Applying ecological systems theory to understand the determinants of early school leaving and second-chance education in a socio-economically disadvantaged area in Sydney, Australia.

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Declaration

I declare that except where due acknowledgement has been made, this research thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree at any university or other institute of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text, and a list of references is given.

....................................................
Laleshwar Nand
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACE</td>
<td>Adult and Community Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATAR</td>
<td>Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COAG</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSC</td>
<td>Higher School Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>High school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPC</td>
<td>Tertiary Preparation Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP</td>
<td>Tertiary Preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TES</td>
<td>Tertiary Entrance Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Technical and Further Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WSI</td>
<td>Western Sydney Institute</td>
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<td>WSU</td>
<td>Western Sydney University</td>
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Abstract

Early school leaving has been a major concern since the introduction of compulsory schooling in Australia. Drawing upon relevant theoretical underpinnings, including Bronfenbrenner’s theory of bioecological human development, Andrew Martin’s motivation and engagement wheel and Bourdieu’s theory of social practice, this study examined a holistic view of the many complex and interrelated factors that influence early school leaving and re-engagement with learning through second-chance education. Specifically, this study explored the experiences of early school leavers in Western Sydney, New South Wales (NSW) Australia and their re-engagement through a form of second-chance education, Tertiary Preparation, at a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) college. The research data were gathered through a mixed methods approach comprising two structured questionnaires which were completed by one hundred and ten ($N = 110$) students; a subsample of these students completed a semi-structured interview ($N = 19$). The students studied Tertiary Preparation at Western Sydney Institute (WSI) colleges in 2011. The mixed methods findings provide rich and comprehensive information on the students’ perceptions of learning experiences in high school and in Tertiary Preparation at TAFE.

The significant findings reveal key features in the Tertiary Preparation course that were instrumental to students’ success. The three significant findings or themes generated from this research as to what impacted on students’ success were: (i) interpersonal relationships (relatedness), (ii) curriculum and pedagogic considerations, including assessments and student autonomy and (iii) socio-economic status and overcoming educational disadvantage. Significantly, related key features leading to
success in Tertiary Preparation, were notably perceived to be absent from the high school setting. For instance, student-teacher relationships and peer-to-peer relationships in high school were less positive and less proximal or interactive, compared with those developed in the Tertiary Preparation environment. Students in Tertiary Preparation, with an engaging and valued curriculum that was seen to be relevant and that provided skills for further study and employment, experienced success. With this success in education, these students overcame their low socio-economic status and educational disadvantage. This study’s findings indicate that demographic characteristics, negative high school experiences and other challenging life circumstances that are powerful predictors of school non-completion, tended to lose their influence in creating disadvantage after students studied and graduated from Tertiary Preparation. Ultimately, this study found that students’ abilities to set clear and attainable goals, to develop positive attitudes, relationships and persistence in a different environment contributed to their success. Early school leaving and re-engagement in learning are multi-faceted, and the influential factors in both are often interrelated. For the dual purposes of understanding these complexities and synthesising the findings of the study, Bronfenbrenner’s theoretical framework accounting for the individual’s development in context, and Andrew Martin’s influential model of motivation and engagement, provide theoretical underpinnings to demonstrate the process through which students in this study were able to re-engage in learning. Finally, drawing upon these findings, and having regard to the limitations of this study, a number of recommendations for future research on early school leaving and re-engagement are proposed.
Chapter 1

Introduction

School completion

Re-engagement through second-chance education is an important opportunity for students to achieve a qualification equivalent to the Year 12 Higher School Certificate (HSC). Re-engagement for a transition to higher education, entry to the labour market and associated themes of social inclusion and equity, are national and state government priorities (COAG, 2013; Wyn, Stokes, & Taylor, 2004). Research on school non-completion indicates that not having Year 12 or an equivalent is a disadvantage. The completion of senior secondary schooling leads to further education and training prospects and to better labour market outcomes (Lamb, Jackson, Walstab, & Huo, 2015; Vickers, Barker, Perry, & Dockett, 2015; Te-Riele, 2015, 2014, 2012; Vickers, Finger, Barker, & Bodkin-Andrews, 2014; Lim & Karmel, 2011; Lamb & Robinson, 2009; Ross, 2008; Ross & Gray, 2005; Lamb, Walstab, Teese, Vickers, & Rumberger, 2004).

Completion of the equivalent of a higher school certificate by early school leavers through a second-chance course, Tertiary Preparation, is the key focus of this study. Thus, this research focuses on the important national issue of school completion through second-chance opportunities. It explores
the ways in which this course opens new opportunities for students. This original research uses Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological systems theory to underpin the research, and draws upon Andrew Martin’s motivation and engagement wheel, Bourdieu’s theory of social practice and a mixed methods approach to understand the contextual factors that lead to disconnection from schooling and re-engagement through Tertiary Preparation at TAFE, NSW. As a teacher at TAFE, NSW for the last 22 years, teaching disadvantaged students who leave school early and re-engage to complete their school education through Tertiary Preparation, I was motivated and inspired to investigate some insights into early school leaving and re-engagement, and into the success of students who study through a second-chance education.

This study represents an important and original contribution to knowledge, for it is a major study examining second-chance education in TAFE as part of the NSW state education system, as the TAFE system in NSW provides a second-chance programme that offers individuals an opportunity to gain a qualification equivalent to the Higher School Certificate (HSC) called the Tertiary Preparation Certificate (TPC). It appears that this form of second-chance education is under-researched. In particular, there is almost no data on the effectiveness of this ‘second-chance’ system, despite the fact that more than 2,000 students enter the programme each year.

In Australia, the school retention rate for Years 11-12 in 2015 was 87.9% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015, Schools, Australia CAT 4221.0). An increase of 2% from 2010 had been achieved with the introduction of the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions, an agreement
endorsed in 2009 by the Australian Federal, State and Territory governments through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG, 2009). The agreement supported new uniform requirements for school completion and participation in education across all jurisdictions, to raise the Year 12 (or equivalent) completion rate from 83.5% in 2009 to 90% by 2015 (COAG, 2009, p. 7). Following the Commonwealth, States and Territories agreement on Year 12 attainment, legislation on school leaving was introduced in NSW and in all other states and territories in 2010.

In NSW, from 2010 students have been required to complete Year 10 and then continue with education and training until they reach 17. This increased school-participation by young people to complete Year 12 (Lamb et al., 2015; Vickers et al., 2015; Te Riele, 2014, 2012). However, in NSW the retention rate in 2015 was 86%, which was lower than the national rate and than other states, including Victoria, Queensland, and South Australia (ABS, 2015). The target set by the Federal Government was not reached, with slightly less than three quarters (74%) of young people attaining Year 12 or an equivalent qualification (Lamb et al., 2015). Thus, re-engagement through alternative or second-chance opportunities has gained a crucial role.

Despite the achievement of a higher national school retention rate, school non-completion at state levels is still prevalent. In NSW, a relatively large proportion of students leave school after Year 10 before completing the HSC. There is a corpus of research literature on the causes and consequences of early school leaving (Lamb et al., 2015; Lamb & Robinson, 2009; Curtis & McMillan, 2008; Ross & Gray 2005; Lamb, Walstab, Teese, Vickers, &
According to Lamb et al., (2015), in 2014, a quarter of all young Australians (26%) did not attain Year 12 or an equivalent by age 19. In NSW, 27% of young people at age 19 were school non-completers. This was substantially higher than Victoria (23%) and Queensland (24%), and demonstrates that retention remains a problem; there is a need for NSW to examine initiatives that could further improve school completion.

1.2 Tertiary Preparation in TAFE NSW: A second-chance education

There remains a problem in NSW with still lower than expected (federal government 90% target) retention rates. Understanding why young people leave school early is central to developing innovative, alternative learning environments and experiences that can re-engage them: given that TPC clearly seems to be already established as at least part of the solution, it contributes substantially to the overall retention rates. Approximately 2,000 students study Tertiary Preparation each year, and most complete their studies.

In NSW, early school leavers enrol in Year 12 equivalent courses such as Tertiary Preparation as ‘second-chance’ learners in TAFE. Other students who enrol there are mature-age adults who left school early or who have been working, or staying at home to look after children. Thus, there are other pathways for non-completers to finish their high school education in NSW. By providing a ‘second chance’, Tertiary Preparation allows many students to complete a high school equivalent qualification, and this provides
opportunities to further their education or find secure employment, thereby facilitating their success in reaching their desired destinations. Evidence suggests that second-chance opportunities have contributed an additional 11.5% of students between age 19 and 24 attaining Year 12 equivalent qualifications nationally, and increased Year 12 completion rates from 74% to 85.5%. In NSW, 12.2% of young people between the ages of 19 and 24 completed Year 12 or equivalent through second-chance opportunities (Lamb et al., 2015).

1.3 Research Questions

This research was guided by three key questions.

1. Why do students in Western Sydney NSW, Australia leave high school early?

2. What opportunities and challenges do early school leavers experience in ‘second-chance’ Tertiary Preparation at TAFE?

3. What are the individual student factors and features of the Tertiary Preparation environment that make it effective for students to complete the equivalent of high school education?
1.4 Significance of the study

For many years, researchers in Australia have strongly argued for the provision of a second-chance or alternative education for early school leavers (Te Riele, 2015, 2014, 2012, 2011, 2008, 2006, 2000; Mills & McGregor, 2010, McGregor & Mills, 2012; Mills & McGregor, 2014; Smyth, Angus, Barry, & McInerney, 2008; Smyth & Hattam, 2004; Ross, 2008). Young people who do not complete Year 12 or begin tertiary studies before the age of 20, do re-enter at a later stage, as work and life trajectories may lead to greater aspiration for the increased benefits of educational qualifications. Thus, young people should be able to access educational qualifications (including a Year 12 certificate equivalent) between the ages of 20-24 years (Lamb et al., 2015; Hargreaves, 2011).

There are economic benefits of Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates and completions, for increased annual earnings (Te Riele, 2014; Leigh, 2008). Furthermore, an increase in school retention leads to higher GDP and Federal government revenue (Access Economics, 2012). Young people who complete Year 12 are less likely to be unemployed or casually employed, and earn higher hourly wages compared to school dropouts (Nous Group, 2011).

Compared to Year 12 completers, early school leavers are more likely to be unemployed, to be seeking work, less likely to engage in study after leaving school, and relatively unlikely to succeed in further study if they do enrol. Early school leavers receive lower wages, participate less in the labour force, and experience periods of unemployment, especially in their younger
years. Apart from the social costs of dropping out, such as increased rate of crime and poorer health and well-being, there are a number of impacts on the economy, such as lower levels of productivity and increased unemployment (Mastrorilli, 2016; Joest & Fairchild, 2015; Lavrijsen & Nicaise, 2015; Gottlieb, 2015; Murray & Mitchell, 2015; Bills, Cook & Giles, 2015; Karmel, 2014; Sweet, 2012; Ryan, 2011; Thomson & Hillman, 2010; Karmel & Woods, 2008).

Second chance education is an important social goal. Early school leavers face the risks of restricted social and labour market opportunities. They also experience financial insecurity, homelessness and mental health problems (Mills et al., 2015; Wyn et al., 2004). Research evidence also shows that increased schooling is a significant predictor of future employment and earning (Marks, 2008; Lamb et al., 2004). In the United States and Europe, early school leavers who re-engage through second-chance or alternative education increase their earning capacity, in comparison to early school leavers who do not acquire higher qualifications (Nordlund, Stehlik & Strandh et al., 2013; Song & Hsu 2008; Ou, 2008).

1.5 Re-engagement with second-chance education

This study demonstrates the importance of second-chance education as an alternative pathway for (a) early school leavers and (b) individuals who failed to meet university requirements in their school studies. Some non-
completers re-enter education outside the school context. School non-completion is a recurring concern in Australia and globally. Despite the continued efforts of governments and school systems to increase participation and school retention rates, many students drop out before completing Year 12 (Polesal, Nizińska, & Kurantowicz, 2011; Curtis & McMillan, 2008; Ross & Gray, 2005; Lamb et al., 2004). In Australia, while the commonwealth government is concerned about school retention and the achievement of Year 12, it has taken little interest in alternative or second-chance provisions (Mills & McGregor, 2016).

Many students re-engage or enrol in alternative education programs, as a form of second-chance education (Te Riele, 2008, 2007, 2000). The present study recommends educational policy change in Australia on school completion and better educational transition and outcomes for young people. It examines the extent to which the second-chance system offers opportunities to early school leavers to complete education and provides opportunities to students who did not attain the required grades in the first-chance system to gain access to higher education. If second-chance education does offer these opportunities, it will have contributed significantly to better educational outcomes.

1.6 Substantive contribution to knowledge

This study provides data on early school leaving and re-engagement and on the success of students in Tertiary Preparation, and as such, adds to the
literature that supports the provision of second-chance education opportunities for school completion in NSW. The significance of this research rests on its focus on an important problem that falls within Australian national research priority 4: ‘Strengthening Australia’s social and economic fabric’ in promoting and maintaining good health (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2002).

Research on second-chance education has been conducted in settings outside TAFE in NSW. This includes temporary government and community response programmes in senior colleges, in alternative school settings in regional New South Wales, in youth at risk studies (Te Riele, 2011, 2008, 2007, 2006, 2000) or as part of mainstream schools (Smyth, et al., 2008; Smyth & Hattam, 2004). Some studies have been done outside the school context, with targeted groups of dropout students, to identify the factors that led them to leave school early (Whannell, Allen & Lynch, 2010; Whannel, Whannell & Allen, 2012; McGregor & Hills, 2012). The factors that lead dropouts to re-engage with learning have been examined in these studies.

Early school leaving is a multifaceted and multi-dimensional process. This study extends current research on early school leaving and re-engagement using Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological human development theory. This human development theory focuses on the interaction between a growing individual and the environmental factors that surround the person. The levels described in Bronfenbrenner’s Human Development model (micro, meso, exo, macro and chrono) systems are applied to examine early school leaving and re-engagement. Andrew Martin’s motivation and engagement wheel is also used
to examine early school leavers’ positive and negative motivation and engagement in learning at school, compared to in Tertiary Preparation at TAFE.

It is anticipated that this research will contribute to our understanding of how to increase school completion through alternative education and provide better educational transitions to further study in TAFE. Success at Tertiary Preparation increases the likelihood of pursuing further study at university, and improves employment opportunities. Finally, it is expected that the findings and results of this study will contribute to the knowledge base and literature on ‘second-chance’ education and school completion in Australia by informing the practices that optimise re-engagement in learning and the successful completion of Year 12 equivalent qualification by young people who left school early.

1.7 Overview of Chapters

The structure of this thesis is as follows:

**Chapter Two** presents a critical and analytical review of the literature on early school leaving and second-chance education in the USA and Europe, with particular attention paid to issues in Australia. Importantly the literature reveals the gap in the literature that led to the development of the research questions: to assist understanding why students leave school early and why they re-engage to complete their education.

**Chapter Three** outlines the research design and sampling procedures. Data collection and analysis principles, procedures and instruments are explained.
**Chapter Four** provides the crucial evidentiary content of this study with quantitative results, and answers research question 1: why students leave school early? The quantitative data analysis provides statistical data related to how Tertiary Preparation provides opportunities to early school leavers to complete their education, and also answers the second and third research questions outlined in Section 1.3. What opportunities and challenges do early school leavers experience in ‘second-chance’ Tertiary Preparation at TAFE? (research question 2) and What are the individual student factors and features of the Tertiary Preparation environment that make it effective for students to complete the equivalent of high school education? (research question 3).

**Chapter Five** presents the results of the qualitative data. The qualitative data analysis provides further insights into the factors that lead to early school leaving and re-engagement, and verifies the quantitative data on early school leaving and re-engagement through Tertiary Preparation. Chapter 5 further answers the three research questions outlined in this Chapter 1.

**Chapter Six** draws on Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological systems theory and Andrew Martin’s motivation and engagement wheel, as well as Bourdieu’s theory of social practice, to discuss key findings in the context of current research on early school leaving and re-engagement through second-chance education, and further answers the three research questions outlined in this Chapter 1.

**Chapter Seven** provides conclusions to key findings of the study, explores implications for policy implementation, and makes recommendations.
for second-chance education. It also highlights the study’s limitations and points to future research directions.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on early school leaving and re-engagement. It begins with a critical review of research on the factors that contribute to early school leaving and then examines key findings from studies of second-chance education. Both topics are central to the research questions outlined in Chapter 1.

2.1 Factors affecting early school leaving

A wide range of studies conducted over the past four decades has led to a shared understanding of the factors that contribute to students dropping out of formal schooling before completing Year 12. In the literature there is a general consensus on reasons for early school leaving. Lamb et al., (2004) outlined a model of the key factors that drive early school leaving in Australia and classified the reasons for early school leaving into three categories: school related factors, employment related factors, and family and personal factors.

School related factors include an excessive focus on academic programmes and university entrance goals, with schools offering limited
subject choices (curriculum and assessments) and inappropriate teaching methods (pedagogy), lack of educational support leading to a risk of failure for many students (Te Riele, 2012, 2006, 2000; Ross, 2008; Teese, 2007; Vickers, 2007; Ross & Gray, 2005). Adverse interpersonal relationships (student-teacher relationships) and peer relationships, and lack of student autonomy in learning also contribute to early school leaving. There is consensus in the research literature on the significance of these factors on early school leaving (Raufelder, Nitsche, Breiymeyer, Hermann & Regner, 2016; DeRebortis, 2015; Vickers et al., 2015; Vickers et al., 2014; Gemici & Lu, 2014; Te Riele, 2012, 2011, 2008, 2006, 2000; Ross, 2008; Teese, 2007; Vickers, 2007).

The employment related factors include entry to work, on-the-job training and advancement through work experience (Lamb & Vickers, 2006). Vickers, Lamb, and Hinkley (2003) argued that students who work long hours per week are likely to drop out. Part-time work can affect students’ academic performance and Year 12 completion, especially if students work long hours (McMillan, Rothman & Wernet, 2005; Anlezark & Lim, 2011), and future prospects of economic benefits diminish over time for students who leave full-time education and start in low skill jobs (Karmel, Lu, & Oliver, 2013). Some part-time work is good, but increasing part-time work hours while studying full-time will affect academic progress and going to university (Gong, Cassells & Duncan, 2012). Getting into an apprenticeship or traineeship influences early school leaving more so among males than females. More males leave school early due to employment and apprenticeship training, or due to earning household income (Obonyo, Janeth & Richard, 2015; McMillan & Curtis,
2008; McMillan & Marks, 2003; Marks & Fleming, 1999; Lamb, 1996; Larum & Beggs, 1989). Research in early school leaving by gender has also confirmed that more males than females leave school early. This is due to the relative decline in fulltime jobs for females (Vickers, 2007; Teese, 2002; Lamb, Dwyer, & Wyn, 2000; Larum & Beggs, 1989).

Family and personal factors also affect school dropout: homelessness, pregnancy, mental health problems and low self-esteem. Research evidence also argues that lack of motivation and not caring about school often leads to the decision to leave school early (Wallace, 2016; Sandberg, 2016; Tariq, 2015; Lamb, Markussen, Teese, Sandberg & Polesel, 2011; Te Riele, 2011; Lamb, Walstab, Teese, Vickers, & Rumberger, 2004; Smyth, Angus, Down, & McInerney, 2008; Smyth & Hattam, 2004). Family socio-economic status and the level of parental education are also associated with high risk of early school leaving. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and racial backgrounds tend to leave school early (Cooper, 2015; McMillan & Marks, 2003; Lamb et al., 2004; Lamb, 1996, 1994; Marks & Fleming, 1999; Rumberger, 1983, 1995).

The geographical location of families is also a factor that influences early school leaving. Young people who live in neighbourhoods experiencing high levels of poverty, or in regional and rural areas, are more likely to leave school early (Watson, Wright, Hay, Beswick, Allen, & Cranston, 2016; Web et al., 2015; Lamb & Rice, 2008; McMillan & Curtis, 2008; Marks & Fleming, 1999; Lamb, 1996). Research evidence also suggests that mobility, especially change of school, leads to early school leaving (Rumberger, 1998). However,
recent research has documented that poor school experiences and risky activities, including crime, add to the complexity of disadvantage and non-completion (Rud, Klaveren, Groot, & Brink, 2016; Homel, Maviskalyan, Nguyen, & Ryan, 2012). Importantly, high aspirations improve outcomes for young people in relation to school completion and further study, even for those from disadvantaged demographic backgrounds (Homel & Ryan, 2014).


2.2 Second Chance Education: Defined

‘Second-chance’ education is another opportunity for individuals who for some reason did not succeed at their ‘first-chance’, but who potentially could succeed. Second-chance programmes offer individuals who ‘drop out’ the possibility of closing educational or vocational gaps (Inbar & Server, 1986, p. 177). Three criteria are used to determine whether second-chance education offers a real opportunity to remedy the problems faced in first-chance
education; (i) second-chance programmes must be accessible to everyone, (ii) they provide knowledge and skills to its participants and (iii) they provide credentials equivalent to the mainstream (Inbar & Server, 1986).

Several studies have examined the role of second-chance education and expanded the conceptualisation of second-chance learning. Wyn, Stokes, and Taylor (2004), Karmel and Woods (2008), Ross (2008) and Phan and Ball (2001) developed the notion of second-chance and conducted substantial studies of second-chance education in Australia.

Many early school leavers re-enter education through the TAFE sector and other pathways, as second-chance learners. The key reason for re-entry is to complete school and undertake further education or employment. Researchers have also conceptualised second-chance education as alternative education or ‘flexible’ learning programmes (Te Riele, 2016, 2014, 2012; Te Riele, Davies, & Baker, 2015; Hodgman, 2016; Kraftl, 2016; Putwain, Nicholson, & Edwards, 2016; O’Gorman, Salmon, & Murphy, 2016; Thomas, Dyment, Moltow & Hay, 2016; Pennacchia, Thomas, Mills & McGregor, 2016; Birch, 2015; Mills & McGregor, 2012). The idea of second-chance and alternative education is criticised and seen as peripheral to main educational provisions (Vadeboncoeur & Vellos, 2016). However, flexible and alternative education both offer innovative pedagogical and relevant and meaningful curriculum for participants through the flexibility of these programs. Flexible and alternative education provides immediate entry and exit to participants, allows autonomous learning and pedagogic approaches and curriculum is tailored to individual learners (Te Riele, 2015, Talbot & Hayes, 2016; Zyngier,
Black, Brubaker & Pruyn, 2016). The re-entry programmes (second-chance, alternative education and flexible learning) largely adopt similar pedagogic approaches but do not refer to its participants, as ‘disengaged’ and ‘at risk’ as argued by many early school leaving and re-engagement studies. The terms ‘disengaged’ and ‘at risk’ is likely to carry ‘deficit’ connotations. Te-Riele conceptualises early school leavers as disadvantaged rather than disengaged or at risk, as the latter connotes that young people are responsible for their own failures (Te Riele, 2014 p. 15). Researchers have also examined re-engagement through alternative education from a social justice and human rights perspectives (Mills, 2015; Mills et al., 2015; Te Riele, 2015; Cooper, Gormally & Hughes, 2015, Bills, Cook & Giles, 2015; McCluskey, Riddell & Weedon, 2015).

Many researchers have also used the concepts ‘portraiture’ and ‘student voices’ to investigate second-chance learning (Baroutsis, McGregor & Mills, 2015; Robinson & Smyth, 2015; Murray & Mitchell, 2015; Martin, et al., 2014; Smyth & McInerney, 2012, 2011; Smyth, et al., 2008; Smyth & Fasoli, 2007; Smyth & Hattam 2004). In these studies, the perspectives of second-chance learners are elicited in an attempt to understand disconnection from schooling from their perspectives. These studies justify the relevance and validity of re-engagement through second-chance education.
Most studies on second chance, alternative and flexible education have identified reasons for early school leaving, and make strong recommendations on re-engagement with education. The Australian studies are reviewed in the section on second-chance education in Australia later in this chapter (Section 2.4).

2.3 Second Chance Education in Europe and the USA

There is provision for alternative pathways for school leavers in Europe, the USA and Canada. Young people re-engage with education through various institutions, such as community colleges and adult schools (Lamb, Markussen, Teese, Sandberg & Polesel, 2011). In European countries, second-chance provisions are successful in their distinctiveness from mainstream school (Ecorys, 2013). In the United States, school dropouts re-enrol in high schools to complete high school education (Barrat & Berliner, 2016), or alternatively in community colleges (Mejia, Rodriguez, & Jojnson, 2016). In Canada, courses are run for adults who return to study and for school leavers in alternative learning (Janosz, Bisset, Pagani & Levin, 2011).

Second-chance educational provisions are also successful in European countries. In Scotland, students may enter adult vocational colleges or the non-formal or voluntary sector (Finlay, Sheridan, McKay & Nudzor 2010). In Spain, courses for dropouts are offered in adult institutions (Merino & Garcia, 2011). England has post-school Vocational Education and Training (VET) providing
school-equivalent qualifications to those students who did not attain the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE; Anderson & Peart, 2016; Putwain et al., 2016; Sullivan & Unwin, 2011; Lamb, et al., 2011). Alternative education also makes provision for partial GCSE achievement for less able students (Thomson & Pennacchia, 2016).

Poland, Iceland, Finland and France, have also made provision for alternative education. Poland has special on job-training schools for the least skilled students, and the Institutions of Professional Training (IPT) provide training to youth at the upper secondary level. Poland has a stronger local policy on all young people completing upper secondary school qualification than do other European counterparts (Mikiewicz, 2011).

In Finland, youth workshops provide skills for the labour market and a basic vocational school certificate to young people who leave school and preparatory training for vocational education pathways to a qualification (Rinne & Jarvinene, 2011). Iceland provides second-chance schooling through upper secondary schools, lifelong learning centres, continuing education and labour market bodies (Blondal, Jonassan, & Tannhauser, 2011). Selected upper secondary schools re-engage school dropouts and, through innovative pedagogy that includes a supportive school ethos and student-teacher relationships, prepare the students for college (Johannesson & Bjarnadottir, 2016). France has second-chance schools, which enable early school leavers, and young people aged 16-25 years, to reacquire the fundamentals of reading, writing and numeracy and prepare for jobs through work placements (Blanchard & Sinthon, 2011). Sweden provides second-chance education to
students who did not complete upper secondary education; these second-chance opportunities have positive effects on the participants, with improved long-term labour market prospects, income development, self-esteem, self-actualisation and further education trajectories (Nordlund, Bonfanti, & Strandh, 2015; Nordlund, Stehlik, & Strandh, 2013; Sandberg, 2016).

In Germany and Switzerland school dropouts either join the labour market or take up other opportunities pathways (apprenticeship) or school-based vocational (non-apprenticeship) pathways for school completion. In Switzerland, transitional programmes provide a pathway for young people who cannot obtain an apprenticeship (Reupold & Tippelt, 2011). In Germany, transition programmes provide remedial preparation for dropouts to enter vocational education. Alternative pathways also provide special courses at Adult Education Centres to complete the Secondary General Certificate (Lamb et. al, 2011).

The Danish Production Schools (PS) provides alternative learning programmes to young people who drop out of school. These PS develop new pedagogy for learning, with a focus on work discipline, learning projects and highly individualised programmes (Sweet, 2012). In Belgium, school dropouts engage in second-chance programmes by enrolling in the EB (Exam Board) or the SSA (Secondary School for Adults) to achieve a secondary diploma after leaving school (Glorieux et al., 2011).

Thus, the provision of second-chance education in schools or outside schools and in adult institutions, is offered in numerous countries. This
encourages re-engagement with education by those who did not complete school.

Aron (in Te Riele, 2009) described three types of alternative education in the US:

1. Schools that offer full-time education options to all students who need individualised study, those seeking an innovative or challenging curriculum, and dropouts wishing to earn their high school diploma. These schools offer a full instructional programme and give credit for graduation.

2. Correctional schools, with limited curriculum, to reform disruptive students.

3. Schools that provide short-term educational opportunities to students affected by social and emotional problems that create academic and behavioural barriers to learning.

Aron argued that high-quality alternative education programmes should have engaging and creative instructions, high expectations of students, relevant and academically rigorous curricula that comply with the state standards, and accountability. They should address the education and career interests of students. Students and staff work collaboratively, and students have personalised learning plans and set learning goals based on individual needs. Alternative education should have caring staff who know their academic content and are creative. Class size should have low student/teacher ratios and should have good facilities and community connection. Successful alternative education programmes should be flexible and highly structured and should
facilitate student transition from school to work and from high school to post high school training. The characteristics of alternative schools outlined by Aaron are strongly supported and recommended by many studies on alternative education (Te Riele 2015, 2014, 2012, 2009, 2008; Ross, 2008; Smyth, et al., 2008; Smyth & Hattam, 2004).

The General Education Development Certificate (GED), is the most common second-chance education opportunity in the United States for students who dropped out of school and for adults who did not complete high school. The GED is used by many adult education programmes in the US (Ryder, 2011; Song & Patterson, 2011; Snider, 2010; Heckman, Humphries, and Marder, 2010; Song & Hsu, 2008; Tyler, 2005). It is obtained through an exam, but not at school. It is available at all times, and is an option for all types of students. It involves preparation for an exam through individualised study, with a focus on specific curriculum leading to high school completion (GED Testing Service, 2014-2015; Song & Hsu, 2008; Tyler, 2005). Colleges and universities requiring the high school diploma accept the GED credential (GED Testing Service, 2014-2015).

2.4 Second-chance education: The Australian experience

In Australia, school dropouts can follow a range of pathways. One pathway is within schools. Some early leavers access adult re-entry schools co-located in upper secondary schools, which focus on dropouts wishing to re-engage in a mainstream senior secondary school certificate (Polesal, Nizinska & Kurantowicz, 2011). Through TAFE in New South Wales, students complete Tertiary Preparation, a Year 12 equivalent qualification. Another

Other studies have examined the utility and value of Flexible Learning Options (FLOs), learning academies, and alternative education (Te Riele, 2015, 2014; Mills & McGregor, 2012, 2014). These studies have argued that more democratic and flexible curriculum and relational pedagogic approaches have led to the success of students in the programmes and to securing employment. These studies are relevant to the current study, which aims to find what features of Tertiary Preparation lead to student success. Small-scale private providers also offer practical vocational education and life skills training to 15-19-year-old young people who left school for employment in industry. However, the private providers are constrained by policies and funding models based on what Myconos, Clark and Te-Riele (2016, p. 9) called ‘short-termism’, and such providers become commercially vulnerable, which can lead to the development of programmes that are not beneficial or do not serve a true purpose for the young people they propose to assist.

Second-chance education is significant for government educational policy on school retention and completion and re-engagement with education,
especially achievement for young people aged 20-24 in increased productivity (Lamb et al., 2015; Te Riele, 2012; COAG, 2009). The current study concentrates on early school leaving and re-engagement in Western Sydney in NSW, Australia. In NSW, there is provision for second-chance education for early school leavers. The types of second-chance opportunities available in NSW are discussed next. There are three major types of second-chance education in NSW:

(1) Enabling courses for people with low literacy levels, leading to (VET) Certificate 11 and Certificate 111 courses.

(2) Senior Colleges/Community organisations and other alternative education settings.

(3) TAFE courses such as Tertiary Preparation Certificate as a Year 12 equivalent qualification.

The following section examines literature on these first two forms of second-chance education in NSW. At present, there is no literature available on the third form of second-chance education in NSW, as no research has been conducted on Tertiary Preparation in TAFE NSW. The current study attempts to generate data on Tertiary Preparation and to add to the literature on second-chance education in NSW, Australia.
2.4.1 Enabling courses in TAFE NSW

A large proportion of students who leave school early, enrol in enabling courses in TAFE. Many 15-19 year olds with below Year 12 qualifications study enabling courses at TAFE. On completion, some students take higher-level courses, and some gain employment (Phan & Ball, 2001). Early school leavers in NSW also engage in (VET) education at TAFE ranging from Certificate I to Certificate IV, and diploma, advanced diploma or associate degree courses (Webb, Black, Morton, Plowright & Reshmi, 2015; Griffin, 2014; Curtis & McMillan, 2008; Karmel & Woods, 2008). Over half of school non-completers engage in some form of VET education in the early post-school years (Black, Polidano, Tabasso & Tseng, 2011; Curtis & McMillan, 2008). This suggests that disengagement from school is not always related to disengagement from learning. Young people who complete a lower level VET qualification (Certificate I and Certificate II) have a strong tendency to complete higher-level courses (Certificate III and IV) and join the labour market (Homel & Ryan, 2015; Wyn et al., 2004). Students are attracted to these programmes because of interrelated features, such as flexible delivery and timetabling, the diversity of courses, and student-centred approaches to teaching and learning, entailing student autonomy and self-paced learning. The students place a high value on gaining educational credentials, are highly motivated to re-enter and complete their school equivalent education and to undertake further education, including higher education. Students enjoy
learning in an adult learning environment, different from school (Ross, 2008; Wyn et al., 2004).

Re-entry through the adult and community sector, Adult and Community Education (ACE) and TAFE institutes, is becoming important to young people who wish to continue with education after leaving school. This is due to the educational and pastoral support that these institutes provide as an alternative to school (Te Riele, 2012). The ACE sector is an important provider of ‘second-chance’ learning due to its lack of ‘institutional structure’, of rigid discipline and rules: this is attractive to young people who are disengaged from education and training (Lamb et al., 2004, p. 68). TAFE re-entry programmes motivate students and help them gain credentials (Wyn et al., 2004). Studies on enabling programmes in TAFE and ACE have influenced the current research, which measures the features of a re-entry programme (Tertiary Preparation) at TAFE and success of students with re-engagement through the programme.

Although the above studies are substantial and delineate data on student completion of studies in these programmes, there is a dearth of evidence on the extent to which second-chance VET participants complete higher level courses, including study at university. This aspect of the research on second-chance or alternative education needs further investigation. Ross (2008) investigated the transition of students from enabling courses in TAFE, Western Australia and concluded that students were more likely to transition from enabling courses to other vocational courses in TAFE and less likely to transition to higher education, especially university courses. However, the
variables that provide transitions to higher-level courses are least understood and warrant further research. An important goal of the current research is to fill this gap in the literature on the transition of second-chance learners into higher-level courses in TAFE and university.

2.4.2 Senior Colleges and Alternative Education Options

The next type of second-chance education available to early school leavers in NSW is through senior secondary colleges, community and tutorial centres, and Flexible Learning Centres. Te Riele (2015, 2014, 2012, 2011, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2007, 2006, 2000) examined re-engagement of disadvantaged early school leavers in different contexts: second chance, alternative education, flexible learning and learning academies in Australia. Alternative education is defined as ‘institutions that aim to provide access to school-based credentials for students who may not feel catered for at most mainstream schools’ (Te Riele, 2008 p. 5). Senior colleges in NSW (Te Riele, 2008, 2007, 2000) and alternative education in country Australia (Te Riele, 2011) engage both early school leavers and Year 12 completers who return to upgrade their skills and knowledge. The senior colleges and alternative education colleges provide more VET education, with an innovative pedagogy, and prepare students for New South Wales Year 12 Higher School Certificate (HSC) and other school-based qualifications (Te Riele, 2008, 2007, 2000). The senior colleges and alternative second-chance education provide caring and helpful environments to young people, characterised by a student-centred
learning environment, positive relationships between staff and students and peers, the building of personal confidence and of individual initiative (Te Riele, 2000). Te Riele (2000) argued that staff encourage student autonomy, provide educational support and believe in student success. Further, the life experiences of students are validated and welcomed in class discussions. The students obtain high school education credentials and broaden their knowledge and skills. They also get into employment in local businesses and take up further study.

The alternative education provision (Te Riele, 2011) is significant, as it provides employment to graduates in rural industries, and established community/industry and business links. Te Riele’s (2011, 2008, 2007, 2000) studies on second-chance education conclude similarly Thomson and Pennacchia (2016) after their study of a re-engagement programmes in the United Kingdom where students made a personal choice to re-engage through an alternative education. They conclude that the choices were many and were based on student opportunities to succeed, or to escape from situations such as school, or making a decision to re-engage with the help of others. Alternative education prepared students for work, although it could not enable full provision of the national credential (the GCSE) but rather, provided partial fulfilment in some subjects.

In two case studies of alternative education in England, Pennacchia & Thomson (2016), concluded that alternative education has a complementary role and supports mainstream schooling. Two alternative education sites and mainstream schools worked in partnership with staff to provide education to
students who were disengaged in mainstream schooling. This provision was a collaborative approach, rather than a ‘repair and return’ model (p. 77), as is the case in many alternative education and mainstream school provisions.

Te Riele argued that school completion through alternative education with an ethics of ‘practice-with-hope’ (Te Riele, 2008, p. 7; 2006 a, p. 59) or a ‘philosophy of hope’ (Te Riele, 2010, p. 54) allows educators and education policy to make a difference to students who drop out of school early and who are labelled as ‘at risk’ (Te Riele, 2012, p. 241). Education practices and policies bring success to these groups of students, turning ‘risk into hope’ (p. 34). An ‘ethic of care’ to students seen as ‘at risk’ enhances learning and achievement (Cassidy & Bates, 2005, p. 66).

With regard to instrumental outcomes from alternative schools, ‘very little is known about the extent to which school qualifications gained in alternative schools in Australia do provide access to opportunity structures in relation to employment and further study’ (Te Riele, 2008, p. 43). In an alternative school study, Te Riele (2008) concluded that second-chance education helped students to complete school through gaining the New South Wales Higher School Certificate (HSC), and this enabled them to pursue vocational and higher education. Te-Riele’s (2008) study has implications for the current study, as the majority of the students studying Tertiary Preparation aspire a transition to higher education. Thus, the current study aims to extend the literature on second-chance education by examining the re-engagement of early school leavers to complete school equivalent qualification to transition higher levels of education, especially tertiary education.
Furthermore, Te Riele (2014) and Te Riele, Davies & Baker (2015) examined alternative education through flexible learning programmes and learning academies. Te Riele (2014) created an extensive database on flexible learning programmes across Australia. These include three broad structural categories of flexible learning programs: within mainstream schools, TAFE or ACE, and separate (standalone) programs. Nationally over 900 flexible programmes educate over 70,000 students each year and offer either junior or senior secondary credentials or VET certificates. Flexible learning programmes target young people at risk of non-completion, and early school leavers. The flexible learning programmes succeed in providing qualifications, career pathways, personal development and community contributions to students who previously did not fit in the mainstream. FLO programmes are relevant, have individualised curriculum and provide support and caring relationships based on mutual respect, trust and care; students are engaged and feel they belong in the flexible learning environment and have personal agency in what they learn. FLOs are committed to each student’s needs, interests and rights, and recognise and build young people’s strengths. Valuing learning and enabling the future prospects of young people are strong aspects of FLOs (Te Riele, 2014; Plows & Baker, 2017).

The Melbourne Academy in Victoria, Australia, a flexible learning programme for young people who experience disengagement from schooling, provides highly successful outcomes for students (Te Riele, Davies & Baker, 2015). The Academy provides academic achievement, student autonomy in learning, positive student teacher relations and positive peer ecology; small
class sizes and flexible learning help inspire, motivate and engage students. It also connects students with community and increases their social and personal wellbeing and sense of ownership.

More recent studies, (Te Riele, Wilson, Wallace, McGinty & Lewthwaite, 2016; McCluskey, Riddell & Weedon, 2015; Mills, McGregor, Baroutsis, Te Riele & Hayes, 2015; Mills, 2015) have argued that access to a high-quality education through FLOs or alternative education is a social justice issue. Te Riele et al., (2016) analysed Australian reports related to FLOs, called grey literature, and examined the specific outcomes of the Flexible Learning Options (FLOs). Grey literature includes unpublished reports written by scholars. The review of literature came up with five broad sets of outcomes achieved by flexible learning programmes. These include:

(i) Traditional academic outcomes; literacy and numeracy skills, successful completion of assessment tasks, achievement of credentials and qualifications; (ii) Engagement; including attendance, enjoyment of learning and reduction in disruptive behaviour; (iii) Pathways, including both actual destinations (employment or further study), and aspirations and skills for future pathways; (iv) personal and social wellbeing; confidence and resilience, team work skills and positive relationships with adults and service providers; and (v) community engagement and wellbeing, such as social inclusion and reduced criminal activity. (Te Riele et. al, p. 5)

Flexible Learning Options provide instrumental outcomes; credentials and transitions into further study (usually vocational) and employment and Equity outcomes for disenfranchised young people, with a focus on broader schooling, community and societal change. The FLOs have a ‘value-added’ role
(p. 10) and their success with a broad range of valuable outcomes for young people and for society has policy implications.

Mills, McGregor, Baroutsis, Te Riele and Hayes (2015), in studies of alternative education, have argued the notion of social justice in alternative education. They emphasised affective justice pertaining to the relationships of ‘care’ (p. 2) and contributive justice in the provision of curriculum and pedagogic approaches that allow students to choose what they would like to study, for the best quality education for intellectual engagement. Alternative education settings need affective and contributive justice for real social justice outcomes for young people in alternative education, as well as in mainstream schooling. Schooling and educational attainment based on social justice, listening to students for success in alternative education settings and helping the young succeed, should be an educational policy (Mills, Renshaw & Zipin, 2013). Affective justice is defined as respectful and caring relationships. Affective justice, an ethics of care, and the affective or emotional labour of teachers are the primary concerns of teachers who work in alternative education. The affective labour of teachers is the democratic and ethical practices of teachers in alternative education settings. This could be adopted and practised by mainstream schools, and could prevent young people from dropping out of school (Te Riele, Mills, McGregor & Batoutsis, 2017). Mills et al. (2015, p. 12) argued that one of the ‘contributive justice’ features of FLOs is that they engage students in meaningful participation.

Social justice issues in alternative education are a global concern: for example, in cooperative schools or academies in England, a socially just
approach to schooling mandates alternative education. The current educational trend is dominated by ‘academisation’, where educational achievement is based on performance and grades (Mills, 2015, p. 1172). A socially just education derived through alternative education moves beyond grades and performance as central to success and instead values life skills, learning and engagement. In the case study of one school, the Meridian College, a co-operative academy in a large English city, it is argued that a socially just approach to schooling requires alternatives be explored (Mills, 2015). The Meridian College engaged with a Co-operative Society and retained its social justice approach to education with key values of trust, democratic education, and inclusive practices. This social justice perspective of the school is included in its pedagogy, curriculum and student-teacher relationships. This shows that there are possibilities for further exploration of co-operative values in alternative education settings. Cajic-Seigneur and Hodgson (2016) examined alternative education provision for disengaged young people in London. In this study, alternative education provided an engaging curriculum that was relevant, and pastoral care with positive student-teacher interaction brought success to students.

Thus, alternative education provisions can, and do, make an important difference in the educational outcomes of the disengaged, as well as offering insights into mainstream education. However, as a caution, Dean (2016) argues that the success of alternative education has led the Government in England to pursue turning alternative education sites into academies, which he argues would have a negative impact on the flexibility, the small scale and relational nature of the operation of alternative education settings. This could further marginalise
young people who are disengaged from mainstream education. Pereira and Lavoie (2016) studied students in the US who had a tumultuous school journey, which contributed to their emotional, behavioural and academic struggles, and recommended that early intervention in schools should be a priority to prevent school dropout, instead of opting for alternative education.

Munns and McFadden (2000) raised concerns about students who dropped out of school and re-entered second-chance education after a period of social problems, experiencing a ‘cultural fracture’, or lack of support from family, school and community. For many early school leavers, the notion of education is ‘unfinished business’ (p. 60). With cultural support however, the educational and social fracture of these students can be mended and a pathway opened to educational opportunity and potential success.

Studies on early school leaving and alternative education have used the concept of ‘portraits’ (Smyth et al., 2004 p. 4) or student ‘voices’ to tell the stories of young people who have left school early and re-engaged through second-chance education. Through the voices of these young people, these studies conclude that students took initiative, had individual agency to make choices, attempted to make their voices heard by education policy makers, and made decisions on their own educational futures. The students, teachers and the community made educational decisions collaboratively, rather than autocratic decisions being made by policy makers (Murray & Mitchell, 2015; Baraoutsis et al., 2015; Mills & McGregor, 2012; Te Riele et al., 2016). These studies that have sought to capture students’ voices argue that disconnection from formal schooling is a rational response to the rigidity of schooling and
that the views of young people should be taken into account in education policy decision making. This research thesis likewise values student voices and recognises their significance through their purposeful inclusion in the research design and methodology. The qualitative component of the mixed methods approach entailed student interviews in the form of conversations, to capture the anecdotes of early school leavers and their re-engagement with Tertiary Preparation.

Alternative education has features that are effective at re-engaging young people with learning. This is evident in alternative schools and flexible learning centres in Queensland (McGregor & Mills, 2012), TAFE Colleges in Western Australia (Ross, 2008), alternatives school in South Australia (Bills, Cook & Giles, 2015) and in university bridging programs (Whannell, Allen & Lynch, 2010; Whannell & Allen, 2011; Whannell, Whannell & Allen, 2012). The key themes generated from these studies include innovative and accommodating curriculum and pedagogy, flexible learning environments, student agency and decision-making, social relationships and, most importantly, positive student-teacher relationships. These are significant features in alternative education settings that are lacking in mainstream education. These studies have further contributed to the knowledge on second-chance education and are examined next.

Mills and colleagues (McGregor & Mills, 2011, 2012; Mills & McGregor, 2016; Mills, McGregor, Baroutsis, Te Riele & Hayes, 2015; Mills, Renshaw, & Zipin, 2013) researched young people who dropped out of mainstream schooling and re-engaged through alternative schools and flexible
learning centres in Queensland. Instead of investigating reasons for dropping out of school, they examined alternative schools that focused on the pedagogic approaches used in teaching and learning in the alternative schools. Mills and his colleagues found a high level of motivation and aspiration among students in alternative education settings. Specifically, they found that positive student-teacher relationships and pedagogic approaches motivated students to learn, as did supportive, caring and flexible learning environments where teachers made the curricula relevant, connected to the life worlds of the young people, and developed a positive emotional connection with them.

Teachers opened up opportunities for students to engage with new knowledge, and valued the diversity of the student body of the school. Positive relationships were a key factor in students’ enthusiastic engagement with the curriculum. However, the quality of relationships was compromised in mainstream schools. The alternative schools also provided diverse curricula: basic literacy and numeracy, vocational education, the state matriculation examination (The Queensland Certificate of Education). The curricula helped students obtain part-time work. Through short courses the alternative school allowed individual agency and decision making, and students were equal partners in learning. Thus, supportive student-teacher relations, diverse curricula and pedagogic dimensions were the key aspects leading to the success of young people in alternative education. Mills, Te Riele, McGregor and Baroutsis (2017) argued that the commitment and emotional labour of teachers and the relational and emotional nature of education in flexible and alternative education is the foundation of student success.
McGregor and Mills (2012) argue that the findings of their study apply to mainstream schooling and could benefit all students. Alternative Education or flexi schools should grow, but they caution that such schools should not become sites for students seen as problematic in the mainstream, to learn a remedial curriculum. Alternative education should be a genuine alternative, providing quality curricula and facilitating access to higher and further education: ‘Access to an education that provides students with deep knowledge of disciplines and that encourages students to engage with work of high intellectual quality, is critical for success in further education and to a broadening of life chances’ (McGregor & Mills, 2012 p. 860). Aron (cited in Te Riele, 2009), who argued that alternative education should be genuinely engaged with curriculum standards and should engage students in constructive learning, confirms this. Vadeboncoeur and Velos, (2016) and Zyngier, Black, Brubaker and Pruyn (2016) recommended that second-chance settings should be genuine, and another choice for all students to complete education and make successful transitions to higher education, rather than being seen as the only option for those who are not academically smart. Tertiary Preparation at TAFE is an alternative to Year 12 completion and provides genuine state education curricula and transitions to higher education. The curriculum, pedagogy, supports and resources that are fostered learning in the above studies are relevant for positive student outcomes, with the achievement of Year 12 equivalent qualification and transitions to higher-level studies.

In alternative education, positive student-teacher relationships are central to students’ motivation and engagement with the curriculum, and boost
student confidence in learning. In a tertiary bridging programme at a regional university in Queensland, Australia, Whannell, et al., (2010) examined academic engagement and students’ ability to cope with a complex curriculum and tertiary study. Many students had poor long-term academic performance at high school, attributed to poor student-teacher relationships and poor academic engagement. In this Queensland study, the nature of the student-teacher relationship was found to be directly correlated to students’ levels of academic achievement at a statistically significant level. Student engagement with complex curriculum, academic performance and preparedness for tertiary study was affected in a positive manner by a good quality student-teacher relationship. Positive student-teacher relationships were central to students’ academic engagement and achievement. Whannel, Whannel and Allen (2012) likewise argue that teacher influence and course design have an impact on students’ academic self-efficacy and study behaviours. For students with low levels of confidence, early teacher intervention results in significant improvements in academic self-efficacy and study behaviours. A more positive association between students’ attitudes towards assessment, their capacity to cope with the programme content, and their academic behaviours, enhances academic outcomes. Whannel et al.’s, (2012) study recommended alternative forms of assessment instead of traditional forms in the early stages of second-chance learning contexts, particularly in examinations.

Research on second-chance education in the TAFE sector is limited. In a study on second-chance education in TAFE, Western Australia, Ross (2008) explored the educational experiences of a small group of 15-19-year-old
students who left school early and re-engaged through TAFE. Ross concluded that teacher immediacy, support, friendliness, their enthusiasm to teach and their genuine interest in students’ experiences and interests, were significant for students. This sustained students’ interests and experiences in learning. In contrast to their previous school, TAFE classes were ‘relaxing’ and ‘fun’ (p. 188). At TAFE, students developed self-esteem, felt like adults, and became motivated and confident learners. Here they were happy and not stressed; everyone was there to learn, and TAFE opened options for further study and employment.

Student-teacher and peer relationships are important in achieving wellbeing and positive educational outcomes. Apart from good student-teacher relationships, the students formed good relations with their peers, and the social relations that students develop, offset the effects of disadvantage (Edwards, Mumford, & Serra-Roldan, 2007; Semo, 2011). McGregor & Mills (2012), Whannel & Allen (2010), Te Riele (2011, 2008, 2000) and Smyth et al., (2008) also conclude similarly in studies of other second-chance education.

Ross’ (2008) findings on engagement and enjoyment of classes is supported by other studies, which argue that students enjoy learning when they are given choice and opportunities to learn (Gorard & See 2011; Hagenauer & Hascher, 2010; Cornelius-White, 2007; Allen, Witt & Wheeless, 2006; Witt, Wheeless & Allen, 2004; O’Connor & McCartney, 2007). Enjoyment of learning has become a key objective in education policy, especially in England (Gorard & See, 2011; Lumby, 2011). When students understand what they are learning, they enjoy their learning and ‘enjoyment is an emotion’ that engages
students in learning (Hartley, 2006, p. 7, in Lumbey, 2011). The third type of second-chance education offered to early school leavers in NSW is the Tertiary Preparation programme at TAFE. As in the introduction of this chapter, there are no data available on Tertiary Preparation, and this original research will fill the gap in the literature on second-chance education in NSW.

2.4.3 Tertiary Preparation in TAFE NSW

In NSW, Tertiary Preparation at TAFE is a third type of second-chance education provision for early school leavers. Tertiary Preparation at TAFE emerged out of the recommendations of the Kangan report (Kangan, 1974) which made recommendations on second-chance education for early school leavers in TAFE NSW. Following the Kangan Report, Access and Equity became an integral policy objective of TAFE NSW and was implemented in a suite of General Education courses. The Tertiary Preparation course stem from the Access and Equity policy. Other reviews and reforms of TAFE NSW programmes (Finn, 1991; Mayer, 1992, Vinson, 2002; Kell, 2006) argued the need for young people’s participation in post school education in NSW and supported Access and Equity programmes as second-chance education. Community capacity building through second-chance education is also part of the “One TAFE” service model and second-chance education will continue as an important part of One TAFE NSW mandate. In the current “One TAFE strategic directions” strategic plan, one of the goals is strengthening communities across NSW and enhancing pathways programmes for early
school leavers; also, addressing the needs of youth at risk is a key success measure here (More than One TAFE Strategic Plan, 2016-2022).

Tertiary Preparation is an integral part of the TAFE NSW Access Employment, Education and Training (AEET) Framework. It is an accredited course within the AQF (Australian Quality Framework) Level 4 (Certificate IV). Tertiary Preparation is a NSW state owned second-chance provision. It is delivered in TAFE NSW under the jurisdiction of the Social Inclusion and Vocational Access (SIVA) and the Employment Preparation, Pathways and Equity (EPPE) industry areas.

Tertiary Preparation focuses on skill-based learning, as well as discipline-specific content. It is a Certificate IV qualification and provides a pathway for people to achieve a Year 12 equivalent qualification in NSW. It is a tertiary entry qualification recognised by the Universities Admissions Centre (UAC), by NSW universities and some interstate universities. The target groups for Tertiary Preparation are people wanting a Year 12 equivalent qualification, students wishing/seeking entry to university, those wanting articulation into higher-level VET qualifications, and people wishing to gain entry to careers requiring a Year 12 equivalent—such as in the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

Tertiary Preparation is suitable for students who require a flexible programme of study. Students can elect to study over one year, full time, or over longer periods, part time. Tertiary Preparation has no formal or intensive selection process; the requirements for admission are based on completion of NSW Year 10, on past education, on work experience and Recognition of
Skills Prior to Learning (RPL), or mature-aged entry. Tertiary Preparation students complete exams in three higher level subjects, including mandatory English, and receive a Tertiary Entrance Score (TES), which is equivalent to the ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank) obtained through the Higher School Certificate in NSW. Most research on second-chance education has argued that student-teacher relationships play a significant role in the success of students who study in this context. Student-teacher relationships in schooling and in education more generally, are examined in the next section.

2.5 Student-Teacher Relationships

The link between positive student-teacher relations and academic outcomes is an important factor in student engagement (Furrer, Skinner & Pitzer, 2014; Jasmi & Hin, 2014; Idrus, 2015; Lamb et al., 2004; Hagenauer, Hasher & Volet, 2015; Pearson, 2015). A lack of meaningful student-teacher relations makes students feel withdrawn, alienated and isolated in school (Finn, 1989; Croninger & Lee, 2001). Meaningful relationships also contribute to students’ feeling of ‘school membership’ (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989, p. 192). Connectedness, relatedness, engagement, support and enjoyment in learning are the key characteristics of good student-teacher relationships. Good student-teacher relationships enhance educational engagement and learning, and reduce school dropout (Vickers, et al., 2014;
“Positive student teacher relations” means not only that the teacher is friendly to the students but that they are firm, express care, challenge students to grow, provide support, share power and expand possibilities (Langley, 2016). Students give a higher priority to their teachers’ inter-personal dimensions over their academic expertise, and desire more than just friendly relationships: they want teachers to know them as learners (Raufelder et al., 2016; Raufelder, Scherber, & Wood, 2016; Bulson, 2015). Positive student-teacher relationships are established with teacher immediacy, which occurs when there is easier physical access to the teacher, and effective communication facilitates learning and engagement (Allen, Witt, & Wheeless, 2006). Open and easy interaction between the students and teachers also supports teacher enthusiasm to teach the class (Cornelius-White, 2007).

A supportive learning environment in which teachers show care and display warmth, and have a superior instructional quality, increases students’ enjoyment for learning (Hagenauer & Hascher, 2010, p. 508). Diverse and interesting learning situations sustain students’ interest. Receiving good grades and understanding the content leads students to feel competent, and is the very basic precondition for experiencing learning enjoyment. In a study on enhancing secondary school enjoyment, Gorard and See (2011) concluded that teacher friendliness and genuine interest in the needs of individual students, extending welcome to those seeking help/advice in and outside of class, or setting extra classes to help students, increases motivation and engagement and makes the learning process enjoyable.
School classes can be more engaging, enjoyable and interesting when students are taught in diverse ways such as questioning and discussions rather than the teacher teaching the content only or what students are intended to learn (Owusu-Ansah & Kyei-Blankson, 2016; Mills & McGregor, 2016; Womack, 2015). More variation in delivery and activity, stimulating student discussion and social interaction between students and students, and students and teachers, and more student and teacher autonomy in the classroom, all increase engagement and enjoyment in learning.

The pedagogic approach is also a significant factor, along with curriculum design and subject content, for student interest in learning and increased understanding (Gorard & See, 2011; Harris & Hayden, 2006). Pedagogic approaches should be enjoyable and should enable students to engage in learning the content. Students engage more effectively and positively, and better understand what is taught, if teachers listen to their views on school subjects. Relatedly, Kim, Gendron, Toro, and Fairborn (2011) argue that school enjoyment and importance of grades are negatively related to high school dropout.

Student-teacher relations studies have also shown that the richness of inter-personal ties, care and connectedness must reach all students in all learning environments, and without teacher bias and conflict (Owusu-Ansah & Kyei-Blankson, 2016; Hendrickx, Mainhard, Boor-Klip, Cillesen, & Brekelmans, 2015). The quality of student-teacher relationships, through the recognition of students’ strengths and areas of improvement, increases educational competence and prevents academic alienation (Jarvin & Subotnik, 2015; Alvi & Gillies,
2015; Lamb & Lerner, 2015; Favennec, 2014; Shefi, 2015). Teacher-student relationships are more influential even for older students, into late adolescence, and are more important for students who are academically at risk, particularly those from disadvantaged economic backgrounds or with learning difficulties (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oortz 2011). This is particularly important to the current study, which examined student-teacher relations for older students who left school early.

Further, the school environment and students’ sense of belonging in school is considered to be significant and influential in the development and growth of individual students (Allen, Vella-Brodrick & Waters, 2016), whereas alienating student-teacher relations were in some studies, the reason given for dropping out of school prematurely (Raufelder et al., 2016; DeRebortis, 2015; Vickers et al., 2015; Vickers et., 2014; Te Riele, 2012, 2008, 2006, 2000). Research evidence shows that there is a larger correlation between positive teacher-student relationships and positive student outcomes (Vickers et al., 2014; Gorard & See 2011).

The present study was undertaken in Western Sydney, NSW, where the demography includes low socio-economic status and educational disadvantage. The population group in Greater Western Sydney face ongoing socio-economic inequities, low income, low educational attainment and high levels of unemployment (WRSOC, 2016; Naidoo, 2015). Although Bourdieu’s theory of social practice is not the theoretical framework or theoretical framing that guided this research, it relates to the discussion on why socio-economic status (SES) and disadvantage are important in understanding early school leaving.
Bourdieu’s work is integrated in the discussion of socio economic status and educational disadvantage in the next section, and elsewhere in this thesis.

2.6 Socio-Economic Status and Educational Disadvantage

Low socio-economic status and disadvantage is one of the major reasons for early school leaving, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Studies have argued that children from less privileged families with low socio-economic status have lower academic attainment in school than do children from high socio-economic status (SES) homes, and low SES is one of the most consistent factors in low school attainment and early school dropout (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Chokkalingam, Armum, Kuan & Chellappan, 2016). Bourdieu’s theoretical concepts of habitus, capital and field (Bourdieu, 1986) explain how socio-economic class influences the educational attainment of students in school. According to Bourdieu, social domination is reproduced from generation to generation (Nash, 2002). Further, enduring poverty is an important risk factor that undermines cognitive development more than does family instability (Schoon, Jones, Chend & Maughan, 2012). In addition, late enrolment and irregular class attendance due to poor family SES, ethnic identity and school factors, all affect school attainment (Uddin, 2016), and children from disadvantaged backgrounds have lower school attainment and more interventions in the early years as well as for older disadvantaged individuals will have long-term benefits and maximum value of investment in education (Heckman, 2006). This research evidence has implication for current study. The
students in this research were from disadvantaged backgrounds and it was crucial to examine if disadvantage influenced their early school leaving.

Family poverty and reduced school attendance can be attributed to Bourdieu’s cultural and social capital (Navarro, 2006). Cultural capital is the skills, dispositions, attitudes, language, knowledge, family background and other cultural assets that parents pass down to their children as life experiences (Ferfolja, Diaz, & Ullman, 2015). Cultural capital gives advantage to some students, while it disadvantages other students in school (Moustakim, 2015). Children from families with an elite culture at home, who have access to resources such as books to read, have an advantage at schools. Teachers recognise and reward such advantage and exclude children who lack cultural capital (Tzanakis, 2011). Family cultural capital is also a safeguard for enrolment in and graduation from post school education (Dumais & Ward, 2010). However, for cultural capital to be effective, it has to be relational—where parents interact with their children and talk about school and attendance, help with enrolment and encourage the children to stay connected to school—rather than a cultural capital that is static, which represents the ‘highbrow activities and practices of parents’ (Tramonte & Willms, 2010, p. 200).

Bourdieu’s concept of capital also includes economic capital. Economic capital is monetary wealth and material goods, such as property and resources. However, individuals or groups gain economic capital by undergoing a process of social recognition. This social recognition is social capital, which involves access to social networks, institutions and relationships, and entails recognition and resources being gained by individuals or groups because of
group membership and mutual acquaintance for success (Ferfolja, Diaz & Ullman, 2015). Parents of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, who lack cultural and social capital, find it hard to navigate the educational landscape to help their children succeed at school.

Students from working class or disadvantaged families aspire to progress with education, including higher education, but have to struggle in school, where they are streamed in non-academic streams and complete a vocational education, even though they still intend to go to university (Smyth & Harrison, 2015). Schools offer vocational education to students from disadvantaged backgrounds and sometimes force them into this form: thus, they are destined for low-skilled, insecure work.

Thus, limiting the educational opportunities for young people limits their future work and income prospects (Smyth, McInerney & Fish, 2013; Smyth & Wrigley, 2013). In another study of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, students who were seen as non-academic and who were channelled into vocationalism saw themselves as ‘hands-on people’ (Smyth and McInerney, 2014, p. 133). Several studies internationally have highlighted that academic and vocational tracking in school education may increase social inequality in educational achievement and attainment (Triventi, Kulic, Skopek, & Blossfeld, 2016). According to Bourdieu, this educational structure creates inequality of power. Students from disadvantaged families, and their parents, start to think of their limitations and their lack of capability in education. This relates to Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’: socialised norms or tendencies that guide behaviour and thinking. Habitus is ‘the way society becomes deposited in
persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them’ (Navarro, 2006 p. 16). Reay (2014 p. 92) called this creation of the power of educational institutions an ‘embodiment’, ‘where not only the individual or body is in the social world but the social world is in the body’. The ‘habitus as the social world is inscribed in the body of the biological individual’ (Bourdieu, 1985b, p. 113 in Reay, 2014, p. 93). Thus, in an educational context, habitus is the set of dispositions, beliefs and values that students have in their participation in education (Moustakim, 2015).

There is a growing body of literature arguing that SES has low association with school attainment and that other factors, such as student motivation, self-realisation for academic achievement and persistence, family support and support in school, and especially positive student-teacher relations, determine successful school attainment for students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Kim, Kim, Wagaman and Fong (2017) argued that children of lower SES blue-collar household families are more motivated to do well academically, in order to achieve upward mobility and escape their current circumstances, than children from business-owning families. In a study of Latino students with academic risk (due to their language background) completing high school in California, United States, Jimerson, Patterson, Stein, and Babcock (2016) concluded that SES was not positively associated with school completion. In this study, high-risk students persisted with their learning and stayed connected with school. They had high self-expectations to attend post-secondary education.
In a review of literature on low SES and educational attainment, Berkowotz, Moore, Astor, and Benbenishty (2016) concluded that there is an overall positive contribution of positive school climate to academic achievement among all students, but especially those from lower SES backgrounds. Watson, Vernon, Seddon, Andrews and Wang (2016) argued that when students’ and their parents discuss university education, it increases aspirations and expectations for university attendance among students from low SES backgrounds. In a study of young women from low socio-economic households in Western Sydney, NSW (Naidoo, 2015) concluded transition and success of young people with motivation, persistence and aspiration to go to university for a better future, irrespective of parental disadvantage. The students and parents used their cultural capital for educational decision making and progress. In a study of family cohesiveness and adaptability and educational achievement, Stubbs and Maynard (2016) concluded that young people from families with balanced cohesion had significantly higher academic self-efficacy beliefs and school engagement levels than those from families with low cohesion. This more recent literature, in arguing for progressive education among students of low socio-economic status, is relevant to the analysis in current research. All students in this research were from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds in Western Sydney, NSW. However, all students did want to complete their Year 12 equivalent qualification, against the odds of disadvantage and make progress with education; for this reason, it was valuable to investigate the factors that enabled them to do so.
The recent evidence in the literature shows success of students from lower socio-economic status through interaction with school factors, teacher relationships, family talk, and their own self-persistence and connectedness with school. From Bourdieu’s perspective, the progress of students from these backgrounds shows that habitus is created through social rather than individual processes, leading to patterns that are enduring and transferrable from one context to another, but that also shift in relation to specific contexts and over time. Habitus ‘is not fixed or permanent, and can be changed under unexpected situations or over a long historical period’ (Navarro 2006, p. 16). Although habitus reflects the social conditions in which it was constructed, transformation and choices are possible, although the choices inscribed in habitus are limited, a person finds a framework of both opportunities and constraints in their external circumstances (Reay, 2014). Nonetheless, the changing habitus of disadvantaged students progressing with education shows that habitus is a compilation of collective and individual trajectories, and is a complex interplay between past and present that is re-structured by an individual’s experiences of the world.

In a study of disadvantaged youth, Gaddis, (2013) concluded that measures of habitus had a positive effect on youth academic achievement when students think of their self-esteem and belief in their abilities with increased attention, and have positive student-teacher relationships. This increases the student’s habitus and transforms their mindsets regarding intelligence. Even though inherent ability is the dominating factor in students’ academic achievement, this is followed in importance by their habitus (Dumais, 2002).
Habitus is a dynamic, fluid, powerful concept that explains how the cycle of poverty and negative attitudes toward schooling is perpetuated. However, individuals can take challenges and opportunities in their external environment and transform their life trajectories (English & Bolton, 2016). In a New Zealand Progress at School study Nash (2002) concluded that certain dispositions and elements of habitus were associated with educational progress at school. The most important of these were aspirations, academic self-concept and perceptions of schooling. The students’ desire to be educated was essential for their success. These studies were relevant in informing the current study, where all students who re-engaged were of low SES background.

The next section discusses the theoretical framework underpinning this study. Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological human development theory and Andrew Martin’s motivation and engagement wheel were the lenses used to examine early school leaving and re-engagement.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

2.7.1 Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological systems theory

Early school leaving and re-engagement is best investigated and understood through the lens of Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological human development theory, which describes the human development process in terms of complex systematic interactions between humans and their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1999, 1989, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, 1998). According to this model, human development is highly complex, and it is the product of numerous interactions
among Person, Process, Context, and Time (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The present study incorporated these interactions of the model during the students study in high school and in Tertiary Preparation. Thus, the student experiences, including individual characteristics (Person), such as socioeconomic status and prior academic performance in school; developmental interactions or (Process); interaction with teachers and peers, changing behaviour, motivation and transition to further study and career prospects (Process) within the (Context) of school and policies, and Tertiary Preparation over (Time) were examined in the study. Bronfenbrenner’s theory of bioecological human development has itself evolved from the 1970s to the mid-2000s, in stages of development, as the theory was progressively refined in its explanation of the context, the individual, the process, and time aspects of human development.

Although the role of the environment was the key to the theory on human development, in the earlier conceptualisation of the theory, Bronfenbrenner emphasised the context and not the person’s interaction with the environment. The development of the Process-Person-Context-Time model (PPCT) in the later or ‘mature’ stage of the theory became the essence of Bronfenbrenner’s theory (Rosa & Tudge, 2013 p. 244). Bronfenbrenner postulated the importance of various experiences, interactions, linkages and influences on human development. He defined human development as:

The ecology of human development is the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life span, between a growing human organism and the changing immediate environments in which it lives, as this process is affected by relations obtaining within and between these immediate settings, as well as the larger social
contexts, both formal and informal, in which the settings are embedded. (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 514)

Bronfenbrenner proposed that the developing child is surrounded by layers of relationships, like a set of nested Russian dolls (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Bronfrenner & Morris, 2006; Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009; Rosa & Tudge, 2013; McInerney, 2014). In Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system theory, the ecological environment is portrayed as a nested arrangement of structures, each contained within the next. Bronfenbrenner emphasised the aspects of context, which included the individual in the centre, and four popular concepts called microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Figure 1). In this model, each system operates at a greater spatial distance, with different forces of magnitude of influence on the developing individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Tudge et al., 2009; McInerney, 2014).
Figure 2.1. The five systems in human development
(Source: Adapted from McInerney D. M. (2014) Educational Psychology Constructing Learning, Pearson).
The individual interacts directly with the microsystems, which consist of daily activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations in children’s lives, such as interactions with parents, friends, and teachers. Relationships in a microsystem are bi-directional and mutualistic, and the person’s reaction is influenced by how they are treated by others, and vice versa. The microsystem is the most interactive and influential level of the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 1977).

In the mesosystem, the interactions and associations of the child take place between two or more settings, such as the family and the school, or the family and the peer group. There are cross-relationships and lateral connections between these small settings. A mesosystem is a web of microsystems where the interactions may conflict with or alternatively encourage various developments. For example, a child may be experiencing difficulties interacting with family members at home and may have a negatively interacting microsystem. This is balanced by positive peer group interaction at school. Thus, development results from the interactions between complex sets of microsystems. These interactions have both positive and negative impacts on the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Leonard, 2011).

The exosystem is the next level. The exosystem consists of the linkages and processes that take place between two or more settings, such as the parents’ workplace, the child’s school, and community services. These settings are external to the individual but influence, delimit or determine development. These structures are the major institutions of society that are deliberately structured, that evolve at the local level and influence the
developing person. Bronfenbrenner suggests that three exosystems are likely to affect the development of children and youth indirectly. These are the school and the peer group, the parents’ workplace, family social networks and neighbourhood-community contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 1977).

The fourth level is the macrosystem. The macrosystem is the wider sociocultural environment that includes the micro, meso, and exosystems. The macrosystem includes the economy, cultural values and beliefs, lifestyles, material resources, political systems and laws with which the child interacts indirectly, and the macrosystem can have a significant impact on development as the child gets older (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 1977; Leonard, 2011; McInerney, 2014).

The final stage of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory is the chronosystem. The chronosystem is composed of the temporal (time) and spatial (space) dimensions in which Bronfenbrenner’s other four (micro, meso, exo and macro) levels of the bioecological systems theory operate. Time determines development, and many dimensions and characteristics of time in space can have a deep effect on development. For example, as children develop today, changing technology and communication through technological devices and social networks, shape the nature, interactions, and impacts of the ecological systems on their development (McInerney, 2014; Leonard, 2011).

The development of human behaviour depends on reciprocal interactions between people and symbols in the immediate environment that are known as ‘proximal process’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 38). Cognitive development occurs, due to the effects of ‘mechanisms of organism-
environment interaction’, the ‘proximal processes’ (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994, p. 569). The effective proximal processes underpin the bioecological theory and explain outcomes such as the realisation and development of individual potentials for different perceptions and responses, and acquiring knowledge and skills. The model proposes that ‘when proximal processes are weak, genetically based potentials for effective psychological functioning remain relatively unrealised but they become actualised to a progressively greater extent as proximal processes increase in magnitude’ (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994 p. 569).

Examples of proximal process are the active interactions between parents and children, children and teachers at school, and peer interactions. The form, content and direction of the proximal processes that affect development of the individual vary, according to the characteristics of the developing person, the environment, and the nature of the developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000 p. 118). This approach has given rise to research models that look at process-person-context development. Researchers on children’s development and relationship to their environment have adopted this approach from Bronfenbrenner’s theory. For example, Tudge, Odero, Hogan, and Etz (2003) utilised Bronfenbrenner’s advanced form of human development theory in their work on children’s developmental interaction with their environment. According to the bioecological systems theory, individuals are ‘developing within a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment’ (Berk, 2006, p. 26). In the present
research, Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 effectively apply the bioecological human
development theory in discussion of the findings.

2.7.2 Motivation and engagement

It is evident from the studies reviewed above that motivation and engagement are fundamental to the learning process. When students experience high motivation and engagement they are more likely to have positive learning experiences, but when they are low, there are adverse effects on students’ cognitive, behavioural and affective domains. Given the importance of motivation and engagement to successful participation in learning, Martin’s comprehensive and empirically validated model of motivation and engagement has been utilised in this study. Motivation and engagement in this model comprise four higher-order factors: (i) adaptive cognition, which is the positive motivational focus in learning and completing tasks; (ii) adaptive behaviours, which represent strategies that individuals use to engage in their learning; (iii) impeding cognition, which inhibits motivation and engagement in learning and attempting tasks; and (iv) maladaptive behaviours, which represent detrimental strategies that individuals use in learning (Martin & Liem, 2012).

The motivation and engagement wheel includes instrumentation, the Motivation and Engagement Scale (MES; Martin, 2007). The MES comprises eleven motivation and engagement sub-scales corresponding to the eleven first-order factors in the wheel (i.e. self-efficacy, valuing, mastery orientation, planning, task management, persistence, anxiety, failure avoidance, uncertain
control, self-handicapping and disengagement). The motivation and engagement wheel was central in designing the survey instruments and analysing the data in this research, and the research instruments constructed for this study included some MES factors. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology and the MES scale used in this study.

2.8 Summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature on early school leaving and second-chance education overseas and in Australia, and has highlighted the factors that affect early school leaving and re-engagement. The studies reviewed provide innovative information and strong arguments for the provision and validity of second-chance education for school completion and transition to higher levels of education and employment. The key notions include: an ethic of care, provision of hope, positive student-teacher relationships, supportive, a nurturing and flexible adult learning environment, contextualised curriculum and assessments, and accommodating pedagogic approaches to meet the needs of young school leavers. The key theme emerging from most studies is positive student-teacher relationships, which increase interest and engagement in learning and achievement. Positive student-teacher relationships are a recurring theme in most of the literature reviewed and is a strong attribute of second-chance education.

These studies on second-chance or alternative education are significant in informing the current research. The majority of the students studying Tertiary Preparation aspired to make successful transitions to higher education.
Thus, the current study aimed to investigate this and find out whether second-chance learners complete Tertiary Preparation and transit to higher levels of education. The current study also attempts to identify whether Tertiary Preparation had particular features that helped students succeed. It does by employing the ecological systems theory to gain a nuanced understanding of the complexities associated with early school leaving and re-engagement through Tertiary Preparation. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology and theoretical framework considerations in this thesis.
Chapter 3

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Considerations

Introduction

Research methodology and design are framed by a series of assumptions about reality that authorise a particular approach to evoking and understanding knowledge (Arthur, Waring, Coe, & Hedges, 2012). This chapter explains the methodology and theoretical framework considerations underpinning the study. The chapter first explains the ontological and epistemological position adopted to acquire knowledge on the issue: early school leaving and re-engagement. The rationale for a mixed methods research approach and for the instrumentation (in a quantitative and qualitative survey design) is outlined. This is followed by discussion of study participants and ethical considerations, and data collection, including sampling procedures and sample size. The data collection procedures, instrumentation and survey administration, and the recording, coding and thematic construction of the interview data are explained. Finally, this
chapter outlines the types of data analysis used, and the theoretical framework.

### 3.1 Methodological Approach

Arthur et al., (2012) outline four key questions a researcher needs to ask. These are, in chronological order: (i) what is reality, (ii) how can the reality that exists be known, (iii) how can the knowledge of reality be obtained and (iv) what techniques could be used to collect data to explore this knowledge?

The study of the nature or existence of different views of reality is called ‘Ontology’ (p. 17). The researcher must take an ontological position to examine reality, which can be imaged as existing along a continuum from left to right. On the right of the ontological spectrum is realism and on the left, constructivism. From the perspective of realism, reality is objective and independent, fixed and concrete in an individual’s perception. Under constructivism, reality is not objective and fixed; there are many realities, formulated by many individuals’ perceptions. Thus, depending on the research and on the research questions, the researcher needs to undertake an ontological position, either realism or constructivism.

Similarly, to the ontological continuum, there is a parallel epistemological spectrum spanning positivism and interpretivism. Positivism adopts a scientific approach and argues that knowledge is attained through direct observation or measurement of the phenomenon under investigation. Interpretivism is founded on the notion that knowledge can be acquired through individual accounts and interpretations of phenomena, with an interdependent network of relationships (Arthur et al., 2012).
From an ontological perspective, the reality of early school leaving and re-engagement assumes neither objective nor singular but multiple realities, as constructed by individual perceptions. Thus, a constructivist ontological assumption was taken in the present research, guided by an interpretivist research approach, to develop a good understanding of the context within which early school leaving and re-engagement occur.

Epistemology concerns the kinds of knowledge that are possible to explore to understand reality (Crotty, 1998; Arthur et al., 2012). This research adopted phenomenography as the epistemological approach. *Phenomenography* is a dialectical or conversational, interpretive and empirical approach to educational research, to explore and gain knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation (Marton, 1981, 2000; Marton & Booth, 1997; Uljens, 1996; Arthur et al., 2012). For the purposes of the present research it was deemed an ideal epistemological approach to gain knowledge of early school leaving and re-engagement, obtained through the accounts of the lived experiences of the students, from which meaning and knowledge were created.

### 3.2 Phenomenography as a Methodological Approach

Phenomenography is a research process that aims to identify, describe, analyse and understand the views that people collectively hold and understand about the phenomena in their world. It describes people’s experiences of various features of the world, as opposed to conventionally held views (Marton, 1981, 2000). Phenomenography does not contemplate that participants have specific conceptions, but collects evidence or categories of
descriptions to illustrate conceptions of a phenomenon in a given population under study. Participants may express many conceptions, as their impression of concepts change in different situations (Marton & Pong, 2005). The conceptions identified within a group during interviews represent the understandings of the group.

Phenomenographic studies use different methods to collect data: interviews, written responses, observations, focus groups, drawings, artefacts, and historical documents (Hyrkas & Paunonen-Illmonene, 2001; Bruce, 1996). Interviews are most common, valid and reliable instruments for collecting data. Semi-structured interviews generate detailed and more valuable phenomenographic data than do written questionnaires (Bruce, 1996). For data to be valid and useful, in phenomenographic studies, the researcher must ask open-ended questions with follow-up prompts, and participants must give open-ended responses during the interviews, so that a deep understanding of participant conceptions can be identified (Bowden, 1996; Moustakas, 1994). The lived experiences of early school leavers were recorded with in-depth interviews. Categories and associated themes of the student voices were generated from these descriptions, and nuanced interpretations were developed on early school leaving and re-engagement.

The type of phenomenography employed in this research was ‘developmental phenomenography’ (Bowden, 1996, p. 52). Bowden’s phenomenographic research approach aims to find out ‘how people experience some aspect of their world that will enable them or others to change the way their world operates, normally in a formal educational setting’. Bowden’s
‘perspective is developmental and the research outcomes are not the objective per se’ (p. 52) but are applied in wider contexts and situations. This is in contrast to the phenomenographic research of Marton (1986, p. 38), a ‘pure’ phenomenographic interest, explaining ‘how people conceive of various aspects of their reality’, that purely concentrates on people’s perceptions of the phenomena under study.

In developmental phenomenographic research, it is vital to interview only those students who are affected by the phenomenon (Bowden, 1994). The focus should be on the nature of students’ understanding under specific conditions. Students’ conceptions can guide course planning, curriculum, assessments, feedback, pedagogic approaches and professional decision making. This can enhance learning experiences and provide a powerful understanding of the phenomenon (Bowden, 1994). Bowden postulates that the research is corroborative, between the participants, the nature of the data collection process, and the phenomenon under study. All these aspects make the research ‘relational’ (p. 54).

Thus, with a constructivist ontological assumption and a phenomenographic epistemological research investigation, a mixed methods research approach was adopted for this study (Creswell, 2015, 2012). Following the rules of developmental phenomenography, only those students who left school early and re-engaged were interviewed, to examine how perceptions of students on early school leaving and re-engagement are universalised. The survey tools included two questionnaires, an entry (E1) and an exit (E2) survey, which helped explain the quantitative data. The student interviews, which
included eight questions in the form of a conversation with students in a phenomenographic approach, assisted in interpreting student voices. The quantitative research methods, and the rationale for mixed methods research, are explained next.

3.3 Quantitative and qualitative research methods

Quantitative research examines a problem or an issue through a description of trends, or explains the relationships among variables. Numeric data from a large sample size using appropriate instruments are collected and analysed to show trends, compare groups, explain, and compare variable results using statistical analysis (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative research helps collect data verbatim from a small number of participants in respect of their perceptions of a phenomenon. The qualitative research analyses, the data for descriptions provided by research participants and help develop themes using analysis of the descriptions to explain the wider pool of meaning of the findings. Qualitative research helps explore a problem and develop a detailed understanding of the context within which it occurred (Creswell, 2015, 2012).
3.4 Mixed methods research approach: Rationale

Research design and methods of data collection are based on the research problem or research questions (Arthur et al., 2012). This research was guided by three key research questions.

1. Why do students in Western Sydney NSW, Australia leave high school early?

2. What opportunities and challenges do early school leavers experience in ‘second-chance’ Tertiary Preparation at TAFE?

3. What are the individual student factors and features of the Tertiary Preparation environment that make it effective for students to complete the equivalent of high school education?

The mixed methods approach, using two survey instruments and student interviews, helped answer these research questions.

One hundred and twenty ($n = 120$) students consented to take part in the study at four colleges in the Western Sydney Institute of TAFE (WSI) in New South Wales in Semester 1, 2011. The small sample size warranted a mixed methods approach. Both a variable-based quantitative method and a phenomenographic qualitative method, gave a greater scope and enhanced deeper knowledge and understanding of early school leaving and re-engagement from the experiences and perspectives of the students. The qualitative method provides a good opportunity for triangulation (Arthur, et al., 2012), by asking a student his or her perceptions of early school leaving and then triangulating the
perceptions with other students’ interpretations of that aspect, or getting another student to give his or her explanation of early school leaving and re-engagement.

In mixed methods research, elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches are integrated for an in-depth and more accurate understanding of the research findings. A mixed methods design is a more pragmatic means of acquiring knowledge on a research problem. Qualitative and quantitative approaches both have strengths and weaknesses, so a combination of the two was a more fruitful option. The convergence of evidence from two or more methods can enrich the strength and validity of research findings (Creswell, 2011; Arthur et al., 2012). In mixed methods, the researcher gathers both quantitative and qualitative data, integrates the two, and writes explanations based on the strengths of two sets of data, to understand research problems (Creswell, 2015). The key assumption of a mixed methods research approach is that ‘when an investigator combines statistical trends (quantitative data) with stories and personal experiences (qualitative data), this collective strength provides a better understanding of the research problem than either form of data alone’ (p. 2). A range of different typologies has been developed for different mixed approaches. Arthur et al., (2012) have outlined a ‘concurrent’ and a ‘sequential’ design (p. 149). In concurrent design, qualitative and quantitative elements occur concurrently in the same study. For example, in a case study in education, variable based data may be collected on student performance and through interviews conducted with teachers and students to build up the case study. In sequential design, the qualitative and quantitative elements alternate. For example, variable based quantitative data may be collected on a certain
phenomenon, such as student characteristics and educational achievement, and statistical analysis is then done to see what patterns are established. These are then followed by in-depth interviews with the same subjects, to gain a deeper understanding of why the patterns occur. Creswell (2015, 2012) refer to such a design as explanatory sequential design, where qualitative questions are used to interpret quantitative results.

The current study adopted the explanatory sequential mixed methods design (Arthur et al., 2012; Creswell, 2015, 2012). The explanatory sequential mixed methods design involved collecting quantitative data first and then explaining the quantitative results with in-depth qualitative data. In the first, quantitative phase of the study, the Entry to Tertiary Preparation Survey (E1) was implemented. In the second stage of the quantitative phase, the Exit from Tertiary Preparation Survey (E2) was administered to students at the end of their studies in Tertiary Preparation. The two structured surveys (E1 and E2) were used to collect variable based quantitative data, to analyse and examine causal and independent explanations of early school leaving and re-engagement.

The qualitative phase of the research was a follow-up to the quantitative results, which delineated further information on early school leaving and re-engagement, to elaborate on and explain the quantitative results. The tentative plan for the exploratory follow-up further explored the central research questions on causes of early school leaving and re-engagement. The qualitative information was read and was categorised into themes, to analyse and explain early school leaving and re-engagement. A mixed methods approach helped
test the variable based data for empirical verification with qualitative data, to
determine whether it could be generalized to a sample and a population.

3.5 Study Participants

All study participants were from Western Sydney or from Blue
Mountains suburbs in NSW, Australia. The majority of the students who
participated in the research were young (18-24 years old). Some were more
mature-age students (25-39 years old). The youngest participants were 17 years
old, and the oldest student was 56 years old. All students who participated in the
qualitative study were young school leavers. All students were given a
statement, which explained the purpose of the research and the three stages of
the research process. Students completed an expression of interest and gave their
consent. The student expression of interest form is included in Appendix A, and
the consent and confidentiality statements are included in Appendix B. The
information for research participants’ letter is included in Appendix C. For
participation in the qualitative study, a letter of invitation was sent to students,
which explained the purpose of the interview, student consent and
confidentiality conditions, and date and time preferences for the interview.
Before the interview, the interviewees were once again informed about the
purpose of the interview, before giving consent to participate. The interviewees
had the option to opt out from being interviewed if they so preferred. A Copy of
the letter of invitation, interview protocol and consent are included in Appendix
D.
3.6 Ethical considerations

At all stages of the research process, the researcher needs to engage in ethical practices. Ethical issues must be considered, from defining the research problem or questions, through collecting and analysing data and writing the final report. Ethics at all times should be at the ‘forefront of the researcher’s agenda’ (Creswell, 2012, p. 13). This research involved young people. In much youth research, all ethical considerations must be observed, to avoid any vulnerability of young people (Te Riele & Brooks, 2013). The principles of ethical research were followed in this study. A National Ethics Application for ethical review of the research was submitted, and was approved. The Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, governing research carried out in Australia was followed. Research commenced after the National Ethics Application Form (NEAF) application to the Ethics Committee was submitted, and only after ethics clearance was obtained. All research participants gave their consent at each stage of the research. At each stage of the research, the research participants were given an opportunity to withdraw from the research if they wished. Consent was also sought from the Institute Director of the Western Sydney Institute (WSI) before the research began. The consent letter and approval from the Institute Director is included in Appendix G.

The information and data generated from participants were for research purposes only, and were treated with confidentiality. All information and data obtained were used for research purposes only in this study. The research
participants were not identified in the overall research results in any way whatsoever, and all participants were acknowledged for completing the surveys and the interviews. The study did not interfere with classroom teaching and learning at the colleges. There was minimum interruption and variation to classroom routines or to student learning.

3.7 Instrumentation and Data Collection

The data collection involved two surveys (quantitative) and follow-up student interviews (qualitative). Two variable based survey instruments (questionnaires) were designed, an Entry Survey (E1) and an Exit Survey (E2). The two surveys gauged the experiences of students who left school early and then re-engaged. The first stage of the research commenced in Semester 1 (Week 7), during which students completed the E1. This survey collected data on the demographic background and the previous experiences of students in school, and possible causes of early school leaving. The survey also measured the students’ initial experience of studying in Tertiary Preparation upon entry at TAFE.

The second quantitative stage of the research was conducted in Semester 2, in November, and students completed the E2, which measured the students’ experiences of studying Tertiary Preparation compared to their experiences of studying in high school. Thus, the two surveys measured the experiences of students both in school and in Tertiary Preparation in a TAFE setting, from entry point to completion.
3.7.1 Quantitative Study—Survey Design

The quantitative research design involved a survey design construct. Survey designs in quantitative research are procedures in which a researcher administers a survey or questionnaire to a large group of people (sample) to identify trends in the attitudes, opinions, behaviours or characteristics of a large group of people or population on a specific issue or problem (Creswell, 2012). The survey design for this research was adopted from an already established questionnaire in the Australian Research Council (ARC) Research Project ‘Staying on at School: Strategies for increasing high school completion rates in low retention regions of NSW’ (Vickers et al., 2015). Sample variables to be measured in the current study were adopted from the Staying On project.

One significant model that was utilised in the methodological construction of this research was Andrew Martin’s wheel of motivation and engagement. The two survey instruments adopted some variables from motivation and engagement wheel to measure student motivation and engagement in learning at high school and in Tertiary Preparation (Martin, 2009, 2007). The motivation and engagement wheel includes instrumentation, which is the MES (Motivation and Engagement Scale; Martin, 2007). The MES comprises eleven motivation and engagement sub-scales, corresponding with the eleven first-order factors in the wheel (i.e. self-efficacy, valuing, mastery orientation, planning, task management, persistence, anxiety, failure avoidance, uncertain control, self-handicapping and disengagement). The eleven MES sub-scales consist of four items; thus, the MES is a 44-item
To respond to the MES, a Likert scale is used, ranging from 1-7 or 1-5 (depending at what stage the instrument is used: elementary school, high school, college) to assess motivation and engagement in diverse settings. In the present research a five point Likert scale was used for each corresponding item in the survey. The scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The discussion of findings in Chapter 6 and the concluding remarks in Chapter 7 apply Martin’s motivation and engagement wheel to see what core motivation and engagement factors were relevant in the performance and success of early school leavers as they re-engaged through Tertiary Preparation at TAFE.

3.7.2 The Entry Survey (E1)

The Entry Survey (E1) included six parts, with key variables measuring demographic background, reasons for early school leaving, study in Tertiary Preparation, motivation and learning, part-time jobs and future career plans (occupation or profession) after completing TAFE. Following the MES rules, each variable was measured on a Likert scale ranging from: 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Table 3.1 shows sample variables measured in each part of the Entry Survey (E1; see Appendix E).
Table 3.1 Sample items: Entry survey (E1)

Part 1 Demographic background

Residence
Gender
Age

Part 2 Early school leaving

I left school before completing Year 12 because
Subjects influenced my decision to leave school early
Assessments and exams influenced my decision to leave

Part 3 Studying TPC at TAFE: Why are you doing the TPC?

I am studying TPC for university entry
I am studying TPC to get a recognised Year 12 qualification

Part 4 Motivation and Learning in TPC at TAFE

I will probably leave TAFE before completing TP if:
   I get a full time job
   My friends leave TAFE

I am likely to stay and complete the TPC because

I would like to get a Year 12 qualification
I would like to complete TPC and go to university

Motivation to study TPC at TAFE

When I am taught something that doesn’t make sense, I spend time to try to understand it
I always meet deadlines for assessments

Part 5 My part-time job

Do you currently have a part-time job?

Part 6 Your plans after studying TPC at TAFE: What would you like to do after completing TPC?

Full-time job
Full-time study at university
What occupation or profession would you like to qualify for in the future?
3.7.3 Exit Survey (E2)

The Exit Survey (E2) included five parts, with key variables on: course content and relevance; student perceptions of teaching and learning in school and in Tertiary Preparation; choice of curriculum, assessments and decision-making; learning environment and support; and students’ plans and career goals. Each variable was measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The questions on students’ teaching and learning were adopted from the highly validated Student Motivation and Engagement scale (Martin, 2007). Table 3.2 shows sample variables measured in each part of the Exit Survey (E2; included in Appendix E.)
Table 3.2

Sample items: Exit survey (E2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part 1 Course/unit content and relevance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The course/unit content in TPC gave me the knowledge and skills that I needed for my future employment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part 2 Learning and academic value in high school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I found high school classes motivating and stimulating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school increased my interest in learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher enthusiasm/quality in high school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in high school were enthusiastic about teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers had a genuine interest in individual students’ needs and requirements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group interaction in high school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was encouraged to ask questions and was given meaningful answers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessments/readings and feedback in high school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessments were boring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments were relevant for future studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part 2 Learning and academic value in TPC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I found TPC classes motivating and stimulating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPC increased my interest in learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers had a genuine interest in individual students’ needs’ and requirements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group interaction in TPC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was encouraged to participate in class discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was encouraged to ask questions and was given meaningful answers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessments/readings and feedback in TPC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessments were relevant for future studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part 3 Choice/decision making in high school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was able to negotiate the time table that I could attend classes at high school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I was able to negotiate assessment tasks due dates that met my needs at high school

**Choice/decision making in TPC**

I was able to negotiate the time table that I could attend classes in TPC
I was able to negotiate assessment tasks due dates that met my needs in TPC

**Part 4 Learning environment, support and resources in high school**

Students’ views and needs were considered when decisions were made at high school
I was mostly happy being at school

**Learning environment, support and resources in the TPC**

I was able to get tutorial support in the TPC
I was mostly happy being in the TPC at TAFE

**Part 5 Your plans after studying TPC at TAFE**

What course would you like to study?
What job would you like to have?

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### 3.7.4 Qualitative Study design

The qualitative study adopted the *phenomenographic* research approach. Certain procedures were followed to acquire reliable and valid data. Nineteen students \((n = 19)\) consented to participate in one-on-one interviews from the early school leaver group of 57 students. The sample consisted of 37% males and 63% females. All one-on-one interviews were conducted for thirty minutes, in a conversational style. The responses were recorded on a voice recorder and transcribed verbatim for data analysis. All conversations were labelled with the name of the participant and an acronym to be used in the final thesis, for anonymity.
During the interviews, students were asked why they left school early and why they re-engaged through Tertiary Preparation. Arthur et al., (2012) state that research questions are not interview questions and, while the researcher wants to answer their overarching questions, the researcher must carefully and mutually probe the participants further with related questions, to get further descriptions, experiences, thoughts and feelings. All descriptions and utterances are to be analysed collectively, to see what patterns and themes emerge, to answer the key research questions.

Following these guidelines, the interviewees were asked the following questions, with prompts:

(1) Tell me the main reasons that made you decide to leave school; what was going on in your life then?

(2) What were the main reasons that made you decide to do Tertiary Preparation?

(3) How do you compare your study in school and your study in Tertiary Preparation?

(4) Tell me how are things going for you in Tertiary Preparation? What are the best things? What are the worst things?

(5) What are your plans after you complete studying Tertiary Preparation?

(6) Any other comment you would like to make about your study in Tertiary Preparation at TAFE?
To capture the lived experiences of the students, in any phenomenographic study the researcher should avoid any bias or preconceived ideas about theories and knowledge during the investigation. Thus, caution was taken to avoid any bias in data collection during the interviews. The first step was to ‘bracket’ (Marton, 1981 p. 196) preconceived ideas on early school leaving and re-engagement. Bracketing originates from Husserl’s work on ‘epoché’, which refers to ‘the suspension of beliefs so that the phenomenon can be fully focussed upon and understood’ (Ehrich, 1999 p. 25). During the bracketing process, the researchers set aside all pre-knowledge and theoretical notions they have about the phenomenon, before conducting the interviews and examining the data (Ashworth & Lucas, 1998, 2000; Marton, 1994).

In any phenomenographic research, the participants must enunciate conceptualisations of the phenomenon objectively. During the interviews, the participants spoke freely and described their experiences of early school leaving and re-engagement. The researcher’s influence on the research process was minimised during data collection and analysis. During these two processes, no in-depth literature on early school leaving was read, and no reference was made to scholarly work on student re-engagement through a second-chance education. Marton (1981) argues that phenomenographic research comprises two parts: first-order perspectives, when a phenomenon is generally conceptualised, and second-order perspectives: how people conceptualise phenomena from their own experiences. In the present study, second-order perspectives were used when students’ first hand experiences were obtained, to glean their descriptions of the conceptualisation of early
school leaving and re-engagement. Data were recorded and interpreted objectively from the students’ perspectives. The students’ conceptions were not judged against the researcher’s values or existing knowledge. Categories and themes were subsequently generated from the recorded transcripts of what the student participants actually said.

There is always an insider and outsider binary in educational research. An insider researcher has prior and deep knowledge of the community and its members that he or she is researching and the outsider is not familiar with the setting and the people involved in the research (Thomson & Gunter, 2011; Mercer, 2007; Hellawell, 2006). Hellawell (2006) observed that as educational researchers move between insider and outsider identity during the conduct of their research, they may experience shifting relationships with the research participants who may also be their colleagues. However, in order to minimise the impact of such shifts in roles and relationships, it is important for researchers to engage in reflexivity through thinking deeply about the potential influence of the beliefs and values they hold throughout the research process. During the research I was aware of my experience in teaching at TAFE NSW and I brought my experience to the research to understand the perceptions of informants, create different themes and make conclusions. Nightingale and Cromby (1999, p. 288) argued ‘Reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, and an acknowledgment of the impossibility of remaining ‘outside of’ one's subject matter while conducting research. Reflexivity then, urges us ‘to explore the ways in which a researcher's involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research’ (p288).
As a practitioner in TAFE NSW for many years, I adopted an insider identity to generate knowledge on early school leaving and re-engagement. As an insider researcher, I felt that I had a moral duty to listen to young people’s anecdotes and experiences of schooling with compassion, empathy and respect and without bias. To avoid any bias and maintain integrity, I did not include students from the college where I taught. Thomson and Gunter (2011) argued that a researcher could have multiple identities during research or have a shifting relationship (p.25) with informants. During this study and especially during the interviews when participants were asked to provide reasons for early school leaving, I took an outsider identity because I did not work in high schools in NSW and thus had no prior knowledge of the school context.

3.8 Data Analysis

This study utilised non-parametric statistical analysis with the survey data. Non-parametric analysis was appropriate because the survey instruments predominantly collected data, which was measured on nominal (categorical) and ordinal (ranked) scales. The mixed methods approach and the small samples justified the use of non-parametric statistical techniques (Hills, 2008; Pallant, 2011).

3.8.1 Quantitative data analysis

Data acquired from structured survey instruments were analysed using SPSS software Version 20.0. The quantitative study involved non-parametric
statistical tests to compare groups and test the significance of variables in early school leaving and re-engagement. The analysis of demographic characteristics of students used basic descriptive statistical analysis of frequency to examine percentages for characteristics; gender, age, marital status and highest level of qualifications achieved. Descriptive statistics of means were examined on variables. Further statistical analysis involved testing the significance of the means: chi-square tests, correlations, paired samples t-tests and size effects of the means obtained on paired variable analysis using Eta size effect formulae (Pallant, 2011).

3.8.2 Chi-square tests

Chi-square tests show the relationship between two categorical variables. Each of the variables can have two or more categories. This test compares the observed frequencies or proportions of cases that occur in each of the categories, with the values that would be expected if there were no association between the two variables being measured (Hills, 2008; Pallant, 2011). The test involves a cross-tabulation with cases classified according to the categories in each variable. In this study, the Chi-square test for independence was used to examine the association between variables: for example: male/female; TPC completion/non-completion, early school leavers/Year 12 completers; TPC completion/non-completion.
3.8.3 Correlations

Correlations describe the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables. Spearman rho correlations show the strength and the shared variance of the variables. A preliminary scatter plot of selected variables was conducted, which produced data points of a curvilinear relationship that justified the use of Spearman rho correlation analysis (Hills, 2008; Pallant, 2011). The correlation analysis measured variables that influenced early school leaving. For example, teacher’s enthusiasm to teach in school and teachers not listening to students and answering their questions. Thus, the purpose of correlational analysis was to examine whether teacher relationships were a determinant of early school leaving. Correlation analysis was also carried out on four other variables on teacher relationships and early school leaving, and on variables on scholastic engagement (curriculum and assessments), emotional engagement and pedagogic engagement, to measure the strength of variables that influenced early school leaving.

3.8.4 T-tests and mean size effects

The means obtained on students’ Teaching and Learning in high school and their Teaching and Learning in Tertiary Preparation, and on variables on students’ Learning Environment and Resources in high school and in Tertiary Preparation, were tested further for their significance using the statistical analysis of paired samples t-tests. Paired samples t-tests or repeated measures
are used when the same participants are tested on more than one occasion, or when the survey instruments have matched pairs (Pallant, 2011).

The purpose of the paired samples t-tests was to see the variations in the means obtained on student responses on each variable on their studies in high school and in Tertiary Preparation. Apart from comparing the variation in means obtained, further analysis was conducted to measure the variation in the size effect size for paired samples t-tests (Pallant, 2011, 247). Measuring the effect size tells whether the means obtained is statistically significant, that is, it is not likely to have occurred by chance. Thus, an analysis of effect size or strength of association (Pallant, 2011: 209-210) was conducted. This set of statistics gives the relative magnitude of the difference between the means obtained on variables. There are a number of different effect size statistics. The most commonly used are partial eta squared and Cohen’s d (Pallant, 2011:210). For this study, partial eta squared was used, and the eta squared was obtained using the information processed by SPSS during t-test analysis, and using the formula provided in Pallant (2011, p. 247):

\[
\text{Eta squared} = \frac{t^2}{t^2 + (N-1)}
\]

The Eta value obtained is explained by guidelines provided by Cohen (1988, pp. 284-287, in Pallant, 2011, p. 247) as .01= small effect, .06= moderate effect, .14= large effect.

3.8.5 **Qualitative Data Analysis**
Researchers such as Smyth, et.al (2008, 2004), Te Riele (2012, 2011, 2008, 2006, and 2000) and McGregor and Mills (2012) have adopted a phenomenographic approach in qualitative investigations of early leaving and re-engagement. These studies provided a pre-existing research base for the present qualitative investigation.

Phenomenographic data must be reliable and valid. A few procedures were followed in this study, to prepare the data for analysis and reporting. Sjostrom and Dahlgren (2002) and Svensson (1997), recommended three criteria for judging descriptions for reliability and validity, so as to attain knowledge of a phenomenon. The first is frequency: how often an idea is mentioned by the participants; the second, the position where the description is positioned in the conversation. The most important parts of the answer are uttered in the introductory part of the conversation. Thirdly, pregnancy is when the participants clearly lay emphasis on certain aspects of the description as important.

After taking steps to bracket preconceived ideas, all responses were printed. The hard copies of the transcripts were examined closely and all data were read several times. The descriptions in the conversations found to be of interest for the research questions were selected and highlighted in different colours. Categories of descriptions and themes were created after reading all transcripts (Marton, 1986, Moustakas, 1994).

The most important component of phenomenographic approaches to a qualitative study is to find categories of descriptions of the phenomenon, to work out the meaning of the categories of information, and to drive at
knowledge (Marton, 1986, 1981; Ehrich, 1999). After examining all transcripts thoroughly, the most frequently appearing ideas were identified, categorised and tabulated. For example, multiple participants made similar statements relating engagement to curriculum in Tertiary Preparation as interesting, relevant, diverse and flexible. Thus, the curriculum was constructed as a category. The key concepts or ideas in each transcript were highlighted and marked as quotes (Marton, 1981). The frequencies of the descriptions related to each category were manually computed and examined with respect to how the descriptions and categories contributed to students’ engagement in learning in Tertiary Preparation. Once the frequency of the descriptions related to each category was organised and tabulated, typical passages of the data related to each category were accounted for in relation to position and pregnancy. The frequency of descriptions related to each category is included in Tables 5.1 and 5.2 in Chapter 5.

For each student’s experience of early leaving and re-engagement, the interview data were developed into categories and topics and, most importantly, as themes, to answer the research questions (Bazeley, 2007; Creswell, 2009). First, the detailed narratives of each participant on early school leaving were analysed and categorised into specific topics. Similarly, the detailed narratives of each participant on re-engagement through Tertiary Preparation were analysed and allocated to categories of descriptions and specific topics on re-engagement, to work out the meaning of the data and to construct different themes. After scrutinising all the transcripts, categories of topics were established, and three major themes were developed, under which
the qualitatively acquired conceptions of early school leaving and re-engagement were examined. The themes included: (i) Interpersonal relationships (relatedness) and educational support, (ii) Disengaging curriculum and assessments and lack of pedagogic dimensions and (iii) Family and personal attributes.

The descriptions expressed by the participants related to each theme are reported as extracted excerpts. The statements articulated spontaneously on different topics represent a qualitatively different way of experiencing early school leaving and re-engagement by the representative student population. Individual narrative texts are reported as direct autonomous extracts, with no editing (Smyth, et.al, 2008, 2004). All 19 cases were created with allocated pseudonyms to ensure anonymity for all the information related to a particular research participant.

This conceptualization of disengagement from learning, early leaving and re-engagement through Tertiary Preparation, from the participants’ perspectives, is reported in the key findings of the qualitative study in Chapter 5. The results are discussed in Chapter 6, the discussion chapter.

3.9 TAFE NSW recorded data

TAFE NSW has state-wide recorded data from 1983-2017 on Tertiary Preparation. Reference to TAFE recorded data was made on aspects of gender and age of students who study in the Tertiary Preparation programme.
3.10 Retrospective Study


3.11 Theoretical approach

There should be an effective connection between research theory, methods and analysis of research results (Creswell, 2012). The theory provides a framework to explain connections among the phenomena under study and provides insights leading to the discovery of new connections (Tudge, et. al, 2009). This study applied Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological human development theory in the analysis of the mixed methods research—importantly, the more ‘mature’, recent advances in the bioecological theory of the mid-1990s and beyond, with its focus on proximal processes at the centre of the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006; Tudge, et. al, 2009; Rosa & Tudge, 2013) were drawn upon in this study. The advanced forms of this theory provide the most appropriate context (Process-Person-
Context-Time) to analyse the factors that affect early school leaving and re-engagement. Thus, it was utilised to explain the proximal relations of individuals (students and teachers) in Tertiary Preparation that motivated and engaged students to accomplish self-determination and self-worth, so as to complete their Year 12 equivalent education.

Regarding time, Tudge et al., (2009) state that any study using the mature version of the theory should be longitudinal, to evaluate the influence of proximal processes, as mutually influenced by personal characteristics and context, on the developmental outcomes of individuals in the group being studied, in a given historical time. However, the present study, although it empirically measured students’ experiences in early school leaving and re-engagement over a twelve-month period was not longitudinal in the true sense. Nonetheless, the research questions led to students being required to discuss their experiences of learning from previous years (in school) and then years later, in Tertiary Preparation. Therefore, there was at least a limited component of time under consideration in the process-person-context-time analysis, to see the development outcomes of students through time, as argued by the theory. Thus, the five levels of the bioecological development theory (micro, meso, exo, macro and chrono) were relevant in examining the transition of students across the levels through time, from their learning in school to Tertiary Preparation at TAFE. The chronosystem of bioecological human development is the temporal (time) and context (place) dimension in which the other four levels operate (see Chapter 2, section .2.7.1). Perhaps future research on early school leaving and the re-engagement of students through TAFE, in
longitudinal approach with spatial-temporal analysis, would generate more
intensive data to evaluate outcomes for students. This possibility is elaborated
on in discussion of the limitations of the study, in the concluding chapter of
this thesis.

Andrew Martin’s wheel of motivation and engagement (Martin, et al.,
2014; Martin & Liem, 2012; Martin, 2009, 2007; Martin & Dowson, 2009)
was used in the methodological construction of this research. The Motivation
and Engagement Scale (MES) informed the instrument design and provided
the link between theory and research design. During the construction of the
two survey instruments features of Martin’s motivation and engagement wheel
were adopted in the surveys. The motivation and engagement wheel includes
instrumentation, the MES (Motivation and Engagement Scale; Martin, 2007).
The MES comprises eleven motivation and engagement sub-scales
corresponding to the eleven first-order factors in the wheel (i.e. self-efficacy,
valuing, mastery orientation, planning, task management, persistence, anxiety,
failure avoidance, uncertain control, self-handicapping and disengagement).
The eleven sub-scales are separated into four major groups representing the
four higher-order motivation and engagement factors: adaptive cognition,
adaptive behaviour, impeding cognition and maladaptive behaviour. In the
wheel, the eleven MES sub-scales consist of four items, so the MES is a 44
item instrument. To respond to the MES, a Likert scale was used ranging from
1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) for each corresponding item in the
surveys. The motivation and engagement wheel was used in the discussion of
the research results. The four higher-order factors in the motivation and
engagement wheel (discussed in Chapter 2) are applied in the discussion, as they relate to students’ learning in high school and in Tertiary Preparation at TAFE.

3.12 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the methodological framework guiding the study. It has outlined the ontological perspective and explained the epistemological approach, ‘phenomenography’, adopted to gain knowledge about early school leaving and re-engagement. The chapter has also presented the rationale for a mixed methods research approach, explained the quantitative and qualitative research methods, discussed the nature of the participants involved in the research, and also addressed ethics and instrumentations: these latter include quantitative survey design and qualitative interviews. The data collection methods and the processes of quantitative and qualitative data analysis have been explained. Most importantly, the chapter has outlined the theoretical framework underpinning the study, in Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological human development theory, the application of which in understanding early school leaving and re-engagement, has been explained. The bioecological human development framework is applied in the discussion of the research findings in Chapter 6.
Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Results—Quantitative

Introduction

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 respectively, present data analysis and results for the quantitative and qualitative data. Chapter 4 reports the quantitative data and the results on early school leaving and re-engagement, which were collected through entry (E1) and exit (E2) surveys. The demographic background of the students is presented first; the factors that influenced early school leaving are analysed and reported next. Re-engagement through Tertiary Preparation at TAFE is then analysed and presented in this chapter.

4.1 Demographic Background

4.1.1 Gender

As shown in Table 4.1, more than half (55.5%) of respondents were females and 44.5% were males. The proportion of students by gender in Tertiary Prepartion in this study was similar to participation of students by gender in Tertiary Prepartion in TAFE NSW and in Western Sydney Institute.
More females (59%) completed Tertiary Preparation than did males (40.8%). As shown in Table 4.2, although more females than males studied Tertiary Preparation, the difference in completion by gender was not statistically significant ($p = 0.292 > \alpha$ value of .05). There was no association between completion and gender. Tertiary Preparation is a second-chance education opportunity for both males and females. As concluded in this study, similarly the completion of TPC by gender is higher for females than males in TAFE NSW and in Western Sydney Institute.
Table 4.2

*Tertiary Preparation completion by gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% within Gender (Males)</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>40.8%</th>
<th>59.2%</th>
<th>100.0%</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>71</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>35.5%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chi-Square Tests**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
<th>Exact Sig. (2-sided)</th>
<th>Exact Sig. (1-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>1.110</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.292</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity</td>
<td>.728</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.394</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisher's Exact test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.321</td>
<td>.197</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 17.37.
b. Computed only for a 2 x 2 table
   WSI – Western Sydney Institute
4.1.2 Age

As shown in Table 4.3, students who completed Tertiary Preparation were either less than 18 years old or in the 18-24 years old age group. Although a large proportion of students (37%) were in more mature age group over 25, the average age of completers of Tertiary Preparation was 26 years. Thus, attainment of Tertiary Preparation is an opportunity for students who have left school and subsequently re-engaged in education through Tertiary Preparation.

Table 4.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of respondents</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>Less than 18 years</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>62.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>74.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>87.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>92.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, as shown in Table 4.4, the data indicate that the opportunity of a second-chance education becomes limited for the more mature-age group.
Table 4.4

Age: Tertiary Preparation completers/non-completers (cross tabulation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Completed TPC</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>18-24</th>
<th>25-29</th>
<th>30-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>50-59</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; than 18</td>
<td>yrs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected  Count</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% completed TP</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% age</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected  Count</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% completed TP</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% age</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected count</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% completed TP</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within age</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.1.3 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander persons

In this study, 3% of students were from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background. Students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background did not complete Tertiary Preparation. The participation of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons is low in Tertiary Preparation in TAFE NSW. In 2008 and 2009, students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studying Tertiary Preparation comprised 6.2 and 6.4 percent respectively.

4.1.4 Marital Status

More than two thirds (76.4%) of the students were single; 12.7% were married. Another 11% were either divorced or in a de-facto relationship. 73% of the completers were single, 27% were either married, divorced or in a de-facto relationship. A quarter of the students were parents.

4.1.5 Country of Birth

Slightly more than two thirds of the students (69%) were born in Australia and slightly less than one third (31%) were born overseas. Nearly three quarters (73%) of the completers were born in Australia. The other 26% were born overseas. Although the proportion of students born overseas was less, the completion by overseas born students was high. The proportion of students born overseas in this study is similar to students who study Tertiary Preparation and who were born overseas. In 2010, 37.5% of Tertiary Preparation students in TAFE NSW were born overseas.
Almost three quarters of the students spoke English as their first language; a quarter of the students spoke another language and were not native English speakers. The students who completed Tertiary Preparation (79%) were predominantly native English speakers; 21% were not native English speakers.

A Pearson chi square test for the variable native English speaker was cross-tabulated with the independent variable Students completed TPC. As shown in Table 4.5, the Chi sq test showed that the association between the two variables was statistically significant (p = 0.160 > alpha value of .05). Thus, being a native speaker of English and completing Tertiary Preparation was not significantly different from those who were not native English speakers and completed. There was no association between students who spoke English as their first language and completed, and those who did not speak English as first language and completed. Both native English speakers and non-native English speakers can study and complete Tertiary Preparation. In 2011, the completion of Tertiary Preparation by students who are non-native speakers of English was high in TAFE NSW and in Western Sydney Institute (WSI).
Table 4.5

*Tertiary Preparation completers/native English speakers (cross tabulation)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are you a native English speaker?</th>
<th>Completion by NESB students (2011)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>TAFE NSW (59.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>WSI (51.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% within Students completed TPC</th>
<th>% within Are you a native English speaker?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>79%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21%</td>
<td>53.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64.5%</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.5%</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>% within Are you a native English speaker?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>51%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>53.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64.5%</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.5%</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>% within Are you a native English speaker?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chi-Square Tests**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
<th>Exact Sig. (2-sided)</th>
<th>Exact Sig. (1-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>1.977</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.160</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity Correlation</td>
<td>1.386</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.239</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisher's Exact test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.176</td>
<td>.120</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N of valid cases = 110

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 9.93.
b. Computed only for a 2 x 2 table
4.1.7 Highest level of qualification achieved

As shown in Table 4.6, 67 students (52%) were early school leavers. They had completed either Year 10 (32%) or Year 11 (20%). Thirty one students (28%) completed the NSW Higher School Certificate (Year 12). Another twenty-two students (20%) had completed a TAFE apprenticeship or traineeship, TAFE Certificate 11 or other qualification: for example, an overseas qualification. The highest level of qualification of students who studied Tertiary Preparation in this study is similar to educational level of students studying Tertiary Preparation in TAFE NSW. In 2011 almost a quarter (24.3%) of students who studied Tertiary Preparation also completed Higher School Certificate (HSC).
The highest level of education achieved, and Tertiary Preparation completion, were tested further, to see if there was any association between high school completion and Tertiary Preparation completion by early school leavers and Year 12 completers.

Chi square tests for the two variables Students completed Year 12/Students left school early were cross-tabulated with the independent variable Students completed TPC. As shown in Table 4.7, there was no association between the two groups, and the outcomes of the two groups were not statistically significant (Year 12 completers $p = 0.378 >$ alpha value of .05/Early school leavers $p = 0.256 >$ alpha value of .05). Students who leave school early and students who complete Year 12 can both complete the TPC. Thus, the Tertiary Preparation Certificate is both a second-chance opportunity for students who left school
early to complete their education, and for those who completed Year 12 to get a better tertiary entrance score. The hypothesis that Year 12 completers were more likely to complete the TPC than early school leavers was disproved.
### Table 4.7

**High school completion/Tertiary Preparation completion (cross tabulation)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students completed TPC</th>
<th>Students completed Year 12</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>% within Students completed TP</td>
<td>% within Students who completed Year 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>71.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>69.0%</td>
<td>62.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>38.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chi-Square Tests</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
<th>Exact Sig. (2-sided)</th>
<th>Exact Sig. (1-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>.778a</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.378</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity</td>
<td>.436</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.509</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisher's Exact test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.507</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N of valid cases 110

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 10.99.
b. Computed only for a 2 x 2 table

### 4.1.8 Pattern of study: Full-time/part-time

The majority of the students (81%) in this sample studied Tertiary Preparation full-time; 19% studied part-time. This data could not be compared with TAFE NSW or WSI data on pattern of study by students in Tertiary Prepration due to lack of data available on this variable.
4.2 Early School Leaving

As shown in Table 4.8, fifty-seven students (52%) left school early. Out of all early school leavers 34 or (59.5%) completed Tertiary Preparation by the end of the year and 23, (40.3%) dropped out, as shown in Table 4.9.

Table 4.8

*Early school leavers in Western Sydney, NSW*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>(52%)</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>(48%)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.9

*Early school leavers completing Tertiary Preparation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students left school early</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early leavers completed</td>
<td>Yes 34 (59.5%)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPC</td>
<td>No 23 (40.3%)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.1 Factors affecting early school leaving

The first research question in this study was: Why do students leave school early? The relevant data are presented in this section of the chapter. As shown in Table 4.10, school related factors appeared to affect early leaving. This included school assessments which did
not interest students and were not perceived to be relevant for future studies. Students perceived a lack of teacher enthusiasm to teach, reported that teachers did not use a variety of methods, and did not find the teaching effective. The students’ felt that they did not belong at school and they were not happy.

Table 4.10

Early school leavers (reasons for early school leaving)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Scholastic engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The subjects I was studying did not give me the knowledge/skills that I needed</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>1.183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The subjects I was studying did not give me the required marks to go to university</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>1.226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The subjects were not interesting to me</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The subjects were difficult to understand</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>1.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments were hard</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>1.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments did not interest me</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>1.408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments were not discussed/explained clearly</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>1.255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments were not relevant for future studies</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>1.386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments lacked variety and were not negotiable</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>1.342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments were difficult to understand</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>1.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Attitudes to teaching and study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers were not enthusiastic about teaching</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>1.668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers did not listen to me and did not answer my questions</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>1.414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers gave me a hard time</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>1.414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ explanations were not clear</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>1.212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers were not friendly and not interested in individual students</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers did not help me when I needed help</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>1.351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers did not use a variety of methods to teach</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>1.420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Pedagogical Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was not encouraged to participate in discussion, ask questions</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>1.159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was not encouraged to express opinions and share ideas in class</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>1.130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not find teaching effective</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>1.441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Emotional Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was bullied by other students</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>1.412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt that I didn’t belong at school</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>1.586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was not happy at school</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>1.558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was suspended/expelled from school</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer pressure affected my studies</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>1.412</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Family/Personal Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I changed residence: state</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>.718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I migrated to Australia recently</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>.981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family responsibilities affected my studies</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>1.476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic hardship affected my studies</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>1.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>.981</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Part-time Employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My part-time job affected my studies</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>1.144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wanted to work/apprenticeship</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>1.604</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=57
The means were not very high, and they could not be statistically tested for significance due to the lack of data available as a control; however, correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and the shared variance of the means that affected early school leaving.

A preliminary scatter plot analysis was conducted, which produced data points of a curvilinear relationship, justifying the use of Spearman rho correlation coefficient analysis (Hillman, 2010; Pallant, 2011). Early school leaving variables were organised into five categories: teacher relationships, scholastic engagement, pedagogic engagement, emotional engagement, and family and personal relationships.

4.2.2 Student-Teacher Relationships

As shown in Table 4.13, paired variables on student-teacher relationships, computed for correlations, were statistically significant.
Table 4.11

*Student-teacher relations in high school*

Student-Teacher relations and early school leaving (Spearman rho Correlations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Teachers were not enthusiastic about teaching/Teachers did not listen to me and did not answer my questions</th>
<th>2. Teachers were not enthusiastic about teaching/Teachers’ explanations were not clear</th>
<th>3. Teachers were not friendly and not interested in individual students/Teachers did not help me when I needed help</th>
<th>4. Teachers were not enthusiastic about teaching/Teachers did not use a variety of methods to teach</th>
<th>5. Teachers gave me hard time/Teachers did not listen to me and did not answer my questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>rho.835 **</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>rho.821 **</td>
<td>rho.821 **</td>
<td>rho.703 **</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** p < 0.01 (Sig 2 tailed) N = 57

Student-teacher relationships influenced early school leaving. A positive correlation resulted between the first paired variables (*teachers not enthusiastic to teach/teachers not listening to students and answering their questions*; \( \rho = .84, n = 57, p < 0.01 \)). The correlation was large (above .50). The coefficient of determination showed a large overlap, with a shared variance of 69.7% \((.84^2)\). Thus, the positive correlation between the first two variables showed a poor relationship between students and teachers. The correlation analysis of four other paired variables on student-teacher relationship also showed a strong
relationship, suggesting that student-teacher relations were adverse and influenced early school leaving.

4.2.3 Scholastic engagement

As shown in Table 4.12, students’ scholastic engagement (subjects were difficult to understand/subjects were not interesting) generated a positive strong correlation (rho = .67, n = 57, p < 0.01. The correlation was large (above .5; Pallant, 2011).

Table 4.12
Scholastic engagement in high school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholastic engagement factors and early school leaving (Spearman rho Correlations)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The subjects were difficult to understand/The subjects were not interesting to me</td>
<td>rho.667 **</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Assessments were not discussed/explained clearly/Assessments were not relevant for future studies</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>rho.515 **</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Assessments lacked variety and were not negotiable/ Assessments were difficult to understand</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>rho.548 **</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Assessments were hard/Assessments did not interest me</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>rho.459 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Assessments lacked variety and were not negotiable/ Assessments were difficult to understand</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** p < 0.01 (Sig 2 tailed) N = 57

The coefficient of determination showed a large overlap, with a shared variance of 44.4% (.67^2). Thus, scholastic disengagement influenced early school leaving. Correlations on the other four variables on scholastic engagement at school showed a strong relationship.
4.2.4 Pedagogic engagement

In testing for the influence of pedagogic approaches on early school leaving, the following results were found.

Table 4.13

Pedagogic engagement in high school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pedagogic engagement and early school leaving (Spearman rho correlations)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Teachers did not use a variety of methods to teach/I did not find teaching effective</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>rho.751 **</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I was not encouraged to participate in discussion, ask questions/I was not encouraged to express opinions and share ideas in class</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>rho.720 **</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I did not find teaching effective/I was not encouraged to participate in discussion, ask questions</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>rho.652 **</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I did not find teaching effective/I was not encouraged to express opinion and share ideas in class</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>rho.821 **</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Teachers were not enthusiastic about teaching/I was not encouraged to participate in discussion, ask questions</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>rho.821 **</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** p < 0.001 (Sig 2 tailed) N = 57

Students’ pedagogic engagement (teachers did not use a variety of methods to teach/teaching was not effective) were positively correlated (rho = .751, n = 57, p < 0.01. The correlation was high (above.5), showing a strong relationship between the two variables. The coefficient of determination showed a large overlap, with a shared variance of 56.4% (.751^2). Thus, high levels of teachers not using a variety of methods related to students’ finding teaching not effective, and may have contributed to the decision to leave school early.
As shown in Table 4.13, correlations among the other four paired variables on pedagogic disengagement were positive (above .50).
4.2.5 Emotional Engagement

The students’ emotional engagement at school was also examined.

Table 4.14

*Emotional engagement in high school*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional engagement affecting early school leaving (Spearman rho Correlations)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I felt that I didn’t belong at school / I was not happy at school</td>
<td>rho.792**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I was bullied by other students / I felt that I didn’t belong at school</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>rho.305*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I was not happy at school / Peer pressure affected my studies</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>rho.252</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I was not happy at school / I was suspended/expelled from school</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>rho.135</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I was not happy at school / I wanted to work/apprenticeship</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>rho.078</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < .01 (Sig 2-tailed) N = 57

The response on students’ feelings of belonging and happiness at school produced higher means than the means on any other variables on emotional engagement at school that contributed to early school leaving. As shown in Table 4.14, the correlation of school belonging and happiness at school was positive (rho = .791, n = 57, p < 0.01) and high (above .50), with a shared variance of 56.4% (792^2). There was no correlation between the four other paired variables on students’ emotional engagement at school. This shows that peer pressure at school, student suspension/expulsion, students’ part-time job or intention
to work/take up an apprenticeship were not correlated, which suggests that these factors did not influence students to leave school early in this study. The lack of student sense of belonging and happiness at school were crucial emotional factors in early leaving.

4.2.6 Family relations and personal attributes

As shown in Table 4.15, there was a weak and non-significant correlation between students’ family relations and personal attributes impacting early school leaving. Early school leavers had an overall positive relationship with their families.

Table 4.15

Family and personal attributes

| Spearman rho Correlations: Family and personal relationships and early school leaving |
|---------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1. I was not happy at school/Family responsibilities affected my studies | rho.041 | -   | -   | -   |
| 2. I was not happy at school/I became a parent: mother/father | -   | rho.156 | -   | -   |
| 3. Family responsibilities affected my studies/I changed residence: state | -   | -   | rho.110 | -   |
| 4. I migrated to Australia recently/Economic hardship affected my studies | -   | -   | -   | rho.043 |

N = 57

In this study, the quantitative data indicate that student-teacher relations, scholastic, pedagogic and emotional engagement were likely to be strong factors influencing early school leaving. In this study, family relations and personal attributes were not important in influencing students’ decision to leave school early.

4.3 Studying Tertiary Preparation at TAFE

The third research question centred on understanding the factors that influenced early school leavers to stay and complete the Tertiary Preparation course. The first step was to
identify the reasons why they choose to study Tertiary Preparation. Table 4.16 outlines various reasons why students elected to study Tertiary Preparation. The means obtained on most variables regarding why the students studied Tertiary Preparation were high, showing that they related strongly to their reasons for studying Tertiary Preparation.

Table 4.16

*Studying Tertiary Preparation at TAFE—entry point 1 (E1)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why studying TP at TAFE?</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study a university course</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>1.196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need a required ATAR for a University Course</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>1.665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPC will give skills for study at University</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>1.387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPC will give right skills for the job</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>1.282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need Year 12 equivalent qualification</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>1.142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Year 12 overseas</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>1.260</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most common reason for studying Tertiary Preparation was for the purpose of gaining university entry. Tertiary Preparation gives skills and credentials to study at university, as it is a Year 12 equivalent qualification. More than a quarter (28%) of the students had already completed Year 12 in high school, but did not get the required ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank) for the university course that they intended to study. These students studied Tertiary Preparation to attain a better score for their university entry. Students also realised that they needed a Year 12 equivalent qualification for their future job prospects. Some students had an overseas Year 12 equivalent qualification, which was not
recognised as an HSC equivalent in NSW. They studied for better opportunities, and especially for university entry.

4.4 Student Experiences in Tertiary Preparation at TAFE

Students perceived various experiences in Tertiary Preparation which further helped to answer research question 3. As shown in Table 4.17, Tertiary Preparation teachers were enthusiastic about teaching, explained clearly, were friendly, welcoming and available to help and advise students, both within class and outside of class. Teachers were interested in what students did in class. The subjects were interesting and fun. Most subjects did not involve exams. Students understood the subject material and subjects were valuable for further studies.

Students liked the assessments and perceived that the assessments were discussed and explained clearly and that a variety of assessments was used. The assessments and the skills learnt were perceived to be relevant and useful for future studies. Assessments were also fair and negotiable. Students also liked the support and learning resources in Tertiary Preparation.

In Tertiary Preparation, students were treated like adults, and they were able to participate in class discussions. The students had more choice of units and in the types of assessment they did, and they felt that they belonged in the Tertiary Preparation group. They made friends easily and their friends cared about doing well. The students also received support from peers and were not disturbed and distracted by other students, unlike in high school. They felt safe while studying at TAFE and improved their self-image and developed confidence; they did not feel put down by other students.

Table 4.17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers in TP</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

117
Are enthusiastic about the classes they teach 4.39 .718
Use a variety of teaching methods 4.21 .850
Explain everything clearly 4.11 .850
Are friendly towards individual students 4.45 .749
Are interested in what I do 4.29 .731
Are available to me when I need help 4.48 .739
Welcome me seeking help/advice in or outside class 4.59 .579

**Subjects and Assessments in TP**

TP has subjects that are interesting and fun 4.00 .845
TP is easier to do as most subjects don’t have exams like the HSC 3.64 1.081
I understand the subject material in TP 4.22 .850
The subjects in TP will be valuable to me in future 4.30 .819
TPC assessments are discussed and explained quite clearly 4.19 .829
In TPC a good variety of assessments is used 4.00 .790
Assessments in TP will be relevant for future studies 4.07 .926
Assessments in TP are fair 4.15 .752
Assessments are worthwhile for my future skills 4.10 .867
In TP I am able to negotiate assessments with the teachers 3.71 1.103

**Support and Learning Resources**

In TP I get tutorial support when I need it 4.07 .955
I have access to computers at TAFE 4.61 .607
The library has study places available 4.54 .631
The library has a variety of resources for the course 4.34 .860
Class sizes in TP are almost right 4.35 .829
I am able to talk to counsellors when I need them 4.14 .943

**Overall experience in TP at TAFE**

I feel I belong in the TP at TAFE 4.24 .801
I make friends easily in TP at TAFE 4.16 .904
I get support from my peers in TP at TAFE 4.04 .794
I am not usually disturbed by other students 3.82 .979
Most of my friends care about doing well in TP 4.06 .870
I feel safe at TAFE 4.34 .822
I am able to improve my self-image and confidence 4.17 .822
I don’t feel ‘put down’ by other students 4.45 .808

N = 110

4.5 **Student Motivation and Learning**

To assist answering the second research question—What opportunities and challenges do early school leavers experience in ‘second-chance’ Tertiary Preparation at TAFE? —students were asked about their levels of motivation and learning in Tertiary Preparation. They were asked if they would probably leave TAFE before completing Tertiary Preparation or if they would stay and complete Tertiary Preparation. As shown in Table
4.18, the majority of the students were highly motivated and indicated that they would complete the course.

Table 4.18  
*Motivation and learning in Tertiary Preparation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I get a full-time job</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>1.260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enjoying the study</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>1.173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The subjects offered are not relevant to me</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>1.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The assessments/exams are too hard</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>1.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juggling my part-time employment and study becomes too hard</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>1.154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If I lose confidence in my ability to succeed  |  2.02 |  1.173  
I gain an apprenticeship  |  1.67 |  1.110  
Teachers start to give me a hard time  |  1.98 |  1.188  
I don’t feel as though I belong at TAFE  |  1.88 |  1.090  
My friends leave TP  |  1.50 |  0.896  

**I will stay and complete TP because:**

Want to get Year 12 qualification  |  4.41 |  1.128  
Highly motivated to study TPC course  |  4.30 |  0.884  
Complete TPC and go to university  |  4.43 |  0.981  
Complete TPC to do other TAFE course e.g. Diploma  |  2.98 |  1.327  
Complete TPC to get a job  |  3.14 |  1.385  
I would like to complete TPC to gain more skills  |  4.12 |  0.950  
I would like to complete TPC to get more opportunities  |  4.40 |  0.950  
I would be proud of myself if I completed TPC  |  4.64 |  0.602  

**Other motivational factors**

If I can’t understand a topic, I keep trying until I do  |  4.09 |  0.830  
Sometimes I don’t try hard so I can have a reason if I don’t do well  |  4.19 |  0.772  
Learning and gaining an education is important  |  4.67 |  0.560  
Always meet deadlines for assessments  |  3.88 |  0.993  
When don’t work hard, have an excuse if do badly  |  2.41 |  1.23  
Having Year 12 will be useful  |  4.46 |  0.885  
Keep trying to understand what is taught  |  4.10 |  0.995  
Waste time before assessment due dates  |  2.13 |  1.24  
It’s important to understand what I ‘am taught in TPC  |  4.39 |  0.847  
Work difficult topics until work it out  |  4.07 |  0.983  
Try to get tutorial support at Learning Centre  |  3.22 |  1.13  

N = 110

**4.6 Part-time jobs**

Slightly more than a quarter (28%) of the students had a part-time job. Students who worked part-time would have preferred to study Tertiary Preparation full-time, but had to work for financial support. Their employers understood when students needed time off to study. Teachers were supportive towards students who had jobs. It was difficult to balance the demands of work and study, students had problems juggling work and study, and they did not want to skip their TAFE classes if the employer asked them to come to work. Students thought that they would get better results if they did not work too many hours.
4.7 Plans after studying Tertiary Preparation

Students’ perceptions of further education and employment were positive, and showed a strong indication that they planned to utilise their Tertiary Preparation qualification in productive ways. More than half (57.3%) of the students reported that they would take up full-time study at the university. Fourteen point five % would take a fulltime job and 12.7% would take up part-time study and part-time work. Another 4.5% of the students would undertake full-time study at TAFE, 1.8% would take up an apprenticeship; and 2.7% wanted a part-time job. Only 6.4% of the students did not know what to do or had no plans after studying Tertiary Preparation. Students wanted to qualify for various occupations or professions in the future. Two common occupations reported were Law/Administration and science. This was followed by nursing/midwifery, engineering, journalism/media, psychology/therapy, medicine, dentistry and occupations in the services industry. The majority of the students had clear career plans and were focussed on their future occupation or profession.

4.8 Tertiary Preparation Completers

The third research question in this study was: What are the individual student factors and features of the Tertiary Preparation environment that make it effective for students to complete the equivalent of high school education? To answer this research question, 71 (*n* = 71) Tertiary Preparation completers responded to questions on their teaching and learning in high school and their teaching and learning in Tertiary Preparation at the ‘Exit’ point Survey (E2) at the end of their studies in Semester 2, 2011. In responding to these questions, the students drawing upon their experiences of both Tertiary Preparation and high school classes, curriculum, assessments, teachers, friend and peer relations, pedagogic approaches and their own motivation to learn. The results obtained from the data, collected at the ‘Exit’ point Survey (E2), are reported next.
Cross tabulation was conducted to analyse the responses of students on ‘teaching and learning’ in Tertiary Preparation and high school. Sixteen paired variables on a Likert scale ranging from 1 ‘Strongly Disagree’ to 5 ‘Strongly Agree’ generated the means for the paired variables. The means in Tertiary Preparation were substantially higher than the means in high school across all variables, and it was imperative to examine the extent to which the means on all sixteen normally distributed variables differed from each other. This served to identify whether there was a statistically significant difference in the means obtained on variables, teaching and learning in Tertiary Preparation compared to high school. This also determined whether teaching and learning in Tertiary Preparation had an impact on students’ mean score on their teaching and learning in high school.

Table 4.19

Teaching and learning in high school and in Tertiary Preparation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholastic engagement</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HS classes motivating and stimulating</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>1.117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP classes Motivating and stimulating</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>.871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS increased interest in learning</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>1.180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP increased interest in learning</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>.936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learnt and understood the subject material in HS</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>1.158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learnt and understood the subject material in TP</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>.766</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher Relations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Relations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in HS were enthusiastic about teaching</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>1.129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in TP were enthusiastic about teaching</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>.667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in HS used humour in class</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in TP used humour in class</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>.913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in HS were friendly towards individual students</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>1.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in TP were friendly towards individual students</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>.727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in HS interested in individual students’ needs and requirements</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>1.093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in TP interested in individual students needs and requirements</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>.734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in HS welcomed students seek help/Advice in or outside class</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>1.271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in TP welcomed students seek help/Advice in or outside class</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>.733</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pedagogical Engagement
In HS I was encouraged to participate in class discussions 3.01 1.089
In TP I was encouraged to participate in class discussions 4.38 .641
In HS I was invited to share my ideas and knowledge 2.85 1.283
In TP I was invited to share my ideas and knowledge 4.44 .626
In HS I was encouraged to ask questions and was given meaningful answers 2.79 1.230
In TP I was encouraged to ask questions and given meaningful answers 4.44 .712

Assessments

Assessments in HS were hard 3.08 .982
Assessments in TP were hard 3.38 .724
Assessments in HS were boring 3.67 1.086
Assessments in TP were boring 2.43 .926
Assessments in HS were interesting and fun 2.10 .881
Assessments in TP were interesting and fun 3.41 .767
Assessments in HS were relevant for future studies 2.66 1.095
Assessments in TP were relevant for future studies 4.10 .796
Most assessments in HS did not involve exams 2.51 1.012
Most assessments in TP did not involve exams 3.30 1.006

N = 71

Sixteen paired variables were examined using t-tests, to gauge the significance of the means on teaching and learning in high school compared to Tertiary Preparation.
### Table 4.20

*Teaching and learning in high school and in Tertiary Preparation (t-tests)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Samples t-Tests</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Upper</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Eta</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP classes motivating and stimulating / HS classes motivating and stimulating</td>
<td>1.690</td>
<td>1.420</td>
<td>1.354</td>
<td>2.026</td>
<td>10.028</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP increased interest in learning / HS increased interest in learning</td>
<td>1.831</td>
<td>1.549</td>
<td>1.464</td>
<td>2.198</td>
<td>9.960</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learnt and understood the subject in TP / learnt and understood the subject in HS</td>
<td>1.141</td>
<td>1.302</td>
<td>.833</td>
<td>1.449</td>
<td>7.385</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in TP were enthusiastic to teach / Teachers in HS were enthusiastic to teach</td>
<td>1.817</td>
<td>1.467</td>
<td>1.470</td>
<td>2.164</td>
<td>10.437</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in TPC used humour in class / Teachers in HS used humour in class</td>
<td>1.423</td>
<td>1.401</td>
<td>1.091</td>
<td>1.754</td>
<td>8.558</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in HS were friendly / Teachers in TP were friendly</td>
<td>1.282</td>
<td>1.322</td>
<td>.969</td>
<td>1.595</td>
<td>8.168</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in TP had a genuine interest in students’ needs and requirements / Teachers in HS had a genuine interest in students’ needs and requirements</td>
<td>1.915</td>
<td>1.296</td>
<td>1.609</td>
<td>2.222</td>
<td>12.458</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in TP made students feel welcome seek help/ in or outside class / Teachers in HS made</td>
<td>1.958</td>
<td>1.487</td>
<td>1.606</td>
<td>2.310</td>
<td>11.090</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
students feel welcome in seek help/in or outside class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1.366</th>
<th>1.365</th>
<th>1.689</th>
<th>1.043</th>
<th>8.432</th>
<th>0.50</th>
<th>70</th>
<th>.000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In HS I was encouraged to participate in class discussions / In TP I was encouraged to participate in discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In TP I was invited to share my ideas and knowledge / In HS I was invited to share my ideas and knowledge</td>
<td>1.592</td>
<td>1.450</td>
<td>1.248</td>
<td>1.935</td>
<td>9.249</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In TP I was encouraged to ask questions and was given meaningful answers / In HS I was encouraged to ask questions and was given meaningful answers</td>
<td>1.648</td>
<td>1.568</td>
<td>1.277</td>
<td>2.019</td>
<td>8.853</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments in TP were hard / Assessments in HS were hard</td>
<td>.296</td>
<td>1.176</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.574</td>
<td>2.119</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments in HS were boring / Assessments in TP school were boring</td>
<td>1.243</td>
<td>1.135</td>
<td>1.513</td>
<td>.972</td>
<td>9.162</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments in TP were interesting and fun / Assessments in HS were interesting and fun</td>
<td>1.310</td>
<td>1.116</td>
<td>1.046</td>
<td>1.574</td>
<td>9.890</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments in TP were relevant / Assessments in HS school were relevant</td>
<td>1.437</td>
<td>1.360</td>
<td>1.115</td>
<td>1.759</td>
<td>8.901</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most assessments in TP did not involve exams / Most assessments in HS did not involve exams</td>
<td>.789</td>
<td>1.275</td>
<td>.487</td>
<td>1.091</td>
<td>5.212</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < .001 *p < .005
As shown in Table 4.20, the means obtained on teaching and learning in Tertiary Preparation were substantially higher on all 16 paired variables than the corresponding means in high school. A few selected variables were chosen for t-test analysis. The means obtained on paired variables were also put to an Eta size effect test (Pallant, 2011), to determine the size difference in the means obtained and the significance of the means. This is discussed in the following section.

4.8.1 Teaching and Learning

Tertiary Preparation increased students’ motivation to learn, and Tertiary Preparation classes were motivating and stimulating. Tertiary Preparation increased students’ interest in learning and they understood the subject material. The assessments were not boring, and TP was fun and interesting and relevant for future studies, compared to high school. The motivation to learn, an increased interest in learning, understanding subjects and finding assessments fun, interesting and relevant, attests to the students’ engagement in and enjoyment of the classes in Tertiary Preparation. This could also attest to teacher relations and pedagogy. The means and the t-tests obtained are reported in the discussion below.

4.8.2 Motivation to Learn

The students had higher motivation to learn in Tertiary Preparation, compared to high school. They found the TP classes motivating and stimulating; this perhaps is what inspired them to learn. The t-test showed a significant increase in the mean, I found TPC classes motivating and stimulating compared to high school [HS $M = 2.42, SD = 1.117$, TP $M = 4.11, SD = .871$, $t_{10.028}, p < .000$]. [Mean increase $1.690$, 95% confidence interval, range $1.354 - 2.026$]. These results showed that the mean of students’ motivation to learn in Tertiary Preparation was statistically
significantly higher than the mean on students’ motivation to learn in high school. The t-value obtained was significant, with a probability value of .001, lower than .05.

Although the t-value obtained was significant, it is important to consider what factors could have influenced the students finding Tertiary Preparation classes more motivating and stimulating than their high school classes. To investigate this, a paired sample t-test was conducted on another 15 variables, to test whether there were features in the Tertiary Preparation environment that were different from the high school environment, and if so, whether these features influenced students’ teaching and learning and thus, completing their education. The t-values obtained on 14 variables in Tertiary Preparation compared to high school were significant, with the actual probability value of .001, lower than .05—except assessment, at .05 rather than .001. The results indicate that Tertiary Preparation had significant features that increased student learning compared to high school.

4.8.3 Increased interest in learning

Compared with high school, Tertiary Preparation increased students’ interest in learning. The mean obtained on interest in learning in Tertiary Preparation compared to high school was higher [HS $M = 2.32$ SD = 1.180, TP, $M = 4.15$, SD = .936], $t (9.960), p < .000$. [Mean increase 1.831, 95% confidence interval, range 1.464-2.198]. These results show that the mean for students’ increased interest in learning in Tertiary Preparation was statistically significantly higher than in high school. The t-value obtained was significant $t (9.960), p < .000$, giving an actual probability value of .05. Thus, it was concluded that the students who completed Tertiary Preparation had motivation to succeed and were interested and willing to learn.
4.8.4 Teacher relations and Pedagogic dimensions

Positive student-teacher relations and pedagogic approaches in Tertiary Preparation were important to students. Student-teacher relations and pedagogic approaches were weak in school, and as such, warranted further analysis.

Paired t-tests of variables on students’ responses to ‘teachers’ and ‘teaching methods’ in Tertiary Preparation produced means which were statistically significantly different from the means obtained in high school. The t-value obtained in Tertiary Preparation compared to high school was significant, \( p < .001 \). Thus, teachers and teaching methods in Tertiary Preparation were significant factors in students’ teaching and learning. These included teacher enthusiasm to teach, teachers use of humour in class, teacher friendliness and genuine interest in the needs of individual students. Teachers making students feel welcome in seeking help/advice in or outside class generated higher means, which were statistically significant, and the t-test indicates that these variables possibly influenced student learning and achievement. Students in Tertiary Preparation were invited to share their ideas and knowledge, felt encouraged to ask questions and were given meaningful answers.

Thus, student-teacher relations and teaching methods were important features of Tertiary Preparation that may have influenced students’ teaching and learning, encouraging them to stay and complete their education at TAFE. During the entry survey, nearly half of the students who left school early, reported having poor teacher relations in high school.
4.8.5 Curriculum and Assessments

In Tertiary Preparation, students reported understanding the curriculum and learning the subject material better than in high school. The results showed a statistically significant increase in means on learning and understanding the subject material in Tertiary Preparation compared to high school [HS, \( M = 2.97 \), \( SD = 1.158 \), TP, \( M = 4.11 \), \( SD = .766 \)], \( t = 7.385, p < .000 \). [Mean 1.141, 95% confidence interval range .833-1.449].

Paired t-tests of variables on Assessments in Tertiary Preparation produced means statistically significantly different from high school. The t-value was significant, \( p < .005 \). Thus, assessments in Tertiary Preparation were significant factors in teaching and learning in Tertiary Preparation. Assessments were interesting and fun, relevant to future studies, and not boring.

A paired sample t-test on the level of difficulty of assessments in Tertiary Preparation and in high school generated means which were not statistically significantly different [HS \( M = 3.08 \), \( SD = .982 \), TPM = 3.38, \( SD .728 \)], \( t = 2.119, p > .038 \), higher than .05. The mean increases in the level of difficulty of assessments in TPC were only .296, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .017 to .574. The t-value obtained on the difficulty of assessments in Tertiary Preparation, compared to high school, was not statistically significant. The level of difficulty of assessments in high school and Tertiary Preparation was almost the same. The lower mean variation on the level of difficulty of assessments in Tertiary Preparation and in high school suggests that Tertiary Preparation is a genuine Year 12 equivalent credential, a ‘Second Chance’ education for students to complete their school education in NSW. This is an important finding, which is discussed in Chapter 6.
4.8.6 Teaching and learning: mean size effect analysis

To determine the degree of difference between the means obtained on paired variables, an effect size analysis was conducted (Eta squared) on each paired variable ($\frac{t^2}{t^2 + (N-1)}$). An Eta squared test shows the magnitude of the difference in the means obtained on paired variables (Pallant, 2011). Table 4.21 shows the Eta size effect on all paired variables tested. Table 4.23 shows the Eta size effect of three paired variables on students’ experience of teaching and learning in Tertiary Preparation compared to high school. Following the guidelines proposed by Cohen (1988, pp. 284-287 in Pallant, 2011, p. 247), on the value of size effects (.01 = small, .06 = moderate, .14 = large), with the exception of the level of difficulty of assessments in high school and in Tertiary Preparation, which had a moderate size effect, the Eta test on all other variables produced a large size effect. There was substantial difference in the mean on students’ experience of teaching and learning in Tertiary Preparation compared to high school. Thus, compared to high school, Tertiary Preparation, a second-chance opportunity, had distinctive features: positive student-teacher relations, educational support, interesting and relevant curriculum and assessments, and diverse pedagogic approaches that motivated and engaged students.
Table 4.21

Teaching and learning in high school and in Tertiary Preparation (eta squared – size effect)

TPC classes motivating and stimulating/I found high school classes motivating and stimulating

\[
(10.028)^2 \\
\frac{100.560784}{170.560784} = 0.58 \text{ a large size effect}
\]

Assessments in TPC were hard/Assessments in high school were hard

\[
(2.119)^2 \\
\frac{4.490161}{74.490161} = 0.06 \text{ a moderate size effect}
\]

Teachers in TPC had a genuine interest in individual students’ needs and requirements/Teachers in high school had a genuine interest in individual students’ needs and requirements

\[
(12.458)^2 \\
\frac{155.201764}{225.201764} = .68 \text{ large size effect}
\]

4.9 Student Learning Environment

Further analysis was conducted on the students’ learning environment, support and resources in high school and Tertiary Preparation, to gauge whether Tertiary Preparation had other features which influenced learning. As shown in Table 4.23, 23 paired variables were measured on students’ learning environment, support.
and resources in high school and in Tertiary Preparation. The paired variables were put to t-test to scope the significance of the mean scores obtained on the variables. The means were also put to an Eta size effect test (Phallant, 2011) to determine the size difference and significance, to test whether Tertiary Preparation had a distinctive learning environment, support and resources for student learning.

As shown in Table 4.22, the means obtained on all paired variables were higher in Tertiary Preparation than in high school. The increase in mean was substantial on almost all paired variables measured on students’ learning environment, support and resources in Tertiary Preparation compared to high school. The students’ learning environment, support and resources in high school and in Tertiary Preparation were categorised into six major groups. These included: (i) student support, (ii) student autonomy, (iii) student-teacher relations, (iv) friends and peer relations, (v) belonging/happiness and (vi) feeling safe and confident in learning. These results are presented next in this chapter.
Table 4.22

*Learning environment in high school and Tertiary Preparation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Autonomy/Decision making</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was able to negotiate timetable in HS</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>1.171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to negotiate timetable in TPC</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>1.093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to negotiate assessment tasks in HS</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to negotiate assessment tasks in TPC</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>1.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to get Tut Support in HS</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>1.210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to get Tutorial support in TPC</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>.790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to talk to counsellor when I needed to—HS</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>1.259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to talk to a counsellor when I needed—TPC</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>.768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students' views and needs were considered at HS</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ views and needs were considered at TPC</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>.765</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Relations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff at my HS apologised if they made mistakes</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>1.341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff in TPC apologised if they made mistakes</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>.582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in high school knew my name</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>1.141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in TPC knew my name</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>.591</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Friends and Peers</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My friends and I were treated fairly at school</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>1.207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends and I were treated fairly at TAFE</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>.753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I made friends easily at High School</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I made friends easily at TAFE</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>.818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I got support from my peers at high school</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>1.208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I got support from my peers at TAFE</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>.821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had lots of friends at High School</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>1.229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had lots of friends at TAFE</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>.903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of my friends liked studying at high school</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>1.119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of my friends liked studying TPC at TAFE</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>.853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends cared about doing well in high school</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>1.063</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most of my friends cared about doing well in TPC 4.31 .767

Belonging/Happiness and confidence at High School/TAFE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I felt lonely at TPC in TAFE</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>.959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt lonely at high school</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>1.534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt I belonged in TPC group at TAFE</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>.906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt like I belonged in a group at school</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>1.337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other students seemed to like me in TPC</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>.820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other students seemed to like me at HS</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>1.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruptions by other students affected my learning in high school</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>1.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruptions by other students affected my learning in TPC</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>1.124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often felt bored at TAFE</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>1.129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often felt bored at high school</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>1.417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In TAFE I did not feel ‘put down’ by other students</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>.940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At school I did not feel ‘put down’ by other students</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>1.294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not feel like an important part of school</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>1.222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not feel like an important part of TAFE</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>.881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was mostly happy doing TPC at TAFE</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>.797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was mostly happy being at school</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>1.301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not feel safe at high school</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>1.278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not feel safe at TAFE</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>.684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPC reduced my fear, uncertainty and lack of confidence</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>1.210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS reduced my fear, uncertainty and lack of confidence</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>1.129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 71
### Table 4.23

**Learning environment high school and Tertiary Preparation (t-tests)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Samples Test</th>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Eta</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Dev</td>
<td>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Autonomy/Decision making</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiated timetable in HS/Negotiated timetable in TPC</td>
<td>-1.718</td>
<td>1.278</td>
<td>-2.021</td>
<td>-1.416</td>
<td>11.327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiated assessment in HS/Negotiated assessment in TPC</td>
<td>-1.577</td>
<td>1.306</td>
<td>-1.886</td>
<td>-1.268</td>
<td>10.181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got Tutorial support in TPC/Got tute support in HS</td>
<td>2.155</td>
<td>1.600</td>
<td>1.776</td>
<td>2.534</td>
<td>11.346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talked to counsellor HS/Talked to counsellor TPC</td>
<td>1.408</td>
<td>1.369</td>
<td>1.084</td>
<td>1.732</td>
<td>8.670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student decisions in TPC/Student decisions in HS</td>
<td>1.718</td>
<td>1.466</td>
<td>1.371</td>
<td>2.065</td>
<td>9.879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Relations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in TPC knew my name/Teachers in high school knew my name</td>
<td>.746</td>
<td>1.227</td>
<td>.456</td>
<td>1.037</td>
<td>5.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff in TPC apologised for mistakes/Staff at HS apologised for mistakes</td>
<td>1.775</td>
<td>1.354</td>
<td>1.454</td>
<td>2.095</td>
<td>11.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends and Peers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends and I treated fairly at TAFE/Friends and I treated fairly at HS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I made friends easily at TAFE/I made friends easily at HS</td>
<td>1.493</td>
<td>1.413</td>
<td>1.159</td>
<td>1.827</td>
<td>8.903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I got support from my peers at TAFE/I got support from my peers at HS</td>
<td>.535</td>
<td>1.193</td>
<td>.253</td>
<td>.818</td>
<td>3.780</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I had lots of friends at TAFE/I had lots of friends at HS
My friends liked studying TPC/My friends liked studying at HS
My friends cared about doing well in TPC/My friends cared about doing well in HS

Belonging/Happiness and confidence at High School/TAFE

I felt lonely at HS/I felt lonely at TPC
Belonged in a group in HS/Belonged in a group at TPC
Other Students liked me in HS/Other students liked me at TPC
Disruptions affected learning in HS/Disruptions affected learning in TPC
I often felt bored at HS/I often felt bored at TAFE
Did not feel put down by students in TPC/Did not feel put down HS
Did not feel like important part of HS/Did not feel like important TAFE
Happy doing TPC at TAFE/Happy being at school
I did not feel safe at HS/I did not feel safe at TAFE
TPC reduced fear/lack of confidence/HS reduced fear/lack of confidence

*p < 0.001 N = 71
4.9.1 Student support

In Tertiary Preparation, students received greater educational support, such as, tutorial support and at TAFE could talk to a counsellor more so than in high school. T-tests showed a significant increase in mean on student support in Tertiary Preparation compared to high school [high school $M = 2.37, SD = 1.210$, TP $M = 4.52, SD = .790$], $[t 11.346, p < .000, lower than .05]$ [Mean increase 2.155, range 1.776-2.534]. The mean on student educational support in Tertiary Preparation was statistically significant, suggesting the availability of greater student support in Tertiary Preparation than in high school.

4.9.2 Student autonomy

In Tertiary Preparation, students had autonomy or individual agency in their learning. They made their own educational decisions, and teachers in Tertiary Preparation treated students more fairly than did teachers in high school. A t-test on the variable Students’ views and needs were considered when decisions were made at high school and in Tertiary Preparation showed a significant increase in mean in Tertiary Preparation, compared to high school, [HSM = 2.68, SD = 1.093, TPM = 4.39, SD = .765], $[t 9.879, p < .000$ less than .05] [Mean increase 1.718, range 1.371-2.065]. In Tertiary Preparation the results showed a higher probability of student autonomous decision making in learning than they did in high school.

4.9.3 Teacher Relations

The data were computed to compare student support in Tertiary Preparation and high school with reference to student-teacher relations. The results indicate that students had relationships with their teachers in Tertiary Preparation that were more positive than those with teachers in their former high school. A t-test was conducted
on the variable, *Staff at my high school apologised to students if they made mistakes/Staff in Tertiary Preparation apologised to students if they made mistakes.*

The results showed a significant increase in the mean in Tertiary Preparation compared to high school, \[ \text{HS } M = 2.73, \text{ SD } = 1.371, \text{ TP } M = 4.51, \text{ SD } = .582 \] \[ t = 11.041, p < .000 \text{ less than .05} \]. \[ \text{Mean increase } 1.775, \text{ range } 1.454-2.075. \]

### 4.9.4 Friends and Peers

Students’ making friends and student popularity in high school and in Tertiary Preparation were not significant factors in students’ *learning environment, support and resources’* in high school and in Tertiary Preparation. T-tests were conducted on related variables: *I had lots of friends at TAFE/’I had lots of friends at high school.* The mean obtained on the two paired variables was not significant \[ \text{HS } M = 3.48, \text{ SD } = 1.229, \text{ TP } M = 3.89, \text{ SD } = .903 \] \[ t = 2.638, p = .010 \text{ more than an alpha value of .05} \], \[ \text{Mean } .408, \text{ range, } .100-717 \]. These results indicate that the mean on student popularity in Tertiary Preparation was not statistically significantly different from the mean on student popularity at high school. Thus, the results indicate that having many friends and being popular might not contribute to students’ learning and completing education in high school or in Tertiary Preparation. However, a t-test analysis on other academic paired variables, on students’ friends and peers in high school and Tertiary Preparation, showed statistically a larger and more significant variance in the means obtained in Tertiary Preparation than in high school. *‘My friends liked studying in TP/My friends liked studying at HS’* \[ \text{HS } M = 2.48, \text{ SD } = 1.110, \text{ TP } M = 3.96, \text{ SD } = .853 \] \[ t = 8.637, p = .000 \text{ less than an alpha value of .05} \]. *‘My friends cared about doing well in TP/My friends cared about doing well in HS’* produced \[ \text{HS } M = 3.11, \text{ SD } = 1.063, \text{ TP } M = 4.31, \text{ SD } = .767 \] \[ t = 8.836, p = .000, \text{ less than an alpha value of .05} \]. The results suggest that in high school,
students’ friends and peers did not like studying and did not care about doing well. In Tertiary Preparation, students’ friends and peers liked studying and cared about doing well. Thus, in school, students had friends and peers to socialise with. In Tertiary Preparation, students had friends and peers for learning and doing well.

4.9.5 Belonging/Happiness

A sense of belonging, happiness and feeling safe were other key factors that influenced students in their learning environment, support and resources in high school and in Tertiary Preparation. A t-test was conducted to evaluate the means on how students ‘felt about belonging in a group at high school and in Tertiary Preparation and students’ ‘happiness’ and sense of ‘feeling safe’. The results are shown in Table 4.24: there was a significant increase in the means on the paired variables in Tertiary Preparation over that in high school.
Table 4.24

Belonging and happiness in high school and in Tertiary Preparation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>High School</th>
<th>TPC</th>
<th>T-score</th>
<th>Mean Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>High school M = 3.41, SD = 1.337</td>
<td>TPC M = 4.25, SD = .906</td>
<td><em>t (5.160), p&lt; .000</em></td>
<td>.845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>High school M = 2.63, SD = 1.301</td>
<td>TPC M = 4.37, SD = .797</td>
<td><em>T (9.315) p &lt; .000</em></td>
<td>1.732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of not feeling safe</td>
<td>High school M = 2.28, SD = 1.278</td>
<td>TPC M = 1.38, SD = .684</td>
<td><em>t(-6.106) p &lt; .000</em></td>
<td>-.901</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < .001

4.9.6 Student confidence and feelings

Another two key factors that possibly influenced how students felt about their learning environment, support and resources in high school and in Tertiary Preparation was ‘student confidence’ and ‘feelings’. A paired samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the scores of students on how they felt about high school and Tertiary Preparation in ‘reducing their fear, uncertainty and lack of confidence’, on whether they felt like ‘an important part of high school and Tertiary Preparation’ at TAFE and whether they felt lonely. A paired t-test was also done on whether students felt being put down by other students at high school and at TAFE, and whether students felt bored.

As shown in Table 4.25, the t-tests results showed that Tertiary Preparation reduced students’ fear, uncertainty and lack of confidence; further, at TAFE, students did not feel ‘put down’ by other students and they did not feel ‘bored’ and lonely; they
did feel like they were an important part of Tertiary Preparation. In contrast, the results indicate that in school students felt *lonely, fearful, bored, put down by other students* and did not feel *an important part of school*. Thus, the results indicate students having a sense of belonging more in Tertiary Preparation than at high school.
Table 4.25

Student confidence and feelings in high school and in Tertiary Preparation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>High School</th>
<th>TPC</th>
<th>T-score/p value</th>
<th>Mean Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Confidence (HS/TP Reduced fear, uncertainty, lack of confidence)</td>
<td>HS $M = 2.69$ $SD = 1.129$</td>
<td>TPC $M = 3.63$ $SD = 1.210$</td>
<td>$t (5.160), p&lt; .000$</td>
<td>.944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student feelings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt lonely in HS/TP</td>
<td>HS $M = 2.70$ $SD = 1.534$</td>
<td>TPC $M = 1.72$ $SD = .959$</td>
<td>$t (5.160), p&lt; .000$</td>
<td>.986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not feel ‘Put down’ in HS/TP</td>
<td>HS $M = 3.20$ $SD = 1.294$</td>
<td>TPC $M = 4.27$ $SD = .940$</td>
<td>$t (5.160), p&lt; .000$</td>
<td>1.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not feel important in HS/TP</td>
<td>HS $M = 3.14$ $SD = 1.222$</td>
<td>TPC $M = 1.90$ $SD = .881$</td>
<td>$t (5.160), p&lt; .000$</td>
<td>1.239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt bored at HS/TP</td>
<td>HS $M = 3.63$ $SD = 1.417$</td>
<td>TPC $M = 2.31$ $SD = 1.129$</td>
<td>$t (5.160), p&lt; .000$</td>
<td>1.324</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**$p < .000$**

4.9.7 Student learning environment: mean size effect analysis

The difference between the means obtained on paired variables on students’ learning environment, support and resources in high school and in Tertiary Preparation was tested using the Eta squared test (Phallant, 2011). The Eta size effects are shown in Table 4.26, and Etas on three selected variables are presented in Table 4.28. The two paired variables, ‘I had lots of friends at TAFE/I Had lots of friends at HS’ and ‘Other Students liked me in TPC/Other students liked me at HS’ had small to moderate sized effects. The Eta test on all other variables produced a large size effect, showing a substantial difference in the means obtained on students’ learning environment, support and resources in high school compared to Tertiary Preparation. Most of the 15 paired variables had a large size effect, and 10 paired
variables had an Eta squared value of .50 and above. Thus, the large degree in mean
difference in students’ *learning environment, support and resources* in high school
and in Tertiary Preparation further confirms that compared to high school, Tertiary
Preparation, a second-chance opportunity, had distinctive features in respect of its
learning *environment, support and resources*, that motivated and engaged students
to study and complete school.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning environment in high school and in Tertiary Preparation (Eta squared—size effect)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negotiated assessment tasks and due dates HS/Negotiated assessment tasks and due dates TPC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| \[
\frac{(10.181)^2}{(10.181)^2 + 71-1} = \frac{103.652761}{103.652761 + 71-1} = \frac{103.652761}{173.652761} = 0.59 \text{ (a large size effect)}
\] |
| Received tutorial support in TPC/Received tutorial support in HS |
| \[
\frac{(11.346)^2}{(11.346)^2 + 71-1} = \frac{128.731716}{128.731716 + 71-1} = \frac{128.731716}{198.731716} = 0.64 \text{ (a large size effect)}
\] |
| Student views and needs considered in decision making in TPC/Student views and needs considered in decision making in HS |
| \[
\frac{(9.987)^2}{(9.987)^2 + 71-1} = \frac{99.740169}{99.740169 + 71-1} = \frac{99.740169}{169.740169} = 0.58 \text{ (a large size effect)}
\] |
4.10 Summary

This chapter has furnished results in response to research question 1: Why do students in Western Sydney NSW, Australia leave high school early? The chapter has also informed the results to address the third research question: What are the individual student factors and features of the Tertiary Preparation environment that make it effective for students to complete the equivalent of high school education?

One group of students had left school early before completing Year 12 (57%); slightly more than a quarter (28%) had completed their Year 12, Higher School Certificate Examination (HSC) but did not get the required marks for university study, so re-engaged to complete their Year 12 equivalent qualification or to improve their grades through Tertiary Preparation at TAFE, for university entry. All students in this study came from Western Sydney suburbs. More female students than males re-engaged; however, there was no statistical difference between gender and re-engagement.

In addition, more females than males completed Tertiary Preparation; there was no statistical association between gender and completion. Tertiary Preparation is a second-chance education opportunity for all students. There was no statistical association between early school leavers and Year 12 completers who also completed Tertiary Preparation. Among the early school leavers, 60% completed Tertiary Preparation. Thus, completion by early school leavers was high. Slightly more than a quarter of the students (28%) had a part-time job but would have preferred to spend more time on their studies and work less hours, for better academic results. The majority of the students had set their career goals.

The key factors that influenced early school leaving included: student-teacher relationship were adverse; students felt alienated; deficient educational support;
scholastic factors (school subjects and assessments) were not perceived to be interesting, relevant and fun; pedagogic approaches in teaching and learning were limited; and emotional engagement (not belonging/not feeling happy) at school also influenced early school leaving. Family relations and personal attributes were not significant in influencing early leaving. Thus, these key factors explored the research question: Why do students leave school early?

The major reason for re-engagement was to study at university. Tertiary Preparation provided a Year 12 credential and academic skills, and was a preferred option for university entry. In Tertiary Preparation, students perceived positive student-teacher relationships and there was educational support. Students liked the diverse pedagogic approaches and the subjects and assessments were interesting, fun, provided them with skills, were relevant for further studies and were not boring. The levels of difficulty of assessments in Tertiary Preparation were equivalent to high school; this indicated that Tertiary Preparation was perceived to be a genuine second-chance opportunity, a high school equivalent qualification, and not a dumping ground for early school leavers.

The students in Tertiary Preparation were motivated and interested in learning. The key features of the Learning environment in Tertiary Preparation included students being able to get tutorial support and access a careers counsellor. Tertiary Preparation also provided fairness, and students’ views and needs were considered in decision making. Thus, students had autonomy/individual agency at TAFE, which motivated them to learn.

Peer relations for academic purposes provided a vital educational network in Tertiary Preparation. In the TAFE environment, students did not feel ‘put down’ by other students, and they were not bored, did not feel lonely, and were happy to study.
Students felt that they were part of TAFE, and the TAFE environment reduced their fears, uncertainties and lack of confidence. The research data shows that student factors such as high motivation and engagement with learning in Tertiary Preparation, and the key features of the Tertiary Preparation environment, were effective in enabling students to complete their high school equivalent education. Thus, this answers research question 3. The results from the quantitative data in this chapter are further elaborated upon with examination of the qualitative study reported in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5

Data Analysis and Results—Qualitative

Introduction

This chapter presents analysis and results of the qualitative research to provide a better understanding and knowledge of early school leaving and re-engagement. The qualitative study findings elaborate upon the results of the quantitative study presented in Chapter 4, with a focus on answering the research questions. The qualitative approach is significant as it provides scope for in-depth analysis of a broader methodological dimension, to see the relationships in the mixed methods research data sets and to help explain the results. The qualitative research provided the basis for a phenomenographic methodological research approach to studying early school leaving and re-engagement as conceived and interpreted by students. The qualitative method employed provides a good opportunity for triangulation (Arthur, et al., 2012). Triangulation involves analysing a phenomenon from multiple perspectives. Qualitative study involves asking a student of his or her perception of early school leaving and re-engagement and then triangulating it, to validate or verify the response of the student with other students’ perceptions and explanations of early school leaving and re-engagement, to have a clear understating and to uncover the deeper meaning of the data. The
data, classified into categories of descriptions following the conventions of phenomenographic conceptual theory, were developed into three major themes:

(i) Interpersonal relationships (relatedness) and educational support
(ii) Disengaging curriculum, assessments, and pedagogic dimensions
(iii) Family and personal attributes.

The students’ responses on early school leaving and re-engagement are shown in Table 5.1 and Table 5.2.

These themes are used to answer the three research questions further along with the quantitative results presented in Chapter 4. The 19 interviews were conducted with a sub-group of students surveyed in the quantitative study, who were selected on the basis that they had left school early. The results of the students’ interviews on early school leaving are presented first; re-engagement through Tertiary Preparation at TAFE is reported next. Students’ career goals, problems, and the issues they experienced while studying at TAFE, are also included in this chapter.

5.1 Early School Leaving

The interview results on early school leaving are presented first.

5.1.1 Demographic Background of early school leavers

All 19 early school leavers who participated in the qualitative study were from the disadvantaged low socio-economic areas of Western Sydney in New South Wales, Australia. Nearly two third of the students (63%) were female and 37% were male. More than half of the participants (53%) were less than 18 years old. Many school leavers were young, due to the low school leaving age, which was 16 when these students left school. More than half of all males and one-third of females had worked full-time after leaving school.
More than half (53%) of early leavers completed Year 10, and 31% completed Year 11. Another 16% completed a TAFE Certificate II. A large percentage of early school leavers had been inspired to complete the Year 12 equivalent Tertiary Preparation at TAFE. This shows that dropping out of school is not necessarily a failure to complete school.

5.1.2 Interpersonal relationships (relatedness) and educational support

School factors influenced early school leaving. In school, alienating student-teacher relationships and student-peer relations, influenced early school leaving. The students’ perceptions of teacher authority in class, of the lack of ‘care’ by teachers, of teacher ‘favouritism’ and students being treated like ‘children’, are factors that were identified as adverse to building positive student-teacher relationships. Teacher favouritism of some students, or bias in school, prevented some students from forming positive teacher-student relationships. These negative perceptions of teachers could have led to student alienation and withdrawal from school. Student A and Student I commented on teacher bias and favouritism.

**Student A:** A couple of the teachers were really helpful but a few of them showed more favouritism and they would help a certain student rather than the rest and like one of the teachers, my religion teacher he had a grudge against me because he didn’t like my cousin or my brother, so I remember like one day in class he like purposely went after me and when I said my view on something, as many other students did, he kept on arguing about my point, and he kept on bringing me down which I ended up talking to my mum and we nearly talked to the school about it. Yeah, well yeah with that teacher especially, he just undermines me. I didn’t like asking questions in the class, I was always embarrassed and if the teacher asked something that he said a minute ago and you did not know, it would just be like you sounded like the stupid person because you didn’t know what something meant.

**Student I:** I had problems with my year advisor There was something like that she had her favourites and she take interest and she wouldn’t take interest in others. Teachers were very strict and eh and like if you asked questions
then they wouldn’t help you eh they just give you a look like well why you were not listening or so yah.

The students also expressed that teachers did not care and lacked enthusiasm to teach, were unfriendly and unapproachable. The following two students confirmed these views:

**Student G:** Well I guess I mainly left because I was very unfocussed at the time, my head was not in one place. And also the teachers, I felt they were being hostile towards me probably because yeah. They didn’t really approach me as friendly and helpful really, and like I don’t know, after a while, because I was a bit of a naughty boy, they just got sick of me really.

**Student N:** Teachers in high school are unfriendly and treat the students like children

Due to alienating student-teacher and peer relations in school, students lacked affective or emotional engagement. Students felt that they did not belong or were not part of school. They felt alienated and lacked bonding at school, especially with their teachers, and were distracted by other students in the classroom. Although, in the quantitative study, not all variables tested on students’ affective engagement at school were positively correlated, the students’ affective disengagement with school was evident in the qualitative data. All students echoed that they were not happy at school. The same students also strongly agreed that they were not happy at school in the quantitative study. The notion of not being happy at school was strong when students commented that they either felt alienated after losing their friends and their social bonding, or they were disturbed by other students and lacked teacher support, which affected their learning. Student A expressed her sense of unhappiness:

**Student A:** All the time. I didn’t like school, I was not happy, the only reason I was at school was because I had the support from my friends and that’s why I left because I didn’t have that anymore. It was an effort to go.
Student L commented that school was a common ground for social bonding and if social bonding were disrupted, students felt unhappy and alienated from school.

**Student L.** Yeah the only reason you are there, I think most of your school friends, the only reason you are friends is because you’ve got school in common.

Student J commented on peer group disparities, losing social bonding, jealousy and intimidation by other students:

**Student J:** Main reason for leaving was fight over my best friend yah. Throughout high school I didn’t feel like fitting with friends. People didn’t like me. Eh there was immaturity of students and they didn’t care about what they say or did. There were peer group differences. Eh there was own groups of students based on races like Asian students and Aussies and mixed group of people and eh they didn’t like other students like me and some of my friends. Yeh my friends changed groups others didn’t like. There was bullying and girls were threatening. There was problem of relationships and jealousy. But I had problem with my best friend and there was internet intimidation. There was fight on Facebook. My best friend changed groups for some reason that I didn’t even know and started to spread rumours about me.

During the interviews, the students commented that large class sizes and ‘distractions’ affected their learning. One of the barriers to students’ engagement was disruption caused by other students. Student N and Student J described how their attempts at engaging with learning were thwarted by other students’ disruptive behaviour. Student J also implied that students were forced to go to school:

**Student N:** I just felt like the class distractions and stuff just preventing me from being able to knuckle down the whole thing. Eh, there were many people and like they would um act bad. I suppose and so teachers’ focus was all on them and not focussing on teaching us and actually teaching us the information that we needed.
Student J: School was disruptive. Students didn’t want to be there but had to be there.

Thus, general distraction by peers and a lack of connection with teachers at school caused early school leaving.

Lack of educational support in school was one of the most significant factors that possibly influenced early school leaving. A lack of explanation, support and help from teachers were cited as key barriers to active engagement. Detailed explanations and guidance from the teacher are crucial, to motivate and engage students. For students to be engaged in learning, they must know and understand what they are learning and what the purpose of learning is. Many participants indicated that their teachers did not ‘explain’ the work or task that was to be completed. Approximately 90% of the students reported a lack of ‘support’ and ‘help’ from their teachers with assessments and classroom activities.

Student D commented:

Student D: Because I just couldn’t learn, like the teachers they just weren’t very good. They didn’t really, they kind of just taught you like said what they had to say and if you didn’t understand them they just didn’t care kind of thing. Like if you didn’t understand it they were just like oh well ... understand it, you have to understand it. Oh, teachers ... can choose who they like and they target people and really—because if they don’t like you then they won’t help you and that.

Students had difficulty completing assessments when teachers spent limited time with students, teachers were inaccessible, unhelpful and discouraging. Most students completed assessments by themselves with no assistance from their teachers. The students could not contact their teachers for help, except in the
classroom when they were told to complete the assigned work. Student I and Student F commented on lack of educational support from teachers.

**Student I:** There is not much help in school. Teachers just give you work to do. There is no encouragement given to you to do the work.

**Student F:** In school there was not much help from teachers, like teachers will not explain everything clearly. You cannot ask questions and it was hard to find teachers. You cannot show your drafts to them. It was hard to get tutoring.

Almost three quarters of the students expressed concerns about a lack of ‘explanation’ of content and assessments. Student R did not get support:

**Student R:** I asked a question, I was told to go and look it up on Google because I did not understand something.

From the participants’ responses, lack of educational support and help from teachers contributed to the decision to leave school early. There are many possible reasons why some students experienced a lack of educational support. In most high schools in NSW, the school structure and classroom practices impede educational support in the classroom. Educational restructuring in NSW and in other states in Australia has resulted in a lack of funding and in casualization, reducing full-time teacher employment; also in curriculum reform and increased student-teacher ratios in comprehensive high schools. Teacher workload, administrative accountability, standardised tests, common curricula, teaching standards, and transparency requirements pressure teachers to teach many subjects and classes within a constrained time. The teacher teaches many classes on a regular school day and, as a result, is unable to provide effective support and guidance to students outside classroom sessions. Teachers mostly help students in the classroom whilst teaching.
Generally, in schools, more emphasis is on the coverage of the curricula rather than on effective student-teacher interaction. Apart from face-to-face delivery, the teacher is under constant pressure to meet the syllabus requirements, assess students, write reports, administer and manage student behaviour, address classroom issues, especially student discipline, carry out playground duty and adhere to school administration.

In most high schools, students are helped with a support teacher either in the student’s classroom or in a different location in school (support classroom). This support is given mostly in junior school years (Year 7 and Year 8). As students get into the middle years of schooling (Year 10), there is less student support. This approach can exacerbate the problem of learning difficulties, contribute to poor classroom behaviour and undermine student-teacher relationships.

In this study, a lack of positive and meaningful student-teacher relationships, and poor educational support, appeared to be determinants in the decision to leave school early. The next section draws upon students’ narratives, to examine how student-teacher relations and lack of educational support affected students’ academic engagement with school curriculum and assessments.

5.1.3 Disengaging curriculum and assessments/Pedagogic dimensions

The students’ academic engagement; the school curriculum or subjects, and school assessments exerted influence on early school leaving. Some students did not like the school curriculum. Nearly one third described school curriculum (subjects) as ‘boring’. School subjects were hard and not ‘relevant’ to many students. Student E and Student M commented on school curriculum.

**Student E**: there was no problem in school but the curriculum was boring. I didn’t like geography, cooking, metal work. It was not relevant. I liked computers and commerce. I want to study forensic.
**Student M**: School subjects were not interesting. Not really. It was just like at work to me really, just like a boring job that you had to turn up. I wasn’t really interested in any of the things that were taught at school.

**Student B**: Subjects were boring, besides PE, PE was fun.

**Student O**: Sports was good. It was fun and I didn’t mind.

Further, a lack of student autonomy in decision making on school curriculum and subjects contributed to academic disengagement. A limited range of subjects was offered, and students perceived that they had no opportunity to make their decisions on what subjects they wanted to study, or to change a given subject to study. Student E and Student F commented on subject choice.

**Student E**: There are no options to what subjects to choose. You do what subjects are given to you.

**Student F**: I suppose there was not a lot of range and if you had to eh if you wanted to change a subject that was a pretty big deal like you didn’t have much choice but eh do what you have to do.

Many students were interested in studying a variety of subjects, and wanted to make an autonomous decision to study, but did not get an opportunity. In NSW, most high schools offer a cluster of subjects that is mainly traditional, academic subjects; sometimes there are timetable or staffing constraints to offering specific subjects or subjects of interest to meet individual student needs. The NSW high school curriculum is broad, and students mostly study the common academic subjects. Some students take a vocational pathway, but subject choice and programmes of study could be limited due to timetable and staffing constraints in schools. In such cases, a student may not be able to study a desired subject or a vocational programme of study. This was perhaps the key reason that students found
school subjects not relevant or boring: they did not have much autonomy in subject choice.

Student academic disengagement was possibly caused by a lack of explanation of assessments, of teacher support and help with assessments. Students were expected to complete the assessments themselves with minimal or no teacher support. Inflexibility with assessment and exam times, frequent assessments, and homework being due simultaneously for each subject, subjects being perceived as boring and not interesting, big class sizes and ‘distractions’ in classrooms, all perhaps contributed to academic disengagement at school.

School assessments and exams appeared to influence early leaving. Almost 50% of the students expressed that school assessments were hard, were not explained clearly, and that no examples were shown. Two thirds of the students reported that they could not understand the assessments and did not get help from teachers. Other students found exams difficult. Students C, B and Student E commented on assessments:

**Student C:** Assessments were hard and I didn’t know what to do.

**Student B:** Assessments were fine, it was just exams, they are terrible.

**Student E:** Assessments are passed on to do and you do it and give to the teachers. If it is wrong then you can’t do anything.

Some students perceived that they were over-assessed. Some students were anxious about the prospect of gaining a lower than expected ATAR in the Year 12 exam to study at university, due to lack of support with assessments. This perhaps disengaged them. Student B felt this way.

**Student B:** I want to do psychology in uni. I felt that if I stayed in school that I wouldn’t get the mark to be able to do—and they also brought in that ranking system so you don’t get your own actual mark.
The participants in the interviews reported that the teaching methods in school did not engage them, and that this influenced their decision to leave school early.

In high school, the students submitted to teacher-driven pedagogy. Teaching methods such as writing notes from textbooks, overheads and boards were not perceived by students as conducive to engaged learning. The delivery of ‘information’ only, did not engage them. Among many respondents, Student B and Student C described classroom teaching thus:

**Student B:** Just like the way it was delivered like you just write things exactly, like they will write things on the board, you copy it from the board. You are reading it word for word. My science teacher would just write things on the board and give you about five minutes to go through it and then she would just write the answers. She would never explain it. Just kind of engaging rather than writing on the board and expecting you to know it. Like explaining it, explaining how to work things out, explaining what it means, going over it in detail rather than just skimming over it. If I knew what was going on it would have been a lot easier.

**Student C:** If you were confused they basically would just put up overheads and tell you to copy it down into your book and that’s what they would do. When it comes to around like test times and it wouldn’t make any sense. The assessments and stuff were hard but I think I found it more hard because of their method of teaching.

From the account of participants, pedagogic approaches did not give much time to students to learn. With better pedagogic design and instructions, teachers would have possibly enhanced student learning experiences and would have encouraged them to apply deeper level of processing strategies such as evaluating their learning, creating or applying knowledge.
Students’ responses showed that the pedagogic approaches in the classroom were teacher-centred and not student-teacher-centred. A lack of student autonomy and discourse in classroom contexts did not engage students in learning; many students expressed that they could not ‘talk’, ‘ask questions’ or ‘discuss’ in classroom. The students complied with teacher instructions and completed the task. A direct teacher instruction did not allow student autonomy and constructive learning. The students were only passive learners in the classroom. Student K commented on what she described as a submissive form of learning:

Student K: In school, you don’t look at books. Only do work in class that the teacher tells you to do.

A more collaborative classroom pedagogic approach would enhance student motivation and engagement. The teachers should perhaps have changed their professional practice and pedagogic approaches by using a variety of teaching methods, adopting diverse teaching and learning styles tailored to individual students, so that they understood the purpose of the tasks they were completing. This would have enhanced their learning experience.

The participants in the study felt that more innovative teaching practices in the classroom would have helped. This, in their view, would consist of detailed explanation of the process and concepts, and a more analytical approach being adopted by teachers. The students’ comments implied that effective teaching methods would also incorporate involving the students in discussion and group work, welcoming questions from students, asking the students questions, and teachers answering student questions in class. Giving more time for instructions, and time for students to complete tasks would also enhance learning. A more interactive pedagogic approach with the teacher, praise and appreciation of student work, would have been helpful for student engagement.
As discussed in the previous categories, accountability, the school curriculum, standards and managerial issues are recurring problems for the teacher in most high schools in NSW. The pedagogic approaches used by teachers are guided by standard curriculum and assessments, by the school timetable and the teacher involved with extra-curricular duties; this perhaps limits the teachers’ implementation of more flexible pedagogic approaches in the classroom.

The next section discusses the students’ family relations and personal attributes influencing early school leaving.

5.1.4 Family relations and personal attributes

Family issues, especially a lack of parental education, affected most students. The research participants were mostly from families with low levels of education. Although one third (33%) of both parents had completed a university degree, nearly half of the parents (46%) had completed some of high school up to Year 10, and another 21% had completed Year 12. Thus, almost half of the parents were also early school leavers, and two thirds did not have a higher level qualification such as a university degree. Lack of parental education, especially higher education, possibly impeded students completing school. For some students, there was a lack of encouragement from parents. Student E explained:

**Student E:** I finished Year 10. Wanted to do Year 12 but parents would not allow. My mum finished Year 10 and dad only finished primary school. They could not pay fees. Expenses were high and my sister finished Year 12 but did not get anything out of it. My father was always against me going to school. My principal asked me if he could talk to my parents. My parents thought I could go to TAFE and do a Certificate to get a job. I wanted to do office job like doing Certificate 111 in legal administration and then after that do TPC.
Research evidence shows that students who come from families where both parents have completed school, have a higher tendency to complete school, compared to students whose parents have not (Lamb et al., 2004). Research also confirms that school completion and transition to further education is better for students whose parents have completed a university degree (Curtis & McMillan, 2008).

The level of parental education is a strong predictor of school completion. Parental attitudes to schooling have a significant influence on students’ engagement with learning, and family encouragement of students’ learning increases motivation to achieve academically. In this study, the research participants, despite coming from families with low levels of education, had a strong intention to re-engage with education and to complete school for better educational pathways and employment. Generational educational disadvantage is not an impediment to education and learning. The early school leavers broke the cycle of educational disadvantage and led the way to further study and employment. They have set a precedent for future generations’ educational achievement and success.

The research participants’ post-school pathways and re-engagement through a second-chance education are discussed next.

5.2 Post-school pathways

All early school leavers in the qualitative study had a post-school pathway. A few students took up employment either part-time or full-time after leaving school. All 19 students had a strong desire to complete school, and enrolled to study Tertiary Preparation at TAFE within a year after leaving school. Thus, early leaving is not necessarily related to disengagement and non-completion. Some students realised that Tertiary Preparation was an alternative and equivalent qualification to Year 12. Student A expressed a strong desire to complete school:
Student A: Because I heard that it was like the HSC equivalent and I was ... because I didn’t get to complete my HSC because of stupid reasons, but I wanted to complete it and I wanted to have that education and everything to be able to put down on resumes and like in the future if I ever wanted to go to university like I would have that qualification or the background or anything which at the moment I don’t.

Student G expressed the desire for self-realisation of his potential, and willingness to re-engage with education through Tertiary Preparation after leaving school:

Student G: Yeah, because TP as you know is an equivalent to HSC and yeah I guess—Yeah, I wanted to do it and I wanted to complete it, it’s just so, give me a wide variety of things that I could do. Yeah, open opportunities. Yeah, help me focus a bit more with my literacy and mathematics because I personally think I was never too bad at that.

A similar argument on re-engagement with education through Tertiary Preparation was developed by Student L.

Student L: I decided eventually that retail wasn’t what I wanted to be for the rest of my life. I decided I wanted to join the Air Force. I want to go in as an officer, because I want to be a pilot but for officer entry you have to have your HSC, so then basically I thought I’d have a crack at that.

All students who were interviewed in the study completed Tertiary Preparation and were ready for further studies at TAFE or university, or to get into employment. Some students planned to get into employment, and then pursue further studies. The students’ re-engagement through Tertiary Preparation is presented next.
5.3 Re-engagement through Tertiary Preparation at TAFE

From the interviews on student re-engagement through Tertiary Preparation, various categories of information emerged, which were developed into three key themes:

(i) Positive student-teacher and peer relations and educational support

(ii) The Tertiary Preparation learning environment.

(iii) Engaging curriculum, assessments and pedagogy.

Each theme developed from interview data was a specific, intrinsic feature of Tertiary Preparation that enhanced students’ learning. The specific themes on re-engagement are discussed in Chapter 6. The phenomenographic research approach outlined in Chapter 2 is applied in the analysis of the data and results on re-engagement.

In the narrative accounts given by the participants in the interviews, many students were determined, and strove to complete school with re-engagement through Tertiary Preparation. Some studied Tertiary Preparation due to past impediments and regrets about not completing school. They developed a sense of self-determination, and re-engaged. For some students’ family circumstances such as lack of education among family members was a reason to re-engage. Others aspired for a career change or get a better job and thus re-engaged. The excerpts from interviews below suggest that a desire to transition to a more secure career in the labour market, motivated students to re-engage. The narratives provided useful insights into the historic lack of participation in education across generations. One of the respondents, Student A, indicated that this was not because of lack of aspiration or interest in education, but because she lacked opportunity and impediments at school affected her education.
Student A: I always wanted to complete school but I couldn’t complete my HSC because of stupid reasons and I am the first person in our family to complete it, so yeah, my cousins or my grandparents, no one has ever done anything, so it is nice to have that history, yeah.

Allied to the cross-generational lack of participation in education among many families is the vulnerability and high risk behaviours that lead to a cycle of poverty, drug abuse and a threat to wellbeing and general mental health. A young man’s account captures these behaviours poignantly in his description of his experience.

Student G: I was really unfocussed, I was doing a bit of drugs and I was doing a lot of drinking. I fell into depression and I wasn’t really happy and I wanted to fix myself up and actually give myself a little bit more purpose than just a Centrelink bum really.

Naturally, not all young people succumb to drug abuse and depression, but without good qualifications, many become trapped in work they perceive as menial and de-motivating. Fortunately, some young people take action by undertaking further study, in order to gain the skills required for them to pursue their career of choice, as in the case of Student L.

Student L: I decided eventually that retail wasn’t what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.

5.3.1 Positive student-teacher and peer relations, and educational support

In Tertiary Preparation, students and teachers developed an open, democratic and collaborative relationship. Student-teacher relationships were positive, and teachers were enthusiastic about teaching and supporting the students with their learning. The narratives of students informed many positive student-teacher relationships.
Positive student-teacher relations reinforced students’ engagement in learning, and they valued the relationships they had with their teachers. The TAFE environment provided space and encouraged autonomous learning and motivated students to learn. The relationships were friendly, open, welcoming and encouraging, which instigated intrinsic motivation and created an ethos of learning among students. The student-teacher relations had many positive aspects. In the quantitative study the variables teacher enthusiasm to teach, teacher support/help and care for students, welcoming, teacher friendliness, teacher availability/immediacy and teacher encouragement, obtained higher means in Tertiary Preparation than in high school. These variables had a high mean on Tertiary Preparation, and also had high mean variation between high school and Tertiary Preparation.

Students described teachers’ preparedness for teaching sessions as an indicator of teacher enthusiasm to teach. Preparedness for teaching was demonstrated through the materials and the appropriate strategies the teachers used that engaged students in learning. Student L described teacher enthusiasm to teach:

**Student L:** In some of the classes and stuff and gear they have got in science labs and some of the practicals in physics are amazing. Um, to make sure his (the teacher) resources are good and for the students he makes a lot of gear himself. So we can use that, it is fantastic. He is good. He is genuinely excited about teaching and about what he is teaching. And that is a massive difference.

Teachers in TAFE had greater perceived commitment to teach, which students appreciated. This perhaps created better relations between teachers and students.

In Tertiary Preparation, teachers used a variety of methods, and prepared resources to engage students. In high school, teachers gave out information and wrote it on the board, and students copied from the board or overheads. In Tertiary
Preparation, the teachers employed or used democratic pedagogic approaches, with diverse and innovative strategies to teach the content; discussions, group work, review of concepts and ideas, questioning and encouraging research, answering students’ questions, critical thinking and writing, and verbal presentations. The broad pedagogic dimension possibly developed student confidence and dialogue with the teachers. Student A expressed how the teacher explained the content.

**Student A:** They can be just more engaged with the content which I didn’t feel like that happened in high school as much.

The teachers knew the content well, and the associated learning outcomes expected. They ensured that all students understood what was taught, with clear instructions, continuous revision and tutorial support. Teachers ensured that no student was behind in their work, and they answered students’ questions. Student C excitedly expressed how the teacher supported and helped her.

**Student C:** I liked the fact that at TAFE the teachers get into their work and stuff. If you get stuck then you have them, like you can ask questions and they will answer you and not get mad. And there are tutorials and stuff like that. There is a lot of revision classes so if you fall behind in anything they will help you pick back up and get right up where you need to be.

The comments of Student C suggest that teachers showed commitment, were empathetic towards their students, gave support, helped, cared and showed consideration and trust, which further enhanced positive student-teacher relationships.

In Tertiary Preparation, teachers provided educational support, pastoral care, counselling and advice. Like Student C above, Student D also expressed how the teachers helped and supported learning.
Student D: At TPC the teachers actually help you. Yeah, like the teachers, help you to get into uni and that. Like preparing you and that is good. The teachers prepare us really well and like they help us out and stuff like that. They explain well, yeah. And if you don’t get it they will explain it to you in different ways so you do get it. Yeah they are good cause like you get certain assessments like to do with what is happening in class. And it if you don’t get it like what to do and that, then the teachers help you and like if you don’t understand the question they sit down and talk to you about it and stuff.

As enunciated by many students, student-teacher interaction in TAFE was continuous and spontaneous, with more open communication between students and teachers. Teachers were approachable and there was no feeling of fear, uncertainty or embarrassment in asking questions, discussing, explaining and sharing knowledge. Students could ‘talk’ to their teachers and the teachers respected and nurtured every student. Student L expressed teacher care and help.

Student L: The best thing was the teachers have been fantastic, they really have. They genuinely care about the students. Nothing is too much trouble, um, yes I will go over it with you. Yeah, to help you do your best. Not to cheat but you know.

Teachers also realised the set goals of students, gave attention, information and direction, and supported student pursuits with course choice for further studies at the university, and with university admission applications. Student K commented on help with university applications:

Student K: To the universities, yes. They actually had a class and teachers help you apply which was very useful.

Teacher support in many ways built the social capital between the students and teachers that enhanced engagement in learning.
Teacher immediacy/availability, or how frequently a student could access the teacher for help and support, was significant. The teachers were always ‘available’ for help and support. Students could ‘contact’ and communicate with teachers about assessment tasks and ask questions. They could personally meet their teachers on a one-to-one basis. Student G and Student S explained teacher immediacy:

**Student G:** And the one on one that I am able to get at TPC, the study centre, you know, we didn’t have that back in high school.

**Student S:** In TPC I feel I have more access to the teachers so they can go through my assessments and give me a feedback whereas at school just go home and do this assessment bring it we could not bring in drafts to show them eh it was just the support that TPC gave was so much better. Can talk to teachers.

Apart from face-to-face, on-site contact with teachers, students contacted their teachers online. They could send draft’ assessments and ask questions.

**Student P:** And it’s good because we get to email our teachers too, drafts and work and then they can look at it, they leave notes in it and—particularly in literature it is really helpful.

Teacher availability was an important aspect of student-teacher relationships that perhaps engaged students. The teachers also encouraged students to do their best and complete their studies, which increased student engagement. Student H and Student J elaborated on teacher encouragement.

**Student H:** They gave us some more detail and they explained assessments and in detail. They just like, they want you to finish this course, they helped out a lot. They encourage you.

**Student J:** There is more encouragement.

Positive student-teacher relationships influenced behaviour. Students applied themselves to work, and completed the tasks. Changes of attitude perhaps helped them learn effectively. Students who were not motivated to learn in school had a higher
commitment in Tertiary Preparation, positive student-teacher relationships increased students; commitment, and they realised the importance of education and got motivated to learn.

Students’ personal attributes—age, maturity, personal circumstances and intrinsic motivation—also perhaps influenced behavioural change to re-engage. Research evidence argues that teachers play an important role in facilitating the students’ educational outcomes when they provide supportive relationships. Positive student-teacher relations influenced student engagement, and they stayed on and completed education at TAFE.

In Tertiary Preparation, students had positive relationship with their friends and peers. Nearly two thirds of the students had peer support and friends who interacted in learning, helped and supported each other at TAFE. There was group learning and group social bonding. Student D valued peer support:

**Student D:** Everyone helps each other and that. Like in the class like if you don’t get something then the other people in the class will help you understand and stuff. Well, like we help each other.

The students also established peer relationships rationally, or with friends who were motivated to study. Student L selected and seeked peer support for learning:

**Student L:** You tend to gravitate naturally to people who are as motivated as you, because you are in the same circumstance, you tend to feed off each other’s energy.

Due to good peer relationships there was more reciprocity and less distraction, which aided better learning. Student B expressed mutuality of peer relations.
Student B: My friends are really nice. They are awesome and we are using things like for health issues. I found those so good.

Some students encountered distractions and used their volitional process or the act of exercising their will to protect their intentions from distractions. There is research evidence that volition plays a significant role in completing a task. Once students have decided to undertake a learning activity, they use their volitional processes to protect those intentions from distractions or possible temptations that would thwart efforts to complete the task. Such processes would include students being able to regulate the context or environment, such as aspects of the immediate task, classrooms, or even the cultural environment that students can monitor and manage. Environmental control includes both changes made to the task circumstances and changes made toward the actions of other people who could be involved with the task.

Tertiary Preparation had an adult learning environment that motivated and engaged students in learning. This is discussed next.

5.3.2 Tertiary Preparation Learning Environment

Student N: People are first and foremost really most importantly that people want to be there. That is the bottom line. The crucial thing that makes us different from high schools.

The TAFE learning environment influenced student engagement. During the interviews, all participants perceived that TAFE had an adult learning environment with mature aged students and everyone was at TAFE to learn. Student N’s explanation above, eloquently captures the significance of the adult and mature learning environment for active engagement with learning. Student P explained the
individual aspirations and willingness of students to study in an adult environment, and that no one was coerced in Tertiary Preparation.

**Student P:** Um, it is very adult ... which I like. Yeah. TAFE is really good because people that want to be here are here. The ones that are going to stay, stay. But people genuinely want to be here, it’s not people are forced to so they act up.

The average age of students in the qualitative data set was 19 years. So students were mature, which created adult behaviours among the student community and made the Tertiary Preparation environment an adult learning environment. The average age of students in the Tertiary Preparation cohort was 26 years, as reported in the quantitative study. So generally, the Tertiary Preparation cohort had mature-aged students, which made it an adult learning environment. A younger student explained that the age difference of students in Tertiary Preparation made his learning better, with interaction and learning with more mature-aged students.

**Student H:** I didn’t expect like there are a few old people in there, like their ages are different which is—it makes it easier as well.

It was not only the age of students but the interaction of younger and more mature-aged students, where students learnt, helped and sought advice from each other, respected and socialised, that made the Tertiary Preparation environment different from high school. Apart from being an adult learning environment, the Tertiary Preparation learning environment extended beyond the immediate TAFE classroom context. Students studied in the Tertiary Preparation classroom, the college library, tutorial centres and outside, in public institutions where they carried out research and di their writing. Students had opportunities to attend open days and went on excursions. All these experiences motivated and engaged them in learning.
Student B expressed the interaction between younger and older students in learning at TAFE.

**Student B**: Probably the best experience is like my friends are really nice here. They are older and more mature yes awesome and we are using things like for health issues we work together and help each other. I found those so good.

The TAFE adult learning environment was an initial motivating factor, which spontaneously engaged students in learning. Students were willing participants in their learning. Student L expressed his motivation to achieve his goals:

**Student L**: I have been quite driven this year because I have and what I want to do, and I need to do well—it is in my best interest to be as motivated as I can.

Student L worked in the retail sector for a few years after leaving school in Year 11 but retail was not a long-term career with prospects for him; he set his goals to join the air force and was highly motivated to achieve his goals.

Setting goals is a key feature of self-regulated learning. It is the key to motivation, and it involves the changing of students’ attitudes and beliefs regarding the usefulness of the task. It also involves changing students’ attitudes in taking interest in the activity. The Tertiary Preparation adult learning environment helped students to set their goals and regulate their learning. On their initial entry, the students were motivated to achieve, which is an intrinsic motivation to learn. They had their goals set, and the TAFE adult environment motivated and fostered their learning to achieve their goals. In the TAFE adult learning environment, students had an active, constructive process, in which the students set their goals for learning and then work through to monitor and control their motivation and behaviour, to achieve their set goals. Student M expressed his sense of achievement motivation to complete work.
**Student M:** I am actually doing all the work compared to school where I didn’t do any, and I am doing it on time, I am even doing extra which is a bit different.

Thus, the motivation to learn in Tertiary Preparation environment was immediate, spontaneous and sustained. Student motivation to learn increased by *smaller class sizes* and *less distractions*. There was more *encouragement* from teachers and there was more *individual* or personalised learning, and students being treated like *adults*. The school learning environment had many distractions, with much *younger, immature*, students who were *forced* to be there, displayed *bad behaviour* and did not engage in learning. Such misbehaviour by other students demotivated students to learn. The TAFE learning environment was influential; it was a ‘pull in’ factor, which increased the students’ initial motivation, interest and engagement.

The TAFE learning environment changed students’ attitude to learning. Attitudes in Tertiary Preparation changed because of students feeling a greater sense of motivation to learn, and changing their behaviours such that the usual way of learning and doing an activity was altered; this change in process resulting in a better outcome. The TAFE adult learning environment enabled a change of attitude towards learning, and students were able to do things differently, such as not coerced being into activities by their friends as they had previously experienced in school; rather, they tended to be more self-driven. The Tertiary Preparation learning environment improved their metacognitive skills, teaching them how to learn, and this resulted in gains to their academic performance and enjoyment in learning.

The TAFE adult learning environment gave students autonomy in their learning and educational decision-making. Student L above, who was highly motivated and made autonomous decisions on what he wanted to achieve, expressed
this. Students made decisions on the curriculum: subjects to study and topics to investigate for assessments, assessment styles, such as essays or reports, and how to conduct an oral presentation. Apart from autonomy in their academic learning, students had autonomy in relation to personal wellbeing. There were fewer rigid rules, like wearing a uniform, or sanctions, like being given detention as in high school, where rigid rules and regulations hinder autonomous decision making in their studies. Student B described the increased autonomy at TAFE.

**Student B:** You don’t have uniforms at TAFE, like there is no massive rules and regulations, I can just kind of relax, you just learn and go home, kind of thing, you weren’t stuck like at school, had recess and lunch kind of thing.

The absence of rigid rules at TAFE and the fact that students were treated like adults and not like children gave them greater autonomy, with teachers and students equal stakeholders in teaching and learning. Student N described the adult status of students at TAFE:

**Student N:** I feel like TAFE has a far more mature atmosphere about it in the sense that the teachers treat you more like adults and not like children.

The perception that students in Tertiary Preparation were treated like adults and not like children implied mutual respectful relationships between teachers and students. The TAFE adult learning environment captured and sustained the interest of students in learning, and they developed good behaviours to engage with interesting and innovative curriculum, assessments, and the diverse and interesting pedagogic approaches of teachers. This category is discussed next.

### 5.3.3 Engaging curriculum, assessments and pedagogy

During the interviews, students reported that the curriculum (subjects and assessments) and pedagogic approaches (teaching methods) in Tertiary Preparation
were interesting, innovative and relevant. The curriculum and pedagogic approaches were significant and positive features of Tertiary Preparation.

More than two thirds of the students suggested that the subjects and assessments were interesting and relevant and more than half (57%) said that they had a choice of what Tertiary Preparation subjects or units they wanted to study. Some students reported that they did not have an opportunity to choose their subjects at high school, and only studied the subjects that the school offered to them. The assessment tasks across the curriculum areas provided choice and were considered novel features of Tertiary preparation. Student B explained her autonomy in choosing subjects of interest.

**Student B:** I like health issues, it’s good, learning about diseases and stuff. Whereas I didn’t really have—like you couldn’t really study that at school. It’s more like things that people are interested in you get to choose your own thing, like what you want to do it on and like how you want to research it, like there is not the specific type of thing that you have to do.

In Tertiary Preparation only English was mandatory, but students were able to select from a range of optional subjects for study. They could also opt for a topic of investigation as part of their research within a subject. Student E described subject choice:

**Student E:** In TPC only English is compulsory and then you choose the subjects you want to do. There are many choices but you have to do some core subjects in first semester. The subjects are interesting and you choose your own topics in some subjects like English.

Students perceived the curriculum relevant and useful and it provided necessary skills for research and writing in future and prepared them for further study and employment. Student O expressed this:
Student O: I learn new things like how to write essay/reports, research. Subjects are interesting and more relevant. It is more important. TPC makes me more prepared for future courses. The subjects are of difficult levels. Some are hard. I enjoy Maths.

The curriculum was relevant and meaningful to students. The diverse offerings of the curriculum—Legal and Political Ideologies, Contemporary Australian Society, Literature, Statistics, Health Issues and Human Biology—were valuable to students. These were seen as subjects *per se* in Tertiary Preparation and not parts of a broader curriculum, such as in Human Society and its Environment (HSIE) or science in school. Rather, these subjects gave students detailed and specific disciplinary knowledge and presented them with opportunities to research and gain knowledge. Student H, below, described his experience with the curriculum. The units or subjects provided him with a deeper understanding of the content, and he improved his learning. His comments suggest that the curriculum provided greater cognitive engagement and theoretical and practical knowledge to students and that they used the knowledge gained from learning the curriculum in this context and improved their learning.

Student H: My study in TPC is, it’s improved so much compared to high school. The best things I went through was seeing my own improvement from results in tests and assessments. Just improvement in TPC was something big for me. Writing, or like learning. Yeah, the units are pretty good. There were some subjects I picked that I weren’t interested at first and then you learn about it and get more information and tend to improve the more in depth you go into it. Yeah, there was really like interesting the subjects, and felt like it was good to learn new information and take it in, and then put it into practice. Um. Yeah, I’ve been like, the improvement I’ve seen within myself is just, feels good to learn so much and yeah it’s just, TPC did help me a lot.
The pedagogic approach was another important feature of Tertiary Preparation that engaged students. Students perceived that the pedagogic approaches involved student and teacher decisions on how to complete assessments and not solely teacher-directed, as in their high schools. The pedagogy was flexible; students and teachers made collaborative educational decisions about curriculum and assessment issues. Discussion and negotiation of learning styles, types of resources and aids to use, and methods of investigation and presentation, was an important aspect of the pedagogic approach. The pedagogic approach involved class discussions, class-based as well as out-of-class methods of assessment, developing students’ research, critical thinking and writing skills, and teachers encouraging draft assessments and feedback on student assessments using criteria and grading. A democratic and innovative pedagogic approach engaged the students better. Student B commented on the pedagogic approach:

Student B: A lot more, it is a lot easier to express your opinion at TAFE as well, like in classes. Whereas school you just kind of don’t speak.

Research shows that students engage more effectively, if teachers listen to students’ views on school subjects (Harris & Hayden, 2006). Students will be interested in the content and will increase their understanding of the learning if they express their views and teachers listen to students’ opinions on the content that is taught.

The participants perceived flexibility as an important curriculum and pedagogic dimension. A majority (84%) of the students liked the flexibility in choosing subjects and topics, and the timetable had two to three hour slot classes, so students who worked, attended fewer days at TAFE compared to school. The curriculum and pedagogic approaches, along with flexibility and autonomy pertaining to Tertiary Preparation, allowed students to complete their studies in one
year, rather than studying Years 11 and 12 across two high school years. On completion, Student H and Student N commented:

**Student H**: It is just, I mean it’s even good that it’s within one year.

**Student N**: I really like the idea of doing it all in one year because it means you can knuckle down really get into learning instead of you know having this drab thing and with all the high school things included, like swimming carnival and assembly.

In Tertiary Preparation, assessment due dates were flexible and the course was less stressful than high school. The students did not have to complete homework each night.

Another pedagogic approach flagged by participants as beneficial in Tertiary Preparation was that assessments were conducted up-front *in class* with *assistance* from teachers. Students worked on their own assessments and received assistance from the teacher. The teacher explained the assessments clearly; students carried out assessments in the classroom or in the library with subsequent teacher feedback and prepared the final submission. Student P and Student H commented on assessments:

**Student P**: Yeah, and most of my classes have class time for it (assessment) when we just come into the library and the teacher will just every now and again look over your shoulder. Yep, particularly in history actually. We pretty much do it all by ourselves. Our teacher gives us the information and tells us what we need to do and then it is pretty much up to us because apparently they can’t exactly teach us our topic. Yes, but it is all covered, and in assessments you will cover it in the class time. Which is good because if you need help the teachers are right there and if you get stuck.

**Student H**: Assessments are within the class and then outside the class you have to like further that information and just take it in.
Face-to-face or upfront assessments with teacher assistance were common, and students saw this pedagogic approach as effective, engaging and helpful. Research evidence shows that classroom-based assessment practices connect to student motivation and engagement with task, and allow sustained interaction between student and teacher, with support and guidance influencing motivation and achievement. Studies have also shown that classroom-based assessment approaches also increase the mastery skills of students in respect of what they are learning. This type of learning increases deep learning, where the students not only learn the content but also learn the context of their learning, by becoming critical thinkers on what they are learning.

Further, the curriculum and pedagogic approaches in Tertiary Preparation built transferability or employability skills. The curriculum and pedagogy fostered the development of life-long learning, analytical, thinking, problem solving and academic learning skills. More than two thirds of the students described that Tertiary Preparation curriculum and pedagogy developed their research and writing skills, which would be relevant and valuable for future studies or employment. Student A commented on the transferability of the skills she was learning:

Student A: Like the assessments, like English at school you read a book and write about it, here you learn to analyse something and learn to write a piece of writing that you will have to write one time in the future.

The pedagogic methods that employed these transferable skills included individual and group research, analysis of scholarly articles from different sources, writing essays, reports and conducting verbal presentations. Student E explained:

Student E: You learn skills that are needed for university like writing essays, reports and research. Have to do presentations.
Tertiary Preparation developed skills such as referencing scholarly documents. Student N commented on academic rigour:

**Student N:** Yeah and TPC is specifically designed for people who want to go on to university just to pull out an example, the learning about Harvard referencing which they don’t teach in high school but university definitely relies on Harvard referencing. I just think, for me personally, it’s more streamlined I suppose, focussed and academic.

Another aspect of the pedagogic approach was ‘feedback’ on draft assessments. Students submitted one *draft* of their assessments to the teacher for feedback. The feedback helped students improve their work. Student A described teacher feedback as follows:

**Student A:** Sometimes it’s a little hard depending on the subject and how well you know that subject, but they usually ask for drafts and a few weeks beforehand they say hand it in to me and I’ll give you pointers of what you can do to improve it, or what really doesn’t make sense, and they help you in that aspect because that can change something dramatically.

Feedback process was through face-to-face contact and in electronic forms such as e-mail.

**Student P:** And it’s good because we get to email our teachers drafts and work and then they can look at it, they leave notes in it and it is really helpful.

Teacher feedback on assessments was helpful, and inspired students to complete assessments. Students received formative or informational feedback on their draft assessment, which was relevant and inspired them to learn. Informational feedback is collective feedback that the teacher gives on the whole assessment, and it is mostly written as a comment. Informational feedback gives the students an opportunity to see how they are learning and enhances motivation and achievement.
with mastery goals of learning a task, for optimum performance to achieve the best grades. Tertiary Preparation is academic and competitive in context and standardised assessments are the practice.

Transparency in curriculum and assessment practices was an important aspect of the pedagogic approach in Tertiary Preparation. Assessment ‘criteria’ for each assessment were given, to effectively implement the curriculum and assessments. The conditions and outcomes of assessments were explicit and were ‘explained’ before students attempted the assessments. The assessment criteria were complex and had clear explanations, guidance and specific directions: the students comprehended it and knew the expectations in assessments. This possibly enhanced student motivation and engaged them for better academic achievement. Student L and Student C commented on assessment practice in Tertiary Preparation:

**Student L**: But you know if there is something they (teachers) can say to you about an assessment and what the markers are looking for and they can explain why they are looking to do that and explain why we are doing it. Whereas in high school they say you are having an essay, write an essay due on Thursday you write it and hand in and they mark. Here they will tell this is what’s happening also when you do your assessments assignments to take home you get the marking criteria. There is really no reason why you can’t get good marks when you have that. But you want to know the criteria, whereas in high school they will mark it—it is a good essay, it is a bad essay. How do I know, you know, get a bad mark.

Transparency helped students construe what was valued in terms of their learning and what constituted achievement and success. The transparency in learning also influenced students’ goal orientations and played a significant role in affecting the nature and quality of engagement in learning tasks. Student C expressed this:

**Student C**: There is criteria that you follow, so it is easier, it’s not like they say like when I was at school they would give you a topic and say go write a report on it, or go and write an essay on it, but at TAFE they give you
something to follow so you know exactly what you need to do for each thing. They break it down like easier.

Like Student C, students understood the meaning of the academic tasks, the competence for each task and purposes for engaging with the tasks.

Teacher instruction and clarity on learning, especially in completing the assessment tasks, was a key feature of the prevalent pedagogic approach in Tertiary Preparation that increased students’ understanding of the curriculum and assessments. Effective teacher instruction involved the teacher explaining clearly what the students were studying, why they were doing a particular task and its relevance. Student N commented favourably on the instructional quality and clarity of teaching:

**Student N:** The best things were ah the more solid nature of the syllabus in each subject. There were very specific things that you needed to learn to be assessed on and it means that there is a lot more focused in the sense that you know exactly what is going on and I guess the transparency as well. All the teachers handed out syllabus outline to us and timetables, okay what are we going to learn on that day? And so that means that the student can really fully understand what is happening in terms of the course and it is very challenging which is fantastic.

Research shows that to engage students in learning and to increase their interest and understanding of subjects, it is important for them to know not only what they are learning but also why they are learning it (Harris & Hayden, 2006). Sample assessments and examples were shown for a better understanding and learning of assessments, as well as meeting the assessment outcomes. This increased student engagement in learning and their mastery of assessment tasks, rather than just performing in an assessment task. Student D and Student K described teacher instruction on assessments:
Student D: Yeah they explain well, yeah. And if you don’t get it they will explain it to you in different ways so you do get it.

Student K: Yeah, they teach you as if you don’t know it. So it is easier. At school they expect you to know it and they just give a brief example and just go. Well in school they talked about it. Here they actually explain it. Yeah. Like step by step. Yeah, they show you examples. At school you just, you have to hand it on the date and that is it.

As discussed above, students only get motivated to complete a task if they see clear teacher instructions on the purpose and relevance of a task. The learning or mastery of a task increases with clear teacher instructions. The transparency of the assessments’ objectives was important for student engagement. The students clearly knew what was happening, why they were completing a task and what they were learning. With clear teacher instructions, they focussed on their learning and understood what they were learning. In Tertiary Preparation, innovative and challenging curriculum, assessments and pedagogic approaches—where students asked questions, discussed and expressed opinions—students were happy studying and enjoyed their learning. The following students expressed a sense of enjoyment and happiness:

Student O: I enjoy TPC. I am happy.

Student M: There are heaps of good things, it just feels good being able to finally finish it, it’s like, wow, it’s great. So it’s, yeah, being able to do it and doing it and enjoying it as well, not just doing it because you have to.

Student N: I have enjoyed it. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I just feel that there are so many positive differences, certainly and it is a fantastic option.

The students found difference in their learning in Tertiary Preparation compared to their former high school, where they could not learn in interesting and enjoyable ways. The enjoyment in learning possibly sustained student participation in learning. The students’ enjoyment in learning could perhaps be attributed to
student-teacher relations, educational support, and the curriculum and pedagogy adopted in Tertiary Preparation. The students’ understanding and enjoyment of learning were stated to be reasons why they stayed on to complete their studies.

Various educational researchers have investigated students’ motivation and engagement, and found that increased interest in learning was related to their sense of ‘enjoyment’ in education (Hagenauer & Hasher, 2010 p.508). Enjoyment of learning has become a key objective in education policy, especially in England. Classrooms with a ‘autonomy supportive learning environment’, ‘teachers care’, and ‘instructional quality’ are significant determinants of students’ learning enjoyment. Tertiary Preparation classes were more engaging, enjoyable and interesting because the classes were more than information delivery. There was more variation in delivery and activity, including student discussions, social interaction between students and between students and teachers, and there was more student autonomy at TAFE. Students enjoyed the subjects more because they were taught in diverse ways rather than only learning the content in the classroom. Teaching approaches were enjoyable and enabled students to engage with what was taught.

With enjoyment of learning, students reflected back on how much they learnt. They self-evaluated their performance with some standard or goal and produced self-judgements about the performance during the reflection of their learning. They engaged with all the skills developed in Tertiary Preparation, and applied them to their learning. The students expressed a higher level of enjoying the cognitive engagement with their learning. For example, they expressed their excitement in learning a science concept, writing an essay in History or doing statistical analysis, or the grades they aspired to achieve in exams. All these showed a high level of self-regulated learning, cognitive engagement and enjoyment in learning. Student L expressed his enthusiasm for learning a new science concept:

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**Student L:** And some of the gear and stuff they have got in science labs is fantastic and some of the practicals we have done in physics has been amazing. I mean we um, we use a cloud chain to witness nuclear decay that was absolutely blew my mind see that. If you did that in high school it just wouldn’t um things such as dropping bearings to measure acceleration and gravity.

The students not only enjoyed their learning but also started to critically think about their learning; how they became good learners and how Tertiary Preparation, a second-chance programme, helped them complete school education and prepare for further studies or work.

The reflection process of self-regulated learning included their efforts to review and respond to the knowledge produced through their own monitoring and feedback on learning and with the experiences with the tasks generally. Research on self-regulated learning (Bandurra, 1991) argues that in the reflection process of self-regulated learning, students generate new metalevel knowledge about the tasks they completed, about strategies and self, and at this stage, students obtain object-level knowledge and adapt their approach to task engagement, to achieve actual performance and ideal standards. Student G expressed his growing ability to learn, gain knowledge and develop potential to do study subjects in Tertiary Preparation:

**Student G:** I guess the best thing about TPC is just the realisation of how much information I can process and just like how much I’m actually able to remember and practise and you know what I am able to do. Yeah, when I did history last year I only—I had to do an in-class assessment and I was really surprised by how well I did, like I was able to remember like what I had written. And when I come to maths and stats, um, it’s really—that’s also another amazing thing, like how—like maths and stats, like with stats especially statistics it’s not so much about the formula it’s about the context of the work, and that’s another thing I am learning and learning to analyse things a lot more thoroughly. Like coming here and statistics at the moment is
my favourite subject and I’m just like, I’m really enjoying it and it’s not hands on, it’s technical work and it’s analysing and it’s so it is something I never thought I would have thought that I would have enjoyed, so yeah.

Students also developed greater confidence, independence, ability to discuss and converse, and improved their self-esteem. Student M and Student I expressed their confidence:

**Student M:** And especially like, I can even tell that since this I have become more intelligent just over the last year. Like I can relate to what people are talking about on a much broader range of topics. And at school I was, I was dumb, like I just I was dumb, and now since here I am probably one of the smarter category of people.

**Student I:** Very happy eh after suffering with anxiety for a long time, it boosted my confidence a lot because like before this I could not go to a supermarket by myself I was like I was too restricted like I was too scared to go somewhere by myself. But it gave me a lot of independence, confidence. It was a good experience. I am happy with my decision that you know, I am not happy not working for a few years after school but I am happy that I choose to do my TPC at TAFE, it was good.

The curriculum, assessment tasks and pedagogic approaches gave the students a great sense of achievement, enjoyment and ownership of their learning, and students valued their learning. Thus, the students experienced deep learning, understood the content, and better applied their learning in different contexts or personal narratives. Deep learning (or deep engagement in learning) requires personal investment and commitment to learning that is meaningful and purposeful in the life of the learner, as seen in comments of Students G, M and I above. Deep learning is not acquired by external demands but is self-perpetuating and intrinsic to the learner. In deep engagement, the learner becomes personally immersed in and committed to, participation in the process of learning and the mastery of a chosen subject, topic, or
task to the highest level of their capabilities. In doing this, the learner is aware of the learning and attends to the processes of learning rather than just the outcome of the learning. In Tertiary Preparation, with their deep learning, the students utilised their power to learn to serve their own chosen purpose, developed learning identity and used the scaffolding provided to pursue the journey towards their chosen outcome. The students increasingly took responsibility for their own learning trajectory, and learning was meaningful to them beyond TAFE and in the trajectory of their particular life story. This is significant from an epistemological perspective; the nature of knowledge and how human beings come to know, to encounter and appropriate the existing funds of knowledge and generate and re-formulate knowledge in new contexts. In Tertiary Preparation, students encountered and explored a myriad of knowledge and used it in context.

In addition to students’ behavioural engagement, which traditionally is measured in high school by conformance on measures such as class attendance and minimum level of academic performance or passing tests, in Tertiary Preparation, students had intellectual, deep engagement, which implied a higher level of cognitive engagement and focused on the learning outcomes at the whole person level. Thus, Tertiary Preparation provided the opportunity for autonomous, democratic and deep, engaged learning. The students’ deep engagement led them to a higher, third-level learning, which involved personal transformation rather than just repetition (primary learning) or learning to learn (secondary learning). This was perhaps the reason students stayed on and completed Tertiary Preparation: Moving beyond learning for its own sake, shifting to a higher level of personal growth, and recognising this may be critically important to cognitive engagement and commitment to learning.

In school, these students only learnt the content, surface learning; they did not critically think about ‘how’, ‘what’, and ‘why’ they learnt. By experiencing the
learning situation, a sense of purpose, and seeing the educational outcomes for
themselves, they became critically engaged and better learners in Tertiary Preparation.

Students in Tertiary Preparation had clear career goals. They did encounter
some problems and issues during their study; these are discussed next.

5.4 Career Goals

All students who participated in the interviews completed Tertiary
Preparation, and most had future career goals. Eight students applied to study a
university degree. Student N and Student K applied to study at university:

**Student N:** I have applied for a Bachelor of Science at several different
universities. I have heard of people doing double majors perhaps that’s an
option.

**Student K:** Primary school teaching, Well the good thing about TPC is we
received an email saying that at UWS if I would receive 168 I think in a lot of
areas and teaching was one of them.

Two students were to begin to study a TAFE Certificate IV or Diploma course.
One student wanted to get into employment, two students applied to join the NSW
police force. One student strongly intended to join the air force, and one wanted to get
into apprenticeship training in a trade area.

**Student L:** I want to be a pilot but for officer entry you have to have your
HSC.

Three other students wanted to work, travel and then study at university in
future. Student D wanted to work, save money and then perhaps study at university.

**Student D:** I just, I don’t know, get a full time job and save up. I might go to
uni later on but not straight away.
One student was undecided on a future career but had completed the Year 12 qualification. Achievement in Tertiary Preparation opened future study and work prospects for the students. Without Tertiary Preparation it would have been difficult for them to complete school or study further, and it would have been difficult for them to join an increasingly competitive labour market in the future.

5.5 Problems/issues

Although Tertiary Preparation had features that motivated and engaged students in learning, this is not to say that this second-chance education is unproblematic in all respects. Fifty per cent of the students reported that they had some constraints while studying. Some students were distracted by other student behaviours, although the level of distraction was not so intense that the students could not study, as had been the case in their former high school. Often, the disruptive students dropped out early. Some students had timetable constraints; the schedule did not always suit students and certainly not those who were working part-time or who wanted to take up more work. Some students could not find information, and did not understand the course structure:

**Student L:** I found it difficult to get information on what I needed to do. There was messing around was because I did find it quite difficult to get information on individual subjects. I didn’t know how they were to their equivalent in the HSC.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a priority in Tertiary Preparation. Lack of information and problem of recognition was a concern for some students.

**Student B:** Probably what’s happening now, I actually can’t graduate. Because the start of the year I was told that I didn’t have to do a course because I had been—like a computer course—because I had been working fulltime with computers, and now they are telling me that I do have to, so I can’t graduate.
Other problems for some students related to the fast pace of the course delivery, the difficulty level of subjects and assessments, workload, assessment deadlines, shortage of time in exams, teacher absence and programme continuity problems. Student E and Student O expressed their concerns:

**Student E:** Maths is hard. There is time shortage in exam. Like you are given only 1 hour to do exam and so much is to be covered. There should be more time. Sometimes teachers are not there. They go on leave and there is disruption of the subjects. Told that teacher is away and class is not on. Sometimes another teacher comes which teaches different things and different way. You get used to your teacher once. Time framework, like we started one week late because new students were coming in and teachers were busy so have to catch up.

**Student O:** The subjects are of difficult levels. Some are hard. Some classes can be hard. English is sometimes hard, to do things in class like essays, reports.

One student expressed strongly that the academic and prescribed nature of Tertiary Preparation, with its focus on specific assessments, did not allow for student innovation and creativity. Student N felt restricted by the conventional conditions of learning aimed at meeting specific curriculum and assessment competence using specific assessment criteria. She felt that there was a lack of opportunity to be innovative and creative in her learning due to the need to conform to the required standards.

**Student N:** I feel like, I guess the rigidity, in saying that the syllabus is very solid. It is a kind of very rigid and it means that people don’t really think, people don’t really innovate with the way they are learning because they are just kind of handed the syllabus and they say okay well this is happening, that’s it about it. Um, I guess, it is not anyone’s fault, it is just that um there is no—I feel like there is kind of going the extra mile in that sense, like a bit more innovative and thinking outside the box and not just sort of you know
being very plain, boring, rigid with the syllabus. No one’s fault. It has to be like that, I understand.

*Tertiary Preparation* is competence based genuine second-chance education, and meets the national standards of the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) Level 4 qualification. The educational context of Tertiary Preparation is a rigorous and scholarly Year 12 equivalent academic qualification in NSW, and provides an entrance score to most Australian universities. Inbar & Server (1986) argue that second-chance education has to be genuine and equivalent to first-chance education; it should provide the same outcomes that learners would have achieved in the first-chance system. Recent studies on second-chance education have questioned the validity of second-chance education in terms of its capacity to provide educational provision that is comparable to mainstream educational standards. Thus, Tertiary Preparation as an alternative education allows flexibility and student autonomy in studies, but as part of New South Wales VET, it is regulated to meet the NSW state educational requirements and national education standards, and provide transition to higher education and employment.
### Table 5.1

**Student interview responses: Why left school early?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions/Themes/concepts</th>
<th>Student responses</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Relationship (Relatedness)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of support/help</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ – ✓ ✓ – ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ – ✓ ✓ ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of explanation in class</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ – ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ – – – ✓ – – ✓ ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher favouritism/bias</td>
<td>✓ – – ✓ – – ✓ – – – – – – – – – – – – – ✓ ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of enthusiasm to teach</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ – ✓ – – – – – ✓ – – – – – – – ✓ ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Authority</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ – – – ✓ – – – – ✓ – – – ✓ – – ✓ ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of care and trust by teachers</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ – ✓ – – – – – – – – – – – – – – ✓ –</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treated like a child</td>
<td>– – – ✓ – – – – – – – – – ✓ – – – – – ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers were nice and friendly</td>
<td>– ✓ – – ✓ – – ✓ – – – – – – – – – – – –</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching Methods (Pedagogy)</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Write from textbooks</td>
<td>– – – – – – – ✓ – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Write notes from board</td>
<td>– ✓ ✓ – – – – – ✓ – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Write from overhead</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of explanation/information only</td>
<td>– ✓ ✓ – – – – ✓ – – – ✓ – – – ✓ – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cannot talk/discuss/ask questions</td>
<td>✓ ✓ – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of student autonomy</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ – – – ✓ – – – – – – – – – ✓ – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Too much homework</td>
<td>✓ – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – 2</td>
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<td>Scholastic Engagement: curriculum (subject), assessments/exams</td>
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<tr>
<td>School subjects</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boring</td>
<td>– ✓ – ✓ ✓ – – – – – – – ✓ ✓ – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hard</td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not relevant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less subjects available</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cannot choose/change subjects</td>
<td>– – – – – ✓ ✓ ✓ – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liked school subjects</td>
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<p>| School Assessments/Exams                                        | – |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tr>
<td>Not relevant</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boring</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not explained well</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Too many assessments</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Too many exams</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do it yourself</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liked school assessments/exams</td>
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<tr>
<td>No help from teacher</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessments/exams were hard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did not understand</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inflexibility</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Poor academic achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>School environment/classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not safe/violence/fights/drugs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distractions in class</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>Uniforms</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>School rules</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class noisy/big classes</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional engagement: interpersonal relationships (social connectedness)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lots of friends/good peer relations</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>Conflict with peers/peer pressure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Detention/suspension/expulsion</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of motivation</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not happy at school</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not interested</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bored</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wanted to have fun</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal attributes</td>
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<td>Health issues (sickness)</td>
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<td>Family issues</td>
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<td>Bullying</td>
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<tr>
<td>School fear/uncertainty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stressful</td>
<td>–</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age/immaturity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change of school/residence</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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2. POST-SCHOOL PATHWAY

| Worked- full-time (FT) Part-time (PT) | – | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | 4 |
| TAFE course | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | 3 |
| TAFE TPC | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | 11 |
Table 5.2

*Student interview responses: Why study Tertiary Preparation?*

<p>| Questions/Themes/Concepts | Student interview response | S  | A  | SB | SC | D  | SE | SF | S  | G  | H  | SI | SJ | SK | SL | SM | SN | SO | SP | SQ | SR | SS | TOTAL |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|     |
| <strong>WHY STUDY TPC?</strong>        |                            |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     |
| Complete Year 12/study university |                        | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | 19  |
| Complete Year 12/work/uni |                            |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | ✓  |    |    |    |    |    |    | ✓  |    |    |    |    |    | 1   |
| Complete Year 12/TAFE/uni |                            |   |    |    |    |    |    |    | ✓  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | ✓  |    |    |    |    | 2   |
| Complete Year 12—Apprenticeship |                        |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | ✓  |    | 1   |
| Other Year 12 (Work, travel, uni) |                        | ✓  | ✓  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 2   |
| Undecided                 |                            |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 1   |
| <strong>Studying TPC at TAFE</strong>  |                            |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     |
| Adult learning environment |                        | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | 19  |
| Everybody is there to learn |                        | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | 19  |
| Student autonomy/choice   |                            | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | –  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | –  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | –  | –  | 14  |
| Age/Maturity              |                            | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | –  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | –  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | –  | ✓  | 14  |
| Less distraction          |                            | ✓  | ✓  | –  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | –  | –  | –  | –  | –  | ✓  | 11  |</p>
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<tr>
<th>TPC Curriculum</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>13</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interesting/relevant/subjects</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice of subjects/electives</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course structure</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multi-campus study</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Better teaching methods (Pedagogy)</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessments explained clearly</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessments conducted in class</td>
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<td>Research and writing skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion/ask questions in class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drafts handed and feedback given</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment criteria/explained</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student choice/decision making</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Better Teacher relations</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Aspect</td>
<td>Teachers enthusiastic to teach</td>
<td>Teachers help/support all students</td>
<td>Teachers care</td>
<td>Teachers encourage</td>
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**Academic achievement (learning)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Teachers enthusiastic to teach</th>
<th>Teachers help/support all students</th>
<th>Teachers care</th>
<th>Teachers encourage</th>
<th>Teachers available/immediacy</th>
<th>Teachers treat students like adults</th>
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**Interpersonal relations**

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<th>Teachers help/support all students</th>
<th>Teachers care</th>
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<th>Teachers available/immediacy</th>
<th>Teachers treat students like adults</th>
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199
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<td>Less distraction</td>
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**Plans/Career goals**

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<td>Problems/Issues</td>
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SA- SS Student Codes ✓ Student response – No response
5.6 Summary

This chapter has presented the results of the interview data and further answered research question 1: Why do students in Western Sydney NSW, Australia, leave high school early? Early school leaving was influenced by inadequate student-teacher relationships, deficient educational support, disengaging curriculum and assessments in school, inflexible pedagogic support and emotional disengagement, resulting from family and personal attributes. All participants in the interviews were early school leavers, and the majority of them were young, female and had completed the NSW Year 10 School Certificate, as their highest qualification. The early school leavers were from the disadvantaged, lower socio-economic demography of Western Sydney in NSW, Australia. Despite coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, all students re-engaged, and completed Tertiary Preparation.

All early leavers had a post-school pathway; they engaged with full-time or part-time work, or study at TAFE or other educational institutions. They re-engaged through Tertiary Preparation within six to twelve months after leaving school. Thus, early school leaving is not necessarily associated with disengagement and non-completion. Student engagement in learning and success in Tertiary Preparation also answered research questions 2 and 3. Research question 2 asks What opportunities and challenges do early school leavers experience in ‘second-chance’, Tertiary Preparation at TAFE?, while research question 3 examines What are the individual student factors and features of the Tertiary Preparation environment that make it effective for students to complete the equivalent of high school education? Tertiary Preparation provided an opportunity to re-engage with education and complete a Year 12 equivalent qualification. Various salient features of Tertiary Preparation motivated and engaged the students: positive student-teacher relations and
educational support, the Tertiary Preparation learning environment, engaging curriculum, assessments and pedagogy, positive peer relations and a learner career path plan. Tertiary Preparation opened up opportunities for students to realise their actual potential and maximise their life chances. It gave students a love for learning, enjoying, enhancing wellbeing, completing a high school equivalent qualification, and achieving their goals. However, like other alternative education settings, Tertiary Preparation also presented students with the new challenges that come with taking responsibility for their own learning, and paved the way to successful transitions to higher study or employment. The qualitative data results are verified in the context of other research literature and theories of second-chance education in the discussion in Chapter 6.
Chapter 6

Discussion

6.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses why a group of students left school early in Western Sydney, why they subsequently re-engaged in formal learning and how they succeeded through a second-chance education, Tertiary Preparation in TAFE NSW. Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory on human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1977; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, 1998), was conceived to be the most appropriate theoretical lens for understanding early school leaving and re-engagement, and underpins the discussion. The model provides scope for analysing the effective ‘proximal processes’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 38) at different levels (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem) to explain the dynamics and dimensions of early school leaving and re-engagement. Proximal processes are the mechanism of organism-environment interaction, such as between students in a school environment. Through proximal processes, the potentials for effective psychological functioning in individuals are actualized (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

The proximal processes or interactions between students and teachers and students and peers, and the Process, Person, Context and Time (PPCT) framework of the model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, 1998) are most relevant and applicable in understanding early school leaving and re-engagement. Andrew
Martin’s motivation and engagement wheel (Martin & Liem, 2012; Martin, 2009, 2007) is used in conjunction with Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory, as it provides a practical multi-factor approach to explain individual motivation and engagement. Importantly, it demonstrates how the environment influences a student’s motivation; hence, the multi-systems framework of Bronfenbrenner is useful in examining retention in both high school and Tertiary Preparation. Bourdieu’s theory of social practice is also applied to the analysis of early school leaving and re-engagement, from a socio-economic and educational disadvantage perspective. SES and the educational disadvantage of families and local areas are often considered at the macrosystem level; this chapter examines how these factors impact individuals in this study. The bioecological human development model provides an overarching framework for understanding early school leaving and second-chance education. Importantly, the theoretical models of Martin (motivation and engagement wheel) and Bourdieu are embedded in Bronfenbrenner’s systems theory. The theoretical frameworks were reviewed in Chapter 2 and 3 in this thesis.

This discussion draws on findings from a mixed methods approach to data collection, which sought to address three central research questions:

1. Why do students in Western Sydney NSW, Australia leave high school early?
2. What opportunities and challenges do early school leavers experience in ‘second-chance’, Tertiary Preparation at TAFE?
3. What are the individual student factors and features of the Tertiary Preparation environment that makes it effective for students to complete the equivalent of high school education?
6.1 Theoretical Framework Analysis

Dominant discourses of students’ disengagement from school and subsequent early leaving, often blame the students concerned for their inability or unwillingness to engage with schooling. However, many of the young people who become estranged from schools are disenfranchised. Researchers attest that it is problematic to blame students for being disengaged, but instead encourage engagement to be considered in the light of what schools do internally and externally that contributes to students becoming disenfranchised (Mills & McGregor, 2016; Morgan & Shay, 2016; Talbot & Hays, 2016; Te Riele, Plows & Bottrell, 2016; Rogers, 2015). There is a plethora of environmental factors which affect young people’s engagement and learning in school. These factors need to be understood to better address school dropout and re-engagement. This research has shown that early school leaving is not necessarily associated with students’ lack of appreciation of the inherently positive goals of education. Rather, their meaningful participation was impinged on by the context in which they learnt at school. The students were determined to complete school, and they re-engaged with Tertiary Preparation on their own. They did not feel coerced into Tertiary Preparation. On the contrary, they had a greater sense of independence and autonomy to re-engage.

From the motivational and engagement perspective (Martin, 2009, 2007; Martin & Liem, 2012), and as individuals at the centre of the bioecological human development model (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 1997; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1998), the students were interested and motivated, and wanted to learn. They had their goals set, they planned, managed and persisted with learning. Students valued learning and were self-determined to strive and achieve their goals.
Future employment prospects possibly determined students’ re-engagement. Early school leavers used their past schooling experiences and their current circumstances as a form of motivation to achieve their new goals. Thus, students’ individual motivation (Martin, 2007) and the environment (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000) were fundamental drivers of a successful second-chance education. Students were often in menial employment, and wanting a career change. Some students wanted to overcome past failures and expressed regret at not completing school or overcoming their personal, family and socio-economic circumstances. To become successful, students had positive relationships with their teachers and peers. Thus, motivation and engagement, as articulated by Martin and the bioecological human development model, provide strong explanatory power for developing nuanced understandings of the negotiations young people make in the process of seizing the second-chance opportunities that Tertiary Preparation provides.

The students’ aspirations to re-engage showed that early school leaving does not mean that they stopped trying or they were failures. This research argues that student disengagement in school is not necessarily associated with disengagement from learning, and supports re-engagement and school completion through second-chance education. Research indicates that most young people who opt out of mainstream schooling are products of systemic failure, but they are still interested in learning (Mills & McGregor, 2016; Zynier, Black, Brubaker & Pruyn, 2016).

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998, p. 996) have argued that effective ‘proximal processes’ are those interactions of the individual with others in the immediate environment, in different contexts. Effective proximal processes, or positive relations with others, give better outcomes—the realisation and development of individual potentials in acquiring knowledge and skills, with
different perceptions and responses in the environment. Students’ physical and social environment, and their interactions with teachers and peers, with their surrounding environment in school and in Tertiary Preparation, influenced their learning and development in this study. The bioecological human development model postulates that a developing individual encapsulates behavioural characteristics that influence effective proximal relations and competent development. The individual behavioural characteristics are dispositions, resources, demand and focus of attention. ‘Dispositions’ involve different responses of the individual to aspects of the physical and social environment. ‘Resources’ are the biopsychological liabilities and assets of the individual that influence the capacity to engage effectively in proximal processes. ‘Demand’ is the socio-economic circumstances that encourage more complex proximal interactions, and ‘focus of attention’ is responses to particular aspects of the behaviour of individuals, such as reducing stress (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 810).

The students’ behavioural ‘dispositions’, which constitute the first characteristic for proximal processes, were their poor school experiences, which they wanted to challenge by completing school successfully with a tendency to initiate activity alone or with others and to pursue long term goals. The students also had the second characteristic of the proximal processes, bioecological ‘resources’ (p. 796), the developmental assets—ability, knowledge and experience as they grew and matured—which they needed for effective and more complex patterns of interactions in Tertiary Preparation. The students also experienced ‘demand’, which is expectations from the social and economic environment that can foster or disrupt the operation of proximal processes. The demands were the requirements and expectations of students from their families and teachers. The teachers
enthusiastically captured the ‘focus of attention’ (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 813) of disadvantaged students and made efforts to reduce the distress of previous (school) educational disadvantage by developing educational competence.

The four characteristics enabled interactions (proximal processes) with and the influences of others in the student’s microsystem, especially teachers and peers, for their educational development and their future life trajectories. The functioning of the more complex proximal processes at the micro level is expected to develop students’ competence for functioning better at the chronosystem level later in life when they complete their education and interact with socio, economic, political and legal systems in society.

The early school leavers moved through a continuum of time and context from high school to TAFE and experienced what Bronfenbrenner labelled: Process, Person, Context and Time (PPCT; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In their school to TAFE transition, they had varying proximal processes with family, teachers and peers. From the PPCT perspective, in school (Time 1) the proximal processes were weak. In contrast in Tertiary Preparation (Time 2), proximal processes were positive. Students had different experiences in Tertiary Preparation from experiences in school. Bronfenbrenner & Morris, (2006, p. 812) argued that ‘development outcomes in Time 1 indirectly influence developmental outcomes at Time 2 through their effect on proximal processes during the intervening period’. The students’ developmental experiences were in their place (context) in the bioecological model.

The students in Tertiary Preparation also responded positively in studying the curriculum, assessments and pedagogic dimensions at the micro and macrosystem levels. At the micro level, they engaged with the curriculum, assessments and
pedagogic approaches as they interacted with teachers and peers in the classroom. The macrosystem factors, external to students, such as, the changing neoliberal approach to education, with the corporatisation of curriculum and pedagogic approaches and the lack of employment opportunities, also impact students. Thus, the dynamics of the macrosystem, with its more distal factors including curriculum design, standardisation and accountability, and educational policies, indirectly interact with students and can therefore influence their decisions to re-engage and succeed. Using Bronfenbrenner’s PPCT of student environments, Ryder, Reason, Mitchell, Gillon and Hemer (2015) concluded that a learning environment that accommodates a wide variety of perspectives and a diversity of curriculum, pedagogy and content, including supportive teachers, correlates with students learning and taking challenges to complete tasks.

An individual’s development and success is related to his or her interaction with the family, and relationships with and support from family members (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 1997; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). The socio-economic status and educational disadvantage of some students in this research, an exosystem component, adversely affected the development of the young people who left school early. For some students, personal attributes and lack of support and interaction with their family influenced early leaving. Support from the family was crucial for success. With re-engagement, the students overcame the constraints in their external environment, especially socio-economic status, that initially impeded their education.

Finally, the students’ success in education in this research is related to Bronfenbrenner’s fifth system-level, the chronosystem. According to the Process, Place, Context and Time (PPCT) perspective, in their transition from school to TAFE the students experienced exposure and changes in time through personal
transformation. As they became older, developmental changes occurred within and around them, such as personal maturity, family changes over time, and reflections on their life trajectories and discourses. All these brought changes in the students’ ways of thinking and decision making and affected their behaviour accordingly.

Three salient themes emerged as highly significant in this study. These were: (i) inter-personal relationships (relatedness); (ii) curriculum, assessments, pedagogic dimensions and student autonomy; and (iii) socio-economic status, educational disadvantage and overcoming educational disadvantage. These three themes hindered students’ learning in high school, while in contrast, they contributed to success in Tertiary Preparation. These three themes are included in the bioecological human development model as shown in Figure 6.1 The three themes are central to the students development at the micro level and progress to other levels (meso, exo, macro and chrono) system levels of bioecological human development model.
6.2 Theme 1: Inter-personal relationships (relatedness)

The centrality of positive inter-personal relationships was a salient theme, explaining students’ success in Tertiary Preparation. The early leavers had varying proximal processes with their teachers and peers in the school, compared to Tertiary Preparation. The students’ proximal processes with teachers and peers in school were negative and alienating, which hindered educational progress. For these students,
some teachers did not establish positive relations, and they were perceived by students to be distant and uncaring. In contrast, the proximal processes in Tertiary Preparation were positive, mutually reinforcing and conducive to positive social and academic outcomes.

Adverse student-teacher and student-peer relations in school suggest disenfranchisement from learning. Lack of positive interactions and strained relationships influenced young people’s decision to leave school early. Students’ school friends and peers provided social bonding, but this did not always lead to healthy relationships and, for some students, it contributed to undermining their motivation to learn.

In the quantitative study, strong correlations on all variables related to student-teacher relationships: for example, the variables, teachers were not enthusiastic about teaching/teachers did not listen to me and did not answer my questions correlated positively. This sheds light on reasons for early leaving and provides insight into the negative experience these students perceived while at school that likely influenced their decision to drop out. The data suggest student-teacher relationships were alienating. The quantitative results also showed higher means and degree of mean variation on variables such as teachers knew my name in high school (low mean) and teachers knew my name in Tertiary Preparation (high mean). The same was recorded for the variable teachers apologised for mistakes.

Student interviews revealed negative views of their school teachers particularly with reference to: favouritism, bias, instances of arguments with some students, and students being treated like ‘children’.

**Student N:** Teachers in high school treat students like children

**Student P:** Well he [teacher] wasn’t very happy that I took too many days off and he tried to fail me yeah.
A common conclusion was ‘they [teachers] did not care’.

**Student B:** Yeah, I wouldn’t have stayed in school for another two years. Teachers did not care. My teachers and I didn’t get along very well.

**Student R:** I also left because one example is when I asked a question I was told to go and look it up on Google because I did not understand something.

The interview comments such as ‘teachers did not care’ and the suggestion that students were asked to find information on Google and were treated like children that teachers lacked care and consideration. As expressed by Student R, the teacher lacked empathy and showed authority and dominance through their teacher-directed approach to responding to a student’s questions. Students looked forward to care and hope from teachers but did not get it. They did not feel the teacher’s presence but instead felt a sense of what Te Riele called lack of hope (Te Riele, 2006, 2008). Most students were transiting to senior studies, and expected more care and consideration from teachers for success in the final exam.

Noddings (1992, p. 15) argued, ‘no matter how hard educators try to care, if the caring is not received by students, the claim “they don’t care” has some validity’. The richness of inter-personal ties, care and connectedness must reach all students and in all learning environments without teacher bias and conflict (Owusu-Ansah & Kyei-Blankson, 2016; Hendrickx, Mainhard, Boor-Klip, Cillesen, & Brekelmans, 2015).

The link between student-teacher relations and academic outcomes is an important factor in student engagement (Furrer, Skinner & Pitzer, 2014; Jasmi & Hin, 2014; Idrus, 2015; Lamb et al., 2004; Hagenauer, Hasher & Volet, 2015; Pearson, 2015). Lack of meaningful teacher relations made students feel hopeless and withdrawn, alienated and isolated in school (Finn, 1989; Croninger & Lee,
This contributed to students feeling a lack of ‘school membership’ (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989, p. 192) and wanting to leave school early.

The quality of student-teacher relationships, in recognising students’ strengths and weaknesses, increases educational competence and prevents academic alienation (Jarvin & Subotnik, 2015; Alvi & Gillies, 2015; Lamb & Lerner, 2015; Favennec, 2014; Shefi, 2015). Student-teacher relationships are a key to engagement and academic success. In fact, relational factors are of equal importance to the content taught in school (Owusu-Ansah & Kyei-Blankson, 2016; Mills & McGregor, 2016; Womack, 2015). Students give a higher priority to their teachers’ inter-personal dimensions, over their academic expertise, and desire more than just friendly relationships; they want teachers to know them as learners (Raufelder, Nitsche, Breitmeyer, Kebler, Herrmann & Regner, 2016).

Research also indicates that students liking even one specific teacher increases motivation to learn and compensates for generally low-quality student-teacher relationships (Raufelder et al., 2016; Raufelder, Scherber, & Wood, 2016; Bulson, 2015). According to Bronfenbrenner, teachers are fundamental to the growth and development of an individual, given they have a direct relationship with them in the microsystem. They are powerful influences that make a difference, which can be either positive or negative depending on the nature of the relationships. In the current study, the proximal processes between students and their teachers in school were not always positive.

Alienating student-teacher relationships are detrimental to forming positive, reciprocal relationship for effective proximal processes at the microsystem level (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1974; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). An effective interaction of all individuals over time in the microsystem minimises distress and
enables competent socioemotional outcomes and wellbeing. Alienating relationships hinder the social and academic development and growth of many students. Thus, the ‘goodness of fit’ (Lerner, 1983 p. 149) or adaptation and desired outcomes were not achieved for students as they did not individually fit into the demands of their school (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The school environment and student belonging in school is highly significant and influential in the development and growth of individual students (Allen, Vella-Brodrick & Waters, 2016). At the microsystem level, students’ good relationships with teachers in high school would have led to positive development and educational achievement. However, positive student-teacher relations in Tertiary Preparation at the microsystem level helped in educational achievement.

Schools play an instrumental role for students who look forward to connecting with 'significant others', including their teachers (Bandura, 1989). The alienating student-teacher relations in this study are consistent with what other studies have found to be the reasons for dropping out of school prematurely (Raufelder et al., 2016; DeRebortis, 2015; Vickers et al., 2015; Vickers et., 2014; Te Riele, 2012, 2008, 2006, 2000; Lamb et al., 2004).

At school the proximal processes were ‘distal’ (Griffore & Phenice, 2016 p. 11). Teachers are a direct influence on students. However, in school, students felt like they were distal and not close, as would be expected given their positioning in the microsystem. In contrast, in Tertiary Preparation students perceived close, positive and reciprocal relationships with teachers and, given the nature of these quality relationships, they were more ‘proximal’ and contributed to more successful outcomes for students. Martin’s motivation and engagement wheel is compatible with the microsystem of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model. It focuses on how individuals pursue adaptive cognitive and behaviour dimensions or pursue
maladaptive behavioural and impeding affective dimensions in relationships with others, especially teachers and peers. This can be applied to the Tertiary Preparation context when considering the significance of student-teacher relations. With positive relations the impeding affective dimensions of anxiety, failure and uncertain control were mitigated. With supportive relationships, students valued their learning context more (value of Tertiary Preparation), believed in their own abilities or self-efficacy (Bandura, 1989) and more importantly, worked to improve their mastery goals. Hence, the students, through the support they felt from their teacher-student relations, enacted more adaptive cognitive and behavioural dimensions.

Students G expressed mutually positive and respectful relationships and overcoming maladaptive behavioural and impeding affective dimensions. Student G interacted on a one on one basis in Tertiary Preparation. In school, Student G could not relate with teachers due to his misbehaviour, and teachers were unfriendly to him. His disengagement was a maladaptive behaviour as he had uncertain control over his behaviour. In school:

Student G: Teachers were unfriendly and hostile towards me because I was a bit of a naughty boy. Yeah, I got suspended nine times. They (teachers) got sick of me.

In Tertiary Preparation:

Student G: Most of the time the teachers were being nice. Yeah. And the one on one that I am able to get at TPC, the study centre, you know, we didn’t have that back in high school.

Student L expressed teachers’ care and enthusiasm to teach:

Student L: He is good [the physics teacher]. He is genuinely excited about teaching and about what he is teaching. And that is a massive difference. The best thing was the teachers have been fantastic, they really have. They genuinely care about the students.
The student-teacher relations were viewed as adult relationships and not based on fear, as expressed by Student C. Student C expressed overcoming anxiety, an impeding cognitive dimension:

**Student C**: The teachers don’t treat you like little kids. They treat you like actual people. You can ask questions and they (teachers) will answer you and not get mad.

### 6.2.1 Student-teacher relations and learning

Positive student-teacher relations increased students’ motivation and persistence to learn. Students had higher cognitive learning in Tertiary Preparation than in high school. This was shown in the quantitative study, with high means and magnitude of mean variation in learning and understanding the subjects in Tertiary Preparation compared to school. For example, the variable *Completing Tertiary Preparation would be valuable in the future* had a high mean. This variable relates to valuing learning in Martin’s motivation and engagement wheel (Martin, 2007). The data suggest students developed their behavioural and cognitive aspects in learning skills sets leading to higher academic achievement (Martin, 2009, 2007). The behavioural and cognitive learning skills sets developed with positive student-teacher relations and individual initiative. All students wanted to achieve a Year 12 equivalent (Tertiary Preparation Certificate) with the key goal of studying at university.

In the quantitative results, student-teacher relations produced larger means than high school and substantially larger degree and magnitude of mean variance, explaining positive student-teacher relationships and increased motivation to learn. Research evidence shows a larger correlation between positive teacher-student

Consistently with Martin’s motivation and engagement wheel, students in Tertiary Preparation demonstrated adaptive behavioural and cognitive skills in the qualitative results of this study. This was exemplified when Students G and M shared positive self-beliefs and articulated what they could do and achieve, thereby demonstrating productive and adaptive motivation to increase their engagement.

Student G eloquently stated:

**Student G:** The best thing about TPC is just the realisation of how much information I can process and just like how much I’m actually able to remember and practise and you know what I am able to do. Yeah, when I did history last year I was really surprised by how well I did, like I was able to remember like what I had written. The history teacher explained everything. Yeah, and when I come to maths and stats, um, its really—that’s also another amazing thing, like maths and stats, like with especially statistics it’s not so much about the formula it’s about the context of the work, and that's another thing I am learning and learning to analyse things a lot more thoroughly. Yeah, and like coming here and statistics at the moment is my favourite subject and I’m just like, I’m really enjoying it and its not hands on, as you know, its technical work and its analysing and it’s—so it is something I never thought I would have enjoyed, so yeah.

For Student G, his enthusiasm to learn increased as he found teachers helpful. He had a positive self-belief that he could learn, and developed his love for learning and enjoyed the subject (statistics). He enjoyed statistics, which he never thought that he would learn or that he would appreciate it. The positive self-belief of Student G is an adaptive cognitive motivational dimension (Martin, 2007, 2009), and he was inspired by and engaged with the work. According to Martin (2007), students’ positive self-talk and bolstered thinking drives their motivation and engagement in
learning. The self-belief of students (like Student G) was not critically aroused in school, due to a lack of proximal relations. In Tertiary Preparation, proximal relationships and teacher support provided the inner motivational strength to students who took initiative to learn, developed self-efficacy and explored their capabilities. By enhancing proximal processes in the environment, it is possible to increase the extent of the actualised potential of the individuals’ developmental competence (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Thus, like Student G, many other students took individual initiatives but they also interacted with others, their teachers and peers, which opened their learning capacities.

Martin (2013) argued that many factors and processes operate in the classroom to affect academic learning. The factors and processes are broadly categorised into two groups: will and skill. 'Will' refers to student motivation, while 'skill' refers to the knowledge and competencies relevant to performing academic tasks (p. 10). The will is the motivation, the inner drive that provides the incentive and direction required to develop and sustain one's knowledge and competence. Along with inner motivation, external influences develop will and skill. The major external influences include teachers. The teacher (via instruction) plays the greatest role in directly impacting both academic will and academic skill. Students learn and become autonomous discoverers with clear and structured instructions from the teacher. Thus, in Tertiary Preparation students had the will (inner motivational strength) to learn, and their academic will and skills were developed and enhanced by proximal processes, the close association and relations with teachers which Bronfenbrenner & Evans (2000, p. 118) call ‘engines of development’.
Despite not feeling a sense of achievement at school, students G and M among others, came to believe that they had a higher self-efficacy to achieve. Student M commented:

**Student M:** I can even tell that since this [Tertiary Preparation] I have become more intelligent just over the last year. Like I can understand and relate to what people are talking about on a much broader range of topics. And at school I was, I was dumb, like I just I was dumb, and now since here I am probably one of the smarter category of people, yeah.

The comments of Student M confirm what Martin (2009, 2007) argues in respect of: uncertain control in learning; the later part of this extract implies the self-belief of the student to achieve success, which developed through proximal processes in Tertiary Preparation.

Students H and J commented on teacher encouragement as influencing their self-belief and motivation to learn.

**Student H:** The teachers usually are a lot better. They gave us some more detail. They just like, just like, they want you to finish this course, they helped out a lot. They encourage you.

**Student J:** There is more encouragement from teachers. There is more personalised learning and teachers listen when you have any problems.

In Tertiary Preparation student-teacher relations enhanced student self-belief. Personalised learning (Student J) showed teachers addressing students’ individual needs. Accommodating personalised learning increases students’ motivation to learn. It also makes individual learning engaging and meaningful. It increases learner knowledge, sense of control, values and self-determination, and self-actualisation of own learning through connections with others, especially teachers (Prain, Cox, Craig, Edwards, Farrelly, Keefe, Lovejoy, Mow, & Sellings, 2015; Wyn et al., 2014).
Martin (2011) calls this the ‘learning focus’ of the student (Martin, 2001 p. 7). This was seen in the quantitative study, which obtained high means on variables on students’ motivation and learning in Tertiary Preparation, such as *I keep trying to understand what is taught/I work difficult topics until I work it out*. The realisation of self-belief to perform, positive proximal relations and increased motivation and engagement, contributed to competence and academic attainment in learning at micro and mesosystem levels of individual development.

Student L demonstrated learning focus, persistence with work and the behavioural dimension. He described his drive to set his goals, plan his study and complete education. Student L, who desired to be a pilot, left school early due to personal circumstances; he left his part-time job and re-engaged to further education, training as a pilot for the air force.

**Student L.** I didn’t really have any career plans. I didn’t have it in my mind where I wanted to go. I guess that was a point, without a goal it was hard to motivate myself. When you are not motivated you don’t really enjoy what you are doing. So coming to do this (Tertiary Preparation) changed everything for me. I came to know what I wanted to do. Yeh and teachers are so helpful who always say yeah come over and I will help you, you know and that makes a massive difference.

Student L’s motivation to learn was reinforced by his self-belief, planning and persistence, positive teacher relations and educational support, which helped him adapt to his cognitive and behavioural aspects, by knowing what he wanted to do and by setting his goals in what Martin & Elliott (2015) call setting PB (Personal Best) goals, which increase achievement growth in students’ academic lives. In school, Student L could not plan and manage his study, due to family circumstances and school curriculum factors. In Tertiary Preparation, he was highly motivated, planned and managed his studies. He understood the assessment criteria and applied the
criteria effectively when completing assessments to achieve maximum grades.

Student L managed his studies, maximised his learning outcomes, and set PB (Personal Best) goals. In school:

Student L: I didn’t really have any career. I didn’t have it in my mind where I wanted to go. I guess without a goal it was hard to motivate myself because I didn’t know what I wanted to do. It is hard when you are not motivated because when you are not motivated you don’t really enjoy what you are doing.

In Tertiary Preparation:

Student L: I have been quite driven this year because I have to and what I want to do, and I need to do well—it is in my best interests to be as motivated as I can.

He commented on how to get the best outcome in Tertiary Preparation:

Student L: I just know I need four of the subjects, I need four Year 12 or equivalent subjects. So I am doing maths, English, physics and chemistry. I will get a certificate. Yeh for assignments to take home you get the marking criteria. There is really no reason why you can’t get good marks when you have that and you know the criteria, you do your assessment, get your mark. You know what’s coming. You adjust, you get the marks.

The students’ motivation in valuing their learning and building mastery skills was shown by Students G and N in Tertiary Preparation.

Student G: Well in high school you’ve got a workload by the week, and at TPC you’ve got these set things and like you know, it’s actually stuff that actually you are learning and it takes a while to build up the learning, and after you build it up you find that you’ve understood and learnt along the way as well.
Student N: Yeah and TPC is specifically designed for people who want to go on to university. Just to pull out an example, the learning about Harvard referencing which they don’t teach in high school but university definitely relies on Harvard referencing. I just think, for me personally, its more focussed and academic in the sense that you learn to know things.

In contrast to school, an important aspect of student-teacher relations in Tertiary Preparation was teacher immediacy. Teacher immediacy is an open form of ‘communication that enhances the closeness between students and teachers’ (Owusu-Ansah & Kyei-Blankson, 2016 p. 5). Teacher immediacy was a vital proximal process for students’ learning needs at the microsystem level (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Immediate, frequent and an open communication with teachers was important. Teacher immediacy increases the level of affective or emotional connection. It enhances learning and supports teacher caring and enthusiasm to teach (Martin, 2007; Benekos, 2016; Allen, Witt & Wheeless, 2006; Witt, Wheeless & Allen, 2004). This behaviour by students refers to valuing school (Martin, 2007). In this study, valuing school also applies to valuing Tertiary Preparation. Thus, students developed a greater sense of ‘social connectedness’ (Juvenon, 2007 p. 197) and possibly developed a sense of ‘school belonging’ in the Tertiary Preparation context (Vickers, et al., 2014 p. 87; Juvenon, 2007). The immediate social connectedness and belonging was significant, which suggests increased student motivation and academic achievement. Student-teacher relations and positive personal characteristics are the strongest predictors of students’ school belonging (Allen, Vella-Brodrick, & Waters, 2016).

For proximal processes to be effective in achieving competency, there needs to be ‘exposure’, which ‘refers to the extent of contact maintained between the developing person and the proximal processes in which that person engages’
This exposure is measured through duration, frequency, and combining the timing and intensity of the interaction. Thus, in Tertiary Preparation, teacher immediacy enabled exposure, and proximal processes provided ‘competence’ or the development of knowledge and skills and better academic outcomes. In contrast, in school, lack of teacher immediacy did not provide adequate exposure for students, and the proximal processes produced ‘dysfunction’ (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 1002) where students could not maintain, control and integrate their behaviour across learning contexts. Also in school, perhaps teacher workload, with curriculum overload and outside classroom duties, constrained teacher immediacy to students. Teacher immediacy is crucial for a successful alternative education context (Talbot & Hayes, 2016). The realisation of self-belief to perform, positive proximal relations and increased motivation and engagement contributed to competence and academic attainment. This was achieved in learning at the micro and mesosystem levels of student development.

In Tertiary Preparation, teachers gave feedback on student progress. Teacher feedback was vital to students’ learning and academic outcomes. Formative feedback (written comment) was prominent to students’ learning and enabled cognitive thinking to improve learning. Many students who had impediments in learning at school gained a sense of control, realised their capabilities with formative feedback, and overcame fear of failure.

High quality informative feedback provides mutual exchanges and engages the student in a deeper understanding of learning (Murray & Mitchell, 2015; La Paro, Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2004; Burnett, 1999; Dohrn & Bryan, 1994; Mueller & Dweck, 1998; Thompson, 1994). Effective evaluative feedback is a good guide to success, a form of encouragement, gives a sense of control, reduces anxiety and threat, and
shows respect and care by both students and teachers (Fakeye, 2016; Rowe, 2011; Perry & Tunna, 1988). In Tertiary Preparation, teacher feedback was prominent at all levels of the bioecological model. At the microsystem level—that is, in the classroom—students received feedback on the actual work they completed. The teachers also gave feedback at the exosystem level, with comments on forthcoming exams and curriculum that students were expected to complete. Students also received feedback at the chronosystem level, when teachers advised them on their potential interaction with other institutions in future, such as studies at university. Thus, feedback to students was contextual, and feedback practices mapped well with the bioecological model.

Proximal relations are not only social interactions but are also the total environment of the individual, and directly impact behaviour (Griffore & Phenice, 2016). In this context, proximal relations in Tertiary Preparation, in contrast to school, were enhanced by learning in an adult environment at TAFE. Students were treated as adults, were allowed freedom on campus and made their own decisions in learning. Students’ experiences and opinions were accommodated and supported by teachers and peers. In the quantitative results, the variables on students being treated like adults, making decisions and sharing experiences and opinion with teachers, had high means. This was also supported by students’ interviews, where students strongly expressed that at TAFE they were treated like adults and not like children as in school.

Schools had large class sizes and student disruption during learning, whereas Tertiary Preparation had small classes in which students interacted effectively with teachers, peers and learning material. Small class sizes in Tertiary Preparation enabled better acquaintances and were ideal for successful alternative education
settings, as also found in previous studies (Te Riele, Plows, & Bottrell, 2016; Te Riele, Davies & Baker, 2015; Mills & McGregor, 2014). The learning environment influences the way students construct, set and attain their goals, and it influences the relationships students have with teachers, peers and friends (Plows & Baker, 2017; Anderman & Patrick 2012; Martin & Dowson, 2009). The TAFE environment influenced students’ decisions on their goals.

The TAFE adult learning environment provided opportunities, eliminated stress, increased flexibility and reduced inequality. Noguera (1995 p. 206) argued for ‘practices for building humane school communities’ where teachers should have a more humane interaction with their students. A learning environment should be created with a ‘strong sense of community and collective responsibility’ (p. 207 as the ‘humanistic side of education is equally important for teaching and learning’ (Owusu-Ansah & Kyei-Blankson, 2016 p. 1). In the Tertiary Preparation learning environment, a more humane interaction took place between teachers and students.

Peer ecology, or the social environment of peers, is one of the most important proximal environments for students' social and academic development. Peer ecology is central in the bioecological model and is interpreted as how an individual is positioned within social settings, like families or with peers in school environments (Hendrickx et al., 2016). Apart from interactions with family and school (with teachers), at the microsystem level, children interact with peers for effective development. Peer relations are established at the microsystem level, but exosystem-level factors such as the extended neighborhood where students live (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) influence behaviours in peer relations either at school or in Tertiary Preparation contexts. The peer ecology of students in high school and in Tertiary Preparation is discussed next.
6.2.2 Peer relationships and learning

Peer relations are central at the microsystem level, and extend to the chronosystem level in the ecological journey of a developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 1977; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Students’ accounts suggest that peer relationships did not motivate and engage them in high school. However, students reported that in Tertiary Preparation, peer relationships were positive, relational and supportive of the achievement of positive academic outcomes. In Tertiary Preparation peer relations were what Juvonen, Espinoza, & Knifsend (2012) call ‘Peer group affiliations’, implying interpersonal relationships for strong academic support and learning. In school, students established friendships mostly for socialization, and student popularity in school was more prone to ‘peer relationship’ (p. 388).

In the quantitative results, peer relations pertaining to socialisation in school context had high means on social interactions and low means on academic intentions. The results were opposite in Tertiary Preparation. Thus, in school, positive peer relations reinforced social interaction and in Tertiary Preparation, peer affiliation was the preferred mode, creating strong and positive peer relationships for academic outcomes. Students M and L commented on socialisation with friends at school.

**Student M:** I had lot of friends, it was really fun We just mucked up a lot we didn’t really do any work, it was still fun to go to, I was only there to socialise, like the students. I just you know, had a car, I had a girlfriend and just wanted to party.

**Student L:** Yeah the only reason you are there, I think most of your school friends, the only reason you are friends is because you’ve got school in common.

The findings are in agreement with Fortuin, Geel and Vedder (2015) and Berndt (2002) that students in school select friends not for academic achievement
but mostly for socialisation. For many young people formal learning is not cool and fun, but being together is important (Mansfield & Wosnitza, 2010). Vickers et al., (2014) argued that peer ecology includes three dimensions: belonging, friends and value coherence. ‘Value Coherence’ (p. 174), focuses on the friendships through which educational values are shared and supported. In the current study, all three dimensions and particularly ‘value coherence’ were important in peer relatedness in school and in Tertiary Preparation. In school, the value coherence factor was absent, as relationships were friendship and socially based, whereas the emphasis of the value coherence friendship groupings was based on forming relationships with peers who value school and learning. Many of the school friendships formed by the early school leavers were not academically orientated and instead were focused on having more friends rather than selecting on the basis of shared educational values. In Tertiary Preparation, valuing friends for academic purposes was consistent with the value coherence factor identified by Vickers et al., (2014). Thus, as young adolescents get older, peer ecology dynamics develop in interaction with other friends and peers for academic values, especially learning with friends and peers. It is the nature of the relationship and the values embedded in the relationship that matter (Vickers et al., 2014).

Although in school, students had value coherence in peer relationships, peers behaviours disrupted learning. Student D commented on disruption.

**Student D:** It is just like at high school friends are just heaps immature and in class they just didn’t care. And you are trying to learn and you can’t because they are disrupt you. Like just bitchy and stuff, like just so young in the head. I just didn’t like many people in my year because they were so immature.
Adverse peer relations such as disturbances and being belittled by others, affected learning. Teachers spent more time on behavioural issues than on teaching, which led students to feel uncertain and not in control of their learning. Distractions were of low intensity compared to school and students used their ‘volitional processes’ (Wolters & Taylor, 2012, p. 639) or exercised their will to protect their intentions and avoided distractions. Students’ academic engagement at school was perceived as nerdy behaviour, discouraged and frowned upon. In Tertiary Preparation, students engaged with tasks, persisted with learning and stayed committed. Thus, they worked in a self-regulatory context. In self-regulated learning, the learners are active and they set goals, work and monitor their own learning, regulate and control their cognition, motivation, and behaviour, to achieve their goals (Pintrich, 2004; Zimmerman, 2002).

Student L negotiated his way, despite distractions and the lack of motivation from other students.

**Student L:** Even here at TAFE I mean there are younger kids who I don’t think are really trying, there are distractions here at TAFE Usually, there are some who have stayed at the course that I don’t think are really going to anywhere near to what they want but you just steer clear of the ones that are, you know. You tend to gravitate naturally to people who are as motivated as you, because you are in the same circumstance you tend to feed off each other’s energy. Um, you have to be self motivated and a lot of the distracters have dropped out, so I think that is very helpful.

Like student L, many students eliminated others who were disruptive. Perhaps age, greater maturity of students and goal-setting, as Student L did, as well as selecting friends who were willing to learn, all contributed to student learning. Such attitudes towards learning prepare students for learning and development at the
chronosystem level (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Research evidence suggests that individual students respond differently in alternative education settings, in relation to self-regulation, academic gratification, intrinsic motivation to learn and self-beliefs related to academic achievement (Herndon & Bembenutty, 2017). As expressed by Student L and many others, past adverse experience, disruptive peers, disappointments and uncertain control in school affected their learning. With their maturity and experiences, they developed higher self-efficacy and determination and selected peers rationally, and as a result learnt better in Tertiary Preparation. The students helped and supported each other. In group learning and group bonding, they interacted with each other, made choices and shared their learning experiences and knowledge. The behaviours of students were ‘developmentally generative’ (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006 p. 810). Students learnt in social context, which enabled positive proximal processes with peers.

Students who are disrupted by others’ behaviour have uncertain control, do not engage in learning, develop educational adversity, lack educational buoyancy and become at risk (Collie, Martin, Bottrell, Armstrong, Ungar, & Liebenberg, 2016; Martin, 2009, 2007). Thus, disruptive behaviours were a causal factor in early school leaving. Disruption, especially distraction in school, a behavioural disposition, is ‘developmentally disruptive’, which could affect development in later life (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006 p. 810). Perhaps teacher intervention in adaptive factors, such as task management and academic support, social skills and emotional deregulation, would have resulted in motivation and learning and better adaptive outcomes (Martin, 2007; Martin, Collie, Papworth, & Ginns, 2016).

In peer interaction at school, students experienced more external, exosystem influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 1977; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 2006). The wider
neighbourhood, an exosystem factor, probably influenced student behaviour and adversely influenced peer relations. The poorer socio-economic demography of Western Sydney in NSW and the lack of neighbourhood resources, parental education, economic and educational support, could have affected the quality of adolescents’ peer relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Hong, Espelage & Sterzing, 2015; Low & Espelage, 2014). Thus, conditions in the neighbourhood, distal stimuli in proximal relations (Griffore & Phenice, 2016), influenced behaviours and peer relationships in school. Using Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological human development model, Steinberg, Darling and Fletcher (1995) in a study on the neighbourhood level of social integration and adolescent school behaviours, concluded that ‘social integration into a neighbourhood which is characterised by bad parenting has a harmful effect on adolescents’ school performance and behaviour’ (p. 457). The finding on the influence of peer relations in this study agrees with previous research on disruptive friends and peer behaviours determining early school leaving (Vickers et al., 2014; Kim, Gendron, Toro, & Fairborn, 2011; McMillan & Curtis, 2008; Ross, 2008; Lamb, 1996; Marks & Fleming, 1999; Kasen, Cohen & Brook, 1998; Vitaro, Larcocque, Janosz, & Tremblay, 2010).

The quantitative data that suggest positive friendships and peer relations enhanced student learning and wellbeing in Tertiary Preparation. Students felt happy studying, had no fear or uncertainty, and developed confidence. Personal satisfaction, security and happiness were possible with good affiliation with peers, which provided better opportunities for success. Research evidence suggests an association between interdependent happiness and key academic outcomes such as autonomous motivation, engagement and achievement (Datu, King & Valdez, 2017). In relation to the Process, Person, Context and Time (PPCT) model, students from the same
socio-economic background, and in a short time framework, did not have adverse peer relations as they moved in context from Time 1 (School) to Time 2 (Tertiary Preparation). During the transition, the students matured, became older and some had work-related experiences. As individuals get older, their developmental capacities increase both in cognition and behavior, and for continued and effective development, the proximal processes must become more extensive and complex, to provide potentials for future development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Thus, close friends, spouses or their equivalents, play significant roles in the developing individual’s life. In this context, in their peer relationships in Tertiary Preparation, students experienced chronosystem level influences, which are future oriented. In future, when these students enter the workforce, they will be able to interact with colleagues, teams and the institutions in which they will work. They will understand and communicate better and work collaboratively with others in wider society.

As independent learners and autonomous decision makers, students started to think about the future. Maturity demands decision-making and choices for forward planning to achieve career plans. Thus, ‘significant others’ (Bandura, 1991, p. 278), for example, close friends and peers, played significant roles in students’ educational decisions. Good relationships with peers provide a sense of self-worth and emotional security (Vickers et., 2014; Veas, Castejon & Minaro, 2015; Robinson, 1995). In school, students were mostly adolescents, and lacked maturity. Peer relations, at a microsystem level, provided social support and emotional engagement, but peer support did not enhance forward thinking and planning for macrosystem experiences. In Tertiary Preparation, peer affiliations prepared students for future macrosystem and chronosystem experiences in the wider society.
Almost all students and their peers had a university pathway. They were self-determined and driven by the common goal, and supported each other to reach their goal. Student-teacher and peer relations are significant to students when the relationship is related to students’ Personal Best (PB) goals (Collie et al., 2016; Martin et al., 2016). Many students had their Personal Best (PB) goals set, as they wanted to do better in Tertiary Preparation than they did at school. By setting their personal goals, and with positive and supportive academic affiliation with their peers, students navigated the academic setback they had experienced in high school.

Other research has argued that a positive peer network influences positive academic engagement. The behaviour of friends in stable and supportive relationships determines academic and emotional engagement (Pereira & Lavoie, 2016; Vickers et al., 2014; Juvonen et al., 2012, Juvonen, 2007; Berndt, 2002; Berndt & Keefe, 1995). Students are ‘likely to seek friends who can help them with academic work’ (Juvonen, et al., 2012, p. 393). Students with reciprocated friendships show higher levels of prosocial behaviour, school belonging, academic, cognitive and emotional engagement than those who have no reciprocated peers (Martin, et al., 2016; Huang, Damean & Cairns, 2015; Delgado, Ettekai, Simpkins, & Schaefer, 2015; Keifer, Alley & Ellerbrock, 2015; Sokatch, 2006; Wentzel, Barry & Caldwell, 2004; Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Social and emotional learning is increasingly recognised as a vital component for human development with many intra and intra-personal benefits. This is beneficial despite hard academic rigour and development of academic skills in contemporary educational context. Social and emotional learning should be promoted in education (Martin, Collie & Frudenberg, 2017).
The qualitative data suggest that in school, students felt a lack of belonging and unhappiness. Lack of school belonging and unhappiness correlated positively with high means, due to students’ lack of significant relationships that not emotionally supported and engaged them at school. In contrast to high school, the data suggest that in Tertiary Preparation, peer group affiliation and quality friends provided students with a greater sense of ‘belonging’ and ‘connectedness’, students were happy with their studies and had better academic outcomes.

The findings confirm previous research findings: that school belonging increases academic achievement (Vickers et al., 2015; Kiefer, Alley, & Ellerbrock, 2015; Lam, Chen, Zhang & Liang, 2015; Juvonen et al., 2012, Juvonen, 2007; Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Friendship may be particularly beneficial for school belonging in highly marginalised groups of students (Pereira & Lavoie, 2016; Delgado et al., 2015; Leaper, 2014; Berndt, 2002). School belonging is defined as students’ perceptions of support and relationships in school (Qin & Wan, 2015; Juvonen, 2007). Friendships with classmates are presumed to promote a sense of school belonging and engagement, and peer rejections can threaten this (Juvonen, 2007; Juvonen et al., 2012). Curriculum and pedagogic dimensions in school and in Tertiary Preparation are the next theme in this study; this is discussed next.

6.3 Theme 2: Curriculum and pedagogic dimensions

The curriculum, and pedagogic dimensions, were the second salient theme. Both the quantitative and qualitative data sets suggest that the curriculum, assessments and pedagogic dimensions in school had distal proximal process. The curriculum and pedagogic dimensions were considered by students to be irrelevant, uninteresting, boring and not student-centred but rather teacher-dominated and controlled. In contrast, in Tertiary Preparation the curriculum, assessments and
pedagogic approaches were relational, interesting, and relevant for future studies. They enhanced skills, and tended to be student-centred, promoting autonomy, and these features increased students’ motivation and engagement for learning.

The best pedagogic practice and instruction is connective and relational (Martin & Dawson, 2009). Connective instruction is based on pastoral pedagogy, which includes teacher instruction, underpinned by trust, and focused on hope, students’ care and wellbeing (Bridgeland, Dilulio Jr & Balfanz, 2009; Martin, 2006a, 2006b). Te Riele (2008, p. 7) postulated ‘practice-with-hope’ or a philosophy of hope (Te Riele, 2010) that involves trust, care and wellbeing, to motivate and engage young people with curriculum and learning at school. In school, students looked forward to care from teachers, and hoped to learn but were unsuccessful. In Tertiary Preparation, teachers practised with hope and cared for the wellbeing of students. Care and hope brought success. The pedagogy of care and hope is the best practice for student engagement in learning (Smyth, 2007, 2006; Smyth & Hattam, 2004, Smyth & Fasoli, 2007).

The curriculum and pedagogic dimensions are the academic teaching and learning aspects, and from the bioecological human development framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1994), this theme relates to the microsystem level and is experienced and developed through proximal relations between students and teachers in learning contexts like the school classroom or Tertiary Preparation. The curriculum and pedagogic dimensions are also experienced from more distal proximal relations, at the macrosystem level as they are initiated and implemented by structures and processes that are external to students and educational contexts.

In Tertiary Preparation, the teachers developed student interest, growth and engagement with curriculum, assessments and pedagogic approaches. As in Theme
1, inter-personal relationships (relatedness), the Process, Place, Context and Time framework, was crucial in learning the curriculum, completing tasks and responding to pedagogic approaches in student transition from school to TAFE. The curriculum, assessments and pedagogy empowered students to think beyond the TAFE classroom and to have a wider vision of the reality and experiences that they would encounter in the external world in the future, a further important distal component of the chronosystem in human development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1998). Curriculum and pedagogic approaches should be student-centred and should enable students to make sense of their own experiences, and to be prepared to encounter the world beyond their immediate lives (Levine, 1995). Practising student-centred learning promotes stronger student emotional attachment to school, teachers and the community, and increases motivation to achieve goals (Thijs & Fleischmann, 2015). Proximal processes developed through pedagogic diversity, and learner centred approaches help students persist with learning, achieve their goals and ultimately prevent school dropout. Teacher-centred learning is not democratic and compelling under strict classroom management (Raufelder et al., 2016; Cornelius-White, 2007).

From the bioecological model, engagement with curriculum and assessments is enhanced, and competences are built through the close relationships students establish with their teachers. In school, the lack of positive relations produces a dysfunctional outcome for students, where they are not able to engage with learning in the school curriculum (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Engagement with the curriculum and assessments in each of the educational settings can be explained by drawing upon Martin’s motivation and engagement model (Martin, 2009, 2007). In Tertiary Preparation, curriculum, assessments and pedagogic interest were developed, and this led to the individuals drawing upon adaptive behavioural and
cognitive skills (Martin, 2009, 2007). Juxtaposed to Tertiary Preparation, schools were a place where proximal processes were weak, and did not foster adaptive behavioural or cognitive skills. Thus, Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological human development model with its key ingredient, —proximal processes—and the behavioural and cognitive dimensions of Andrew Martin’s motivation and engagement wheel, influenced students’ learning of the curriculum and their responses to the pedagogic approaches.

In school, students lacked autonomy and teacher support with curriculum and assessments, which limited the learning taking place. In the quantitative results, strong correlations on lack of educational support with curriculum, assessments and pedagogic approaches, suggest that students lacked encouragement and assistance, which may have been partly responsible for their declining interest in learning. A lack of educational support was due to lack of teacher interest or enthusiasm to teach. Teacher enthusiasm is defined as ‘conjoined occurrence of positive affective experiences, that is, teaching-related enjoyment, and the behavioural expressions of these experiences’ (Keller, Goetz, Hoy, & Frenzel, 2015, para 28). Teacher enthusiasm to teach was perhaps not expressed by teachers to capture the attention of students. Thus, students could not express their interest and emotions; their behavioural dimensions to enjoy and engage in learning. Martin (2007) argued that when students adopt behaviours for learning, and attempt to plan and persist with their learning and master what they learn, this increases both teachers’ enjoyment and confidence in teaching, and students’ motivation to learn. Research evidence suggests that in school, students like to be involved in making decisions about their learning. They should have fun with interesting, relevant and meaningful school
curriculum. Teachers should be more enthusiastic and should be active in teaching (Vickers et al., 2015).

From the bioecological perspective, the proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) in school were not positive, and good educational outcomes were not achieved. Keogh (1986) argues that student-teacher interaction and students’ personality development are related. In this study, the students’ personality development was not successful in school, due to a lack of autonomy and positive student-teacher relations, and problems associated with and learning curriculum and assessments. Educational support and students’ autonomy in learning belong at the microsystem level, and healthy interactions between students and teachers in learning the curriculum, subjects, assessments, and grades are significant at this stage of students’ education, for better academic outcomes. Educational support in school such as answering students’ questions, listening to students’ opinions and views and involving them in discussion, was important for student learning. However, both the quantitative and qualitative data suggest that teachers did not do this. In the quantitative study, the results showed strong correlations between the variables teachers were not enthusiastic about teaching and teachers did not listen to me and did not answer my questions. Also, strong correlations were found on assessments lacked variety, were not negotiable and assessments were difficult to understand. The data suggest that for these students, only minimal proximal relations were established at the micro level for educational support and autonomy in learning; instead, they conformed to teacher-directed learning.

In contrast, in Tertiary Preparation at the very microsystem level, pedagogic dimensions or teaching methods were relational and provided better outcomes. Students achieved desired outcomes (Keogh, 1986). The pedagogic approaches were
interesting and enjoyable, comprehensive, diverse, valuable, relevant, fair and negotiable, and conducive to learning. The curriculum was also challenging, rigorous and encouraged student autonomy in learning. Student autonomy in learning is the capacity to ‘take charge of one’s own learning’ (Holec, 1981, p. 3) or ‘take more responsibility for their own learning’, and ‘control over the processes and content of learning’ (Benson, 2013 p. 19). Little (1995) argued that the ‘autonomous learner tends to integrate whatever he or she learns in the formal context of the classroom with what he or she has already become as a result of developmental and experiential learning’ (175), and student autonomy involves choice, interest, realising personal goals and values, and developing competence in learning (Smolarchuk, 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In these contexts, the curriculum and assessments in Tertiary Preparation enabled choice based on students’ interests and personal goals. The curriculum and assessments were explicit and the outcomes were of a higher standard; this developed students’ skills. Thus, a better educational structure in Tertiary Preparation gave better outcomes, and success to students.

The quantitative results showed large means in curriculum and pedagogic practices in Tertiary Preparation compared to school, thus showing increased student motivation and engagement in learning in Tertiary Preparation. Students developed greater ‘confidence’ and independence, and improved their ‘self-esteem’. The quantitative results showed that students learnt and understood the subject material and found assessments in Tertiary Preparation interesting, fun and relevant for future studies. From a pedagogic perspective, the quantitative results showed that students in Tertiary Preparation were encouraged to participate in class discussions, to share their ideas and knowledge, a were encouraged to ask questions and were given meaningful answers by teachers, compared to school. Tertiary Preparation had
dialogic pedagogy (Freire, 1987), and students were active participants instead of passive receivers of information from teachers. Students and teachers collaborated and were equal stakeholders.

In dialogic pedagogies, teachers help and students navigate learning with critical thinking of theory and social discourse (Stewart, 2010; Moustakim, 2011). The teacher and students collaborate in learning, to illuminate knowledge and act on reality (Shore & Friere, 1987). Tertiary Preparation had what Shore & Friere (1987) argued a humanising dialogic pedagogy, where the relationships and perspectives of students were respected. Teachers created relationships with students. They saw students as capable individuals and active participants in learning. Fostering relationships and dialogue is more important than regulation by policy (Leva, 2015; Smyth et al., 2008; Noguera, 1995; Bartolome, 1994). Talbot and Hayes (2016) argued that pedagogies of inquiry, which involves negotiated curriculum, dialogic pedagogy and inquiry-based learning, are challenging for both students and teachers and are successful in alternative education.

All the curriculum, assessment and pedagogic variables measured in the quantitative study obtained higher means in Tertiary Preparation than high school, and the magnitude of mean variation and size effect ($\eta^2$) was large. For example, in Tertiary Preparation I was encouraged to ask questions and was given meaningful answers/In high school I was encouraged to ask questions and was given meaningful answers (mean HS 2.79, Mean TP 4.44, $\eta^2 = .052$, a large size effect). Similarly, I learnt and understood the subject material in High School/I understood and learnt the subject material in Tertiary Preparation (mean HS 2.9, TP 4.1, $\eta^2 = .043$, a large size effect).
The Qualitative results were on parity with survey data. Students O and E commented on curriculum.

**Student O:** Subjects are interesting and more relevant for future. It is more important like you learn how to write essays and research.

**Student E:** Only English is compulsory and then you choose the subjects you want to do. There are many choices. The subjects are interesting and you choose your own topics in some subjects like English.

Curriculum and learning in Tertiary Preparation was contextualised. Student B and H expressed this:

**Student B:** I like health issues, it’s good, learning about diseases and stuff. Whereas you couldn’t really study that at school. Rather than just English, maths, science. So you have human biology and then you have health issues which are like diseases and stuff. It’s more like things that people are interested in. Yeah, like history, which isn’t really history but historical studies and you like learn about viewpoints of historians on things that happened and then you have like an arts one which is like when you go into arts. Yeah, you get to choose your own thing, like you get a set assessment but like you get to choose what you want to do it on and like how you want to research it, like there is not the specific type of thing that you have to do.

**Student H:** My study in TPC is, it’s improved so much compared to high school. Just improvement in TPC was something big for me like writing, or like studying. There were some subjects I picked that I weren’t interested at first and then you learn about it and get more information and tend to improve the more in depth you go into it. Yeah, there was really like interesting the subjects, and felt like it was good to learn new information and take it in, and then put it into practice.

As enunciated by Student B and other participants, students constructed and developed knowledge in context rather than learning content only; constructing
knowledge of historians’ viewpoints on events promoted critical thinking. Student H understood the subjects and saw that his learning improved. As interpreted by Student H, students engaged meaningfully with curriculum and pedagogy by conducting research to find information on topics. Sleeter (2005) argued that students should be prepared to engage with real-world experiences, outside the traditional subject disciplines, and investigate different viewpoints. In this way, students researched, created knowledge and developed cognitive thinking. They contextualised the knowledge they gained and became critical learners.

In school, limited choice of curriculum and lack of student autonomy, and the nature of the educational structure led to poor educational outcomes. In high school, students perceived assessments and subjects as boring and felt that the curriculum was not explained clearly. Students also expressed that they did not get help from teachers to complete assessments. Further, the school subjects were not relevant to students for future studies. The following students commented on school curriculum and assessments:

**Student E:** There was no problem in school but the curriculum was boring. I didn’t like Geography, cooking, metal work. It was not relevant. I liked computers and commerce. I want to study forensic. I liked computers and commerce.

**Student M:** School subjects were not interesting. Not really. It was just like at work to me really, just like a boring job that you had to turn up. I wasn’t really interested in any of the things that were taught at school at the time.

**D:** Assessments, no, ha, ha, ha. Yeah, it was like boring. We didn’t really do assignments in class, but at TAFE we do. In school we write notes that the teacher tells.

**Student E:** Assessments are passed on to do and you do it and give to the teachers. If it is wrong then you can’t do anything.
Student F: Some assessments were of not much help and it was hard to find teachers. General information was given about assessments and then submit. You don’t give drafts and get support.

Student G commented on the lack of choice in curriculum at school:

Student G: I didn’t like subjects because most of the subjects I felt they weren’t broad enough. It was science, music, drama, English and maths that was it. Yeh not much choice at all. The thing about high school was that what you did there the year before were like, if you were going through to Year 11, the courses that you pick in Year 11 were dependent on the courses that you had already done. So if I like hadn’t done woodwork and metalwork the year before I wouldn’t be able to do that in Year 11. Yeah, so in respects to the sort of category that it was in, so if you did something in a certain category the year before that’s the choices that you were able to pick. I’m probably a lot better off using my hands, handiwork, hands on.

The following three students commented on lack of autonomy in learning and pedagogy in school.

Student B: But in science, my teacher would just write things on the board and give you about five minutes to go through it and then she would just write the answers. She would never explain it and when we went to do our science exam for my school certificate like half of us just had no idea what was in there, like at all, it was crazy.

Student C: I didn’t like the subjects because of the way they taught. I think I would have probably liked it better if they taught it differently, but they just put it up and told you to write it. We weren’t allowed to talk at all. And they wouldn’t ask us questions and they wouldn’t give examples or anything, they would just walk into the classroom, sit down, turn on the overhead and say copy it down and would leave when the bell goes and that was it.

Student H: Copying out of textbooks. I didn’t feel like I learnt anything.
Yeah, just writing notes instead of actually teaching.
The above comments suggest that students were not encouraged to engage deeply and meaningfully, and this limited their capacity to understand and reach their full potential. The pedagogic approaches employed by teachers did not enthuse students to learn, and they became positioned as passive learners who responded to teacher-regulated activities. Students were not given opportunities to ask questions and were not able to negotiate aspects of the curriculum, assessment tasks and pedagogic approaches. The research results suggest that teachers provided answers to questions and controlled the learning process, which inhibited students’ critical thinking. By not providing explanations and a rationale for learning activities, teachers were not able to harness the students’ inner abilities and strengths, to motivate and engage them. Lack of pedagogic approach in teaching the curriculum did not intrinsically engage and sustain in-depth learning.

**Student L:** The subjects were not interesting. Um some of the subjects were good, I found back, English is the one I think was taught like the books we were learning weren’t interesting

Lack of adequate support and not learning academic content and achieving required grades, especially in the high stakes Higher School Certificate examination (Year 12) exit examination in NSW, created fear of failure in students. Student B commented:

**Student B:** Oh the teachers weren’t helping, there was nothing really sticking in my head. I got along at school and stuff, it was mostly like the teachers and worrying about whether or not I was going to get the mark I needed to go to uni.
As facilitators, teachers should structure the learning and provide educational support with clear and detailed instructions and expectations. Teachers should allow autonomy during learning and increase rather than neglect, thwart, and overlook students’ internal motivational powers (Titsworth, Mazer, Goodboy, Bolkan, & Myers, 2015; Jang, Reeve & Deci, 2010; Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Jeon, & Barch, 2004; Reeve & Jang, 2006; Reeve & Halusic, 2009). Teacher expectation and teacher efficacy also enhances students’ perception of closer student-teacher relationships and increases student motivation to learn (Summers, Davis & Hoy, 2017).

Research evidence suggests that allowing students to select their topics to study, and less teacher-regulated learning, increases motivation and engagement, relatedness and competency (Lubold, Forbes & Stevenson, 2016; Smit, de Brabander & Martens, 2014) and increases deep conceptual learning (Jang, Reeve & Halusic, 2016; Warring Jr, 2016). Students’ desire to learn is greater when they have more control of the learning environment, enjoy the activities they do and make judgements on their learning (Manreka, 2015; Xu, 2015; Guvenc, 2015; Cowie & Moreland, 2015; Goyal, 2016; Reeve 2006). Students benefit more if they are supported and allowed to contribute their opinions and views. This increases their cognitive thinking (Goldschmidt, Scharfenberg & Bogner, 2015). Students’ persistence increases performance and achievement with learning opportunities and choices in supportive environments (Huang, 2015; Prain et al., 2015). Teachers who practise student-centred beliefs and learning are themselves persistent, enjoy teaching and are confident in teaching (Wong & Luft, 2015; Goodear & Dudley, 2016; Hattie, 2012; Martin, 2006).

Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (2006) postulated that personal resource capacity—the ability, skills, knowledge and experience of individuals—shapes his or her
development, and the proximal processes in which they engage. Student-teacher interaction must be supported, to constructively foster development and gain competence. Personal resource capacity needs to be exposed and supported frequently and intensively over longer periods for development of competence (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000).

Academic performance as measured by numerous exams and assessments, lack of support and fear of failure, could have influenced students to leave school early. Lack of interest in text and subjects (e.g. English, for Student L above) was due to the pedagogic approaches; use of prescribed texts for assessments, and examinations for specific outcomes. The subject and text must interest the students in learning and enjoying what they read. The lack of interest in texts and subjects is supported by quantitative and qualitative results. In school, teachers were not enthusiastic about teaching, which correlated positively with lack of a variety of methods. There were also positive correlations between lack of a variety of methods and school subjects were not interesting to students. A wider choice of texts, and applying texts in different contexts for learning, would have motivated students such as Student L. This way, students would have liked and learnt subjects in school.

Lovejoy, Lucy, Palma, Prain and Edwards (2015) have argued that English curriculum should shift from print prescribed text to multi-modal text types, including digital media with individual and collaborative reasoning, multiple literacies, high order thinking and ownership of the English curriculum. The type of curriculum and pedagogic approaches suggested by these authors would motivate students in school.

From the comments of Students E, L and B, and other participants in this study, it could be concluded that students exhibited what Martin (2007, p. 418) called
‘failure avoidance’. Failure avoidance is an impeding/maladaptive cognition among students who are anxious and are motivated by fear of failure and who actively handicap themselves against their chances of success and become disengaged (Martin, 2007, Martin & Liem, 2012). Student B had a fear of failure of not getting the adequate marks to go to university, due to lack of support at school.

In this research, early school leaving was influenced by teacher-dominated pedagogic approaches. Students wrote from the board, making notes from textbooks, and teachers provided answers. Lack of interesting curriculum and assessments, and lack of student autonomy in learning, also influenced early school leaving. These pedagogic approaches and limited curriculum soundly resonate with other research on early school leaving (Vickers, et al., 2015; Gemici & Lu, 2014; Te Riele, 2012, 2006, 2000; Ross, 2008; Teese, 2007; Vickers, 2007; Ross & Gray, 2005; Lamb, et al., 2004).

Tertiary Preparation echoed Freire and Levine’s philosophy of dialogic and democratic pedagogy, which was effective for learning. Freire 1970 (in Shore, 1992 p. 86) argued that dialogue education is a ‘horizontal’ relationship with mutual conversations between teachers and students. In school, the students’ pedagogic dimension is what Freire called didactic lecturing, which is anti-dialogical, an unequal relationship between teacher as authority and students as passive listeners who are filled with curriculum content. Freire (2000, p. 45) argued that teachers should not treat students as ‘depositories’ to be filled with content. Teachers and students must collaboratively explore and critically re-create knowledge and meaning, and students should be committed and involved in the learning process. The curriculum and pedagogy must be connective and involve ‘engaged learning’ (Smyth et al., 2008 p. 157).
In Tertiary Preparation, students learnt actively and explored the curriculum in context, rather than learning content only. There was an equal relationship between students and teachers, and students learnt in open dialogue with teachers. Levine (1995) stated that learning is a social process effectively accomplished with the active engagement of the learner. In Tertiary Preparation, the curriculum was selected carefully, with conditions of assessment, explicit instructions and criteria for assessment being applied effectively to measure learning outcomes. In school, students lacked clear instructions on tasks.

The following students commented on the discourse and assessment criteria:

**Student C:** There is criteria that you follow, so it is easier, it’s not like when I was at school they would give you a topic and say go write a report on it, or go and write an essay on it, but at TAFE they give you something to follow so you know exactly what you need to do for each thing. They break it down like easier.

**Student A:** Um, the assessments are more set out, a lot easier to understand you know what you have to do. In class they usually explain to us in more detail about what to write, so then yeah how it says the assessment criteria, like if you pinpoint five different things and describe each of them you will get more marks, it tells you what to do if you want to get a high mark rather than a lower, yeah, it shows you the specifics.

**Student L said:** But you know if there is something they (teachers) can say to you about an assessment and what the markers are looking for and they can explain why they are looking to do that and explain why we are doing it. Whereas in high school they say you are having an essay, write an essay due on Thursday you write it and hand in and they mark. Here they will tell this is what’s happening also when you do your assessments assignments to take home you get the marking criteria. There is really no reason why you can’t get good marks when you have that. But you want to know the criteria, whereas in high school they will mark it—it is a good essay, it is a bad essay. How do I know, you know, get a bad mark.
Individualised instructions and upfront approaches meeting students’ needs are highlighted as features of good pedagogic practice in second-chance contexts (Mills & McGregor, 2016). Singh (2007 p. 19) argued that curricular and pedagogic approach should focus on the ‘framing’ of knowledge, which involves criteria for assessing learning and explicit instructional discourse.

The dialogic pedagogic approach motivated students and developed their higher order cognitive skills, increased aptitude to learn and valuing of learning (Martin, 2007, 2009). Students perceived curriculum as meaningful, valuable and worthwhile, and the dialogic nature of learning involved students emotionally. The students’ interest in learning was a central psychological process (Stenefau et al., 2004) that energised and directed interaction with different curriculum activities.

The comments of students above illustrate that individuals are at the centre of the human development process (Bronfenbrenner, 2006) and as such, should have the choices, opportunities, resources necessary; should be supported and nurtured by others with whom they interact (proximal relations), especially teachers in school, as this enhances students’ learning experience beyond the classroom environment. In Tertiary Preparation, learning and proximal relations were created by a dialogic, democratic pedagogy and curriculum, which provided opportunities and choices to learn critically in context, and with others.

Furthermore, the curriculum and assessments developed knowledge and skills for future education, employment and wellbeing. Meaningful and relational curriculum created capabilities in students for freedom and wellbeing. The dialogic and democratic curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, students, and teachers creating knowledge collaboratively, prepared students to meaningfully understand the macrosystem influences of society, which will affect their lives in the foreseeable
future. The macrosystem includes a wider sociocultural environment with which the individuals interact, as they get older. In this context, students will indirectly interact with macrosystem factors, which will impact on their development in the future as they progress from education to work. The students will also make choices and rational decisions on socio-economic and political influences in their lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 1977; Leonard, 2011; McInerney et al., 2011). Thus, the curriculum, assessment, and pedagogic dimension, with its context-based learning, prepared students better for their macrosystem experiences in future.

Educators should engage students in thinking about the big questions and ideas of the 21st century. Controversial issues related to politics, justice and the environment should be part of the curriculum (Hutchinson, 1996). The curriculum, and pedagogic instruction in Tertiary Preparation, gave students an opportunity to explore contemporary issues affecting society. The diversity of the curriculum enabled students to discuss, enquire, create, and enhance knowledge. The curriculum gave students exosystem experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) to construct knowledge on local politics, industry, media and technology that influence their lives. Thus, the curriculum and pedagogic approaches were significant tools for stimulating intellectual thinking, which further motivated and engaged students.

In Tertiary Preparation, students self-regulated their learning and were accountable for their assessment tasks. These findings are consistent with self-regulated learning perspectives (Prain et al., 2015; Brown & Hirschfeld, 2008; Zimmerman, 2002; Ryan & Deci 2000) which argue that students who attempt assessment as their own responsibility for learning, demonstrate increased educational outcomes. Student P shared an example of self-regulated learning.


**Student P:** Yeah and most of my classes have class time for it (assessment) when we just come into the library particularly in history actually. We pretty much do it all by our—our teacher gives us the information and tells us what we need to do and then it is pretty much up to us because apparently they can’t exactly teach us our topic.

6.3.1 Enjoyment and Valuing Learning

In the quantitative data the variables measured on curriculum, assessment and pedagogy, such as assessments in Tertiary Preparation were interesting and relevant for future studies, with high means indicating that the curriculum, assessment and pedagogic dimension aroused students’ interest and enjoyment in learning, which suggests that students valued and owned their learning. The qualitative results affirmed students’ interest in and valuing of their learning. Students L and I showed high levels of interest in learning, and valued the curriculum. Student L showed interest, sustained engagement and persistence with the science curriculum activity.

**Student I:** Since I have been here I have learnt a lot of stuff that I didn’t even know like eh in first semester I did legal issues and I did contemporary Australian society and I learnt a lot of stuff like issues in society that I would have never learnt and stuff about politics and all that kind of stuff that I didn’t know before.

**Student L:** And some of the gear and stuff they have got in science labs is fantastic and some of the practicals we have done in in physics has been amazing. I mean we um, we use a cloud chain to witness nuclear decay that was absolutely blew my mind see that. If you did that in high school it just wouldn’t work, um things such as dropping bearings to measure acceleration and gravity and just the quality of the gear we got and that’s a, a lot of that is the hard work put into it.
Students in Tertiary Preparation embraced curriculum activities and expressed enjoyment. Physics experiments engrossed Student L. For Student L, learning new concepts and practical components in science was of personal value to him and he felt he owned his learning. Student L was given an opportunity to connect and engage with the curriculum. According to Flowerday and Shell (2015), situational interest created by teachers is the key motivator for engagement and student outcomes. Student L observed a physics experiment, and the teacher-set equipment for the activity motivated and engaged him. Various researchers argue that instructional design and equipment, and student autonomy in education, lead to higher motivation and student ownership of learning as individual, or working in groups (Enghag & Neidderer, 2008; Brookhart, Moss & Long, 2009; O’Neill, 2010).

Student N commented on interest, and valuing the curriculum by learning academic writing and documenting reference items which would be of value to her in future, as she wanted to study psychology at university.

**Student N:** Just to pull out an example, the learning about Harvard referencing which they don’t teach in high school but university definitely relies on Harvard referencing. I just think, for me personally, it’s more streamlined I suppose, focussed and academic in the sense that you learn to know things.

The enjoyment of the curriculum and assessments, and valuing them, created a sense of ownership of learning by students. This was a crucial aspect of curriculum, assessments and pedagogic dimensions in Tertiary Preparation compared to high school that gave students success. The research data also suggest that with curriculum, assessment and pedagogic support in Tertiary Preparation, the students were happy and enjoyed learning. Happiness and enjoyment in learning were attributed to academic rigour and teacher attributes. In the qualitative study, many
students enunciated the words ‘happy’ and ‘enjoyed’ several times. The quantitative
data showed being happy studying in Tertiary Preparation had a high mean compared
to high school, and a large magnitude of mean variation. This could be related to
interesting and relevant curriculum, assessments and pedagogic dimensions.

Students’ interest in learning is related to their sense of enjoyment (Gorard &
See, 2011; Lumby, 2011). The findings in the current study agree with Hagenauer
and Hascher (2010, p. 508) who argued that ‘supporting learning environment’,
‘teachers’ care’, and ‘instructional quality’ are significant origins of students’
learning enjoyment. Diverse and interesting learning situations increase students’
interest, competence and enjoyment. They receive good grades and understand the
learning matter. Lack of competence hinders learning enjoyment. Learning can be
more engaging, enjoyable and interesting when it is more than information delivery.
Students enjoy the subject more when it is taught in diverse ways, rather than
learning content only (Gorard & See, 2011; Harris & Haydn 2006).

With their sense of enjoyment in learning, it could be argued that the students
also valued and owned their learning. The data suggest that the students cultivated
ownership of their learning. Students learned not for the sake of learning or due to
an obligation to learn, but they enjoyed their learning. Student N enunciated his
capabilities and intellectual growth. He studied Tertiary Preparation to complete his
high school education but also enjoyed his learning and looked forward to utilising
it for future career prospects.

**Student N:** It’s pretty good, seem to learn a lot in a short time. Yeah, I just
can’t believe how much I’ve learnt in not even a year. I can do whatever I
want which feels great, I can do whatever, when I just finished Year 10 it was
like oh I can go to the Army and what else, that’s about it, or get a trade,
that’s about all you can do, but I didn’t want a trade. I can go in the Army as
an officer, air force as a fighter pilot or whatever. There are heaps of good
things, it just feels good being able to finally finish it; it’s like, wow, it’s great. So it’s, yeah, being able to do it and doing it and enjoying it as well, not just doing it because you have to.

Students made decisions and developed ownership of their learning. Student autonomy and ownership was created by pedagogic practice that Mortimer and Scott (2003, p. 21) called ‘handing over responsibility to the student’. The pedagogic practice was based on the Vygotskian perspective of learning, a shift from assisted to unassisted performance, which motivated students to think of what they were learning and internalise their learning. Dudley-Marling and Searle (1995, p. vii, cited in Rainer & Matthews, 2002 p. 22) state that ‘meaningful learning will always depend on the degree to which learners are able to make learning their own’. In Tertiary Preparation, the relational curriculum, assessments and pedagogic diversity enabled students to make autonomous decisions and gain ownership of their learning. Students valuing their own learning showed that they adopted a higher level of motivation and cognitive thinking (Martin, 2007).

Research suggests that teachers should give choices to encourage or foster autonomous learning, as autonomy is an important pedagogy for student motivation and engagement (Taylor, Cooper-Thomas, & Peterson, 2015). Cultivation of learner autonomy should be the goal of education in the 21st Century (Gang, 2015; Ma & Gao, 2010). The readiness to take control and sustain interest best explains students’ academic performance, and thus students’ perspectives should be considered in educational practice (Cowie & Moreland, 2015; Ata & Nguyen, 2015).

In this study, school was perceived to be not providing or supporting student autonomy and choice to students, especially in choice of curriculum. Tertiary Preparation however provided choice of curriculum, assessments and pedagogic approaches for better outcomes for students. In this study, socio-economic status and
educational disadvantage determined early school leaving, as well as overcoming socio-economic status by re-engagement through second chance. This is discussed next.

6.4 Theme 3: Socio-economic status and educational disadvantage

The third salient theme was socio-economic status and educational disadvantage. Out-of-school factors—family relations, health problems, homelessness, parental education and economic hardship—exerted influence on early school leaving. In this study, the students became successful and overcame their educational disadvantage through re-engagement. Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and capital is significant in explaining how students in this study were affected by low socio-economic status and disadvantage, which influenced early school leaving. However, students overcoming their disadvantage and educational success through re-engagement also explains how Bourdieu’s habitus can be transformed or de-constructed through time, and social capital gained. Bourdieu’s theoretical concepts of habitus, capital and field (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986) explain educational attainment of students in school. His three key principles explain the relations of power play in education, with manifestation of inequality within educational discourses, policies and pedagogies. The key concept in Bourdieu’s theory of habitus is discussed in Chapter 2. The key concepts in Bourdieu’s theory are analysed as important to the success of students in this study. The success of students from disadvantaged backgrounds shows their changing habitus, which they created from their experiences in Tertiary Preparation. Reay (2014) argued that habitus is collective and individual trajectories, a complex interplay between past and present, re-structured by an individual’s experiences of the world. It reflects the social conditions in which it was constructed over a historical period. Transformation and choices are possible but the choices
inscribed in the habitus are limited. Choices are bounded by the opportunities and constraints a person finds in their external circumstances.

In this study, the students transformed their habitus with re-engagement and success. English and Bolton (2016) argued that habitus is a dynamic, fluid, powerful concept that explains how the cycle of poverty and negative attitudes toward schooling is perpetuated. This study showed that negative attitudes to schooling are not inherent, that they change through time and personal experiences.

The second important concept in Bourdieu’s theory, as applied to this research finding, is ‘capital’. Capital includes social, cultural and economic resources (Navarro 2006). Cultural capital is the skills, dispositions, attitudes, language, knowledge, family background and other cultural assets that parents pass down to their children as their life experiences (Ferfolja, Diaz, & Ullman, 2015). Cultural capital gives advantage to some students, while it disadvantages other students in school (Moustakim, 2015). Children from families with an elite culture at home have an advantage at schools. Teachers recognise and reward this advantage, and exclude children who lack cultural capital (Tzanakis, 2011). Family cultural capital is also a safeguard for enrolment in and graduation from post school education (Dumais & Ward, 2010). However, for cultural capital to be effective, it has to be relational: where parents interact with their children and talk about school and attendance, help with enrolment and encourage the children to stay connected to school, rather than a cultural capital that is static, which represents the ‘highbrow activities and practices of parents’ (Tramonte & Willms, 2010, p. 200). Economic capital is monetary wealth and material goods, such as property and resources. However, economic capital is not gained itself but it is obtained by individuals or groups undergoing a process of social recognition. This social recognition is social capital, which involves access to social
networks, institutions, relationships, recognition and resources that are acquired by
individuals or groups as a result of group membership and mutual acquaintance for
success (Ferfolja, Diaz & Ullman, 2015). In this study, students perhaps lacked
cultural assets from their families, but teachers in Tertiary Preparation recognised and
rewarded the potential of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and helped
students achieve social capital in manoeuvring their way in education.

With success and social capital, these students will be able to express
themselves and play a significant role in Bourdieu’s idea of ‘field’, the third important
concept of Bourdieu’s theory. Fields are the many social and institutional settings or
social relations in which people express and reproduce their dispositions. People
compete for the distribution of different kinds of capital in these fields (Gaventa 2003,
p. 6). A field is a ‘network or set of relationships’ which may be ‘intellectual, religious,
educational, cultural,’ (Navarro 2006, p. 18). Social fields are constituted in broader
institutions such as education, law, family, health, arts, media and popular culture
(Ferfolja, Diaz & Ullman, 2015). People experience power differently in a field, in a
given context and environment—these being the key influences on habitus (Gaventa,
2003). Thus, Bourdieu’s theory of social practice is important in explaining early
school leaving and re-engagement; it is embedded in the discussion of socio-economic
status and educational disadvantage in this section.

In this study, although the quantitative data sets showed no correlations on
socio-economic status and personal attributes on early school leaving, the qualitative
data had extended narratives that elucidated the dynamics of personal and family
circumstances on early school leaving. This was probably due to the way the
questions were designed in the quantitative and qualitative study. In the quantitative
study the objective nature of the questions gave students limited responses on
variables. In the qualitative component, given the open-ended questions and the conversational style of the interviews, participants had more opportunity to express themselves. Some students’ health affected their studies.

**Student A:** I started my Year 11 but half way through I got really sick with glandular fever and I think I had six weeks off and by the time I got back there was a lot of work and it was really hard to catch up on and it wasn’t for me.

**Student P:** I ended up with a sleeping disorder and missed a few days and it continued and I missed a few more days and then they said that I would have to repeat and I didn’t want to so I left.

Student A and Student P developed what Martin, in his motivation and engagement wheel (Martin, 2007) called anxiety and uncertain control in school environment by teachers and peers, which appear to have affected their motivation at school. Students who are absent from school for any reason miss out on school work and find it difficult to catch up with accumulated work, and become disengaged in school (Lloyd-Jones, Bowen, Holtom, Griffin, & Sims, 2010). For some students, trying family circumstances led to early school leaving. Student C lived in a single parent family and intended to complete school but left early, due to family disputes. She echoed her family and personal circumstances.

**Student C:** After I left Year 9, I worked for a while. After I finished Year 10 at Western Training and Education Centre. I wanted to start Year 11 so I signed into a senior campus and I was there for about two months, but again with my mum, because I’d moved out of her house she would be real nasty and she would start on people that I know and they would start on me, and it reminded me a lot of AA (former school) so I wanted to try something different so I left XX (senior college). I moved again, I moved from my auntie’s house to a friend’s house because of more trouble and I wanted to get back into school but I thought I couldn’t start in Year 11, like I wanted to start from Year 11 again, like start it from scratch, but at somewhere else and there
was like, I couldn’t do it at senior campus so it was hard to find somewhere else.

Student M, whose parents were divorced, juggled living with both parents, did not get support and left school early. For Students C and M, education was important, to counter the vulnerability of their family context, but they could not continue with school, due to a lack of support. For these students, education was constrained by what Battin-Pearson, Newcomb, Abbott, Hill, Catalano & Hawkins (2000) postulated in Models of Deviance in terms of a Family socialisation theory which focuses on varied family socialisation patterns—including parental divorce, family stress, parental behavioural control and acceptance—that influence dropping out. Student C was affected by what Battin-Pearson et al., (2000) called Structural strains theory where demographic factors such as low socio-economic status (SES) contribute to school dropout.

Lack of parental education also determined early leaving. Both parents of Student E did not finish school. Student E was told by her father to leave school, to work and contribute to household expenses. An older sibling completed school but could not find employment, and thus the family perceived that education was not helping.

Student E: I finished Year 10. Wanted to do Year 12 but parents would not allow. My mum finished Year 10 and dad only finished primary school. They could not pay fees. Expenses were high and my sister finished Year 12 but did not get anything out of it. My father was always against me going to school.

The parents of Student E exhibited what Bourdieu conceptualised in his theory of social practice as a lack of ‘cultural capital’ and ‘social disposition’ or nature of their lifestyle in the community where they live (Nash, 1999). From a lack of cultural capital perspective, they accepted their position in society and their
current socio-economic circumstances and lower level of education. They did not see any possibility of change and progress, but maintained their status quo. Their habitus was embodied (Reay, 2015) and deeply ingrained in habits and skills, and their dispositions were perhaps due to life experiences (Reay & Vincent, 2014). Despite their lack of cultural capital, the parents of Student E did not aspire to struggle to win in Bourdieu’s field of education (Reay, 2015, 2004). Unlike parents who have cultural and social capital, who encourage, help and keep their children connected with school, the parents of Student E lacked social interaction with Bourdieu’s field, the educational institution (school). However, Student E strived and succeeded in education and transformed her habitus.

To enhance their children’s learning, parents need skills to bring knowledge, know-how, and materials from the external environment to the family. Families who live in environments that contain such resources have an advantage where the proximal processes in the immediate setting make the needed goods available. However, for families in disadvantaged environments, the same level of proximal process cannot yield the same return. For example, parents with limited education may not have the knowledge or skill to help the child with homework (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994); in Bourdieu’s theory, these parents lack social capital and cannot effectively network with school for help, or communicate with other organisations for help. Thus, in this study, lower parental education constrained parents helping their children with school work.

However, in Tertiary Preparation, these students were older, more mature and relied on environmental contexts for support from teachers and peers, different environmental contexts than their families. The students had a change in their habitus in a different learning context, saw possibilities, and recognised their potential.
Research evidence shows that there is a need for continuous teacher support during the schooling years as well as before the start of school (such as in the home and school environment microsystem) to compensate for lower skill level at school entry (Youn, 2016). In Tertiary Preparation, teachers attempt to reduce inequality in education by supporting and treating all students equally.

The human development model also argues that apart from the physical resources and knowledge that are required for successful proximal processes, the growing person requires some degree of stability. Proposition 1 (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994 p. 576) stipulates that to be effective, the proximal processes driving development ‘must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time’. Thus, if there is inconsistency, disruptive and unstable environments with inconsistent behaviour—for example, conflict among families with divorced parents—then the kinds of proximal process will not engage the young person, and will not enhance their psychological development. This would have affected Students C, M, and many others, who came from single parent homes or families where parents were divorced and experienced conflict and arguments. If students from disadvantaged backgrounds are marginalised in the school environment, they will have poor school attainment.

Consistently with the current research findings, other research suggests that the level of parental education determines educational achievement and early school leaving. Students from households where parents are less educated, have a higher tendency to leave school early, and students from families with a higher level of parental education and income have a greater school completion rate (Lavrijsen & Nicaise, 2015; Traag, Rolf, & Velden, 2011; Marks & Fleming, 1999).
Research evidence argues that socio-economic status influences early school leaving (Dunst & Hamby, 2016; Lamb et al., 2011; Lamb & Rice, 2008; Lamb et al., 2004; Smyth et al., 2008; Smyth & Hattam, 2004; McMillan & Curtis, 2008; Lamb, 1996; Marks & Fleming, 1999; Kasen, Cohen & Brook, 1998; Kim, et al., 2011; Vitaro, et al. 2001). Socio-economic status also increases anxiety and withdrawal from school; a lack of family resources for schooling and costs leads to school dropout (Berger & Archer, 2015; Minello & Blossfeld, 2016; Vickers et al., 2014; Obonyo et al., 2015). The socio-economic status of children is also related to student segregation in school, which influences school dropout (Palardy, Rumberger & Butler, 2015; Clark, 2014). Factors such as geographic isolation and young people living in neighbourhoods with high poverty, low income or in regional and rural areas, are more likely to result in leaving school early (Lamb & Rice, 2008; McMillan & Curtis, 2008; Marks & Fleming, 1999; Lamb, 1996). However, more recent research has argued that low socio-economic status is only moderately associated with educational outcomes, and does not determine educational achievement and university entry. Student performance is more related to ability and persistence than to socioeconomic background (Marks, 2014; Kim et al., 2017; Jimerson et al., 2016; Berkowotz et al., 2016). The progress of students from low socio-economic demography in the present study supports this conclusion.

**6.4.1 Overcoming Educational Disadvantage**

Socio-economic status is a determinant of early school leaving; however, in this study, although some students left school early, due to their socio-economic status, and from homes with lower parental education and family constraints, the students re-engaged and completed Tertiary Preparation, and thus overcame their educational disadvantage. Tertiary Preparation opened opportunities for these
students to study further at TAFE, university or take up employment. The evidence in this research shows that socio-economic status can be overcome and that students can become successful in school through their commitment to learning and the proximal processes they develop with others, especially their teachers and peers.

Unlike her parents, who did not complete school, Student E (discussed above) aspired to study forensic science and secure a promising professional career. socio-economic status influenced the adoption of academic achievement goals for Student E. Her re-engagement showed her agency, course of actions, transformation, and the relations she established with teachers and peers at TAFE; which constitutes development of what Bourdieu called a secondary habitus (Reay & Vincent, 2014); learning in Tertiary Preparation provided this disposition.

The educational success of Student A (below) also showed changing dispositions in families, from past generational statuses to present, and how re-engagement with education provides change in social and economic status. Student M, after leaving school, worked with his father as a labourer but ended up in arguments with him, which fortunately led to his re-engagement through Tertiary Preparation and thus changed his secondary habitus.

**Student A:** I always wanted to complete school and I am the first person in our family to complete it, so—Yeah, my cousins or my grandparents, no one has ever done anything, so it is nice to have that history, yeah. I really want a full time job, so like I want to be earning money.

**Student M:** Well yeah, we got into an argument (with dad) and then I thought look—we always argue, so then, and because mum lives up here (Blue Mountains) so I lived in Manly, I said I would move up to mum’s, so I moved up here and straightaway just thought I may as well finish school.

Like these three students, many early leavers in this study were from low income, high unemployment suburbs of Western Sydney. The parents of early school
leavers had lower levels of education. More than three quarter of the parents (76%) did not complete school. Lower levels of parental education would have influenced early school leaving. In this study, students from low SES background had choice and strong determination to re-engage and complete school. ‘Choice is at the heart of habitus’ (Reay, 2014, p. 95). The students’ choice and persistence show educational transition and academic success. The students prepared themselves to build their cultural and social capital, and navigate society for employment and social status. This is different from their parents, and previous generations, whose choices and opportunities inscribed in their habitus were constrained in their immediate and external circumstances. As explained by Reay (2014, p. 95), ‘within Bourdieu’s theoretical framework’ these parents were ‘circumscribed by an internalised framework that makes some possibilities inconceivable, others improbable and a limited range acceptable’.

The students’ perspectives in the current study showed that the proximal processes of students with teachers and peers in Tertiary Preparation and their family members at the microsystem levels mitigated their educational disadvantage. The relationships that students established helped them succeed, irrespective of their parental education and economic status. The exosystem level factors, such as how they felt about their neighbourhoods, also influenced the students. The macrosystem level of the human development framework, where they intended to have better educational outcomes for better socio-economic status and wellbeing than previous generations, also influenced the students to re-engage and succeed. Increased aspirations, development and life changes over time (chronosystem) gave them better educational outcomes, even though they were from disadvantaged demographic backgrounds. Student N (above) had changing personal circumstances such as, residence, when he
had to decide to re-locate to re-engage with education; he was a mature adult when he made that decision.

**Student M:** I think it’s just because I am a bit older and I have dropped out of school and I have realised how important it is and that you just have to do it. Yeah, and I guess, yes, since—I am 20 now and I can tell I’m a lot more mature than I was when I was 17, 18 at high school. So I felt I had to.

All students aspired to gain cultural capital and social capital for a better life in future, and thus the macrosystem level forces such as better job prospects and enjoyment of higher social class commodities, influenced their decisions to re-engage. The students were in challenging family circumstances, but their persistence in striving to achieve their goals was critical in their decisions to re-engage, and break intergenerational cycles of disadvantage. The students from disadvantaged backgrounds formed personal learning identities, with autonomous educational decisions and inter-personal relationships at the micro or interpersonal level in school, rather than following their acquired cultural habitus and macro structural influences, to achieve academic goals and social mobility.

These findings on the success of students from disadvantaged lower socio-economic backgrounds agree with previous research, which argued that students from disadvantaged backgrounds succeed with individual persistence in supportive learning environments with teachers, parents and community support including their own autonomous educational decision-making (Krauss, Kornbluh & Zeldin, 2017; Lovett, 2016; Jimerson et al., 2016; Berkowitz et al., 2016; Huang, 2015; Homel & Ryan, 2014). The successes of these students are due to their own negotiation with others, such as teachers and peers, at the microsystem level, and they make gradual progress with their educational development. Research also shows that poor school
experiences, risky activities and aspirations of young people add to the complexity of disadvantage and non-completion (Homel, Maviskalyan, Nguyen & Ryan, 2012). In this study, students had poor experiences in school, but they aspired to succeed.

6.5 Summary

Consistently with Bronfenbrenner’s theory and Andrew Martin’s motivation and engagement wheel, the discussion on early school leaving confirms that early school leavers were not disengaged but rather disenfranchised from learning at school. The school factors such as connectedness with positive student-teacher and peer relationships, and curriculum and pedagogic dimensions, the microsystem components, did not connect to the students for positive educational outcomes. At the micro level, students’ strong connections to school, proximal processes with their teachers and peers, and positive connections with school curriculum, assessments and pedagogies, would have promoted positive development and educational achievement.

The bioecological model suggests that individuals develop in relation to others and the proximal processes of different environments and contexts. The students who underachieved did not lack the potential and capability, but their abilities were not nurtured and developed in the school environment. These students had a long history of poor academic outcomes. According to the bioecological model, the early school leavers were not failures in life; Tertiary Preparation changed their behaviours, learning capacities and academic performance. Studying Tertiary Preparation, a different environment from school, with its positive proximal processes and different types of influences, opened the students’ potential social and cognitive development and led to academic success.
Early school leavers were still interested, motivated and wanted to learn. They wanted to overcome past failures and expressed regret at not completing school. Students also felt like resolving their personal, family and socio-economic circumstances, to break generational educational disadvantage. They persisted and managed their learning with set goals, established positive relationships with their teachers and peers, planned their study, valued learning and were self-determined to strive towards and achieve their goals. The students’ aspirations to re-engage inform us that early school leaving is not disengagement and failure. Thus, this research refutes the notion of student disengagement in school and supports re-engagement and school completion through second-chance education. Andrew Martin’s motivation and engagement construct, and Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological human development model explain or shed light on individual initiative and on the close relationships and interactions that generate positive outcomes and development in students.

The students in Tertiary Preparation experienced effective complex reciprocal interactions with others, especially with their teachers and peers in the TAFE environment (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000 p. 117; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994, p. 568). With effective interactions, they had positive outcomes, such as, realisation and development of their potential and acquired knowledge and skills. The students’ learning and development was propelled by individual initiative, enabled by interactions with and the influence of others in the microsystem, especially teachers and peers. Moving through a continuum of time and contexts from high school to TAFE, at the very microsystem level, they had varying proximal relations with family, teachers and peers in school and TAFE. Proximal processes in school hindered educational progress. In contrast, the proximal processes in Tertiary
Preparation were positive, mutual and relational, which encouraged learning. Learning in school and in Tertiary Preparation involved interaction with the curriculum, assessments and pedagogic dimensions at the micro and mesosystem levels.

At school, the students’ interactions with learning were not adequately supportive and autonomous: teaching was teacher-directed, students were compelled to learn, and thus proximal processes were not relational, which hampered their learning the curriculum and prevented them from negotiating the assessment requirements successfully. In contrast, in Tertiary Preparation, interactions with learning were supportive, autonomous, student-centred and relational, which motivated and engaged students in learning. Proximal processes in Tertiary Preparation were paramount both for relatedness with teachers and peers and for academic interaction with curriculum, assessments and pedagogic approaches leading to better outcomes. The curriculum, assessments and pedagogic approaches are also distal stimuli at the mesosystem level. The curriculum and assessments are designed centrally and are external to students; however, the positive proximal processes in Tertiary Preparation enabled studying the curriculum and completing assessments with student-centred pedagogies.

An individual’s development and success is related to his or her interaction with family, and relationships with and support from family members (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1989). For some students, the support of, and interaction with their family was constrained, and family issues and personal attributes influenced early school leaving. However, support from family was crucial for success. The students’ academic success was a result of their changing behaviours, maturity, and previous poor learning experiences. Students also set their goals and
persisted with their learning. They asked for help from their teachers and peers, to become successful. The major social environments—home, school and TAFE—and relationships that the students experienced with others (mostly adults), gave practical support and made distinct contributions to their capacities for academic success.

Most early school leaving research has argued that SES and parental education predict school performance and early leaving. Students from lower socio-economic background have lower educational aspirations and achievement. In the present study however, students of low SES status whose parents had lower educational qualifications, re-engaged, and completed their studies. The findings in this study yield significant insights into socio-economic status and school completion, suggesting that SES status and demographic educational disadvantages were not constraints to educational progress and social mobility. The students were active agents in their own educational progress with their individual initiatives. They had changing life trajectories in their transition from school to TAFE, and social contexts, especially interaction with teachers and peers, contributed to academic outcomes. Other research evidence has argued that learning and student persistence are not likely to address SES constraints on achievement for low SES students, but that some interventions, such as learning opportunities and support, are necessary (Huang, 2015).

In the current study, students overcame their educational disadvantages with teacher support, student autonomy in learning, curriculum and assessments, and pedagogic support. Thus, for this sample of students, SES had no bearing on educational achievement. Students had self-actualisation and persistence to attain qualifications, despite the odds stacked against them of SES status and the disadvantaged educational backgrounds of their parents. Socio-economic status and
educational disadvantage, exosystem-level components, affected the indirect
development of the young people. With re-engagement, they overcame the external
environment, especially the educational disadvantage that impeded their education.
Nevertheless, there are strong links between SES and educational achievement, not
simply in terms of some students completing education despite the odds, but the
long-term differentials in educational attainment, occupational trajectories and
overall life chances.

The factors of the macrosystem also affected students in this study. Today’s
changed neoliberal approach to education, with the corporatisation of curriculum and
pedagogic approaches, and a lack of employment opportunities, affected them. Thus,
the dynamics of the macrosystem, with its more distal factors—educational policies
with which students interacted indirectly—influenced their decisions on re-
engagement and educational outcomes.

Schools focus on retention and completing the Higher School Certificate
(HSC), but academic achievement and retention alone should not be overshadowed by
the importance of emphasising other valuable skills: for example, relationship building
and giving students autonomy in decision making on their learning. There are clear
benefits to staying in school to complete Year 12 that go beyond the mere acquisition
of qualifications. These benefits are implied in many of the practices schools advocate
to keep young people in school. They need to focus on doing things better: for
example, focusing on positive relationships, building a supportive environment,
paying attention to curriculum and offering targeted individual strategies, similarly to
what Tertiary Preparation already does; strategies that proved to be successful in this
study.
Finally, the students’ success is related to Bronfenbrenner’s fifth level, the chronosystem. The time dimension, and contexts or situations and interactions were important in the students’ movement in a continuum of two different environments (school and TAFE). From a Process, Place, Context and Time (PPCT) perspective, in school, the students were not given the ‘exposure’, the degree of contact between the developing individual and the proximal process in which the person engages proximal relations to develop competence (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000 p. 118). Although the students stayed in school longer, from entry in junior school to middle school, and some through senior school until they decided to leave school, the exposure to teachers and peers in context and time was limited, and inadequate for proximal processes to be effective. In Tertiary Preparation, the exposure in context and time was short but positive, and effective proximal processes developed competent outcomes.

Also from a PPCT perspective, in their transition from school to TAFE the students experienced changes in time and with age: developmental changes such as maturity, and developments around them, such as family changes over time and their reflections on their life experiences. These changed students’ ways of thinking and decision-making. With these developments and life changing experiences, the students interacted better with teachers and peers and engaged more with curriculum, assessments and pedagogic dimensions in Tertiary Preparation than in school. Thus, in the context of PPCT, with their age and maturity through time, they had better proximal relations and meaningful social interactions with others (teachers and peers), which resulted in better outcomes. In their transition, some students realised their past behavioural problems and lack of engagement, and changed their behaviours to re-engage with education. Behaviours that are resistant to school
demands for conformity are predictors of dropping out (Batin-Pearson, et al., 2000).

Early leavers who realised the disruptive nature of their own behaviours and later re-engaged, suggest maturity and self-realization to achieve and succeed.
Chapter 7

Conclusion

7.1 Contribution to Knowledge

This research makes an important contribution to knowledge by providing significant insights into early school leaving in Western Sydney, NSW, Australia, and re-engagement through Tertiary Preparation at TAFE. It fills a conspicuous gap in existing literature on the topic through providing new insights and nuanced interpretations of the conditions that facilitate re-engagement through the NSW state-run Tertiary Preparation, a Year 12 equivalent qualification at TAFE, which leads to university pathways and employment.

This study makes an original contribution because it provides some preliminary insights into the reasons for the effectiveness of Tertiary Preparation, as well as drilling down into the aspects of Tertiary Preparation to which its success is attributable. To date, there has been minimal data on the effectiveness of this second-chance education. A large number of students, approximately more than 2,000 enrol in Tertiary Preparation throughout the state each year, and many students successfully complete their high school equivalent education for further study or employment. It provides a true second chance and has the potential to change the life trajectory for a graduating student.

This study argues that Tertiary Preparation provides an alternative pathway for young people to re-engage and gain positive academic results; importantly, it
challenges the conception of TAFE being a place where only disengaged, early school leavers go to complete their Year 12 equivalents. On the contrary, this study reveals that TAFE is a site of excellence, with some young people enrolling already possessing the Higher School Certificate, but wanting to work hard to improve their previous Year 12 HSC results.

TAFE is the largest provider of post-secondary education and training in Australia (Goozee, 2001). Traditionally it has been viewed as a last resort or an alternative education site, where students who leave compulsory school prematurely pursue what has been described as ‘narrow vocationalism’ (Smyth, McInerney, & Fish, 2013 p. 194), with low expectations from students and a limited range of intellectually challenging subjects. The findings from this study dispute this naïve view of Tertiary Preparation.

Tertiary Preparation is a genuine second-chance education and leads to successful high school completion and transition to higher education. The effectiveness of Tertiary Preparation was confirmed by this research, where slightly more than a quarter of the students who already completed Year 12 enrolled in TAFE to attain a better Tertiary Entrance Score (TES) for university entry. However, in this study, the quantitative results showed that there was no statistical association between early school leavers and Year 12 completers who completed Tertiary Preparation. This suggests that Tertiary Preparation is a genuine second-chance education opportunity available to all students; early school leavers and HSC completers. The important role of TAFE in providing credentials is highlighted in other studies on second-chance or alternative education (Te Riele, 2015, 2014, 2011, 2008, 2006; Te Tiele, Plows & Bottrell, 2016; Talbot & Hayes, 2016; Ross, 2008). The finding on student success in Tertiary Preparation, where all students qualified
for tertiary education, is a notable finding in this study and highlights the contributive justice feature of second-chance education which, as argued by Mills et al. (2015), lacks in alternative education.

Both the quantitative and qualitative data generated reveal that young people may often be marginalised by school cultures in respect of student-teacher and peer relations, and excluded by educational policies on curriculum and pedagogic dimensions that are focussed on educational accountability, standardisation and performance measurements. This answers research question 1-Why students leave school early. This study reveals that unlike high school, three elements in Tertiary Preparation contribute to supportive teacher-student relationships. These are the beliefs of students that they can learn and achieve, and that they do so by planning their study, through persistence and valuing their study; the caring and supportive approach of their teachers; and the constructive programmes, with relevant, skilful and engaging curriculum, assessment and pedagogic approaches. Students’ increased interest in learning in Tertiary Preparation was due to increased motivation, interest and willingness to learn. This answers research questions 2 and 3. Research question 2 – What opportunities and challenges do early school leavers experience in ‘second-chance tertiary Preparation at TAFE– and Research question 3 what are the individual student factors and features of the Tertiary Preparation environment that make it effective for students to complete the equivalent of high school education?

The curriculum, assessments and pedagogic approaches created enthusiasm to learn and led to positive relationships between students and teachers, which were instrumental in the success of Tertiary Preparation. Relationships make alternative education successful (Vadeboncoeur & Velos, 2016).
7.2 Implications for Theoretical Framework and Methodology

An important original feature of this research’s contribution is the theoretical framework and the research methodology. Early school leaving and re-engagement through Tertiary Preparation are best investigated and understood within the context of Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological human development theory, which describes the human development process in terms of complex systematic interactions between humans and their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1999, 1989, 1977; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). According to this model, human development is highly complex and is the product of numerous interactions among Person, Process, Context, and Time (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). Thus, this study incorporated student experiences including individual characteristics of the Person, such as socioeconomic status, prior academic performance in school, developmental interactions (or Process) such as interaction with teachers and peers, changing behaviour, motivation, transition to further study and career prospects within the Context, of school and Tertiary Preparation over Time.

Early school leaving and re-engagement draws from all four concepts of the model, as early school leaving is influenced by interactions (Process) over a long period in school (Time) that impacts students’ developmental outcomes. Leaving school early is the result of interactions among individual characteristics and risk factors (Person) within the school environment (Context). Similarly, re-engagement is a result of students’ experiences after leaving school, over time and proximal interactions (processes) with other adults in a second-chance learning context.
The bioecological model provides a comprehensive model to fully explain the individual and social processes that interact over time and across context, to facilitate understanding of how Tertiary Preparation provides opportunities for student development. This framework helps broaden the scope of research on early school leaving beyond the individual student to the school system environment, and to the external social and economic environment that influences their development. Proximal processes, a key feature of the human development model, help us to understand how students who previously had difficulty learning in mainstream schooling became successful in Tertiary Preparation. The proximal processes at the micro level in school were weak and not attuned to learning. In Tertiary Preparation the students’ ecological context was more ‘proximal’ which enhanced student motivation and engagement.

To date, much research on early school leaving typically has focused on the microsystem (the first level) in the bioecological human development model, concentrating on the child, school, family, peers, and neighbourhood. In part, this study attempts to understand the context of school as a factor within students’ microsystem that is important to early departure from school. However, this study looked at students’ development beyond the microsystem. It looked at their development and transition to the future as they planned and persisted with their study in Tertiary Preparation, for future employment and career prospects. Thus, they interacted with various aspects of the socio-ecological environment (micro, meso, exo, macro, chrono) and different levels of human development in their educational journeys.

Along with Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological human development model, Andrew Martin’s motivation and engagement wheel was applied, to compare
students’ motivation and engagement in school and Tertiary Preparation. In school, the students had anxiety and fear of failure, and had low control of their learning; sometimes they reduced themselves to adopting self-sabotaging strategies in their learning. In school, students had negative motivation and engagement. These types of behaviours restricted and reduced students’ motivation, due to poorer relationships in school. Martin (2003, p. 18) calls these students with restricting or reducing behaviours ‘mufflers’ and ‘guzzlers’. In their transition from school to TAFE, the students matured, developing positive motivation with a focus on learning, valuing learning and developing self-belief or confidence that they can learn. The students had positive engagement, planned and managed their study, persisted with their learning, avoided failure and managed to complete their tasks. The students became what Martin (2003, p. 18) in the student motivation and engagement wheel, calls ‘boosters’. This further answers research questions 2 and 3.

It could also be argued that in students’ educational transition from early schooling to high school, and as adolescents, they experience puberty and growth, which affects their schooling and educational achievement. Martin and Steinbeck (2017) argue that puberty is a key stage of adolescent development, and conclude that pubertal status influences academic motivation and academic achievement. An advanced stage of pubertal status is associated with lower achievement beyond age, gender and school factors. This also agrees with what Bronfenbrenner (1977) argues: ‘development is seen as instigated and paced primarily by events within the organism, that is, by biological change’. Puberty is a biological change in individuals and it affects development as individuals go through changes in life, what Bronfenbrenner called ‘ecological transitions’ (p. 525), which shape the course of
human development. The proximal processes are significant in students’ ecological transitions as they grow from childhood to adolescents to adults.

The socio-economic status of students, and parental educational disadvantage, influenced early school leaving and re-engagement. The research results indicate that students attempted to overcome their disadvantaged status with effort and determination, in their transition from school to TAFE. The success of students and overcoming socio-economic disadvantage has theoretical implications. Bourdieu’s theory of habitus and capital (social and economic) argues for the perpetuation of educational inequality in society. The parents of these students did not have the social and economic capital and could not overcome their disadvantage. As argued by Reay (2014), the habitus of the students parents was inscribed in them and social conditions were deeply rooted historically in their life, due to the socio-economic environment in which they lived. In this study, students from disadvantaged homes challenged their disadvantage, made choices in the educational field (Tertiary Preparation) and transformed their habitus with success. Their success in Tertiary Preparation empowered them to navigate the educational landscape and gain social capital through interaction with others, especially their teachers. Thus, Bourdieu’s habitus is a collective and individual trajectory, a complex interplay between past and present and, as shown by the experiences of students in this study, it is re-structured by individuals’ experiences of the world.

Lower socio-economic status is not a barrier to educational advancement. Nearly two thirds of the students in this study stayed and completed Tertiary Preparation and 90% of the completers applied to study undergraduate courses at university. It is often argued that young people originating from lower socio-economic backgrounds have a higher tendency not to complete school, to have low
educational aspirations and not to complete higher education. To the contrary, this research showed no link between socio-economic status and educational achievement. A second-chance opportunity to complete school and continue with their educational journey is significant for young people from low socio-economic status who have poorer educational experiences in high school, and who are disadvantaged by lower parental education.

A notable contribution of this research that is unique to this field of study is the combination of research methods in this mixed methods research: to elucidate young people’s experiences at school and how they compared to Tertiary Preparation. The interviews gave an understanding of the lived experiences of the young people in their educational journey. The mixed methods approach was novel in explaining the data comprehensively, providing the opportunity to propose some recommendations grounded in empirical evidence. The mixed methods approach validated and reinforced the data and the results, and explained young people’s reasons for early school leaving and re-engagement in formal learning. The mixed methods approach provided a context for the student ‘voice’ (Smyth & Hattam, 2004; Smyth, et al., 2008) to be heard on their aspirations and needs in the educational journey from school to TAFE, and future career prospects.

Furthermore, the research methodology in the mixed methods employed the phenomenographic approach to data collection and analysis, which is consistent with an epistemology that views knowledge as constructed through an individual’s experiences of the world (Marton & Booth, 1997). The phenomenographic research approach is a ‘kind of research that aims at description, analysis and understanding of experiences’ (Marton, 1981, p. 177) and allows the researcher to describe the
variations in the ways a phenomenon has been experienced by people in the world. The experiences, both individual and collective on early school leaving and the re-engagement of students are described and the protection of the identity of participants was ensured in the phenomenographic method, in which the reporting of results was depersonalised and students’ identifying features were removed.

The mixed methods approach, in part drawing upon the bioecological human development model, as well as applying Andrew Martin’s motivation and engagement wheel to explain re-engagement through Tertiary Preparation, was ideal, because it offered a fuller explanation than preceding studies. It showed the interaction of both individual and socio-ecological processes that are influential in young people’s educational endeavours. The complexity and interactions across time, the environment, and an individual’s own development are all considered in these two models, better explaining the process of leaving school early and re-engagement.

Transitions have become difficult for many young people; to navigate their way in the de-regulated labour market, with a part-time and casualized labour force in a context of high rates of unemployment. As young people become estranged from school and begin to explore potential employment, many realise how difficult it can be to secure a job without a qualification. This research has shown that these early school leavers were still interested in learning; they self-realized that they needed to complete a Higher School Certificate equivalent qualification to improve their life chances. For many students, re-entry was a significant part of their educational journey, and an opportunity through Tertiary Preparation was important for their educational advancement and transition to higher education and the labour market. Thus, this research showed that early school leavers who were disenfranchised from
learning in school sought re-entry through TAFE and were determined to give education ‘another shot’, as they believed they were capable of learning and succeeding. The early school leavers made an individual decision to engage in Tertiary Preparation, as their life changing trajectories did not conform to the standardised framework of the school system. The students confronted transitions such as social relations, part-time job, age and maturity, and wider socio-economic changes, including skills and qualifications for advancement in life. Tertiary Preparation helped the students to reflect on and respond to their learning in school, and they changed their behaviour, engaged with learning for the future, and prepared themselves to live in institutions in the wider ecosystem at other levels of bioecological human development, in the chronosystem model, which encompasses all the other levels of the bioecological human development framework.

In this context, the chronosystem level, the final stage of Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological human development framework, which is the temporal (time) and space (context) dimensions in which Bronfenbrenner’s other four (micro, meso, exo and macro) levels of the bioecological systems theory operate, positively impacted the students. The wider socio-economic environment and many dimensions, such as the impact of a regulated labour market and jobs external to school, influenced students’ educational transitions. Tertiary Preparation made changes in a number of the students’ ecological systems that appear to have been supportive in enabling them to effectively re-engage with learning, future transitions and advancement. The ecological systems of students in school were possibly not supported but rather thwarted and controlled by the school culture.

Students’ experiences in Tertiary Preparation point to their triumph and to overcoming educational struggles. Their narrative accounts suggest that they
developed self-belief, persistence and determination. They reflected on their experiences to see the mistakes they had made in their educational journeys, and how they were able to turn things around. The Tertiary Preparation completers stepped out of the ‘square’ to self-reflect, and made critical decisions for better outcomes. They developed academic resilience, planned, and persisted with their study for future employment and career prospects. Thus, this study looked at development of the child beyond the microsystem; school, family, peers.

The effects of school context and current neo-liberal education policies on early school leaving have mandated a re-focus on young people’s transitions and educational pathways. The lives of students who leave school early are dominated by complexities and uncertainties, and thus a linear educational progression from school to university and employment is no longer the norm. Many young people’s educational transition is multidimensional, and re-entry through second-chance or alternative education modes is necessary, but this context is underscored, underfunded and unappreciated by governments and educational policy makers (Mills & McGregor, 2016; Te Riele, Talbot & Hayes, 2016). Current educational policies in Australia especially, focus on student retention and school completion in a linear education pathway which is often out of kilter with the multidimensional nature of many young people’s educational and life trajectories (Smyth & Hattam, 2004; Wyn et al., 2004; Te Riele, 2011, 2008, 2006, 2000). The evidence presented in this research shows that early school leavers made individual decisions to engage in an alternative educational pathway, as their life changing trajectories did not conform to the standardised framework of the school system.

This research provides sound advice to help develop supportive relationships between students and teachers, which is the key factor at the micro level of individual
student development in school and in Tertiary Preparation, for better educational outcomes. Education is more than receiving a formal qualification, and these relationships and learning experiences should be valued as outcomes in their own right.

7.2 Recommendations on early school leaving and Tertiary Preparation

The recommendations made on early school leaving is based on the analysis of the perception of one specific cohort of early school leavers who participated in this study. Therefore, the recommendations cannot be generalised to a wider context of early school leaving. This study argues that students who left school early were not disengaged and did not reject schooling. The current research, and Vickers et al., (2015) demonstrate that not all young people stay on at school and complete Year 12. Disconnection from learning is key to early school leaving, and young people are often blamed for allowing themselves to become disengaged and leaving school prematurely.

From the perception of students who participated in this study, this research recommends two possible strategies to implement in schools, to prevent early school leaving. The first strategy relates to improving the school environment. The second strategy includes improving student-teacher relationships and the development of flexible approaches to curriculum and pedagogic approaches. Positive student-teacher relationships in school are essential and integral, and should grow. Creating supportive relationships would help the students’ full socio-ecological development, and they would perceive their learning to be valuable in their environment and experience, would appreciate the interactions with others, teachers and peers, and would be positively open to diverse learning and challenges in school. With trusted and caring relationships with adults (their teachers), the students will extend their
relationships across their immediate micro and meso system (family, school, peers, neighbourhood) and exosystem (communities) as educated citizens, and make positive contributions at the macrosystem level (societal structures and services; Bronfenbrenner, 1995) in their education and future employment journeys. Trusted adult relationships are fundamentally important for the development of young people (Meltzer, Muir & Craig, 2016). The relations with caring adults, participation by students and emotional engagement by young people develop resilience in students and enhance their learning (Soto, 2016).

When there is a strong tendency for students to leave school early as identified by research participants, schools should play a responsible and constructive role in preparing the individual student who wishes to exit and effectively re-enter into second-chance education, such as TAFE. Future educational possibilities and transitions to early school leavers should be provided so students can make informed decisions on the available options to keep them connected with education: from school to TAFE courses such as Tertiary Preparation, or other vocational course and industry-specific courses at TAFE. The support mechanism in school to assist early school leavers during a crucial educational and employment transition period, can provide good experiences to young school leavers in attaining education and further advancement.

Furthermore, schools should develop systems to identify early signs of disengagement: for example, referral to counselling, staff training, and professional development of teachers through workshops and conferences. Creative leadership is needed to develop curriculum, plan programmes and support teachers in providing the necessary accommodations to students showing signs of exiting from school. Also, connecting potential early school leavers with a peer group that values
education is important. The findings in this study showed that when students were associated with those who valued learning, they were more likely to engage themselves. This is substantiated by Vickers et al., (2015).

The NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC) has implemented the Wellbeing Framework for Schools. The framework is underpinned by three themes: connect, succeed and thrive. Under these themes, the department of education, and schools, are committed to creating quality learning opportunities for children and young people. Developing positive learning relationships, and student autonomy to succeed, are key requirements of the framework (Government NSW, 2015). It is expected that teachers and students should establish more caring, empathetic and supportive relationships. Whilst the implementation of the framework is in progress, many schools still practise a school culture of marginalisation and isolation of students, with streaming of classes, detention, and delivering rigid curriculum and assessments with no student autonomy in learning.

This study found that teachers have a greater impact on student learning through positive relationship with their students, improving student outcomes. Many students in this study commented that their interactions with teachers in Tertiary Preparation strengthened their relationships, both academically and socially. Similarly, from the perspectives of students who participated in this study, student and teacher interaction in high school could establish better academic and social relations. Schools should provide teachers the space and time to collaborate, on behalf of students, to allow for both academic and personal support and to give similar opportunities and experiences of learning to all students.

It is also concluded from the research cohort that teachers and students in school should have opportunities to share both structured (in classroom) and less-
structured (outside classroom) time, and contexts for these relationships to grow. Although school teachers have a daily busy schedule—teaching, assessing, administrating, mentoring and conducting other duties—school teachers need to adopt more caring relationships and promote autonomous learning among students. In NSW, schools have structured curriculum, graded assessments, exams, and standardisation. Teachers deliver the prescribed syllabuses and curriculum with pedagogic approaches appropriate to meeting the conditions of learning outcomes, and they are accountable to educational outcomes. These conditions exert immense pressures on both teachers and students, to perform and meet targets. In this context, teachers lack time to get to know their students and develop deeper, stronger student–teacher relations. Teachers cannot influence externally designed curriculum and pedagogic practices or deliver curriculum of their own. However, teachers can contextualise learning and create a more hospitable school climate for students to learn in. In Queensland, Australia, a productive pedagogies framework has been developed as part of school reform in Queensland; this framework is being adopted in Australia and internationally. ‘Productive pedagogic dimensions’ relates to particular learning, and includes: work being given to students that is of academic intellectual quality, relevance and connectedness with learning; a supportive classroom environment with student agency or voice in learning; and recognition of difference among learners (Mills, Goos, Keddie, Honan, Pendergast, Gilbert, Nichols, Renshaw & Wright, 2009; Gore, Griffith & Ladwig, 2006). Productive pedagogies and interesting curriculum will engage students. Productive pedagogies and engaging curriculum with caring approaches to learners is a social justice goals of education and adopting this will reduce differentiation and engage all students in learning (Mills, Keddie, Renshaw and Monk, 2017)
The research participants in this study also inform that teachers and schools should adopt different learning approaches, such as constructivist and social pedagogic approaches, to motivate and engage students. This research has shown that teacher-directed activities and a lack of student autonomy in learning are not enjoyable, fun, or relevant. Constructivist learning approaches, especially Social Constructivism, a theory of Vygotsky, (Dougiamas, 1998) dually promotes learning and enjoyment and, therefore, should be considered for adoption. In constructivist learning, the teacher engages students with their experiences, and challenges previous conceptions of their existing knowledge. It encourages discussion by asking open-ended questions, and allows students’ opinion and views on content. The teacher assists students to understand their own cognitive processes, encourages and accepts student autonomy and initiative by being willing to give classroom control to students (Dougiamas, 1998; Lebow, 1993). The constructivist learning approach will perhaps motivate and engage students, who may come to see learning as a social activity, and they may learn in context with curiosity and fun, and see the relevance of their learning. The constructivist learning approach is a productive pedagogic dimension.

High schools have instructional and behavioural expectations to which students are expected to conform, and when students do not conform or meet expectations, they can be marginalised, leading to school dropout. Tertiary Preparation provides students with another option against high school expectations. It encourages self-advocacy for students’ own education and an opportunity for teachers to listen to how they can help students to be successful. Tertiary Preparation is not for any student who chooses not to work in high school, but it is for students who ‘want to be here’; for ‘nobody forces them but it is their choice’ (Student P and
Student N); it can be successful in a different environment. The success of these students shows that Tertiary Preparation gives its graduates a sense of self-worth and the desire to aim higher.

Moreover, the student cohort also informs that school administrators and teachers perhaps need to work more collaboratively with intending early leavers and their parents, along with TAFE colleges, community, and industry and government departments, to explore the conditions and difficulties encountered by young people and to discover the prospects and options available to them. Such a coordinated approach, with respect, care and empathy, will provide the best opportunities to early school leavers and support them in their educational and employment experiences and prospects.

This research has established that Tertiary Preparation at TAFE is successful with its relational and supportive features, which lead to student success. The already-developed proximal features of Tertiary Preparation could be applied to mainstream education. Tertiary Preparation is a strong indicator of student success. In the current climate, the predominant discourse of success in TAFE NSW is measured by the attainment of quantifiable outcomes, including student course completion rates, attainment of qualifications, and transition to further and higher studies and employment. The success of students in Tertiary Preparation, both in terms of academic and personal development, is a quantifiable measure of the success of early school leavers and of others, who want to upgrade their skills and university entrance scores.

Second-chance education is often criticised, and a stigma is attached to students who study through it and to teachers who teach in second chance. It should however be seen as a ‘strength rather than a weakness’ (Vadeboncoeur & Vellos,
In this context, second-chance education such as Tertiary Preparation should continue and should be supported, sustained and increased through better funding models, to provide the necessary level of support to this group of learners who come from the low SES region of Western Sydney, NSW. This argument could be extended to all regions in the state, where many students re-enter to study and succeed through Tertiary Preparation at various TAFE Colleges.

7.3 Implications for Policy and Practice

In this section, implications for policy and practice are outlined in respect of how early school levers in the study interpreted their experiences in mainstream schooling compared to Tertiary Preparation; thus, this research offers useful suggestions in the field of education and education policy formulation.

Globally, education policies seek to improve school retention and completion while promoting the wellbeing of students to ensure smooth transitions to higher and vocational education and training. For example, the United States developed the ‘no child left behind’ policy (Bush, 2001), the UK, ‘every child matters’ (Reid, 2005). These policies were concomitant with an increasing focus on youth at risk, or what has become commonly known as NEET, shorthand for ‘not in education, employment or training’, to address the education and employment needs of young people (Hutchinson & Kettlewell, 2015, p. 113; Maguire, 2015). Similarly, in Australia, state and federal governments and the non-government sector are undertaking wide education improvement through legislative change, such as an increased school leaving age and the ‘Students First’ package of reforms, with a focus on teacher quality, school autonomy, engaging parents in education, and strengthening the curriculum (Government NSW, 2015). All education policy
initiatives are vital to school completion and transition to higher education, VET and employment.

From the mixed methods results, this study confirms the need for policy makers to consider investing in second-chance education. Many young people’s educational transition as informed by participants in this study, is multidimensional, and re-entry through second-chance or alternative education modes is important, but this context is unappreciated and underfunded by governments and educational policy makers (Mills & McGregor, 2016; Te Riele, Talbot & Hayes, 2016). Political leaders and school administrators need to provide valid educational options for early school leavers. This research can also be beneficial to policy makers who provide funding to second-chance education at TAFE.

The graduates interviewed for this study provided valid reasons to support second-chance education. Education administrators have multiple accountabilities to state and federal laws, and the use of the voices of graduates from Tertiary Preparation obtained using mixed methods research, provides concrete evidence for supporting second-chance education. With continual budget issues within school districts, school officials must continually evaluate programmes for effectiveness and cost efficiency. The graduates’ experiences provide a broader picture of the impact of second-chance education on struggling students who drop out. Schools can use the data from this research to provide support to students who could be potential dropouts, transitioning to second-chance education such as Tertiary Preparation. Second-chance education is often criticised, and a stigma is attached to students who study Tertiary Preparation courses, and to teachers who teach it, when it should be seen as a ‘strength rather than a weakness’ (Vadeboncoeur & Vellos, 2016 p. 307).
School administrators need to continually monitor students for signs of withdrawing from school. Some of these indicators include lower academic achievement and attendance issues. The teachers need to help identify these individuals, like students in this study and build good academic and caring relationship with students. Once it is identified, the school staff need to work together to develop a plan to meet the needs of the student. If a student is transitioning to re-entry into a second chance, the school needs to support the student. Often, second-chance education is deemed to be a setting for students who cannot behave in high schools. There should be no stigma attached to the transitioning student, or the high school, or the second-chance institution accepting the students. High schools and second-chance contexts should work together to meet the student’s needs.

The current educational policies in Australia focus on student retention and school completion on a linear education pathway, which is opposite to the deconstructed multidimensional nature of many young people’s educational and life trajectories (Smyth & Hattam, 2004; Wyn et al., 2004). Education policy makers should recognise the importance of re-engagement options for disenfranchised young people; second-chance education is effective and purposeful learning, it provides an alternative pathway to completing school, and it should be embedded in educational policy formulation.

Given that lack of academic achievement, and various real-life events are the leading reasons why students drop out and this was specific to many students in this study, schools need to make connections with students, to monitor for signs that they may be withdrawing. Giving those students the option of second-chance education can provide a chance to be successful in another environment. Teachers at schools can use this research to help them reach students who may be struggling, as the
Tertiary Preparation graduates stated they had been at school, by recognizing characteristics common to potential dropouts, such as attendance, low academics, and lack of interest in school curriculum and assessments. Teachers may be able to recognize similar characteristics in their current students and then provide the necessary interventions. The student–teacher relationship is a key component in achieving a balance between school methods and student characteristics. All students in this study discussed the academic, relational and behavioural struggles they had faced before moving from high school. Research participants also shared what changes they would make to the high school in the light of their experiences in Tertiary Preparation. For example, high student-staff ratios in school limited their direct interaction with teachers and students. In contrast, for some students, Tertiary Preparation provided more opportunity for teacher-student interaction with small class sizes. These inhibitors of success can serve as indicators to the administrators of high schools that a second-chance education such as Tertiary Preparation may be able to provide the necessary intervention before a student becomes a dropout.

The families of students who are struggling in high school as shown by experiences of students in this study can benefit from this research. It is important that each student is in the environment best fitted for their particular learning style. Students struggling in high schools may find success in second-chance settings, such as Tertiary Preparation.

Finally, this research affirms that educational policy makers should recognise the importance of re-engagement options for disenfranchised young people in school, and argues the value of second-chance education as effective and purposeful learning that should be embedded in educational policy formulation. It is hoped that along with much other research on second-chance education, the findings of this
research will enhance and create a deeper understanding of second-chance education and possibly support those practitioners creating, designing and developing second-chance programmes; including governments. It is also anticipated that the role of the programme and the context features that would possibly support the success of the students will be realised and implemented in education policies.

A key message in this study and other studies on alternative education is that second-chance education contexts are at a micro level of the education system, not enough and ad hoc in nature. This study, and the literature, shows that second-chance education delivered in states across Australia and also internationally, is successful and has potential, but needs to be developed, supported and delivered on a larger scale, and to be a part of state and national education qualification and policy discourses. Various researchers on second-chance education (Poole, 2016; Te Riele, 2012, 2011, 2008, 2006, 2000; McGregor & Mills 2012; Smyth, et.al 2008; Smyth & Hattam, 2008) have expressed similar notions and sentiments.

7.4 Limitations

There are some limitations to this research. Teacher perspectives in studies of early school leaving and re-engagement through Tertiary Preparation were not covered by this research. Future research on early school leaving and re-engagement through Tertiary Preparation at TAFE would be beneficial, to help develop knowledge on building and experiencing relationships by both students and teachers.

Although this research employed mixed methods, and was a cross-sectional study in which two surveys (entry and exit point surveys) were conducted over a one year period, the research was not longitudinal. The study has captured the experiences and perspectives of students during their study in high school and in Tertiary Preparation at one point in time. Future studies could consider a longitudinal
exploration—for example, the students’ transition to higher education or employment after their study in Tertiary Preparation. This will allow an examination of the types and strengths of inter-personal relationships, support and benefits to learning over time.

Finally, the sample of students who took part in the research was substantial \((n = 110)\), and the size of the student group who were selected to participate in the qualitative study was reasonable \((n = 19)\). The sample of students was obtained from four colleges in the Western Sydney Institute of TAFE. This strengthens the results and maximises the validity and reliability of the data. The small sample of students who participated in the research gave a good understanding of the context of early school leaving and re-engagement, however, a larger sample size in the mixed methods approach would have allowed for analysis of a more sophisticated nature. The mixed methods approach with a slightly larger sample size than previous studies on second-chance education in TAFE (for example, Ross, 2008, in TAFE in Western Australia which used a small sample size), generated further data to quantify and argued a productive role that second-chance education such as Tertiary Preparation in TAFE provides to early school leavers in NSW.

7.5 Recommendations for Future Research

This research has several implications for future research. Due to the limited time framework, it was not possible to reach a large sample of participants. Future research could involve more participants in the one to one interviews, which could also be supplemented with focus groups, to capture a wider range of experiences in second-chance education settings. Secondly, the impact of student-teacher relations was one of the salient themes in this study. In future studies, interviewing the
teachers the students made connections with in Tertiary Preparation, would provide further insights into how these relationships are formed and sustained.

The compassionate and flexible nature of the Tertiary Preparation learning environment was highlighted as an important factor in the success of Tertiary Preparation with re-engaging participants in learning. The adult learning environment included both academic support from teachers and peers, general wellbeing of the students while studying in Tertiary Preparation. Future research could involve the overall culture of Tertiary Preparation, exploring the differences between the affective domain and the learning environment. Throughout the research, students discussed their success in Tertiary Preparation and shared their self-evaluations, expressing how they were determined to finish education. Future research could follow up to explore the primary transition of students, and the pathway they followed to become successful. This would provide a way to allow them to share other experiences that they might have after graduation, and to explore how well, and in what ways, Tertiary Preparation helped prepare them for the future. Providing another opportunity to express themselves would allow the graduates to fully share their post Tertiary Preparation experiences. Further research could also be undertaken to examine how long the success and social capital gained through Tertiary Preparation concluded in this study lasts for students who study Tertiary Preparation through TAFE.

One surprising finding in this research was the graduates socio-economic status and educational achievement. All graduates were from low socio-economic backgrounds, and had parental educational disadvantage. However, the socio-economic aspects did not affect the Tertiary Preparation graduates’ experiences and success and there was no evidence of a clear impact of the social aspects and parental
educational disadvantage on their experiences and success in Tertiary Preparation. Future research could explore the longer term effect of low socio-economic status on educational aspirations and future life chances. One potential avenue may be to consider the impact of habitus and cultural capital on academic and career success, and test whether students from disadvantage backgrounds successfully complete education through Tertiary Preparation in TAFE NSW statewide. The family played a vital role in the lives of these individuals, and most had a positive relationship with them. Future studies may want to explore the impact of families in urban areas to compare the results with suburban and rural populations of this group of students. The roles of the families with these graduates need not necessarily be similar in other locations in the state of NSW.

Self-realisation was a motivational factor derived from the analysis of the interviews in this study. An exploration of self-realisation in individuals before and after second-chance education could lead to better ways to help individuals become successful in negotiating important transitions to higher education or the labour market.
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Appendix A: Expression of interest

RE: Research in Education, TAFE NSW - Western Sydney Institute (WSI)

2011-2012

Expression of interest

Dear TPC Students

Welcome to TPC in Western Sydney Institute of TAFE.

I would like to let you know that a research will be conducted on the Tertiary Preparation Certificate (TPC) in Western Sydney Institute at Mount Druitt and Blacktown Colleges in 2011 and 2012.

All Tertiary Preparation Certificate (TPC) students are invited to take part in this research. The purpose of the research is to collect data to write a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). The research will be conducted by Lalesh Nand through the University Of Western Sydney (UWS)

All information collected will be used anonymously. All data obtained during the research will be kept strictly confidential and no student will be identified in any subsequent publications. Your name and contact details will not be given out to anybody.

Please write your name and contact details in the box below if you would like to participate in the research.

An information package containing the full details explaining the purpose of the research and a consent form will be sent to you on your postal address.

Name:_________________________________________________________________
TAFE College:_____________________________________________________________
Contact Phone :__________________________________________________________
Mobile:_______________________________________________________________
E-Mail:_________________________________________________________________
Postal Address:_________________________________________________________________

I wish you all the best with your studies in the TPC.

Lalesh Nand
School of Education
Western Sydney University (WSU)
Appendix B:

Research participant consent form

Research Participant Consent Form and Confidentiality

I, …………………………………………….., consent to participate in the research project titled:

‘Re-engagement with Education through a ‘Second Chance’ Programme in TAFE NSW’.

I acknowledge that:

I have read the participant information sheet and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher. The procedures required for the research and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the research have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that my involvement is confidential and that the information gained during the study may be published but no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my relationship with TAFE NSW now or in the future.

I would like to participate in the research.

Name: ____________________________
TAFE College: ________________________________
Signature __________________________
Contact Phone number ______________________
E-Mail: _________________________________
Postal Address: ______________________________

Date: ____________________________

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Appendix C: Confidentiality statement

Research - Re-engagement with Education through a ‘Second-Chance’ in TAFE NSW.

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

My name is Lalesh Nand. I sent you an information package regarding a research that I am conducting through University of Western Sydney (UWS) at Mount Druitt and Blacktown TAFE Colleges in Western Sydney Institute. The aim of the research is to identify why students leave school early and other life decisions. The focus of the research is on TAFE TPC - based strategies and programs that help students to re-engage with education as young people who left school early as well as those who return to complete schooling as mature age students. The title of the study is Re-engagement with Education through a ‘Second Chance’ Programme in TAFE NSW.

The study will aim to answer the following questions:

- For whom is TPC a success?
- What are the characteristics of students who are most likely to study the TPC and succeed versus those who do not complete the TPC?
- Why did some succeed/persist in the TPC even though they had dropped out of high school?
- What are initial outcomes for students who complete the TPC and how did the TPC help the students to achieve these outcomes?

You were invited to participate in the research and you also gave your consent to participate in the research. The research will not cause any discomfort to you and you can withdraw from the research anytime you like. The information that you will provide in this survey will be kept confidential and all results will be reported in forms of reports and your name and your personal details will not be used. The results from the study will not be reported to anybody but will be part of a research thesis.

This is the first stage of the research. I hope you will help me by completing this survey. Please complete the attached survey. This questionnaire will take 30 minutes to complete at a time convenient for you. Once you have completed the survey, please return to the address shown in the self-contained paid return envelope.

Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have about the survey.

Lalesh Nand
School of Education
University of Western Sydney (UWS)

NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics...
Appendix D Interview Protocol and consent

Re-engagement with Education through a ‘Second Chance’ Programme in TAFE NSW.

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<th>Interviewer</th>
<th>Lalesh Nand</th>
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<th>Researcher</th>
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<tr>
<th>Interviewee (pseudonym only)</th>
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<th>Student Name and Signature:</th>
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**PROBE QUESTIONS**

*Note: Each question on a new page and allow enough space for writing the response.*

1. What were the main reasons that made you decide to do the Tertiary Preparation Certificate (TPC)?
2. Why did you decide to study at TAFE?
3. What were the main reasons that made you decide to leave school?
4. Tell me as much as you can why you left school early and what was happening in your life then?
5. What did you do after you left school?
6. How do you compare your study in school and your study in TPC?
7. How are things going for you in TPC course? What are the best things? What are the worst things?
8. What are your plans after you complete studying TPC?
9. What might you do if you don’t complete the TPC?

Thank you for participating in the interview. All your responses to the questions are confidential.

You may be invited to take part in a short telephone interview after you have completed studying TPC. Would you be interested in being interviewed? Yes/No
Appendix E: Entry survey (E1)

Re-engagement with Education through a ‘Second Chance’ Programme in TAFE NSW.

CONSENT AND CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

My name is Lalesh Nand. I met you at the beginning of the semester and gave you information on a research project that I am conducting in TAFE NSW at Western Sydney Institute (WSI) in collaboration with University of Western Sydney (UWS). The aim of the research is to identify how and why some people decide to re-engage with education to complete high school qualifications and make other life decisions. The focus of the research is on TAFE TPC - based programs that help young people who left school early as well as those who return to complete schooling as mature age students. The title of the study is Re-engagement with Education through a ‘Second Chance’ Programme in TAFE NSW.

This is the first stage of the research. I hope you will help me by completing this survey. Please complete the attached survey. This questionnaire will take approximately 30 minutes to complete at a time convenient for you.

When you are asked to write the answer, please print as clearly as possible.

Please read the questions carefully and answer every question (unless you are asked to skip over). If you think you have made a mistake, cross it out and then answer again for which one is most appropriate/true for you.

Once you have completed the survey, please return to the address shown in the self-contained paid return envelope.

Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have about the survey.

Consent

What I will be doing and what this survey is for has been explained to me. My questions have been answered (if I had any). I know I can change my mind at any time and not be involved in this study.

NB This form will be separated from the questionnaire before the data is entered and your name will be replaced by an anonymous code number.

First Name: ___________________ Last Name: ___________________

E-mail: ____________________________

Telephone number: ____________________________

Student’s signature: ____________________________

Today’s date: ___________/_____________/2011

Lalesh Nand

NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officers (tel: 02 4570 1136). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
PART 1: Demographic Background

1. What suburb do you live in? 
   - Western Sydney suburb ☐
   - Blue Mountains suburb ☐
   - Other Sydney suburb ☐

2. Are you: 
   - 1. Male ☐
   - 2. Female ☐

3. What is your age? 
   - < 18 years ☐
   - 18-24 ☐
   - 25-29 ☐
   - 30-39 ☐
   - 40-49 ☐
   - 50-59 ☐
   - 60-65 ☐
   - 65 plus ☐

4. Are you an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person? 
   - 1. Yes ☐
   - 2. No ☐
   - 3. Not Sure ☐

5. What is your marital status? 
   - 1. Single ☐
   - 2. Married ☐
   - 3. Divorced ☐
   - 4. De-facto relationship ☐

6. How many children do you have? 
   - 1. None ☐
   - 2. One ☐
   - 3. Two ☐
   - 4. Three or more ☐

7. Do they live with you? 
   - 1. Yes ☐
   - 2. No ☐

8. Are you a primary care giver? 
   - 1. Yes ☐
   - 2. No ☐

9. Are you a parent? 
   - 1. Yes ☐
   - 2. No ☐ (If you answered no, go to question 11)

10. If you are a primary caregiver, are you 
    - Grandparent ☐
    - 2. Aunt or Uncle ☐
    - 3. Other ☐
11. Where were you born? (Please put a cross in the column in the right or write the name of the country) in the column at 27.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>15 Macedonia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Canada</td>
<td></td>
<td>16 Malaysia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 China or Hong Kong</td>
<td></td>
<td>17 Malta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Egypt</td>
<td></td>
<td>18 Netherlands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Fiji, Samoa, or Tonga</td>
<td></td>
<td>19 New Zealand</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Germany</td>
<td></td>
<td>20 Poland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Greece</td>
<td></td>
<td>21 South Africa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 India</td>
<td></td>
<td>22 Sri Lanka</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Italy</td>
<td></td>
<td>23 United Kingdom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Korea</td>
<td></td>
<td>24 United States</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Lebanon</td>
<td></td>
<td>25 Vietnam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Sudan</td>
<td></td>
<td>26 Yugoslavia or Ex Yugoslavia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Iran</td>
<td></td>
<td>27 Other country: (Write country in column)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12 Are you a native English speaker? If yes, skip to question 15.  1 Yes □ 2 No □

13 How do you rate your ability to speak and understand spoken English?
14 1 Needing improvement □ 2 Fairly fluent □ 3 Very Good □ 4 Excellent □
   How do you rate your ability to read and write in English?
   1 Needing improvement □ 2 Fairly fluent □ 3 Very Good □ 4 Excellent □

15 How often do you speak English when you are at home with your family? If you only speak English, circle 5 ‘always’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I speak ENGLISH</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you speak any languages other than English, please answer Q 16.

Otherwise, go to Question 17.

16. Other language spoken

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Assyrian</th>
<th>2 Arabic/Lebanese</th>
<th>3 Cantonese</th>
<th>4 Chinese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

17. What is your highest level of qualification? Put X in column beside your qualification.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Qualification</th>
<th>X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No secondary school qualifications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Year 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Year 11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Year 12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed TAFE - Apprentice or traineeship. Please write name of qualification:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed TAFE—Certificate 11 Please write name of qualification:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
18. What is the highest level of education your parents have completed? Please circle the number that is right for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grade 6 or less</th>
<th>Completed some of high school</th>
<th>Completed Year 10</th>
<th>Completed Year 12</th>
<th>TAFE or technical qualification</th>
<th>University degree</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MOTHER</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FATHER</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. Do you study TPC full-time or part-time? 1. Full-time. 2. Part-time

20. How many hours each week do you usually attend TAFE to study TPC?

0-5  6-10  11-15  16-20  20+

**PART 2: EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING**

Did you leave school before completing Year 12? Even if you left school many years ago we would like you to answer these questions. If yes, answer these questions by circling the most appropriate number. If you have completed Year 12, go to part 3.

I LEFT SCHOOL BEFORE COMPLETING YEAR 12 BECAUSE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School related factors Issues related to high school</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Disagree</th>
<th>Sometimes Agree, Sometimes Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Subjects influenced my decision to leave school early</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The subjects I was studying did not give me the knowledge and skills that I needed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The subjects I was studying did not give me the required marks to go to university</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Subjects were not interesting to me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Subjects were difficult to understand

2. Assessments and exams influenced my decision to leave

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessments were hard</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments did not interest me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments were not discussed/explained clearly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments were not relevant for future studies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments lacked variety and were not negotiable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments were difficult to understand</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Teacher factors influenced my intention to leave

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers were not enthusiastic about teaching</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers did not listen to me and did not answer my questions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers gave me hard time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers explanations were not clear</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers were not friendly and not interested in individual students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers did not help me when I needed help</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. I left school early because of teaching methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers did not use a variety of methods to teach</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was not encouraged to participate in discussion, ask questions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was not encouraged to express opinion and share ideas in class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not find teaching effective</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. I left school before Year 12 because

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was bullied by other students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt that I didn’t belong at school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was not happy at school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was suspended/expelled from school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer pressure affected my studies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Out-of-school factors influenced my decision to leave early

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Disagree</th>
<th>Sometimes Agree, Sometimes Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My part-time job affected my studies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wanted to work/apprenticeship</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I changed residence - state</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I migrated to Australia recently</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family responsibilities affected my studies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic hardship affected my studies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 2011 you have enrolled to study the TPC course at TAFE. The next questions are about TPC at TAFE.

1. WHY ARE YOU DOING THE TPC? PLEASE CIRCLE MOST APPROPRIATE NUMBER.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for studying the TPC at TAFE</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Disagree</th>
<th>Sometimes Agree, Sometimes Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 I am studying TPC for University Entry</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to study a university course</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not get the required ATAR for the university course that I want to study</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPC course will give me my skills to study at university</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 I am studying TPC to get skills for a job</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSC did not give me the right skills for my desired job</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPC will give me the rights skills for my job</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 I am studying TPC to get a recognised Y12 qualification</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I realise I need a qualification equivalent to the HSC in order to get ahead in life</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I completed Year 12 overseas which is not recognised as a Year 12 equivalent qualification in NSW</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Your Experience in Studying TPC

Please circle the most appropriate number.

### 1. Teachers
- Teachers in TPC are enthusiastic about the classes they teach
- Teachers use a variety of teaching methods
- In TPC teachers explain everything clearly
- Teachers are friendly towards individual students
- In TPC teachers are interested in what I do
- Teachers are available to me when I need help
- Teachers in TPC make me feel welcome in seeking help/advice in or outside class.

### 2. Subjects and Assessments
- TPC has subjects that are interesting and fun
- TPC is easier to do as most subjects don’t have exams like the HSC
- I understand the subject material in TPC
- The subjects in TPC will be valuable to me in future
- In TPC assessments are discussed and explained quite clearly
- In TPC a good variety of assessments is used
- The assessments in TPC will be relevant for future studies
- Assessments in TPC are fair
- Assessments are worthwhile for my future skills
- In TPC I am able to negotiate assessments with the teachers

### 3. Support and Learning resources
- In TPC I get tutorial support when I need it
- I have access to computers at TAFE
- The library has a variety of resources for the course
- The library has study places available
- Class sizes in TPC are almost right
- I am able to talk to counsellors when I need them

### 4. Flexible/easier/more choice
- TPC is flexible allowing me to combine study and work
- In TPC I am treated like an adult
- In TPC I am able to ask questions and express my ideas and opinion during class discussions
- In TPC I have more choice about my studies
### PART 4: MOTIVATION AND LEARNING IN TPC AT TAFE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Disagree</th>
<th>Sometimes Agree, Sometimes Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I make friends easily at TAFE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get support from my peers in TAFE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not usually disturbed by other students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of my friends care about doing well in TPC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel safe at TAFE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to improve my self-image and confidence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t feel ‘put down’ by other students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING MIGHT APPLY TO YOU? PLEASE CIRCLE

**THE MOST APPROPRIATE NUMBER.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I will probably leave TAFE before completing TPC if</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I get a full time job</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not enjoying the study</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The subjects offered are not relevant to me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The assessments/exams are too hard</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juggling my part-time employment and study becomes too hard</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I lose confidence in my ability to succeed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I gain an apprenticeship</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers start to give me a hard time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t feel as though I belong at TAFE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends leave TPC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING MIGHT APPLY TO YOU? PLEASE CIRCLE THE MOST APPROPRIATE NUMBER.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for staying and completing TPC</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would like to get a Year 12 qualification</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am highly motivated to study in the TPC course</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to complete TPC and go to university</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to complete TPC to do other TAFE course e.g. Diploma</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to complete TPC to get a job</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to complete TPC to gain more skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to complete TPC to get more opportunities in life</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be proud of myself if I completed TPC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My family and others who know me would be pleased if I finish TPC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. THE NEXT QUESTION IS ABOUT YOU AND YOUR MOTIVATION IN STUDYING THE TPC AT TAFE. PLEASE CIRCLE THE MOST APPROPRIATE NUMBER.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am able to use some of the things I learn at TAFE in other parts of my life</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I can’t understand a topic, I keep trying until I do</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes I don’t try hard so I can have a reason if I don’t do well</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each week I am trying less and less at TAFE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and gaining an education is important</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always meet deadlines for assessments</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I don’t work hard, I have an excuse if I do badly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t really care about getting Year 12 anymore</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a qualification (Y12) will be useful one day</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I am taught something that doesn’t make sense, I spend time to try to understand it</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I sometimes waste time the night before an assessment so I can have a reason if I don’t do well</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s important to understand what I am taught at TPC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. ON AVERAGE, HOW MANY HOURS PER WEEK YOU SPEND DOING THESE THINGS? (WHEN ANSWERING THIS QUESTION INCLUDE TIME ON THE WEEKEND TOO. CIRCLE THE ANSWER THAT BEST DESCRIBES YOU).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>0-5 hrs</th>
<th>6-10 hrs</th>
<th>11-15 hrs</th>
<th>16+ hrs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Homework or assessments assigned in TPC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Study in the library at TAFE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Enrichment classes at TAFE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Working with a tutor in the ‘Learning Centre’ at TAFE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Attending out-of-TAFE classes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Employment in a paid job</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Helping with family business</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Babysitting/parenting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Household chores</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Other studies (eg, music, dance, etc)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. TV/Computer games</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PART 5: MY PART-TIME JOB

1. Do you currently have a part-time job?  1 Yes ☐  2 No ☐ Go to Part 6

Go to question 2

2. How many hours per week do you work? Please circle the answer that gives the number of hours you work most weeks.

1-5  6-10  11-15  16-20  20-25  26-30  30+

353
3. Where do you mostly work? Tick one answer only. If you have more than one job, tell me about your main job. Put a cross in the column beside the work you do.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Office (eg receptionist or clerical)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Supermarket (eg filling shelves, customer service)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Other retail (e.g. chemist or clothing store)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Food services (fast food, waiter, kitchen hand)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Trades assistant—building site, house painting etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Sports coaching or refereeing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Farm - Gardening, fruit picking, market gardening</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. House cleaning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Delivery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Child care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Other: Please specify</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Which of the following statements is true about you and your work? Please circle the most appropriate number.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would rather be working at my job than at TAFE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My employer is very understanding when I need time off to study</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find it difficult to balance the demands of work and study</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teachers are supportive towards students like me who have jobs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are mostly unaware of the problems of juggling work and study</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers should be more flexible towards students with jobs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I sometimes skip TAFE if my employer asks me to come to work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I would get better results if I did not work so many hours</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PART 6: YOUR PLANS AFTER STUDYING TPC AT TAFE

IN THE YEAR AFTER LEAVING TAFE

1. WHAT WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO DO?
2. WHAT OCCUPATION OR PROFESSION WOULD YOU LIKE TO QUALIFY FOR IN THE FUTURE?

____________________________________________________________________

THIS IS THE END OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE. THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP.
Appendix F: Exit survey (E2)

Re-engagement with Education through a ‘Second Chance’ Programme in TAFE NSW.

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

My name is Lalesh Nand. You completed a survey when you began studying TPC at the beginning of the year. Now you have completed your TPC studies.

This is the third stage of the research. The purpose of this survey is to collect information on your education and experiences in the TPC compared to your educational experiences in high school. I hope you will help me by completing this survey. Please complete the attached survey. This questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

When you are asked to write the answer, please print as clearly as possible. Please read the questions carefully and answer every question. If you think you have made a mistake, cross it out and then answer again for which one is most appropriate/true for you.

Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have about the survey.

Consent

What I will be doing and what this survey is for has been explained to me. My questions have been answered (if I had any).

NB This form will be separated from the following questionnaire before the data is entered and your name will be replaced by an anonymous code number.

First Name: ___________________________ Last Name: ___________________________

E-mail: __________________________________________________________

Telephone number: ___________________________

Student's signature: ____________________________________________

Today's date: _____________/_____________/2011

Lalesh Nand
Mobile: 0408416262

NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officers (tel: 02 4570 1136). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
When you are asked to write the answer, please print as clearly as possible. Please read the questions carefully and answer every question (unless you are asked to skip over). If you think

These questions are about how you felt about the Course/Unit content and relevance in TPC.
**PART 1: COURSE/UNIT CONTENT AND RELEVANCE**

Please circle the number that is most appropriate for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course/Unit Content and Relevance</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Disagree</th>
<th>Sometimes Agree, Sometimes Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The course/units in TPC gave me the knowledge and skills that I needed for my future employment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The course/units in TPC met my requirements to go to university</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The course/unit content in TPC was relevant, fun and interesting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PART 2: TEACHING AND LEARNING**

These questions are about how you felt about the Teaching and Learning in high school and how you felt about the Teaching and Learning in TPC at TAFE. Please circle the most appropriate number.

**TEACHING AND LEARNING AT HIGH SCHOOL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Learning and academic value in high school</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Disagree</th>
<th>Sometimes Agree, Sometimes Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• I found high school classes motivating and stimulating</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• High school increased my interest in learning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I learnt and understood the subject material in high school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2 Teacher Enthusiasm/Quality in high school</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Disagree</th>
<th>Sometimes Agree, Sometimes Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers in high school were enthusiastic about teaching</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers in high school used humour in class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers were friendly towards individual students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers had a genuine interest in individual students’ needs and requirements</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers made students feel welcome in seeking help/advice in or outside class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3 Group Interaction in high school</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Disagree</th>
<th>Sometimes Agree, Sometimes Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• I was encouraged to participate in class discussions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### PART 3: CHOICE OF COURSE UNITS AND DECISION MAKING

#### 1 Learning and academic value in TPC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Disagree</th>
<th>Sometime Agree, Sometimes Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I found TPC classes motivating and stimulating</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPC increased my interest in learning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learnt and understood the subject material in TPC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 2 Teacher Enthusiasm/Quality in TPC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Disagree</th>
<th>Sometime Agree, Sometimes Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in TPC were enthusiastic about teaching</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in TPC used humour in class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers were friendly towards individual students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers had a genuine interest in individual students’ needs and requirements</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers made students feel welcome in seeking help/advice in or outside class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3 Group Interaction in TPC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Disagree</th>
<th>Sometime Agree, Sometimes Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was encouraged to participate in class discussions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was invited to share my ideas and knowledge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was encouraged to ask questions and was given meaningful answers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 4 Assessments/Readings and feedback in TPC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Disagree</th>
<th>Sometime Agree, Sometimes Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessments in the course were hard</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments were boring</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments were relevant for future studies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments were interesting and fun</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most assessments in TPC did not involve exams</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next questions are about how you made your choices of course units and your decision in studying at high school and studying in TPC at TAFE. Please circle the most appropriate number.
These questions are about how you felt about the *Learning environment*, the *support given to you*, and the *resources* available in studying in *high school* and in *TPC at TAFE*. Please circle the most appropriate number.

### PART 3: CHOICE OF COURSE UNITS AND DECISION MAKING (Continue)

### PART 4: LEARNING ENVIRONMENT, SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice/Decision Making in High School</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Disagree</th>
<th>Sometimes Agree, Sometimes Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was able to negotiate the time table that I could attend classes at high school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to negotiate assessment tasks due dates that met my needs at high school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice/Decision Making in TPC</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree, Sometimes Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• I was able to negotiate the time table that I could attend classes in TPC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I was able to negotiate assessment tasks due dates that met my needs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT, SUPPORT AND RESOURCES IN STUDYING AT HIGH SCHOOL

1 Support and Learning Resources in high school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Disagree</th>
<th>Sometimes Agree, Sometimes Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
I was able to get tutorial support in high school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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</table>

2 Equity and Fairness in high school

Teachers in high school knew my name

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</table>

Students’ views and needs were considered when decisions were made at high school

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<tr>
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</thead>
</table>

My friends and I were treated fairly at school

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</table>

Staff at my high school apologised to students if they made mistakes

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</table>

3 Overall Experience at high school

I felt lonely at high school

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<th>5</th>
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</thead>
</table>

I felt like I belonged in a group at school

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<th>5</th>
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</table>

I got support from my peers at high school

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</table>

I made friends easily at high school

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</table>

Other students seem to like me at school

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<th>5</th>
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</thead>
</table>

Disruptions by other students affected my learning

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<th>5</th>
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</table>

Most of my friends liked studying at school

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<th>5</th>
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</thead>
</table>

I often felt bored at school

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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

I had lots of friends at school

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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

My friends cared about doing well in school

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<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

At school I did not feel ‘put down’ by students

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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

I did not feel like an important part of school

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

I was mostly happy being at school

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

I did not feel safe at school

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

School reduced my fear, uncertainty and lack of confidence

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</table>

PART 4: LEARNING ENVIRONMENT, SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT, SUPPORT AND RESOURCES IN STUDYING

TPC AT TAFE

1 Support and Learning Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Disagree</th>
<th>Sometimes Agree, Sometimes Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was able to get tutorial support in TPC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to talk to a counsellor when I needed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 Equity and Fairness in TPC
### PART 5: YOUR PLANS AFTER STUDYING TPC AT TAFE

**YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR TPC AT TAFE. WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO AFTER THIS?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What would you do?</th>
<th>Full-time job</th>
<th>Part-time job only</th>
<th>Part-time job and part-time study</th>
<th>Full-time study at University</th>
<th>Apprentice-ship</th>
<th>Full-time study at TAFE</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. What course would you like to study?
2. What job would you like to have?

**This is the end of the questionnaire. Thank you for your help.**
Appendix G: Research support letter

On Mon 08/30/10 4:21 PM, "Hartigan, Susan"Susan.Hartigan@lnf.nsw.edu.au sent:

Hi Lalesh

I refer to your application to conduct research in TAFE NSW - Western Sydney Institute.

Your research proposal has been approved. You will need to keep a copy of this email for reference when making arrangements with Institute staff.

Please ensure you communicate with the Director Education, Manager Educational Programs and Head Teachers at Mount Druitt and Blacktown Colleges before you commence your research.

I would like to draw your attention to the requirements for all researchers in NSW TAFE stated in the Guidelines for applications to conduct research in TAFE NSW, in particular:

- Institute Directors have the right to withdraw their Institute from the study at any time
- the privacy of the Institute and the students is to be protected
- the participation of staff and students must be voluntary and at the Institute's convenience
- if there are variations in the focus, scope or timeframe for the research you will need to notify the Institute.

When your study is completed, please make contact with Ann Rice to discuss the final research outcomes or forward us your final draft report.

If you have any queries, please contact Ann Rice on 02 9208 9485 or via email.

All the best in your research

Susan

Susan Hartigan
Institute Director
A 2-10 O'Connell Street, Kingswood NSW 2747
T (02) 9208 9201 | F (02) 9208 9277 | M 0409 624 068
E susan.hartigan@lnf.nsw.edu.au | W workforcedevelopment.nsw.edu.au