



RESEARCH PROGRAMME ON  
EDUCATION EMPLOYMENT  
LINKAGES

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# **Choosing Career Pathways: Identity, Abilities and Support**

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**(with Karen Vaughan and Hazel Phillips)**



## Details

This PowerPoint presentation was prepared for the *Catching the Wave* conference of the Careers and Transition Education (CATE) Association Aotearoa NZ, held in New Plymouth on 19-22 November 2008.



# Introduction

- On 22 March last year, FRST announced it is funding a \$2 million five-year research programme on education employment linkages for youth in New Zealand.
- This presentation introduces the EEL programme and describe the results of its first year of research.
- More details are available at our dedicated web site, [www.eel.org.nz](http://www.eel.org.nz).



## Background to the Research

“In the next decade, the largest ever group of young New Zealanders will make the transition from secondary schooling into tertiary education and the workforce. ...

This is a strategic opportunity to ensure our workforce can compete with the best in the global economy.”

*(Developing the Second Tertiary Education Strategy, 2007/12, p. 11)*



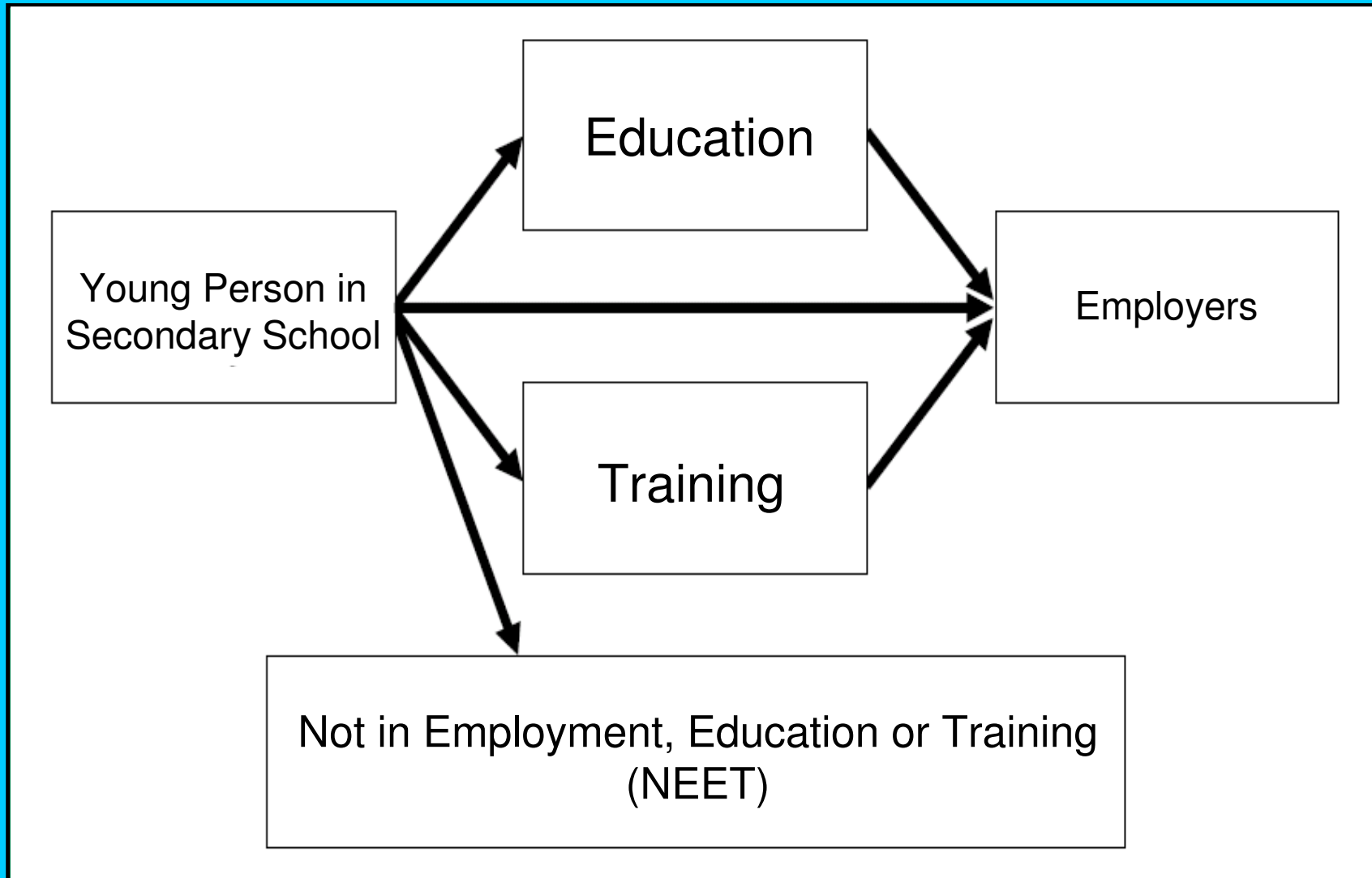
## Is There a Problem?

The Labour Market Dynamics Research Programme, led by Professor Paul Spoonley at Massey University, reported from a survey that **43 per cent** of people aged 15-34 feel their current job is not very closely related, or is not related at all, to their educational qualifications.

This suggests there is a significant amount of education-employment mismatch.

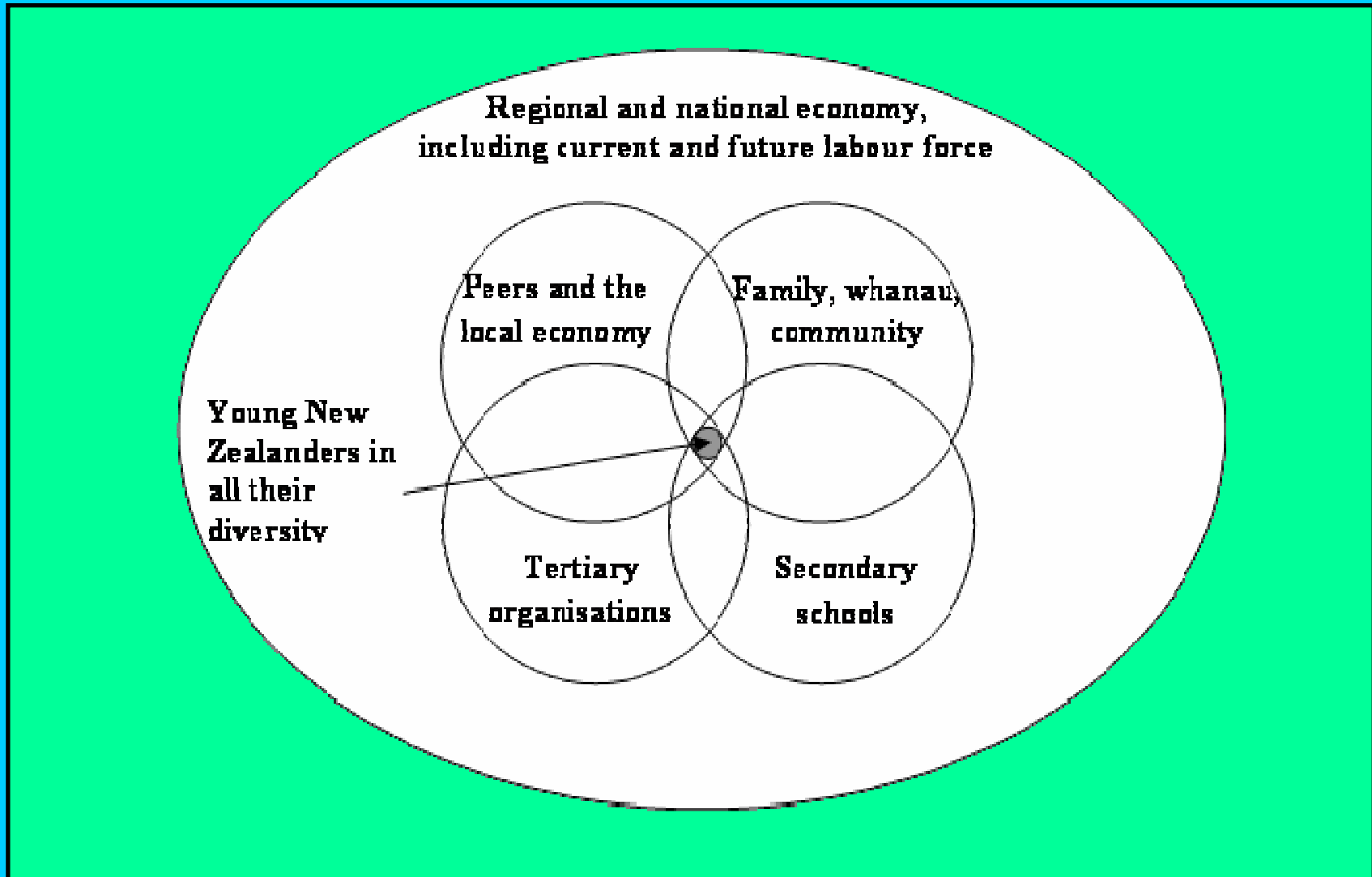


# School to Work Transitions





# The Need for a System View





# The EEL Research Question

- *How can **formal support systems** best help young New Zealanders make good education-employment linkages to benefit themselves, their communities, and the national economy:*
  - In school communities?
  - In regional communities?
  - In Māori and Pasifika communities?
  - In employer-led channels?



# The EEL Research Programme

		Objective 1 (K. Vaughan)	Objective 2 (J. Higgins)	Objective 3 (H. Phillips)	Objective 4 (P. Dalziel)
<i>1. International Context</i>		Integrated international literature review drawing on: Education      Sociology      Indigenous Studies      Economics			
<i>Primary Research</i>	<i>2. What is happening?</i>	Mapping of current education employment systems in: School Communities      Regional Communities      Māori & Pacific Communities      Employer-Led Channels			
	<i>3. Why is it happening?</i>	Interviews, surveys and focus groups of key informants in: School Communities      Regional Communities      Māori & Pacific Communities      Employer-Led Channels			
	<i>4. How can we make it different?</i>	Case studies of how positive outcomes occur in: School Communities      Regional Communities      Māori & Pacific Communities      Employer-Led Channels			
<i>5. Integration and Assessment</i>		Two pilots of best practice systems, assessing in each pilot site the integrated results of the four research streams.			



# Aims of the Literature Review

- To lay the foundations for the project.
- To identify key themes in the literature that have emerged in our interdisciplinary conversations.
- To consider material that is potentially important, puzzling, and/or contradictory across the disciplines.
- To create a knowledge basket that will be a key resource for the project.



# Format of the Literature Review

- The literature review is now available as a research report at [www.eel.org.nz](http://www.eel.org.nz).
- We had hoped to write this in a style suitable for secondary school students, but this proved to be beyond us in the first draft!
- Part of the feedback we hope to obtain from this presentation is advice on whether it would be worthwhile to engage experts to prepare a resource for youth on its themes.



# Three Themes

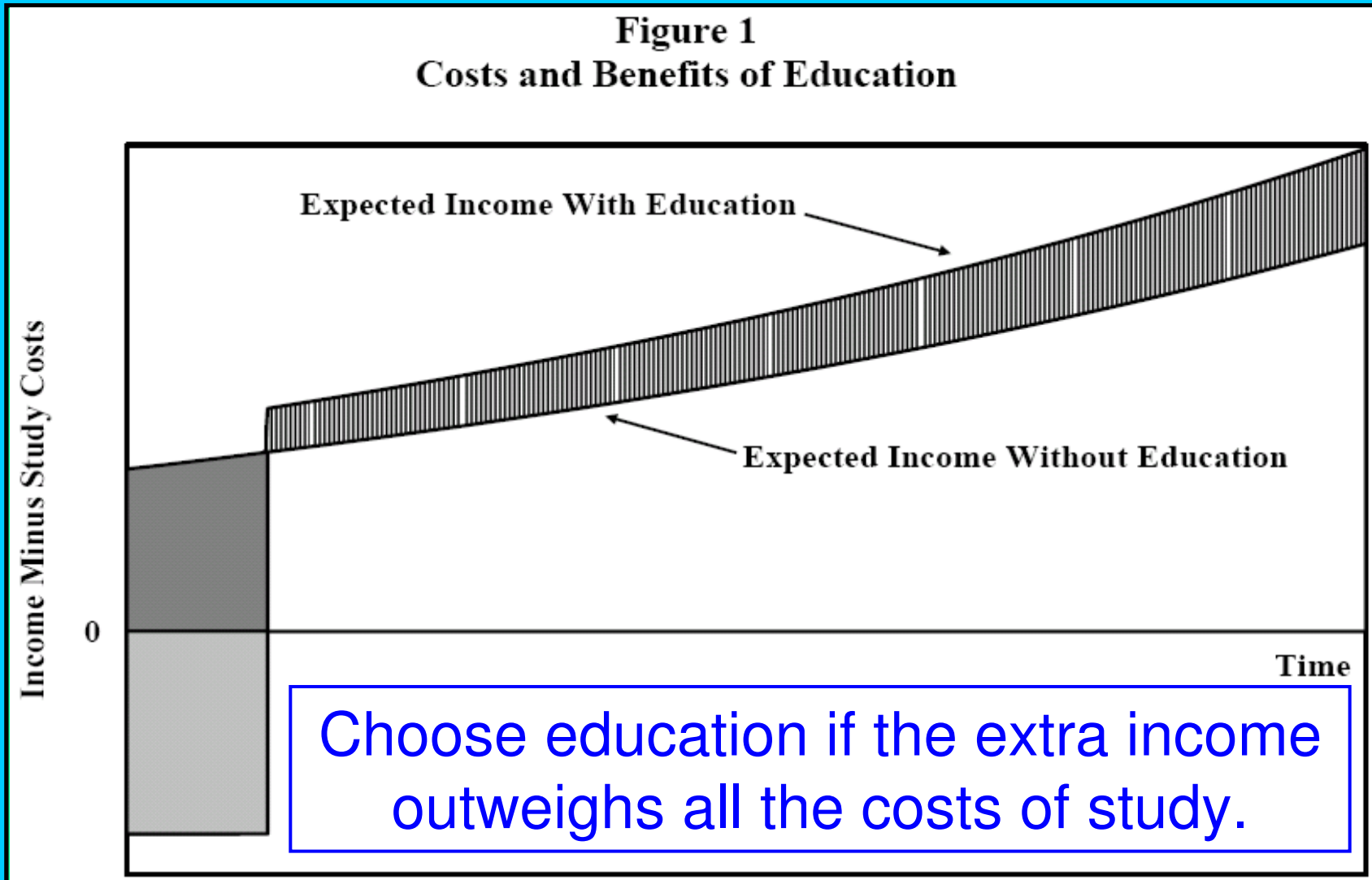
The overall framework comes from the ways in which “choice” is understood by economics, sociology, education and indigenous studies.

Within the choice framework, 3 themes emerge:

1. Crafting identities.
2. Discovery and development of abilities.
3. Providing support:
  - Opportunities and structures.
  - Systems linking education-employment choices.

# Choice: Economics

Figure 1  
Costs and Benefits of Education





# Choice: Sociology

- Structural constraints associated with class, gender and ethnicity affect young people's choices.
- Nevertheless, young people have agency within their bounded 'horizons for action'.
- Decision-making is not a one-off event, but is a social process, taking place in interaction with others.
- There are distinct 'turning points' when choices must be made.



# Choice: Education

- Educators have a critical role to play in helping young people at their turning points.
- Educators can help young people navigate the 'landscape' of choices.
- Educators can help young people imagine different options ('horizons') they might not be able to see from their point in the landscape.
- Educators may also help young people not limit themselves to making decisions based on very short-term considerations.



# Choice: Indigenous Studies

- Indigenous communities emphasise strongly collectivist approaches to decision-making.
- Indigenous students may be more strongly motivated by contributing to the community than by earning high future incomes.
- Educators may consciously or unconsciously reinforce ethnic stereotypes in the advice they give their students.
- Dropping out from education that is not culturally safe may be a positive decision.



# 1. Crafting Identities

- Young people are reworking ‘what do you want to do when you leave school?’ into a broader question of ‘**who do I want to be?**’.
- Identities produced by this ‘identity work’ are:
  - Relational
  - Multiple
  - Contested
  - Dynamic
- As a result, youth transitions do not proceed in straight lines or even in continuous lines.



# 1. Crafting Identities

Youth researchers in Europe are saying that, in forging biographies and identities in transition, young people shift continuously between youth and adulthood; they experience uncertainties, fluctuations, discontinuities, reversals and seesaws; they develop patchwork lifestyles; and they undergo the ups and downs of fragile and reversible transitions.

- All of which makes careers education difficult (not that it was ever easy)!



# 1. Crafting Identities

- Young people may also be “strung out between competing definitions of their ‘identity’ emanating from home, from school and from wider society, where in each context particular different expectations, norms and rules may be at stake” (Valentine 2000).
- There may also be a failure by others to recognise and respect the **diversity** and **range** of strong Maori identities, for example, that are possible.



## 2. Discovering Abilities

- A key idea going back at least to Rousseau (1762) is that education allows a person to discover and develop his or her abilities.
- More recently, Guy Claxton has argued that young people are hard wired to learn, and that education should **support their learning**, but also help **expand their learning capacity**.
- This means encouraging students to maintain a '**learning identity**' and '**learning careers**'.



## 2. Discovering Abilities

- This approach has implications for **career education**.
- Career education is about providing access to information, but is also about helping students learn how to construct a good education-employment pathway that suits their abilities (some of which are still to be discovered).
- Plans and goals are important for successful transitions, but need to be **adaptable** as the students learn more about themselves.



## 2. Discovering Abilities

Developing career pathway goals is useful for good matching and a stable career path, perhaps because it encourages:

- learning about career pathways
- assessing challenges
- problem-solving in relation to challenges, e.g. by identifying/marshalling available resources
- identity work



## 2. Discovering Abilities

- An essential element is a good **relationship** between the student and his or her teachers and career educators that allows a ‘**career dialogue**’ to take place.
- Some research has found that simply asking students to create personal development plans, without any good relationship with teachers, is ineffective.
- Some economics models have incorporated ability-discovery in education, concluding:



## 2. Discovering Abilities

1. Failure during education need not be a bad outcome as a student learns their abilities.
2. Persistence in failure, however, is not likely to be a good outcome.
3. Obtaining a qualification without genuine ability may not be a good outcome.
4. Matching abilities to qualifications, and then qualifications to the right job, is typically the best outcome.



## 3. Providing Support

- Families have a powerful influence on identity crafting and on career pathway choices by young people.
- The educational attainments of parents are very strongly associated with those of their children.
- Families often provide financial support for education, but less material forms of support (including emotional support) can also be influential.



## 3. Providing Support

- Parents can unconsciously dampen their children's outlook as a result of their own negative experiences of work or education.
- Some research suggests that the earlier in school a career path decision is made, the more 'conservative' it is likely to be (i.e. influenced by parental experience).
- Some research suggests that career services might explicitly include and support the family in relation to a student's decision-making.



## 3. Providing Support

- There is strong evidence that young people from poorer neighbourhoods tend to have poorer chances of doing well in their learning and work careers.
- Many young jobseekers use their local networks to find employment, but in poorer neighbourhoods this can be limiting.
- It is risky for a young person to move away from a tight-knit community; for example, to take up further education possibilities.



## 3. Providing Support

- Support programmes that are tightly targeted at young people labelled as “at risk” can be counter-productive because non-inclusive.
- A United States case study of programmes in two similarly poor neighbourhoods illustrates.
- In the Lanier case, the support programmes separated ‘at risk’/‘dysfunctional’ youth and were directed towards behaviour modification in keeping with the norms and values of the programme workers.



## 3. Providing Support

- In the Palm Heights case, the support programmes were inclusive (by age group) incorporating youth and adult volunteers from diverse neighbourhoods, leading to enhanced networks for participants.
- The researchers concluded that the Palm Heights addressed *safety* and *identity* issues through inclusion and 'bridges to other social networks' with positive outcomes.



## 3. Providing Support

- A range of research has found that the involvement of respected mentors can be helpful in expanding young people's horizons of what jobs or education choices they might consider.
- Indigenous studies research supports this, adding that drawing mentors from the indigenous community reflects traditional practice in which elders taught the young through apprentice-style learning.



## Conclusion

At the centre of the literature is the young person: a dynamic individual continuously constructing multiple self-identities in diverse contexts, discovering and developing personal abilities, making purposeful choices that are influenced by perceived and actual social, economic and cultural constraints, and engaging with education and employment systems in their schools, in their workplaces, in their local communities, and in their countries.



A full copy of the literature review, and other publications of the EEL research programme, can be downloaded at:

[www.eel.org.nz](http://www.eel.org.nz)