"I DON'T REALLY LIKE THE MILL; IN FACT, I HATE THE MILL":

Changing Youth Vocationalism Under Fordism and Post-Fordism in Powell River, British Columbia

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Forest towns in British Columbia are in the throes of a profound restructuring (Hayter 2000). The most recent turn of the screw, the US imposition of a 27% import tax on softwood lumber (May 2002), is only the latest twist in a twenty-year history scarred by volatility and industrial downsizing. Persistent job losses due to technological change, corporate rationalization, increased international competition, trade conflicts, and resource depletion have progressively undone the fabric of BC forest communities, especially on the coast. But while a plethora of policies, schemes, and programs have been initiated to help those worst affected, little attention has been paid to high school youth who have yet to enter the job market (Hay 1993 ; Barnes and Hayter 1992, 1995a, and 1995b; Barnes, Hayter, and Hay 1999; Hayter 2000, 288-320; Egan and Klausen 1998). Historically, high school students' job expectations were directly tied to a buoyant resource economy, which, in turn, helped to define the culture of the resource town itself. But in this era of economic downsizing and industrial restructuring, those expectations are increasingly frustrated. The purpose of this paper is to examine how the new economic reality of forest towns has influenced not only the expectations of high school students but also the content and philosophy of high school programs.

The paper's interpretive framework derives from theories of vocationalism and labour market segmentation. By "vocationalism" we mean the way in which students conceptualize their future work roles. Long before they enter the labour market, students typically have an idea about the kind of work they intend to do, and this then influences their performance at school and, later, their choice of jobs (Gaskell 1985). By "labour market segmentation," we mean the division of the

labour market into discrete submarkets, each of which is associated with particular career rules and conventions, and between which there is only limited mobility (Doeringer and Piore 1971; Hayter and Barnes 1992; Peck 1989a). By joining these two ideas we develop two arguments: first, that students anticipate future occupations and perform accordingly, and, once an occupation is chosen, they follow a distinct career path; second, over the past decade the restructuring of British Columbia's economy has fundamentally altered the substance of vocationalism and segmentation. Behind that restructuring, and indeed propelling wider changes across North American manufacturing, was a larger transition between Fordist and post-Fordist forms of production.

Fordist production systems developed around specialized, mass production techniques that exploited economies of scale and size. Employing large numbers of workers, Fordist industries sharply segmented management and unionized employees, the latter being structured by a collective bargaining process based on the principles of job demarcation and seniority. Under Fordism, vocationalism meant the expectation of a relatively high-waged job at the factory, and, because the job was defined within a particular segment of the labour market, it pre-defined a career path.

In contrast, post-Fordism, or flexible production, is characterized by the manufacture of limited amounts of specialized products, the exploitation of external economies of scale and scope that facilitates rapid product differentiation by the flexible use of existing factors of production, and reliance upon computerized technology. Workforce requirements are typically fewer in number, and working conditions and forms of segregation are quite different than those under Fordism. There is now a division between those workers who are flexible, and are thereby suitably rewarded, and those who are not, and who suffer the consequences. Vocationalism under post-Fordism thus means something quite different than it did under Fordism. A job at the factory is not guaranteed, and career paths exist only for those who have the skills and attitudes that enable them to be flexible.

The transition between Fordism and post-Fordism, and the concomitant shifts in the meaning and practice of vocationalism and labour market segmentation, have particular relevance for British Columbia's forest communities (Hayter and Barnes 1992; Hayter, Grass, and Barnes 1994; and Hayter and Barnes 1997). Consistent with developments throughout North America, from the late 1940s

to the 1970s provincial government policy in British Columbia stimulated Fordist production, giving priority to a mass production system organized by large firms in giant factories employing union labour (Hayter 2000). Geographically, this policy underwrote a dispersed system of high-income, company-union towns dominated by a single (or very few) employer(s). Since the crisis of the early 1980s, however, forest towns have become deeply troubled places, threatened by the imperatives of post-Fordism and marked by displaced workers, conflicts over labour relations, and reduced work opportunities. Moreover, in company-union towns, what happens "in the mill" directly affects household and social behaviour. Workplace change found expression particular in forest community schools.

To assess how high school students, and high schools themselves, are coping with the restructured work environment of post-Fordism we use as a case study the forest community of Powell River on the Sunshine Coast – a town in which pulp and paper has dominated since the establishment of its mill in 1912 (Hayter 1997; Hayter and Holmes 1994). Production at the mill has increasingly been restructured along the lines of post-Fordism, and since 1980 Powell River's unionized workforce has been reduced by more than half as mill management has sought a smaller, more flexible workforce. In turn, this change fundamentally altered the job market for Powell River high school students and revamped older (Fordist) definitions of vocationalism and labour market segmentation and concomitant career paths. To assess the effects of structural change on student attitudes, interviews were conducted in 1994 with Grade 12 students at Powell River's Max Cameron High School, with teachers and administrators in the school, and with other key informants in the community (Behrisch 1995).

This paper is divided into three main sections. First, we elaborate upon our two explanatory concepts of vocationalism and segmented labour markets. Second, we provide a recent history of employment restructuring at the pulp and paper mill at Powell River, setting it within the wider context of the recent troubles experienced by BC forest-based coastal communities. Finally, we report and interpret our interviews with the Grade 12 students at Max Cameron High School and with our other respondents.

VOCATIONALISM AND LABOUR MARKET SEGMENTATION

Vocationalism

As an institution, high school is an inextricable part of a set of social relations defining the goals and needs of a market-based economy. One of those needs is the provision of an adequately trained labour force, which, upon their graduation, allows students to connect with particular kinds of jobs.

Vocationalism gains purchase at the crucial conjunction between school and labour market. In particular, Gaskell (1985) argues that vocationalism takes one of two distinct logics – immediate and distant – and that these logics, in turn, channel students into two different kinds of labour market and types of occupation. Students who think of school as a relatively minor, temporary platform from which to enter quickly into the labour market follow an immediate logic, while students willing to invest more time in school (and postsecondary education) in order to gain access to a job market demanding a high level of formal academic education pursue a distant logic. Attendant upon these two different strategies are distinct student attitudes and course selections. Students who pursue an immediate logic and who view school as a "massive irritant" (Willis 1977) select vocational courses that have practical, learning-by-doing characteristics, that often require minimal effort, and that are directly useful in the job market upon graduation. For example, courses such as welding, typing, and woodworking are favoured by the at-risk student population. In contrast, students who pursue a distant logic are more enthusiastic about school and select academic courses that serve as prerequisites for further studies. These students tend to achieve higher grades than do immediate-logic students (Gaskell 1985).

The distant-immediate logic distinction is admittedly crude, masking a wide range of student attitudes and choices. For example, education and training also occur on the job. Students following an immediate logic at school may therefore choose occupations requiring lengthy apprenticeship programs. Such post-school education, however, is constrained by the initial labour market choice, which, in turn, depends on the pursuit of either immediate logic or distant logic.

But what determines the strategy pursued by a given student? One factor is class position. Admittedly, "class" is a problematic term. In

some studies, class is presented as all-determining, so that, for example, working-class children only get working-class jobs. However, we prefer the more nuanced and now classic analysis of Paul Willis (1977), who investigated the relationship between class and job choice for a group of high school boys in the industrial English Midlands. Willis warns us against any deterministic approach that reduces occupation choice to class position and, in doing so, stresses the need to accept the possibility of individual agency. In particular, Willis highlights not only the potential variability of job outcomes but also the apparent willingness of most working-class youth to accept restricted opportunities (which explains the title of his book, *Learning to Labour*). Others have further explored the interaction of student characteristics (agency) with class and environmental factors in determining occupation (Peters 1987; Hamilton and Powers 1990; Ashton 1988). In this work, the authors conclude that students exercise some choices reflecting individual abilities, experience, interests, education levels, social awareness, effectiveness in interpersonal relations, and self-identity (Peters 1987, 466). However, this individual choice interacts with the immediate social class and environmental conditions within which students live. Moreover, both class and environmental conditions – notably, family, school, peer groups, neighbourhood – often represent intensely localized experiences.

Let us elaborate further on the power of the local. First, home and school are particularly important for students with regard to structuring job market expectations. Peck (1989a, 129) writes: "Families play a crucial role in the process of socialization for work." Expectations of parents for their children; the work and educational histories of parents; and the importance that parents give to homework, grades, and report cards all influence the logic practised by students. Similarly, the culture of the school makes a difference: is it a public inner city school or a private school in the suburbs? Peer group and neighbourhood similarly affect youths' labour market expectations, as Morris's work (1987, 1988, 1991, 1994) demonstrates. Finally, there is the influence of local variations in industrial base and labour market opportunities. Based on a comparison of British and Canadian experiences, Ashton (1988, 4) identifies the geographical structure of labour markets as a key condition shaping how students develop their expectations about future work: "Of crucial importance ... is the significance of local labour market variations in life chances. Evidence suggests that irrespective of political and other differences in the wider

society, local labour markets appear to generate distinctive cultures that influence the behaviour and attitudes of youth." He found that youth often first experience the local labour market as "part-timers" while still at school. The prevailing view of such part-time work is that, beyond a few easily learned lessons (for example, about punctuality and neatness), students are not helped either academically or occupationally after the "initiation" period (Gaskell 1985; Hamilton and Powers 1996). However, this conclusion misses the point that local part-time labour markets significantly shape which vocationalist logic students take up.

In sum, although the factors we have identified here under the labels of "class" and "the local" do influence vocationalism and career paths, students are not mere dupes of them. If they were, then social, occupational, and geographical change would grind to a halt. That this has not happened is in part due to the fact that the school system itself is integrated within regional and national structures of education and plays diverse roles in meeting the needs of students who pursue both immediate and distant vocational logics. Thus, on the one hand, schools play a vital role in creating mobility for some students by realizing their potential and by providing credentials for them that enable them to move beyond their present social, economic, and geographic locations. Nevertheless, for many school students, education and learning, along with awareness of labour market opportunities, is not only highly localized and classed but is also a localizing and class-defining experience in that it fosters close attachments to localities and existing class positions. For these students, established local conditions and class position reinforce each other within places and particular cultures of vocationalism. That said, the seemingly stable relationships underlying vocationalism are dynamic and periodically subject to forces of restructuring. In particular, the recent transition between Fordist and post-Fordist forms of production offers a critical illustration of that dynamism and restructuring. And we now turn to it.

Labour market segmentation

Fordism, which lasted in North America from roughly the 1920s to the 1970s, was pervasive, and it was found as much in the resource sector as in mass production secondary manufacturing industries such as automobile manufacture. A central characteristic of Fordism was its dualistic labour market (Kerr 1954; Doeringer and Piore 1971). On

the one hand, at the national level, large core firms like Ford or GM (and, in British Columbia, MacMillan Bloedel) developed highly structured labour markets known as the "primary" segment. On the other hand, smaller firms developed much more competitive, unstructured labour markets known as the "secondary" segment. Our study is principally concerned with the primary labour markets that comprised a primary independent segment and a primary subordinate segment, the latter organized by collective bargaining agreements with unions (Hayter and Barnes 1992). The labour market for these core firms is termed "internal" or "administered" and is characterized by clear rules of promotion, seniority, job demarcation, and security; and it is typically well paid. In contrast, the secondary labour market is termed "external" and is characterised by lack of promotion, hire-and-fire policies, poor wages, and lack of union representation.

In the primary independent segment (e.g., managers and engineers), entry typically depends on a relatively high level of formal academic education. Represented by white-collar managers, and supported by "pink-collar" staff, the former enjoy high incomes, stable employment, and self-supervision. Promotion in the primary independent segment is open to outsiders as well as to internal candidates, depending on qualifications, merit, and senior management preference. In the primary subordinate segment (e.g., production line and maintenance workers), formal collective bargaining between unions and management structures blue-collar workers according to the principles of seniority and job demarcation. Seniority means that entry is confined to starting positions and that promotion follows a line of progression based on date of hire. During recession, layoffs are also organized by seniority, the most junior being laid off first and rehired last. Moreover, in Fordist collective bargaining, jobs are narrowly defined and closely supervised. Entry into the primary subordinate segment requires a minimum of academic qualifications, and training occurs on the job, although in the trades (e.g., electrical trades), apprenticeship schemes include technical schooling.

Our argument is that, during the Fordist era, the two logics of vocationalism discussed above – immediate and distant – functioned as the primary channels along which students were funnelled into either the primary independent or primary subordinate labour market segments. In this sense, a pre-market bifurcation of students occurred well before they actually joined the labour force and, especially with regard to males, directed them into one of the two primary

(independent and subordinate) labour market segments emerging out of Fordist production (Empson-Warner and Krahn 1992; Willis 1977; Gaskell 1985; Peck 1989a).

While workplace segmentation, and the necessary prior division within schools that sustained it (Willis divides students into "ear 'oles" and "lads"), was criticized for creating social divisiveness and inequality, there were benefits, at least for workers in sectors of the economy dominated by Fordist firms. In the workplace, collective bargaining provided workers with some dignity and progressively improved working conditions, while levels of remuneration were superior to, and set a benchmark for, the secondary labour market segment. In return, firms received a disciplined, stable, and productive workforce. If unions wanted job demarcation, then so did firms. This was because it conformed to the strictures of scientific management, the aim of which was to maximize labour efficiency.

In communities dominated by Fordist firms, increasing employment and incomes meant prosperity, marred only by temporary layoffs. Students, especially males, could leave school and, with virtually no academic qualifications, obtain a well-paid job at the factory or mill. Indeed, they could drop in and out of the workforce as they pleased. For female students it was a different story. Primary subordinate jobs went predominantly to males, which meant that females were frequently confined to pink-collar jobs or to work in the secondary segment.

The Fordist system, and its economic largesse, was not to last, however. Beginning in the early 1970s, the mass production industries of North America were increasingly undermined by technological change, especially that rooted in the micro-electronics revolution, as well as by rising global competition and by various crises related to energy, stagflation, and recession. For commentators like Atkinson (1987), the solution to these problems was a radical redevelopment of production towards flexible systems, which consequently redefined the demand for labour, labour markets, and segmentation.

For established mass production industries, the effect of the imposition of new flexible methods was profound. New computer-based technologies were not only much more efficient but were also permitted greater quality control and more nuanced product differentiation. Also, flexible production techniques meant fewer workers and managers while, at the same time, demanding different skills, attitudes, and forms of work organization. The flexible core worker

was required to be multiskilled and self-directed. In contrast, for tasks that did not require functional flexibility, firms would contract out or use part-time or temporary workers whom they hired and fired at will. For unions, the move to flexibility represented a direct attack on the principles of job demarcation and seniority. In addition, contracting out to non-union workforces constituted a threat to the very existence of unions and, more broadly, to their ability to maintain acceptable wage and employment conditions. Not surprisingly, introduction of employment flexibility was especially controversial at long-standing Fordist sites of employment, where collective bargaining had enshrined the old principles of segmentation.

The move towards flexibility altered the established norms of vocationalism, especially in those communities based on Fordist mass production. The most obvious threat was to male high school students who were pursuing an immediate logic with the expectation of working in the local factory or mill. For those students, flexibility vastly reduced their entry opportunities, putting into question the logic they were following. Many entry-level positions for unskilled work were eliminated under post-Fordism, creating a jarring relationship between youths' job expectations and the job market reality (Machlis et al. 1990, Peck 1989b). In addition, the few opportunities that were available required a different, more stringent set of entry requirements. While these changes directly affected males, female students, who, in the past, may have expected to marry someone who had a high-paying, primary subordinate job, were also adversely affected. However, as McDowell (forthcoming) recently argued, females could also benefit from the feminization of work within the post-Fordist regime. This possibility increasingly turns on the ability of workers to communicate, to foster personal relationships of trust and understanding, and to perform publicly. These latter abilities, argues McDowell, are traditionally associated with women, and, in this sense, recent changes in the nature of work may give them a competitive edge over their male counterparts.

BRITISH COLUMBIA'S FOREST COMMUNITIES IN CRISIS

The restructuring of the BC forest economy as it moved from Fordism to post-Fordism provides an exemplary case for understanding the changed nature of vocationalism and segmentation. The Forest Act,

1947, explicitly underwrote a Fordist prescription for British Columbia's forest economy and associated communities (Barnes and Hayter 1997; Hayter 2000). By offering large areas of timber at low cost, and by providing a physical infrastructure and a favourable business climate, BC forest policy sought to attract large-scale investment to produce standardized commodities for export markets. Given the nature of the timber resource, the policy also encouraged geographical dispersal centring on a few accessible nodes, or growth centres. In some cases, dispersion required the construction of new towns (such as Mackenzie and Gold River), although for the most part investment occurred in already established forest towns (such as Powell River).

As the industry expanded under Fordism, unions were fully accommodated. Forest towns became company-union towns, and because dominant companies and unions were not interested in diversification outside the forest sector, neither were the communities they supported. After all, per capita incomes were relatively high compared to the Canadian average and the Vancouver metropolitan area, and jobs for youth were plentiful.

In Powell River, the paper mill dominated vocationalism. As a Canada Employment Programs officer working in Powell River put it:

> Eighteen to 40 years ago in this town, kids went through school, dropped out of school, somewhere around Grade 10. Went to work for the mill. Bought themself <sic> a big car and had a great time. That was the pattern. Their fathers, their grandfathers, all worked for the mill. They knew once they finished school, whatever that meant, when they reached working age for the mill, which was probably about sixteen at the time, they could drop out of school. And go and work in the mill and earn good money. (Interview with author 1994)

In another example, a union leader at Powell River reported that, in the 1970s, after leaving school (Grade 10) he was able to start at the mill and quickly earned enough money for a six-month tour of Europe before returning and re-entering the mill, suffering only the minor inconvenience of losing half a year of seniority. At Powell River, as elsewhere, seniority locked employees into particular occupational lines of progression, mills, and towns. But being locked in also meant stability and improving benefits. Moreover, intergenerational employment, with sons following fathers into the mill, helped to

solidify values regarding unions, labour markets, and education.

The complacency that increasingly developed among British Columbia's forest communities during the golden age of Fordism was shattered by the recession of the early 1980s. This was the beginning of the end (Hayter 2000). In the Powell River paper mill, permanent jobs declined from 2,335 in 1981 to 1,833 in 1986; and, after reaching a plateau during the late 1980s, employment dropped again, reaching 1,245 by 1994. By June 2000, there were 1,000 employees and 130 staff (see Table 1).

Proportionately, white-collar jobs declined as much as did blue-collar jobs, and apprenticeships had all but disappeared. During this period (between 1981 and 1994), the population of Powell River remained stable at around 20,000 people (see Table 2). However, the teenage population dropped by about one-third; although in recent years, as the population total has modestly increased, so has the number of teenagers. Unemployment rates remain high. In addition, the flexibility introduced into the mill was highly contentious, creating acrimonious relations between the unions and MacMillan Bloedel, which owned the mill from 1957 to 1998. After that it was bought by Pacifica, which, in turn, sold it in 2001 to the Norwegian firm Norske Skog.

With these changes in employment levels, and the nature of the work at the Powell River paper mill, job employment prospects are now quite different than they were before. The few jobs available are now highly prized. Pacifica, for example, reported that 1,000 applications were received for each of a handful of entrance-level jobs advertised in the late 1990s at Powell River and Port Alberni (personal communication, Mr. Norm Koffler, Employee Relations Manager, Pacfica Papers, March 1999). Moreover, for those entry positions the firm required Grade 12 math and other academic qualifications – a requirement that was unheard of twenty years previously. In addition, each short-listed applicant was subject to a variety of tests to determine his/her fitness to work at the mill, including a psychological assessment of his/her willingness to engage in teamwork.

TABLE 1:
Powell River paper mill employment levels, 1971–2000

YEAR	TOTAL EMPLOYED	HOURLY WORKERS	SALARIED WORKERS
1971	2442	2123	319
1976	2165	1853	311
1981	2335	2003	332
1986	1833	1568	265
1991	1828	1558	270
1994	1275	1093	182
2000	1130	1000	130

Source: See Hayter 1996, 2000. Note that hourly workers include relief workers.

TABLE 2:
Powell River: Population and teenage population, 1971–2000

YEAR	TOTAL	TEENAGERS (15–19 YEARS)
1971	19,127	1878
1976	20,101	2031
1981	19,834	1989
1986	18,971	1643
1991	19,689	1415
1994	20,038	1235
2000	21,112	1535

Source: BC Stats, 2002. *Regional District Population Estimates*. Victoria: Government of British Columbia, Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations, Population Section.

MAX CAMERON SECONDARY SCHOOL: RETHINKING VOCATIONALISM

With the restructuring of work at the Powell River paper mill, the expectations of students at Powell River's high school, and the curriculum to which they are exposed, changed substantially. Our study of these changes, which was conducted in 1994 by Behrisch (1995), is based on a large-scale survey of 155 Grade 12 students – approximately half the graduating class – at the Max Cameron High School. The survey was pre-tested, implemented during class time, and provided information on family background, courses, school skills, family

members' work experience, education and training achievements, job experience, short- and long-term plans, and perceptions of the locality. Details of this survey can be found in Behrisch (1995, 154-65). In addition, in-depth interviews were carried out with six students and their families as well as with school administrators, including the principal and vice-principal, a former principal, two counsellors, three teachers, two union leaders, and several community representatives. The six students were selected to represent differences in gender, academic achievement, and class position. The names we use to refer to the key student informants – Ann, David, Debbie, Marcus, Shawn, and Sarah – are fictitious. These students, as well as other key informants (including parents), were interviewed using a semi-structured format, with the aim of pursuing in some depth the themes raised in the large-scale survey. At the time of the interviews, Max Cameron was the only school in Powell River teaching Grades 8 to 12. However, a new high school, Brooks, was under construction in 1994, and its first principal is a former principal of Max Cameron. It might be noted that Brooks was already a junior high school and that its (substantial) reconfiguration was judged cheaper than the renovation of the older, larger Max Cameron. Enrolment is a problem, however, and the two schools are to be combined in the near future.

By way of a context for the present study, we begin with what some have referred to as the "lost generation"; that is, the cohort of students that graduated after the early 1980s recession but that had not yet reconfigured their expectations in light of the new realities of post-Fordism. This is followed by a review of the survey and interviews from the class of 1995, which we divide into the following two subsections: (1) a discussion of how programs at the school have changed in response to the emergence of post-Fordist labour markets and (2) a discussion of how the students' own expectations have changed.

The "lost generation"

Following the massive cutbacks in the Powell River mill during the 1981-85 recession, the BC forest economy enjoyed a brief boom, and, at the mill, employment levels stabilized and a limited number of employees were hired or rehired. For some, it appeared that the earlier downturn had been only a temporary decline, simply a continuation of the boom-and-bust cycle that had characterized the three decades following the Second World War. Such a belief encouraged at least some graduates of Max Cameron who left school in the second half

of the 1980s to remain in the locality and to work in marginal jobs while living with their parents and waiting for an upturn in employment at the mill. Unfortunately, their expectations were never realized. This period was not just another recession but, rather, was the beginning of a fundamental shift in how work and labour markets operated. This fact became only too apparent in 1990 when another round of downsizing began, leaving those waiting for a job at the mill with neither hope nor credentials for alternative careers. This group that waited in vain for jobs at the mill became known locally as the "lost generation" and was increasingly characterised by low morale, lack of direction, and extreme negativism about the future. As the former school principal noted:

> There's an interesting thing going on right now. Powell River had their layoffs in 1982, probably their first big layoffs ever. In the mid-80s, the problems started to arise. It was a group of people that came out of high school at that time, and they were the first generation that never had that opportunity to enter the mill ... I knew them all. I would speak to their brothers and sisters and ask, "Well, how's your brother doing?" "Well, they are at home." Basically they didn't get work right away when they came out of high school ... the ones that stayed behind [in Powell River].

Or, as Shawn's father, noted:

> A lot of kids have graduated in the last few years and are still wandering around, wondering what they should be doing ... Sticking around town and taking on these low-paying jobs just to put spending money in their pockets. But they really don't know what they want to do.

This lost generation of youth, with limited qualifications and no clear view of the future, left a strong impression on the community psyche. Their problems helped to stimulate community responses in the home, school, and related institutions. According to a programs officer at the Canada Employment Centre:

> I've always talked with the schools over the last ten years. But there was a period there, maybe a four- or five-year period, up until a couple of years ago, where the kids were very negative ... I guess as the economy started to improve, it diversified and the job situation improved. And now you're getting that positive spark again. With good ideas.

Notwithstanding this "positive spark," a widely voiced sentiment among school administrators, parents, and students is that youth need to leave the locality in order to grow up. According to the school's head counsellor: "I say [to them] leave. If you've got any money, if you've got any desire to travel, why not do it now? Then if you choose to come back, that's fine, you know what's out there. But don't do it for jobs, do it more for worldly experience. This [place] is too sheltered."

Ann's mother echoes the same sentiment. She says that, in order for her girls to grow up, they must leave Powell River:

> Interviewer: What about your girls coming back to Powell River?
>
> Ann's mother: I hope they don't. Not initially anyway. I find people that I went to school with ... people that have never left here, the ones that got the job at the mill and stayed here and raised a family, are very narrow-minded. Very critical. They can't see what's above Powell River. Because this is a rich little town. It's a spoiled little town.

A union representative said that most mill workers tell their kids to look outside the community for jobs. As a Canada Employment Programs officer observed, "It's healthy for Powell River kids to go out of town. This is a very protective environment. It really is. Parents are over-protective in this town."

Of course, not all students are able to leave town. Those in the lost generation who either dropped out of school early or who did not achieve sufficiently high academic standing to move on to post-secondary education are in a very difficult position, especially given the current tendency for even relatively menial jobs to demand qualifications. It is against this backdrop that the school has attempted to alter its own curriculum in order to better meet the employment needs of the students, thus avoiding any more lost generations.

Curricula changes at Max Cameron

The curricula changes enacted at Max Cameron have been primarily directed towards preparing students for contemporary, flexible labour markets. A special set of measures has also been directed towards the at-risk student population because high school dropouts no longer have the option of the paper mill, and there is no other obvious alternative. Clearly, flexibility has changed the nature of the labour

market for everyone, but it is those pursuing an immediate logic who are most threatened.

In particular, Max Cameron's curricula reform focused on changing its vocational courses and, in general, promoting computer literacy. Such changes were informed both by an assessment of needs by school administrators/teachers and by a survey of the skill requirements of Powell River businesses (Behrisch 1995, 51). The latter, an admittedly highly generalized survey, identified the top four skill areas as computer literacy, personal improvement and attitude, business skills, and customer service.

At bottom, the rationale for curriculum reform was the restructuring at the mill, something that the former principal recognised explicitly:

> I became principal at this particular school in 1990. Even since then, everything has changed. When you talk to graduating students, the first time I spoke to them, I said, "Not many of you will work at the mill." We are promoting other kinds of things among the students. Each year I have spoken to the Grade 12 class. This year I said, "Probably, none of you will ever work in the mill." That's probably not true in one sense but its appropriate.

For several years, a particularly dynamic speaker under contract from Canada Employment has annually reinforced the same message. In his talk on "modern workplace realities," he gives each student a jelly doughnut, which he uses as a metaphor for the labour market. The desirable jelly centre represents the good jobs, which are shrinking, and the outside represents the peripheral jobs, which are expanding. His message is that the good jobs are not simply waiting to be had; rather, in order to get them, students must develop flexible expectations, learn new skills, and, above all, develop the right attitude.

The former principal noted that, in order to provide these new skills, the school's changing philosophy has entailed the eradication of most of the long-established vocational programs:

> The numbers are dropping. Welding is an example. Probably seven or eight years ago, enrolment in welding was way up there because anybody in a short period of time could get training, get work on construction, get fairly high wages and be a welder. It's sort of romantic to be a welder, I guess. Now there's just really little interest in that.

Along with this de-emphasis on traditional shop courses (like welding), the school has downplayed Math 11a, the alternative "easy

math" for the non-academic stream. In order to enter a trades program at the local (Malaspina) college, a student must take Math 11 and Math 12 as well as Physics 11. In response to this, Max Cameron established a math centre, where students coach each other; as a result, enrolment in Math 11 and Math 12 has doubled. In addition, Max Cameron has sought to increase computer literacy among the student body and has expanded its computer science department so that it overlaps with business education. In order to maintain a stimulating learning environment, the school encourages highly computer literate students to take on semi-instructional roles. These "propeller-heads," as the former principal affectionately refers to them, are clearly vital to keeping up with constantly advancing technology:

> Here [in computer instruction], we have to keep changing the course every year and go further and further because of the skills of the kids coming in. Some areas are having a hard time keeping up. Like in the business ed area, I moved the computer programming from Apple to IBM. They [the students] have all got their own computer businesses and stuff like this. They go up there and the poor teachers haven't got a hope. And so, I've had to transfer a few people around and put a propeller-head with the teacher.

It should be noted that, at the new Brooks High School, where this former principal of Max Cameron is now principal, both the curriculum and the physical layout were designed to reflect contemporary vocationalism. For example, there is a technology laboratory that mimics a modern engineering workplace, where students learn computer-assisted drawing (CAD) and mechanical drawing (CAM), while another laboratory features robotics and other technologies. In addition, "vocational" courses combine a hands-on approach with theory. As the principal puts it:

> The shop area is designed on a whole new philosophical bent, which is one of technology instead of mechanics. Students are expected to learn processes as opposed to actual manual skills. Manual skills are not as high in demand anymore. So we are changing. Things like business education, the demand for that is rising because the jobs in small business are increasing. The first thing you have to have is computers; you have to have accounting skills and the business entrepreneurial skills.

At Max Cameron, as at Brooks, the promotion of entrepreneurialism is also a new development – one that was not found under Fordism. In fact, historically, resource towns such as Powell River were antagonistic towards entrepreneurialism (Hayter 2000, 185). Now, as a counsellor puts it, "Entrepreneurialism is the way to go." This person even expressed enthusiasm for a student – "a computer genius" – who had dropped out of school in Grade 11 to start his own business from his home in Powell River.

A major initiative for Max Cameron is to provide all of its students with work experience outside of school in order to make them more attractive to the labour market. Its integrated work experience program helped stimulate a similar provincial initiative, and, in 1994, the school's application for funding under the Skills Now Programme gave top priority to work experience. In 1994 Max Cameron liased with seventy local businesses and professional associations to allow its students to participate in one of three programs: Work Experience, Job Shadowing, and Work Opportunities for Women (WOW). Under Work Experience, a single employer hired students for several weeks, while Job Shadowing provided students with glimpses of a variety of jobs by allowing them to spend a day or so with a professional. WOW initially provided disadvantaged and at-risk female students with weekend job experiences, which included a small salary. WOW was subsequently extended to at-risk males.

In addition, in 1993 Max Cameron School adopted the semester system in order to allow at-risk students to commit to four months at a time instead of eight. The rationale behind this switch was to provide such students with an incentive to finish high school. The semester system allows for more student work placements throughout the year and for a wider range of courses. Youth who have graduated or dropped out can return to Max Cameron to upgrade their Grade 12 qualifications. These students put a significant strain on school resources, but the administration considers this worthwhile as the result is that local youths are able to obtain the prerequisites for post-secondary education. In 1994 upgrading students accounted for 8 per cent of the Grade 12 class.

Finally, Powell River has an exceptionally high teen pregnancy and birth rate – a birth rate of 33.4 compared to the provincial 23.8 (British Columbia 1994). The Powell River School District identifies teen mothers as a special needs group: "There is a need to ensure girls and women access to new technologies. Particular emphasis should be

placed upon enabling young mothers to access educational and social programs" (School District No. 47 1994). To that end, in an effort to encourage young mothers to stay in school, a day care centre was constructed next to the counselling department.

In sum, Max Cameron probably did not anticipate how the recession of the early 1980s would affect its programs. Even if it had, given the entrenched nature of student attitudes, it is unlikely that changes could have been introduced effectively. The consequence was a lost generation of students. Yet Max Cameron quickly recognized the long-term implications of the recession for the mill and for its own role as a high school. And student expectations have moved in tandem with this recognition.

Changed student expectations

It is clear from both the general survey and the in-depth interviews that the once dominant mill is no longer important either to student labour market expectations or to the school programs they choose to attend. Sixty-three per cent of the students rated job opportunities at the mill as poor or very poor. Students who had family members working, or who had been laid off at the mill, held even dimmer opinions. Only 5 per cent of Max Cameron students surveyed said that they would consider quitting school if they were offered a full-time job at the mill. The head counsellor thought that family involvement at the mill was critical in influencing this perception: "They see everybody getting cut. I mean, even their dads now, who have been there for twenty years ... their jobs are possibly on the line in the next round, whenever that happens to be. They know that there's no secure job there at all."

David, whose father works at the mill as a saw filer, confirms this view:

> INTERVIEWER: What are job opportunities for youth like there [the paper mill]?
> DAVID: Slim. They laid off 130 people last year. So why would they hire more kids?

In addition, Markus and Sarah expressed strong environmental concerns about the mill.

> INTERVIEWER: Do you see the mill as an important part of the economy?
> MARCUS: Definitely. Which is very sad, but it's true. And I mean, it's disgusting. I just can't stand it.

INTERVIEWER: You can't stand the mill?
MARCUS: No. The mill is really polluting. I mean it stinks. If you're driving through town, it just reeks. And some days, it's intoxicating. You have to roll your windows up. It's just incredible!

INTERVIEWER: Are you aware of what's going on at the mill at all?
SARAH: No. I don't really like the mill; in fact, I hate the mill.
INTERVIEWER: Really? Why's that?
SARAH: Because there's, like there's this big huge cloud hanging over the mill all the time. And when you drive over, if you're going to go watch a movie at the theatre or something, you gotta bring a nose plug or put lots of perfume right under your nose so that you don't have to smell it. Because it's really bad smelling. It does bring in a lot of money, I'll admit that. Except it brings in a lot of pollution.

While the mill is still polluting, due to declining employment levels it brings in less money than Sarah perhaps realizes. That decline, in part, explains why over half the students interviewed say that, following completion of Grade 12, they intend to continue with some form of education or training (see Table 3). The school and/or training categories that dominate student expectations include postsecondary and high school upgrading. In addition to the 57 per cent who said that they planned to go to school, a further 11 per cent said that, after graduation, they planned to work and attend school concurrently. That is, nearly 70 per cent of the class intends to continue their education in some form. The reasons for this continuance varied, but the majority (87 per cent) said it was "to gain job qualifications."

TABLE 3:
Max Cameron Students: Short-term expectations

EXPECTATION	NUMBER	PER CENT
School/training	88	57
Work	40	26
Both school and work	17	11
Other	9	6

Source: Behrisch 1995: 114

More specifically, over one-third of the students planning to continue their education after graduation expect to attend university, while another 28 per cent plan to enter college (see Table 4). Just 21 per cent of the group continuing with their education plan to stay in

Powell River, while 15 per cent plan to leave British Columbia. The student counsellors interviewed believe that parents have strong expectations that their children will attend university. As one counsellor says:

> About 85 per cent of kids' parents figure they are going on to university. The number one choice for parents in terms of university is middle management. Well, fifteen years ago, that might not have been a bad choice, but no one is hiring middle management now. It's a dead-end job. All those people, even if you have got really high marks, you are still going to be scrambling under those conditions. So, a lot of the expectations that parents have, they push onto their kids. They are not realistic.

TABLE 4:
Max Cameron students: Educational plans after school

INSTITUTION	NUMBER	PERCENT
University	39	39
College	30	29
Technical	18	17
High school upgrade	14	14
Other	1	1
Don't know	1	1

Source: Behrisch 1995: 116

In fact, only about 25 per cent of the interviewed students stated that they planned to attend university – markedly fewer than were contemplated by parents (as assessed by counsellors). It may be that the high hopes of parents were stimulated by their awareness that many of the traditionally good blue-collar jobs are no long available and that their children have to do something else.

Within this context, the earlier distinction we made between immediate logic and distant logic is useful. The school recognizes both an academic program and a non-academic program, and, while it is not a perfect fit, this distinction can be read as the difference between distant logic and immediate logic. In the case of Max Cameron, just over half of the 155 Grade 12 students who were surveyed were enrolled in the academic program and were practising a distant logic, while the rest were enrolled in the non-academic program and were practising an immediate logic (see Table 5). To be in the academic program,

students need to take at least four courses that involve taking provincial examinations. In contrast, non-academic courses are non-examinable and include, for example, Construction 12 and Metalwork 12.

TABLE 5:
Max Cameron Students:
Proportion of Grade 12 class in academic and non-academic programs

PROGRAM	NUMBER	PER CENT
Academic	87	56
Non-academic	68	44

Source: Behrisch 1995: 77
Note: Enrolment in the academic program requires students to take at least four courses that are examined provincially

Two points stand out. First, as might be expected, a statistically significant relationship was found between students' school program and their short-term plans after graduation. In particular, academic students were far more likely to plan on continuing their education than were non-academic students, who were more likely to enter the workforce immediately (see Table 6). While this tendency is statistically significant, it should not be regarded as universal. Debbie, for example, is a low achiever (C+ average) who is enrolled in an academic program and plans to be a cashier after graduation.

TABLE 6:
Max Cameron students:
School program and post-graduation plans (short-term)

	SCHOOL PROGRAM	
POST-GRADUATION PLANS	ACADEMIC	NON-ACADEMIC
Further education	61	27
Work	13	27

Source: Behrisch 1995: 77
Note: The chi-square (X^2) statistic is 15.285, which is statistically significant (0.05 level of significance)

Second, practitioners of distant logic who enrol in the academic program tend towards higher academic achievement than do those practising immediate logic and taking non-academic courses. Females show a tendency to outperform boys in terms of academic achievement. Furthermore, there is a relationship between academic achievement

and class position, as is indicated by fathers' job status (Table 7). Students from white-collar families are more likely to be higher achievers than are students from blue-collar families, although there are certainly exceptions.

TABLE 7:
Max Cameron Students:
High School Grades and Fathers' Job Status

	FATHERS' JOB STATUS	
GRADES	WHITE COLLAR	BLUE COLLAR
A/B	27	38
Below B	14	57

Source: Behrisch 1995: 87
Note: the chi-squire (X^2) statistic is 7.672 which is statistically significant (0.05 level of significance).

More generally, from the interviews it is clear that the segmentation among students who adopt either the immediate logic or the distant logic is related to family and class background as measured by fathers' job status (whether manual or professional) and fathers' completion of Grade 12. Using either measure, there is a greater tendency for students from blue-collar families to indicate "work" after graduation than there is for students from white-collar families.

That said, the relationship between class position and the school program selected is not straightforward. Specifically, among the three working-class families interviewed in-depth, none of the fathers had completed high school; all had dropped out between Grade 8 and Grade 11 and had started working. However, David's father, who had dropped out of school in Grade 8 and who works at the paper mill, was particularly keen to stress to his son the importance of continuing his education:

> DAVID'S FATHER: I told him he would have to move out. My oldest boy was chummin' around with a young guy. And I heard through the grapevine that his friend was going to quit school. I said, "I heard your friend is going to quit school." He says, "Is that right, Dad?" and I said, "Yeah." But I said, "If you got any notion of quitting, you get your bags packed the day you quit." I said the same thing to Jacob. I even said the same thing to David, didn't I?
> DAVID'S MOTHER: Uh-huh. We try and tell them to stay in school.

Similarly, Sarah's parents, neither of whom completed high school (her father works in a wood mill as a shake cutter), strongly urge her to finish high school. According to Sarah: "They don't push me. They encourage me. They help a lot. When I have a hard time with my homework, they'll help me as much as they can, or they'll get me a tutor who knows how to." Appreciation of the value of education certainly exists within working-class as well as middle-class families, perhaps to some degree more than was traditionally the case, indicating the growing importance of distant logic within working-class student plans. As the head counsellor says, "If education is viewed as valuable, there is more pressure put on the child to perform and to have some aspirations." While this "pressure" occurs across family status types among Max Cameron students, distinctions between working- and middle-class families remain apparent, as does the presence of immediate logic in student expectations. On the one hand, interviews with middle-class parents revealed their inherent assumptions that their children would attend university or college; their main concerns were which university and what program would stimulate them the most. On the other hand, even though working-class families valued education, the performance of their children in school was consistently lower than that of the children of middle-class families.

As emerged from the in-depth interviews with students, class and family are also important in the making of longer-term plans. However, this is not a neat, reductive relationship. Marcus's long-range plan is a mirror image of his parents' lives. His father is a doctor, his parents travelled extensively as young adults, and his older sisters have attended university. Marcus, in turn, will attend a university somewhere in Canada or the United States that offers courses in molecular genetics (his mother was researching options at the time of the interview), and he hopes to become a doctor. Debbie also conforms to a pattern. Like her mother and two sisters, she sees herself becoming a homemaker and plans to keep her cashier job after graduation. Shawn's hope to become a certified auto-mechanic also reflect his family background as his father, who works at the mill, "always has cars around." David, on the other hand, is a "don't know." His father and his brother work at the paper mill and they have advised him to go into business for himself. His father suggests that he go into real estate and "make a lot of money." Yet David thinks the future will be "hard" and that it will be difficult for him to go into business. Ann is another "don't

know," but she has a clearer sense of direction than David. She also acknowledges considerable pressure from her mother, a registered nurse and single mother, to become an independent professional, and, although she does not have a career plan, she will follow her sister to university. Sarah is an example of a student who conforms neither to traditional family nor to gender roles (although she plans on marrying her boyfriend of five years immediately after graduation). She does, however, have a clear idea of her future. In particular, she wants to be a custom carpenter and own her own cabinetry shop. In fact, Sarah was the only female in her construction class.

These few examples, although briefly stated, at least intimate the constraints and choices shaping vocationalism in Powell River, and it is likely that actual career paths, as well as career expectations, will reflect diversity among students. Of course many students will doubtless leave Powell River: half of those surveyed said they would do so upon graduation, and another 24 per cent said they did not know or did not care. Those who leave might find, should they return for a visit, that the mill isn't even there any more.

The mill, then, no longer shapes vocationalism in Powell River, and this extends to part-time work. A remarkable number of the students (104, or 68 per cent) had a part-time job, and a further twenty (13 per cent) were looking for a part-time job. Moreover, 37 per cent (thirty-six students) of those with jobs worked at least twenty hours a week, and 10 per cent worked over thirty hours (Behrisch 1995, 96-102). Yet most of the students' part-time jobs were in the food and service sectors (e.g., McDonalds), and none found part-time work in the paper mill – a pattern that reflects the shift from a producer-based to a consumer-based economy. The motivations underlying part-time work varied, although all stressed financial reasons, especially reasons related to spending rather than "need." In addition, other reasons for working, such as "good experience," "fun atmosphere," and "something to put on my resume," were important, indicating that, at least in Powell River, the literature's bleak portrayal of youth labour markets requires modification. Indeed, the five key informants with jobs perceived this experience to be valuable not simply for financial reasons but also for providing a sense of independence, a source of money, a place to cultivate friendships, and skills. These skills, however, are no longer shaped by or for the mill.

CONCLUSION

The transition of labour markets from Fordism to post-Fordism profoundly influenced vocationalism, and this is nowhere more evident than in such BC resource towns as Powell River. This transition created a lost generation. By the early 1990s, however, the nature of vocationalism was redefined by school and students alike as well as by the related institutions of family, community, and unions. The immediate logic and distant logic underlying vocationalism is still present, although there is a shift towards the latter. Student choices also continue to be shaped by various social interactions, notably those around class, family, school, and peer groups, as well as by part-time work (perhaps more so than is realized) and by the individual personalities and motivations of the students themselves. Here we emphasize Peters's (1987, 466) claim that "research on youth and employment must recognize that adolescents are not monolithic."

In Powell River students no longer think of the community's once dominant employer as part of their labour market expectations. Aided by curriculum initiatives at Max Cameron High School (and the new Brooks High School), students are seeking to invest more time in education and to develop technological skills and attitudes now demanded in Powell River and beyond. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that Fordist labour markets in communities such as Powell River were a lot more forgiving than are contemporary flexible ones. The at-risk student population no longer possesses the good job alternatives it once had, and this group is less likely to perform well at school or to solve its difficulties by leaving Powell River. Max Cameron has made efforts to help these students to increase their academic qualifications, for example, by requiring Grade 12 math; and our informant interviews suggest that greater attention is being paid to academic achievement. At-risk students remain, however, and their difficulties are reinforced by a tendency towards demanding excessive qualifications even for relatively low-paying jobs.

Finally, from a policy perspective, it needs to be recognized that skill formation is essential to local development and that schools and students are the bases of education, learning, and innovation. Local development policy often gives a lot of attention to retraining laid off workers, although the results are frequently mixed. It is our belief, after having studied Powell River, that attention to education should begin at the beginning, within the school system itself. Students who think of education as a "massive irritant" (Willis 1977), and who think

of job training as a postgraduate concern, will significantly disadvantage themselves. If too many students make this choice, then local development potentials may be affected as well.

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