

Literacy

- **Level 1**
  - Write: simple sentence, fill in basic forms
  - Read: newspaper difficult
- **Level 2**
  - Write: compound sentences
  - Read: newspaper / not fully understand
- **Level 3**
  - Write: complex sentences, 2-3 paragraphs
  - Read & fully understand newspaper
- **Level 4**
  - Write: 3+ paragraphs, well constructed, abstract ideas & terminology, genres related to social and cultural contexts
  - Read: several sources, distinguish fact from opinion, infer purpose

APPENDIX 2 – LANGUAGE & PEDAGOGICAL *COMPOSITE ASSESSMENT MODEL*							
Language Model: **4 RESOURCES MODEL** (Freebody, 2004; Santoro, 2004)							
1. Code Breakers (decoders / functional skills)	C h e c k	**2. Text Participants** (readers, listeners / comprehension skills)	C h e c k	**3. Text Users** (writers, speakers / discourse & genre skills)	C h e c k	**4. Text Analysis** (analysers / critical literacy skills)	C h e c k
i) Grapho /phonic decoding		i) Stated / unstated patterns of meanings …		i) Genres' form / function		i) Cultural & ideological bias	
ii) Punctuation / formatting conventions		- vocabulary - clauses		ii) Genres' socio-cultural expectations		ii) How author positions reader	
		ii) Genres' conventions & components				iii) How gaps, silences, missing points of view – constrain & influence reader	
Pedagogical Model: **PRODUCTIVE PEDAGOGIES - 4 Dimensions of Practice** (Education Queensland, 2001-2003)							
1. Intellectual Quality (depth of knowledge)	C h e c k	**2. Connected-ness** (student knowledge to a widening community knowledge)	C h e c k	**3. Supportive Classroom Environment** (student ownership, behaviours, teacher scaffolding)	C h e c k	**4. Recognition of Difference** (belonging and cultural/social inclusivity)	C h e c k
i) Higher Order Thinking		i) Knowledge Integration		i) Student Control		i) Cultural Knowledge	
ii) Deep Knowledge		ii) Background Knowledge		ii) Social Support		ii) Inclusivity	
iii) Deep Understanding		iii) Connected-ness to the World		iii) Academic Engagement		iii) Narrative	
iv) Substantive Conversation		iv) Problem based Curriculum		iv) Explicit Quality Performance Criteria		iv) Group Identity	
v) Knowledge as problematic				v) Self-regulation		v) Citizenship	
vi) Metalanguage							

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