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The influence of students' contextual perceptions on motivational goal pursuit in the first year of middle school

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**The Influence of Students' Contextual Perceptions
on Motivational Goal Pursuit in the First Year of Middle
School**

By

**Caroline Mansfield
B.A., Dip. Ed., M. Ed.**

**A Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of
Doctor of Philosophy**

**at the Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences,
Edith Cowan University,
Perth, Western Australia.**

Date of Submission: February, 2002.

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Abstract

The nature of student motivation in schools, particularly during early adolescence, has been of interest and concern to educators and researchers alike. Particularly over the last 20 years, considerable technological advances, societal changes, changes in traditional family structures, and changes in educational structures and practice have seen the issue of student motivation emerge as a prime focus for educators and researchers. Simultaneously, developments in educational research and consequent understandings developed about student motivation in classroom contexts have revealed the complexity of students' motivational processes and served to inspire further research in this field.

In Australia, the problem of best meeting the needs of early adolescents and enhancing their motivation in educational contexts has been in some schools addressed by the implementation of a 'middle' school. Traditional school structures in Australia have consisted of primary (Years K-7, ages 4-12) and secondary (Years 8-12, ages 12-17) schools, but recent changes have seen some schools restructure to preparatory school (Years K-2, ages 4-7), junior school (Years 3-6, ages 7-11), middle school (Years 7-9, ages 11-14) and senior school (Years 10-12, ages 14-17). Middle schools in Australia generally aim to provide a more age-appropriate learning environment for early adolescents through changes in school structures and learning environments. In Western Australia there are many varying models of such middle schools as schools tend to adopt differing degrees of middle schooling policies and practices. Nevertheless, most middle schools aim to more adequately meet the educational needs of early adolescents and positively enhance student motivation.

The research reported in this dissertation investigates the influence of students' contextual perceptions on the academic and social motivational goals they pursued in their first year of middle school. Using a goal orientation theory framework and approaching the nature of student motivation from a 'situative' perspective, the study focused on the experiences and perceptions of seven Year 7 students throughout the first year of their middle schooling experience. The study focused particularly on how students' perceptions of the middle school context in

which they participated, influenced the nature of the academic and social motivational goals they chose to pursue throughout the year.

An exploratory study conducted in a naturalistic setting, the research used primarily qualitative techniques for data collection and analysis. Data were collected mainly through classroom observation and student and teacher interviews. The research also incorporated one set of quantitative data (by way of survey) that were explored and enriched through qualitative data. A case study approach was used to gain a deeper understanding of the contextual perceptions held by students and to develop a holistic view of the complexities of student life during early adolescence.

The findings of the study revealed that students' perceptions of the contexts in which they operated during their first year of middle school had a significant influence on the nature of academic and social goals individuals pursued and that students' goals seemed to emerge from a consistent series of negotiations that occurred between family goals, school and classroom goals, and peer goals over the course of the year. It appeared that students also 'filtered' contextual information and endorsed behaviours and goals that corresponded with their personal priorities and agendas. Also, over time some students reported an increasing desire to protect their sense of self-worth in front of teachers, peers and parents by engaging in avoidance strategies and self-presentation tactics.

With regard to the specific school and classroom context in which students participated, the study found the school's behavioural control and reward system to have a significantly negative impact on individual's sense of belonging at school, school affect, perceived levels of teacher care and support, student teacher relationships and students' self-reported academic engagement and effort. Such a system also seemed, for some students, to override any positive benefits from task mastery focused classrooms and learning environments. In addition, some students' perceptions of teacher support appeared to also have a significant impact on their school adjustment, feelings about school and academic engagement and effort.

The results of this study have a number of implications for educators and school administrators working with early adolescents in middle schools, particularly those interested in creating school and classroom environments to more adequately meet the needs of early adolescents and enhance students' motivation. The findings indicate that school administrators and educators may wish to reconsider the use of behavioural control systems that seem to have a negative impact on student motivation. In addition, teachers may benefit from a greater understanding about student motivation and how to create learning and emotional environment that encourage students to pursue positive and complementary motivational goals. The study points to the need for educators and school administrators to approach their schools and classrooms from a motivational perspective.

Declaration

“I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.”

Signature: _____

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature.

Date : February, 2002.

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Associate Professor Len King, my principal supervisor, for his positive encouragement, support, expertise and patience;

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My husband Peter, whose emotional and physical support has made this thesis possible;

Luke (4) and Aidan (2), who have spent their early years sharing Mummy with a Ph. D.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the memory of my father, Kevin Barry, whose work as an educator and researcher remains a constant source of inspiration.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction to the study

Overview

Entitled “The influence of contextual perceptions on students’ personal academic and social goal pursuit in the first year of middle school” this study approaches the nature of student motivation from a contextual or situative perspective. Specifically, it focuses on the perceptions seven students developed of a particular middle school context over the period of an academic year and how such perceptions influenced the nature of the academic and social motivational goals they chose to pursue. Primarily qualitative in nature the study provides in-depth description of the experiences, relationships, and motivational goals of seven twelve-year-olds as they journey through their first year of middle school.

Chapter One provides background to the study and focuses on the themes of student motivation with particular regard to early adolescents and the emergence of the middle school structures and middle schooling philosophy in the West Australian education system. The chapter continues by describing the purpose of the study and presenting the problem statement and resultant research questions. The significance of this study is described and the chapter concludes by providing an overview of the study.

Background to the study

Over the last twenty years educators and educational researchers in western society have become increasingly interested in the phenomenon of student motivation. Through research a great deal has been discovered about the nature of student motivation, how it develops, its relationship to student performance at school, and factors that influence motivation such as parental, school and peer influences. In particular, attention has been directed to aspects of school and classroom contexts that influence student motivation such as school psychological environment, classroom and teacher practices. As a result of this

knowledge, educators and administrators have been prompted to make changes in school environments and curriculum, particularly with regard to adolescent students.

While many students are highly motivated and do well at school, other students have difficulty with motivation and do not enjoy school or fulfil their academic potential. Often this lack of motivation to learn has behavioural side-effects within the school and society. The problem of unmotivated students is a growing one, especially in secondary schools, and increasing numbers of teachers, administrators, parents and researchers are expressing concern about how to enhance students' motivation at school. Certainly student motivation is central to school learning.

In part, this problem of students who lack motivation has been attributed to rapid changes in society and the struggle schools have in meeting these changes. Societal factors often cited include global economic influences, cultural change, technological innovations, media influences, new patterns of work and changing family structures. In turn, these factors impinge on schools and are exacerbated by such issues as the growth in retention rates of students, gender specific problems (education of girls/boys), inappropriate curriculum and ineffective teaching practices. To view motivation, or lack of motivation, as a result of one or more of these broad factors is to underplay the complexity of motivational processes.

This complexity has become apparent to researchers as they have developed a range of motivational theories and strategies. For example, theories such as expectancy times value theory (Feather, 1982), attribution theory (Weiner, 1980), self-worth theory (Covington, 1984) and self-determination theory (Deci, 1980) have focused on the role of an individual's stable personality traits in determining motivational patterns. In particular, over the last decade, achievement goal theory (Ames, 1992; Meece, Blumenfeld & Hoyle, 1988; Meece, 1991; Nicholls, 1989) which allows for consideration of both individual personality traits and contextual factors in determining student motivational patterns has emerged as highly significant. More recently, theories of social motivation

(Wentzel, 1991a, 1991b, 1994, 1996, 1998) have also gained considerable credibility.

In focusing on the student's reasons for engaging in learning activities and in providing an understanding for the classroom behaviours such reasons promote, achievement goal theory suggests that students engage in learning activities for several reasons. Students may wish to fulfil a genuine interest in the task at hand and receive a sense of accomplishment from learning (task mastery goals), demonstrate their ability to others in ways that will enhance their ego (performance approach goals), or to complete tasks with as little effort as possible (performance avoidance goals) and engage in strategies designed to protect self-worth. In providing a framework within which student achievement motivation in specific contexts can be explored, achievement goal theory has established an important starting point for the development of this thesis.

As well as pursuing academic goals in the classroom students pursue a range of social goals, such as social responsibility goals, social relationship goals and social status goals. As Wentzel has convincingly argued, pursuit of appropriate social goals has been shown to complement academic goals and thus influence achievement (Wentzel, 1991a, 1993a). In contrast, pursuit of inappropriate social goals has the potential to disrupt and/or alter the pursuit of appropriate academic goals. The ability of social goals to either complement or contradict academic goals, and the impact social goal pursuit has on individuals' classroom behaviour and relationships is of significance to this thesis which considers the nature of social goals students pursue in their first year of middle school.

Focusing on the motivation of early adolescents within the context of a newly formed Western Australian middle school this study has been prompted by four factors: my experience as a secondary school teacher; my previous research for a Masters of Education thesis in the field of student motivation; my involvement in a Western Australian secondary school adopting the concept of a middle school; and my growing interest about the influence of school

environments and classroom contexts on the motivational patterns of students, particularly early adolescents.

More specifically, as a teacher in a secondary school I have experienced the problems created by poor student motivation. This experience has led to a keen interest in student motivation and provided the focus for a Masters thesis entitled "The influence of student perceptions about school experience on non-university bound students' motivation to succeed" (Mansfield, 1997). While this thesis concentrated on 17-year-old students in their final year of a West Australian secondary school, it became apparent during the course of the research that the motivational patterns exhibited by students at this level were in fact established in their first years of secondary school (age 12-13 years). It followed then that academic and social motivational patterns during early adolescence were of paramount importance in schooling.

At the same time, as a staff member of a school in the process of changing its structure to include a middle school, I developed an interest in the philosophy of middle schooling and in particular, how changes in a school structure might impact on the motivation of early adolescents. Indeed, educators and administrators from the school voiced concern about the poor motivation and behaviour of students and initiated change with the aim of improving student motivation and providing a more age-appropriate learning environment for early adolescents.

In this respect, research focusing on the impact of school contexts on student motivation in the United States has suggested that the failure of many schools to provide age-appropriate learning environments for students, particularly early adolescents, often manifests itself in poor patterns of student motivation (Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Eccles & Midgley, 1989). By making changes to the context(s) early adolescents encountered at school, educators and administrators in this Western Australian school hoped to be able to increase levels of student motivation as well as provide a more supportive environment for early adolescents.

At this point I began to develop a keen interest in the role contexts play in determining student motivational patterns. Recently researchers (Anderman & Anderman, 1999, 2000; Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996; Turner & Meyer, 1999, 2000) have begun to focus more intently on the role educational and learning contexts play in forming and developing individual's motivational patterns. This more 'situative' approach to exploring student motivation allows for questions about how and why particular motivational patterns develop among groups of students and individuals, questions which can be addressed and explored and thus enhance understandings about student motivation. The situative approach to exploring student motivation is central to this thesis which focuses on the influence a specific classroom and school context have on the personal motivational goals endorsed by individual students.

Middle schooling in Australia

The shift toward middle schooling in Australia has been primarily prompted by research conducted regarding transition from primary (Kindergarten to Year 7; ages 4-12) to secondary school (Years 8-12; ages 13-17) in the Australian education system. This research has shown that transition to secondary school is often accompanied by a decline in student motivation (Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Eccles & Midgley, 1989), which may be reflected in lower than expected academic performance and less positive attitudes towards school. In addition, practitioners have noted that certain features of secondary schools contributed to the undermining of students' motivation to learn during the transition period. Research regarding transition conducted in other schooling systems, especially the United States, has also contributed to current thinking about the nature of transition experienced by students in Australian schools.

In an effort to facilitate the transition from primary to secondary school and provide a learning environment more suitable to the needs of early adolescents, some Australian schools have adopted the North American concept and philosophy of a Middle School for students in Years 7-9 (age 11-14). These schools are generally formed as sub-schools within a larger school structure with

the aim of providing a more flexible, age-appropriate, student-centred learning environment to ease student adjustment during transition time. In this context, emphasis has been placed on student-centred learning techniques especially the use of cooperative learning strategies in the classroom. Among other things, changes in timetabling and staffing have been made in an endeavour to improve interactions between students and teachers. More generally, middle schools have attempted to meet the myriad of social, physical and cognitive needs of students who are experiencing the beginnings of adolescence.

In Australia two national reports on middle schooling have been released. The first, entitled 'The Middle' (1993), which was released by the Schools Council, established the climate of collaborative exploration into middle schooling philosophy and practice. The second, entitled 'From Alienation to Engagement' (1995), which was published by the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) argued that, in a context of economic, social and technological change, it is vital that young adolescents are provided with the kinds of learning experiences that will enable them to understand themselves, the world and their place in it. To aid in the development of a common and agreed view about the shape of middle schooling in Australia, the ACSA coordinated a National Middle Schooling Project that held its first forum in March 1997. The project has been successful in establishing a set of principles that guide middle schooling.

Educators and administrators in Western Australia have also taken up the challenge of middle schooling through a series of forums and conferences and the establishment of a number of middle schools. The first Western Australian Middle School Forum was held in May 1997 as a partnership venture between the ACSA, the Department of Education (W.A.), the Catholic Education Commission and Independent Schools. Participants included representatives from all education systems, parent representatives, tertiary educators, union representatives and school-based administrators and teachers. Subsequently, a number of forums and conferences have been held where issues and characteristics of middle schooling,

such as definition, teaming of students and teachers, curriculum and integration of learning areas, have been discussed.

In terms of the establishment of middle schools in Western Australia there has been broad agreement on the essential characteristics of middle schools which include the teaming of students and teachers, curriculum integration and relevance, student-centred planning and flexible use of time and space. The extent to which these characteristics have been implemented varies between schools and many middle schools are still in the process of evolving and the middle schooling philosophies and practices they embrace may differ from year to year.

While educators in Western Australia have expressed a strong interest in middle schooling, little is being done to evaluate its impact on student motivation. Educators and administrators have claimed in some instances that students are exhibiting behaviour that indicates they are motivated to participate and achieve academically but little is known about the social and academic goals Western Australian students pursue in the classroom during the first year of middle school and how a 'middle school context' may influence such goals. It is the intention of this thesis to explore the academic and social motivation of first year middle school students and the influence contextual perceptions have on the dynamics of student motivation.

Purpose of the study

The primary purpose of this study then is to inquire into the perceptions early adolescent students hold of the school and main classroom context(s) they encounter during their first year of middle school and to investigate how such perceptions influence the nature of the personal academic and social goals students pursue.

In fulfilling this primary purpose, the study will pursue several aims. First it will explore the personal academic and social motivational goals students bring to the learning context(s) and subsequently pursue in their first year of middle school. In so doing it will consider the nature of the goals pursued and the factors

external to the immediate school and classroom context, such as family, parents, culture and peers that appear to influence the goals students pursue.

Secondly it will explore the perceptions students hold of a specific classroom and school context during their first year of middle school. In this way it will focus on the nature of the perceptions held by students and attempt to develop an understanding of how and why such perceptions develop. In particular, it will address key factors that seem to promote particular motivational goals, noting, among other things, the school environment and goals, goals promoted in a classroom context, perceived teacher support and the nature of student teacher relationships. In this respect, it will attempt to identify trends among perceptions and explore why some perceptions are more salient and influential for some students than for others.

Finally, the study will attempt to provide an understanding about how individual students' contextual perceptions influence the academic and social goals they pursue in the first year of middle school. This will involve an exploration of how students perceive and interpret contextual features and events and how such perceptions and interpretations interface with students' personal goals and ultimately influence the academic and social goals individuals pursue.

Having addressed these aims, the study will endeavour to draw appropriate conclusions about the influence of contextual perceptions on the personal academic and social goals pursued by students in their first year of middle school. It is hoped these findings will enable educators and administrators to develop further strategies for working with early adolescent students in order to provide learning environments that may influence the pursuit of appropriate, positive and complementary academic and social goals.

Problem statement and research questions

The problem generating this study is the significant decline in motivation exhibited by early adolescents within the Western Australian education system specifically and across the world generally. To address this problem some schools are developing middle schools with the aim of providing an age-appropriate

learning environment that aims to enhance student motivation. In addition, researchers are developing interest in the role contextual variables play in determining student motivational patterns with a view to enhancing and enriching understandings about student motivation.

In responding to the problem this study seeks to explore the influence of student perceptions of a specific middle school and classroom context on students' pursuit of personal academic and social motivational goals. In particular the thesis will address the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of motivation oriented goals pursued by early adolescent students in their first year of middle school?
2. What is the nature of students' contextual perceptions in their first year of middle school?
3. How do individual students' contextual perceptions influence the pursuit of social and academic goals in their first year of middle school?

Significance of the study

This study aims to provide an understanding about the influence of student perceptions of a middle school environment and classroom context on the personal academic and social goals pursued by individuals in their first year of middle school. Through developing an understanding of the relationship that exists between students' contextual perceptions and their personal goal pursuit, the study should prove to be significant in four key areas.

First, the study will examine student motivation within a newly formed middle school. While educators and administrators recognise that the schooling needs of early adolescents are different from those of students at other ages, little has been done to evaluate the impact of the implementation of middle school philosophy and practice on the motivation of early adolescents in Western Australia. Indeed school administrators are implementing changes in line with middle schooling philosophy in the hope of creating more age-appropriate learning environments for early adolescents. Initial reports indicate that

administrators and teachers believe that such changes are having a positive impact on student motivation and academic success; but research has yet to validate these claims. As this study aims to explore the motivation of students in one particular middle schooling situation, it will attempt to provide an understanding of how the middle schooling practices adopted influence students' social and academic motivation.

Secondly, the study requires an examination of contextual variables that may influence personal goal pursuit. Research in the United States has successfully identified social and academic goals pursued by junior high school and middle school students and researchers have reported that particular contextual variables can affect goal pursuit and attainment (Anderman & Midgley, 1997; Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Maehr & Midgley, 1996). While those of North American middle schools may differ to the models of middle schooling and learning environments being developed in Western Australia, by building on such research this study will help identify particular contextual variables that influence student academic and social goal pursuit at a middle school level in Western Australia. The importance of examining particular school contexts is emphasised by Anderman and Midgley (1997) who argue that :

“It is important that researchers and school practitioners concerned with adolescent development attend to the contexts in which these (early adolescents) young people learn and grow. In particular, we must be aware that these contexts may change just as young adolescents also are changing” (p. 291).

This study will investigate the association between students' contextual perceptions and academic and social goal pursuit.

Thirdly, this study will attempt to develop an understanding of the changing nature of motivational goal patterns exhibited by students in the first year of middle school. While there is considerable research that explore relationships between sets of motivational constructs at a particular point in time, there are few longitudinal studies that explore the development and dynamics of motivational patterns (and factors influencing such patterns) in this field. As this

study follows a group of middle school students over the duration of an academic year, it will attempt to capture the ebb and flow of student motivational patterns in a naturalistic setting and explore contextual factors that enhance or hinder positive motivational patterns for individuals.

Finally, this study aims to contribute to the literature in the field of student motivation in contexts by focusing on how students' contextual perceptions influence their academic and social goal pursuit using primarily qualitative methodology. Existing research regarding student motivation during early adolescence is predominantly quantitative and as such is unable to provide qualitative descriptive information in the form of in-depth accounts of what life may be like for early adolescents and how they cope with the complexities of juggling academic and social life within the confines exerted by school, family and peers. As suggested by some researchers, the perceptions students have of their environment significantly influences their motivational behaviour and thus an understanding of their world must be vital to understanding their motivation (Harter, 1996; Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996). This study aims to supplement existing quantitative studies with such qualitative information through an understanding of the many variables that early adolescents experience and coordinate in an attempt to meet the pressure exerted on them from parents, school and peers. In the midst of the increasingly complex lives of adolescents, this qualitative study will attempt to develop an understanding of student motivation through an examination of students' academic and social goal pursuit influenced by contextual perceptions.

Summary

Chapter I has introduced the study, presented research questions and drawn attention to the purpose and significance of the study. Chapter II provides a review of the literature in which this study is embodied and describes the conceptual framework. Chapter III describes the methodology used and addressed questions of validity and reliability. Chapters IV through to X report the cases of seven students whose experiences and perceptions during the first year of middle

school are the focus of the study. Chapter XI discusses the data reported in this thesis according to themes that emerged and with reference to recent research literature. Chapter XII addresses the research questions posed and considers implications for theory, implications for teaching and learning and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Introduction

The literature regarding student motivation is widespread and covers a variety of different theories. In the case of this thesis, recent motivational literature with specific attention to goal orientation theory is highly relevant. Research concerning the role of school contexts in shaping students' goals, particularly at the stage of transition to middle school, is important. Again, in so far as this thesis is concerned with the perceptions students hold about themselves and the contexts in which they operate, the thesis draws on research regarding student perceptions and motivation in schools.

Theories of motivation

Since researchers and psychologists became interested in the motivation individuals possess to engage in particular activities many theories of motivation have been developed. Educators have been particularly interested in the motivation that enables students to engage successfully in academic tasks. Much of the research regarding motivation in education has been concerned with this field of achievement motivation.

The term achievement motivation specifically refers to the motivation individuals have to succeed. Over the years researchers have formulated and justified many theories of achievement motivation including attribution theory (Dweck & Elliot, 1983; Weiner, 1980), expectancy-value theory (Feather, 1982), self-worth theory (Covington, 1984) and self-determination theory (Deci, 1980). In order to focus specifically on achievement behaviour in classrooms researchers developed goal orientation theory (Ames, 1992; Meece, 1991; Meece, Blumenfeld & Hoyle, 1988; Nicholls, 1989). The theoretical framework for this study is embodied in the literature regarding goal orientation theory and student perceptions.

Student perceptions and motivation

Research has also emphasised the importance of exploring student perceptions of school contexts with a view to offer insights on how to make school environments more appropriate for the clientele they serve. Some researchers suggest that students' perceptions of their school environment and in particular their reaction to those perceptions are of importance in the study of student motivation (Maehr, 1991; Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996).

The beliefs students hold and the interpretations they make of their school experience can affect achievement in a variety of ways. How students perceive themselves in the context of the classroom has been found to influence many aspects of their behaviour such as level of interest, persistence, task engagement, and task performance (Newman & Schwager, 1992; Wittrock, 1986). Student perceptions, including self-perceptions and perceptions of classroom factors, have also been seen to influence help seeking patterns. In a school situation students construct their own reality of self and environment and this reality influences their classroom behaviour (Newman & Schwager, 1992).

In the field of motivation it is essential that the perceptions students have of classroom contexts be investigated. Nicholls (1992) argues that the starting point for research into student motivation should be the students and the perceptions they hold about themselves and their classroom. He proposes that educators consider students as Educational Theorists and his research demonstrates how even second grade students are able to discuss classroom practices, make curriculum decisions and provide valuable commentary about their motivation for particular tasks and activities. Similarly, Harter (1996) argues that studies concerning student motivation must take into account the power and relevance of student perceptions as they "address the issue of how students make meaning out of their own experiences, and as such they offer valuable insights into the perceived social and educational milieu in which students must function" (p. 24).

Goal orientation theory

Within a goal orientation theory framework, research concerned with student perceptions has been valuable in developing understandings about how students interpret classroom processes, teacher behaviour and peer and teacher relationships. Goal theory emphasises the “purposes students perceive for engaging in achievement-related behaviour and the meanings they ascribe to that behaviour” (Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin & Midgley, 2001). Whereas earlier motivational theories focused on either the role of an individual’s stable personality traits or the environment in determining motivational patterns, goal theory considers that both environmental and individual factors contribute to student motivation (Urdan, Kneisel, & Mason, 1999). Goal orientations have been shown to account for the difference in student motivational behaviour as the way students respond to tasks may differ according to the types of personal goals they pursue and the goals emphasised in the context in which they operate.

The nature of goals

Achievement goal theorists have suggested that the motivation students have towards engaging in activities is directed by a complex set of goals (Meece, Blumenfeld & Hoyle, 1988; Urdan, Kneisel & Mason, 1999; Wentzel, 1992, 1993b, 1994, 2000). Students are capable of pursuing multiple goals in classroom situations and the role of multiple goals has been examined by researchers (Meece & Holt, 1983; Pintrich, 1999; Urdan, 1994; cited in Midgley & Urdan, 2001).

Research concerning goal theory has established that students are capable of pursuing two main types of goals: academic goals (task mastery goals and performance goals) and social goals (social responsibility goals, social status goals and social relationship goals). Links have been established between patterns of academic and social goal pursuit and their impact on student achievement has been well documented (Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Wentzel 1991a, 1991b, 1992, 1993b). Researchers argue that in school settings students pursue complex patterns of academic and social goals and that successful school students pursue complementary goals, use a range of self-regulatory processes and are able

to coordinate their goals into a system of hierarchically related objectives (Newman, 1998; Wentzel, 1991a).

Academic goals

Researchers using achievement goal theory have described student achievement behaviour as oriented toward the academic goals of either task mastery or performance. Students who exhibit task mastery orientation are those who aim to independently master and understand their work (Meece, Blumenfeld & Hoyle, 1988). Such students view self-improvement and skill mastery as a reward and receive a sense of accomplishment from the inherent qualities of the task. They aim to gain knowledge by doing their best and value learning as an end in itself (Meece, 1991). Task mastery oriented students are concerned with learning for the sake of learning, striving to master tasks, to improve and develop intellectually. These students are interested in “problem solving, novel tasks and challenging situations” (Anderman, Maehr & Midgley, 1999, p. 132).

A mastery goal orientation has a positive influence on students’ cognition, affect and behaviour (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Mastery students generally have high levels of intrinsic motivation to learn and high cognitive engagement in learning activities (Meece, Blumenfeld & Hoyle, 1988). In addition research has shown task mastery orientation to be reflected in students’ metacognitive knowledge, strategy usage, and academic effort (Ames 1992). Task mastery oriented students are more likely to link their efforts to outcomes and attribute successes and failures to effort. They believe there is a positive relationship between effort and ability and are more likely to exert more effort in order to develop more ability (Pintrich and Schunk, 1996). Mastery goals have been positively related to deep processing, persistence and effort (Elliot, McGregor & Gable, 1999).

In terms of affective outcomes, mastery goals seem to lead students to feel proud and satisfied when they are successful and guilty when they are not successful (Ames, 1992). These affective outcomes are usually generated by attributions that stress the controllability of behaviour (such as effort).

Task orientation is associated with the view that school should prepare one for socially useful work and to understand the world (Nicholls, 1992). Students who exhibit task mastery orientation believe that success in school is the result of working cooperatively, working hard, being interested in the work and attempting to understand rather than memorise information (Nicholls, 1989). They believe that success is dependent on interest and effort, along with attempting to understand and help each other.

Performance oriented students generally possess less intrinsic motivation to learn than task mastery oriented students and are concerned with extrinsic variables such as gaining recognition, pleasing others, and in avoidance cases, minimizing effort as much as possible. These students also are more likely to attribute success to high ability and the relative performance of other students (Butler, 1987). Students pursuing performance goals aim to demonstrate high ability, impress those in authority and wish to be perceived as having high ability in relation to other students (Meece, 1991). They receive a sense of accomplishment from demonstrating superior ability, avoiding negative ability judgements, or receiving external reinforcement regardless of the learning involved (Meece, Blumenfeld & Hoyle, 1988). Performance oriented students tend to see effort and ability as inversely related, therefore believing the harder they try the less ability they have. In turn this belief can lead to avoiding effort in order to protect their ability and self-worth (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996).

Performance orientation has been associated with the view that school should help enhance one's wealth and socioeconomic status (Nicholls, 1992). Students who are performance oriented believe that being successful is the result of being intelligent, performing at a higher level than their peers, having teachers who expect them to do well, knowing how to impress others and showing a liking for the teacher (Nicholls, 1989). They believe that successful students are smarter than their peers and achieve at a higher level than them (Nicholls, 1989).

In recent years, goal theorists have seen benefits in identifying performance orientation in terms of approach and avoidance (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Elliot, 1999; Middleton & Midgley, 1997), to gain greater

understanding of student motivational behaviour. According to Elliot (1999) performance approach goals have been associated with numerous positive and few negative processes and outcomes. In terms of positive consequences, performance approach has been linked to high levels of aspiration, absorption during task engagement, challenge related effect while studying, high performance outcomes and intrinsic motivation. Performance approach goals have also been linked to persistence and positive exam performance (Elliot, McGregor & Gable, 1999).

Elliot (1999) reports that performance avoidance goals are linked to negative processes and outcomes. These include low absorption during task engagement, low self-determination during study, disorganised studying, procrastination, reluctance to seek help, shallow processing, poor retention of information, desire to escape evaluation, anxiety during evaluation, poor performance and reduced intrinsic motivation, along with surface processing and disorganization (Elliot, McGregor & Gable, 1999). Midgley and Urdan (2001) report a positive association between performance avoidance and use of self-handicapping strategies such as reduction of effort, procrastination and fooling around.

Social goals

There has been a growing recognition amongst researchers and theorists of the impact of social influences on student learning and motivation (McCaslin & Good, 1996). Learning is an inherently social activity generally occurring in an environment that encourages interaction between teachers and students and students and peers. The relationships developed within this context have a marked influence on how students learn. Goodenow (1992; cited in Anderman & Anderman, 2000) argues that “an ecologically valid psychology of education must include an understanding of the social and interpersonal processes that make up the social context of schooling” (p. 67). As learning becomes viewed as a social activity, implications for conceptualizations of motivation and development of student motivation emerge. Early research in the field of social motivation was

dominated by Wentzel (1989, 1991a, 1991b, 1993a, 1993b, 1994) who has shown the significant impact social motivation has on students' classroom behaviour and academic achievement. Some researchers have also demonstrated that the social organization of classrooms and schools and student relationships with peers and teachers influence motivation in a dramatic way (Eccles, Wigfield & Schiefele, 1998; Juvonen & Wentzel, 1996; Maehr & Midgley, 1996).

A range of social goals students may pursue in the classroom, and indeed in school settings, have been identified. Such goals include social responsibility goals (to comply with school and classroom rules and expectations), prosocial goals (willingness to help, share and cooperate), affiliation and relationship goals (desire to belong, to be liked by others, to establish relationships), approval goals (to be liked by others, to seek approval from teachers, peers, parents), welfare goals (to help others), and status goals (to be well regarded within the peer group and the class).

Significant research attention has been given to the impact of students' pursuit of social responsibility within school and classroom contexts. The degree to which students endorse social responsibility goals has been reported to be indicative of their desire and ability to meet the social requirements of classroom contexts and has been associated with task mastery orientation, academic outcomes, increased academic efficacy and higher teacher allocated grades (Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Wentzel 1989, 1993a, 1993b). Students pursuing responsibility goals are likely to attempt to earn approval, comply with teacher requests and show consideration for other students (Anderman, 1999a).

Anderman (1999a) suggests that endorsement of responsibility goals is associated with positive affect during school transition and that students who wish to be compliant and cooperative class members may be "more likely to persist with academic tasks for social reasons alone even when the tasks hold little personal value or interest" (p. 307). Pursuit of social responsibility goals along with positive feelings about school belonging have also been associated with increased focus on academic tasks (Anderman & Anderman, 1999) and increased positive affect during transition (Anderman, 1999a).

Researchers have also given attention to the influence students' demonstration of social competence has in school contexts (Wentzel, 1991b). In the classroom, teachers spend time teaching and reinforcing socially competent behaviour usually through classroom management strategies. Research suggests that the degree of emphasis teachers place on classroom management varies according to student age. Brophy and Evertson (1978) argue that early elementary and junior high teachers spend more time dealing with classroom management issues than teachers of other grades and that teachers of early adolescents spend considerable time attempting to maintain order. In addition, teacher behaviour toward students has been influenced by students' social behaviour and suggests that students who demonstrate irresponsible social behaviour are more likely to be treated negatively and less likely to receive individual instruction than others (Wentzel, 1991a).

Social status goals represent students' social motivation in relation to the wider peer group at school. In terms of motivation, social status goals represent students' desires to establish and maintain "social prestige through affiliation with the 'popular' group at school, but not necessarily a goal of being well liked" (Anderman, 1999b, p. 309). In addition, pursuit of status goals indicates a desire to receive positive judgments by the wider peer group and reflect an individual's acceptance of the informal social norms generated by the peer group. Students who do not pursue status goals may indeed hold different values to those promoted by the peer group (Anderman, 1999a). Pursuit of social status goals has been linked to performance approach goal orientation and with the perception that help seeking in the classroom is a negative behaviour (Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Ryan, Hicks & Midgley, 1997). Ryan, Hicks & Midgley (1997) associated students' endorsement of status goals with students' reluctance to seek help with academic work in order to protect self-worth. Anderman and Anderman (1999) suggest the possibility that:

"students who are more focused on their social relationships and reputations among their peers are also more likely to look to their peer group for evidence of their own academic success and achievement ... the peer group is not only more salient for such individuals as a social

network, but also as a comparison group against which to assess their own performance” (p. 33).

Students pursuing relationship goals wish to establish and maintain positive peer relationships in the school context (Anderman, 1999a). Peer relationships become highly valued during early adolescence especially when the peer group widens significantly following transition (Eccles & Midgley, 1989). Relationship goals are important to adolescents who seek “companionship, validation and socialization” (Anderman, 1999a, p. 92). Students who do not desire peer relationships within the school environment may be more susceptible to experiencing negative affect in school through lack of social support, whereas those desiring peer relationships may experience positive affect in school through positive feelings emanating from companionship and peer validation (Anderman, 1999a). Pursuit of social relationship goals has also been shown to have a negative impact on academic motivation, interest, engagement and learning if students’ desire to make friends dominates their academic motivation (Anderman, 1999b).

Wentzel (1991a, 1993a) suggests that achieving social goals in the classroom can have a positive impact on student achievement. The pursuit of social responsibility at school is valuable in as much as social responsibility can:

“facilitate learning and performance outcomes by promoting positive interactions with teachers and peers and, from a motivational perspective, by providing students with additional incentives to achieve” (Wentzel, 1991b, p. 1).

The motivational components of pursuing social responsibility goals have been shown to influence the intensity with which students engage in academic activities (Wentzel, 1991b). Students’ social competence has been shown to affect the quality of relationships they have with peers and teachers and have a significant impact on academic achievement (Wentzel, 1991a).

Anderman (1999b) argues that while research has developed understandings regarding the impact of social aspects of schooling on academic

outcomes the “reciprocity of these domains has received little attention. Understanding how these domains interact remains a challenge for future research” (p. 305).

Goal content

Wentzel (2000) argues that a “focus on the content of students’ goals can provide unique and valuable insights into ways in which students’ multiple social and academic goals might influence their academic accomplishments” (p. 105). Within a goal content perspective Wentzel defines goals as “cognitive representations of what it is that an individual is trying to achieve in a given situation” (Wentzel, 2000, p. 105-106). Wentzel argues that from a goal content perspective, goal orientations (mastery and performance) are only representative of two of the possible multiple goals that students might pursue at school.

Wentzel makes the point:

“if we are to understand the relevance of multiple goal pursuit for academic outcomes, issues raised by each perspective will have to be explored: which goals does the student bring to the classroom; which goals do teachers expect students to achieve and how; and does the student have effective strategies for coordinating these multiple goals” (Wentzel, 2000, p. 112-113).

According to Wentzel (2000) a “goal content perspective is essential for understanding motivation within context” (p. 106) for a number of key reasons. First, it “allows for the possibility that goals can emanate either from the individual or from the context” (p. 106) and that even though students may pursue “a core set of personal goals across a variety of situations, goals also are socially derived constructs that cannot be studied in isolation of the rules and conventions of culture and context” (p. 106). Second a goals content perspective “allows for the fact that individuals are likely to pursue more than one goal in a particular situation” (p. 106) and “the likelihood that individuals pursue multiple goals implies that the ability to coordinate the pursuit of these goals effectively is a critical self-regulatory skill that links motivation to competent behaviour (p. 107). A goal content perspective is relevant to this thesis as it allows for the

development of an understanding between individuals and the context(s) within which they operate.

Personal and contextual goals

Researchers working with goal orientation theory have considered academic goals as either personal trait like characteristics of individual students (Dweck & Leggett, 1988) or as contextual and therefore emanating from aspects of classroom and school situations (Ames 1992; Newman, 1998). Personal goals refer to goals students bring to a learning context whereas contextual goals are those which are espoused and endorsed by contexts such as the classroom and school environment.

The interaction between personal and contextual goals and the impact such interaction has on student adjustment and academic achievement has become a topic of interest for researchers (Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Newman, 1998). The 'fit' between contextual and personal goals has been shown to influence students' task performance, attitudes to learning and academic outcomes (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Wentzel, 1996; Newman, 1998).

Urdu (1997) argues that "goals and environmental goals structures may affect students in different ways, depending on students' characteristics" (p. 126). Ames (1992) makes the point that although a classroom task goal structure should have positive implications for all students, the effect may be greater for low achieving at-risk students. Dweck (1986) also suggests that performance goals may have negative implications for students with low self-perceptions of ability. Harackiewicz and Elliot (1993) suggest that when students have high achievement motivation they may benefit more from a performance goal orientation than task goals. Such literature has implications for this research that explores the effect perceived classroom and school goal structures have on individuals.

Ford (1992) suggests that context beliefs can potentially link "generalised perceptions of social settings to classroom functioning" (Wentzel, 1999, p. 65). This notion proposes that in certain situations students develop beliefs regarding the relationship between their personal goals and goals endorsed by others.

Students therefore, will determine how others can support their personal goals and how social relationships may help in creating an emotionally supportive environment. Wentzel (1999) argues that these context beliefs will “most likely reflect the outcome of students’ history of interacting within family and community contexts, as well as with teachers and peers at school” (p. 65).

Turner (in press) argues that motivational constructs have focused on the self and considered context as less important. She argues:

“the present challenge to motivational research is to integrate the notion of self and context. The ‘situative’ approach attempts to understand persons-in-situations and provides an alternative to both behavioural and cognitive approaches to motivation.”

The ‘fit’ between goals individuals bring to learning situations and the goals promoted by classroom and school environments is particularly relevant to this thesis as it explores the nature of students’ personal goal pursuit with regard to perceptions of contexts. The following sections of this literature review aim to provide an overview of research regarding the role of personal and contextual goals in developing an understanding of student motivation in the first year of middle school.

Personal goals

When students enter an achievement setting they bring with them personal values, belief systems and ideas about education. Some of these may be based on prior experience and others developed from family and/or cultural values. In addition, students will hold particular perceptions about the school, classroom and peer contexts they encounter and engage with. These in turn have the potential to influence students’ personal goals and thus it is possible that for some students a reciprocal relationship exists between the contextual perceptions and the degree to which contextual goals are endorsed.

Factors contributing to personal goals

Researchers have identified a number of factors that influence the nature of the personal goals students bring to learning situations. The following section focuses on factors such as parental influences, cultural influences, prior educational experiences and beliefs about ability and effort. In addition this section also reviews literature concerned with strategies students use when they feel that classroom situations pose a threat to their sense of self-worth.

Parental influences

Over the last twenty years much research has focused on the role parents play in influencing the academic and social goals students pursue within the school environment. Meece (1994) suggests that certain socialisation experiences students have at home can influence their school achievement goals. Ames and Archer (1987) found that mothers could influence the academic goals pursued by their children by virtue of the activities they encouraged at home, their own definition of success and the manner in which they evaluate their children's academic success. Trusty and Pirtle (1998) report there to be a strong link between the educational goals held by parents and those endorsed by their children. They argue that parents' effects on their children are more continual and multidimensional than those of educational professionals. Nelson, Hrudá and Midgley (2000) found that students were able to differentiate parental mastery and performance goals from personal goals and perceived teacher goals. In addition, perceived parental goals were found to be significant predictors of students' academic self-efficacy, more so than perceived teacher goals and personal goals.

The social goals promoted and reinforced by parents have been seen to be a significant factor in school adjustment and in situations where family social goals differ from those expected at school, students are put at risk (Wentzel, 1996). Wentzel argues that although research shows the importance of parental influences on student motivation little research indicates "how goals develop over the course of the school years or about the relative contribution of schooling and

family socialization processes to individual differences in children's adoption and pursuit of these goals" (Wentzel, 1996, p. 241).

Investigating the influence of perceived parental caring of first year middle school students, Wentzel (1998) found that having supportive parental relationships and parents with positive parenting styles had an impact on both school socialization practices and academic motivation. Perceived support from parents was shown to be a positive predictor of school interest and goal orientations.

Parent child relationships have been shown to have a significant impact on school adjustment (Wentzel, 1999). Wentzel argues parents can enhance their children's intellectual development and academic outcomes by providing educational opportunities and resources, and through direct involvement in their children's educational activities. Wentzel also reports that parents teach children rules for social interaction with adults and peers that are relevant for classroom contexts. As such:

"if a child learns to engage in cooperative and prosocial interactions with others, to follow rules, and to strive to achieve standards for performance set by adults, they are more likely to succeed at school than children who do not" (Wentzel, 1999 p. 60).

Cultural influences

The cultural values embraced and promoted by parents have also been shown to influence the nature of students' academic and social goal pursuit. In a study of adolescents from immigrant and American born families, Fuligni and Tseng (1999) report that children of immigrant parents possess strong academic motivation and that this stems in part from a desire to support and assist the family. In addition, adolescents from immigrant families emphasise the importance of education and school success. Maehr and Nicholls (1980) suggest that the effects of goals on motivation and behaviour may vary due to cultural considerations and different world views. Thus goals and perceived goal structures may not operate in the same way for all students.

Brophy (1999) addresses the issue of differences between western and eastern approaches to the psychology of motivation and reports there to be some central differences that may influence student motivation in the classroom. Of prime concern is the notion that western culture assumes individuals to be unique and encourages individuals to develop an “increasingly differentiated and individuated self-concept” (p. 39) and thus our motivational concepts largely focus on self. Eastern psychological thinking he argues, reflects a “collectivist” rather than “individualist” orientation and thus individuals are socialised to focus on their memberships to families and other groups and pursuing group agendas. Such discussion has important implications for educators and researchers and is particularly relevant to this study which includes students of Asian culture.

Prior educational experiences

Students hold certain views of education based on their prior educational experience, such as schools attended, types of teachers, and amount of time spent on various subjects. Crick and Dodge (1994) propose a model of social information processing that suggests that students approach a certain social situation influenced by their past social experiences. As they receive social cues their behavioural response is influenced by prior social knowledge. The Crick and Dodge model suggests that students encode a set of external and internal cues, interpret those cues, select appropriate goals, and then respond accordingly.

Beliefs about ability and effort

During early adolescence students’ beliefs, definitions and attributions regarding ability begin to change. In particular ability becomes increasingly viewed as a fixed entity, rather than incremental (as a result of effort) and thus to invest effort requires risk, as outcomes may be perceived to indicate level of intelligence (Dweck & Elliot, 1983). These changes in perceptions can also influence pursuit of academic goals as students who believe ability to be fixed have been more likely to pursue performance goals and engage in self-presentation behaviours to protect self-worth. Students who believe ability to be

susceptible to change through effort have been shown to be more likely to pursue task mastery goals (Dweck, 1996).

Anderman and Maehr (1994) argue the problems associated with adolescents changing beliefs about ability and effort is often compounded by schooling practices early adolescents encounter which define worth by ability rather than progress in learning. In addition, some schooling practices that focus on student performance may lead students to believe that their performance level is representative of their worth in the school setting. Accordingly students may experience reduced feelings of self-worth under such conditions.

The problems associated with students' beliefs about ability, effort and self-worth are also acknowledged by Roeser, Eccles and Sameroff (2000) who report:

“adolescents' decisions to engage in learning or not in the classroom depend in some measure on whether they feel able to meet the challenges presented them, whether they see purpose and value in classroom activities, and whether they feel safe and cared for by others in the setting” (p. 454).

They argue that teachers should focus their attention toward motivating students to learn “rather than motivated to protect themselves from situations they perceive as threatening to their self, meaningless, or somehow threatening to their social image” (p. 454). Such research suggests that students' desire to protect their sense of self-worth can in some situations override their desire to learn.

As a consequence of working in particular school and classroom environments students may employ a range of strategies in order to protect their sense of self-worth. These strategies are focused around accounting for lack of success due to external and unstable causes that may be perceived in a more positive light than lack of ability. A range of strategies may be employed by students to protect their sense of self worth. The following sections focus on strategies such as self-presentation tactics (Juvonen, 1996; Juvonen & Nishina, 1997), self-handicapping (Midgley, Arunkumar & Urdan, 1996; Midgley & Urdan, 2001), excuse making (Juvonen & Nishina, 1997) and avoidance strategies such as withdrawal of effort, resisting novel approaches to learning and avoiding

academic help seeking (Turner, Midgley, Meyer, Gheen, Anderman, Kang & Patrick, in press).

Self-presentation tactics

Juvonen (1996) reports that students learn to control and manipulate the reactions teachers, classmates and parents have toward them through use of self-presentation tactics such as excuses, public accounts, effort and ability explanations. Use of such social tactics reveals that students “understand and are sensitive to various implicit classroom norms, and can act according to the values and expectations of those with whom they interact in achievement situations” (Juvonen, 1996, p. 44). Early adolescents have been found to have an acute awareness of the different impact ascriptions of ability and effort has on teachers and classmates. Juvonen and Murdock (1993) found that students were likely to attribute success and failure in different ways depending on audience. Students were more likely to explain success to adults as a result of studying hard (recognizing adults to value effort) and competence and were likely to convey to their classmates that they did not exert effort (recognising peers to value competence and ability).

Juvonen and Nishina (1997) argue that most students want to relate positively to and be well liked by their teachers and classmates. In order to establish and maintain approval of teachers and peers they must have an understanding of others values expectations and present themselves accordingly. Juvonen and Nishina (1997) suggest one set of self-presentation tactics to involve manipulating explanations for personal outcomes. By “altering causal explanations of one’s own successes or failures, the account giver can influence others’ impressions and manipulate their reactions to his or her performance” (Juvonen and Nishina, 1997, p. 200). In this way a student receiving an unusually high test result may explain to peers they were good at guessing, but acknowledge success to the teacher in terms of investment of effort.

Self-handicapping

In a 1996 study Midgley, Arunkumar and Urdan examined predictors of adolescents' use of academic self-handicapping strategies. They argue that adolescents use self-handicapping strategies (such as procrastination, fooling around, reducing effort) for self-presentation and as a "proactive attempt to manipulate others' perceptions of the causes of performance outcomes" (p. 423). Self-handicapping strategies are often used to hide true ability and protect self-worth, but may also be an indicator of intentional withdrawal from school. Use of self-handicapping strategies is likely to emerge during early adolescence as students develop an awareness that effort and ability covary and that academic success with little effort is perceived to represent high ability, whereas academic failure with substantial effort is perceived as an indication of low ability. Midgley and Urdan (2001) report that students pursuing personal avoidance goals are most likely to engage in self-handicapping behaviours.

Excuse making

Juvonen and Nishina (1997) report that as children grow older they learn to avoid others' negative reactions through excuse making. In addition, students will use different excuses when dealing with teachers and peers depending on how they estimate the excuse to be received. A young student who behaves inappropriately may try to deny the behaviour to avoid punishment, whereas older students may deny responsibility for the act in order to reduce negative social consequences. Students have also been shown to use "uncontrollable circumstances as excuses to mitigate the responsibility judgement" (Juvonen & Nishina, 1997, p. 198).

Avoidance strategies

Researchers have suggested that in order to protect self-worth and "deflect attention from low ability" some early adolescent students begin to engage in three main avoidance strategies (Turner, Midgley, Meyer, Gheen, Anderman, Kang & Patrick, in press). Such strategies include intentionally

withdrawing effort (self-handicapping), resisting novel approaches to learning and avoiding academic help-seeking when needed. Thus avoidance strategies undermine academic performance. Turner et al. (in press) argue that the main reasons for students to engage in avoidance strategies are related to “the search for self-acceptance” which in school situations most often depends on “one’s ability to achieve competitively” (p. 74). The use of avoidance strategies is particularly relevant to research dealing with early adolescents who are beginning to understand ability to be fixed, rather than susceptible to change through investment of effort. At such a stage protecting public images of competence may cause some students to reduce efforts to succeed.

Turner and her colleagues (in press) report that as notions of ability have been influenced by the nature of classroom contexts possible associations may exist between students’ use of avoidance strategies and particular aspects of classroom contexts. Avoidance strategies such as reluctance to seek help and self-handicapping have been associated with perceptions of performance goal structures in school contexts. This research also suggests that students were less likely to engage in avoidance behaviours when teachers “provided instructional and motivational support for learning” through “modeling their own thinking processes” and demonstrating that “being unsure, learning from mistakes, and asking questions was a natural and necessary part of learning” (Turner et al. in press).

Help-seeking behaviour

Researchers have investigated relationships between students’ help-seeking behaviours and multiple achievement goals (Newman, 1998) and help-seeking and academic efficacy, teachers’ social-emotional role and the classroom goal structure (Ryan, Gheen & Midgley, 1998). Newman (1998) argues that students who prioritised task mastery and social affiliation goals were more likely to seek help than students focusing on performance and looking smart. In addition, students pursuing performance goals were more likely to be influenced by goals promoted and endorsed by contexts than those pursuing task mastery

goals. Personal performance goals and performance goals emphasised in context significantly reduced students' help-seeking behaviour.

Ryan, Gheen and Midgley (1998) relate students' help-seeking behaviours to both student and classroom characteristics. Students with low levels of academic efficacy were more inclined to seek help in classrooms where teachers attended effectively to students' social and emotional needs. This research points to the importance of the emotional life in the classroom with regard to student behaviour and goal pursuit.

Summary of personal goals

The personal goals students choose to pursue are influenced by a number of factors. Those particularly relevant to this thesis include parental and cultural influences, students' prior schooling experiences and beliefs about ability and effort. Of particular concern to educators and researchers are the strategies students are capable of employing when they perceive contextual situations to threaten their self-worth. Use of such strategies has a negative impact on academic achievement and may also have implications for the nature of social and academic goals students pursue in middle school.

Contextual goals

Over the last 30 years there has been a growing interest in the role contexts and situations play in determining beliefs. Research has focused on many variables of classroom contexts, such as "beliefs, goals, values, perceptions, behaviours, classroom management, social relations, physical space and social-emotional and evaluative climates" (Turner & Meyer, 2000, p. 70) and in particular, instructional processes. Anderman and Anderman (2000) report they have observed an "ongoing call from researchers, symposium discussants, and journal editors for increased attention to contextual effects in the study of educational psychology" (p. 67). Turner (in press) argues that the "situative" approach to motivational research "means that we assume that motivation is an

interactive experience, depending on the influences of students and their environments on each other”.

Researchers working with goal orientation theory propose that goal theory “emphasises the point...that the context is a major factor in the motivational problems of adolescence” (Anderman & Maehr, 1994, p. 294). In addition, Anderman and Anderman (1999) state “goal orientation theory assumes that student perceptions of the goal structures in their classroom influence their adoption of personal goal orientations as well as other important educational outcomes” (p. 22). Studies (Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Roeser, Midgley & Urda, 1996) show that the psychological environment of the classroom may have a strong influence on the goals that students adopt.

Anderman (1999a) argues that although students’ perceptions of classroom goal orientation, sense of school belonging and personal social goals will contribute to school-related affect. Specifically, she reports:

“it is likely contextual and individual variables might interact in influencing students’ affect. That is, the extent to which students endorse social goals in school and their sense of school belonging might be expected to moderate the strength of the associations between their perceptions of the goal orientations of classes and affect in school” (p. 93).

The results from the Anderman (1999a) study indicate changes in students’ school affect were explained by the interaction between students’ perceptions of their learning environment and social goals. For example, students perceiving classroom task mastery goals, but endorsing personal social status goals were likely to experience negative affect, whereas students in the same class pursuing responsibility and relationship goals were more likely to experience positive affect.

Even though contexts can encourage students to pursue particular goals, contextual goals have meaning that is constructed individually by each student. For contextual goals to influence students’ behaviour “environmental cues must be experienced and goals adopted into the child’s way of thinking” (Newman, 1998, p. 645). Most research regarding contextual goals has primarily involved experimental conditions whereby either task or performance goals are emphasised

(Newman, 1998; Urdan, Kniesel & Mason, 1999). Newman (1998) makes the point that personal and contextual goals have rarely been considered simultaneously.

The following section reviews literature focusing on context and the contribution research has made to our understanding of the “situative” nature of student motivation. Specifically this sections of the review reports research regarding school context and adolescence, student perceptions of middle school contexts, student perceptions of classroom goals, and factors influencing contextual goals such as teacher and peer related influences.

School contexts and adolescence

One of the most significant insights into the power contextual variables can have on the achievement of early adolescents', lies in the work of Eccles and Midgley (1989). Eccles and Midgley (1989) pose a “stage-environment fit” theory to argue that the ‘fit’ between the developmental needs of the adolescents and the educational environment is crucial for optimum motivational benefits. They suggest that there is often a “mismatch between characteristics of the classroom environment in traditional middle grade schools and early adolescents’ developmental level” (Eccles, J. S., Wigfield, A., Midgley, C., Reuman, D., Mac Iver, D., & Feldlaufer, H., 1993, p. 553). Eccles and her colleagues (1993) argue that positive motivational outcomes will only result when school and classroom environments respond to the changing needs of early adolescents and succeed in offering stimulation to encourage continued positive growth.

Eccles et al. (1993) suggest that traditional middle school classrooms (in the United States) place emphasis on teacher control and discipline, use competitive motivational strategies and provide few opportunities for student choice and self-management. Teachers tend to be concerned about instruction and performance evaluation and students experience work that requires lower level cognitive skills. In addition, Eccles and her colleagues propose that negative societal stereotypes about early adolescent students may influence some teachers

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who then fail to engender feelings of efficacy or trust in their students. These factors have a negative influence on student motivation.

Anderman and Maehr (1994) also describe the typical American middle school environment as dominated by:

“few opportunities for students to make important decisions, excessive rules and discipline, poor teacher-student relationships, homogeneous grouping by ability, and stricter grading practices than those in the elementary school years” (p. 293).

As students enter such an environment they also desire to become independent and autonomous (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Anderman, Maehr & Midgley, 1999). This developmental stage is “best nurtured by a strong sense of autonomy, independence, self-determination, and social interaction” (Anderman & Maehr, 1994, p. 294). Should contexts not reflect student needs at this time a serious mismatch can occur between the psychological needs of early adolescents and the contexts they encounter. This mismatch may be responsible for the serious decline in motivation often experienced during transition to middle school (Anderman & Maehr, 1994).

Student perceptions of middle school contexts

Researchers have begun to explore student perceptions of middle school contexts, and in particular how such perceptions may influence the nature of the academic and social goals students pursue (Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996; Anderman, 1999a).

Roeser, Midgley and Urdan (1996) argue that the perceptions early adolescents have of the school psychological environment in which they operate influence the types of motivational goals they adopt. Their research reports:

“there is evidence that students’ perceptions of the goals emphasised in the school as a whole are related to their personal achievement goals, feelings of academic efficacy, use of effective learning strategies and in-school behaviour” (p. 410).

They suggest that the use of extrinsic incentives in schools may contribute to student perceptions that schools “value and care less for them as individuals” as

well as reducing the number of students who feel successful and have a positive sense of belonging at school. Roeser, Midgley and Urdan (1996) argue that future research should aim to develop an understanding of how social relationships and motivational goal structures are related to the everyday experience of middle school students. "Such knowledge could contribute to discussions about how best to make middle schools academically motivating and supportive for all students" (p. 420).

Student perceptions of classroom contexts

Research has demonstrated how classroom contexts can endorse either task or performance achievement goals (Ames & Archer, 1988; Meece, 1991; Midgley, 1993). Anderman and Anderman (1999) report that students' perceptions of the goals emphasised in classrooms can predict their adoption of personal goal orientations. Their study suggests that both task and performance personal goal orientations are related to goals emphasised in the classroom and that students' social perceptions in the first year of middle school have a significant impact on their personal achievement goal orientations. The Anderman and Anderman (1999) study reinforces the importance classroom and school contexts have on the academic and social motivation of students following transition to middle school.

Specifically, classrooms can communicate task mastery emphasis (focusing on effort and understanding) through provision of challenging tasks, some student choice and control, evaluation with regard to personal improvement, recognition of effort and progress, opportunities for cooperative learning and peer interaction, and flexible time requirements to task completion (Anderman, 1999a). Likewise performance goal orientations (focusing on demonstrating ability relative to others) can be communicated through evaluation practices involving peer comparison, public displays of grades and scores, ability groupings and rigid time constraints for completion of tasks (Ames 1992). Covington (1992) suggests that classroom structures promoting performance goals encourage students to focus on how others perceive their ability and thus "strategies to appear able, or at

least to avoid appearing unable, are likely to be used” (Midgley & Urdan, 2001, p. 62).

Student perceptions of classroom contexts have been found to predict student behaviours. Midgley and Urdan (2001) report that perceptions of a performance classroom goal structure can predict use of self-handicapping strategies, independent of personal goals. Such strategies are designed to provide reasons, apart from lack of ability, for possible poor performance and are used by students to protect their self-worth (Covington, 1992). Midgley and Urdan (2001) found:

“Personal performance-avoid goals positively predicted handicapping whereas personal performance-approach goals did not. Personal task goals negatively predicted handicapping. Perceptions of a performance goal structure positively predicted handicapping, and perceptions of a task goal structure negatively predicted handicapping, independent of personal goals” (p. 61).

Midgley and Urdan (2001) also argue “little research using a goal orientation framework has simultaneously examined personal goals and perceptions of the goals emphasised in the learning environment” (p. 64).

Turner et al. (in press) report that specific classroom instructional practices are related to students’ perceptions of classroom goal structures. Meece (1991) showed that mastery focused classrooms emphasised meaningfulness of learning, adapted instruction to students’ developmental level, provided teacher support for instructional activities, emphasised intrinsic reasons for learning and not giving emphasis to ability related information. Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin & Midgley (2001) also contributed to understandings about mastery focused classrooms by reporting that in such classrooms teachers emphasised the notion of learning as an active process and expressed strong positive affect about learning and conveyed positive expectations for students.

Turner and her colleagues (in press) propose that a mastery learning environment is:

“related to ‘caring about learning’ which fuses the cognitive and the affective components of teaching and learning. An essential avenue to creating such a classroom is by attending to the positive relationships that

teachers develop with students and the messages they send about learning through their instructional interactions.”

Ryan and Patrick (2001) suggest that certain dimensions of the classroom social environment have the potential to influence student motivation and engagement in middle school. Specifically, they report that perceived teacher support, promotion of interaction between students, promotion of mutual respect among class members, and performance goals have an impact on indicators of student motivation such as academic and social efficacy, self-regulated learning and disruptive behaviour. This quantitative study found:

“when students believe they are encouraged to know, interact with, and help classmates during lessons; when they view their classroom as one where students and their ideas are respected and not belittled; when students perceive their teacher as understanding and supportive; and when they feel their teacher does not publicly identify students’ relative performance, they tend to engage in more adaptive patterns of learning” (p. 456).

Factors influencing contextual goals

Contextual studies have identified factors that may contribute to students’ endorsement of task mastery or performance goals in the classroom and school environment. Among such factors are school environment and goal emphasis, peer influences, teacher influences, instructional variables, and sense of belonging.

School goal emphasis

The whole school environment has the potential to influence student goal endorsement. Research on school climate and culture indicates that schools emphasise different goals and that individual students’ goals and motivation are influenced by this larger culture within which they operate (Anderman & Maehr, 1994). These school effects have been shown to play a greater role in individual goal selection and pursuit as students get older, move around the school more as a necessary part of their day, and encounter different teachers for different subjects.

Researchers examining school culture of middle schools in the United States, found that such schools are typically performance goal oriented (Eccles & Midgley, 1989).

“Thus, in spite of what an individual teacher might do to stress the value of learning for its own sake, to stress the role of effort and progress, to include all within the learning community, these efforts may be undermined if the school as a whole emphasises grades, competition, and rewards” (Anderman & Maehr, 1994, p. 297).

In their 1996 study of student perceptions of the school psychological environment and early adolescents’ psychological and behavioural functioning in school Roeser, Midgley and Urdan (1996) report evidence students’ perceptions of school goals are related to their “personal achievement goals, feelings of academic efficacy, use of effective learning strategies and in-school behaviour” (p. 410). Their findings support other research (Eccles, Wigfield, Midgley, Rueman, Mac Iver, & Feldlaufer, 1993) by indicating that middle school environments that are perceived as supportive, caring, and which emphasise individual effort and improvement are likely to encourage students to form adaptive patterns of cognition, affect and behaviour. Likewise environments that are perceived to be less supportive and to emphasise relative ability and comparison encourage students to possess less adaptive patterns.

Sense of belonging

Research has also addressed the concept of sense of belonging with regard to student motivation. Students’ sense of belonging to and identification with their school community has been proposed as one important social variable that influences academic functioning (Anderman, 1999b). Strong sense of belonging has been linked to positive outcomes including academic motivation, sense of efficacy and liking for school. Lack of sense of belonging has been associated with negative academic outcomes such as truancy and withdrawal from school. In addition, students with a strong sense of belonging have been shown to be more inclined to internalise values promoted by the school and classroom (Anderman, 1999b).

Sense of school belonging (Anderman, 1999b) has emerged as an important social predictor of academic variables. Anderman (1999b) demonstrates students who report a sense of belonging in their particular school setting are more likely to endorse a mastery goal orientation and less likely to endorse a performance goal orientation toward their academic work. In addition, Anderman (1991a) associated positive sense of school belonging with positive school affect.

Wentzel (1999) suggests that when students' needs for belonging are met, individuals experience a "positive sense of self, emotional well being, and beliefs that the social environment is a benevolent and supportive place" (p. 61). In turn, positive perceptions of a sense of belonging and the view that teachers and peers are socially supportive is likely to encourage students to pursue social goals to behave appropriately as well as goals to learn and achieve academically (Wentzel, 1999).

Teacher influences

Teachers have also been shown to have significant influence with regard to student motivation and pursuit of academic and social goals. Research has addressed many aspects of teacher influences, in particular, teacher student relationships (Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996; Wentzel, 1999), perceived teacher support (Goodenow, 1993; Wentzel, 1997, 1998), teacher recognition (Juvonen & Nishina, 1997), teacher communication of goal emphasis (Epstein, 1983; Midgley, Maehr, Hicks, Roeser, Urdan, Anderman & Kaplan, 1996; Patrick, Ryan, Anderman, Middleton, Linnenbrink, Hruda, Edelin, Kaplan & Midgley, 1997; Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin & Midgley, 2001) and teacher expectations (Cooper & Tom, 1985; Good & Brophy, 1997; Rosenthal & Jacobsen, 1968).

Research has shown how relationships between teachers and students can influence students' motivation towards and interest in school (Wentzel, 1988). In particular, perceptions of positive teacher-student relationships have been related to positive academic motivation and achievement (Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996). Roeser, Midgley & Urdan suggest:

“Feeling positively about how teachers and students interact in school may provide a secure emotional basis from which students can both come to enjoy school and also develop academic competence without feeling self-conscious or worried about failure” (p. 419).

Teacher influences are particularly relevant to early adolescents who report that after transition they perceive that teachers no longer care about them (Eccles & Midgley, 1989). Davidson and Phelan (1999) state that students report teachers can form positive interpersonal relationships with students if they “support student input, give personal attention to students, and convey respect for students of varied social backgrounds” (p. 267).

Wentzel (1999) suggests that the influence between students and teachers is bi-directional. Children have a significant impact on adults and peers, as well as on the organizational structures within which social interactions take place. Researchers should consider the role of individual children or groups of children on teacher behaviour or on the behaviour of other groups of students.

In a 1993 study Goodenow reported that students’ perceptions of teacher support and their sense of belongingness in their classrooms related strongly to the perceived valuing of the schoolwork in which they were engaged. Likewise Wentzel’s 1997 study regarding the impact of perceived pedagogical caring on student motivation in the middle school suggests that students will be motivated to engage in classroom activities if they believe that teachers care about them. Indeed Wentzel reports that perceived caring from teachers is directly related to motivational outcomes, specifically academic efforts and pursuit of prosocial and social responsibility goals. Students indicated that caring teachers were those who were:

“demonstrating democratic interaction styles, developing expectations for student behaviour in light of individual differences, modeling a ‘caring’ attitude toward their own work, and providing constructive feedback” (Wentzel, 1997, p 415-416).

Furthermore perceived caring from teachers has been shown to predict motivational outcomes in middle school students (Wentzel, 1997).

In addition to these findings Wentzel's (1998) exploration of the role of teachers with regard to student social relationships and motivation in middle school found that teacher support was a positive predictor of social responsibility goal pursuit, general interest in school and persistence and engagement in classroom activities. Perceived support from teachers has been related to positive motivational outcomes, including the pursuit of goals to learn and to behave prosocially and responsibly, educational aspirations and values, and self-concept (Wentzel, 1994, 1997, 1999). Roeser, Eccles and Sameroff (2000) suggest that adolescents' decisions to engage in learning is partly dependent on whether they feel "safe and cared for by others in the setting" (p. 9). Ryan and Patrick (2001) report that perceptions of teacher support were positively related to student motivation and engagement, particularly self-regulated learning and reduced instances of disruptive behaviour.

Teacher recognition and specifically the way teachers use praise can have a significant impact on student motivation. Juvonen & Nishina (1997) argue that around preadolescence most children come to view ability as uncontrollable and investment of effort as a sign of low ability. Given these views students may begin to perceive teacher praise to also indicate low ability. Juvonen and Nishina (1997) argue that while praise is likely to increase the achievement motivation of young students, praise might discourage older students from trying harder if they perceive investment of effort to be a way of compensating for low ability, which they regard as unchangeable. This view perhaps accounts for older students preferring private to public praise, as public praise may be perceived as having the potential to communicate the teacher's belief about their low aptitude, especially if the task is easy.

Goal orientation theorists have been interested in the ways in which teachers may communicate task or performance goals to their students. Early investigations of goal communication focused on instructional variables. Epstein (1983) identified six instructional practices (task, authority, recognition, grouping, evaluation and time) which contribute to the goal emphasis of their classroom. These categories have been explored further by goal orientation theorists (Ames,

1992; Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Maehr and Anderman, 1993) and used to develop quantitative scales to evaluate classroom goal structures, in particular the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey (Midgley, Maehr, Hicks, Roeser, Urdan, Anderman & Kaplan, 1996). In addition, Patrick, Ryan, Anderman, Middleton, Linnenbrink, Hruda, Edelin, Kaplan and Midgley (1997) have developed and extended the TARGET categories to form a protocol for observing patterns of adaptive learning (OPAL). OPAL suggests nine categories for recording observational data: Task, Authority, Recognition, Grouping, Evaluation, Time, Social, Help seeking and Messages (teacher “beliefs, assumptions and expectations” regarding school and schoolwork communicated to students).

Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin & Midgley (2001) investigated the ways in which teachers communicate an emphasis on mastery and performance goals to their students and found that certain teacher behaviours were associated with student perceptions of mastery and performance focused classrooms. For example, teachers promoting task mastery goals spoke about academic tasks with high levels of enthusiasm and pleasure, emphasised understanding and expending effort, expressed confidence that all students can learn, encouraged students to help each other with class work, strongly encouraged students to ask questions and emphasised that making mistakes is not important if students try. On the other hand teachers promoting performance goals did not allow students interaction during work time, emphasised memorization, were attentive to how many mistakes students made, emphasised tests and grades, linked homework to punishment, emphasised students listening and not talking, focused on compliance with rules, conveyed negative expectations of students performance and allowed students to ask questions only at specific times. Roeser, Eccles and Sameroff (2000) report that it is possible for teachers to:

“enhance achievement-related motivation in the classroom by reinforcing adolescents’ perceptions of competence through scaffolded skill development and feedback, by framing for them the value and purposes of activities, and by providing emotional support and encouragement during the learning process” (p. 454).

In addition they suggest teachers can also “harness” social motivation “through collaborative problem solving and group work that is carefully designed” (p. 454).

Teacher behaviours that communicate classroom goals are particularly relevant to this thesis as it involves examination of a particular classroom context and explores student perceptions of the classroom context including teacher behaviours.

Peer group influences

Peer group influences have been acknowledged to have significant influence on the nature of students’ academic and social motivational patterns. Research has focused on the influence of peer relationships (Anderman, 1999b; Wentzel & Asher, 1995; Wentzel, 1999), the nature of peer relationships (Wentzel, 1999), peer support (Harter, 1996; Juvonen & Nishina, 1997; Wentzel, 1991b, 1994, 1998, 1999) peer rejection (Juvonen & Nishina, 1997), and peer relationships and motivational orientations (Urdan, 1997; Wentzel, 1999).

Studies have investigated the strength of the influence of peer contexts as compared to that of parents and other adults. Some researchers argue that in early adolescence peer relationships compete with and distract students from engaging in academic activities (Steinberg 1996). Others propose that associations between peer relationships and academic outcomes are more complex because social and academic motives may compete with or complement one another depending on contextual variables (Berndt, 1999).

Studies of parents and peers provide evidence that parents can influence their children to a much greater extent than peers (Wentzel, 1999). In addition, Wentzel & Asher (1995) suggest that being liked by teachers also might offset whatever the negative effects of peer rejection might be on student’s adjustment at school. They found that being liked by teachers was related more strongly to the adoption of school related goals than was a high level of peer acceptance. Wentzel (1999) reports that students with few friends, who were neither well liked nor disliked by their peers, were the most highly motivated students and most well liked by their teachers. These students were found to exhibit positive

characteristics of academic and social adjustment throughout their middle school years.

Ryan (2000) proposes that peers can influence individuals' motivation during early adolescence through information exchange, modeling and reinforcement of peer norms and values. Ryan (2000) argues that peers socialise engagement and achievement in school, and thus researchers are beginning to explore the role of the peer group as a context for the socialisation of student motivation.

The impact peers have on students' motivation and in particular perceived scholastic competence is particularly relevant during transition. As students move to a significantly larger school environment and have increased numbers in their wider peer group, they seek to "reassess their competence in relationship to members of this new social comparison group" (Harter, 1996, p. 15). Whilst such a reassessment may prove favourable for some students, for others the comparative instability of the new peer group and possible unfavourable peer evaluations of competence can have negative effects on others. Ryan (2000) suggests that peer groups are influential with changes in individuals' intrinsic value for school and achievement during the first year of middle school.

Much research considers the influence of particular peer relationships on academic outcomes whilst less has examined the role of students' desire or motivation to form various relationships. Anderman, (1999b) suggests that the degree to which students wish to affiliate with their peers at school in different ways may be associated with academic outcomes. Such a notion is relevant to this thesis which seeks to explore individual's perceptions of peer relationships and how such perceptions may influence academic motivation.

Peer relationships have generally been described by their quality and stability and have been shown to influence students adjustment to school (Berndt, 1999). Peer relationships take on many forms, but those that have been described as high quality are those that have similar qualities to adaptive child-parent relationships. Such relationships are characterised as those in which "friends validate and care about each others' emotional well being, support intimacy and

self-disclosure, resolve conflicts effectively, and provide help and companionship” (Wentzel 1999, p. 63). Wentzel (1999) suggests that quality peer relationships do not necessarily influence motivation either negatively or positively providing individuals have supportive relationships with parents or teachers. The nature of an individual’s relationships with peers can have positive or negative implications for students’ emotional and motivational response to school. Berndt (1999) reports that students with stable friendships are more likely to be positively involved at school and less disruptive in class. In addition, these students are more likely to have higher grades, perceived higher competence and in school behaviour. Conversely, students with less stable relationships (particularly adolescent boys) were more likely to exhibit anti-social behaviour. Berndt (1999) argues that friendship stability is associated with desirable social behaviour and positive school adjustment.

Researchers acknowledge that support from peers has a significant impact on student success in the classroom, particularly during early adolescence. Supportive peer relationships have the potential to influence classroom performance and learning outcomes in positive ways (Wentzel, 1991b). Peers can complement teacher behaviour and provide support for the instructional process by clarifying and interpreting instructions for each other and providing assistance in areas of difficulty. In addition, peers provide each other with information by modeling both academic and social competencies (Wentzel, 1991b). Conversely, Epperson, (1963, cited in Wentzel, 1991b p. 10) has shown how lack of support from peers, and in particular perceived isolation and lack of control in obtaining social support at school are related to poor academic outcomes.

Use of particular teaching strategies has been shown to encourage students to support each other academically and emotionally in the learning environment. Specifically, cooperative and collaborative learning and peer tutoring has indicated the positive motivational and cognitive outcomes of learning with peers (Wentzel, 1991b).

Perceived support from peers has been shown to be a positive predictor of prosocial goal pursuit and self-concept (Wentzel, 1998, 1999). Wentzel (1994)

reported prosocial goal pursuit (to help classmates with academic problems and cooperate) related positively to peer acceptance. Pursuit of social responsibility goals (follow class rules and norms) was found to be related negatively to peer acceptance and positively to teacher acceptance (Wentzel, 1994). Wentzel (1999) suggests that the negative association between social responsibility goals and peer acceptance is in part the result of adolescents establishing independence from adults and as such it is less likely students will automatically endorse their teacher's classroom rules.

Harter (1996) reports that a relationship exists between peer support and self-esteem and suggests that approval from the wider peer group is more strongly associated with an individual's self-esteem than approval from close friends. Thus the support from the peer environment within school contexts can be a critical determinant of an individual's sense of self-worth.

Juvonen and Nishina (1997) suggest that in classroom situations where peers seek help from each other "perceived causes of need affect classmates' willingness to extend help and the quality of assistance provided" (p. 191). Thus the nature and quality of assistance students provide for each other varies, depending on the reasons they perceive peers to seek help. Juvonen and Nishina (1997) propose that perhaps students are more willing to provide a partner with an elaborate explanation of a problem when they believe the peer wants to learn and understand the problem. In contrast, they might be less inclined to provide the same level of assistance to a peer who is perceived as lazy or unmotivated.

The influence of causal inferences about others and perceived controllability also has implications for peer rejection. Juvonen and Nishina (1997) argue that peer rejection is linked to perceptions of "responsibility judgements of deviance" (p. 193). Juvonen (1991) found that aggressive students were held more responsible for their behaviour than were students with physical disabilities. Thus students who were perceived to be responsible for 'peculiar' characteristics were more likely to be rejected by the peer group. In fact, findings show that the more strongly students perceived classmates to be responsible for their peculiarities, the more anger and less sympathy they reported. "Anger

predicted increased rejection and lack of social support, whereas sympathy predicted willingness to provide support” (Juvonen & Nishina, 1997, p. 193). In addition Juvonen and Nishina (1997) suggest that adolescent students are more likely to explain peer rejection in terms of controllable factors, whereas younger students are more likely to favour the explanations related to uncontrollable factors.

Some researchers have considered the nature and influence of peer relationships with particular regard to motivational orientations. Urdan (1997) examined the relations among early adolescent students’ goals and their friends’ orientation toward effort and achievement in school. The findings indicated that among eighth grade students “associating with positively oriented friends was the strongest predictor of task goals, whereas associating with negatively oriented friends was strongly related to pursuing extrinsic and effort avoidance goals” (Urdan, 1997, p. 165). Kindermann, McCollam and Gibson (1996) reported that elementary school aged students tend to self select into groups of peers that have motivational orientations to school similar to their own. Over the course of the school year, these orientations appear to become stronger and more similar within groups. The role of peer relationships in influencing academic motivational orientations is particularly relevant to this thesis which explores students’ perceptions of peer relationships alongside development of motivational goals.

Summary of contextual goals

This growing body of information regarding the powerful influence of contextual and environmental factors on student motivation has particular relevance to this thesis. The contexts studied have been those of American middle schools which may differ to the models of middle schooling being developed in Western Australia. In addition school environments and students from one country to another may not be the same.

“It is important that researchers and school practitioners concerned with adolescent development attend to the contexts in which these (early adolescents) young people learn and grow. In particular, we must be aware

that these contexts may change just as young adolescents also are changing” (Anderman & Midgley, 1997, p. 291).

Methodology in the study of motivation

Much of the research regarding student motivation has been quantitative and deductive in nature and has made extensive use of student and teacher self-reports (particularly surveys) to obtain data regarding student motivation in classroom contexts. Such research has extended our knowledge of student motivation considerably, but some researchers now argue that using qualitative research and multimethod approaches will allow for an even greater understanding of student motivation (Turner & Meyer, 2000). The following section reviews the methodology used in the field of student motivation and in particular classroom contexts.

Self-reports

The main form of self-reports used in motivational research has been surveys. Surveys have been used to develop understandings of the types of academic and social goals pursued by students and some contextual variables that may influence particular patterns of goal pursuit. Researchers have relied on surveys of students’ perceptions of classroom environments to develop understandings about how goal structures promoted in schools and classrooms relate to particular contextual variables (Ames & Archer, 1988; Anderman & Midgley, 1997). Such studies have helped develop understandings about the nature of contextual influences on students’ personal goals and achievement behaviour.

Survey methodology has been advantageous to researchers as providing a “vehicle for understanding differential experiences within the same classroom” (Turner & Meyer, 2000, p. 76). As a means of data gathering surveys are efficient and enable researchers to gather a large sample of data and demonstrate a high degree of generalizability. In addition, surveys can demonstrate construct validity and reliability of items.

Exclusive use of survey methodology also has some disadvantages. Survey results are correlational and therefore “inhibit inferences about causation” (Urdu, Kneisel & Mason, 1999, p. 130). Thus while survey results may indicate that students’ personal goals are influenced by contextual goals, it is also possible that students perceive and interpret contexts with regard to their own personal goal orientations and personal agendas. Such a notion is explored within this thesis.

Limitations of surveys also include issues of measurement and construct definition as different students may interpret survey items in different ways (Urdu, Kneisel & Mason, 1999) and may define terms such as “learning” in different ways (Turner, 2000). In addition, survey methodology assumes that the relationship between classroom goal structures and student motivation and behaviour is largely static. Urdu, Kneisel and Mason (1999) argue that such relationships are in fact dynamic and teacher practices may be interpreted differently by individual students at different points in the year.

“The resulting message, that a given goal structure will produce a given motivational, cognitive, or behavioural outcome, may not capture the complexity of the dynamic relationship between instructional practices or classroom goal structures and student motivation and behaviour” (Urdu, Kneisel & Mason, 1999, p. 131).

According to Turner and Meyer (2000) self-reports on their own “do not provide information about events or interactions in the classroom thus obscuring the why and how” (p. 76).

Researchers have also used the Experience Sampling Method (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1987; cited in Turner & Meyer, 2000, p. 76) as a form of student self-report. This process involves students being electronically “beeped” during their school day to complete an experience sampling form on which they describe their thoughts and feelings at that particular time and indicate levels of intrinsic motivation. This method of data collection has high ecological validity and has been used in conjunction with other methods (Turner, Meyer, Cox, Logan, DiCintio & Thomas, 1998).

Experimental studies

Classroom goal structures have been experimentally manipulated by providing certain information to students prior to the commencement of a task. Such studies have broadened our knowledge about how task and performance classroom goal structures can be created, but “there are reasons to suspect that in the more complex classroom and school environments, the relationship between environmental cues and students goal orientations is more complicated” (Urdu, Kneisel & Mason, 1999, p. 128). Urdu, Kneisel and Mason report that experimental situations and classroom situations are quite different for a number of reasons. Experimental conditions have strongly emphasised a single goal, whereas in the classroom students receive multiple messages that may emphasise different goals. Experimental conditions often provide participants with fun and challenging tasks, whereas the nature of classroom tasks may not hold the same attraction and may have long term consequences for students. Urdu, Kneisel and Mason also report that a once only experimental situation is vastly different from a classroom situation that may be in a constant state of development and occurs as part of the context of everyday life for the students involved.

Observational studies

To develop the understanding of classroom practices that may be responsible for task and performance focused environments researchers have conducted observational studies. Using data obtained from student surveys and classroom observation Meece (1991) found that student goals may be influenced by classroom processes. Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin and Midgley (2001) also used survey and observational data to develop an understanding of the relationship between teacher practices and students’ perceptions of classroom goal structures. Observational research, is relatively time consuming and labour intensive and consequently there is little observational research published in this field (Turner & Meyer, 2000; Urdu Kneisel & Mason, 1999). Observational research on its own also does not permit the researcher to examine how individuals interpret goal related messages in the classroom. Turner and Meyer (2000) report that classroom observations can “paint a descriptive picture of the context” (p. 75) and can accurately show how people react

and what they say. They argue that observations can be used to “verify and interpret patterns found using other methods” (p. 75).

Interviews

Using interviews to obtain data regarding classrooms has only received recent attention in the field of situated motivation. The nature of interviews can be either structured in the case of preplanned interviews, or narrative whereby participants are encouraged to ‘tell’ their stories. Turner and Meyer (2000) argue that interviews “provide opportunities to instantiate and enlighten our theories and empirical literature base as well as to inform theory and practice by giving us first-person accounts of the contexts we study” (p. 77). The success of interviews largely depends on the skill and knowledge of the interviewer and the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is paramount to capturing the most powerful meanings. Validity of interviews can also be dependent on the ability and desire interviewees have to communicate ideas, thoughts and feelings. (Turner & Meyer, 2000) In addition, reliability of participants’ recollections can be affected by the interviewees’ desire to present themselves in a favourable manner. Turner and Meyer (2000) specifically report the main advantage of interviews is that “interviews illuminate the why and how behind the observed actions or self-reports, and they allow for constructs to be redefined by the participants and for new perspective on theoretical concepts to emerge” (p. 77).

Classroom discourse analysis

Classroom discourse analysis has been used in classroom research to “explore multiple levels of a dynamic context based on the assumptions that ‘oral language ... weaves the fabric of classroom culture’ (Alvermann & Hayes, 1989, p. 305) and that language is used to negotiate meaning” (Turner & Meyer, 2000, p. 77). Classroom discourse has been recorded through audio or video and observational notes focusing on language with a view to capturing “real and in-depth examples of how the immediate context of a lesson” is “created and maintained” (Turner & Meyer, 2000, p. 78). Thus, classroom discourse allows for the introduction of new constructs and for

researchers to interpret empirical or theoretical literature. Discourse analysis can provide significant detail to develop understandings of teacher-student interactions and can help explain “how contextual influences are interpreted, communicated, sanctioned, and changed within classrooms” (Turner & Meyer, 2000, p. 78). The main disadvantages of discourse analysis are that it is costly and labour intensive and accurate analysis of transcripts depends on the degree of understanding the researcher has of the context.

Anthropological approaches

Davidson and Phelan (1999) argue that an anthropological perspective offers many benefits in expanding our understanding of student motivation. They argue that such a perspective allows for the incorporation of concepts not traditionally considered in other psychological literature and that analysis of data is not limited by disciplines already established. Their anthropological perspective allows presentation of an ‘insiders’ perspective and accordingly students’ voices are incorporated in the data reporting. In particular, Davidson and Phelan’s (1999) anthropological study allows an “understanding of students’ interpretations of events and their definitions and views of the circumstances in which they find themselves” (p. 268). Such a perspective allows our understanding of student motivation to be considerably enhanced.

Multimethod approaches

Researchers acknowledge the significant contributions studies focusing on a single methodology have made, but have begun to use multimethod approaches to provide a more complete and in-depth view of student motivation in classrooms (Patrick, et al., 1997; Turner & Meyer, 2000). In particular, quantitative and qualitative approaches have been used in a complementary manner allowing for new interpretations to emerge and empirical findings to be supported or challenged.

Patrick, et al. (2001) used both quantitative and qualitative data to “investigate associations between survey measures of student perceptions of the classroom goal structure and observational records of teacher and student behaviour”. Turner, Meyer,

Cox, Logan, DiCintio and Thomas (1998) used multiple sources of data (student self-reports through the experience sampling method, classroom observations, discourse analysis of teacher instruction and survey measures) to develop an understanding of the relationship between instructional characteristics and students' qualities of experience in mathematics.

Turner and Meyer (2000) propose that the study of classroom context requires that researchers use multiple sources of data and must necessarily include qualitative methods to enhance understandings of what theoretical constructs mean in particular settings.

"We are always investigating several variables from multiple perspectives and using a multimethod approach (some quantitative, some qualitative); all our methods are chosen to help build a database for understanding specific classroom activities" (p. 79).

In addition, multimethod approaches can be particularly valuable if contradictions between sets of data emerge. Such contradictions encourage researchers to search for new ways of understanding classroom contexts. Turner and Meyer (2000) report that contradictions in their data lead to more "situated theories of teaching and learning" as "the qualitative data challenged, enriched and informed our original theoretical notions and empirical findings" (p. 80).

Summary of methodological approaches to student motivation

The range of methodological approaches to the study of student motivation indicates that researchers are concerned about the issue of student motivation in classrooms and are exploring less traditional methodological approaches in order to develop understandings and theories about motivation in context. In particular the use of multimethod approaches is beginning to illuminate contradictions in data that in turn serves to enrich both understanding and theory.

Conclusion

The literature regarding student motivation in classroom contexts has developed quite rapidly over recent years and considers a number of theories, the most

prominent of which is currently goal orientation theory. Goal orientation theorists have considered the notions of self and of context with regard to student motivation, but recent studies have begun to also focus on the role of student perceptions regarding contexts in determining the types of personal academic and social goals students pursue.

The literature reviewed for this thesis draws attention to an increasing focus on data suggesting students are perceptive of goal related messages in schools and such perceptions influence student motivation, cognitive engagement, school affect and academic and social outcomes. Such data and the consequential findings are significant to this thesis which focuses on the development of student motivation in context over time, using a goal orientation framework.

Conceptual Framework

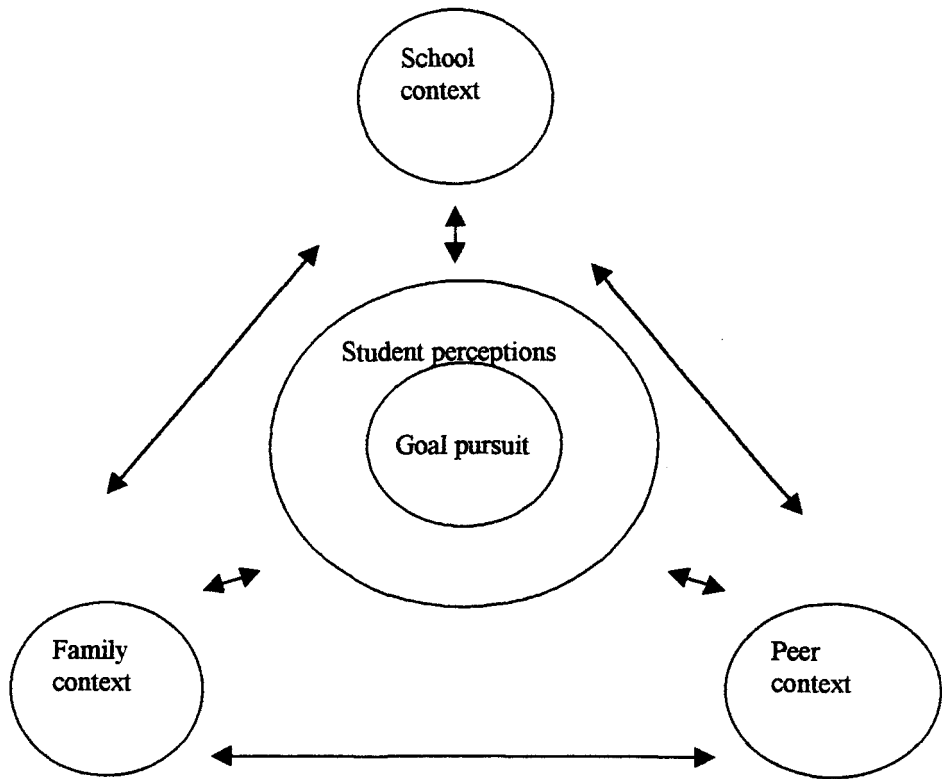
Introduction

The conceptual framework for this study provides a direction within which the complexity of student motivation in the classroom can be explored using goal orientation theory. The framework has been developed from literature that has focused on the situative approach to student motivation and the “multiple and overlapping contexts” (Turner, 2001) that influence students’ motivational goals. In accordance with recent literature this conceptual framework suggests that the interaction between personal and contextual factors has a powerful influence on students’ motivational behaviour and school adjustment (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996; Newman, 1998; Anderman & Anderman, 1999).

This framework proposes that students’ perceptions of three main contextual domains have a significant influence on student motivational outcomes in the classroom and the social and academic goals students pursue. The contexts considered are those that relate to students’ family context, school context and peer context (Davidson & Phelan, 1999). The framework emphasises that it is the way in which students’ perceive each of these contexts and their role within them that influences motivational behaviour and school adjustment. Furthermore, the framework proposes that student perceptions of the three contexts must be ‘filtered’ through the students’ view of self, including self-perceptions, prior school experiences and beliefs and values before motivational goals are adopted.

In addition, the framework suggests the three contexts have the ability to influence one another and that student perceptions of one context may influence their perceptions of other contexts. The personal and contextual variables in students’ worlds and their interrelationship have been acknowledged to play a crucial role in developing an understanding of student motivation (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Davidson & Phelan, 1999).

Fig 1.0 Conceptual framework : the influence of students' contextual perceptions on motivational goal pursuit in the first year of middle school



The family contextual domain

This conceptual framework suggests that the family context from which a student emerges and their perceptions about their family have an impact on the motivational goals they choose to endorse. Within the context of the family, this framework proposes that elements such as the family situation, family relationships, parental influences and parental goals (Wentzel, 1996; Trusty & Pirtle, 1998; Nelson, Hruda & Midgley, 2000), the nature of student parent relationships (Wentzel, 1998; Wentzel, 1999), cultural influences (Fuligni & Tseng, 1999) and the influence of siblings have an important influence on student

motivation. Research has shown how these elements have a strong impact on the academic and social goals students pursue.

The school contextual domain

The conceptual framework proposes that student perceptions of their school context also influence their motivational goal pursuit. Of specific importance are the broader school context and, for the purposes of this study, a specific classroom context. To address the broader school context elements such as the nature of the school environment, the physical school environment, and the values and goals promoted by the school have been considered. The literature shows how students' perceptions of their school environment and the goals promoted by the school can influence their endorsement of academic and social goals (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Anderman & Maehr, 1994). In particular, the school psychological environment has been shown to influence students' adoption of academic and social goals, feelings of academic efficacy, use of learning strategies and in school behaviour (Roeser, Midgley & Urda, 1996). Research also demonstrates that students' sense of belonging within the broader school context contributes to academic functioning and motivational outcomes (Anderman, 1999a; Wentzel, 1999). Student perceptions of the school environment have been shown to influence the degree to which they exhibit adaptive or non-adaptive patterns of cognition, affect and behaviour (Eccles, Wigfield, Midgley, Rueman, MacIver & Feldlaufer, 1993).

Students' perceptions of classroom contexts also have considerable influence on students' motivational goal pursuit and have been shown to influence motivational outcomes and adoption of personal goal orientations (Anderman & Anderman, 1999). At a classroom level factors such as the classroom instructional environment (Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin & Midgley, 2001) have an impact on student motivation. Such instructional variables include the nature of classroom tasks, classroom authority patterns, teacher use of recognition and social comparison, classroom grouping, formal and informal evaluation, use of time, social aspects of the classroom, help seeking and the messages teachers

communicate to students through their comments and actions (OPAL, 1997; Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin & Midgley, 2001). In addition, student perceptions of classroom contexts have been shown to influence students behaviours such as use of self-handicapping strategies (Midgley & Urdan, 2001).

The conceptual framework also suggests that perceptions students hold of the teacher(s) they encounter has the potential to influence student motivational outcomes. In particular students' feelings and perceptions about student-teacher relationships (Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996; Wentzel & Wigfield, 1998), perceived teacher support (Goodenow, 1993; Wentzel, 1994, 1997, 1998, 1999), teacher caring (Eccles & Midgley, 1989), teacher recognition and praise (Juvonen & Nishina, 1997), and teacher expectations (Good & Brophy, 1997) have been shown to influence student motivation. In addition, the nature of student-teacher relationships has been shown to have positive and negative effects on students' academic achievement (Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996) and student perceptions of teacher support have been related to pursuit of social goals to behave appropriately, learn and achieve academically (Wentzel, 1999).

The peer contextual domain

The framework also proposes that the perceptions students have of peer contexts has an impact on student motivation (Harter 1996; Wentzel, 1999; Juvonen & Nishina, 1997; Urdan, 1997). Of specific consideration for this study were factors including perceptions of peers and classmates, peer relationships, friendships and help seeking and help giving in the peer context. Research has associated perceived peer support with social and motivational aspects of school adjustment, such as prosocial goal pursuit and peer acceptance (Wentzel, 1994). In addition, the degree to which students desire to affiliate with school peers has been suggested to influence academic outcomes (Anderman, 1999) and student perceptions of peer support have been related to pursuit of social goals to behave appropriately, learn and achieve academically (Wentzel, 1999).

Student perceptions

This conceptual framework proposes that the nature of student perceptions regarding family, school and peer contexts that is largely responsible for students' motivational outcomes in the form of social and academic goals endorsed and school adjustment. In this sense, student perceptions can provide a "lens" through which students view, interpret and construct meaning about family, schools and peers. Such interpretations influence the social and academic goals students choose to pursue.



Interaction between contexts

Although each of the three contexts discussed individually has a significant role to play in contributing to students' motivational outcomes, this framework proposes that student perceptions of contexts may also influence one another. As such, changes in perceptions of one context may influence perceptions of other contexts.

To illustrate, a student may view the goals promoted by the school and/ or classroom with regard to those promoted by their family. Similarly a student may place more emphasis on affiliation and status within a peer group and this in turn may influence their perception of school and classroom goals. The common occurrence of moving from individual work to group work in the classroom may influence peer relationships (as students interact), student teacher relationships (as the teacher interacts with groups) help seeking patterns (as students work together or otherwise) and attributions for success or failure (individual or group), to suggest a few. The capacity student perceptions of one context have to influence perceptions of another highlights the complexity of exploring student motivation in a naturalistic setting.

The situation becomes more complex when an exploration of student perceptions of contextual influences on motivational goal pursuit takes place over a significant period of time, in this case an academic year. The framework accommodates the longitudinal nature of this study by suggesting that the process of perceiving situations and adopting behaviours based on such perceptions is in

fact an ongoing one. The ongoing nature of this process is vital in a study such as this because it allows for changes in perceptions and the effect of such changes to be explored. For example, the relationship between the teacher and the students within the classroom context may change over a period of time as teacher and students develop a working relationship and an understanding about the classroom context and how it will operate. The perceptions students hold about this change in relationship may in turn influence their motivational behaviour.

Conclusion

The conceptual framework for this study has been generated by a situative approach to the study of student motivation and is based on current research in the field working with goal orientation theory. The framework suggests a way in which students' perceptions of family, school and peer contexts, and the relationships that exist within and between them may be considered to develop our understanding of student motivation in the classroom. The framework is not designed to provide a complete set of variables or possible relationships within each of the sets of variables, but provides an approach by which naturalistic data may be reported and interpreted in a way that is meaningful to current research. Indeed, the framework allows for analysis of variables emerging from qualitative data regarding individuals, the contexts in which they operate, and the motivational goals they pursue.

CHAPTER III

Method of Research

Introduction

This chapter describes the method used in the study and includes a description of the school and classroom where data were obtained. The research involved a 10 month study of Western Australian students in Year 7, the first year of middle school. The research design, including procedures for data collection and analysis are also described and justified. Issues of reliability and validity are identified and examined and the chapter concludes with a consideration of the generalisability of the study.

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

The study sought to answer the following questions that related to the influence of contextual perceptions on the academic and social motivational goals pursued by early adolescent students in their first year of middle school.

1. What is the nature of motivation oriental goals pursued by early adolescent students in their first year of middle school?
2. What is the nature of students' contextual perceptions in their first year of middle school?
3. How do individual students' contextual perceptions influence the pursuit of social and academic goals in their first year of middle school?

Research design

The research questions guided the design of the study and suggested that an exploratory research design was most appropriate. The research questions specifically required the research to focus on exploratory issues within a naturalistic setting, and provide descriptive and ethnographic data to answer research questions.

The design of this mixed method study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) was of naturalistic inquiry using primarily qualitative measurement techniques and focusing on content analysis of data. The study used mainly qualitative data collection techniques and operations via narrative forms. The three main data collection techniques used were student and teacher interviews, classroom observation and a survey. The study involved qualitative (content) analysis and inference. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) describe this type of research design as a Dominant-Less Dominant (QUAL + quan) mixed method design.

In essence, the study involved a naturalistic inquiry that focused on qualitative research techniques but which also incorporated one set of quantitative data that were explored and enriched through addition of qualitative data. Specifically a twelve point survey ('Perceived Classroom Goal Structure' scales from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales; PALS, Midgley, Maehr, Hicks, Roeser, Urda, Anderman & Kaplan, 1994, cited in Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin, & Midgley, 2001; see Appendix B) was administered and students were interviewed regarding their responses to survey items. The qualitative data obtained during that set of interviews generally enhanced and enriched the quantitative data by providing insights into why students hold particular perceptions about classroom goal structures.

A case study approach was used to gain a deeper understanding of the contextual perceptions held by students and the concerns that directed their everyday experiences throughout the course of the year. Emphasis was placed on exploring students' contextual perceptions during their first year of middle school and investigating how contextual perceptions influenced the nature of personal academic and social motivational goals students pursued. Accordingly, the research is presented in the form of case studies and used primarily case study techniques for gathering and analysing data.

Case study

Because the nature of the study required description of students as individuals who work and function in a larger system, a case study approach was

selected as the most appropriate methodology. Case study “allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events” (Burns, 1994, p. 313). In this research a case study approach allowed for rich description of students’ psychological functioning and enabled the researcher to develop some understandings about the complexities of student life during early adolescence. Specifically case study allowed an image of the students in relation to their beliefs and values, personal life, emotional and psychological development, family life, friendships, school experiences and school relationships to be developed. By understanding the students as individuals a more accurate view of how academic and social motivational goals were formed and altered according to individuals’ contextual perceptions.

Participants

The participants in the study were a class of Year 7 students and their main classroom teacher. The participants attended a middle school in the Perth metropolitan area, Western Australia. The students attending the school were from predominantly working class socio-economic areas.

From a class of thirty-one students, twenty-six students (including sixteen females and ten males) agreed to participate in the study. The students understood that participation meant they would be observed in the classroom, interviewed, and asked to complete a survey. Students were informed that the researcher would be present in the classroom for half a day every week and during this time would observe them working in class and interview a selection of students. This pattern was followed for the duration of one academic year.

All students who agreed to participate were considered as potential candidates for micro-analysis and were interviewed in the first three weeks of the school academic year. Over the course of the year the researcher began to focus on particular students who were deemed more suitable than others for micro-analysis. Suitable students were those who did not have English language difficulties that made it difficult to answer interview questions, those who had the ability to verbalise, and those who represented particular student ‘types’, such as a

student from a migrant family, an international student, a student from a single parent family and students with a range of ability levels. Neither the classroom teacher nor the students were made aware that a small number of students had become the focus of the researcher, as interviewing of all twenty-six students continued as expected. By term four (September) the focus group contained seven students, five girls and two boys. Five of the students were from Australian family backgrounds and two were from non-Australian backgrounds.

The school that participated in this study had a middle school in its third year of operation. The middle school aimed to provide students in Years 7, 8 and 9 with a unique learning environment, embracing academic, co-curricular and pastoral care programs which administrators and teachers believed to cater for the developmental needs of early adolescents. The stated overarching philosophy of this particular middle school quotes from the Board of Education for the City of York, Canada, 1992 and states

“The goal of the middle school curriculum and instructional practices should be to produce young people who are self-directed problem solvers, capable of thinking critically and feeling deeply about issues. We must produce young people who will open their hearts and minds to the joy of learning and the possibilities of a more just and humane world”.

The Year 7 students who participated in the study took part in a curriculum comprised of nine learning areas: English, Studies of Society and Environment, Science, Mathematics, Health and Physical Education, Languages other than English, Religious Education, Arts and Technology and Enterprise. These learning areas were represented by specific subjects, eight of which were “core” (not optional) and three of which were electives. The class group remained together for core subjects, but were split for electives, based on the choice individual students had made. The Year 7 class had the same teacher for six of their core subjects, namely, English, Studies of Society and Environment, Mathematics, Computer Technology, Health and Religious Education. Where possible the teacher sought to integrate subjects, for example English, Studies of Society and Environment and Computer Technology were presented in an integrated curriculum. The class had different teachers for Science and Physical Education. For the remaining three subjects students were grouped according to

the subject and ability level they had chosen. Elective subjects were taught in multi-age groups, combining years 7, 8 and 9. The Year 7 students also belonged to multi-age form groups comprised of students from years 7, 8 and 9.

The main classroom context the students operated within was that facilitated by their core teacher, Mrs Kelly. Although the students were taught six different subjects in that classroom, the teacher integrated subjects where possible and used cooperative learning strategies frequently. A more detailed description of the classroom context is provided in Appendix C.

Gathering data

Kinds of data sought

To address the research questions for the study two main kinds of data were sought. The study primarily sought data regarding the academic and social motivational goals pursued by a small group of early adolescents in their first year of middle school and data related to the contextual perceptions held by students during the year. Through collecting such data the research aimed to develop understandings about how the personal academic and social goals pursued by early adolescents in their first year of middle school were influenced by perceptions they held about the contexts in which they operated.

Data regarding the academic and social motivational goals pursued by first year middle school students as they progressed through the year were of particular importance to this study. Specifically data related to students' academic goal orientations and pursuit of task mastery, performance approach and performance avoidance goals were gathered. Attention was also directed to data regarding students' social goals, specifically social responsibility, social relationship, and social status goals. In seeking data related to students' goal pursuit, data regarding why students pursued particular goals at particular points in time were also generated.

Data regarding student pursuit of academic and social goals were gathered through individual student interviews and classroom observation. Through classroom observation and individual student interviews the study attempted to

develop an understanding of the academic and social goals individuals pursued throughout the school year. Classroom observations focused on data regarding student interactions with the teacher and other students, and student behaviour patterns that may have indicated particular patterns of academic and social goal pursuit. Data obtained during classroom observation were used to prompt student recall in interviews and to generate discussion about particular classroom events and situations. Interviews also focused on data concerning students' contextual perceptions along with data regarding the many facets of student life at this level. Data ranged from subjects such as family life, relationships with peers, personal concerns, hobbies and the like. Through collection of data related to students' everyday experiences and concerns an attempt was made to provide a 'snapshot' of the complexities facing early adolescents at particular times throughout the year. These data enabled the research to attempt to provide an understanding of the dynamics of student academic and social motivational goal pursuit.

Of particular interest were data concerning student perceptions of contextual factors that may influence certain patterns of student academic and social goal pursuit. These data were obtained through classroom observation and interview and included factors such as student perceptions of teaching strategies, classroom activities, assessment and evaluation techniques, teacher behaviour, class groupings, peer influences and social support from teachers and peers. In addition, data regarding students' perceptions of the academic and social goals valued and promoted by the school were obtained through student observation and interviews. Gathering these data enabled understandings about contextual variables that may influence students' academic and social goal pursuit to be developed.

Documents regarding middle school structure, philosophy and curriculum were obtained to provide data regarding the aims of the middle school and how these aims were met. In addition classroom handouts, task information sheets and marking sheets were obtained to supplement data obtained through classroom observation and student interviews. These data enabled links to be made between

the motivational goals pursued by students and those promoted and valued by the school.

Source of data

Given the nature of the data being sought the primary source was the students themselves. The study required data from individuals and the general class group obtained through interviews and classroom observation. Data were also obtained from documents relating to school philosophy, structure and goals. One classroom teacher (known as Mrs Kelly) participated in the study as she taught the students for their core subjects. Mrs Kelly also consented to interviews with the researcher and as such was a source of data relevant to the study.

How data were obtained

The data were obtained from four major sources, namely student interviews, teacher interviews, classroom observation and a student survey ('Perceived Classroom Goal Structure scales from PALS, cited in Patrick, et al.; see Appendix B). In addition, data were obtained from school documents related to curriculum and philosophy, classroom handouts and student school diaries.

Survey

As indicated above, the study sought data regarding the social and academic goals given priority by students in the target class. Researchers (Anderman, 1999a; Midgley & Urdan, 2001) attest that the personal academic and social goals pursued by students in classrooms are significantly influenced by the perceptions they hold about the goal structure of particular classrooms. Accordingly, this study sought to obtain data related to students' perceptions of the goal structure emphasised in their main core class, taught by Mrs Kelly. Such data were obtained through student completion of the 'Perceived Classroom Goal Structure' scales from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey (PALS, 1994, cited in Patrick, et al.; see Appendix B). The 'Perceived Classroom Goal Structure' scales ask students to rate a total of twelve items on a five point Likert

scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Student responses to the survey were used during interviews to prompt discussion about why students rated each item in a particular way. Through interviews the research aimed to generate some understandings about why students may respond to survey items in particular ways.

Interviews

The majority of data used in this research were obtained from student interviews that occurred on at least two occasions in each of the four terms of the school academic year. Interviews enabled the researcher to build rapport with the interviewees, clarify and develop responses where necessary and reach an understanding of the total student experience whilst focusing on key areas. Interviews also enabled participants to use their own words to explain their thoughts and feelings about school experiences.

Initially the interviewer aimed to establish a rapport with the students so as to allow them to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings. The interviewer also attempted to establish a sense of genuine interest for each student and began to develop a relationship based on mutual trust and sharing of appropriate personal information. In particular the interviewer focused on establishing a trusting, non-judgmental and understanding relationship with the participants. Building such a relationship with the participants encouraged them to feel safe expressing their thoughts and feelings and this enabled the researcher to gain a more accurate understanding of school life from the students' perspective.

The individuals asked to participate in the study were involved in semi-structured interviews for which there was a brief interview guideline. Interview questions were mainly open-ended allowing the participants to fully describe their experience and provide explanations for their actions. Students were often asked to explain why they held particular perceptions and given opportunities to develop responses into ideas reflecting their innermost thoughts and feelings. During interviews, the researcher condensed and interpreted the meaning of the interviewee's statements and clarified by using phrases such as "so what you

mean is...”, “are you saying that you feel ...”. Use of such a process enabled the interviewee to either confirm or disconfirm the interviewer’s interpretation. The interviews operated in a type of “self-correcting” manner where the subjects had the opportunity to comment on the interviewer’s interpretations as well as elaborate on their own statements. Use of this process in turn improved reliability of the study.

The interviewer attempted to avoid questions that may be leading or loaded and pre-tested questions on non-target students to help avoid this. Although interviews were largely unstructured, an interview guide was used so as to minimise bias and to establish consistency across participants. Interviews were conducted during class time (with teacher consent) and occurred in the same place each time. Specifically, interviews took place in a corner of the school library which was secluded enough to allow disclosure of private information, but public enough so library staff could see but not hear interviews in progress. All interviews were audio taped for future practical analysis. The interviewer attempted to avoid showing any emotional response to student answers and affirming or negating student answers. Where appropriate the interviewer used student vernacular to promote understanding and enable students to fully comprehend questions. Use of student vernacular also aided the development of a trusting and understanding relationship with interviewees.

Classroom Observation

The researcher conducted classroom observations (with teacher and parent consent, see Appendix A) across at least two subject areas on a weekly basis for the duration of a year. Observation enabled the researcher to provide a richer description of the schooling experience of the participants. Observation functioned largely as the trigger for student interviews and enabled the researcher to take advantage of changing class dynamics (including teacher-student interactions, student behaviour and peer relationships) and incidents that may influence particular patterns of student goal pursuit. In addition, the researcher observed the individual student’s classroom behaviour and the relationships in

which he/she participated. Observation sought to clarify, enhance and in some respects validate student comments during interviews and also provide a fuller understanding of the context within which the students aimed to fulfil specific academic and social goals.

Specific guidelines for observation from the Observing Patterns of Adaptive Learning (OPAL, 1997, Patrick, Ryan, Anderman, Middleton, Linnenbrink, Hruda, Edelin, Kaplan & Midgley) protocol were used for some classroom observation and the researcher recorded data specifically related to the OPAL categories of task, authority, recognition, grouping, evaluation, time, social, help-seeking and messages. Data obtained from observations using OPAL were used to describe classroom practices, structure and processes to provide background information to the case studies. A description of the classroom context using OPAL is provided in Appendix C.

Phases of gathering data

There were four main phases of data gathering involved in this study. The year prior to the main data collection period, a pilot study was conducted as part of the pre-study phase. The year data for the main study were collected involved three phases specifically, an entry phase, exploratory and developmental phase, and an exit phase.

Pre-study phase

The pre-study phase of the research was completed the year prior to the main data gathering phase in order to validate the research process. In particular the objectives of the pre-study phase were to:

1. Enable the researcher to become familiar with the data gathering process.
2. Conduct classroom observation to monitor student motivational behaviour and evaluate the use of particular observations as prompts during interview discussion.

3. Interview students as a basis for analyzing the researcher's own interview skills and ability to develop quality of contact with students.
4. Identify and describe some of the types of variables that influence student motivational behaviour. Obtain substantial evidence to show the existence of the specific phenomena sought.
5. Establish links between observation and interview data.
6. Enable the researcher to establish a positive working relationship with school administration and the teachers involved in the study.

This pre-study phase involved four specific activities. Initially the researcher entered the field and spoke with school administrators, the Principal and Head of Middle School, to explain the proposed research and to discuss any concerns that may arise from the project. The Head of Middle School spoke with a Year 7 teacher who then agreed to be part of the study. The researcher met with the teacher to explain the research process and address any concerns the teacher may have had. The researcher then spoke with the Year 7 class, explaining briefly the focus of the project and outlined the requirements for participants. Consent forms were distributed and collected.

Following these discussions the researcher observed three lessons, two lessons where the students were taught by the Year 7 teacher and a third lesson taken by a different teacher. During the lessons the researcher made general notes about the teaching strategies, classroom environment and the types of activities in which the students were engaged. Specific notes were made about individual students who were either playing prominent roles in the classroom and/or engaging in behaviours that may indicate a particular motivational pattern. During classroom observation the researcher also wrote interview questions related to the lesson and questions targeted at individuals as a result of their behaviour.

After each lesson the researcher was able to interview six or seven students. Interview questions were mainly open ended and consisted of those specifically related to the lesson and broader questions related to students' goals and thoughts about their school experience. A total of thirteen students were

interviewed with a group of five students being interviewed a second time. During the second interviews students were more relaxed and able to talk more freely.

As a result of the pre-study the following outcomes have addressed the objectives of the pre-study phase.

1. Classroom observation was an effective way to monitor student motivational behaviour and provided useful prompts for discussion during student interviews.
 2. The researcher was able to conduct some analysis of her interview style and in particular realise opportunities for more probing questions in the main data gathering phase. In addition, the researcher was able to reconnect with students of this age group and become familiar with their interests and priorities.
 3. Substantial evidence was obtained that the type of phenomena the study sought to describe exists within the Year 7 class group and the researcher was able to identify and describe variables from the sources of data.
 4. Complementary links between observation and interview data can be made.
 5. A positive working relationship was established between school staff and the researcher.
-

In addition, the following amendment was made to the research process for the main data gathering phase.

1. The Year 7 teacher will be included as a source of data for the study. Given the substantial amount of time the teacher spends with the class she will be able to provide (where necessary and/or appropriate) information regarding student behaviour and progress and classroom practices and structures. The pre-study found the teacher to be a valuable source of information about students, school curriculum and

teaching strategies used with the Year 7 group. The teacher was also able to provide background information that aided interpretation of student comments during interviews.

2. The researcher will conduct interviews with the Year 7 teacher on a regular basis to help provide a richer account of school life for the Year 7 students.

Entry phase

The entry phase of gathering data involved whole class participation. Parental permission was sought from the students in the target class and teacher permission was sought from teachers involved with the class (see Appendix A). The researcher began by conducting several observation sessions with the class to develop an understanding of the class dynamics including contextual factors such as teacher-student relationships, peer relationships and behaviour indicating particular patterns of student goal pursuit. Observation at this stage also enabled the researcher to become familiar with students and vice versa.

Once three observation sessions had been conducted the researcher began to interview students from the target class. During the first interview the researcher aimed to develop an understanding of each student with regard to their general perceptions of school, family relationships and cultural background. The first interview also aimed to obtain information regarding the types of goals that were important to students at the beginning of the school year, the priority attached to particular goals and the reasons for pursuing such goals.

Exploratory and developmental phases

The subsequent phases of the study involved weekly classroom observation followed by interviews with selected class members.

A naturalistic approach to these exploratory and developmental phases was taken and the researcher aimed to take advantage of the natural changes in class dynamics and experiences to initiate interviews. Interviews took a semi-spontaneous format and followed groups of students through patterns and

episodes of experience, tapping into factors that may influence their academic and social goal pursuit. Classroom observation and student interviews allowed the researcher to explore and develop an understanding of emerging class trends with particular regard to patterns of academic and social goal pursuit. During this phase the researcher gradually reduced the group of students most suitable for micro-analysis down to approximately seven students.

Exit phase

The final phase of gathering data involved the last interview and observation session at the end of term four of the academic year. During the final phase the researcher aimed to consolidate understandings developed about the influence of contextual variables on students' pursuit of appropriate academic and social goals and sought to develop explanations for patterns of goal pursuit adopted by case study students. During this phase the researcher also requested students' permission to access to their school diaries to obtain data regarding how students had been formally rewarded and / or penalised during the year, as this had emerged as a theme that had significant influence with regard to students' motivational patterns. As part of their final interview, students were asked to complete a hypothetical activity in which they were asked to give advice to future Year 7 students about how to have a successful school year. This activity was used as a prompt for the final interview and aimed to allow students to clearly present the five features of middle school existence they deemed essential. Through such information the researcher was able to develop an understanding about the priorities students held looking at their year retrospectively.

Data analysis

The data collection and analysis in this research was an ongoing and cyclical process. As suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) data analysis consisted of three "concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification" (p. 10).

Process of analysis

The data obtained in this study were subject to content analysis following the outline of the conceptual framework presented in Chapter Two. The process of data analysis had three main stages outlined below.

Stage 1 – Record keeping

Student interviews

Interviews were audio taped and a summary of each interview with a target student was made. Transcripts of interviews were made so as to accurately record student thoughts verbatim. The researcher also made notes about students' body language during interviews and any significant non-verbal signals that were made during interviews. Data from student interviews were kept in a separate file for each target student and stored on computer disc. In addition, a data comparison file was kept and its contents also stored on computer disc.

Teacher interviews

Teacher interviews were also audio taped and summaries of each interview written. Interviews were transcribed so as to capture the emphases Mrs Kelly conveyed in her personal teaching philosophy and also to aid in the creation of her character as a real and believable educator. Teacher interviews were kept in a separate file and also stored on computer disc.

Classroom observation

During classroom observation the researcher kept a record of the general format of the lesson, teacher/student interactions, student/student interactions, general and specific student behaviour and goal related messages generated in the classroom. A brief outline of teaching/learning strategies and lesson procedure was kept. Following each observation session a summary was made of the lesson, basically adhering to the categories reflected in OPAL (Observing Patterns of Adaptive Learning, 1997, Patrick et al.). Brief summaries were made of lessons

highlighting salient points regarding contextual variables and student goal pursuit. These summaries were used to shape appropriate questions for subsequent interviews. A classroom observation file was kept and its contents stored on computer disc.

Stage 2 – Analysis of data

Survey

The survey used in this research was analysed using Microsoft Excel for descriptive statistics only. Such analysis allowed general themes and trends among the class group to be distinguished. Specifically the analysis revealed mean statistics for the class group's perceptions of task mastery classroom goal structure and performance classroom goal structure and the perceptions individual students held about classroom goal emphasis.

Student interviews

Following each set of interviews, data from target students interview transcripts were analysed according to content and to identify key themes emerging from the data using QSR NUD*IST 4 (Qualitative Solutions and Research : Non-numerical, Unstructured Data, Indexing, Searching and Theorising tool, 1997). Interview data were coded according to the main contextual areas presented in the conceptual framework, namely, parental and cultural influences, perceptions of middle school and classroom context (including instructional variables and perceptions of teacher) and perceptions related to peer relationships and the peer group. A display of the final coding categories used is provided in Appendix D. Interview data were used to help shape the focus of questions in subsequent interviews and were shared with a mentor (supervisor) to maintain similar inferences from the data.

Using the basic categories outlined in the conceptual framework the process of open coding to identify and develop emerging themes within each of the categories began. Open coding involved naming and categorising of phenomena through close examination of data. "During open coding the data are

broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 62). Themes were coded and categorised to facilitate analysis of data. After each interview a summary of main themes emerging from individual interviews was made. Following each set of interviews comparison of data according to themes and across categories took place. Such comparison enabled emerging trends to be identified and helped shape the focus for further interviews and classroom observation. A summary indicating results of case comparisons was written. This process was followed for each subsequent set of interviews and in addition interview sets were compared with each other so as to develop an understanding of reasons for particular themes taking precedence over others. In addition, codes were revised after each set of interviews as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 61-62).

When all interviews had been conducted the researcher developed a narrative of each student’s experiences during the year and within such a narrative attempted to develop understandings about the reasons for each student endorsing particular academic and social motivational goals at different times during the academic year. Summaries were made of each student’s experience. Once individual summaries were constructed analysis between students took place. The researcher sought to compare student experiences by isolating similar motivational patterns among students and attempting to link such patterns to contextual variables. In addition an understanding of how contextual variables may trigger motivational patterns was developed.

Teacher interviews

Teacher interviews were analysed for content relating to three main themes, namely, data relating to teacher perceptions of case study students, teacher beliefs and philosophy and teacher behaviours indicative of task mastery and performance classroom goal emphasis. Within each of these themes subsequent themes emerged and were coded accordingly.

Classroom observation

Classroom observation was analysed by linking observations to motivational patterns suggested by questionnaire and interview results. Classroom observation was part of the continual analysis and observations were used to trigger discussions during student interviews. In addition observation was used to aid interpretation of interview data and develop a broader understanding of the reasons for particular patterns of student motivational behaviour.

Following analysis of individual sets of data, links between survey, interview and observational data were developed. In particular analysis sought to follow the categories outlined in the conceptual framework and develop an understanding of the contextual influences that influence patterns of goal pursuit.

Reliability

The reliability of this study was monitored primarily through documented data collection techniques and process and the sharing of data with a mentor (supervisor) to maintain consistency in interpretation and inference. I am aware of concerns about reliability in qualitative research and endeavoured to address such concerns by explicitly documenting research steps and procedures in this dissertation (Burns, 1990).

The risk of obtaining contaminated data during interviews was limited by using all class members for interviews at various stages throughout the year. Target students were not able to identify themselves as such, nor were classmates or teachers able to recognise target students. Reliability of interviews was monitored by the use of audio-tape to administer interviews in a similar manner and as discussed above interviews operated in a self-correcting manner so as to limit misinterpretation of data. In addition, interview data were shared with a mentor (supervisor) to maintain similar inferences. Data obtained during classroom observation sessions were discussed and either confirmed or disconfirmed by students during interview sessions.

At the end of each case study report a subsection discussing the reliability of data obtained from each student has been included. The section includes information related to students' knowledge about me, attitudes towards interviews and other factors that may influence reliability of data. By including such a section it is hoped that reliability of the study was enhanced.

Validity

To improve the internal validity of this study triangulation was used. Data were obtained from four major sources, namely, student and teacher interviews, classroom observation and a survey.

Data obtained from questionnaires, interviews and classroom observation were analysed individually and then cross-referenced to improve the validity of themes discussed. During interviews checks with students about interpretation of their comments and observed classroom behaviour were observed. In addition, data were shared with a supervisor to check interpretation and development of themes. Interviewer bias was limited by adherence to a brief interview guideline for each set of interviews.

Generalisability

The findings of this study are confined to a group of Year 7 students within a particular model of middle schooling. As this was an exploratory study no attempts to generalise findings were made but rather the study aimed to develop a rich, descriptive account of the experiences of students in their first year of middle school.

Ethical issues

Confidentiality of data

In line with Edith Cowan University's policies on research ethics confidentiality and anonymity of participants and the school involved have been guaranteed during the course of the research and after completion of the dissertation. All records kept including transcripts and summaries have been

coded so as to protect the identity of the participants and the school. Any references to school staff are also confidential and the identity of individual staff members protected.

Access to participants

The consent of the school principal was obtained for this research. Written consent from subjects and their parents/guardians and relevant classroom teachers was obtained prior to commencement of the research. Participants were fully briefed as to what they were being asked to contribute in terms of the general nature of interviews and time investment. Parents and guardians were given the opportunity to telephone the researcher if they had any concerns about the research. Participants were also briefed about the purpose of the research, how research data will be used and what the research aimed to achieve. Participants were given the option to withdraw from the study at any time should they have difficulties.

CHAPTER IV

Case One : Anita

Introduction

Over the course of the academic year between February and December, ten interviews were conducted with Anita. As she became more familiar with me she began to talk more candidly about her school experience and family life. Anita had prior knowledge that I had taught her older sister five years before. As described in the methodology chapter, interviews were semi-structured and focused around themes relevant to Anita's school experience and current literature in this field.

The structure of this chapter has been generated from the conceptual framework for the study. Accordingly the chapter begins by describing Anita's perceptions of her family context including family and cultural influences. Data regarding Anita's perceptions of the school context, including the broader school environment, a specific classroom context and teachers are then reported. The chapter continues by exploring Anita's perception of the peer context including peer relationships, friendships and help seeking and giving within the peer context. Anita's contextual perceptions and how they influenced the nature of the academic and social goals she pursued during the year are also discussed. The chapter concludes by raising issues that may influence reliability of data and reporting perceptions Mrs Kelly held of her. A summary of Anita's case can be found in Appendix D.

The data presented were gathered as a result of interviews with Anita, interviews with Anita's core teacher, a survey and information obtained from Anita's student diary. A supplement to the case studies describing the classroom context according to the Observing Patterns of Adaptive Learning (OPAL: Patrick, Ryan, Hicks, Anderman, Middleton, Linnenbrink, Hruda, Edelin, Kaplan & Midgley, 1997) categories of task, authority, autonomy, recognition, grouping,

evaluation, time, social interactions and help seeking, can be found in Appendix C.

Family context and perceptions

During the year Anita spoke often of her family background and culture. In particular she was able to describe how these two factors influence the nature of her school related perceptions and the goals she pursued at school.

Family background

Anita was born in India and her family immigrated to Australia in 1994. At the time data were collected Anita had a sister five years her senior who was in her final year at the same school. Anita's mother worked in a secretarial role and her father was an engineer. Anita described herself as a "very good" student and indicated that she would like to go to university and become a lawyer.

Anita had a very strong sense of obligation to her family and respected and endorsed the values emphasised by her parents. Such values included a strong respect for elders, loyalty first and foremost to her family, a strong emphasis on academic achievement and the value of education for future success. She was proud of her culture, but revealed that cultural differences made it difficult for her to establish peer relationships and a strong sense of belonging with her peers and within the school community.

As the youngest in her family Anita followed family decisions and respected her elders. In March during a discussion about a class activity Anita indicated that at times it was difficult for her to be treated with respect by her family.

"Because of my culture and because of the way I have been brought up, it's pretty hard to be treated with respect but I don't mind that. Like say I want to go somewhere or do something, they have different things and I just have to follow wherever they go."

She reported not having the opportunity to make many decisions for herself as “some of them my parents and my sister will have to make for me, but I’m happy that they make them because then I don’t have to think of making them.”

Anita felt an immensely strong obligation to her family in terms of her academic achievement. At the end of March she explained, “because when my parents came over here we came because of me and my sister’s studies, so it’s important that I do well here and that I get a good education.” In July she reported that it was important for her to please her parents.

“Because my parents have always wanted me to study hard and they help me with everything that I need. When they were schooling they never had that much opportunity to school, the way we get to school nowadays, so they wanted me to.”

When asked about the main thing that motivated her at school she replied “making my parents proud of me”.

In particular Anita felt a responsibility to do well on behalf of her mother.

“She had the potential to become a doctor or something, but her parents never wanted her to be one, because in India ... all the ladies should stay at home and do home things, and she was good but she never got the opportunity otherwise she would have been successful ... she doesn’t feel that successful now, because what she does - there’s tons and tons of people that do the same thing”.

Anita was also strongly influenced by the academic achievement of her sister and aspired to follow her lead. In June she spoke of how her sister had influenced her attitude towards school.

“Now she’s in Year 12 and now she has to do her TEE (Tertiary Entrance Examinations) and now it’s getting harder and harder for her ... she was really good at her work, but if I can’t be good now how can I be good then”.

Anita had a close relationship with her sister, but admitted that as her sister’s exams had become increasingly closer she had been unable to spend as much time with her. In November Anita mentioned an incident that had occurred earlier in the year whereby she had experienced harassment from other students because she was Indian. She reported not being able to discuss this incident with

her sister “because she had her exams and she had to study lots and I couldn’t talk to her as much”. Anita also stated that family social events had been curtailed because of her sister’s exams, although this did not seem to concern her.

Anita had a very strong sense of how her present situation would influence her future. In February she stated how important it was that she do well at school “because my whole life depends on how I do. If I don’t do well in school and study now then I won’t become anything”. Anita emphasised that it was important for her to improve in her learning because “when I grow older I know that this will come in handy for me when I join the workforce and I go up into Year 12 ... if I learn now then it’s better when I grow older”.

Anita spoke of her parents’ educational values. She perceived her parents to value achievement in terms of scores and grades “but working hard is really important to them as well because only if you work hard you will get the results”. Anita perceived her parents to view mistakes negatively.

“They think that I shouldn’t make mistakes because if my mistakes keep on getting bigger and bigger then I won’t get that good marks and it also depends on the subject because like if it’s Math’s then my parents think I shouldn’t make a mistake but if it’s Japanese they wouldn’t really mind”.

Anita reported her parents being concerned about comparative class information regarding assignment and test scores. In October Anita revealed that she had shown her parents a test where she had received 29/30 and commented “but they always say I should have got 30/30. They were sort of pleased, but they would have been more pleased if I’d got full marks”. Anita consistently reported her efforts to please her parents and this in part led to an emphasis on performance approach goals and receiving recognition, in particular through existing school based reward structures.

Throughout the year Anita regularly reported pursuit of performance approach goals and emphasised the importance of academic performance. This appeared to be directly influenced by her family situation. In March she stated that working hard at school was important to her “so I can achieve at a higher level than other students in the class”. She continued to explain how her family

situation influenced such a desire by reporting “because I come here and I want to achieve more than other people in the class and I want to get the highest marks in the class. It matters about getting full marks in everything, or being the highest to get, like the highest in that class”.

In June Anita reported high academic performance being of prime importance to her. “My goals are first of all to get good marks in my tests, to learn more, to be good in work and that’s all”. These goals were important to her because “that’s what I want to do, that’s what I’ve always been like, even when I was small up to now because my sister gave me a lot of influence that I too should be good”. Anita’s pursuit of academic performance goals may also have been influenced by her parents’ promotion of performance goals and desire for comparative information regarding Anita’s schoolwork.

Anita held extremely high expectations for herself in terms of her academic performance.

“Sometimes I work really hard but miss out on a couple of marks and then I get in a really bad mood with myself. Science is the only subject that I’m really low in for some reason. I only got 17.5/20 and I like to get higher marks. If I got 19 or something I would have been happier and if I got 20 I would have been very happy”.

Her pursuit of academic performance goals appeared to be strongly linked to her desire to please her parents and to feel they were proud of her. She frequently referred to the association she perceived between a high level of school academic performance and parental approval. Anita’s strong feelings of responsibility toward her parents were also strongly linked to her desire for their approval.

Cultural influences

The nature of academic and social goals Anita pursued during her first year of middle school were strongly influenced by cultural considerations. Anita described her experience of education in India and how this influenced her ideas about schooling and learning. She explained that students in India were required

to pass one grade in order to move to the next grade and "it's more of a strain for us, the children, but I think it's better in India because you have to pass so then everyone wants to learn". She believed "the people in India want to learn and most of the people are really smart because they want to learn".

Anita also spoke of differences she perceived between Indian and Australian culture and the values they espoused with regard to family, learning and education.

"Australian parents want their kids to study, but they don't know that their kids are not studying. And if you see people who are in the papers for getting good T.E.E. results they're mainly Asians".

She believed Australian culture placed less emphasis on the value of education and that if education had a higher profile "then more kids would try harder".

Anita attributed this attitude to the structure of some Australian families and continued "in India none of that, like breaking up doesn't happen that much". She also believed that Indian parents were more involved with their children and that this encouraged children to want to do well at school.

"But in Australia the parents are not involved at all ... if they have broken homes then the children don't tend to do more schoolwork and they don't have a really strong culture with that. I think Australian parents are not involved with their children but then they're not involved with the school either. This is just my opinion, but most parents have other things to do rather than worry about what the child is doing in school. My parents always want to know like what I got in my report, they always want to know everything that happens in school, like what's there in school and they're always there to help me in case I need anything".

Summary of perceptions of family context

Throughout the year Anita was able to discuss her family and cultural perceptions and to an extent, how such perceptions influenced her school behaviour and motivational goals. Anita endorsed the emphasis her family and culture placed on education and academic achievement and consistently reported her desire to achieve the highest marks possible in her academic work. This desire appeared to also be linked to her efforts to attain parental approval and her sense of responsibility to her parents with regard to school achievement. Anita

demonstrated an awareness of how her present experiences would influence future opportunities and this also increased her desire for high academic performance. The data indicate that for Anita, family background and cultural experiences made a significant contribution to pursuit of performance approach and academic goals.

Perceptions of school context

Throughout the year Anita was able to describe her school experience and how particular situations influenced her feelings about school and the priorities she had. Anita had attended the junior school adjoining this middle school and therefore the environment was somewhat familiar to her. Despite the fact that the school structure had been changed in 1998 Anita still referred to junior school as 'primary school' and to middle school as 'high school'. This section discusses Anita's perceptions of the school context, classroom context and teachers, and focuses on contextual themes that emerged as being particularly relevant to the motivational goals she pursued.

Perceptions of middle school context

Anita adjusted quickly to the middle school environment. At the beginning of the year she conveyed a positive attitude toward transition and she believed that the experience would be of value to her in the future. In February Anita reported that being in middle school was "pretty good" as "we get used to it when we go higher and do our grades because in Year 8 it's pretty difficult just to get used to it straight away".

Anita had prior information about middle school from her primary school teachers and some middle school staff at an orientation programme the year before. At the first interview Anita stated she had the impression middle school would be fun and reported enjoying "learning to use lockers and becoming more independent". Anita's sister had apparently told her that middle school would be hard and that she would have to start studying more.

Anita enjoyed the opportunities to meet new people that transition to a new school environment offered. She enjoyed "being able to meet new teachers

for different things” and meeting students from other year levels in her elective subjects. Anita described enjoying working with students from other year levels because “I prefer working like that because they don’t know me and I get to know them at least, and I get to know new people in the school”.

The main difficulty Anita reported in adjusting to the new environment was that she found the movement from one class to another and having different teachers made it difficult “if you want to talk to the teacher or something like that, but I guess I’ll get used to it”. She described difficulties finding time to approach teachers and talk with them about any concerns, or to gain feedback about her progress and as such began to perceive middle school teachers as less approachable.

Anita reported adjusting to the amount of homework “okay, because my sister used to have a lot of homework”. She described the style of homework as different “because in primary school we had like a package of homework to do and then you handed it all in at the last lesson, but here you have to keep on handing it in and keep on doing it”. She had a positive attitude towards homework and liked the immediate feedback it provided her with regarding her performance. “I like doing homework because it’s easier and I know that I can improve myself in it”.

By August, Anita’s enthusiasm for middle school appeared to have diminished. She reported thinking ‘high school’ would be harder than she had experienced and described the work to present less challenge than she had anticipated. When asked if she felt happy at school she responded “well a little bit and a little bit not because study wise this school is not as competitive. People in this school are not as competitive”. She spoke of how she perceived other schools to be more competitive and how no students from her school had ever received “really high” Tertiary Entrance Examination results, “so I’m not as happy to be in this school”. At this time Anita’s sister would have been engaged in final preparations for her November exams and this perhaps heightened her perception of the importance of tertiary entrance scores.

Although Anita adjusted well to middle school her enthusiasm for the new environment dwindled over the year partly as a result of her immediate schooling experiences, the experience of her sister, and an increasing awareness of her competitive nature and what she perceived to be the lack of academic effort by her peers.

Perceptions of school reward structures

Throughout the year Anita consistently expressed her concern about the system of rewards operating in the school. During interviews Anita placed emphasis on receiving end of year awards and frequently spoke of her efforts to receive notes of commendation and disappointment when not receiving them when she felt they were deserved.

During her second last interview in November Anita reported feeling very disappointed that she had not been awarded a prize for a subject. At this stage prize winners had not been announced and she appeared quite certain she was not going to receive an award. The following week award winners were announced via a letter sent home informing parents that their child would be receiving an award at the awards night. During her final interview Anita related how she arrived home to find her sister had already opened the envelope and the family knew she would receive an award. She was unsure of the subject for which she would be awarded and only at the rehearsal was she informed she would be receiving two awards. She described an elaborate process of speculation, based on how she was grouped with other students during the rehearsal, and what she knew of those students' academic abilities and success at previous awards nights. She described feeling "relieved because I'd waited so long to know if I was getting an award or not ... because I had tried hard this year and I just wanted to get an award". Anita reported that her sister did not make any comment about the situation apart from "you're getting an award" and that her parents also did not make any comment. This reported response from Anita's parents may have been influenced by the expectation that her sister, in her final year of schooling, should have received an award.

Anita believed there was more to receiving an award than being successful in one subject area. Specifically, she believed that award recipients should be students who demonstrated social responsibility within the school environment.

“Because some of them are not like people that do, they only do well in one thing and they don’t want to try for anything else. They’re not very studious people. They’re not people that follow instructions and all that, and some people do and they don’t get awards for it ... I just think that they should be good at the subject as well as they don’t just be bad every time, like their good behaviour”.

Perceptions of school based system of rewards and penalties

Throughout the year Anita specifically discussed her perceptions and feelings about the school based system of notes of concern and notes of commendation. In July she reported having received two notes of commendation, one in Japanese and the other in Integrated Studies. She described being commended for “well in Japanese, participating well in something in class and in Integrated Studies it was for doing something in the novel reading.” Anita reported feeling “good but not exactly good” about the notes.

“The Japanese one I wasn’t actually feeling that good because people that were being naughty or something in the class, they used to get a note of commendation from the Japanese teacher, because one time in class they changed their attitude. The people who were constantly being good never got any notes of commendation.”

Anita received the note of commendation for “well I had won a game or something ... it wasn’t really important because I had tried before that and I’m normally good at Japanese, I don’t really study that much for it”. When asked about the Integrated Studies note, she replied “it was last term, I’m not really sure but I was just doing what I normally do”. Dissatisfaction regarding these notes occurred largely because she felt she had not been recognised in areas where she had invested most effort. “I really really work hard in Math’s and well she never gives one in Math’s for some reason”. When receiving full marks for a Mathematics test she described being praised verbally by the teacher, but being disappointed she did not receive a note of commendation.

She perceived the criteria for receiving notes of commendation as unpredictable and described how she was unable to determine specific behaviours that would lead to a note being awarded. She explained "when they're giving someone else one and you stand near you might get one". Notes were also perceived to be dependent on the teacher's mood.

"Because sometimes the teacher is very happy and she wants to give notes of commendation, but say she has another class before and somebody has been naughty in her class, then she would be not that likely to give notes of commendation. Also if people are being naughty in class and she was in a good mood that day she would just let them off. But say she was in a very angry mood then she would probably give them a note of concern".

Anita explained that notes of concern sometimes led to students becoming "even more angry towards the teacher and then their attitude is even worse than before".

In September she expressed the belief that in reality notes of commendation were not really a sign of success. "Because sometimes teachers give notes of commendation for not exactly being successful but for people asking." She described how some students were able to manipulate teachers into giving notes of commendation.

"They (students) say if I be good then can I have them ... it works most of the time ... because they get upset at the teacher, because they're the people who are always being not good and the people who always be good never get one. And that's been happening for years and years".

She described instances where she perceived notes of commendation to be of little value because in Japanese "some days she will give one to the whole entire class, some days she won't and some days she'll give it to the bad people that have changed to be good."

Despite these comments she described how the anticipation of receiving a note of commendation was motivating. In recalling an instance where she was asked to rewrite some work she had done quickly after arriving late to class she reported feeling motivated because she knew she could improve her work and people who had finished were receiving notes of commendation. "I finished just in time but then she said bring it tomorrow anyway, but I don't know if I'll get

one tomorrow because maybe tomorrow she may not want to give any notes of commendation”.

Anita believed that notes of commendation should be awarded to “people who are academically good”. The ‘Notes of Commendation’ page in her school diary revealed that during the year she had received notes of commendation for activities that she perceived to have little value. Six out of her eight notes of commendation for the year were awarded in Japanese for working well, actively participating in class and giving of her best (5 notes – 18th July, 3rd August, 7th September, 26th October and 3rd November). She referred to these as being “for participating or something in class”. On the 11th August Anita received a note for winning a colouring competition in Japanese. When explaining this she appeared embarrassed and rolled her eyes and laughed before reiterating her belief that notes of commendation should be awarded for academic success. The remaining two notes were received from her core teacher in Integrated studies. The first awarded on the 13th March was “for excellent work on her individual reading programme” and the second given on 6th September was “for being an amazing independent student ... is a joy to have in my class”. Notably, over the course of the year Anita received no notes for the subject she felt she had put most effort into and valued the most – Mathematics.

Summary of perceptions of school context

Anita’s perceptions about the school context influenced the way she behaved at school and her pursuit of academic performance approach goals. Although she initially expressed positive perceptions of the middle school environment as the year progressed her enthusiasm began to diminish as she perceived academic work to be less challenging than she had anticipated. In addition, Anita began to perceive infrequent and sometimes trivial recognition from teachers and lack of academic competition within the school.

Anita sought high academic performance and throughout the year shared how she strived to maintain high academic levels. Indeed, she felt that moving to a ‘high school’ accentuated her desire for high achievement because “in high

school I think it's more important because I'm getting older and the studies are getting harder and I need to achieve more". She also expressed her feeling that the school context did not provide her with the recognition she desired and frequently referred to her frustration with the system of notes of concern and commendation. This perhaps lead her to become more focused on achieving teacher recognition (by endorsing values promoted by teachers) and teacher approval, but her strong desire for teacher approval was somewhat compromised by what she perceived to be the reduced accessibility of teachers in the middle school environment.

Perceptions of classroom context

During the course of the school year, Anita was able to share her perceptions about a specific classroom context, namely, that directed by her core teacher, Mrs Kelly. Within this classroom Mrs Kelly taught Anita's class Mathematics, Integrated Studies (English and Studies of Society and Environment), Health, Computer technology and Religious Education.

Perceptions of class goal structure

In September the 26 students participating in the study were asked to complete the twelve item 'Perceived Classroom Goal Structure' scales from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey (PALS; Midgley, Maehr, Hicks, Roeser, Urdan, Anderman & Kaplan, 1994, cited in Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin & Midgley, 2001, see Appendix B). The survey required students to rate a total of twelve items on a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Survey results indicated that Anita perceived Mrs Kelly's classroom to have a higher task mastery goal emphasis (4.17) than performance goal emphasis (4.00). As the sample of students surveyed was considerably small I interviewed Anita in October to clarify her responses and explore why she had responded to survey items in particular ways.

Anita agreed with many of the statements that had been intended to reveal perceptions of task mastery goal emphasis in the classroom. She agreed that the teacher believed making mistakes to be part of the learning process.

“Because sometimes we make mistakes, like in Math’s when we’re doing the exercises, we make a mistake and then the teacher says okay, this is the right thing and this is how you do it properly and she doesn’t really mind if we do it wrong so long as you know what we’re talking about after that.”

Anita personally believed that making mistakes was part of learning “because if you make a mistake then you know that you have to learn a bit more”.

Interestingly, such a belief conflicted with her previous reports of parental perceptions of mistake making. Anita also strongly agreed that the teacher promoted understanding of work.

“When you understand something you will remember it ... like in the social studies test when you’re asked to remember all this information to write down, you have to know how you find out the compass degrees and then you’ll remember how you do that”.

Even though Anita perceived the teacher to emphasise understanding, in her explanation she revealed that such a view coincided with her own views about understanding concepts to remember them. She also perceived Mrs Kelly to want the students to enjoy learning and reported the perception that not all teachers wanted to make learning fun, but that when learning was fun it was easier. Anita perceived Mrs Kelly to recognise students for trying hard because “the time when I was trying really hard to get a good mark for Math’s, she recognised that ... she told the class ... and next time I want to get better than that”. She reported perceiving teacher recognition to inspire her desire for achievement. Anita seemed unsure about whether Mrs Kelly told the students that working hard was more important than anything else.

“Because sometimes the teacher is telling us to really work hard and sometimes the teacher says that working together as a group is really important and sometimes she says that we don’t have to work hard, just follow the rubric and then we already know what we’re going to get if you follow the rubric ... and then she says to us to work really hard when we’re working individually, not in a group task”.

Although she perceived such messages to be conflicting, her explanation revealed her ability to recognise the different messages the teacher promoted in the

classroom, and her desire to endorse the messages promoted at different times in order to achieve academic success and teacher approval.

Anita described her responses to survey items indicating a performance classroom goal emphasis although she seemed less certain about the degree to which Mrs Kelly emphasised performance goals. She strongly agreed that the teacher pointed out students who received good grades and reported that Mrs Kelly drew attention to students who achieved good marks. "When she's marking she always tells all of us that this person has done everything well and it's not that hard and all of that". She added that this occurred on most occasions and that work was recognised on merit and demonstration of explicit learning outcomes. Anita strongly agreed that the teacher let students know who achieved highest test scores through acknowledging students who had successfully met learning outcomes. Although Mrs Kelly did not generally provide regular statistical information regarding class averages and highest and lowest scores, Anita revealed she had on one occasion.

"On one of my Math's tests she put on the paper, 1st, 2nd and 3rd (top three scores), but she never told anyone. She never told the whole class but the individual students knew when they got their tests back. I got second highest and found out who got first and third ... I should have got first because I missed by one mark."

Despite this episode, Anita perceived the teacher to not compare students.

"She doesn't tell us you're that good or not good, she doesn't exactly say that you have to do this better than that person. She doesn't compare us at all, but I wish she would because then we would know who is better than us and how we could try to be that way".

She admitted to comparing herself to other students and wanting to know class and personal averages for assessments. Anita agreed that the teacher called on smart students more than other students to help in the class and reported that the teacher asked "smart students" to respond to more difficult questions. She also perceived the teacher made it obvious when students did not do well in their work.

"The people who did really well, she put it in front of the class, and the people who needed to look at their rubrics more, she put it up and said it was a really good piece of work but they didn't actually follow what the rubric needed".

Anita perceived that only a few students in the class did really well and when she explained why, revealed her interpretation of the item to be influenced by her beliefs about ability and effort.

"I think that if some of them tried harder, they'd get there. It also depends what it is. If it is something that's really easy then everybody sort of gets the same thing, but if it's like a Math's test, not many people get a really good score. More of them could do well if they really want to try their hardest and do well."

Perceptions of class groupings

For most of the year Anita worked in mixed ability groups within her core class. In September, the teacher restructured the Mathematics class so as to have students seated in three ability groups. The students were not informed that the groups were ability based.

"The group in the middle (of the classroom), that's the group that needs to learn a bit more, well, some people in that group could be in the second group because they are good but they don't want to learn. They've got the capability to be in that group but they forget their worksheets or they don't want to listen about how to do the type of sum, so they should be in that group but they don't want to try".

Although she perceived her group to be "not a bad group" she stated that "some people should be in that group and some shouldn't be because some people haven't been that good in their tests ... they haven't always got an A". Anita believed the group should consist of "all the people who got an A" for their previous Mathematics test. This perception was perhaps influenced by her strong desire for academic achievement and growing desire for academic status within the class group.

The change in class grouping appeared to influence Anita's work in that subject.

"It's easier because you don't have to help anybody else in the group and you just get the hardest things to do. I have more time because normally I'm always helping people and I don't have to help them in that group ... the work is more challenging and it makes me want to do more".

Over the year Anita spoke of her anxiety about and dislike of classroom group tasks. Although she acknowledged that working in a group had enabled her to form friendships with some class members, she reported her relationship with classmates to be strained by having to complete group tasks. Specifically she reported her ideas about learning, effort and achievement sometimes conflicted with those of her fellow group members and that this made group tasks difficult for her. She described her disappointment when teachers introduced group tasks.

"At least I know that if I do it myself that I'll get a pretty good mark but if I do it as a group well maybe I'll get this person in my group who just doesn't want to listen or just doesn't want to learn or doesn't want to do anything and then I have more strain and more headaches".

In May Anita reported being in a group where tension existed. "I always have a problem with Brett in my group because he used to always call me names and all of that, before in Year 6". Despite her feelings toward Brett, Anita focused on her desire for achievement and her sense of responsibility to the group. "I just had to keep on doing the task and doing that duty because I couldn't do anything about it". She also described how the tension in the group was compounded by other strained relationships.

"Well Jeremy and Brett always fight, like Jeremy is writing something down then Brett says don't write it, and then whatever I say Kristy agrees on ... sometimes we agree and sometimes we're all against each other on a question ... when it's like that I just have to agree with them because then they say it's a group majority ... it's not that easy to do that but I guess I have to because I want to get on with the rest of the task".

Anita perceived working in such a group to be a negative experience "because it just hurts you more when people are not listening and they're not being really nice to you".

In June Anita described a geography test that had been a group task. The students were given twenty-one test questions a week prior to the test and were

required to work together in small groups to prepare the answers. Each student was to prepare answers for seven questions and share their answers with the others. Students received a group mark and an individual mark. Anita's fellow group members failed to prepare their answers and so Anita prepared all twenty-one answers.

"I wanted to get it both ways, my own personal way and the group way as well. And I wanted them to learn. I wanted them to learn and get good marks as well, but instead I felt bad because they could get the answers out and me still ... I felt really hurt that none of them did their questions ... and in the test they didn't know the answers and so I had to tell them anyway because I wanted to get a good mark for my group".

Ironically, despite her efforts, the members of Anita's group did not achieve as high a mark as her "because in some questions they never listened to what I said and they only wrote half of what I said and half of what they thought". She expressed disappointment that group members were ungrateful and "didn't even say thank you. I would rather have done it individually because I did all the work anyway and it would have been much easier if I didn't have to put the hurt into it".

During a major group project for Integrated Studies Anita reported feeling frustrated.

"Some people don't even do any work and then half the time somebody else is fighting with another person and then it gets really strained ... sometimes I get frustrated because they just don't want to do anything. You just have to ask them, you have to tell them, but some don't really care and it gets really hard but then the next day they might do some work, but some days they are really not nice".

Summary of perceptions of classroom context

Anita perceived Mrs Kelly to emphasise task mastery goals more than performance goals in her classroom. To this extent she perceived the classroom environment to focus on understanding of learning and enjoyment of classroom activities. Anita did express some concern about the lack of performance emphasis which she so desired. She expressed frustration that the teacher did not provide comparative information about class scores and grades and perceived she

was not recognised as much as she should have been. In addition, Anita experienced difficulties working in cooperative learning groups for assessed tasks and perceived this to put a strain on some of the relationships she held with members of her peer group.

Perceptions of teacher(s)

Throughout the year Anita spoke about middle school teachers with particular reference to their expectations, perceived support and care for students, and how well she perceived them to recognise effort and achievement.

Anita perceived Mrs Kelly to expect the class to do well in their academic work "because when she gives us assignment and assessments she gives us the sheet showing how she is going to mark it and what you need to do to get 100%". She described an instance where the students were writing an essay and the teacher drew a grid on the board and gave illustrations of how students could achieve a range of marks depending on their performance in four different areas of skill. Anita interpreted attention to how work would be scored as an indicator of Mrs Kelly's high expectations for the class.

Perceived teacher support

Throughout the year Anita perceived middle school teachers to be less caring than junior school teachers. In February she stated that she felt it was advantageous to have different teachers for different subjects "because then you can learn from a different type of teaching, how different teachers teach". In March, Anita explained perceiving middle school teachers to be less accessible than their junior school counterparts.

"It's a bit hard if you want to talk to the teacher or something ... like I want to talk about a subject or about homework or things that I'm not good at and I want to improve myself or get better in ... we can't approach the high school teacher as much as we approach the primary school teacher because our classes are not with the same teacher all day."

This reduction in teacher accessibility perhaps contributed to Anita's perception that middle school teachers were less caring than junior school teachers.

In May Anita reported Mrs Kelly as sometimes caring about her on a personal level "because when we have the parent interview night everything about my report was okay and she gave me good marks for my term report." She perceived levels of teacher care to be curriculum dependent. "Sometimes you can tell that she's caring and sometimes can't really tell because she's teaching different, like when she teaches Math's you can't really tell if she's caring about you or not".

Anita described an incident where she had approached the teacher for help during a group activity. "I went and told her that some people were treating me really not very kindly". Mrs Kelly had apparently explained Anita would have an opportunity to show how much each group member contributed to the final product.

"Because we had to make this sheet at the end where you had to draw a cake and cut out how much you think this person worked out, how much you think this person worked out. She said when you are doing that then you can tell who did all the work in your group. But when we got to that my group wouldn't actually agree that I put a little amount for them and we all had to share quarters anyway."

It seemed Anita had wanted the teacher to come to her aid and she expressed disappointment in the group outcome. In this situation Anita perceived the teacher to demonstrate lower levels of support than she had expected.

Anita had a strong desire for teacher recognition. This desire emanated from her beliefs about achievement and performance, cultural background and also her perception that the teacher "gave" marks. Anita desired teacher recognition and as the year progressed perceived that she was not recognised for her efforts often enough.

"When I was in India the teachers would always recognise that (effort and achievement), so here I want the teachers to because I just want them to recognise because I put a lot of hard work into my work".

When asked whether she felt teachers recognised her effort she replied "not really that much, well if they do I'm not sure that they show it ... I don't think they

know what I want to achieve and how much, because they have things to do themselves”.

Help-seeking from teachers

Some aspects of Anita's attitude toward help-seeking from her core teacher changed over the year. Initially she perceived asking for help to be a sign of lack of academic ability, but as the year progressed Anita began to accept the idea, promoted by Mrs Kelly, that help seeking was a sign of being an 'effective learner'. Mrs Kelly was regularly observed encouraging the students to seek help and this became an important way Anita began to receive teacher recognition. She reported in October that Mrs Kelly had drawn positive attention to Anita asking questions.

“I always ask the teacher a lot of questions and once she pointed out that I always ask a lot of questions and because I do I get good grades and because I want to learn ... because if I didn't ask that many questions then I wouldn't have got that many marks”.

She reported feeling pleased that the teacher had publicly acknowledged her desire to learn and academic achievement although admitted there were times when she was afraid to ask the teacher questions “because sometimes she's in an angry mood or she's just screamed at somebody, then I get a little worried like, is she going to shout at me or something”.

In November Anita stated that she would encourage future Year 7 students to not “hesitate to ask teachers any questions” because of the positive impact she perceived such behaviour to have had on her achievement. “At the start of the year I was afraid of asking questions but now I don't worry”. In this instance the emphasis the teacher placed on help seeking and the opportunity for teacher recognition this afforded her encouraged Anita to change her help seeking behaviour in the classroom.

Summary of perceptions of teacher(s)

Anita generally held positive perceptions of teachers and had a strong desire for teacher recognition and approval. Even so, she perceived middle school teachers to be less caring and accessible than junior school teachers and to have other concerns apart from establishing supportive and stable relationships with their students. Anita's desire for teacher approval lead her to endorse some of the behaviours Mrs Kelly promoted in the classroom as a way of receiving teacher recognition.

Perceptions of peer context

Initially Anita was a little reluctant to discuss peer relationships, particularly friendships. As the year progressed she was able to offer insightful comments regarding the nature of the relationships she held with her classmates and the friendships she established. Throughout the year Anita reported feeling distant from her classmates because of the differences in family and cultural background.

“Well they've grown up differently and I've come from India and in India basically the thing is that you study hard. These opportunities were not open to my Mum and my Dad, it's open to me and so I should take them and keep on going ... maybe some other people's mum and dad, they've had some different types of background. They don't have the same ideas because they just think school is somewhere for them to socialise or they have to just not learn, they're just there because somebody has forced them to be there and they don't really care about learning”.

These perceptions of the values held by her classmates may have lead Anita to expend little energy in trying to establish close friendships with many classmates and instead direct her energy to classroom performance and academic achievement.

Anita talked of her impressions of 'popular' students within her class. She described popular students as “the students that want attention and that have attention ... when you seek attention from the teacher and from other students ... like everybody knows who they are because they're very naughty and not

normal". To illustrate she described a female student in her class as constantly telling people that she loved them and that "some students are really naughty to the teacher so that everybody looks at them". She reported popular students as trying to hide their academic success and explained "sometimes they say they don't care but they actually do care because in this school, people who say they don't care naturally become cool".

To gain insight into how Anita presented herself to classmates, in September she was asked how she thought her classmates might describe her. She partly avoided the question by stating "I don't know because it's their feeling not mine and they don't know what I do" but then revealed how she had been guarded in the information she had allowed others to have of her. "They don't know what I do because they're not with me and they don't know what I have to do and what my culture is and what I have to actually give unto others and what I do, and things with my family." She described her classmates as not really understanding her "because none of them know what I have, what I have to go through and none of them are Indian, the same culture as me". Cultural similarities were perceived by Anita to be a vital part of a close relationship. "I wish there would be another Indian girl here, that I could speak the same language and we would be better friends".

Anita perceived her classmates to be academically inferior due to their work habits and lack of effort.

"They're not going to be there if I do something in university or something ... I don't think any of them would be there because they don't think the way I do and they don't want to change their habits. They can work well but the majority of them don't want to actually study and work well".

She reported her desire to study and "work hard because of my parents but most of them probably don't want to study because they just maybe they have to do something else ... I'm not sure what they want to do". Anita believed she was slightly disadvantaged by being in that particular class "because when we're doing group work ... if they don't want to work hard then I have to do all the work and it puts more strain on me". The way in which Anita began to distance

herself from her classmates perhaps contributes to a reduction in reports of relationship goals and an increase in pursuit of status goals, which she perceived would ultimately be beneficial to academic performance.

Anita reported being competitive with her classmates, particularly two boys who also achieved high marks.

“We did an essay writing activity and in that I felt very good because I got an A but I had 90% because I made two errors and one boy got 5 more than me and one boy got the same as me so I felt pretty okay”.

In August Anita spoke further about how she valued classroom competition and stated “if I had other competitors I would want to study more and more and more, but if I didn’t I would just not really be bothered”.

Anita described her endeavors to find out the academic scores of other students. Most of the time this involved asking individuals directly and in February she described how “I ask them because if I got a low mark then I want to see what the highest mark was”. At this stage she described feeling that “if I ask someone I should tell my mark as well”. If she had received a higher mark than those around her, she reported “I feel really good and I feel that I have done the best that I can do for that. And I feel very proud and I can go home and tell my parents that”. Toward the end of the year she reported that she had become more discreet about how she would find out others’ scores without revealing her own.

Anita felt that being competitive enabled her to achieve more and to learn more because it meant she would work harder.

“For the essay activity we were allowed to write notes out and because I wanted to get more marks than the other people, I took the whole day and I wrote a draft and then I wrote the thing and then I looked in essay books and then finally I wrote my notes out so it helped me to learn lots more than I would have”.

Perceptions of peer relationships

In March Anita described herself as “not really best friends with anyone in this class, I’m friends with everybody”.

“I wouldn’t really say my really good friends ... all the girls are just, they know me but I’m not best friends with them, just friends with them, I help them and they help me in anything. One day I will sit with somebody and then the next day I will sit with another person. I just go to all the groups. I’m not really that good friends with anybody, I’m just friends with all the girls. I know them and I’m friends with them but I’m not best friends with anybody”.

At this stage she had not established one group of girls she mainly sat with at lunchtime and when asked how she felt about that responded “it’s just that sometimes some people are nice, sometimes people are not”.

In June Anita described how she had sought friendship with an Indonesian girl, Evalina, who she perceived to have similar ideas and values. She stated that they were “pretty close because she has the same type of background”, and explained how they shared similar ideas about family and the value of learning and schoolwork.

“I mostly hang around with one set of friends ... because whenever we went into a group (for class work) I was with Evalina because she’s the same level of thinking as me and I always go with them because they’re just my friends. I don’t exactly hang around with them because ... it really depends where everyone is as to who I hang around. Normally I’m always in the library at lunchtime and recess, like on rainy days”.

Anita revealed that discussing class work often decided her movements during breaks.

“If I’m asking someone about what happened in class then normally I would stay and hang around with them for the rest of that break ... normally Evalina is always asking me something and I normally stay with her”.

Despite her negative feelings about classroom group work, Anita admitted that group activities had enabled her to form friendships. With regard to Evalina she

explained “we’ve had some group activities where we’ve been together ... and so I made a friendship”.

In September Anita reported looking forward to Year 8 and the opportunity to meet different people.

“At the beginning of the year I had a goal that I would make new friends, but actually this year there were not many people who came to Year 7. But when you go to another school in Year 8 then everybody starts all over again because everybody’s new so that’s my goal to have to make new friends, but my goal of achievement is always what I have”.

Help-seeking and help-giving behaviour in the peer context

Anita’s views about help seeking from her peers remained consistent over the course of the year and she always reported being reluctant to ask peers for help. “I only ask someone something if I really have to ask them ... I prefer not to ask people”. In addition, she perceived help seeking from peers to be an admission of lack of knowledge and was unsure whether Evalina was at her academic level because she asked questions.

Anita also expressed her desire to comply with social expectations of the classroom context and this involved helping others. The teacher actively encouraged students to help each other and Anita followed this partly because of her desire to be respected by her classmates and her desire to please the teacher. She also viewed helping others to be a part of establishing friendships. “I’m not best friends with them, just friends with them, I help them and they help me in anything”.

Anita also commented that she perceived helping others to play a part in her learning.

“I realise that when I help them I learn more ... it makes me feel that I know something and I can explain it to them and that means I understand it and that I’m getting better at learning and people are asking me because I’m good at it.”

In June Anita reported “I’m always helping people” and that it made her feel “good when you’re helping them but it’s not good that when you help them that they don’t show any gratefulness. It makes me feel that I shouldn’t help them

next time.” She reported being selective about whom she helped “because the other people don’t show it but they too are smart but the same type of thing I mean they understand and then when I need help they can help me as well”. When discussing the group project she was currently involved in she stated “I’m spending most of my time helping others instead of helping myself ... it’s a group thing.”

Anita reported having negative experiences assisting peers in junior school because “we used to have this thing where if you finish work then you would get this package of things to improve your skills but I never got up to the package because I always helped other people”. Anita found she had to compromise her desire to comply with classroom and peer expectations to realise her goals of achievement and wanting to improve. She admitted finally receiving a package because “I didn’t actually help a person that day”. In this instance she described how difficult it was to respond in the negative to her fellow classmates when they asked for her help.

Summary of perceptions of peer context

Anita wished to establish new friendships during the year but seemed unable to strongly align herself with any particular friendship group. She perceived herself to be distant from peers because of family and cultural differences and reported the perception that most Australian students attended school to socialise rather than learn. Such perceptions appeared to be enhanced through her experiences in cooperative learning groups where she seemed to begin to resent other students because she perceived they took advantage of her and were ungrateful. She perceived herself to be markedly different from most of her peers and even stated that she felt none of them would continue their education to university. In this sense Anita indicated that she felt academically superior to many of her peers and to this end did not report pursuing friendships with most members of her class group. Such perceptions may have had substantial influence on one another as her failure to establish friendships may have influenced her desire to distance herself emotionally and academically from her

peers. Likewise, her emotional and academic distance from the peer group may have manifested itself in ego-protecting feelings of superiority and pursuit of social status goals. In turn, Anita's desire for academic respect from her peer group may have enhanced her pursuit of academic performance goals.

Anita's desire for academic status and respect may well have been enhanced by her inability to form strong relationships within the peer group. The only friendship Anita reported pursuing was with Evalina who she perceived to share similar beliefs and values. Even so, this friendship was difficult as Evalina was part of a close group of Indonesian girls who shared similar experiences, culture and language. Toward the end of the year Anita revealed her desire for friendship with another Indian girl and hoped next year such a person may come to the school.

Throughout the year Anita revealed herself to be a highly competitive student. She aimed to achieve at a higher level than other students and commented that she felt her desire for competition enabled her to learn more and to achieve more. The data reveal how Anita's competitive nature stemmed from her cultural background, prior school experiences and her overriding desire to please her parents and to make them proud of her. In addition, her competitive nature may well have been enhanced by her inability to form strong friendships and a sense of belonging within the peer group, and her desire for academic respect and status.

Advice to Year 7s of 2001

In November the researcher asked all class members to pretend they had been asked to offer some advice to the Year 7s of 2001 about how to have a successful year. The aim of this activity was to allow students the opportunity to discuss issues they perceived to be most important for Year 7s based on their experience. Anita described how she had chosen her pieces of advice "because those are the mistakes that I've made".

Her advice included firstly "don't hang around the lockers because you get in trouble for that". Although she reported that she had not actually got into

trouble for this, she had seen other people get into trouble in this way and felt it was important to avoid doing things that may get her into trouble.

Anita felt it important for Year 7s to “make a lot of new friends” and explained “if you don’t make friends now, then when you grow up and get to the higher grades it’s harder to make friends”. She continued “making new friends in any school is important, especially when it’s the first year of that school because when you grow older other people have their friends and they don’t want to make friends”. She reported that when she was in Year 6 she had found it difficult to make friends with people who already had established friendships and friendship groups. During the year she had found it difficult to establish friendships and those she desired with the Indonesian students were difficult because they were a fairly exclusive group who often spoke in their own language.

Anita advised “don’t hesitate to ask teachers any questions” because of the performance advantages asking questions had provided her with during the year. She also felt it was important to “make a good impression first because a first impression is always the last”.

“If you’re really good at the start of the year then the teacher thinks you’re good and then at the end of the year, even if you become not that good at the subject, then the teacher thinks you’re still quite good at it because of the first impression”.

Whilst she acknowledged not being conscious of trying to make a good impression at the beginning of the year, she justified her opinion by using the example from Mathematics.

“People I know were very good at the start of the year, but now they’re not that good but the teacher doesn’t put them in a lower group ... like in Math’s, at the start of the year they would get As in their tests but now they get Cs in some things, but the teacher still puts them in a higher group in Math’s”.

Anita felt it important to “always try out something even if you can’t do it”. She spoke of her efforts in gymnastics and how she had found it difficult and how she also had difficulty swimming “because I haven’t been brought up

swimming ... and I find it very difficult swimming. And now I can do things in swimming I couldn't do before and that's because I tried".

The nature of the advice Anita chose to offer to future Year 7s reinforces some of her key concerns about the year. Firstly, Anita felt it important to avoid behaviours that may lead to being in trouble at school. She also saw it important to make lots of new friends this notion is strongly supported by other interview data. In addition, Anita acknowledged the importance of asking questions of the teacher, and this advice was clearly influenced by her experiences within the classroom context. Finally advice to try new things reflects Anita's beliefs about ability and effort and how investment of effort will mean improvement of ability.

Contextual perceptions and personal goal pursuit

Over the course of the year Anita described the nature of the academic and social goals she pursued at school and was able to describe why she pursued such goals. The interview data indicate how her contextual perceptions influenced her pursuit of particular goals.

Anita's primary goals were to achieve high academic performance and through this meet parental approval. Her descriptions of her family and cultural background provide the explanations as to why such goals were important to her. The perceptions Anita held about her family context and the goals she pursued as a result, influenced her perceptions of the school and peer contexts. As such Anita strove for academic excellence in the school situation and when she did not receive the recognition she felt she deserved, began to modify her classroom behaviour so as to reflect behaviours the teacher promoted and praised, namely asking questions. Anita believed it important to receive teacher recognition and perceived it to result in high academic achievement and parental approval. In this situation Anita used task mastery behaviours to receive teacher recognition and to enhance her pursuit of performance approach goals.

Although Anita desired friendship within her peer group, she perceived that differences in family situations and culture made it difficult for her to establish friendships. Specifically she spoke of the distance that existed between

herself and many other students due to the fact she perceived others to have little understanding of her culture and beliefs about schooling. Such perceptions may well have influenced her pursuit of academic performance goals (as this is where she invested most of her effort and energy), desire for teacher approval along with academic status and respect from her peers. Anita's inability to form strong friendships in her class may have also influenced her desire for peer respect and academic status as a way of protecting her ego and sense of self-worth.

Anita pursued strong social responsibility goals at school through her behaviour and attitudes towards teachers and other students. Pursuit of social responsibility goals appeared to be related to the parental and cultural expectations she perceived. Even though Anita's school behaviour made it highly unlikely that she would receive any formal penalties, she still expressed a desire to avoid being in trouble, and as such was influenced by the experiences of her peers in the classroom and school context.

The data reveal the academic and social goals Anita pursued in the school and classroom contexts were influenced by a number of factors, most notably parental and cultural influences, perceptions of the school based behavioural control system, classroom contexts and teachers, and peer groups and peer relationships.

Teacher perceptions of Anita

During the interviews with Anita's core teacher she spoke of Anita on a number of occasions. Mrs Kelly described her as a high achiever and as an "absolute pleasure to have in the class". When she spoke in reference to Anita, it was often with regard to issues Anita herself had chosen to discuss, namely help seeking, group work, the school based reward system and competition.

In September Mrs Kelly discussed student help seeking and described Anita and Evalina as being "very aware of what it takes to be a learner, that they're not looking at me constantly and waiting for the next step". She specifically referred to Anita's help seeking behaviour.

"I would use that as an example of how to be a good learner. So I'll often say things like 'Anita's been up here three times to ask a question, does that mean that the rest of you have no questions at all?' and then all of a sudden you'll have five kids out here realising that it's okay to ask a question".

In October Mrs Kelly discussed students' "inherent motivation" and desire for self-improvement. She reported Anita and Evalina to have the "inherent motivation" that she perceived to be lacking in other class members. Mrs Kelly described how Anita frequently approached her for feedback by asking " 'am I on the right track, is this what I would be doing, I've done such and such, is that what you mean?' ".

In November Mrs Kelly discussed group work with reference to Anita. She described an instance where a student who normally achieves D grades receiving an A grade because she had been "dragged up by the group".

"I felt that to me is like why you put students in a group because you get them to make each other work hard. All you need is one student in that group who wants a good mark and they shove the rest of them along."

Mrs Kelly acknowledged that she understood Anita found group work difficult, but emphasised the value of the other skills she would learn.

"And it might be hard work for them, students like Anita and Evalina, sometimes it might be frustrating for them, but the skills that they're learning in dealing with peers, adults, who don't pull their weight is going to be invaluable for them later on in life. They have to learn to negotiate with people, they have to learn to come and be able to say to me, Mrs Kelly, my group is not working. And I say to them, your group has to work, so let's find out how it can work. Let's work out what the problems are and let's talk about it."

In December the teacher spoke of her personal dissatisfaction with the system of notes of concern and commendation. To this end she had put in place her own classroom based system of special award certificates to reward students for work habits and processes that had been ongoing. She reported one of the major disadvantages of the school system to be the pattern of following a note of concern with a note of commendation so "all those students who do the right thing

all the time like Anita, will have a blank diary at the end of the year, with nothing in it, but what that student will have had from me is dozens of certificates".

Interestingly, Anita (nor any other student) never mentioned the certificates during interviews, the researcher never observed their existence in the classroom, and the teacher spoke of the certificates at the last interview in December, when the students had finished their school year.

In an informal discussion Mrs Kelly also revealed her dissatisfaction about the awards night with particular regard to the awards Anita received and the process by which awards were allocated. Teachers had been asked to nominate students for outstanding academic performance and outstanding effort in each subject. She reported "Anita is an unbelievably dedicated student. She came in here as a C in some things, a B in others, but she has worked extremely hard all year. The only thing she managed to get best marks in was SOSE and she did, she was outstanding in it." She explained that unbeknown to her, Anita had also been nominated for the Science award. Mrs Kelly described Anita as also being "outstanding in every way for her effort" and so she nominated her for an outstanding effort award in every other subject. Consequently, she explained how she had been approached by her cluster leader and asked to change the nominations she had made in order to "share it around a bit" because Anita was already receiving two awards. Mrs Kelly reported feeling "quietly upset" about this as she felt her integrity was being questioned and in addition she felt that Anita deserved to receive awards for effort.

In December Mrs Kelly discussed competition in the classroom. She described herself as highly competitive and acknowledged that Anita was a highly competitive student. In addition, she explained that although she did not provide comparative information to the class as a whole, she had given such information to Anita on an individual basis "because I know how much she values that".

Reliability of data

During the year Anita had been prepared to talk quite openly about her beliefs and values, school experience and family life. Her behaviour indicated she

began to feel more comfortable talking to me as the year progressed and I perceived her to be genuine and insightful about her experiences. Even so, there are some issues that should be recognised when considering the reliability of the data Anita provided during interviews.

Anita acknowledged feeling strong desires to please her parents and to please the teacher. To this extent it is possible that she also wanted to please me and this may have influenced the types of comments she made and the events she chose to describe. In addition, it is possible she desired to present herself in a particular manner, so as to portray her plight in ways that may elicit sympathy and protect her own ego.

Anita revealed herself as being fairly guarded with her peers. Whilst she reported her feelings of not being understood by peers because of her culture, it is also possible that she helped create and maintain this situation through neglecting to share her cultural experiences with her peers for fear of total rejection. In the earlier part of the year Anita was reluctant to discuss some issues during interviews and it is possible that she initially maintained the same discretion with me. Notably, at the end of November she mentioned an incident that had occurred early in the year where she had been harassed because of her nationality. This incident had not been spoken of previously when she had been asked about harassment.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Anita had knowledge that I had previously been employed as a teacher at the school and had in fact taught her sister five years before. This knowledge may have initially influenced her responses during interviews and her desire to present herself positively. Anita also had knowledge that I was conducting the research as part of a Ph.D. and along with her beliefs about performance and achievement, and cultural respect for education, this knowledge may have contributed to her desire to please me through her comments.

When asked about how she felt about being part of the study and in particular participating in the interviews she responded "I'm happy because I don't have that many people to talk to". She did admit there had been times when

she had been anxious to return to class because “I just want to hand things in and make sure they get handed in, and sometimes we play games and I don’t want to miss out”.

Conclusion

Anita maintained a very strong orientation towards academic performance goals throughout the year in order to attain parental approval. She strived to academically outperform others and to receive teacher recognition and approval for her efforts. Anita felt a great responsibility toward her family to do well at school and reported this to be the main reason for her pursuit of academic performance goals.

Anita’s perceptions of her family context and the goals she adopted as a result of this influenced her perceptions of the school and peer contexts. She reported feeling that others were unable to understand her because of cultural differences and this may have increased her focus on academic performance as a way of attaining desired peer respect and teacher approval. In addition, Anita’s beliefs about ability and effort influenced her perceptions of her peers and perhaps widened the gap she perceived between her world and the world of other Australian students attending the school.

The lens through which Anita viewed the contexts she encountered was primarily dominated by her desire to please her parents. Anita’s contextual perceptions filtered through her self-perceptions resulted in particular patterns of motivational behaviour through which she felt she could meet teacher and therefore parental approval.

CHAPTER V

Case Two : Jeremy

Introduction

Over the course of the academic year between February and October, eight interviews were conducted with Jeremy. An end of year interview was not conducted as he left very suddenly to return to Indonesia due to family matters. As described in the methodology chapter, the interviews conducted were semi-structured and focused around themes relevant to Jeremy's school experience and current literature in this field.

The structure of this chapter has been generated from the conceptual framework for the study. Accordingly the chapter focuses around Jeremy's perceptions of family, school and peer contexts. Data regarding his perceptions of the school context, including the broader school environment, a specific classroom context and teachers, peer contexts and peer relationships are reported. Jeremy's contextual perceptions and how they influenced the nature of the academic and social goals he pursued during the year are also discussed. The chapter concludes by raising issues that may influence reliability of data and by reporting perceptions Mrs Kelly held of him. A summary of Jeremy's case can be found in Appendix D.

The data presented were gathered as a result of interviews with Jeremy, interviews with Mrs Kelly, a student information sheet and classroom observation. A supplement to the case studies describing the classroom context according to the Observing Patterns of Adaptive Learning (OPAL: Patrick, Ryan, Hicks, Anderman, Middleton, Linnenbrink, Hruda, Edelin, Kaplan & Midgley, 1997) categories of task, authority, autonomy, recognition, grouping, evaluation, time, social interactions and help seeking, can be found in Appendix C.

Family context and perceptions

Over the course of the year, Jeremy spoke of his family and in particular how family situations influenced his attitudes and feelings toward school. The following section reports the data regarding Jeremy's family he chose to reveal in interviews during the year.

Family background

Jeremy was born in Indonesia as were his parents. During the year of data collection, he lived with his grandparents and older sister in Perth to attend school, while his parents lived and worked in Indonesia. He described his parents' occupations as 'businessman' and 'businesswoman' and reported that he saw them intermittently throughout the year. At the end of the year Jeremy returned to Indonesia for the summer holidays, but at the shorter two week breaks in April, July and September, he remained in Australia.

In week two of the school year the students were asked to complete an information sheet providing general information about themselves and their family. Jeremy described himself as a "good" student and indicated that he would like to attend university and have a career as a "computer maker". He nominated his best subject as Materials Technology and his worst subject as Band.

In June Jeremy spoke of how he felt about coming to school in Australia.

"It's very good, I make some friends. But the first time I came to here like at Year 5 I don't know anything and I was doubting myself that I don't know English and things. But luckily I got in one of the English schools in Indonesia".

He explained that his grandparents did not speak English well and that "sometimes my grandma says that I'm her teacher".

Jeremy reported showing his schoolwork to his parents when he saw them and that they would usually say "you did very good Jeremy, try and do better next time". He perceived his parents to always encourage him to "do better" and that

he usually looked for ways to improve. He also explained that his grandparents valued hard work.

“My grandfather says even if you are smart you cannot be lazy, you have to be really hardworking and busy, but sometimes it’s hard because if I have nothing to do and I have read lots of books and everything and my grandfather say ‘what are you doing? You’re so lazy, you’re not doing anything’ and I say ‘I’ve finished my work already’ and he says ‘well, do something’.”

Jeremy explained it was important to not disappoint his parents.

“Because my mum really works day and night, works hard and my father also, I was trying not to make them, not letting them down because school fees is really high in comparing to our currency and I am keeping up with my studies and things. Last time I checked in the Australian the currency exchange I found like I think about 7,500 Rupee, quite a big amount in our currency for one dollar which is a really big thing. It’s really, really hard if I fail that one subject and my mum is really upset about it and she will begin to doubt, she will think that her work was in vain.”

In October Jeremy described himself as a student who wanted to learn “very much”. He voiced his belief that wanting to learn something and committing himself to it would mean he would eventually become good at that particular thing.

“When I want to learn and I’m not very good at things, for example, band, I’m not very good at the keyboards. But first I didn’t want to learn and then I just realised how very silly I am not to learn because my mum says ‘even if you’re really bad at things still you can make yourself very good at it’”.

He explained how important he felt learning was to his future.

“If I don’t learn it will reflect on the future and I want to learn because I want to have a good future. I sometimes feel that if other students don’t want to learn, they’re not thinking about the future of themselves, they’re just thinking about this present. But the next present which is the future will reflect on what they learn and it will, they might not have certain jobs and they might regret it. I want to not regret it and learn as much as I can in this present not the next present. In my theory we only have one chance at our lives so we best to make it as good as we can be learning”.

Jeremy appeared to have some strong beliefs that seemed to contribute to his pursuit of personal task mastery goals. Although he was unable to explain the origin of some of these beliefs, it seemed probable they may have been formed through Jeremy's own experiences and parental and cultural influences. In April Jeremy reported he believed everyone had the opportunity to do well.

"I believe people have hidden powers beneath them and they just have to express them and get them out of their bodies and minds and hearts and so if you read a lot of books, you don't have to read a lot of books, you just have to be good in something which is one of your talents, you improve them a lot and then you can be the best at that talent".

In September Jeremy spoke of his beliefs about goals and success.

"Some people just set up goals for themselves, I'm one of them and I think putting up goals for the term or for the year is very important because sometimes you don't know what you are actually doing this for and therefore you need to set up a goal. So when you say 'oh, this isn't worth it, what am I doing this for', you just go back to your goal, like remembering your goals are and then you'll see that it's worth it. Sometimes you get discriminated against, while going your way to success because people get jealous of you or just want to do that for fun because their life is boring ... if they tease you too much and discriminate you too much, then after that at the rate of your success you think 'oh this is not worth it' and things, but you need goals for that so you think it's worth it".

Jeremy commented that at times he felt others hindered him in his attempt to reach his goals and that when that happened "I just ignore them and still try". He referred to what he called his "inner strength" which he believed to be "really special to be successful because it's a good thing that pushes you on".

Summary of perceptions of family context

During the year Jeremy revealed how the perceptions he held of his family, and in particular his parents influenced the goals he pursued at school. His strong desire for parental approval and sense of responsibility to do well at school led him to place emphasis on learning and self-improvement. Although he experienced some difficulties with English and lived with his grandparents as

guardians, Jeremy maintained the belief that it was his responsibility to do as well as he could at school so he would have a good future and make his parents proud.

Perceptions of school context

Throughout the year Jeremy was able to describe aspects of his school experience and how particular situations influenced his feelings about school. He had attended the junior school adjoining this middle school and therefore the environment was somewhat familiar to him. This section discusses Jeremy's adjustment to the middle school environment and then focuses on contextual themes that emerged as being particularly relevant to him.

Perceptions of middle school context

Throughout the year data were collected regarding Jeremy's adjustment to the middle school environment, including factors such as adapting to the physical changes in school environment, perceptions of how well he was adjusting, how he coped with increased academic demands and his attitude towards school.

Jeremy had some expectations of middle school and reported thinking it would be "hard study and boring things but once I found my way around I found out better things about middle school". He also reported that middle school had not been as difficult as he had anticipated and that he remembered his Year 6 teacher saying "it would be more difficult than Year 6, that's all".

In February Jeremy reported to have found middle school "fun". He described "Swimming and Band and Materials Technology" as being fun, in particular Materials Technology because "we can be creative and stuff and use our imagination to make a gum nut collections or a pencil case or an M&Ms dispenser". Jeremy enjoyed reading and reported there were "a lot of good books in the library". The only difficulty he reported was "at the first week of school I was very confused about the rooms. I end up going to the wrong room". When asked what hopes he had for the year he stated "my mum hopes that I could get the scholarship certificate so I really hope that I could get it".

In March Jeremy described the most important thing to him at school as “my friends are really important to me because if I don’t have any friends then I don’t have anyone to associate with and like my associating skills will go down”. Although he still reported middle school to be fun, acknowledged he had encountered some difficulties with organisation. He gave a lengthy explanation as to how he went about organising himself for each day and how he was “trying to memorise the timetable so I won’t use it that much ... then you don’t have to carry it around”. He reported there being less homework than he expected and was able to also explain how he structured his homework with regard to assignments and his homework routine at home.

In April Jeremy described how he wished to work hard at school because he mostly found the learning interesting.

“Because sometimes we learn new stuff ... and there’s the Individual Reading Programme in Integrated Studies and sometimes I choose a book and then make a book review out of it. We just read that’s my favourite part and then we make key questions that describe the book and then there’s the book report. And my second favourite part is the free response like we can make a drama out of it or a story map out of it”.

Jeremy also described his interest in SOSE (Studies of Society and Environment). “We look up countries in our atlas which is very pleasing. I like to look at countries and find out what’s their agriculture and stuff”. He explained how he felt when learning.

“Very good really because, not just because you get good marks, you get this warm feeling that says I can do it, like if you go on the bungee, if you look at that like 200 metres down or something and you think I can’t do it, it’s so high and then after you jump and get back to the bridge you say I can do it ... sometimes you’re very scared about it but after you jump and then you do a bungee and stuff you say I can do it, I can do it all over again, it’s safe”.

Jeremy explained that this analogy related to his classroom experience as “if I have a test I am very scared because sometimes tests make me nervous and then I did the test and I get a good mark like 10/10 and I say to myself I can do it, I can do it all over again just that I have to study”.

Jeremy described wanting to do well at school so he could acquire a good job and improve his opportunities in the future, “because I think it’s what choices you make in your young stage is the choice that you make in your older stages, like if you refuse to do drawing and you become an architect you’re not going to be a very good architect because you hate drawing”. Jeremy continued to explain the importance of thinking of the future.

“It is important to do well because after you do something you can’t do it again, like if you eat a watermelon but you’re not supposed to and after you eat it your conscience says you eat the watermelon that’s for guests or something and you can’t get the watermelon back as it is because you can’t get back the past and so that’s why I’m doing my best right now so I don’t regret myself in the future”.

In May Jeremy commented that he felt that some aspects of the middle school curriculum were familiar to him from his Year 5 and Year 6 experience and explained, “I think they just want to revise us so we don’t forget about things, just to revise so we remember it for later days”. He admitted that sometimes when this happened he became bored in class.

“I try to listen to the teacher because I just kept on thinking to myself that I am going to need it for the later days ... but sometimes I just switch off and go wandering around in my mind ... but when the teacher says my name I just switch back”.

Jeremy spoke about how he prepared his schoolwork.

“The sort of things I aim for are the neatness and the goodness of the work, the goodness of the work means that I did it very well and that. I know when a piece of work is good if I got really satisfied by it ... I’ll just take a try and then it’s not very good but at least I did my best and I just say it’s still good so I’ll get there. I get satisfied when researching ... I get almost enough information so I can say oh, it’s a very good start for me and then I can use a bit of sense of foresight and then I say I think I’m going to pass on this assignment because I think I have enough information but it also depends on what you write about the information, how you answer the question.”

In May Jeremy also spoke of his goals for that term.

“The goals I have for this term is to I think really to get good marks and stuff. The goal from last term was to really know the school, know the

short cuts and me and my friends used to play exploring at recess and lunchtime and try to find shortcuts around the school and Cody found two shortcuts to the field and I think on Friday I found two more shortcuts because I don't have anything to do I just go around and I found a shortcut to the library and another to the teacher's rooms and when I climbed some stairs I found myself in front of Mr. Skane's room which was really scary and I went back down the stairs."

In June Jeremy reported his term was going "very good" and explained "because today when I was doing a reading test in Japanese, I got 10 out of 10 and the smartest person in the core class got 9 out of 10, I was really, really overjoyed because I beat him". When asked about peer competition he responded that he felt it was good "sometimes ... but only just for fun, not for thinking oh, well sometimes Cody says that now he is really angry because I was beating him in lots of things. If I were Cody I would just say to myself at least I'm having fun and at least I got good average marks".

In June Jeremy also described the most important thing to him at that time.

"I think friendship because like Mrs Kelly said in Health, when we talk about what makes a healthy person, one of my friends says that we need friends to help us talk, friends to talk to. And another one of my friends says why do we need friends, we could just talk to ourselves. And she says try to go one day without people giving you positive comments, like good morning or something else. That's what I say."

Jeremy was asked to describe the aspects of friendship he felt were important.

"I think it's loyalty ... for instance, if there is one person here and I was like standing between the trench. I think this person is really, really lonely and I'm his only friend but this person has lots of friends, he wants more friends. If I don't have loyalty I just go with them and join and have more friends but if I have big loyalty I will go here and comfort that friend. But sometimes I choose to remain neutral."

In July he reported "going very well" because "I think I got better marks than last semester". He acknowledged that he felt it important to have received better marks than he had previously "because that tells me that I'm improving in my studies".

Jeremy described motivation as an “aim to do something, like for example a goal”. He reported being motivated at school because “my goal is to get promoted to Year 8 and so on, but my best motivation for the year is to get graduated from Year 12 so I could go to a good university”. He described classroom role plays made him feel motivated because “it’s really fun and you get to act as a different person which I really like and when you get to act as a different person you can slot in the emotions or you can do whatever you think that character might do”. Jeremy acknowledged that having fun activities helped encourage students to be more motivated at school. He felt that being motivated made him more successful “because if you don’t have any motivation to do something well you cannot be successful”.

Jeremy also expressed his views about avoiding trouble through the quality of his schoolwork.

“When I get into trouble I really hate it because sometimes if I get in trouble I’ll get into more trouble because of that. For example, if I did bad school work and for example I got a Friday detention so I went home late and then after that my mum says why did you get home late and I said I got a detention and she says why did you get a detention and I get into more trouble ... I just want to avoid trouble without harming people and getting people into trouble”.

In September I observed a book entitled ‘Fighting the invisible tigers – a guide to teenage stress’ on Jeremy’s desk. When asked about this Jeremy explained that the book was for Cody who had suggested Jeremy read it so he could “give me some tips”. Jeremy explained that he had read most of the book before he became a bit bored. He described the book as “really useful, because sometimes I get quite stressed a lot. I don’t have any major problems in my head but sometimes I do”. He explained that the book was able to help him with “stresses mainly, because it’s a stress management guide”. Jeremy indicated that he was stressed by assignments. When asked if he was ever stressed by his peers he responded “no, I have what some people like to call an emotional barrier which is sometimes created by humour. I think my emotional barrier is actually my

imagination. Sometimes if people say bad things to me I just wander off in my imaginary world.”

In October Jeremy reported that over the two-week holiday break he had missed attending school. “I missed the studying and I also missed the library ... I like to play chess with my friends here and they have a lot of good books here”.

As already mentioned an end of year interview was not conducted with Jeremy because of his sudden departure from Australia. Interestingly, he did ask Jordan to relay a message to the class on his behalf. I was able to interview Jordan and according to him the message Jeremy wished him to give went as follows.

“I've seen many people in classes throughout my years but I've never seen the people like in this class because they have willingness and potential to learn. I like the people in this class, I've liked the friendships I've made. I've always liked Mrs Kelly's jokes. I have seen them like little advices. I forgive people who have done negative things throughout my years at this school’. And then he asked me to leave a final sort of speech. Like, ‘I have one last thing to say in my message. Fate plays a part in our lives, this is what many people believe but a strong person makes his own fate, he doesn't look into his fate. We all have to die some time but we can do anything between the time we die and now. And it's like that is all, thank you very much.”

I asked Jordan what he felt Jeremy wished to convey to the class in his message.

“Just stuff like he just wanted to be forgiving, thanking. He just wanted to leave a final message and give something for us to build on. I think they (the students) were in a way sort of like shocked but they also quite liked the message. Some people like Ryan was the sort of person that doubted it. Some people just sort of like didn't really believe it but others they actually understood, like especially people that were Jeremy's friends over the years. That's how they reacted more or less. And the people who got a special mention, mainly Anita and his friends and Mrs Kelly, they all quite liked the special mention actually.”

Perceptions of school based system of rewards and penalties

During the year Jeremy mentioned the reward structures operating in the school, in particular the system of notes of concern and notes of commendation, only once. Interestingly, Jeremy appeared to be quite unaffected by the system and did not question its relevance to his progress. Because a final interview was

not conducted with Jeremy I was unable to access his diary and speak specifically with him about the notes he had received.

In March Jeremy reported having “two notes of commendation and I got one note of concern. The note of concern was for, my friend, when he’s working with me I told him I don’t know the answer so I keep thinking and he laughs and so the teacher mistook me for him and got me a note of concern”. Jeremy emphasised the fact that he tried to avoid notes of concern because they would lead to more serious consequences for him at home. He spoke of the notes of commendation.

“The first is for, I’m always late at form at the first week and so at the second week I made a great effort not to be late to form all week ... and the second note of commendation I got it from swimming, everybody got a note of commendation at swimming because like they say that we are great swimmers, we did great swimming and the teacher said that I won but I didn’t realise it I just kept swimming ... sometimes when you’re swimming you don’t think about anything you just think about winning and stuff and so you just carry on”.

Summary of perceptions of middle school context

Jeremy reported positive perceptions of the middle school context. He enjoyed the subject selection it offered and seemed happy about his adjustment to the new environment. Jeremy aimed to receive high marks at school and spoke of the importance of avoiding penalties. Unlike other students Jeremy’s perceptions of middle school seemed to be less affected by his feelings about the behavioural control system operating at the school.

Perceptions of classroom context

During the course of the school year, Jeremy was able to share his perceptions about a specific classroom context, namely, that directed by her core teacher, Mrs Kelly. Within this classroom Mrs Kelly taught Jeremy’s class Mathematics, Integrated Studies (English and Studies of Society and Environment), Health, Computer Technology and Religious Education.

Perceptions of class goal structure

In September the 26 students participating in the study were asked to complete a twelve item survey using the 'Perceived Classroom Goal Structure' scales from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey (PALS; Midgley, Maehr, Hicks, Roeser, Urdan, Anderman & Kaplan, 1994, cited in Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin & Midgley, 2001, see Appendix B). The survey required students to rate a total of twelve items on a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Survey results indicated that Jeremy perceived Mrs Kelly's classroom to have a higher task mastery emphasis (4.83) than performance goal emphasis (3.0). To clarify his responses and to explore why he had responded in particular ways Jeremy was interviewed regarding his responses to survey items in October.

Jeremy explained why he responded to items generally indicative of a classroom task mastery goal emphasis. He agreed the teacher to believe making mistakes to be an important part of learning as "everybody makes mistakes, that's just how humans are built, not even everybody is perfect so long as we are learning then that's okay". Jeremy acknowledged this view supported his personal beliefs but also the beliefs he perceived Mrs Kelly to have "because she showed it to me and she says 'that's the wrong sentence, but that's okay, it's an easy fix, so long as you are learning, it's okay'. He believed the teacher to promote understanding of work.

"Because if you just memorise it, well it's just a waste because if you forget it and you don't even understand it what is the point of memorising it. Mrs Kelly says there's no point learning it if you don't want to learn and there's no point in memorising it if you don't understand it ... and she says 'if you want to learn it and you're really determined to learn it then you will be very good at it one day'".

In addition Jeremy believed Mrs Kelly wanted the students to enjoy learning.

"Mrs Kelly always makes us prepared to learn new things, like for example, in term three right before the holiday she says we need a protractor, a sharp pencil, a compass and a 30cm ruler and she says the protractor has to be plastic so you can see through it ... she prepares us and if you are not prepared for it you miss out and you're just going to sit there and not do anything else and it's really boring. Sometimes she gives

us learning that is very enjoyable, like the assignment on Odysseus, that's very good because we get to express our creativity and we get to work in a group".

He perceived her to recognise effort. "Mrs Kelly points out students who do well because she wants that person who does well to be an example, so that we can do well also". He also agreed she allowed students time to explore and understand new ideas because "if she gives a reflection sheet she says to other students try to expand on it and put your opinion on it. That's why I recognise that she wants us to understand and explore new ideas."

Jeremy agreed with the statement 'our teacher tells us that working hard is more important than anything else' and in his explanation demonstrated that he had been unable to separate his own views from those he perceived the teacher to emphasise. "I mostly agree with it. Sometimes the teacher tells us that really working hard is the most important thing but sometimes I don't agree with it because if you work hard and take care of your health then that could go to a major problem." When asked specifically whether he felt Mrs Kelly thought that working hard was more important than anything else, he responded "well not actually, I've just been getting the influence from my past teachers". Jeremy agreed that he felt working hard was important in the classroom "because it is also based in your reports, how well you do in the classroom, like your effort and your academic grade". He also reported his parents would support the importance of working hard because "most parents want their child and cousins to work very hard just to uprise the name of the family which is very good".

Jeremy explained why he had responded in particular ways to items intended to convey a performance classroom goal emphasis. He agreed that 'our teacher points out those students who get good grades as an example to all of us'.

"I strongly agree with that but sometimes if a student doesn't want to be pointed out, it's their choice so Mrs Kelly doesn't point them out. I got a very good marks for my journal entry and she asked me if I wanted to be pointed or not, and I said yes it's okay. And she pointed me and read my journal entry to the whole class and then there's Natalie, she got a very good mark for her biography and Mrs Kelly said do you want to be

pointed or not to the biography to be read and she says no, and the teacher still points her out but didn't read the biography."

Jeremy perceived it was good for teachers to acknowledge students in this way.

"Because it does affect the students' learning like for example, 'oh somebody got a really good mark, there is no reason why I should not get a good mark' so that it boosts them, like their morale. Mrs Kelly says that it's not the point whether you're good at Math's or other subjects, it's just a matter of whether you want to learn it or not".

Jeremy disagreed that Mrs Kelly made highest scores public in the classroom.

"It doesn't happen, because Mrs Kelly, she just says a person, she doesn't say a name, she just says here's somebody who writes, who gets a very high marks in a test because that person does this ... she doesn't name the person she just says somebody".

He disagreed that Mrs Kelly called on 'smart' students more than others because "she just calls us by the list by going up the list of names or by going down the list of names". He also strongly disagreed that only a few students do really well in Mrs Kelly's class' because "I would say that every student does well ... everybody does well in their point of view".

Perceptions of class groupings

For most of the year Jeremy worked in mixed ability groups within his core class. As part of their academic programme the students were required to work in cooperative learning groups for a number of activities. In March Jeremy was asked whether he preferred working on his own or working in groups.

"It depends on the work we have to do like if it's drawing a big poster I prefer working in groups but if its an investigation thing then I prefer working alone because sometimes we might have different ideas so that we just argue and stuff. If we have to draw a poster, it will take weeks to draw the poster and stuff, but if we have to pair up it will take less time".

In October Jeremy spoke of the new mathematics groups and explained that Mrs Kelly "is trying to sort out the beginner, intermediate and expert levels and I also think that in some groups they have a real mix up so I'm not sure".

Jeremy described himself as being part of the “expert group, which I am really surprised. There are lots of other smart people in there ... Jordan is in there and he’s the smartest person”. He described the work he was experiencing as challenging.

“Because I find it’s up to my level and sometimes goes past my level. If it goes past my level I sometimes say to myself, it’s okay, it’s just another Math’s thing and even if it goes past your level think of it as a book, because I like to read books a lot”.

Summary of perceptions of classroom context

Jeremy perceived Mrs Kelly’s class to have a stronger task mastery emphasis than performance goal emphasis, but his explanation about why he held such perceptions appeared to be strongly linked to his own beliefs about school and learning. Jeremy perceived Mrs Kelly to value learning and understanding, recognition of effort and working hard. Jeremy appeared to work happily within this classroom environment.

Perceptions of teachers

Throughout the year Jeremy held fairly positive perceptions of teachers. At the beginning of the year he described teachers as “very kind and considerable and they’re reliable also ... like when you have a problem you just ask the teachers and they will give a perfect solution for you”. Apart from this initial comment Jeremy seemed reluctant to discuss teachers.

In April Jeremy was asked whether he preferred teachers to recognise his achievements publicly or privately.

“I prefer neither really because I don’t want to brag about it because everybody will get good marks not just me, it just depends if they study even I don’t get good marks always, so I can’t brag about it ... sometimes if you brag about something like I got an A or something and then you got a D and then somebody got an A and then they brag about it to you all day so that’s why I don’t want to brag about it. I don’t care whether teachers say anything, I just be praising myself because in my heart I just be saying ‘good on you Jeremy’”.

Jeremy perceived that how much he learnt in a subject was not teacher dependent.

“If the teacher explains it really well but you don’t want to listen to the teacher, it’s the student’s fault, not the teacher’s. It’s like a poem we did in Year 5 called “I can” and when I’m feeling really low and thinking I can’t do this, someone is better than me, someone is really smarter than me, I can’t do anything, then I just say to myself remember the poem and I start going forward and stop doubting that my abilities aren’t good enough”.

In May Jeremy described how he would supplement his classroom learning by researching on his own in the library to find out more about interesting subjects.

Jeremy did not seem to have a strong relationship with Mrs Kelly. In October he spoke of his reluctance to seek help from her because he was “terrified” of her. When asked about this he responded “I’m petrified ... because I just have an experience of seeing people being shouted at ... I’m trying to avoid this at all costs”. Jeremy did not report having had strong associations with any of his teachers and indicated that he was not concerned about what teachers thought of him, or whether they praised and encouraged him.

Perceived teacher support

In May Jeremy stated that he felt Mrs Kelly cared about her class.

“I think she’s trying to make as learn as much as we could and she’s trying to help us link our study to another study. On Friday we were revising for the test and one of my friends said the seven continents there are four starting with A and one of my friends says can’t we just two to the power of four’ and Mrs Kelly says ‘oh, that’s very good of you because you’re linking geography to Math’s’”.

He added that Mrs Kelly also related classroom learning to real life experiences “because when she was saying about the Magna Carta she’s trying to reflect the Magna Carta on our real laws today”. Jeremy also felt that Mrs Kelly was caring because “she’s trying to help us make our English more better and things”.

In July Jeremy mentioned he looked to his guardians and parents rather than teachers for encouragement.

"I never really want to socialise with teachers because they are not exactly your relatives or someone you know, they're just teachers. You might know them and you might know them by blood if they are one of your relatives, but in my case Mrs Kelly or every other teacher in this school I don't know them by blood or by relatives, I just know them by word."

He also commented that he felt teachers were caring individuals by virtue of the occupations they had chosen. "They really want to teach everybody. They really want to teach everybody the same and they really want everybody to proceed the same steps as other students." He did also acknowledge that if he had a problem he would not necessarily speak with Mrs Kelly about it because "I don't know what her feelings are towards me so it would be hard to do".

Help seeking from teachers

In October Jeremy spoke about help seeking from teachers.

"At first I don't actually ask for help from Mrs Kelly because I got other experiences from other teachers that says like okay, before you ask the teacher, ask your whole group first, the people around you and then after that if they don't know, ask me. And so sometimes I will get terrified to ask her and then I ask the people around me first and Joseph or Corey will get it right so I don't need to question the teacher."

Jeremy also acknowledged that it helped to ask his peers for help.

"Because most people around here knows English very good and sometimes I don't, so I ask them to give me a further explanation with a word that isn't in the question, and sometimes from that word I can easily get the answer. If people ask for help then Mrs Kelly doesn't actually say go back to your seat and ask the people around you but she says, she just gives you further information to help you answer it".

He commented that he had not asked many questions of the teacher during the year.

"Sometimes I do, but I try to ask as least questions as possible, because sometimes I usually repeat what people say because I'm not very good at putting it in my own form ... not actually repeat by purpose, but because I listened and I really want to expand on the idea ... I think I might have been sending false messages ... because I'm using complicating words."

Jeremy acknowledged that sometimes he had been aware of using words incorrectly “and it was really embarrassing ... some of the teachers doesn’t even know what I’m talking about”. He explained that he was more anxious about using incorrect words when talking to teachers than he was when speaking with other students primarily because teachers were older.

Summary of perceptions of teacher(s)

Jeremy appeared to hold fairly positive perceptions of teachers, the types of individuals they must be by virtue of their chosen occupations, and the learning contexts they provided. Interestingly, there appeared to be a personal / emotional dimension of teacher perceptions that Jeremy reported in less positive terms. He expressed views about not wanting to have relationships with teachers on a personal level and reported being unconcerned about how teachers perceived him. Furthermore, he was reluctant to seek help from Mrs Kelly for fear of embarrassment and described being “petrified” of her because he had seen other students shouted at. These perceptions of the emotional dimension of the teacher seemed to have a significant impact on the Jeremy’s classroom behaviour.

Perceptions of peer context

Over the course of the year Jeremy spoke about his relationships with his peers, particularly his friendship group. In March Jeremy described three boys in his class as his good friends. These boys had been his friends in Year 6 and one was also Indonesian. In February and June Jeremy indicated that having strong friendships at school was important to him.

Perceptions of peer relationships

In July Jeremy spoke of how it was important for him to do well at school so that he could feel close to his group of friends. He explained “my group of friends is really all very smart and I don’t want to be left out just because I don’t have the requirements of being in their group”. He commented that one of the requirements of the group was to ask few questions and explained “if you ask but

never give they will just hate you and things. I don't want to do that, I want to make the asking as less as possible, because I just don't want to feel left out really". Jeremy explained that it was important to him to do well in his schoolwork to feel important in front of his school friends.

"Well, lots of students in my class sometimes make fun of me when I get low marks and that really upsets me. So that makes me ... now I really want to get good marks so that I can't be teased anymore. I don't know what's the motive of people teasing. I don't know it that's the spirit of jealousy. I don't know if they have other motives for teasing me or maybe it was discrimination, I don't really know".

I asked Jeremy what he meant by discrimination and he stated "like in a group of friends, they always left out the overseas people, that's discrimination" and acknowledged that although this had happened to him "I don't really care I just ignore them if they do that to me". In situations of this nature, Jeremy stated that he looked to his guardians and parents for encouragement. "I just tell them what happened and then they always give me encouragement".

As the year progressed Jeremy established a friendship with Jordan who was new to the school that year. In June he spoke in detail about the value of loyalty and trust in friendships and explained how he supported Jordan when he was being teased by other students. "When Jordan was being teased by other people I just stand up to them and say 'don't tease him' and then I ask him 'let's go away and just ignore them'". He also explained how he supported Cody by commenting "when Cody thinks he is just really dumb or Jordan is smarter than me, and thinks that I can't do this, I can't do that and I'll say to him think that you can do anything, remember our poem 'I can'".

In September Jeremy reported that he was happy with the friendships he had made.

"I can't ask for more friends and I can't ask for less friends, because if I ask for more friends sometimes more friends you have to stick with them. Like if one of my friends hit one of my friends I have to choose between them. Sooner or later I have to choose between them and sometimes I have to remain neutral. But I can't have lesser friends because if I have no friends, I'll just be isolated. It's really important to have friends because then you can discuss with them and then you can talk to them about what's

your experience at the weekends and things. You can share the experience. And sometimes when you are troubled with homework you can phone them up and ask them how does this work and things.”

He also explained whether he felt it was important for students to be socially successful at school.

“Well sometimes no, because sometimes I feel like it’s my destiny to be alone. People say that I have a very good imagination and so I use that just for an imaginary friend for myself ... sometimes it’s just like when I get along with my group of friends, some of my friends quarrel with the others and I don’t actually want to go into their business or quarrels, but sometimes I am forced to because over time I hang around and they still quarrel and quarrel until I can’t stand it anymore ... sometimes I think that everyone’s quarreling whenever they’re around me and when I go away they just stop quarreling ... the quarrel is not my business, I just feel that sometimes I am the centre of gravity.”

During classroom observation Jeremy appeared to be less tolerated by his classmates as the year progressed. In May he was observed being particularly argumentative with Brett during a group activity. He seemed quite adamant that he had the correct answer and tried a variety of tactics, including belittling Brett’s intelligence, to try to convince Brett he was incorrect. In addition, his tone indicated that he felt he had superior knowledge compared to other students in his group. Apart from this instance Jeremy was mostly observed working with members of his friendship group during class.

To gain insight into how Jeremy presented himself to his classmates, in September he was asked how he thought his classmates might describe him. He responded “Unpopular ... because I am unpopular at school because they think that popularity rates are as how many friends you have”. He continued by indicating that he did not have a large circle of friends and that he preferred to be friends with a small select group of students.

As the year progressed Jeremy reported more instances of competing with his peers at an academic level. He spoke specifically about “beating” a friend during a Japanese test, and also referred to instances where Cody had become irritated because of Jeremy’s perceived success.

In September Jeremy described popular students as “a bit of a show off, like ‘I’m so popular, you’re not, ha ha’. That’s what happens to me and I’m not that popular and I’m not trying to be popular”. Jeremy expressed his view that popular students could not be academically successful because “sometimes if you are academically successful you just create jealousy of people and so they start to make you unpopular ... if I had to sacrifice my studies to become popular I’d say no to popularity”.

Help seeking and giving in the peer context

In July Jeremy spoke of how he felt it important to help others with their school work “because I’m not the only one that needs help. Other people that doesn’t understand needs help also so as I go on along I will help people on my way”. Although he indicated he was willing to help others, he acknowledged that he did not want to ask his friends for help as they may perceive him be less intelligent and he did not wish to feel left out.

Summary of perceptions of peer context

Jeremy perceived establishing supportive friendships to be an important part of school life. To this extent he endeavoured to maintain supportive relationships with his friends and to relate well to other students. He expressed concern about being excluded from friendship groups because of low academic grades and this may have contributed to his increasing desire for academic performance.

As the year progressed Jeremy appeared to struggle socially and at times appeared isolated from his classmates and his immediate peers. This situation may have contributed to his increasing pursuit of academic performance approach goals and social status goals within the peer group. As the nature of his comments would indicate, Jeremy had some understandings that his peers may not have shared and this may have served to isolate him further. In addition, Jeremy’s difficulties with English may have provided a barrier to his social acceptance and his feeling that it was his “destiny to be alone”.

Contextual perceptions and personal goal pursuit

Over the course of the year Jeremy revealed the nature of the academic and social goals he pursued and in his explanations indicated how particular contextual perceptions influenced his goal pursuit. Specifically Jeremy pursued task mastery and increasingly performance approach academic goals and social responsibility and relationship goals.

Jeremy genuinely appeared to pursue academic task mastery goals with relation to his attitude towards and reasons for engaging in schoolwork. This goal orientation appeared to be reinforced through the classroom context, his perceptions of classroom, school and peer contexts gradually lead Jeremy to also pursue performance approach goals. He began reporting desires to attain higher marks than others and to compete academically. Some school practices seemed to also promote such an emphasis. Jeremy also expressed concern about how peers may perceive his academic ability and to this extent began to engage in avoidance strategies in order to protect his sense of self-worth.

Jeremy demonstrated social responsibility and this goal was reinforced through his perceptions of family and school and classroom contexts. His pursuit of relationship goals also emerged from what he perceived to be the importance of having stable and supportive friendships at school and the fluctuations he experienced with his peer relationships during the year.

Teacher perceptions of Jeremy

During the year Jeremy's core teacher made comments about him in both informal discussions with the researcher and in audiotaped interviews.

In March Mrs Kelly described Jeremy as "a very clever little boy, but quite unusual, he often gets sidetracked by other issues". She added that she felt he often needed to be "kept" with regard to his written work but also that "he surprises me sometimes with what he gets out of it" (his work).

At the end of November Mrs Kelly described how Jeremy had left the school quite suddenly and that Jordan had approached her to "ask me if he could

Speak on behalf of Jeremy, because Jeremy had to go back suddenly to Indonesia and he was quite troubled that he hadn't been able to speak to the class before he left". According to Mrs Kelly Jeremy had known he was returning to Indonesia before school was finished.

"But apparently it was more sudden than he expected. I mean he would have told me days before he left. I had heard through the grapevine that the Indonesian kids were leaving early. I said to the kids in the class, if anyone is leaving early could you please let me know because I need to make sure all your assessments are done. Then I got a note maybe a day or so before he left to say that there was an urgent reason why he had to go back to Indonesia to do with the family. But I'm not 100% convinced that it's anything other than they like to get the kids back a little early. Once they feel the school year is over they feel they can depart".

She continued to explain that Jeremy had telephoned Jordan from Indonesia and asked him to relay a message to the class on his behalf.

"Jordan came out the front and he said that Jeremy phoned from Indonesia and he would like me to say these words on his behalf. He would like to thank all the students for their contribution to his education this year. And in particular he would like to say how much he has thoroughly enjoyed being in Mrs Kelly's class, he really, really loved her jokes. And all the kids were going oh, oh yeah. And he would like to say that he's terribly sorry to those people who he may have harmed in some way this year and he would like to say that he forgives anyone who may have harmed him. And he would like to say in conclusion, this is Jordan, in conclusion he would like to say that people follow their fate but in fact you can control your own fate. You are in control of your own fate if you take charge. You can take your life where you want to take it. You don't need to let other people decide what your fate is ... that wasn't all he said, there was just so much, it was amazing the way he came out and said it in front of the other kids. It was brilliant".

Mrs Kelly described the students' response to this speech as "quite amazing to tell you the truth ... they really took it seriously" and indicated that other students then wished to give speeches to the class.

Reliability of data

Throughout the year Jeremy seemed to speak honestly about his school experience and his personal life. In particular he was quite willing to discuss his beliefs about particular concepts such as learning, friendship and success. I felt that Jeremy was willing to participate as well as he could in the study, even though at times it became apparent that his English language skills made it difficult for him to fully understand what was being asked of him. Despite this, of the five Indonesian students in his class, Jeremy had the strongest grasp of English language, so it is possible that the difficulties that existed for him may also have existed for other international students.

Conclusion

Jeremy possessed many traits that made him typical of a small group of Indonesian students in his class. He lived away from home for most of the year with guardians (his grandparents) and he experienced some difficulty adapting to school due to some difficulties with English language. He portrayed himself as being fairly independent in terms of his work habits and the way in which he handled relationships in and out of the school environment.

Throughout the series of eight interviews particular themes relevant to Jeremy's experience emerged and through these the types of goals he chose to pursue can be identified. Jeremy believed in the importance of learning and working hard at school so as to prepare him adequately for a good future. In addition Jeremy felt a strong sense of responsibility towards his parents who he reported as working very hard so he could attend school in Australia. It was important to him to see that they became proud of him. Jeremy wished to maintain good friendships at school and saw value in having a few good friends. As the year progressed he became more competitive with his friends in the learning environment and indicated that he wished them to respect him intellectually.

Over the year Jeremy began to internalise some of the goals promoted by

the school context in which he participated. He began to talk more of the importance of performing well academically at school and began to indicate how he tried to avoid being in trouble.

Jeremy was quite forthcoming as an interviewee. He was able to share his beliefs and experiences and gave the impression of speaking honestly and explaining himself as best he could. As Jeremy was able to typify other Indonesian students in some respects I felt he made a suitable candidate for case study analysis.

CHAPTER VI

Case Three : Stephanie

Introduction

Over the course of the academic year between February and December, nine interviews were conducted with Stephanie. As described in the methodology chapter, the interviews conducted were semi-structured and focused around themes relevant to Stephanie's school experience and current literature in this field.

The structure of this chapter has been generated from the conceptual framework for the study. Accordingly, the chapter follows the format of previous chapters and describes Stephanie's perceptions of her family, school and classroom, and peer context throughout an academic year. Within each section data are reported chronologically so as to illustrate how Stephanie's perceptions change over the year. The nature of the relationship between Stephanie's contextual perceptions and her personal goal pursuit is also explored. The chapter concludes by reporting perceptions Stephanie's core teacher held of her and by raising issues that may influence reliability of data. A summary of Stephanie's case can be found in Appendix D.

The data presented were gathered as a result of interviews with Stephanie, interviews with Stephanie's core teacher, a student information sheet, classroom observation and information obtained from Stephanie's student diary. A supplement to the case studies describing the classroom context according to the Observing Patterns of Adaptive Learning (OPAL: Patrick, Ryan, Hicks, Anderman, Middleton, Linnenbrink, Hruda, Edelin, Kaplan & Midgley, 1997) categories of task, authority, autonomy, recognition, grouping, evaluation, time, social interactions and help seeking, can be found in Appendix C.

Family context and perceptions

Over the course of the year, Stephanie spoke often of her family and in particular how family situations influenced her attitudes and feelings about her school work and peer relationships over the year. At the beginning of the year on her information sheet, she described herself as a “fair” student and stated that she would like to attend university and become a writer. She nominated her best subject as Fashion and Design and her worst subject as Mathematics.

Family background

Stephanie was born in Australia, as were her mother and father. During the year data were collected Stephanie lived with her mother, stepfather and a younger sister. Stephanie’s father worked as an engineer’s tradesman and her mother was a homemaker. Stephanie initially spoke little of her family, but in July she described her family circumstances in detail. She reported that her biological father was Aboriginal.

“They lived together for a while, they had me but then they broke up so my mum lived in the house they had for a while when my dad moved out and then my mum found this guy called David and she really loved him and so they got married. They moved into a new house and they had a child but he died of SIDS you know, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, and that was quite big, so they didn’t have any other children for quite some time. Now I’ve got a little sister, she’s about three quarters of my height and she’s five, she’s really tall”.

Stephanie reported that her mother had remarried when Stephanie was six and that she had a supportive relationship with her stepfather, referring to him as “dad”. She vividly recalled the death of her younger brother when she was seven and how “my auntie had to stay over at my house because my mum couldn’t stand seeing any children whatsoever because she was just so broken up about it, so my auntie used to stay and look after me”. She reported her aunt to have stayed with the family for about a year.

“Then after that when I was nine, she got married and then everything changed. My nana, my real close nana, she just lives down our street, she’s started to look after my sister at first, then she started looking after my cousins. And now my closest nana she doesn’t get any time to spend

with me any more. I feel sad, it's a bit unfair. I ride my bike down to her house and I try to get in when there's no other children around. I go there a lot. My granddad drops me off and picks me up from school because my mum's got a disease called MS (Multiple Sclerosis) and so my granddad helps out a bit and so does my nana. She does all the ironing because my mum's fingers aren't very good and she'll touch the iron while she's ironing and then she'll burn herself, so lots of people help us ... there's one thing I don't like and that's when people say 'how's your mum' every time they see me. Well they're talking to me, they're supposed to ask how I am, they can ask her how she is. And when they're helping her trying to get down the steps I go 'she's not dis...' and then I stop because she is disabled but she doesn't seem disabled to me because she always does the same stuff a mum does".

Stephanie explained no longer having contact with her biological father. "I stopped seeing him when I was seven. His new wife isn't very nice ... I always get the blame for things. I'm not sad I don't see him because I don't really know him, so I don't need to see him".

In July she reported having disputes with her parents regarding her schoolwork. "I had a really, really big fight with my parents with how they felt about my overall work. I got really, really worked up about it because my mum thought my work was just satisfactory, they were just satisfied with it." The report form required parents to sign and give any comments about the report if they wished. Stephanie described how her mother had written "this isn't Stephanie's standard, she can get higher, her potential is higher".

"I cried practically for half an hour and then my mum finally came in and said 'oh, the only reason we wrote that was because if you had worked that first semester harder you'd have the As. If you work another term you'll get the As.' But I know she was just saying that to settle me down because I couldn't stop crying. She brought me tissues and a drink of water but she was just saying that. She just wanted me to get to sleep ... My mum doesn't think I'm good enough, my mum thinks I'm terrible at everything. This is my potential, this is a good report, I work hard, this is as high as I can get."

Since this incident Stephanie perceived her mother to have softened a little and commented "I think she thinks that it's terrible, she just doesn't want me to break out in tears again". Stephanie described how she was trying to please her mother.

“I’m trying to show her that I planned all my homework out in my diary and I’ve coloured in the squares and I’m going to do my science assignment and that proves that I am working harder, and trying to get those marks ... I do do everything that I can to get better but she just doesn’t notice”.

These comments illustrate Stephanie’s desire for parental approval and her belief that she was unable to meet the perceived high expectations of her mother at that time.

In July Stephanie commented feeling less anxious about her parents’ perceptions of her academic achievement.

“Because I know whatever I get they’ll be happy with what I got. They can’t change what I’ve done and they’ll still think of me well. I don’t usually tell anybody about it or my marks. I have to try and convince Mum that I am doing well in my school work, but I don’t have to show her any proof that I’ve done school work, but I just try and convince her ... but I do, it’s not convincing it is the truth that I do do my school work and I am average at it ... she’s just not happy with that ... she’s not happy with average, she wants the best”.

Stephanie acknowledged her increased desire to receive good marks “since my mum was angry at me ... so I’ve started working hard so I can get the good marks that my mum wants to see. But I’m not sure whether she’ll see them or not, I can’t predict”. She acknowledged the influence trying to please her mother had on her school performance and described how she was “motivated to please people at home. Mainly my mum because she cares most about my work”.

Stephanie explained that her parents often compared her with one of her school friends who received all As for her midyear report. “My family always, I don’t like this at all, they compare me to her all the time. I say ‘stop comparing, you’re supposed to be parents, parents aren’t allowed to compare with other students’, but they still do”. In October Stephanie reinforced her desire to please her parents through her academic efforts when she spoke of her hopes of receiving an award at the end of the year. “We have this award where if you get As in all of your subjects, well most of them, you get this certificate thing ... that’s my goal at the moment to get that award but I’m not doing too good but I’ll

keep trying". At the end of the year Stephanie described her biggest disappointment as "not getting a letter from the teacher for an award ... I really really wanted one so I could have them in frames all around my room, like five of them all in a line, that's my biggest disappointment ... it was just my highest goal".

In November Stephanie spoke with disappointment of the change in relationship that had occurred between her and her grandparents. This had become accentuated by the fact that Stephanie's aunt was due to have another baby and her other children spent time with Stephanie's nana.

"I don't really enjoy being around the kids because they're a little bit bratty, they tend to get in your way and I don't like them very much. So I decided that I wouldn't go over to my nana's house anymore because my auntie brings her children over all the time. So now I stay at home by myself while my dad is at work ... that's really changed what happens to me a lot. Like I have to have really quick dinners, like heat up a can of soup or something or have left-overs from last night because I can't make big meals by myself because there's no point ... My mum and my sister go over to my nana's on Tuesdays. I have to go to my nana's on Wednesdays because my mum and dad like to be alone ... Thursdays I go over to my auntie's where I don't like going either and on Fridays everyone goes over to my nana's for dinner".

Stephanie gave details about how the relationship with her grandparents had changed.

"We used to be really close, like I used to sleep over there every weekend and we used to do stuff together but my nana is quitting work because she's quite old. She's going to start looking after my cousins all the time and I won't get any time with them. I just find that really disappointing".

Stephanie also spoke of changes that occurred with relation to the types of activities she involved herself in at home. In March when asked how her weekend was, she responded "oh, I had to pack away all my old toys because I decided to give up playing. I don't like it, I just think that now I'm getting older I shouldn't, 'cause there's a lot more things that I need to get done". Stephanie described how she had felt sad about packing away her collection of little dogs.

"I didn't want to turn away from them ... but I've sort of gone back to something that I used to do ages ago, I play with Barbies with my sister.

But it's better now because like they have more complex conversations and like more stuff happens. Like people die of cancer and then a car crash happens. We just get our Barbies out and we just start, we don't make it up before we go into it, we make it up as we go, we don't even talk about it, we are out of the game and make the Barbies just go as if they have a life of their own."

Personal goals

During the year Stephanie often spoke of the goals she had and how she was trying to reach particular goals. In June she spoke of a difference she perceived in school (academic) related goals and what she referred to as her "personal goals". When asked what goals Stephanie had at the beginning of the year she responded "I didn't have any". She went on to explain that in previous years teachers had asked students to write down their goals.

"Our Year 6 teacher made us write down our goals on soccer balls and then she had a goal ring and she pinned it up and then another teacher made us do footballs and all different things that make you score goals and stars and stuff like that ... I have my goals inside my head but the ones that we write down, I just try to think of anything so I can get the work done and it's not really my goals ... my goals are kept inside me ... I don't like to share my goals".

Despite this Stephanie consented to share her goals during our interviews "because I know only the tape recorder will know it and you".

"They're mostly about my family, like I try and be nice to everybody and some days I wake up and say 'I'm going to be nice to everybody today' but then slowly at the end of the day it gets worse and worse but then I start it afresh the next day. I get frustrated with my sister a lot because she can be really really annoying"

Stephanie went on to describe goals she pursued with regard to her pleasing her peers and her personal appearance particularly her hair.

"I used to just do my hair any way like tie it back, but then one day I came to school with pig tails but I sort of had them twisted up and then just a bit hanging out and everybody said 'that looks really bad' and so I decided to start doing my hair a bit better. I've come up with lots of different things and now everybody expects me to come to school with something different and so I like to have a goal that I do my hair, but it takes me about thirty minutes every morning to do my hair, and that's bad. But it's

my goal to have my hair done differently every day ... because my group expects me to do that, it's just something that was brought about ages ago and ... it's kind of a tradition".

She spoke of these personal goals as being very distinct from school related goals.

"Everybody knows about it (school goals) because I talk about it a lot like 'I'm going to try to be very quiet today and I'm not going to talk about rubbish' and then everybody knows about it and they try not to talk to me. Everybody knows that I do that and so it's completely separate from my personal goals."

When speaking of what motivated her at school, Stephanie acknowledged the influence of her family, in particular her mother and Mrs Kelly.

"I'm not motivated by myself because I don't really feel as if I don't need these marks yet, but I do know that I will need the marks when I'm older, but my brain just doesn't think that yet ... it will soon, but not yet. It's too crazy at the moment ... it's more interested in parties and movies and hair and sort of twelve year old stuff, like fun stuff instead of work stuff, mark stuff, hard stuff, school stuff."

Summary of perceptions of family context

Stephanie's perception of her family situation influenced the nature of the goals she chose to pursue in her first year of middle school. She strongly expressed the desire for her mother's approval and seemed to perceive that she was unable to reach her mother's high expectations. To this end she made attempts to show her mother that she was endeavouring to do her best. Her desire for maternal approval was perhaps also enhanced by her perceptions about her mother's illness and the increasing distance she perceived in her relationship with her grandparents.

Perceptions of school context

Throughout the year Stephanie was able to describe aspects of her school experience and how particular situations influenced her feelings about school. She had attended the junior school adjoining this middle school and therefore the environment was somewhat familiar to her. This section discusses Stephanie's perceptions of the school context, classroom context and teachers and focuses on

contextual themes that emerged as being particularly relevant to her motivational behaviour.

Perceptions of the middle school context

Throughout the year data were collected regarding Stephanie's perceptions of the middle school context and adjustment to the middle school environment. Despite the fact that the school structure had been changed in 1998 Stephanie still referred to junior school as 'primary school' and to middle school as 'high school'.

Stephanie had few expectations of middle school. She had expected it to be "bigger" and knew that she would use a locker and move to different classrooms for different subjects. Her Year 6 teacher had apparently told students they would be required to "stand up to greet the teachers" and to "keep your diary good". In September Stephanie discussed how she felt about leaving junior school. Her memories of this had been prompted by the orientation of junior school students to middle school through a 'buddy' system with her class.

"First of all it brought back memories of me being terrified, and then it brought back the memories of my old teacher. She was a great teacher. And the graduation, that was a disaster for me because they had a laptop and they showed all these photos of us, like really funny ones, and it just made me cry so much ... because you're leaving primary school and I've been there since pre-primary and it's a big step".

Stephanie perceived herself to adjust fairly well to the middle school environment and enjoyed being with her friends, but there were several areas in which she experienced difficulties. In February she reported having difficulty with organisation. "I'm finding it difficult to get myself organised. With art I've had two lessons and I've forgotten my book, so I've got two notes of concern." In March she reported difficulties with her locker because "we've got a really squashy area. We have to make a lot of noise to get through and if you forget things in your locker and you say 'I need to get it out of my locker', the teachers don't let you get it out of your locker, so if you leave it there you haven't got it".

She also described how she had taken steps to become more organised and this including rewriting her timetable.

Stephanie reported wanting to do well in Integrated Studies because she was interested in what she was learning. She explained “well, I like English and we’re learning lots of really interesting stuff about slavery and stuff like that. We had to do an essay about how we would feel if we were slaves and that was really interesting.” Stephanie indicated she felt she was more interested in the learning she was engaged in at middle school.

“Because they teach in a different way, like last year we were just fed facts, but this year we’re given facts and then we’re asked to do something with them ... We’ve been given a facts sheet and then we’re asked to pick out the information and then write a paragraph about it, that was the slavery essay, but last year we were just given the information and then we had a really big test at the end so we sort of had to memorise them”.

In May Stephanie perceived that she had adapted “pretty well” to middle school because “I’ve still got my friends, I keep my locker clean, I’m doing well, I got a pretty good report”. In June Stephanie reported her term to be progressing “pretty good”.

“I’ve turned around a lot because I had an interview with Mrs Kelly because I was going pretty bad in my work like mucking around and getting bad marks, and so she talked about ideas of what I should do and I’ve been starting to get As again and I’ve turned over a new leaf”.

In July Stephanie described how she liked attending the school because “I’ve been at this school since pre-primary and it just feels like a part of me, I’ve just known it for my whole life and it just seems like I don’t want to leave”. She reported many of her friends to be attending another school the following year and she would be unable to follow them because of financial constraints. “My dad has recently been made redundant and he lost the job. So he’s looking around for one and the redundancy pay is running low so it might be that I have to go to a new school but I want to stay here”. She explained that if she were to attend a new school “it’s not that bad because when you meet new people you can cover up a bit more, you don’t have to tell everything about you, and you can also lie about

some certain things". Should this happen she indicated she would probably "cover up" some aspects of her family situation.

In November Stephanie talked about how the physical environment at the middle school had influenced the activities she was able to engage in during break times. She reported "I think we should have been down there (at the junior school) a bit more because we used to run around and play basketball and stuff, but now all we do is walk around and around and around and talk and it's really really boring". Stephanie described how she and her friends had developed an activity of preparing a 'mini mass' in the school chapel to keep them occupied during lunch times.

In November Stephanie reflected on how her attitude towards coming to school had changed during the year.

"Well I used to dread coming to school in the morning because I used to tell my granddad, because he brings me to school, I used to go, 'oh, I don't want to go to school, I'm scared I'm going to get a note of concern' and I'd come in and then nothing seemed to come out my way. It just dragged on. But now I don't really think about it, I just go to school and whatever happens, happens. I haven't got very many notes of concern and I don't get in trouble as much and teachers, they don't seem to be as angry with me, that's why I'm not scared any more".

Perceptions of school based system of rewards and penalties

During the year Stephanie often spoke of her negative feelings about the reward structures operating in the school, in particular the system of notes of concern and notes of commendation and how it made her feel about her school experience. In March she reported that she already had three notes of concern "two for homework, one for behaviour ... I got two for art for forgetting my big book we do everything in and one in Integrated Studies for just mucking around".

In May Stephanie reported the perception that notes of concern had a negative influence on student learning. She reported "some people don't learn very well in Mrs Kelly's class because she gets angry a bit. She gives out notes of concern easily". She explained how she had "gotten in trouble a bit" with Mrs Kelly and that it was "scary, I don't like being told off ... I get scared and almost terrified of the teacher who is telling me off".

"I suppose teachers give notes so you learn not to do that again, but sometimes they just go a little bit overboard ... like if somebody just starts talking just a little bit, then they get a note of concern just for that. And if they forget their homework they get another note of concern. If they've got their shirt tucked out then they get another note of concern, and then if they don't get those notes of concern signed by their parent they get another note of concern for not getting all those signed ... it doesn't really matter if your shirt is tucked out a bit. And if you forget your homework once it's not that bad. And if you're talking a bit it's not that bad either, you have to talk".

In June Stephanie described how she disliked getting in trouble at school and gave a detailed account of the current state of her 'notes of concern' page.

"There's a section in our diary and it's for notes of concern and I've really got to the maximum of four notes of concern and if you get four notes of concern you get a detention and I've already been through that instance where I had a detention. I've got three more spots for notes of concern for my homework. Four more spots for behaviour and if I get any more, if I get two more for behaviour then I get another detention and it goes on your school record and I really don't want that to happen to me too much".

In July Stephanie spoke about the notes of commendation when she expressed her opinion that it was important that teachers acknowledge the efforts of students.

"Because students like to be, I think every student likes to be praised. We have a section in our diary for, that's a commendation and the teachers are supposed to give you commendation notes if you're good and they don't use it. They're supposed to but they don't. They use the notes of concern more than the notes of commendation. I haven't got any yet and I've done heaps of stuff ... teachers forget about it ... some of them do give them out but every time they do give them out I haven't done it, the reason everyone else is getting it. But every other time I do stuff that everybody else doesn't do, but then they don't ever think about it, if only one person has done it."

She also explained that notes of concern were sometimes given for trivial things.

"Teachers pick up really little things. Like I got another note of concern for homework because I wrote the Math's homework in the book, in the Math's book instead of my exercise book. And little stuff like forgetting your pencil case, they give you a note of concern for that. But big things you do good you don't get any sort of reward for it ... I don't even think about the note of commendation section anymore because it's not used. So

I don't need to look at or even pass it across my eyes because it's never used. I mean I'm not sure because it's never happened to me, it might do something if I do get a note of commendation, but I wouldn't know because I haven't got one, nearly everyone else has got one except for me"

At this point Stephanie rejected the possibility that she may receive a note of commendation "because I've been here for two terms already and if a teacher did notice that I've done something then she would have given me one. But it hasn't happened yet so I don't think it's going to happen". Although Stephanie was unsure of the criteria for notes of commendation she was quite specific about criteria for notes of concern.

"Nobody knows when we're going to get one. If you do something that's good and you don't get one, then you're just doing anything and then you get one. It's just strange; I don't know what's going through the teacher's mind. I'm not sure whether they don't notice or they do notice it and they just can't be bothered. I don't know ... you know when you're going to get a note of concern because you're doing something bad and the teacher will come up behind you and say, 'Stephanie, give me your diary'. Then you know straight away 'oh, they're going to give me a note of concern now'. That's what Mrs Kelly does. I haven't got any notes of concern from any other teacher except from my art teacher because I forgot my art book".

In September Stephanie reported that she had seven or eight notes of concern. Whilst she perceived notes of commendation to be a sign of success she indicated that notes of concern were "really bad. That's striking me down ... I can't do anything about it ... I can't wipe them out and I can't erase them ... I can't get it off the school record any way, I'm stuck with them". Also in September Stephanie reported that she had received a note of commendation in Science.

"I felt really excited. I showed Mrs Kelly and she was really happy with me and I showed my mum and she signed it. I was really happy with myself ... I didn't even know I was going to get one. I was just working with my group normally. But she did say she'd give out notes of commendation if she'd see a group sitting quietly and doing their work and one person talking at a time, but I didn't think it would be us".

Stephanie spoke of difference between reward systems in junior and middle school.

“In primary school they just give anything out, like just an assembly award because we used to have assembly awards. I think, this is a secret, I think that the teacher actually had a whole drawer full of awards already written out for use. Not giving them out because we actually did something because I noticed it went in a pattern. But nobody missed out on getting an award. People got two awards a year, every year. I think the teachers actually write it out at the beginning of the year and keep it in a drawer and just pick them out. That’s what I think.”

She described her perception that middle school teachers failed to reward students.

“They don’t give out notes of commendation much. They don’t give it out for special things. I mean I don’t know how people get all these notes of commendation so much because I hardly see in any of my classes people getting notes of commendation. I don’t think you can predict if you’re going to get a note of commendation because they don’t tell you. Our science teacher is the only one who actually says I’m going to give out a note of commendation to the people who are doing, this, that, and the other. I don’t think that anybody has got a note of commendation from Mrs Kelly, I’m not sure”.

In contrast, Stephanie reported being able to predict when she may receive a note of concern.

“If I’m talking and she’s given me a warning twice, if she gives me another warning she’ll give me a note of concern. I got this silly one ages ago, it was like in the first term. I kept going like this with my fringe and then going like that. I don’t know what really gave the right to Mrs Kelly to give me a note of concern for doing that with my hair. I don’t think it really matters if I’m fiddling with my fringe. It’s not harming her in any way, I’m still listening, but she wrote this really, not nasty but it really gave my parents the right to be angry because it said ‘it would give me the pleasure to see that Stephanie put as much effort into her schoolwork as she does her hair’. That really got my parents angry and I was banned from the computer for a week”.

In November Stephanie spoke about how the notes of concern had affected her feelings about school.

“At the beginning of the year I used to be so scared of notes of concern because I knew that it was just about close to a detention if I got one more

I'd get a detention. But I got one and then my parents got a little bit angry. I did the detention and then I just got another note of concern a couple of weeks ago but I don't think there's going to be anymore, I've only got two spots left".

She described feeling that she had been in more trouble at middle school than in junior school.

"It's not put on a record when you get in trouble in primary school. But like in high school, middle school, they have a diary and you've got it all and I like to keep my diaries but its not very good to keep a diary full of notes of concern. So I think, yes, you get in trouble, I think the teachers are just trying to be a little bit easier on you in primary school and teach you to be slowly, gradually, start telling you off a little bit more. But it's just training you so you know what to do, you should learn from your mistakes, don't do it three times or whatever".

In September Stephanie talked of her desire to receive public recognition through the school system of end of year awards.

"One of my goals, and if I do reach this goal it's a great success because it's pretty high and I'm not sure whether I can reach it. What happens in the reports is if you get As for trying hard, effort, for seven of your subjects, you get this award at assembly. I really want to strive for that because I really want it, because Anita and a lot of people got it and I think I might be able to get it. I think that it might impress my parents a bit if I did get it ... I don't know, I might get a new pair of shoes. I don't know, I'm just thinking maybe if I got this it might be easier for me to get a job if I kept it. Because they always want to see, I've heard this about my dad because when he got his job ages ago he had to show his school reports for his last three years at high school. And he had to show them the best stuff he's done academically. I think if I had that it might be pretty impressive".

Summary of perceptions of middle school context

Stephanie's perceptions of particular aspects of the school context influenced her pursuit of particular academic and social goals. Although she mostly reported a positive attitude towards school, there were some aspects of her school experience that she perceived to be negative. The most influential of these was the system of notes of concern and notes of commendation. Stephanie reported intensely disliking being in trouble and indicated that being in trouble

made her feel “scared and even terrified” of teachers and that this in turn had a negative impact on her feelings about school. Coupled with the fact that she also perceived she was not recognised formally through notes of commendation Stephanie began to avoid behaviours that might result in notes of concern and sought a stronger relationship with her teacher to enhance her feelings of adjustment at school.

Stephanie also perceived the physical environment of the middle school to provide limited opportunities for Year 7s to play and relax during break times. To this end she indicated that her friends had tried to create fun for themselves by role playing a Mass at lunch times. Stephanie’s perceptions of the physical environment along with her somewhat sentimental feelings about junior school indicate perhaps a slight reluctance on her behalf to perceive herself as changing and growing up.

Perceptions of classroom context

During the course of the school year, Stephanie was able to share her perceptions about a specific classroom context, namely, that directed by her core teacher, Mrs Kelly. Within this classroom context Mrs Kelly taught Stephanie’s class Mathematics, Integrated Studies (English and Studies of Society and Environment), Health, Computer Technology and Religious Education.

Perceptions of class goal structure

In September the 26 students participating in the study were asked to complete a twelve item “Perceived Classroom Goal Structure” scales from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey (PALS : Midgley, Maehr, Hicks, Roeser, Urdan, Anderman & Kaplan, 1994, cited in Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin & Midgley, 2001, see Appendix B). The survey required students to rate a total of twelve items on a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Survey results indicated that Stephanie perceived Mrs Kelly’s classroom to have high task mastery emphasis (4.17) than performance goal emphasis (3.33). To clarify her responses and to explore why she had responded

in particular ways Stephanie was interviewed regarding her responses to survey items in October.

Stephanie described why she had responded in particular ways to items indicating a task mastery classroom goal structure. She agreed Mrs Kelly to emphasise working hard.

“Because it’s been that way all through school. Teachers don’t really care if you’re good at something or bad at something, they just, well this is in creative work more, not Math’s, Math’s is more if you don’t understand it ask for help so you have to understand it later on, but creative work, if you can’t draw at all try your hardest. They don’t really care, it’s your point of view”.

Stephanie’s comments indicated that she perceived this particular trait to be indicative of all teachers, not especially Mrs Kelly. She also agreed that Mrs Kelly believed mistakes to be part of the learning process as did her parents.

“Well, my parents always say if you make a mistake or if you talk back and then you say sorry afterwards, then the main thing is just don’t do it again, learn from your mistakes ... but I think that the teacher will actually help you when you’re marking if you say ‘whoops, I made a mistake, I don’t understand this’ she’ll go through it on the board. She doesn’t mind mistakes as long as you’re learning from them. Point them out and she’ll show you what to do. If you keep making the same mistake then I think she’d probably get a bit ... (shrugs shoulders)”.

Stephanie described how she felt about making mistakes.

“Well it’s a little bit embarrassing, you know, and like everybody else knows it, you feel a little bit left out and I sit in a group with other students who are all scribbling away and I’m there like ‘oh, my gosh, I don’t know how to do this’. But Emma usually explains it to me ... she tells me how to do the first one and then I do the next one and the next one and then she checks them. And if I’m making mistakes she’ll show me again but using different words like she gives examples ... the teacher does that as well but she doesn’t do it twice. Emma will tell me twice, like if I make one mistake she’ll tell me how to do it again, but the teacher, if I make one mistake, she’ll show me how to do it but she won’t help me again. Like she’ll think that I’ve already worked it”.

Stephanie stated that she would not ask for teacher help a second time but that “I just sort of pick it up that she doesn’t want to explain again” due to behaviours

such as “walking away to other students, sitting down and marking, starting another subject and giving it to us for homework”. She continued to acknowledge that sometimes the teacher might have thought she had understood.

“If I keep saying ‘yeah, yeah, yeah,’ then it’s sort of. If I actually say ‘no, I don’t get that’ then she’ll go through it again while she’s standing there, but if she actually leaves me after I’ve just been looking at it and I don’t understand a word she’d said, once she’s left me the only other time I could get her over is the next time we go on to Math’s and then a couple of other people say they don’t understand and then she’ll show the whole class on the board”.

Stephanie explained she did not like asking the same question of the teacher twice. “I don’t do it very often, once it’s explained to me I don’t have to ask again and again and again. I get things pretty quickly after they’ve been explained”.

Stephanie described other strategies she would use to find out the answers she required.

“Mrs Kelly comes along to Joshua to help him out and while she’s explaining it to him I listen in so I can sort of hear and then it ends up, cause I say ‘yeah, yeah, yeah’, by accident, and then she starts working with both of us instead of just Joshua”.

Stephanie perceived Mrs Kelly to value understanding of work.

“Well, she’s never really said that but I can feel it like, I mean for a test we have this whole revision page and we have exactly the same test but she’s just printed it out and we have to do it all the way through, get the answers but some people just memorise the answers because they’re exactly the same as the ones in the test. But that’s not good, you should learn the pattern or something, you know how in Math’s things there’s always a way of doing it ... you should learn the pattern, not the answer ... how to do it first”.

She perceived that in Mrs Kelly’s class because “I think everyone does well in their own way. Not everyone does well but it’s more people, everyone does well basically. Everyone does well in their own thing”. Stephanie admitted that “I haven’t really picked up yet what I’m really really good at ... I think that I’m good at creative stuff”. Stephanie reported being unsure about whether Mrs Kelly wanted the students to enjoy learning.

“It depends, like in Math’s it’s a little bit boring with learning new things. I don’t think she tries to make it fun unless we’re actually playing a game. But that’s only for solving stuff. She gives us out problems in groups of two and we have to solve them with the things we have ... that’s the only fun thing in Math’s ... but I find English really fun because you can just expand it quite a bit, like you’ve got more things that you’re able to do, in Math’s there’s not really many fun things to do”.

When asked whether she thought Mrs Kelly enjoyed mathematics, she responded “I have no idea”, but when asked whether she thought Mrs Kelly enjoyed English she commented positively.

“Yes I think she does because she’s always like picking up books for us to read and thinking of new things, like funny things to do on the board. I do think she enjoys spending her whole weekend looking for stuff, digging around for stuff for us to do. I think she enjoys English, yeah ... she puts in a lot of effort to find stuff for us in English. I’m not sure whether it’s the teaching programme or her looking for stuff for us to do, but yeah I do think it has a big impact on the way I feel about English, because I like English and I do think she likes English.”

Interestingly, Stephanie was able to perceive how Mrs Kelly felt about English and Mathematics and linked teacher feelings about English to her own feelings of subject enjoyment.

Stephanie agreed Mrs Kelly recognised students for trying hard but through verbal recognition for effort and improvement, rather than notes of commendation. She also agreed students were given time to really explore and understand new ideas and gave a recent example where a diversion to explain how biblical stories were written to “make life easier to understand”. This episode apparently took about an hour and “we spent about an hour just chatting, the whole class we just put up our hand whenever we wanted and we’d just say our bit, and we were talking about what we thought heaven was like and what God was like”.

Stephanie also explained why she had responded to survey items suggesting performance classroom goal emphasis. She agreed Mrs Kelly pointed out students who received good grades as an example to the class.

“I do think teachers point out people, ‘cause yesterday, we had to write out a biography and Mrs Kelly, she pointed out Natalie, because she did it perfectly and she got an A. She did it in seven paragraphs and I only did it in two paragraphs, so I’m not sure if I’m going to get a good mark. But she was the only person who got an A so she pointed her out ... she just points out people at random ... she wouldn’t even have to look at the names, she just looks at the work and if it’s really good she’ll look at the name and then tell everybody. She doesn’t really mind whose work it is”.

Stephanie “slightly” disagreed that Mrs Kelly made it obvious when students did not do well on their work.

“Because she doesn’t really pick on me as much as before. But she doesn’t really do it to other people either anymore. I don’t know what’s changed her, there’s something, I don’t know. She might have been hard on us at the beginning of the year and worked through getting easier and easier. Just to get us working hard and the beginning and then ease off a little bit so we know our routine. But she does go through tests and read out answers that are just so silly. We had this SOSE (Studies of Society and Environment) test yesterday and she read out some of the answers. One of the questions was ‘the sun rises in the ... and sets in the ...’ and then she went ‘oh, somebody wrote the sun rises in the north and sets in the south’ and then, the funny one, ‘the sun rises in the morning and sets in the afternoon’, that wasn’t one of mine, I think I got that one right ... well everyone’s looking around the room to see if there’s anybody going completely red”.

She explained that Mrs Kelly did not provide comparative information to students.

“I don’t think she compares us, you know how my mum and dad compare me, well I think teachers are strange. Well they’re taught not to compare people. If I was to get into trouble for my work, which I have, she would say ‘you’ve done this wrong and I’d like you to repeat it, but she wouldn’t compare me ... she usually gives the average mark for the whole class and she usually says ‘most people will end up with a B but only one person will get an A or the average percentage was 60%, so I’m pretty happy with that. She will congratulate us if the whole class has done well, and she’ll tell us if we have done really bad ... it does make you feel better to know how many Cs there were if you got a C, because if more people got a C, if you got a D and you’re the only person who got a D and nobody got an E then you feel pretty bad. But if you got a B and you found out that lots and lots of people got it then you feel pretty good, so it is Ok for her to tell us what we got”.

Stephanie reported Mrs Kelly to call on intelligent students more than others. To explain, she used an example from the Webquest project where one student who was largely perceived by the students to be the smartest in the class, was given the task of curator, or coordinator of the entire performance. She said “ ‘I have to pick Jordan to be the curator because I don’t think this work will be challenging enough for him’ ... that sort of gives you a big hint that she thinks he’s really good. I don’t know, I think Anita could have easily been as good a curator as him”.

Perceptions of class groupings

For most of the year Stephanie worked in mixed ability groups within her core class. As part of their academic programme the students were required to work in cooperative learning groups for a number of activities. In March Stephanie explained that she preferred to work on her own. “I like getting things done my way. I like having everything the way I want it to be, but when you’re working with somebody else they want it their way as well so you have to agree on something and it’s harder”. Despite these initial feelings Stephanie did not report any major difficulties in working in groups, to the contrary she acknowledged that she had enjoyed participating in particular group tasks especially the Webquest.

In October Stephanie discussed the new groupings for mathematics.

“I’m in the middle (ability) group ... you can sort of tell how Mrs Kelly groups us. She’s got all the smart people here and then all the dumb people, and a couple of people have worked that out and I think everybody did work it out because like Brett was moved from the not so good group to the medium group and he said ‘have you realised the pattern, have you realised it that that’s the smart group and I just got moved out of the dumb group to the middle group’ and he was quite happy about it ... it’s alright, I like the group. I think the main reason I’m in the average group is because I don’t know my times tables. I know a couple of them but I don’t know my 9s, my 8s or my 12s, or anything like that. I only know the basic ones ... it’s good because I have the rest of the group there just in case I don’t know the answer. They go ‘si ...’ and I go ‘six’ with them because they start and then I just copy the rest of the word. It’s good because it helps us. I reckon that if you do hear the same answer over and over again

you do learn it eventually, with your times tables. I do like being in the group but it's also challenging".

Stephanie also spoke of the Ancient Civilisations activity where the students had worked in groups formed using the MICA (Multiple Intelligences Checklist for Adults and years 11 to 12: McGrath & Noble, 1995) test results to allocate areas of responsibility to students. She spoke of her scores for the Ancient Civilisations activities.

"I did really really well. In the first one I got an A and in the second one I got an A+++, then the last one I sort of went down a lot I got a C for it because my presentation was good and everything, but the content ... it was for the future and I just went completely off it ... it just didn't work ... but the group worked really, really, really well. We probably got 100% as a group altogether. It was really, really good just having different resources. Like all of us have to put in something to the group and then we all have to have a fair share of the work".

Summary of perceptions of classroom context

Stephanie's perceptions of the classroom context also influenced her pursuit of particular goals. She perceived Mrs Kelly's classroom to have a stronger task mastery emphasis than performance emphasis and this was reflected in the types of behaviours and attitudes Stephanie reported. Specifically she perceived Mrs Kelly to value effort and understanding of curriculum and recognised student achievement and effort. It is notable that Stephanie's perceptions of the classroom context were sometimes influenced by her perceptions of the values promoted by her family and beliefs about teachers in general.

Perceptions of teacher(s)

During the period of data collection Stephanie was able to speak candidly regarding her perceptions of middle school teachers. She reported fairly positive perceptions of teachers and at the beginning of the year described teachers as "nice, especially Mrs Kelly, I like Mrs Kelly". Stephanie spoke in particular about her relationship with Mrs Kelly, how it developed over the year and how the

nature of their relationship had implications for her academic success and feelings of comfort at school.

In May Stephanie spoke of an interview she and her mother attended with Mrs Kelly to discuss aspects of her classroom behaviour and academic results. Stephanie reported the interview had helped her “turn over a new leaf”. She explained “she asked my mum for an interview and she requested me to be in there with them”. She admitted feeling “pretty scared because I’m a bit scared of Mrs Kelly because she tells you off a lot and she can be very sarcastic and she can sort of tease you in front of the class and I don’t like that”. During the interview Stephanie reported Mrs Kelly to have discussed Stephanie’s talking during class and presentation of work below expectation. “She told me my goals like try and be more quiet, that was my first goal and my second goal was to get better marks and to study and not get any notes of concern”. The interview apparently lasted about two hours and during that time “she covered all the goals that I should start heading towards and I think I’ve accomplished nearly all of them”.

In May Stephanie reported that she felt Mrs Kelly expected her to “go pretty good” in her work because “she says she expects me, like I might hand in a bit of work that’s not very well done and then she says ‘that’s not very good Stephanie. Do you think you could do better than that?’ And then I say ‘yes, I can do better than that’. So then she says ‘can you do it again for me tonight’.” Stephanie reported that she felt this was helping her achieve more.

“Because I’m stretching out a bit more, like I’m trying to get a bit better than what I already do. Like just a bit of work that I just scribble down really quickly then she gets me to present it better and make the content a bit bigger and better ... she wants everyone to do well ... because it’s Year 7 and she explains things very well. She’s good at explaining things and everybody understands it because she uses good examples ... she gets us to try harder, and always read. She likes us to read. She tells us to study for tests and she says ‘am I helping you here, am I helping you or no?’ and everybody says ‘yes, you’re helping us’.

In July Stephanie described how she liked to try to do well at school to please her teachers.

“Because I like my teachers to say, ‘oh, you did so well Stephanie and you deserve that A, because like when I got an A for Math’s my teacher said ‘oh, you really deserved that’, and I just like that, it just makes me feel special. I worked hard to get it and I’ve turned my tables around. Like starting over a new leaf and she thinks I’ve done well. That’s why she thinks I’ve deserved it”.

She also described a change that had occurred in her relationship with Mrs Kelly.

“Because I’ve sort of gone off to her bad side again. I don’t know what I did but I’ve got a Friday detention for doing something bad on computers. And then I got a note of concern yesterday for writing in my Math’s books instead of in the exercise book ... I think once I have another interview I think she’ll be a bit nicer to me again. Once I get it all flowing through my head again all about being good, being quiet. But she went away the week before the holidays and we had lots of relief teachers and people started going a bit mental because everybody plays up.”

In October Stephanie began to reflect on how her relationship with Mrs Kelly had changed over the year and described how earlier in the year she found it difficult to learn in Mrs Kelly’s class “because I got in trouble a bit from her”. She felt being in trouble with a teacher negatively influenced her ability to learn because “it’s scary, I don’t like being told off. I don’t think anybody does ... you feel anxious, scared and almost terrified of the teacher who is telling you off ... and then you feel bad about yourself”.

“After my break (the May interview and consequent changes in behaviour) it hasn’t been hard for me because I’ve sort of become Mrs Kelly’s friend. But before she was really really hard on me. She was just telling me off a lot and I got really scared and I don’t think anybody really liked her before but she’s changed I think. I think last year my teacher was getting really, really soppy because we were all leaving and she said teachers don’t just teach the children, the children teach the teachers how to be more. Because she’d changed a lot as well, like she’d gotten a little bit more stricter. But Mrs Kelly has softened and is just right for us now”.

Stephanie described Mrs Kelly as one of her main influences this year.

“Because she’s helped me change a lot and I think I’ve changed because I haven’t got very many notes of concern and I don’t get in trouble as much and teachers, they don’t seem to be as angry with me, that’s why I’m not scared any more”.

Stephanie reported the perception that how much she learnt in a subject depended on the teacher.

"Last year I had a really, really open teacher ... she'd tell us all her personal things like her cat, Mittens, and where she was going on holidays and her house and her boyfriend and everything ... so she was really open and when it came to explaining things to learn she really used examples that would remind us of our own lives, and it just comes in handy to know those sort of things when you think about them and you'll always remember it".

She felt it important for teachers to be open with students in that way "because it's nice to know a little bit of background about them, and like you can tell whether they're friendly or they're open, or whether they're thinking about you when they're writing out the test instead of just the learning". She stated that from her experience "when teachers are open about their lives it's helped me learn ... it helps you concentrate and get all those nerves out of you".

Perceived teacher support

To the extent that Stephanie perceived Mrs Kelly to want her students to do well, she felt she cared about them. In May Stephanie indicated Mrs Kelly cared about her as a person because "I think all teachers do care about their students and what happens to them or whether they get good marks." She reported that Mrs Kelly also cared about their physical development as she had talked on one occasion with the girls regarding female matters.

She explained feeling that Mrs Kelly treated the students "very much like adults ... she just treats us with respect, she doesn't treat anybody with disrespect. I think every teacher has to do that with their students. She treats us as if we're at the same level as her, almost like a best buddy sometimes." Stephanie felt that such treatment influenced the way students responded to her because "she's more fun and nice and help us learn and it's good". She also explained that under such conditions students "feel as if the teacher likes them and not hates them ... then they're not scared of them".

In June, after Stephanie and her mother had had the interview with Mrs Kelly, Stephanie reported feeling that Mrs Kelly cared about her “a lot”. She described Mrs Kelly as caring about “my learning, how I’m feeling in the classroom, I think she sits us next to our friends so we’re not lonely, but I don’t think that’s a good idea, I think I should be sitting by myself, that’s what I need.” The interview appeared to change how she felt about being in Mrs Kelly’s class because “she’s worried about me, that’s one thing I know. And she cares about how I’m feeling and she lets me have a little more talking time because she knows I just need a little bit of time to just let it all out”. Stephanie described being surprised at the level of concern Mrs Kelly showed for her.

“Because at first I thought she just thought of us as her class people but then I realised she thought of us more as friends and she needed to make sure we were alright and she’s really worried, well not worried, but she likes to know how you’re doing, she wants you to improve and she’s been giving me pretty good marks so far because I think she thinks I deserve them because I’ve improved a lot ... I’ve cut my volume down a lot and I haven’t talked as much and I’m getting more done and I’m only asking for help if I really need it. And I can remember that before the interview, whenever she told me off I used to roll my eyes, but after the interview I realised that I really am talking too much and now I just say sorry and stop”.

In July Stephanie commented that she felt Mrs Kelly cared for her personally and that these feelings were mainly a result of being in Mrs Kelly’s form class.

“She cares about me personally in form, she wants to know what I’ve done over the weekend but not in core because she has lots of other people she has to attend to as well not just me. So she doesn’t have enough time to care about anybody personally, she just all roundly cares about everybody getting their work done, not about their weekend, that happens in form not in core.”

Summary of perceptions of teacher(s)

Stephanie held mostly positive perceptions of teachers during the year and reported being particularly influenced by her core teacher, Mrs Kelly. Stephanie perceived Mrs Kelly to have a strong influence over her classroom behaviour and

academic success and in particular she perceived a strong link between the relationship she had with Mrs Kelly and her classroom success. She noted in September how she perceived her relationship with Mrs Kelly to have changed because she had been in trouble in Mrs Kelly's class. To this extent Stephanie desired approval from Mrs Kelly and perceived it to be important to please her. This in turn meant that Stephanie was more likely to endorse the goals Mrs Kelly promoted in the classroom environment.

Perceptions of peer context

During the period of data collection Stephanie was able to share her perceptions of the peer context in which she participated. She spoke openly and in detail about her wider peer relationships, friendships and relationships with class members. Stephanie endeavoured to establish and maintain strong friendships over the year and felt this was an important aspect of school life.

Perceptions of peer relationships

During classroom observation Stephanie appeared to be well liked by her peers. She contributed to class discussion regularly and her classmates appeared to respect her comments and value her contributions. She demonstrated a good sense of humour that was appreciated by other class members and the teacher.

In March Stephanie reported having two good friends in her core class, one whom she had been good friends with since pre-primary. In May she described settling in well to middle school because "I've still got my friends, you know, I haven't lost them yet, they haven't gone away from me ... they are all leaving next year to go to another school so I'll have to find some new friends".

In June Stephanie spoke of her desire to make new friends over the year. She reiterated that most of her current friends were going to another school the following year and explained how she had made an effort to make friends with other students because of this. Stephanie admitted being scared about the thought of her friends leaving her school.

"I don't want to be alone. I don't like walking around the school by myself ... it's quite scary, like when I come to school, I come to school quite early and I look for anybody to walk up to the gate with because I don't like walking past all the seniors playing basketball and all that".

Stephanie desired the approval of her peers and reported behaviours where she attempted to attain peer approval. For example, in June Stephanie spoke about a priority that had emerged for her within her friendship group. "Somebody's given me a new role, I'm the social organiser of my group and that's a new goal for me. I'm going to try and be the best social organiser they've ever had and I'm going to organise lots of stuff for them to do."

"Because we hardly ever see each other, like, I mean, I see my friends like really close ones but the others I don't see that much, they're not my best friends but they're still friends but I don't see them very much. But it would be better if you could make more friendships rather than just keeping your old friends, but still the friends that you have you could make them better friends by doing more with them and inviting them over and that's what I think".

In July Stephanie reported the role had been abandoned because the group had been unable to decide on activities to do.

"We just say stuff but we don't do it. We were going to go down to the beach then everybody said it's too rainy. Then Emma and I said 'oh, it's good, it's good if it's raining down at the beach it's fun'. Then they'd say, 'oh, what are we going to do', and I'd say 'oh, we can splash around and we can build sand castles and look for shells, there's heaps of stuff to do'. They said 'oh, you're just being kiddish, that's boring stuff' ... they don't like the idea of running around just playing chasey.

In July Stephanie spoke about her immediate peers' perceptions of individuals' academic levels. She explained "people of our age don't really talk about school work, we talk over family matters and boys obviously ... it doesn't really matter if you're horrible at school or good at school, excellent at school or average because we don't even look at it ... it doesn't matter". When asked whether she felt doing well at school was important to her friends she responded "I don't know".

"If I got all Es in my report they would probably say 'oh, it's okay Stephanie, you'll do better next time' and stuff like that. They don't try and help me get it better. They just say 'oh come on, keep trying'. But I'd probably be looked down upon if I got Es just a little bit, because everybody else would get better. Especially my friend Kiara who gets all As, she's a very, a very good student ... but she still likes me as a person even if I did get bad marks she still would like me as a person. Even if I got bad marks she wouldn't leave me".

She explained the issues her group felt were important were "mainly boys. That's all we really think about. Or fun, we like to have a bit of fun ... all we do is sit down and talk, share lip smackers, do nothing". She indicated that she was "not really" interested in having a boyfriend, but that she liked a boy in the other Year 7 class. She reported to have liked him since Year 4 and stated that they emailed each other a lot. Stephanie was asked what she felt about Year 7s having boyfriends and girlfriends and she said "I think that, well my mum told me, I'm like 'nobody is ever going to ask me out' and then my mum said 'well what do you expect to happen, you're only in Year 7'. I asked my mum when did she go out and she said when she was sixteen".

Stephanie described how she often found her peer relationships and schoolwork to conflict with each other most often when it came to making decisions about homework and socialising. Stephanie explained how she would negotiate some homework with some socialising but depending on the urgency of the socialising would give priority to her homework.

"Because it's more important to my learning and learning is very important to me because ... I just feel good, like when I've had a good homework session, but social things are more fun and you have to do your homework before you have fun so the homework is more important to me ... I like to learn. I listen to the teacher. I like getting my homework done because I feel good and I've had a nice session and I've got it all done ... everybody knows when I'm doing my homework because it's like 'don't bother me because I need to get it done'".

Stephanie also described difficulties negotiating these priorities.

"If there's somebody that is a really good friend I try not to get in a fight with them because if the schoolwork gets in the way, like sometimes I have to stay in the library at lunchtime and then I can't really talk to them

about stuff and I might have to say something to them. The schoolwork is more important because maybe next period I forgot to do my homework and so I've got to do it at lunchtime so that I don't get in trouble next period and so I've got to spend nearly the whole lunchtime in the library and that can cause a fight".

She described how one particular friend (Emma) would "be in a really bad mood" with her if she spent lunchtime in the library finishing schoolwork. She explained that she still needed to complete the homework because "I really don't want to get in trouble, that's a big thing for me. I really hate getting in trouble".

Stephanie's relationship with her friend Kiara changed over the year. In September she described how she had "gone to England, so I'm missing her heaps. But we email each other, not very constant but a little bit". In the final interview Stephanie described how the friendship had deteriorated.

"I used to be a really good friend with Kiara. I don't know what's happened. We've just sort of grown apart. I haven't told anybody but I did this test this morning and I've done it all day and I said okay, I'm not going to talk to her and I'm only going to talk to her if she talks to me. And like I was around her all day and she hasn't said a word to me. I don't know what's happened, maybe she doesn't like me anymore."

At the same time Stephanie reported becoming closer to her friend Emma.

"Kiara went away to Florida and Emma and I had to do everything together. Emma was a little bit sad that Kiara went because they were really good friends before. But now we do everything together, like we don't move away from each other. She can't go anywhere without me unless we're in different classes of course."

Help-seeking and help-giving in the peer context

In March Stephanie reported that other students regularly asked for her help during class, particularly for spelling. "They don't exactly use me as a dictionary but when they can't think of the answer they just ask me and I explain it to them". She also reported wanting to do well in Integrated Studies so others can learn things from her.

"I like to give people answers ... it makes me feel special, pretty good at it, like I sort of feel better than other people, but I'm helping them get as good as me. If they don't understand the question they'll come and ask me

and I'll just explain it a bit more like a Year 7 question, because sometimes they put really hard questions in".

In July Stephanie stated that she felt it important to be able to help her classmates with their schoolwork "if they ask, yes, because lots of people have to ask for help, mainly from Anita ... if it's my friends it is important to help them because ... they're my friends". Stephanie admitted that her friends might be displeased with her should she not help them. "They'd say 'why didn't you help me, I needed help and you're my friend and you didn't even think about me, you're too busy in your own work.' That's the thing, you've got your own work as well". Stephanie also explained how she tried to help her partner in science. "Well, he's Indonesian and he's my partner and he's nice and all that and sometimes he doesn't understand things and he asks me and I need to be listening so I can answer his questions, that's what I usually pay attention for".

Summary of perceptions of peer context

The data reported indicates that Stephanie's perceptions of her peer context influenced the nature of the goals she pursued. She desired approval from her friends and aimed to live up to their expectations of her. In addition, Stephanie reported not liking being alone and to this end she sought the friendship of other students not directly involved in her immediate friendship group. Stephanie also described how her friendship goals sometimes conflicted with her desire to complete schoolwork and the personal satisfaction she received from her learning. It is possible that Stephanie perceived successful peer relationships to have a positive impact on her self-esteem and self-perceptions and she reported positive feelings about being able to help her peers with academic tasks.

Advice to Year 7s of 2001

In November the researcher asked all class members to pretend they had been asked to offer some advice to the Year 7s of 2001 about how to have a successful year. The aim of this activity was to allow students the opportunity to

discuss issues they perceived to be most important for Year 7s based on their experience.

Stephanie gave advice to the year sevens of 2001. Her first piece of advice was to “survive in the locker room”. To explain she related “well, I’ve had this girl in year 9 who has been going through my locker when I haven’t put my lock on, so I use my lock now”.

Stephanie felt it was also important to “avoid notes of concern because this can lead to detentions”. She explained “what happens is like I get a warning and then I get another one and I know that next time I do it. Then I’ve got to really watch myself and I just stay quiet for the rest of the afternoon because I know that the teacher is angry with me.” Stephanie acknowledged that she was no longer worried so much about notes of concern even though “it used to be at the beginning of the year I used to be so scared of notes of concern because I knew that It was just about close to a detention if I got one more”.

She also advised future Year 7s to “keep your homework and uniform up to scratch and stay out of trouble”. The main reason for this Stephanie commented was to avoid notes of concern. In addition Stephanie felt future Year 7s should “start collecting notes of commendation; make friends with all your teachers and you can pick up quite a few notes”.

“I just find it really disappointing that I only got one note of commendation all year and it was from my science teacher and it wasn’t even what I did, it was my group. We were just being quiet because we weren’t talking to each other. I got his note of commendation and I think notes of commendation are really, really good because our cluster leader comes in and signs it all and then makes these big awards up for us. I think it’s just really really special and I think it would be good if you had a collections of notes of commendation”.

Stephanie acknowledged that she felt making friends with teachers meant that students had improved chances of receiving notes of commendation.

“Evalina told me about it. There’s one Japanese teacher who just gives notes of commendation if you ask for them. She said ‘look, I’ll show you’ and she took her diary and she went up and said ‘can I have a note of commendation’ and the teacher got out her pen and wrote this commendation to Evalina for like using her manners or something. I think

that if I made friends with that teacher I could get quite a few notes of commendation.”

Stephanie also indicated she felt it important for future Year 7s to “learn to use the library when you first come, if you can’t find books ask a librarian to help and learn how to use the computers to find books. Because I think it’s really important that you can find information well and use the library well”.

Stephanie also acknowledged that it was important for Year 7s to consider presentation, steps to keep yourself and your work well presented, keep your shirt tucked in, use textas to colour your work”. She explained, “I think that textas look better on work, it’s like more well presented and you get marked up on your work if you actually have colour on it”.

Contextual perceptions and personal goal pursuit

During the year Stephanie was able to describe how her perceptions of family, school and peer contexts influenced her feelings and behaviour, and through this the nature of the academic and social goals she chose to pursue. She sought the approval of her mother for her schoolwork and this influenced her pursuit of task mastery and mostly performance approach academic goals in the classroom. In addition, Stephanie desired peer approval and pursued social relationship and responsibility goals.

Stephanie perceived aspects of her family life to be changing irreversibly, particularly the nature of her relationship with her grandparents. Her feelings about this change, perhaps coupled with her knowledge of her mother’s illness, enhanced her feelings for a sense of stability and strong relationships within her peer group. Stephanie placed emphasis on her relationship with Kiara, and when this began to deteriorate turned to Emma for a similar relationship. Stephanie’s comments about how she ‘tested’ Kiara indicate her anxiety about the strength of her peer relationships.

Throughout all contextual perceptions she reported, Stephanie appeared to be anxious about the changes growing up would mean. As she realised her relationship with her grandparents was changing and that there were other small

children who needed their attention more than her, she began to perceive that other aspects of growing up had been perhaps forced on her before she would have liked. She symbolically packed away all her toys because she perceived it was time to stop 'playing' but by the end of the year described how she would wake her sister up early in the morning to play Barbies. She spoke of her perception that there was little opportunity for her to 'play' as she might have at junior school during school break times. Such perceptions of change may have enhanced Stephanie's desire for maternal approval and for a teacher with whom she held a strong relationship and who could provide stability through the year of change.

At the beginning of the year Stephanie indicated how interested she was in learning and described the positive feelings she experienced when learning and completing tasks well. As the year progressed she began to speak more regularly about grades and their importance. In October she began to talk about her hope of receiving an award at the end of the year. It is possible that the shift in emphasis from enjoying learning to performing at a particular level was in part enhanced by the school and classroom context, peer influences (in particular Anita who was extremely concerned about such matters) and a desire to please her mother.

In addition, the frequency and intensity with which Stephanie spoke of the importance of avoiding being in trouble increased most notably. Such a shift could possibly emanate from the school based system of rewards and penalties and in particular a desire to avoid notes of concern, which became of major importance. Stephanie expressed consistently negative perceptions about the system of rewards and penalties and described the negative impact it had on her learning, school affect and sense of belonging at school.

Towards the end of the year Stephanie began to reflect and acknowledged how her attitude towards school had changed from one of being fearful of school because of potential notes of concern, to a reluctant acceptance of the middle school procedures and in particular reward structures. Stephanie spoke of her interview with Mrs Kelly as a turning point in her year, where she began to focus on her behaviour and schoolwork more intently and therefore experienced less

difficulties. She described her relationship with Mrs Kelly and perceptions of teacher support as both important to her learning and academic success.

Teacher perceptions of Stephanie

During the year the teacher made reference to Stephanie in both informal discussions with me and in audiotaped interviews.

In March Mrs Kelly spoke of how she was impressed by Stephanie's ability to relate her classroom experience to real life experiences. She described how she encouraged students to make links between new and existing knowledge regularly and mentioned how impressed she was that Stephanie and four other students in the class were doing this. Also in March Mrs Kelly described Stephanie as a "very clever little girl". She added that she felt Stephanie had "an old head on young shoulders" and that she "doesn't necessarily focus her learning in a positive way, but she's certainly got it there, very clever". In October Mrs Kelly stated that Stephanie's mathematics had "improved out of sight" and she acknowledged that she was one of a few students who had moved from the bottom of the class in terms of mathematics grades to the top.

During an informal conversation Mrs Kelly spoke of the interview she had requested with Stephanie and her mother and how she felt the experience had been positive for all parties concerned. She commented that Stephanie's classroom behaviour and schoolwork had improved since the interview and that she had been pleased with her progress over the year.

Classroom observations revealed Mrs Kelly to have a positive attitude towards Stephanie and to be giving her verbal recognition for effort and displaying effective learning strategies.

Reliability of data

Throughout the year Stephanie seemed to speak both honestly and openly about her school experience and her personal life. I was able to build a rapport with Stephanie and felt that a degree of trust developed over the year. This was particularly evident when in June Stephanie chose to reveal particular details

about her family life including her biological father, her mother's illness and the distance developing in the relationship between herself and her grandmother. I felt that the sharing of such information was an indication of Stephanie's trust and honesty. Stephanie's trust was also evident in the fact that she was happy to discuss her personal goals related to her friends and her appearance because "I know only the tape recorder will know it and you".

Stephanie was particularly open when discussing her relationships both with her friends and with Mrs Kelly. I felt that the details given with regard to both sets of interpersonal relationships suggested trust of the researcher and reliability of data. Stephanie's descriptions of the fluctuations in intensity of these relationships seemed indicative of the natural processes in establishing and maintaining relationships, thus enhancing reliability of data.

During the period of data collection I became aware that Stephanie had quickly developed an understanding of certain themes referred to during interviews. She began to incorporate ideas related to learning, motivation, pleasing parents, teachers and friends into her responses unprompted. In addition, she quickly sensed that if she did not give explanations as to how and why she made particular statements, I would ask 'how' and 'why' questions. To this end by the third interview Stephanie was elaborating and explaining her responses with little prompting.

In December Stephanie commented on how she felt about participating in the research. "Our chats do last a long time. Sometimes I'm really happy about it because I miss out on Math's or something like that. But sometimes in I.S. and stuff I miss out on quite a lot of study period but I don't mind because I like talking about this stuff". When asked if being part of the research had made her think about issues she may not otherwise have thought about, she responded "well I have actually had to try and think a lot. Some things like just about the teachers, like how I feel about them. I never thought that I'd actually have to tell anybody about that except for Emma. I tell Emma a lot."

Stephanie was asked whether Mrs Kelly had ever mentioned the research and she responded "sometimes I threatened her that I'll tell Caroline about you,

and then she goes okay then, okay and then she'll get on with her work". She continued to explain by giving an example.

"She was about to give me a note of concern, I said, I think it was a note of concern, or she wouldn't let me use the cards in form once. I said 'I'll tell Caroline that you wouldn't let me use the cards and you were being selfish and then she says fine. And then I got to use the cards, but it was a joke".

Stephanie reported that Mrs Kelly sometimes behaved differently when I was conducting classroom observation. "Sometimes she explains things differently, like more thoroughly when you're in the class. I don't know why or anything."

Conclusion

Stephanie was a fairly typical example of an Australian student who adapted reasonably well to the middle school environment. Although there were exceptional circumstances in her home environment, Stephanie encountered many issues at home and at school that other students her age encountered and responded to.

Throughout the series of nine interviews particular themes relevant to Stephanie's experience emerged and through these the types of goals she chose to pursue can be identified. Stephanie sought approval from her mother, her teachers and her friends in different ways. She desired her mother's praise with regard to her schoolwork, she sought and was exhilarated by recognition from teachers, and she wished to please her friends by helping them with their schoolwork, maintaining and establishing strong relationships and fixing her hair in different styles each day.

Stephanie regularly spoke of her frustration with the system of notes of concern and commendation. She felt receiving notes of concern increased her anxiety about school and teachers and thus hindered her ability to concentrate on learning. Stephanie indicated that receiving notes of concern also made students feel negatively towards teachers and this in turn made it more difficult for them to learn. In addition, she felt notes of commendation were rarely awarded and was

particularly disappointed by receiving a commendation in a situation where she felt it was not deserved.

Stephanie made connections between her school achievement and her relationship with Mrs Kelly. She expressed the view that when she was doing well it was because the teacher felt she deserved good marks and that when she was receiving notes of concern she had somehow upset the teacher. Stephanie was convinced that Mrs Kelly held high expectations of her and cared about her progress. She indicated that the strength of the relationship she had with the teacher had enabled her to do well during the year.

Over the year Stephanie began to internalise some of the goals enhanced by the school context in which she participated. She began to talk more of the importance of performance in terms of grades and the approval that generated, along with the importance of avoiding trouble, specifically in the form of notes of concern. She also appeared to be influenced by peer relationships and spoke of how she had been influenced particularly Anita. The emphasis she placed on the end of year awards is perhaps an example of Anita's influence with regards to performance.

Stephanie was extremely approachable and forthcoming as an interviewee. She spoke openly and was able to question her own thoughts and explore the how and why of her views on a deeper level. In addition, Stephanie demonstrated average academic ability and a growing concern about the social aspects of her school experience. These features made her a suitable candidate for case study analysis.

CHAPTER VII

Case Four : Natalie

Introduction

Over the course of the academic year between February and December, nine interviews were conducted with Natalie. As described in the methodology chapter, the interviews conducted were semi-structured and focused around themes relevant to Natalie's school experience and current literature in this field.

The structure of this chapter has been generated from the conceptual framework for the study. Accordingly, the chapter follows the format of previous chapters and focuses around Natalie's perceptions of family, school and peer contexts. The chapter concludes by reporting perceptions Mrs Kelly held of her and by raising issues that may influence reliability of data. A summary of Natalie's case can be found in Appendix D.

The data presented were gathered as a result of interviews with Natalie, interviews with Mrs Kelly, a student information sheet, classroom observation and information obtained from Natalie's student diary. A supplement to the case studies describing the classroom context according to the Observing Patterns of Adaptive Learning (OPAL: Patrick, Ryan, Hicks, Anderman, Middleton, Linnenbrink, Hruda, Edelin, Kaplan & Midgley, 1997) categories of task, authority, autonomy, recognition, grouping, evaluation, time, social interactions and help seeking, can be found in Appendix C.

Family context and perceptions

Over the course of the year, Natalie spoke of her family and in particular how family situations influenced her attitudes and feelings about her school work and peer relationships over the year. The following section reports the data regarding her family Natalie chose to reveal in interviews during the year.

Family background

Natalie was born in Australia, as was her mother. On her student information sheet completed at the beginning of the year Natalie wrote that her father was born in Singapore, but when asked her father's occupation she wrote "don't really have a father". She also indicated she had no knowledge of her father's schooling, but that her mother who was at the time a student and homemaker had been to university. Natalie's mother married in early June of the year data were collected and after this event Natalie lived with her mother and stepfather, who she called Peter.

In week two of the school year the students were asked to complete an information sheet providing general information about themselves and their family. Natalie described herself as a "good" student and indicated that she would like to go to university and have a career as a hairdresser. She nominated her best subject as Math's and her worst subject as Religion.

In March Natalie acknowledged that she wished to do well at school to receive parental praise.

"I like it when my mum and her fiance are happy with what I've done ... at the parent interview night, I got a bad report but that was from the first couple of weeks and when my mum saw the teacher it was nothing like that and I was really good, and I was grounded that week and they took the grounding off because of what the teacher said."

Natalie was present during the parent teacher interview and described a teacher as stating "just that I'm learning to adapt to high school, it was hard when I first began but now I'm getting pretty good marks, I'm in the top four in the class". Natalie was asked which subject teacher had made these comments and she responded "I can't remember". The teacher had been Mrs Kelly and Natalie's reluctance to acknowledge that may have been an indication that she was initially a little guarded about what information she revealed during interviews.

Natalie indicated that she desired her mother's approval for her schoolwork more than she had done in junior school because "the work's much harder". She explained that her mother praised her by saying " 'that's really good' and sometimes if it's really good I get take-away (food) that night". Natalie again

acknowledged wanting to do well in her schoolwork to please her parents. She commented “I want to do well in my school work because they know I can do a lot better than I am doing ... I have to pay more attention”. Natalie spoke of how she had been “very side tracked” by “everything, and I talk a lot”.

“Since Year 5 I have been very talkative ... I don’t mean to talk a lot. It’s just I don’t know how to stop. I used to get lines all the time for resource and lunch for talking too much in Year 5. The teacher got really fed up because she didn’t know what to do because I couldn’t stop talking. There was always something for me to talk about. I don’t mean to. And all my friends are really talkative so it doesn’t help me to stop talking either. Stephanie and me don’t talk much anymore, we used to talk a lot. But she’s not like a best best friend. Emma is, we talk a lot ... I don’t even realise I’m talking a lot most of the time. I try not to talk a lot but I don’t realise that I am talking a lot when I’m talking a lot”.

In June Natalie also spoke of her mother’s recent marriage. She described how she had been a bridesmaid and reported that she was happy about the marriage “because I like her husband”.

In June and July Natalie once again commented that she wished to do well in her schoolwork to please her mother and stepfather. She reported that when she did not do her work well “I don’t exactly get into trouble, it’s just that my Mum says, ‘oh you could do better,’ and Peter says ‘oh yes, you could do better’”. She commented that she received “a little bit, not much though” pressure from her mother and stepfather to do well.

In October Natalie spoke of the sorts of things her mother and stepfather valued with regard to her schoolwork.

“They think it’s if you put in a good effort but they say that I’ve always got the potential to do better. Because last year I got all these awards but now I don’t be sort of with it ... I don’t know, I’ve just been side tracked with all the new stuff ... I usually forget to take stuff home. I haven’t taken my portfolio home yet and that was for semester one.”

In November Natalie recalled a recent situation where she had been grounded because “I went to my stepdad and I asked him something and he said ‘no’ so I went and asked my mum, they weren’t too impressed”. At this time she stated that she was mostly able to “get along” with her stepfather although she did

disagree with him about some things. She commented “not more than my mum but, not that much, just normal stuff”. Natalie admitted that she felt the changes in her family life had affected her schoolwork. “I think so because it’s been really exciting leading up to mum’s wedding which was in June and then in September when I was going to go on holiday.”

Natalie described her mother as her main influence during the year because “she’s just said like if you don’t think you’re going to do something right then study, just don’t stress about it too much”. Natalie also stated her mother was her main role model.

“Because I don’t know my dad, I haven’t even met him before and she’s always been there. Oh, and my grandparents probably because I lived with them until I was six ... my mum was there sometimes ... she was only fifteen when she had me ... when I was six I went to live with her”.

Natalie commented that she had a strong relationship with her grandparents. In March Natalie had spoken of how she had spent the weekend in Northam with her grandparents. She explained “I went up on the train on Friday night and I came home last night (Sunday) and the train was an hour late so I didn’t get home until 11.30pm”. Soon after, her grandparents moved to the city and so Natalie was able to see them most weekends.

Summary of perceptions of family context

Throughout the period of data collection Natalie described the changes that had occurred in her family situation, particularly regarding her mother’s marriage. Natalie perceived such changes to have had an influence on her schoolwork and the issues she had been concerned about. Natalie expressed a strong desire for parental approval and to meet the expectations of her parents, particularly her mother whom she described as her strongest influence over the year.

Perceptions of school context

Throughout the year Natalie was able to describe aspects of her school experience and how particular situations influenced her feelings about school. Natalie had attended the junior school adjoining this middle school and therefore the environment was somewhat familiar to her. Despite the fact that the school structure had been changed in 1998 Natalie still referred to junior school as 'primary school' and to middle school as 'high school'. This section discusses Natalie's perceptions of the school context, classroom context and teachers, and focuses on contextual themes that emerged as being particularly relevant to her motivational behaviour.

Perceptions of middle school context

Throughout the year data were collected regarding Natalie's adjustment to the middle school environment, including factors such as adapting to the physical changes in school environment, her perceptions of how well she was adjusting, how she coped with increased academic demands and her attitude towards school.

In February Natalie was asked to comment about her early middle school experience and adjustment.

"I like primary school better ... you don't have to move you can just stay in the same classroom all day. My form class is at one end of the school and then my core class and my locker is right down the other end. I wish I was back at primary school because it's not as hard. It's just different I guess ... I have to get used to it".

Natalie reported few expectations of middle school. She described how her Year 6 teacher had informed the class middle school students had to "stand up when visitors come in (to the classroom) ... and we did that last year just to get in to the habit". Natalie initially enjoyed some aspects of middle school, specifically Dance, Swimming and Art. She explained, "Dance is just fun and you just get to do different stuff and it's not stuff that's like for homework or anything 'cause it's just dancing, like you don't have to make up a dance for homework or anything". Natalie described her hopes for the year as "just that I make it without getting into trouble or too much trouble or anything and that I have fun" and reported she had

difficulties arriving at school on time and acknowledged that this had resulted in receiving notes of concern.

In March Natalie mentioned receiving notes of concern for being late for class and explained “my locker is just down there and my form class is right over the other side, the very end. I don’t get there late as much anymore but it’s hard still.” She reported that as she settled into middle school it had been important to her to “try not to get in trouble, even though it doesn’t work”.

Natalie spoke of the academic work she was involved in at school and commented she did what she needed to in order to “get by”. She explained “I don’t think I do any better than anyone else but I still try and do well. It’s not I don’t do well or anything it’s just that I’m not the best in the class but I don’t mind that I still get by”. Later in the same interview Natalie defined “getting by” as “so it’s done and it’s okay, I’m not going to get into trouble for it”. When asked whether she ever re-did her work, she responded “sometimes I fix it up”.

On reflection, Natalie admitted that she had found it hard to adapt to the new middle school environment and that in Term 1 she “could have done better”. When asked what kinds of things may have made it easier for her she commented, “maybe if I was still back in primary school in Year 7 ... it just would have been better”.

“I just prefer it better at primary school, I think because of everything ... It’s mainly, ... the teachers say it’s my attitude, like they say my work is fantastic, it’s my attitude towards it ... they say I sound like I don’t care if I get in trouble or something, but my work is really good still, but I do care because when I get home I get all these consequences ... it’s because I don’t like to show how I feel”.

In May Natalie commented that school was “okay, but I still wish I was in primary school; I prefer it heaps more, you don’t have to change classes all day ... I don’t like doing that.” She explained that she aimed “just to try and fit in” by “trying to get everything right, like not being late and don’t get any more notes of concern. I’ve only had one this term”.

In June Natalie spoke of the things that were important to her at school being “in class time I sort of don’t want to get into any trouble than I already am

in. Not that I'm in a lot of trouble or anything". She explained "oh, well, just at home I'm in trouble enough as it is, and I sort of don't want to get any lower marks because I have been handing in things late because I've lost them and had to start them again and all that sort of stuff". Natalie described how she lost 10% of her mark each day a piece of work was late. She stated that "mum knows that I've got lower marks" and that her mother's usual response was "there's a consequence to that". For example she explained "well I'm grounded this week, and that means no TV, early bed, have my radio taken off me and I'm not allowed to go out or anything". This current grounding she stated was for a few assignments "in all subjects, there was one and it was a story writing one and I think that we had to write a short novel, a realistic fiction story ... I handed it in about a week late". Later in the same interview Natalie stated that other things that were important to her at school were "getting my work done and not having a lot for homework". To this end she reported she would "try and finish it in class obviously, that's about all I can do really". In addition she reported that during lunchtime and recess it was important to her to "have a bit of fun" with her friends.

In June after her mother's wedding, Natalie reported handing work in late and therefore receiving lower than expected marks which in turn meant she had been in trouble.

"I think that getting in trouble makes me go slower. Like because in primary school I got the Principal's Award last year and I've done really well in primary school. But since I've come up here, as in high school and everything, but it's just been harder and I've got in trouble more ... I think that being put down, like getting told off gets me down, I'm not as enthused to do work".

Natalie felt that being in trouble affected her attitude towards school "because I could do better, like I know I can do better it's just that I can't help myself not trying as much because I don't feel the best". Natalie continued to explain that "getting told off" made her feel "bad" about herself and that in these situations "I think about when I go home what I want to do is lie on my bed and cry sometimes".

In July Natalie reported not being sure about whether she wanted to do well at school.

“Well I want to be a hairdresser, a beautician and that doesn’t really mean doing well in school ... because it’s something that you’re good at with your hands or something like that, it’s not really academic or something, not like a lawyer or something like that”.

When asked whether she felt she did not need to do well at school then, she responded “I do still, so if I don’t become that or something. But I’m not sure”.

Natalie was asked whether she felt she tried her best at school.

“Yes, no, no ... I can do better, but, well last semester I wasn’t very good because I had a lot going on. My mum had just got married and all that kind of stuff. Now this semester I hope will be better even though I’m going to England for four weeks ... I’m happy about that, but I’ve still got to try really hard to keep in the gist of it so I don’t lapse.”

When asked how she was progressing at school Natalie reported “I think I could do a lot better”. Natalie was also asked whether she was happy being at that school.

“I don’t know ... I don’t know, I just don’t think, like my Mum says this as well that they don’t take things slowly, they just rush into things to try and get more people to come and that sort of stuff. Like Year 7 coming up here and that kind of stuff ... they just rushed into getting the Year 7s up here”.

Such comments indicate the parental attitude towards the middle school that Natalie may have been influenced by. Natalie stated she felt being at the ‘high school’ campus was not a good thing “because, I don’t know, like some people enjoy being up here, even some of my friends enjoy it, but some of them, even their parents don’t agree with it. They think that we’re not ready for it”. Natalie explained her feelings about school. “I don’t hate it but I don’t, if I had a choice I’d rather not and just be given knowledge when I was born”. When asked if she preferred junior school, she responded “heaps more. The subjects up here are good. It would be perfect if some of the subjects up here were in primary school, that would be perfect. I like the subjects up here better than the ones in primary school, but I like sport down there better”.

Natalie continued to talk of the differences between junior and middle school and commented "there's more things you can't do. Like in primary school if you were late you just had to come in and say sorry to the teacher that you were late then nothing happened. Whereas with here if you're late you get a note of concern". She perceived there to be stricter discipline at middle school and commented "my mum says I need it though. She says I need discipline. So I'm not allowed to go to a public school". She explained her mother felt she needed discipline "because of this year since I haven't been getting work done as much. So I need the discipline to keep me at it. But I think that if I didn't have as much discipline I wouldn't be down as much all the time so I would be able to do it". She reiterated that she felt the discipline system at the school prevented her from working as well as she could. Natalie also stated she felt she would not have been in as much trouble if she were still at junior school. She explained the affect she felt this had had on her schoolwork. "I think that me getting told off puts me down and then like I get told off more up here. It puts me down and then my work isn't as good ... it makes me dislike school even more".

In July Natalie spoke about her most recent report and stated "I know I can do better". When asked why she felt that she responded she was "just like not focusing and concentrating as much ... in the first term I was doing really well, I want to go back to how I was then".

"In Science I know I could have got a heaps better mark but just on our last thing that we did someone in our group didn't like our design so he took it up to the teacher and showed, and came back and said 'she said it's too colourful' and he took all the things off it. Then I took it up to the teacher and she said 'not creative enough' and that took heaps of points off my thing ... I felt really annoyed at Steven because he actually made the plan up ... I don't think that the teacher said that, she would have said it was good. Because there were teddy bear ones and our one wasn't good enough. Ours was a little monster".

In this instance Natalie explained how she had felt her mark had been negatively influenced by the way in which her group had worked.

When reflecting on the first two terms Natalie indicated that the best thing that had happened to her was "getting an A in something". She commented "I'm

not sure but I got an A in something. But like some people wrote three pages and I only wrote just under a page and I got an A in it ... I think it was an essay about what we thought about slavery or something like that". She stated she felt she had received an A because "I included all the stuff that I was supposed to include in it". When asked how she felt about this she responded "okay".

As already mentioned, Natalie aimed to "fit in" to the middle school throughout the year. When asked how well she felt she had been able to do this she responded "I don't really like it here ... I don't know, I just don't think I should have come to high school this year". When asked whether she had tried to fit in she commented "I suppose ... I don't know it just doesn't work very easily for me, but I try to be like really good and not get any more notes of concern". I asked Natalie whether not receiving notes of concern made her feel as though she was fitting in and she responded "actually what makes me feel like that is when I get a note of commendation and I've only got one of those ... I think it was for homework or for Math's work". She recalled the note stating "my work was 'a star in the sky of clouds' something like that" from Mrs Kelly. She described "I thought it was good. The thing is like all the times I've had a note of concern I've been with my mum but this time I was with my grandparents so my mum didn't get to see it ... my grandparents had to sign it ... but I showed it to my mum later".

In September Natalie reported that she had not received any notes of concern that term. When asked what things she had been doing differently she responded "I don't know, I just haven't been getting them I suppose. I can't really notice, I'm bad like that". She stated that she had made an effort to "just try and stay on task and make sure I listen to everything that is said and all that". Natalie was asked to describe her year using three words. She chose "not very good" because she would have preferred to be at junior school.

In September Natalie spoke about her goals for the year. She stated she had aimed to "sort of like fit in" to the middle school and the school routine. She felt she had done "all right" with fitting in because "I've sort of been away and I've missed out on a lot of stuff". Natalie stated that she felt her mother's

marriage had affected her school year “because we’ve had like lots of hypes, there’s been lots of stuff for me all this year ... and we’re starting to build a new house”. Natalie commented that the house should be completed by the end of the year and when they move she will attend a different school. When asked how she felt about leaving this school she responded “good ... because my friends are going to other schools anyway, but I want to keep in touch with them because I think it’s really important to stay in contact with your friends”.

Natalie explained that she always tried to do her best work at school.

“Well I try and do my best work all the time especially poems and essays and that kind of thing. Like I did this really, really good piece of Art work earlier this year and I don’t know where it is. I think I gave it to the teacher but I haven’t got it back yet, and most of the kids have got it back ... I can’t remember what she said ... if I don’t get it back by the end of the year it doesn’t really matter ... I don’t know, I can always make another one. It was like all these flowers drawn on the page with leaves and all that and I scrunched little pieces of tissue paper up and just stuck it. It was this huge A3 piece of paper, and I had to do it twice because the paper wasn’t big enough the first time. So I had to make the stuff smaller”.

Natalie reflected on her year.

“It’s just gone different ... it’s just really weird coming from the primary school and we were the oldest class to coming up here and how we’re the youngest class ... but I actually don’t mind it up here apart from schoolwork which is the main thing about school I suppose. I don’t know I just think maybe I shouldn’t have come up here so early. The work is sort of like a whole different level up ... it’s got nothing to do with what we learned last year and like finishing it off. Like we’ve started a whole new level I think ... it’s just a heap harder and there’s more expected up here. Like just for being late you get a note of concern, whereas in primary school you just say sorry I was late and you can go and sit down. I suppose teachers are just expecting you to do the right thing but in junior school we weren’t told to do as much things. We never had as many notes of concern at primary school and I reckon we should have had little notes to start us off.”

Even though Natalie felt resentful about the notes of concern she stated “but I suppose I deserve them ... I don’t know, teachers know more than I do”. When asked if she felt as though some things were unfair she responded “I don’t really

think anything is that unfair. Unfair to me I suppose but to everybody else it's probably just fair".

In November Natalie commented that she thought middle school and high school were the same thing except "I think high school will be easier ... middle school just gets you ready for high school. I don't think you've got to do as much work in high school. You probably have to do as much but you do it all like quicker".

Natalie reiterated the perception that she would have preferred to remain in junior school "because I always enjoyed it down there and I don't always enjoy it up here". When asked what kinds of things she did not enjoy she responded "being here ... it's just different". She continued "I just remember it to be really fun in primary school, it doesn't seem that way up here."

Natalie described the highlight of her school year as "going to primary school carnivals". She explained that because of their ages, Year 7s were unable to compete at an inter-school level with the Year 8s through to 12s. Therefore they had to compete with the junior school students and Natalie stated "I got captain for swimming and athletic carnivals ... we get to go to inter-schools with the primary school, not the high school". Natalie explained that she was the captain because "I got into the most races ... there's a girl and a boy captain for the whole team". Natalie described her biggest disappointment as "I know I won't get a good report. Last year I got a really good report but this year I don't reckon I will because I haven't been putting in the effort that I know I could have".

In November Natalie spoke of how she would attend another school the following year. She was enthusiastic about the move and indicated that she had heard the school was particularly good at encouraging students to do their best.

"If you're a D grading person and you get a C then the teachers will say really good, really good. But if you're an A grade student and you get another A you'll get really good, really good, but the people that are usually D and get a C they'll get a lot as well, they'll get it just as much ... but here it's usually pointing out the people who get As and A+s ... if you're good at something then you get an award at awards night".

Perceptions of school based system of rewards and penalties.

During the year Natalie often spoke of her negative feelings about the reward structures operating in the school, in particular the system of notes of concern and notes of commendation.

Throughout the year Natalie received eleven notes of concern and two notes of commendation. The notes of concern comprised of two notes for being late to school on a total of six occasions, two notes for incorrect uniform, three notes for inappropriate behaviour, one note for failing to have the correct equipment for class, one note for poor organisation and two notes for not completing work. The notes of commendation were for playing a good game of soccer in Physical Education and for thoughtful writing in Religious Education.

In March Natalie reported having already acquired notes of concern. She reported “one was for attitude and not bringing stuff to class, one was for being late and I got another one as well but I don’t remember what that was for, I think it was not bringing my homework in”.

In June Natalie spoke more of notes of concern when she was discussing how being in trouble at school reduced her enthusiasm for school activities. She reported she had “about four or five in the first term and I’ve got two this term ... I think two or three were for being late to form and some were just for work in the classroom”.

As already reported Natalie discussed in September how receiving notes of concern reduced her feelings of belonging in the school. She stated that receiving notes of commendation enhanced her feelings of ‘fitting in’ at the school even though at the time she had only received one note of commendation from Mrs Kelly. The note was awarded in August and read “fantastic, thoughtful writing Natalie. You are a star in an otherwise dull sky”. Natalie received another note of commendation in November reading “Natalie played a great game of soccer today. She is a star”.

Summary of perceptions of middle school context

Throughout the year Natalie consistently expressed her preference for the junior school rather than middle school environment. She perceived that she was not ready to move to middle school and that attributed her inability to adjust well to this perception. There appeared to be a sharp contrast between Natalie's junior school performance and her middle school performance, as she stated that she had received the Principal's Award in Year 6. In addition, she reported being nominated school captain for swimming and athletics when the Year 7s competed at inter-school competitions with the junior school students. Natalie perceived that her adjustment to middle school was also influenced by receiving notes of concern which she reported made her feel negative about her school experience and this in turn influenced her ability to complete academic tasks. In addition, she felt that receiving notes of concern influenced her feelings of belongingness in the school. Natalie consistently reported that she felt she was capable of higher marks and acknowledged that changes in her family situation had influenced the nature of her school performance. She perceived the school to focus on students who received As and A+s and reported that the school she would attend the following year focused on encouraging students to do their best.

Perceptions of classroom context

During the course of the school year, Natalie was able to share her perceptions about a specific classroom context, namely, that directed by her core teacher, Mrs Kelly. Within this classroom Mrs Kelly taught Natalie's class Mathematics, Integrated Studies (English and Studies of Society and Environment), Health, Computer Technology, and Religious Education.

Perceptions of class goal structure

In September the 26 students participating in the study were asked to complete a twelve item 'Perceived Classroom Goal Structure' scales from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey (PALS: Midgley, Maehr, Hicks, Roeser, Urdu, Anderman & Kaplan, 1994, cited in Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin, &

Midgley, 2001, see Appendix B). The survey required students to rate a total of twelve items on a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Survey results indicated that Natalie perceived Mrs Kelly's classroom to have a higher task mastery emphasis (3.67) than performance goal emphasis (3.17). As the sample of students surveyed was considerably small I interviewed Natalie in October with a view to clarifying responses and to explore why she had responded in particular ways to survey items.

Natalie described her responses to survey items representing a task mastery classroom goal structure. She indicated being unsure about whether 'our teacher tells us that really working hard is more important than anything else'.

"Because like sometimes people they do work hard but they don't have to work hard because they already know all this kind of stuff. So I think it's not as much as having to be working hard I think it's having to understand what you're working with ... you have to work hard at it as well but the main thing I think Mrs Kelly wants us to learn is understanding it as well ... you can work hard at something and have no idea what it is".

Natalie commented that she felt Mrs Kelly emphasised "working hard and understanding" in her class. To this extent she also agreed with the statement 'our teacher wants us to understand our work, not memorise it'. Natalie agreed that 'our teacher thinks mistakes are okay so long as we are learning' and explained "well because if you still know what you're doing, one mistake is not going to sort of mix it up. If you know where you've done a mistake you can just go back and do it again." Natalie agreed that 'our teacher wants us to enjoy learning new things'.

"Because it's easier to learn things when you are enjoying what you are getting taught. Like she tries to put us with our friends while we're doing, she likes to try us with our friends and if there's something wrong with that she'll just move us both".

She explained that "sometimes" she felt Mrs Kelly tried to make learning fun and that for her learning was fun "when I'm with my friends and I know what's happening". Natalie described how she was enjoying "the Odysseus thing that we're doing at the moment, it's interesting, just the legends and the myths, it's

really interesting like what it is". Natalie agreed that 'our teacher recognises us for trying hard' but added "sometimes, I'm not sure though ... I've only had one commendation". She went on to explain how she felt notes of commendation should be given to recognise effort.

"I reckon that should happen. If you have a really good piece of work or something you should get a note of commendation. Because we always get sent notes of concern but never, hardly ever, notes of commendation".

Natalie was unsure about whether 'our teacher gives us time to really explore and understand new ideas' because she was unsure about what the item was asking. After verbal explanation from the researcher she agreed and explained.

"We did that the other day ... we were talking about cave men and all that, and I just said where did Adam and Eve come into it. And we just started this huge discussion and it came to religion and all and then the bell went so we wasted about a whole period. But we learnt something."

Natalie also explained her responses to survey items indicative of a performance classroom goal emphasis. She agreed that 'our teacher points out those students who get good grades as an example to all of us' and explained "she does but not like every, every single time. I've got good marks sometimes and she's pointed me out". Natalie spoke of how she had been "pointed out" for her recent biographies.

"Well, I would have got an A but I didn't hand in my grid, but my actual bibliographies were the only ones that were set out properly ... she said it was the only one and you didn't have to do eleven pages because that's how many Liana did and I only did, on one of them I didn't do a whole page and on the other one I did like two lines over a page. You don't have to do over a page she said. I just answered all the questions correctly".

Natalie was asked how she felt about being 'pointed out' and responded "sometimes I don't like getting pointed out because it makes me look like a goody-goody and I don't want that ... like a know it all and that kind of thing, but I'm not". Natalie explained that she thought a 'goody-goody' was a person "that always does what the teacher says and never ever gets in trouble, has never had a note of concern or anything like that in their whole entire life". She was asked

whether she had been at all teased for being 'pointed out' and she explained "well, they used to say 'oh, you square' but I knew they were joking, they don't anymore". Natalie felt she was unsure about whether 'our teacher lets us know which students get the highest scores on the test'.

"Well, not always the highest, sometimes she just lets them tell us, sometimes she does ... I don't really mind, I just like to know what I got and my friends got ... I'm just interested ... I like comparing ... it's something to talk about or do".

She explained her friends usually received marks that were "around higher and lower than me". Natalie also reported not being sure about whether 'our teacher makes it obvious when students are not doing well in their work' because "sometimes she'll point out what is wrong on somebody's work ... that's good because it helps that person or people go back and see where they've done something wrong." Natalie commented that she was not sure whether 'our teacher tells us how we compare to other students' because she did not understand what the item was asking. After a brief verbal explanation she agreed with the statement commenting that the class was given information about the best pieces of work and average marks. Natalie disagreed that 'our teacher calls on the smart students more than other students'.

"She calls on like people that aren't listening most of the time just so they get told to listen. Sometimes I like to get called on so I pretend I'm not listening ... I just fiddle with my keys and that when I know the answer and she says, and when I give the right answer she goes 'just making sure you're listening'".

Natalie reported being unsure about whether 'only a few students do really well' in Mrs Kelly's class and went on to explain "I'm not sure. I think everybody gets better at stuff as we learn about it".

Perceptions of class groupings

In March Natalie reported that she preferred working in groups to working individually because "if I don't understand I can just get stuff off other people". When working on her own Natalie acknowledged that if she did not understand

that she would “ask someone else or the teacher, but it’s just easier if you’re in a group”. Natalie also spoke of multi-age groupings she experienced for her elective subjects. She described feeling that having such classes was a little unfair “because you get marked on the same stuff. I think it’s unfair because Year 7s get marked as high and as low as Year 9s and like they’ve done it before as well and we still get marked the same”. In November Natalie reported that she felt the Year 8s and 9s did not like the Year 7s because “I don’t know, I just don’t think they do”.

Summary of perceptions of classroom context

Natalie reported to perceive Mrs Kelly’s classroom to have a stronger task mastery than performance goal emphasis. To this end she reported Mrs Kelly emphasising understanding, enjoyment of learning and working hard. Interestingly, although Natalie held the perception of a task mastery focused classroom, she did not appear to endorse these goals on a personal level. For Natalie, perceptions of the classroom context were significantly influenced by her perceptions of the person facilitating the context, her teacher, Mrs Kelly.

Perceptions of teacher(s)

Throughout the year Natalie spoke about middle school teachers with particular reference to the perceptions she held of them and the degree to which she felt they cared about students. Natalie was able to speak about teachers in general and gave more specific information about her core teacher, Mrs Kelly. In March Natalie was asked what she thought of the teachers she had encountered thus far. She responded “um, my favourite teacher would have to be ... hmm ... I don’t know, I like the primary teachers”. She acknowledged that “some” of the teachers at middle school were friendly.

In June Natalie spoke of how her feelings about teachers were influenced by whether or not she had been in trouble with them.

“It depends if they’re always like that to everybody. If they’re just like that to me. I suppose if they’re just like that to me I have a different idea if they’re like that to everybody as well as me, but it’s still kind of the same.

But if they're really nice generally and they suddenly just tell me off once, then it's okay."

In July Natalie commented that she felt Mrs Kelly expected her to achieve more in her schoolwork. "With my report she said that I, well the teachers I didn't get as good a mark with said that I had the potential to do better ... I know I can do better". From Natalie's comments it appeared she felt Mrs Kelly held this belief of her throughout the year, apart from when she made comments about how well her biographies had been completed.

Perceived teacher support

Natalie did not appear to have a strong relationship with Mrs Kelly compared to the relationship she described she had with her Year 6 teacher. Her comments indicated that she maintained distance from Mrs Kelly because she was a little afraid of her.

To gain insight into how Natalie presented herself to teachers she was asked in September how she thought Mrs Kelly might describe her. She responded "I don't know, I have no idea what she thinks of me. Don't think she thinks much of me though". When asked why she thought that she responded "I don't know". When asked whether she thought Mrs Kelly was interested in her she responded "not particularly". Natalie was unable to explain why she felt this way. She explained that she generally related to Mrs Kelly "okay I suppose, sometimes, it depends if I'm having a good day or a bad day ... sometimes when I get grumpy it's because I'm grumpy with my parents. With teachers though, it depends what teacher it is". Natalie acknowledged becoming 'grumpy' with Mrs Kelly and she commented "I try not to show it but, I don't show her". Natalie was asked about the sorts of things she did in the classroom when she was grumpy and she reported "I try not to get picked first answering questions she asks us. I try not to talk to her at all. I just don't feel like talking to her when I'm grumpy. Don't like talking to anybody when I'm grumpy". She also indicated that sometimes Mrs Kelly made her grumpy by "I just don't like it when, I suppose nobody like it when we just get picked out and say now this was totally wrong and all that, and

just pick at a piece of work and all that”. Natalie was asked if this had ever happened to her and she responded “yes, can’t remember when though”.

She explained that she had a strong relationship with her Year 6 teacher.

“I really loved that teacher, she was one of my favourites. I had her for two years ... she was really nice ... she trusted me and she thought I was responsible. We had a sport council and all that kind of thing and I was on the sports council and the student representative council”.

When asked if she was able to “get along” well with Mrs Kelly, she commented “sometimes” and indicated that she did not know whether Mrs Kelly thought she was responsible or could trust her because “sometimes I’m good and sometimes I’m not, I don’t know why. Sometimes I’m just really giddy, happy or something and so I don’t think as much on school work, I just think of fun stuff”. When asked whether she felt that the relationship she had with the teacher influenced the way she worked she commented “I don’t know, I think if you just do your work then it’s okay”.

Help seeking from teachers

In May Natalie discussed her ideas regarding help seeking from teachers. She commented that she felt she could not ask Mrs Kelly for help when “I think like she’s gone over something really similar and then its just self-explanatory”. In such situations she reported trying to ask people around her who “might know”. In instances where she did not ask for help Natalie reported that “I probably just sit there, pretty lazy but that doesn’t happen much”. She indicated that most of the time this was “okay” as “eventually by the end of the thing I get it”.

In September Natalie spoke of how she was concerned about being ‘pointed out’ by Mrs Kelly for not doing her work in the correct way. She acknowledged this affected her ability to ask the teacher for help in particular instances because “sometimes it’s been all explained but I don’t get it or I just missed out a bit and then I don’t feel like asking because she’ll say ‘you should have been listening’”. In these instances Natalie reported that she asked her

classmates but that sometimes they would say “ask the teacher, just ask the teacher”. Natalie stated that she had felt comfortable asking her Year 6 teacher for help when she needed it, but was less comfortable asking Mrs Kelly.

In November Natalie spoke of how important it was for students to ask the teacher for help if they needed it. Although she acknowledged this was not something that she regularly did she explained “but you hear people saying ‘oh, that’s good. I’m glad you came up and asked me’”. When asked why she did not ask she responded “I forget ... oh, I don’t know, I probably do ask actually, or I ask my friends”. Natalie reported feeling more comfortable about help seeking from the teacher in junior school because “I never used to get in trouble like I did this year”. She spoke of an example when “I didn’t do my homework once because I didn’t get it (understand) and it was too late by the time I asked.”

Summary of perceptions of teachers

Natalie reported not having as strong a relationship with Mrs Kelly as she had experienced with her Year 6 teacher who she perceived as trusting her and believing her to be responsible. Natalie indicated that she was a little afraid of Mrs Kelly and was reluctant to ask for her help with academic tasks. She perceived that receiving notes of concern from Mrs Kelly influenced her feelings for the teacher and ability to seek help. In addition, Natalie reported wanting Mrs Kelly to think she was able to achieve higher marks than she usually did and reported behaviours designed to manipulate the teacher’s perception of her.

Perceptions of peer context

Over the course of the year Natalie became more willing to talk about her relationships with her peers, particularly her friendship group. Natalie spoke of how her friendships evolved over the year and her feelings about friendship related issues.

Perceptions of peer relationships

Initially Natalie spoke little of her friends, but in her June interview she began by speaking specifically of a situation that had occurred with her friends.

“On Wednesday I went to the dentist and got a plate. I didn’t tell some of my friends because like they’re the teasing type, even though they’ve got braces. They would probably still tease me. Like everybody that knew I told not to tell them, which was probably a bit mean of me, but still. Then somebody told Sandra. I told them that I didn’t tell them because I thought they’d tease me, and because I told them that they won’t tease me”.

Later in the same interview Natalie described how at recess and lunchtime she liked to “have a bit of fun” with her friends. She reported being one of a group of about four girls who were good friends and she stated that she was happy with the friendships she had. She reported a small conflict with a girl in the other Year 7 class who had a twin brother Natalie used to like.

“She’s got a twin brother and I used to like him and I think, you know how say that sometimes people only hang around you because you like their brother. Well I still like her even though I don’t like her brother, but she doesn’t like me now that I don’t like her brother because I think that she probably thinks that I don’t like her. But I still do, she’s getting really snotty”.

In July Natalie was asked whether she wanted to do well at school in order to feel close to her friends.

“Well probably not, because well, I just want to be friends with my friends because like my friend Kiara in the other class she’s really good at stuff so I don’t want to just be good at stuff because I’ll be too competitive against her. I’m really competitive against my friends. In work I just finish first to get, like say I want to be partners with someone I want to finish at the same time. Like I don’t want anyone else to finish in that time and stuff like that. Sometimes I rush things in that way”.

Natalie acknowledged that doing well at school was important to her friends to the extent that “it’s just not doing well at school isn’t a good thing because you get lower grades and it’s harder to get into other schools and other stuff like that. Because hardly any of my friends are coming here next year. They’re going somewhere else.” When asked what other things were important to

her friends she commented “just all being together I think”. Natalie agreed that it was important to feel close to a group of friends at school “because if you don’t you’re sort of like a loner, unless you’re like with heaps of different friends but you sort of have to feel close to some friends I suppose”. She stated that she felt close to most of her friends “because some are just like friends, like they’re nice to me but they’re not exactly my best friends or anything”. She reported being happy with the friends she had although “there’s Liana and my friend Ella and they’re both my best friends so it’s a bit awkward. Ella doesn’t like Liana, so it’s a bit ... they ignore each other. Ella tries to be nice to Liana but I don’t think Liana likes her very much”. Natalie admitted that this situation was difficult for her.

“I like to keep my friends happy. I don’t try and do wrong things but I stick up for myself still. Well if I don’t agree with a friend I just ignore them, which doesn’t always help. Not always I do that but sometimes. like to please them but I don’t like to like, like my friend Kiara she likes to be everyone’s friend all the time which isn’t really possible because like of someone is having an argument with someone else then she can’t be friends with both of them or something like that. That’s how some of us feel. I try not to fight with them. But I still like to stick up for my own ideas”.

In September Natalie spoke of how she would probably attend a different school the following year and during this conversation reported that most of her friends would also attend other schools. She described how she wanted to “keep in touch with them because I think it’s really important to stay in contact with your friends”. When asked what things were important to her in the friendships she had she responded “just knowing what each other likes and doesn’t like and getting on with each other”.

In November Natalie described another situation that had occurred with her friends.

“I don’t know what’s happened, just me and Amber are always fighting ... and I want to stay in a fight for once, I don’t want anybody to say sorry. Liana is trying to make me say sorry and I don’t want to say sorry because I got really annoyed at her ... I like to ignore her like she did me”.

Natalie described feeling harrassed by Amber throughout the year and that the situation was particularly difficult as her best friend Liana had sided with Amber. Natalie admitted that friendships had been more important to her during her Year 7 year than they had been previously “because like all my friends, we got split up and being in different clusters, that makes us split up even more”.

During classroom observation Natalie appeared to be fairly well accepted by her classmates. She appeared reluctant to volunteer during class discussions and was often restless during class time, engaging in talking and fiddling when the teacher was giving explanations and instructions.

To gain insight into how Natalie presented herself to her classmates, in September she was asked how she thought her classmates might describe her. She responded “I don’t know”. When asked what positive things they’d say about her she responded “I don’t know”. Natalie was asked whether there’d be any things they might say about her personality and commented “weird ... I don’t know why, they just call me weird all the time and loud”.

In September Natalie was asked who she felt were the popular students in her class. She responded “I don’t know really ... I suppose sometimes there can be nice popular and sometimes it can be a snobbish popular”. She described ‘nice popular’ as “someone that’s just sort of like really nice to all their friends and all that kind of thing, not perfect but really nice”. Natalie described ‘snobbish popular’ as “taking advantage of being popular ... just floating around and being snobbish and being popular for being snobbish”.

Help seeking and giving in the peer context

In July Natalie spoke of how she sought help from her peers during class.

“I usually ask Stephanie because she’s across from me, but that’s not always good because she’s as dippy as I am. She understands the same level as I do but sometimes we know more than each other, like we understand different bit more than each other ... I suppose if we’re both at the same part we can do work together”.

Natalie also reported sometimes asking Jordan for help, but commented that he was not usually helpful because “he explains it the scientific way and I don’t

understand him”. Natalie also spoke about helping her friends with academic tasks and commented “well they don’t usually need it, but I help them if I know how to do it”.

Summary of perceptions of peer context

Natalie placed substantial value on her peer relationships over the year. She specifically reported liking to please her friends and keep them happy but maintained that in doing so, she still felt it important to remain firm in her personal beliefs. Natalie reported being competitive with her friends and insecure about whether or not she would be teased by having to wear a dental plate. Although Natalie strongly desired supportive friendships she appeared to be concerned about protecting her sense of self-worth in front of her peers.

Advice to year 7s of 2001

In November I asked the 26 class members participating in the study to pretend they had been invited to offer some advice to the Year 7s of 2001 about how to have a successful year. The aim of this activity was to allow students the opportunity to discuss issues they perceived to be most important for Year 7s based on their experience. Through this it was also possible to gain some insight into the goals students felt it important to pursue throughout the year.

Natalie’s first piece of advice was “try to get into your teacher’s good books, like especially at the beginning, because then they’ll think you’re a very good student and they’ll keep a good eye on you for a long time after”. She explained that she felt teacher’s initial impressions of students had a lasting effect “because they think you’re a good student from the beginning”. When asked whether this was something Natalie had tried to do at the beginning of the year, she responded “no, I sort of just wanted to”. Natalie commented that “asking questions in class when you don’t know something” also would help students maintain a favourable impression “because then they know that you’re responsible”. She acknowledged that she felt it important that teachers think students are responsible “because then they can give you more responsible jobs to

do and they can trust you with things and all that kind of stuff". Through these comments Natalie revealed she felt it important to seek the approval of teachers in middle school and demonstrated how she felt supportive relationships with teachers could be established.

Natalie also felt it worthwhile for new Year 7s to forget about their friends, at least for the first term.

"Because I didn't used to think about my work, and I probably still do, I think about my friends more than my work. Especially in first term you've got to just get into school ... like you have to get the hang of it and then you can sort of relax".

Natalie admitted that her friends had always been more important to her than her work and that she had been interested in "probably having fun with them, not exactly doing my work". Natalie felt that by second term students could "do stuff with your friends, just make sure you've still got your work in" and that by term four students should "do a good job because your reports are coming up".

On her advice sheet Natalie wrote "after you've got the hang of middle school, relax, don't stress" and explained "because it took me ages to get the hang of high school, middle school and I was so stressed, I didn't relax as much". She commented that it specifically took her a while to "know where my classes are, make sure I wrote my homework in my diary, all that kind of stuff". She felt she did not really get used to these routines until August.

Natalie also wrote "have lots of fun and take it easy on the weekends especially". She commented that she felt it important for Year 7s to not "think about school on the weekends".

Contextual perceptions and personal goal pursuit

Over the year Natalie was able to discuss her school experiences, relationships and perceptions and provide some insight into how the perceptions she held influenced the nature of the academic and social motivational goals she chose to pursue.

Natalie held a strong desire to seek parental approval, particularly the approval of her mother. This desire lead her to initially try to pursue performance approach goals in order to achieve the academic levels her parents expected from her and when such levels were not attained, she reported engaging in avoidance strategies, perhaps as a way of maintaining her sense of self-worth in front of her parents. These factors also contributed to her pursuit of performance avoidance goals at school and in the classroom.

Even though Natalie perceived the classroom context to emphasise task mastery academic goals, her ability to endorse such goals appeared to be influenced by the perceptions she held of the teacher, Mrs Kelly, and the perceptions she believed Mrs Kelly to hold of her. Natalie's inability to form a supportive and positive relationship with Mrs Kelly had a significant influence on her goal pursuit, as she began to focus on performance approach goals initially, and then when these could not be reached, performance avoidance goals which became most prominent throughout the year. Natalie also began to try to manipulate the teacher's perception of her.

School reward and penalty structures appeared to influence the motivational goals Natalie pursued and she reported specifically the negative influence penalties and infrequency of rewards had on her school adjustment, sense of belonging, perceptions of teacher support, academic effort and engagement. This strong behavioural control system also encouraged Natalie to pursue avoidance goals and engage in avoidance strategies.

Natalie pursued strong social relationship goals with her peers and reported valuing supportive and stable peer relationships. She desired a sense of belonging with her immediate peer group that was perhaps emphasised by reduced feelings of belonging in the school environment. Even so, Natalie demonstrated concern about negative peer perceptions and this encouraged her to endorse goals promoted by her peer group and engage in strategies designed to protect her sense of self-worth in front of her peers.

The data indicate that the nature of personal goals Natalie chose to pursue over the course of her first year at middle school seemed to be influenced by her

family, school and peer perceptions. From Natalie's response to such perceptions there seemed to emerge a need to protect her sense of self-worth and avoid negative parental, peer and teacher judgements. In turn she began to pursue performance avoidance goals in some instances and attempted to attribute difficulties in adjusting to the middle school environment to factors beyond her immediate control.

Teacher perceptions of Natalie

During the year Mrs Kelly occasionally mentioned Natalie in informal conversations. At the beginning of the year it became evident to the researcher through a classroom situation that Mrs Kelly perhaps held negative expectations of Natalie. After the students had completed a questionnaire the researcher had reason to meet with a small group of students who had not completed the questionnaire correctly. Natalie was one of this group and when the researcher asked the teacher to see her, the teacher responded sarcastically "ah yes, what a surprise".

In September Mrs Kelly made comment that Natalie's year had been terribly upset by her mother's wedding. She referred to the event as "Natalie's wedding" because of the level of involvement she had and spoke of how "obsessed" she had become with the wedding process and celebrations.

Reliability of data

Throughout the year Natalie seemed to speak honestly about her school experience and personal life, but she appeared to become more comfortable during interviews toward the end of the year. Natalie became particularly relaxed in November after the researcher informed her that this would probably be the last interview. At this point she revealed more about her family background and the complexities of her current relationships with her friends.

At times, it seemed as though Natalie were reluctant to discuss particular issues and she sometimes behaved nervously and giggled. Over the course of the year it became evident that she was unable to adequately articulate much of how

she felt and it appeared that she really did not think as deeply as other students might about their school experience. She frequently responded "I don't know" and it appeared that this often was the most truthful answer she could give.

In November Natalie commented on how she felt about participating in the research and reported "I like it ... probably especially because you get to miss out on work, but I don't know I just do". Natalie indicated that she had not spoken to anyone about the interviews and did not feel that Mrs Kelly had behaved differently when the researcher had been conducting observation.

Conclusion

Natalie was a fairly typical example of an Australian student who had difficulties adapting to the middle school environment. The year was extremely difficult for Natalie as she had to deal with fairly large changes on both the home and school levels. These changes influenced each other and hindered Natalie's ability to adapt well to middle school.

Throughout the series of nine interviews particular themes relevant to Natalie's experience emerged and through these the types of goals she chose to pursue can be identified. Natalie was unhappy being part of the middle school and strongly expressed her desire to be in a primary school situation. She wanted to please her mother and to keep her friends happy. She wanted to avoid being in trouble and to "fit in" at school. In addition, she spoke negatively about the effect notes of concern had on her feelings about school.

Natalie appeared to be quite happy about being an interviewee. She was able to describe her experience and feelings as much as she understood them. To the extent that Natalie had a difficult year both at home and at school, and was neither a high or low achieving student, she was fairly typical of many students in the class and for this reason made a suitable candidate for case study analysis.

CHAPTER VIII

Case Five: Brett

Introduction

Over the course of the academic year between February and December, nine interviews were conducted with Brett. Throughout the year Brett remained quite guarded during interviews, but as he was able to offer quite a different perspective of school experiences to that offered by other focus students, he remained part of the research group for the year. As described in the methodology chapter, the interviews conducted were semi-structured and focused around themes relevant to Brett's school experience and current literature in this field.

The structure of this chapter has been generated from the conceptual framework for the study. Accordingly the chapter follows the format of previous chapters and focuses around Brett's perceptions of family, school and peer contexts. Within each section data are reported chronologically so as to illustrate how Brett's perceptions change over the year. The chapter also describes the relationship between Brett's contextual perceptions and the personal goals he pursued over the ten months data were collected. In concluding, some perceptions Mrs Kelly held of him are reported and reliability of data is discussed. A summary of Brett's case can be found in Appendix D.

The data presented were gathered as a result of interviews with Brett, interviews with Mrs Kelly, a student information sheet, classroom observation and information obtained from Brett's student diary. A supplement to the case studies describing the classroom context according to the Observing Patterns of Adaptive Learning (OPAL: Patrick, Ryan, Hicks, Anderman, Middleton, Linnenbrink, Hruda, Edelin, Kaplan & Midgley, 1997) categories of task, authority, autonomy, recognition, grouping, evaluation, time, social interactions and help seeking, can be found in Appendix C.

Family context and perceptions

Over the course of the year, Brett spoke of his family and in particular how family situations and relationships influenced his attitudes and feelings throughout the year. The following section reports the data regarding his family Brett chose to reveal in interviews during the year.

Family background

Brett was born in Australia, as were his mother and father. At the time of data collection, Brett's father worked as a builder and his mother worked as a teacher. Brett lived with his mother and older sister as his parents separated three years previously. He often spoke of his father and appeared to spend time with him on a regular basis, but was reluctant to discuss this, and in fact only revealed to the researcher that his parents had separated during an interview in July.

In week 2 of the school year the students were asked to complete an information sheet providing general information about themselves and their family. At this time Brett reported his best subject as Sport and his worst subject as Spelling. He described himself as a "poor" student but wrote that he wished to have a career as a pilot. He described his hopes for the year as "that I don't get into trouble".

Throughout the year, there appeared to be fairly constant conflict between Brett and his parents. Most of the conflict seemed to arise from Brett's school reports, notes of concern he received and more serious school disciplinary measures such as suspension. In June he described his parents' reaction to notes of concern.

"They don't really do much about it. They do care, but they get angry at me and they give me a bit of a lecture and stuff, but they don't do anything like scream at me or something because it doesn't do anything ... I just get bored and walk off. So now they mostly lecture me in the car, they mostly do it so I can't walk off and I just say 'oh, I've heard this before' and I just don't listen to them".

Brett reported other instances where he chose to ignore adults.

“Baseball season’s finished and I never used to listen to the coach, I used to do what I want, and now my mum won’t let me play football ‘cause she thought I was going to do the same in football but I only do it in baseball ‘cause baseball’s boring, but football is interesting ... when it’s boring I listen a bit and then I start getting bored and I fool around and when the coach is saying something I just walk off and just sit on my own”.

Brett’s relationship with his father seemed strained. He reported feeling pressure from his father to do well in sport and explained “in sport my dad always wants me to be the best and I don’t do anything he says I always do the opposite to spite him”. When asked why he behaved in this way Brett stated “to make him angry” but was unable to explain why he wanted to anger his father. Such behaviour may have been a reflection of his feelings about his parents’ separation and his desire for attention from his father.

In July Brett explained that his mid-year school report had been “pretty bad”. He stated “my mum got really angry and my dad’s still got to see it then he’s going to give me a big lecture”. He explained how his dad had not yet seen the report because Brett had only seen him once over the school holidays (two-week break) and had not had the report with him at the time. Brett also explained how he sometimes tried to live up to his mother’s expectations. He stated that he wanted to do good schoolwork because she expected it of him, but she also expected him to keep his room tidy. “My room is all messy and that’s not her expectation that’s the only thing I don’t try to live up to”. He reported that there were other times he did not live up to her expectations because “I’m tired, I just go to bed. If I can’t do it, I don’t do it.”

Brett reported conflicts occurring with his mother about when he was allowed to go out. “Me and my sister want to go out with our friends sometimes and my mum doesn’t want us to ... she doesn’t want us to be a druggie on the streets when we get older ... in one way she is right, but we still want to go”. Brett acknowledged that his mother was able to use extrinsic incentives to influence his behaviour and described how even though this made him angry, it was a successful strategy for his mother.

“My mum goes ‘if you get one more note of concern or something you’re not going to the movies or something’ ... she does it all the time, she bribes me and says ‘if you’re really naughty you’re not going to the movies’. She just says all that stuff and I get really, really angry. I don’t know what I do, probably just go to my room or something”.

When asked why being “bribed” made him angry, he reported “because it works. It’s the only thing that works”.

Brett described how his parents’ separation had affected his relationship with each of his parent’s families.

“My mum’s family are real bad. Sometimes I get really angry with them because they use my dad’s family to get under my skin because sometimes they’re rude to them ... it makes me feel so angry, so I call them names. I’m caught in the middle because my dad’s family says things about my mum’s family which I don’t really care because I agree with them. But my mum’s family say something about my dad’s family and I don’t agree with them”.

In September Brett explained that he was trying to change his behaviour at school.

“It’s because of my mum and my dad. They said I have to change and all this other stuff. They threatened they’d keep me down a grade and I don’t want that ... they said it but they wouldn’t do it because I want to finish at Year 10 and not go to Year 12. I got in trouble with a few people and Mrs Kelly rang up my mum and we had a parent teacher interview and that’s how they found out ... they talked about my behaviour and all that, how it’s not acceptable. My dad was angry and said you’d better change”.

Brett spoke of his father’s beliefs toward learning. He indicated his father to believe that making mistakes was a part of the learning process, and explained “if we don’t learn by our mistakes we’re just going to be doing the same mistakes over and over again ... if we make one mistake and we don’t make it again I reckon that’s a way of learning because my dad says”. In addition, he acknowledged the importance his father placed on learning when in October, he commented, “because I might like sport better than school, and my dad might think something else is more important than learning, but he doesn’t.” He also

reported that his parents had never asked him for comparative information regarding other students' scores, they only asked him about his own scores.

Summary of perceptions of family context

Throughout the year Brett described some of his feelings about his family situation and the nature of the relationship he held with each of his parents. Brett's comments revealed both his anger about his parent's separation, and his desire for a more supportive relationship with his father. Toward the end of the year it appeared that Brett had resolved to make more effort at school in order to receive parental approval, in particular, paternal approval.

Perceptions of school context

Throughout the year Brett was able to describe aspects of his school experience and how particular situations influenced his feelings about school. Brett had attended the Junior School adjoining this Middle School and therefore the environment was somewhat familiar to him. This section discusses Brett's perceptions of the school context, classroom context and teachers, and focuses on contextual themes that emerged as being particularly relevant to his motivational behaviour.

Perceptions of the middle school context

Throughout the year data were collected regarding Brett's perceptions of the middle school context and adjustment to the middle school environment, including factors such as adapting to the physical changes in school environment, attitude towards school over the year, experience of school subjects and issues that arose during the year.

In February Brett stated that he was unable to remember being told anything of what middle school would be like and that he expected it to be "like it is". In his first interview Brett described middle school as "okay" and reported enjoying "Outdoor Ed. but the river is closed, we were snorkeling ... now we're

doing work. I don't enjoy Math's and all that stuff, Band's all right". Brett was one of three electric guitarists in the school band.

In March Brett described his adjustment to the physical environment at middle school.

"I'm going quite bad actually. Well, I always go to my locker before form because I always used to do that and then I got told and now it's a habit and I keep going there ... I go before form and you're not allowed to do that ... you have to go at recess and after form and before you go to class and all that stuff so you can get prepared ... Homework is easy, it's just sometimes I forget it, I forget to, I leave it at home or something, but it's always done".

He reported spending varying amounts of time on homework "sometimes like two hours or something, and sometimes just a little while like an hour or half an hour, it just depends on what homework I've got".

Brett chose to discuss his school reports as an indication of his progress and performance. At the end of term one (April) an 'interim' report had been sent home indicating aspects of students' school adjustment by giving a rating for factors including organisation, effort, attitude to school work, classroom behaviour and homework. Brett reported in May "everything was average, my school work, because I didn't really try as much as I could have done". Even though he described his report as "quite a good report" he stated that "I could do much better".

In April Brett explained wanting to do well at school so he could "get a good job, one that gets paid a lot". He described his father's occupation.

"My dad is a builder, he contracts people and doesn't really do anything he just gets paid because he contracts them. I just want a good job that gets paid lots of money. I want to get a good job because my cousin doesn't have a job at all and he just sits and he doesn't do nothing all day, sleeps, watches TV. I don't want to do that. I want a good job and get money and stuff so I can have a nice house and good car and all that."

In June Brett reported that he was not really enjoying much at school except "recess because I'm not doing work and I get to hang out with my friends". He stated he was enjoying "the social life" and that schoolwork was "a bit boring

unless we do acting and stuff ... because well, you don't have to do any writing". Brett explained how he did not like schoolwork that required writing and in order to cope with this his strategy was to "just do what I have to do". In June Brett also acknowledged that his feelings about school had changed during the year "because I liked it more when I first came because it was new".

Brett was asked again about how his feelings toward school may have changed in July.

"They haven't because I've always hated school, I've never liked it. Teachers ... they're too strict and tell you off too much. Those people in public schools, I've never been to a public school, and they say how much they get off trouble and they don't even do their homework and stuff. I've always gone to Catholic schools, if I don't do my homework I get in big trouble and stuff, but I don't want to go to a public school because I'm already at a Catholic school ... I don't know, it's just all druggies and all that stuff ... I'd probably get bashed up coming from a Catholic school".

In July Brett also discussed his second report.

"I never really tried and so that's why I got a bad report ... sometimes I tried but this is the first time I've ever got a bad report. But the only thing that's really bad in my report is my behaviour and everything else is like average ... but this time I got bad nearly everything ... they marked me pretty fair. I think that I haven't even been concentrating, that's what I'm trying to change this term. I'm listening, trying to do all my work and stuff and get good in my tests and pass".

In July Brett was also asked about he felt about being part of the school.

"I don't want to be part of this school ... because I don't like this school as much as my old one ... because I didn't like my old school because that's the only one I've ever been to and now I've come to this school it's strict and everything ... so I don't like it and I don't want to be part of this school ... it's just too strict. I don't try to do the right thing all the time, that's why I'm always in trouble most of the time ... if I do the right thing it's because of my mum and my dad because it's less stress for them ... that's the right thing sometimes but I don't really try in my tests and stuff, I don't try at all. I study and stuff but if I don't know the question I'm not going to try and do the question ... if I don't remember it, it's not going to come back".

In his final interview Brett was asked who he thought had been his main influences during the year. Apart from Claude VanDamme ("cause he's got huge

muscles”) Brett acknowledged the Vice Principal as one of his main influences “because he’s told me not to do things that I have done, and I haven’t done them again”. Brett described his year on reflection.

“It’s been pretty bad ... because I’ve got in trouble heaps for being bad in class, being bad everywhere, bad attitude ... teachers say I’ve got a bad attitude because I’m rude, but I’m only rude when I get in trouble and I never did it. I’m rude if I get in trouble and I didn’t do nothing and I get blamed for it, that’s when I’m rude and when I start answering back”.

Brett was asked when he had felt positive about coming to school and he responded “a few times when I’m going to go to Outdoor Education and we go bike riding”. As Brett had described his year as “pretty bad” I asked if he would change anything about the year, could he repeat it. He responded “yeah, probably everything that I got in trouble for”.

In his final interview in December Brett was asked what kind of student he would describe himself as being. He responded “no idea”. He was unable to recall describing himself as a ‘poor’ student at the beginning of the year and stated that it was probably “because I don’t listen. I don’t do nothing. I’m always in trouble”.

“I want to do well at school in the education, yes, but I don’t want to do everything good around. I want to do good in class, like really good work but I don’t want to be good good. I don’t want to do everything good around everyone ... and I don’t want to be really good all the time, I just want to be good at work and don’t be good all the time in class ... because it’s not fun without being bad sometimes.”

Brett was asked whether he felt that ‘being bad’ made school more fun and responded “sometimes, it depends how much I do and how much trouble I’m in”. Brett described how he felt about school.

“I don’t want to go to it ... because at home we get to do what we want, here we have to do work, we have to listen to the teacher and if we don’t we get screamed at ... at home we can sleep, swim, do what we like”.

Perceptions of subjects

Throughout the interviews Brett spoke of his feelings toward particular subject areas. The only subject Brett reported enjoying any aspect of was Outdoor

Education. Brett felt that Outdoor Ed. should be fun, but his expectations for the subject often appeared to differ from the reality of what the subject was like.

“I like doing it in a double period but I still don’t really like it because every single period we do so much writing and that and half my book’s already gone with so many pages of writing you know, and last period yesterday we did rope ... and that was pretty good but I don’t particularly like bushwalking because last time we went the bag was too heavy and all my back was out and it always tugs on my back. But we just write too much, we should be able to get out and do something fun”.

When asked what he thought about the Outdoor Education teacher he responded “he’s okay”. He described most classroom tasks as either theory or writing tasks (copying notes and completing worksheets) and practical tasks. When asked whether he was attentive to what the teacher said in this subject he reported “he doesn’t speak to us in theory, he just makes us write down things. He doesn’t really speak to us only when we’re bike riding telling us what to do”. He described the theory or writing tasks as uninteresting “but I just do it because we know that it is going to help us when we do bike riding”.

Perception of school based system of rewards and penalties

Over the interview period Brett expressed his feelings about the school reward structures, specifically the system of notes of concern and notes of commendation. Brett’s diary revealed that during the year he had received four notes of commendation and seventeen notes of concern.

The majority of his notes of concern were for issues related to Brett’s behaviour. On the 17th of February his core teacher (Mrs Kelly) noted he was “not working as hard as he needs; to be attentive in class, bring all equipment and get to class on time”. Two days later, his mother responded by writing “Brett is very aware that he needs to pay more attention and I see change in him. This is improvement.” Mrs Kelly followed by writing “thanks for the note. He is trying really hard”. The next note was at the end of May where another teacher wrote that he “continued to be disruptive during a class discussion”. In June his core teacher found him “out of bounds” during lunch break. Also in June Brett

received a note from a relief teacher who wrote that he was “very distracted and sometimes rude and uncooperative. He needs to focus on the task at hand”. In July the core teacher wrote that Brett was “eating in class and denying that he was” and in August that he was “unable to quietly go on with his work despite warnings”. The last note recorded in his diary is in September where his core teacher wrote he was “unable to work without close supervision”.

Brett received two notes of concern in Ball Games for not bringing his sport uniform (August and October) and in November his core teacher wrote “Brett needs constant reminders about his shirt hanging out”. Brett received a total of six notes for homework not being completed. Three of these were in March, the others June, July and November.

Brett was awarded four notes of commendation during the year. In May his core teacher wrote “Brett is showing greater interest in his schooling and his behaviour is on the improve. Well done Brett”. In June she also noted in mathematics he was showing “great concentration and interest in improving lately Brett. Well done.” The following week his Outdoor Education teacher noted “Brett worked very well in completing the worksheet”. His final note was from his science teacher who reported “an improved attitude and a great lesson from Brett. Keep it up!”

The notes of concern and commendation featured in interviews with Brett. He referred to them frequently and often based his feelings and comments about his progress on how many notes of concern he had received. His reported goals revolved around behaviours that would help him avoid notes of concern and thus avoid getting into trouble at school and at home.

In March Brett explained how he had already received notes of concern and stated “I don’t really care if I get a note of concern because I just won’t do it again”. In his next statement he reported that not being late for class was the most important thing for him at school at the moments “‘cause I’ll get a note of concern for it”. In June Brett described his term as “pretty good because I’ve just got one note of concern this whole term”.

Brett talked about his school experience with particular attention to being in trouble. Some of his comments indicated the possibility of a relationship between the school's behavioural control system and his pursuit of avoidance goals. In February Brett stated that his only hope for the year was "that I don't get into trouble". In March, he described the most important aspect of his year had been "not to be late for class ... 'cause I'll get a note of concern for it". In April he reported he was having a good day because "I haven't got into trouble". At the beginning of June he reported he was having a "pretty good" term "because I've just got one note of concern this whole term, last term I got about eight or something ... I haven't been doing really bad things, I haven't been misbehaving in class". In July Brett talked about getting into trouble and commented "sometimes I don't care ... sometimes I care and sometimes I don't care ... I care when I get a lecture because it's so boring and my dad goes on and on and I don't like it".

Brett sometimes attributed being in trouble to external factors beyond his control, such as other students, teachers, and luck. Specifically he reported that he tried not to get into trouble but was often unfortunate to be around other students who were misbehaving.

"Sometimes I get brought into it ... like when they were throwing an aeroplane around when the teacher wasn't looking and it hit me, I threw it on the floor and it was a good aeroplane and it went up again and I got in trouble and I had to sit up the front. People talk to me and I talk back and I get in trouble again because they think I started it. I just get sent up the front, and get a note of concern. When I'm at the front it bothers me but when I get a note of concern I just think what my mum's going to do, sign it or get angry ... mostly she just signs it ... she doesn't hit me or anything, sometimes she cares".

In July Brett explained how he felt about getting in trouble at school.

"I don't know ... sometimes I try and sometimes I always get in trouble for the sake of it ... sometimes I just don't care if I'm naughty and sometimes I do. It depends like, my mum goes if you get one more note of concern or something you're not going to the movies or something ... I might try but when there's nothing on I just be normal".

Brett felt that he was often unfairly in trouble and described a situation from the previous year to explain.

“At my old school I had two strikes and the third one was not going to the end of the year excursion. Someone talked to me and I told them to be quiet and she (the teacher) goes ‘that’s your third strike’ and I wasn’t allowed to go. And I didn’t even talk, I just told them to be quiet”.

He described how being in trouble affected his attitude toward school “because I get in trouble like something I did right and I got in trouble for it. I get really, really mad and I hate it”.

Summary of perceptions of middle school context

Brett seemed to experience some difficulties adjusting to the middle school context and as the year progressed became increasingly negative about his school experience, despite reporting attempts to improve. He voiced a dislike of school and teachers and the rigidity of the system within which he found himself. Such perceptions may have encouraged him to rebel against the system as he did for much of the year. Although Brett had a desire to do well academically, he appeared to be concerned about the image academic success may afford him and so attempted to combat this through inappropriate behaviour.

Perceptions of classroom context

During the course of the school year, Brett was able to share his perceptions about a specific classroom context, namely, that directed by his core teacher, Mrs Kelly. Within this classroom Mrs Kelly taught Brett’s class Mathematics, Integrated Studies (English and Studies of Society and Environment), Health, Computer Technology and Religious Education.

Perceptions of class goal structure

In September the 26 students participating in the study completed the twelve item “Perceived Classroom Goal Structure” scales from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey (PALS: Midgley, Maehr, Hicks, Roeser, Urdan,

Anderman & Kaplan, 1994, cited in Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin & Midgley, 2001, see Appendix B). The survey required students to rate a total of twelve items on a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Survey results indicated that Brett perceived Mrs Kelly's classroom to have a higher task mastery emphasis (4.17) than performance goal emphasis (3.67). Class averages were 3.86 for task mastery and 3.15 for performance. As the sample of students surveyed was considerably small I interviewed Brett in October to clarify his responses and to explore why he had responded in particular ways.

Brett described why he had responded to items indicating a task mastery goal emphasis. He strongly agreed with the statement that 'our teacher thinks mistakes are okay as long as we're learning'.

"Because if we don't learn by our mistakes we're just going to be doing the same mistakes over and over again and she'll get angry. But if we make one mistake and we don't make it again I reckon that's a way of learning because my dad says and I'm pretty sure my teacher agrees with that".

He agreed that the teacher wanted the students to enjoy learning new things.

"Because if we don't enjoy it we don't listen and we just talk and we're not listening to her ... when people don't listen and we're talking in class we just get in more trouble". He acknowledged that the teacher made an effort to make learning fun for her students "sometimes, it depends ... if she knows we're not going to enjoy it I don't think she tries very hard but when it's fun, yes I reckon she tries".

He also reported that the teacher wanted the students to understand their work not just memorise it "because if we just memorise it we're not learning anything". He agreed that Mrs Kelly recognised students for trying hard and described the nature of recognition. "It all depends, some people get bad marks in Math's like an E or something, if they get a C+ or a D she always shows their work and says you've improved lots". Brett disagreed that the teacher told the class members how they compared with each other "because she doesn't". He

also reported being unsure of whether the teacher gave the class time to really explore and understand new ideas.

“Sometimes we get an idea of something but sometimes it’s wrong ... I don’t know, she doesn’t let us think about what we’re thinking because ... like when I think about something I’ve got it in my head most of the time it’s always wrong because I haven’t learnt that stuff before ... I suppose she lets us about 30 seconds to think about it and then she gets us to write it down ... that’s only happened a few times. I don’t need more time because if I don’t get it the first time I’m not going to get it. Sometimes when I don’t get it I never get it and I’m sitting there for ages and I just don’t get it”.

Brett also reported not being sure about the statement ‘our teacher tells us that really working hard is more important than anything else’.

“Because she never says that. Because I might like sport better than school, and my dad might think something else is more important than learning, but he doesn’t, but I’m not sure because she’s never said it to us.”

Brett disagreed that only a few students in the class do really well.

“Because sometimes people that get really poor in Math’s try and lots of students do really well ... not just a few, there’s quite a few students. Everyone can do well if they study and try on the test”.

Brett also explained his responses to survey items reflecting a performance classroom goal emphasis. He reported that Mrs Kelly made it obvious when students were not doing well in their work by placing the students in ability groups for Mathematics. He felt that this highlighted the students who did not do well at Mathematics and even though his friends were in the ‘middle’ group stated “they’re there because I know they’re just not trying, they don’t care”. He reported that sometimes the teacher would point out students who got good grades as an example to the others. He indicated that he had been ‘pointed out’ for getting a good grade and it had made him feel “good” despite his earlier comments that he preferred praise to be given privately rather than publicly “because I don’t want to brag about it”. He reported that the teacher let the class know which students had received the highest scores on a test.

“I like knowing, because I just want to know who gets the highest score, it’s just the thing or else then I have to go around and look on everyone’s work and see what they got ... I just want to know who got the highest score”.

He strongly agreed that the teacher called on smart students more than other students.

“Because some people when she asks us a question they put up their hand and they give the wrong answer and we’re going around for a long time ... so then she just picks the smart people for a while and then they always give the right answer ... I don’t mind about that, as long as I don’t have my hand up at that time. I put my hand up if I’ve got the answer and I know I’ve got a good chance of getting picked”.

Perceptions of class groupings

For most of the year Brett worked in mixed ability groups within his core class. As already mentioned, in September, Mrs Kelly restructured the Mathematics class so as to seat the students in three ability groups. The group of students who the teacher perceived had most difficulty with Mathematics was seated in the middle of the room and Brett referred to them as the ‘middle group’.

“Because sometimes she puts us in the middle there and then the second group that doesn’t need that much help and then that group, they don’t need any help at all. That’s the smart group, they put us in groups. She didn’t tell us that but everyone knows because all the people that don’t really understand much about Math’s are in there, and the other group here are the smart group that understand just about everything”.

Brett described himself as being in the “C grade group” and that he felt “it’s okay so long as I’m not in the middle group”. When asked whether he felt the people who got Es for their tests could move up to another group if they tried he replied “yes, if they try”. He indicated that although he was in the ‘middle’ group he did want to move up to the ‘top’ group and that to this end he tried “sometimes ... it depends on whether it’s easy work or hard work. If it’s easy work I’ll try for it and I’ll get an A for it, then if it’s hard and I don’t study for it I’ll just get an E”. Brett reported not “not really” being interested in trying to learn how to do things

he found difficult. When asked if he felt he could improve his ability by increasing his effort he responded “yes”.

Brett was also attending elective classes with students in Years 8 and 9. In March he reported not particularly liking the multi-age groupings he experienced in elective classes.

“I’d prefer just to be with Year 7s but if they’re there (Year 8 and 9 students) then I suppose it’s okay. But I’d prefer just to be with Year 7s because they might be really good at it (the subject) and you might be okay because you’re a Year 7 and so you don’t stand a chance like at ball games and all that stuff”.

In March Brett was asked how he felt about working in groups to complete classroom tasks. He reported liking working in a group “when it’s hard but sometimes alone because I might have a slow partner or a fast partner and I just can’t keep up”. When work was “hard” he preferred to have a partner because “they help you and sometimes I help them in case it’s hard for them and I know how to do it”.

Brett also indicated his preference for classroom tasks that were easy. In April he reported wanting to do well in Integrated Studies when the work was easy.

“Because when it’s too hard I get confused but when it’s easy work I work really well. I like easy work because I can get stuff quicker, like Math’s, I get Math’s very quickly, it’s just some things I don’t, like spelling, I’m not very good at spelling and I don’t get it ... sometimes I get it really quick and I do it, but spelling I just can’t do it, it’s just too hard”.

Brett reported that being able to do work quickly made him happy “because I don’t have to ask anything”. In the same interview Brett also reported working hard “to get good marks ... like a B”. As he had just completed a test he was asked what kind of mark he expected to receive for the test. He responded “probably a C ... she hasn’t marked it yet, but that’s what I usually get, a C”. Such comments indicate Brett’s desire for easy work in order to enhance feelings of being able to do the work, and to avoid having to ask for help. In addition, Brett revealed feelings of academic helplessness in the beginning of the year, as

he felt unable to change the types of grades he would get. This perception appeared to change during the year as reported previously.

Summary of perceptions of classroom context

Brett perceived his main classroom context to emphasis task mastery rather than performance learning goals and was able to explain why he held such a perception. He described Mrs Kelly's classroom as emphasising many classroom features traditionally associated with task mastery classroom emphasis, but his explanations seemed to suggest that his concerns about avoiding trouble had influenced some of his perceptions about the classroom context. Even though Brett perceived a task mastery classroom emphasis his concerns about the system of behavioural concern seemed to hinder his ability to learn effectively in the classroom environment.

Perceptions of teacher(s)

Throughout the year Brett spoke about middle school teachers with particular reference to the perceptions he held of them and the degree to which he felt they cared about students. He was able to speak about teachers in general and gave more specific information about his core teacher, Mrs Kelly.

Brett reported holding fairly negative perceptions of teachers. In March he expressed his views about teachers.

"Some are all right, some are mean ... they give you notes of concern and that shout at you and all that and some for no reason at all, but you need to get along with them because if you don't get along and they're screaming at you you'll get a note of concern and get in trouble or something".

In June Brett described rarely listening to teachers.

"I just switch off because sometimes I know what she's doing and then I just switch off and go into dreamland and then she goes 'Brett, what's this' and I don't know which number but if she told me what number they were up to I would know the answer ... at least that's what happens most of the time ... I just don't listen, I can just shut it all off".

In July Brett spoke of how he felt about when reprimanded by teachers.

"I don't know ... sometimes it annoys me, it depends ... like if I want to play a game and I get called into the office or something ... or I'm on a roll on my schoolwork and I get called outside and I just lose it".

To gain insight into how Brett presented himself to teachers he was asked in September how he thought Mrs Kelly might describe him.

"She'd say I muck around a lot in class and that I talk when she talks and that I'm the class clown ... I'm not anymore because I'm trying to pass, I was because I used to muck around ... I don't know why, sometimes it just comes out ... I don't try to make it happen, sometimes I just say it and people laugh ... sometimes it makes me really mad because then the teacher's angry and I get sent out of the classroom".

Brett indicated that he felt it important for teachers to have a sense of humour "because if they don't have a sense of humour, they're grumpy". When asked whether he felt Mrs Kelly to have a sense of humour he replied "sort of". To explain he continued "sometimes she makes other people laugh but I don't laugh because it's not funny to me". He described how other students "just laugh for the sake of it, but I don't do it, I don't laugh if it's just not funny at all". Brett acknowledged appreciating her sense of humour "because if she makes a joke, she's in a good mood. When she doesn't she's in a bad mood".

In December Brett reported that he had begun to listen more to teachers, in particular Mrs Kelly.

"I listen to her now but at the start of the year I never used to listen because I never listened to any of my teachers. But I just ask people around me if I don't know. I don't listen to my Italian teacher because it's quite boring, it doesn't interest me ... then I just don't listen to her talk".

Brett described Mrs Kelly as a good teacher. He indicated that he felt she was a good teacher "because some teachers they just go 'you've got this to do, do it' ... they don't explain and Mrs Kelly does". When asked if there was anything fun he could remember doing in her class he replied "Yes, the art that she has up the back, that was fun". These more positive perceptions of Mrs Kelly may well have been the result of her efforts to work with Brett and his parents to help him adjust more adequately to the school. In addition, his change in behaviour and

academic achievement, may have lead him to hold more positive perceptions of the classroom, including the teacher who had been giving him more positive feedback.

When reflecting on the year Brett perceived he had come to know the teachers at the school quite well “because I know which ones to behave with and I know which ones not to”. He described how this process had taken him a while “because I had to know all the teachers and how they teach and if they’re strict and all that. I had to be in a class with just about everyone of them as a relief teacher, so it took a long time”. He reported that it had not taken him long to get to know Mrs Kelly.

“Because she screams at me ... she didn’t do it at the beginning of the year, oh, I suppose a bit at the beginning of the year and then at the end, a lot, in the middle heaps. Here not much, she hasn’t screamed at me that much”.

He reported that he felt she had been trying to help him “because she makes sure we know what we’re doing in class”. In addition, he described Mrs Kelly as “much stricter than other teachers” and indicated that he felt that this was a positive attribute.

Brett felt that the teachers at the school had treated Year 7s “not very good at all” and in December explained that “sometimes they just scream at me for no reason ... write your name on a piece of paper for no reason at all ... there’s other people, other kids that should have their name down that haven’t there and they get in trouble”.

Perceived teacher support

In May Brett reported that Mrs Kelly cared about her class “because if we don’t understand she always explains it so we do understand”. When asked whether she cared for him as an individual he responded “I don’t know”.

In July Brett indicated that he did not feel that teachers were interested in things that affected him personally and explained that he felt that way previously when he was “in a lot of trouble and I was angry, now I feel not as bad”. He

reported that Mrs Kelly was not interested in him as a person “because she just teaches school work and I don’t see her the rest of the day”. He stated that the teachers at the school did not care about the students because “well, the teachers have got pets some of them, but some of them they just care about people that they like and others they just teach them and don’t care about that much”. He stated he perceived teachers to care about students who were “like the really good ones and they’re quite smart and all that stuff”. When asked how he felt about this perception he responded “I don’t care” and added “they’re all the same from my old school to this school”. Brett’s feelings that teachers did not care about him and his anger with teachers about his being in trouble, perhaps contributed to his feelings of dislike of school.

Summary of perceptions of teacher(s)

Throughout the school year Brett consistently reported negative perceptions of teachers, which he often related to his experiences of receiving penalties. He expressed his view that teachers believed he had a bad attitude and sometimes treated him unfairly. As the year progressed Brett began to talk of the benefits of having amicable relationships with teachers, but did not talk of experiencing such a relationship. Brett seemed to perceive low levels of teacher support and believed teachers cared about students who were intelligent and behaved appropriately.

Perceptions of peer context

During the nine interviews Brett was able to share his perceptions about some aspects of his peer context. Over the course of the year Brett’s peer relationships appeared to be constant, although he was somewhat reluctant to discuss the nature of his friendships in detail. This section reports data obtained in particular with regard to his friendships and relationships with his classmates.

Perceptions of peer relationships

Throughout the year Brett maintained a constant group of friends who were also Year 7 students. Over the course of the year no changes transpired regarding Brett's main group of friends, as most of the relationships had been established in junior school. One boy who was new to the school in Year 7 joined Brett's group but apart from this the group remained fairly constant.

In June Brett described how his friends sometimes took advantage of him.

"Sometimes they make me angry because they always ask for money for the canteen and 'cause I give it to them, they always come back for more. I didn't have money today, I spent it before school and they came up and asked for money and I just said I didn't have any. When I've got money and I don't give it to them they know and they just keep asking me and asking me until I give in".

Whilst this situation angered Brett it appeared that he felt powerless to change it and showed how he felt his friends were able to manipulate him.

In July Brett spoke of conflicts with his friends.

"I don't know, probably ... I have a few fights, but not really, probably once a year or something, once or twice ... it just depends what kind of a day it is. Maybe if like they've said something behind your back or something. I just want to know what they said ... so I bribe people ... I just make up things, I go, 'I'm going to get my dad down here' or 'I'm going to tell my teacher'. Just things that I won't do because it would embarrass me as well. I just say things that I won't do and they think I will so they tell me what happened".

Even though Brett was angry that his mother used extrinsic incentives to manipulate his behaviour, he chose to do the same to his friends and explained "it works for me, it should work for them".

Brett also explained his feelings about peer competition. In October he described himself as a competitive person and even though he did not set out to compete with others he acknowledged that "when I'm racing somebody I try more than I do any other time if I'm not competitive". He indicated that he felt inclined to want to achieve more if there was competition.

In December Brett stated that he was interested in having a girlfriend and that he had “been out” with a girl the previous year, but felt that there were not any girls he liked at this school.

“At my old school I liked one, this school I don’t like anyone here because I just don’t like them ... at my other school they were nice and here they’re not very nice at all ... some of them are mean and that ... they swear and throw stuff at you and they push you and they kick you for no reason”.

During classroom observation, Brett appeared to be fairly well accepted by his classmates, but occasional disputes were observed where Brett was attempting to argue a point and others disagreed with him and where Brett had copied answers from other students.

In May Brett was involved in a group dispute during a class activity. The aim of the activity was that the group should do their best to reach consensus with answers to a series of questions related to surviving in the wilderness. The question that was the cause of the dispute was regarding the sorts of behaviours that are appropriate when encountering snakes in the bush. Brett was in a group with three other class members including Anita and Jeremy. The researcher observed Brett’s group working and in particular had noted how even though Brett had the right answer to the question other group members, particularly Jeremy, were trying to convince him otherwise so that the group could reach consensus on that question. Brett knew from his experiences that snakes were scared of loud noises, but Jeremy disagreed and argued adamantly and sometimes irrationally against him. When Brett refused to change his answer Jeremy asked difficult questions of him and tried to use terminology that was beyond Brett’s understanding. Brett moved from arguing based on his experience to “but I know I’m right, I saw it on a documentary”. When Jeremy tried again to break down his confidence Brett responded “But I’m not that stupid am I?” Although the group moved on to the next question, Brett still kept insisting he had the right answer. Eventually he asked the teacher if the group could have more than one correct answer. The researcher noted that as the students moved out of the classroom to

recess break Brett was still trying to argue his point with other group members.

Brett was asked about the incident during the following interview.

“I got an answer that I knew was right and they got an answer and they thought they knew it was right, they thought. But I knew mine was right because I’d seen it on a documentary and they still wouldn’t agree and when I saw a snake in the bush I never did what I was supposed to do, I just stayed still. I knew I was right and they were wrong. I go ‘fine you can have the answer’ but then the teacher was talking about if you don’t get it just agree ... then I said that I’ve watched a documentary, you can make lots of noise the snakes get scared and go away. The teacher said that my answer was right because I had seen it in something and they never had, they just guessed that that was right, then I got the answer”.

He reported that other group members had said nothing to him about his answer when the activity was completed. This incident showed Brett’s desire to be perceived as an academic equal by his peers and their reluctance to allow him that.

During the year Brett was observed frequently looking at other students’ work (without their knowledge) for answers. This appeared to cause some tension as when he was discovered behaving in this manner other students became angry. This in turn led to Brett’s classmates being reluctant to help him when he asked for assistance. He reported “I have to ask about 10 people to just get one thing ‘cause they don’t tell me ... they just think I’m copying”.

To gain insight into how Brett presented himself to his classmates, in September he was asked how he thought his classmates might describe him.

“They’d say I’m mean ... because if they get on the wrong side of me I’ll always be mean to them ... it’s only if I don’t know them and they call me a name I don’t like, I’ll be mean to them, only if they say something first”.

Brett’s desire to present himself as ‘mean’ may well have been a reflection of his negative feelings about school along with his desire for status within the peer group.

In September Brett explained how he perceived popularity with regard to his own status within the peer context.

“I want to be popular and I’m not very smart but I’d rather be smart than popular. I’d rather be both. Some people are smart and popular, it doesn’t

mean you have to be dumb to be popular ... it's just how you act. Popular students, well, they just be nice really, like some people are mean and they don't have any friends ... some people are nice and they have a lot of friends".

Brett included himself in his list of students he would describe as popular in his class but his comments about what made students popular appeared to contradict his presentation of himself as 'mean'.

Help seeking and giving in the peer context

Brett saw the value of being able to ask his classmates for help, although he indicated that he often preferred not to. In April he reported liking easy work because it meant "I don't have to ask anything" but continued by explaining how help seeking put a strain on his relationships with other class members. "Asking doesn't bother me, it's just that when I ask I have to ask about 10 people to just get one thing 'cause they don't tell me ... they just think I'm copying". When asked if he would turn to the teacher for help he responded "no, she goes ask the people around you, so I ask the people around me first and then I ask the teacher ... she'll still help me".

In May Brett reported help seeking from peers to be his main strategy when he found work difficult and in July described how he did not like being seated at the front of the classroom under the blackboard (as a result of misbehaviour) "because when I don't know how to do something I always ask people and I'm not allowed to ask people. So I'm always stuck on a question".

In July Brett also described how he saw it as advantageous to be friends with "smart people".

"When I'm friends with a smart person when I don't know something I could just copy them or get them to help me ... but when I'm not friends with them and like not very smart, they go 'you're just copying me' when I do good work ... sometimes they help me out sometimes if I make friends".

He went on to elaborate and indicated that he wanted to do well in his schoolwork so that other students, in particular smarter students, would want to be friends

with him. He reported that being friends with smart people meant “they won’t think I’m copying that much ... just my idea”. Brett was asked why he used the word ‘copying’ rather than helping. He responded “it’s not copying, they just help me out. When they help me out they tell me the answer with it”. He described one student in particular who used to help him but explained that he was no longer able to ask for his help as he was now seated further away. “I can’t get out and walk over there ... I just ask for help around me and see if they know”. Brett’s reference to the notion of ‘copying’ in July and April indicated his desire to manipulate his peers for his own ends. To avoid being perceived as a student who copies others, he felt that making friends would allow him to copy, but that his behaviour would not be perceived as such by his peers due to the friendship.

Brett’s perception of how the Year 7 students were treated by students from other year groups did not appear to change as he got to know other students in his elective classes. In December Brett reported that other students in the school had treated the Year 7s “not very good at all ... because when we’re in line they push us out of line, they think they own us”. Brett acknowledged that he had been “not teased, threatened yes ... when we’re in line they go ‘get back or I’ll bash you’ or something ... I didn’t move out of the line ... I knew they weren’t going to hit me because they’re losers”.

Summary of perceptions of peer context

Brett appeared to maintain a constant group of friends during the year, but reported that his friends were sometimes able to manipulate him and that in turn he sometimes sought to manipulate them through threats. He appeared to desire status and popularity within the peer group and aimed to create an image of himself as mean. Brett sought to make friends with more academically capable students with a view to enhancing his own academic success.

Advice to Year 7s of 2001

In November the researcher asked all class members to pretend they had been asked to offer some advice to the Year 7s of 2001 about how to have a

successful year. The aim of this activity was to allow students the opportunity to discuss issues they perceived to be most important for Year 7s based on their experience. Brett indicated that the advice he suggested be as a result of his experiences that year.

Brett's first piece of advice was to "listen to the teacher because if you're talking to someone else while the teacher is talking you get into big trouble and get sent outside and if you don't listen to her you won't know what to do on your worksheet as well".

Brett's second piece of advice was to "do your work ... if you don't do your work you're going to have heaps of homework and you won't cope". Brett advised it was important to "don't be bad in class ... muck around, run around in the classroom". He also recommended that future Year 7 students "don't throw things because if you throw things you could get in trouble and hurt someone, poke their eye out or something". He explained how he had got in to trouble the period before because "we were throwing things and we got into trouble". He reported they were throwing small blocks used in mathematics. He explained "I wasn't throwing it until one hit me ... it didn't really hurt so I picked one up and threw it back and I got in trouble". He reported that other people, "everyone" were also throwing blocks. His final piece of advice was "don't eat in class". Brett described an incident where "we bought some V-pops from the shop and we chopped off the stick and we were eating it in class ... lots of people got caught and we got notes of concern in our diary".

The advice Brett chose to offer future Year 7 revolved around avoiding trouble and completing academic tasks.

Contextual perceptions and personal goal pursuit

During the year Brett was able to describe how his perceptions of family, school and peers influenced his feelings and behaviour, and through this the nature of the goals he pursued. Specifically, perceptions he held and developed over the course of the year appeared to influence his pursuit of predominantly performance avoidance and social status goals.

Throughout the year Brett often pursued avoidance goals and reported avoidance behaviours. He described his preference for easy work that could be completed quickly and his desire to explore strategies designed to help him avoid difficult work. Brett also demonstrated use of self-presentation tactics, such as excuse making and avoidance behaviours such as fooling around and procrastination. Brett appeared to be concerned about protecting his sense of self-worth and this contributed to his pursuit of avoidance goals.

Brett's perceptions of particular aspects of the school context influenced his pursuit of particular academic and social goals. The majority of interview data revealed that Brett held fairly negative perceptions of the middle school context (and school in general), and in particular found it difficult to adjust to what he perceived to be the strictness of the environment. As such he tended to rebel and engage in activities not sanctioned by the school through social irresponsibility and noncompliance behaviours. As a result he reported being in trouble regularly. These experiences seemed to contribute to and reinforce his pursuit of avoidance goals.

Brett reported desiring respect and status within his immediate and wider peer groups and he tried to attain this by creating an image of himself as 'mean' and by manipulating other students through threats. Part of his 'mean' image may well have required him to engage in activities not sanctioned by the school, that would help him build notoriety and status within the peer group. To support this notion he explicitly described his desire to be good at schoolwork but not to behave well all the time. This behaviour he appeared to perceive as giving him some status within his peer group.

Teacher perceptions of Brett

During the year the teacher made reference to Brett in both informal discussions with the researcher and in audiotaped interviews. Mrs Kelly acknowledged that Brett had experienced difficulties throughout the year and expressed a desire to work with him to help him improve.

In an interview in March Mrs Kelly described Brett as one of a group of students in the class she would describe as “at risk”. In September she referred to her dealings with Brett and described him as one of a group of students “who would be my biggest problems”. She went on to explain how she had begun regular contact with Brett’s mother to inform her of Brett’s progress both in term of difficulties he experienced and positive efforts.

“If I’ve had difficulties with a child and I’ve had a lot of dealings with their parents for whatever reason, when I see the slightest improvement, no matter what it is I get on the phone to their parents and I ring up and say “I just wanted to let you know that Brett has had a really great week”.

Mrs Kelly was aware of Brett’s family situation and during an informal conversation at the end of August she reported that Brett and his parents had an interview with her during which the parents argued with each other in front of both Brett and herself. Brett’s father reportedly became extremely angry so much so that the interview was terminated and alternative interview arrangements were made involving the Head of Middle School. The subsequent interview with Brett and his mother had been successful in that Brett’s behaviour and work had been improving ever since.

Over the course of the year observations were made regarding Brett’s classroom behaviour and the nature of interactions he was directly involved in within the classroom context. Brett was frequently called to attention by Mrs Kelly and reminded of his behaviour when the teacher deemed it necessary. In February and March the researcher observed that Brett was frequently moved due to inappropriate behaviour. During one lesson at the end of February Brett was moved to sit at the front of the class so that his desk was directly under the whiteboard and his back to the class. Mrs Kelly commented “you’re making bad choices at the moment” to him.

In August the class was close to finishing their Webquest project and at this stage Brett had not been able to find much information on his topic, plants in Padagonia. A lesson was conducted where each group had an opportunity to

present their work in progress to the rest of the class for feedback. The teacher introduced the lesson by stating:

“The aim of today is to try and pull our Webquest together and to see what it is that you’ve achieved so far within your group, and what is it that you need to achieve so that at the end we’ve got a really good product. In this session I’m not just looking at product I’m looking at process as well, so you can explain this is what you’ve done and this is where you’re heading.”

She went on to specifically refer to Brett’s predicament.

“Brett has actually come to me a little bit late in the process, a little bit late, and he’s come and told me that he’s having a little bit of trouble finding plants in Padagonia. Considering that’s his area of study and we’re a long, long way down the track, he’s come a little too late to actually do a good job of it (pause) but at least he’s come before they’ve finished, so that’s something that they’re going to have to work on to find information.”

Whilst the students were getting organised in their groups the teacher spoke with me about the project. Mrs Kelly reported that one of the main outcomes of the Webquest activity was that the students recognise that the Internet is not the only source of information. She reported that many students perceived the Internet as the best resource tool available.

“Brett is still fighting that belief that the information is there somewhere ... every week you’ll go in there (to the computer laboratory), every week, and he’ll sit there and search for stuff and I’ll say to him ‘what are you doing’ and he’ll say ‘oh, I’m looking up plants’. I’d say to him why don’t you just leave the Internet and find a book. No, he wouldn’t have a bar of it ... it’s there somewhere I’m going to find it. And he finally came to me yesterday for help”.

In the workshop lesson, Brett had to explain his predicament to the class.

“As you know I don’t have very much information so I couldn’t do what I wanted to do, but at the end me and M are going to do (to M) what is it?, oh yeah, a news recording but if I get some information quickly I’ll see what I can do, but I know we’ll do something.”

Brett was the only student in his group who was not able to show anything for his efforts.

Mrs Kelly remained very firm with Brett throughout the year and he described her as one of his strictest teachers. During an informal conversation in October she reported he had changed his behaviour and that his work had improved immensely.

At the end of November Mrs Kelly described how Brett (and another student, Steven) had been suspended once more.

“Mum apparently went totally off the wall at him in (the Head of Middle School) office. What they did was they were cleaning the lockers and found a pencil case. Now the pencil case had been reported missing (and advertised as such in the daily school notices) ... well apparently they decided they would divvy up the goods and take them home. In it was a graphics calculator and pencils, pens, the whole lot. They were quite happy to have the stuff and the boy whose pencil case it was got wind of it and well, they begrudgingly admitted that it was them. So there wasn't a lot of yes we're sorry, we did this and all that sort of thing, which is a shame because both of them in here are working well. They're both boys that we've had a bit of trouble with at the beginning of the year, but they just seem to have lost the plot outside. Steven is mixing with much, much older students, like the Year 10s, they just seem to have lost the plot a little bit”.

Reliability of data

As already mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Brett remained slightly guarded during interviews. On a few occasions Brett seemed uncomfortable during interviews and sat with his arms folded and made very little eye contact. Given the nature of Brett's experiences over the year and the nature of his relationships with other adults, it is plausible that he may have felt uncomfortable being interviewed by an adult conducting research.

As the year progressed, the researcher gained the impression that when interview questions may have required Brett to reveal more about himself than he wished to, he responded with “I don't know”. Attempts were made to ask the same type of questions in different ways and at different points during the year, but Brett still used “I don't know” to avoid answering. It is possible that Brett genuinely did not know answers to particular questions, but given the strength of some of his other comments and the degree to which he had thought about various aspects of his school experience, the researcher found this to be quite unlikely.

The researcher felt that there may have been instances where Brett genuinely was not able to recognise reasons for his behaviour, but sensed that there were also instances where he chose not to tell.

At various points in the year the researcher was made aware of other information relating to Brett, particularly about his suspension from school, which Brett had chosen not to discuss during interviews. Due to the fact that the researcher did not wish to be perceived to be affiliated with school staff, Brett had no knowledge that the researcher may have had such information. Thus, he was never directly asked if he had been suspended, but rather was asked general questions such as 'what has been happening since the last interview'. At these points Brett neglected to mention his suspension and the results of such serious disciplinary measures. As he chose not to mention this it is possible that there were other aspects of his school experience he also chose not to reveal.

Brett recognised the importance of presenting as good an image as possible to teachers and it is possible that he may have tried to do the same with the researcher. As such, he was selective about the information he chose to discuss and sometimes endeavoured to portray himself in a way that would protect his ego.

In December Brett was asked how he felt about being part of the study. He responded that he felt "okay" about being interviewed and that "sometimes I'm trying to do my work but it was okay". When asked if he had ever been asked any questions he did not wish to talk about he responded "I don't really care". With regard to the classroom observation Brett stated that the teacher "was much nicer" when the researcher was in the class.

Conclusion

Brett found it difficult adjusting to middle school and felt constrained by what he perceived to be an increase in rules and what he described as the "strictness" of the environment. He was repeatedly in trouble with teachers for his behaviour and there seemed to be a culmination of negative experiences that lead to serious disciplinary measures being imposed on him in September. In October

Brett reported that he had decided to try and improve his school performance in terms of behaviour and academic pursuits.

Brett stated that he did not enjoy school, apart from the social opportunities it provided and he seemed to spend much of his energy either being in trouble or trying to avoid being in trouble. Brett appeared to have a good understanding of the behaviours that would lead him in to trouble, but did not appear to always wish to behave that way. From his comments about the reasons why he did not wish to be in trouble it became evident that his parents were the main reason he wished to avoid trouble. Given his feelings about his parents separation, it is possible that he saw being in trouble as a way of drawing himself to their attention. In addition, it became evident that he perceived being in trouble as a way of enhancing his status within his peer group.

By October it appeared that Brett had reached a point where he was able to more adequately achieve a balance between his academic and social goals within the school context.

CHAPTER IX

Case Six : Jessica

Introduction

Over the course of the academic year between February and December, nine interviews were conducted with Jessica. As described in the methodology chapter, the interviews conducted were semi-structured and focused around themes relevant to Jessica's school experience and current literature in this field.

The structure of this chapter has been generated from the conceptual framework for the study. Accordingly, the chapter follows the format of previous chapters and focuses around Jessica's perceptions of family, school and peer contexts. Within each section data are reported chronologically so as to illustrate how Jessica's contextual perceptions change over the year. The chapter also describes the relationship between Jessica's contextual perceptions and the personal goals she pursued over the ten months data were collected. In concluding perceptions Mrs. Kelly teacher held of her are reported and issues that may influence reliability of data are addressed. A summary of Jessica's case can be found in Appendix D.

The data presented were gathered as a result of interviews with Jessica, interviews with Mrs. Kelly, a student information sheet, classroom observation and information obtained from Jessica's student diary. A supplement to the case studies describing the classroom context according to the Observing Patterns of Adaptive Learning (OPAL: Patrick, Ryan, Hicks, Anderman, Middleton, Linnenbrink, Huda, Edelin, Kaplan & Midgley, 1997) categories of task, authority, autonomy, recognition, grouping, evaluation, time, social interactions and help seeking, can be found in Appendix C.

Family context and perceptions

Over the course of the year, Jessica spoke of her family and in particular how family situations influenced her attitudes and feelings about her school work and peer relationships over the year. The following section reports the data regarding her family Jessica chose to reveal in interviews during the year.

Family background

Jessica was born in Australia and during the year of data collection lived with both parents and an older sister. Her mother was Australian and her father American. She reported that her mother worked in a non-teaching role at another high school and had completed school at the end of Year 10 (age 15). She stated that her father who had completed school at the end of year 12 (age 17) worked in the city.

In week two of the school year the students were asked to complete an information sheet providing general information about themselves and their family. Jessica described herself as a “very good” student and indicated that she would like to complete school at the end of Year 10 (age 15). She nominated her best subject as Art and her worst subject as Mathematics. She wished to have a career in photography.

In the first half of the year Jessica only occasionally mentioned her parents. She described how she did not wish them to know she was studying and would often study when they were out. She also described her parents commenting that some of the Mathematics she was required to learn would only be needed by students intending to become Mathematics teachers. In the second half of the year she made more frequent reference to her parents.

In June Jessica spoke of a planned five week holiday for her and her father to the United States so she would be able to meet her father’s family for the first time. She explained how her father had told her that if her school grades were not good, she would not be able to go. This particular bribe appeared to be quite effective in providing an incentive for Jessica to do her best at school.

“Because I’m going to the U.S. my dad says when we’re on the plane and everything you have to learn all this stuff and you have to take all your math’s books and all your SOSE books, like you still have to do the work that they’re doing. But if I was really good I wouldn’t have to do that because I already know that stuff and I don’t have to keep going over and over and over again.”

In September Jessica described how her parents responded to her studying and her school results.

“Like sometimes my dad gets really angry because I would say like if I have homework which she hardly gives any out, but if I do and I’m watching TV or something and I’ll say ‘I’ll do it later’ and then like he comes home from work or something and I say ‘oops I haven’t done it yet’. Then he gets angry and says that, and he says TV is stupid and everything you don’t need to watch that. Because my parents do care if I get good marks and they do care if I get bad marks but like some things they say that’s okay because we know that you’ve put your hardest in and that but you’ve still got a bad mark. So as long as you put your hardest in and everything”.

In addition, she described how her parents had begun to encourage her to recognise mistakes in her schoolwork in order to learn from them and improve.

In November Jessica spoke of how her mother’s aunt had died during the year and how this had upset her a little bit “but now I’m okay”. She explained that although she had been able to talk to her mother and father about death in some cases she preferred to keep her feelings to herself. She commented that she was not close to her sister and that “she is working nearly every night and when she’s not working she goes out. So I hardly see her unless it’s in the morning and she’s asking my mum something”. Jessica explained that the only people she felt she could confide in were her three-year-old niece and a neighbour.

“Because my niece is only three and she hardly understands anything so if I say something she goes ‘huh’. And like if I start crying she will start crying because I’m crying which is annoying sometimes because mum says ‘what did you do to her this time?’ And my neighbour, well, she’s 16 and I’ve known her since I moved to Perth, because I used to live in Carnarvon. I came to Perth when I was in Year 3 and I’ve known her since then. She talks to me about stuff and everything and I talk to her about things.”

Jessica spoke of how she enjoyed the company of her mother. She commented in November that she wished she could attend the school her mother worked at “because then I could see her every break that I have and everything”. She commented that they both liked “the same shows, like Chicago Hope and those shows like The Bill and everything. We like watching them.”

Summary of perceptions of family context

During the year Jessica was able to share certain perceptions she held of her family and some of the beliefs, goals and values that were promoted by her parents. She perceived her parents to value completion of homework, effort with regard to schoolwork and learning from mistakes. Interestingly, Jessica perceived her parents to hold negative attitudes regarding the nature of the Mathematics tasks she was required to complete and these attitudes perhaps influenced Jessica’s engagement with Mathematical activities. Over the course of the year Jessica seemed to respond to the extrinsic incentive her parents offered regarding her trip to the United States.

Perceptions of school context

Throughout the year Jessica was able to describe aspects of her school experience and how particular situations influenced her feelings about school. She had attended the junior school adjoining this middle school and therefore the environment was somewhat familiar to her. Despite the fact that the school structure had been changed in 1998 Jessica still referred to junior school as ‘primary school’ and to middle school as ‘high school’. This section discusses Jessica’s perceptions of the school context, classroom context and teachers, and focuses on contextual themes that emerged as being particularly relevant to her motivational behaviour.

Perceptions of the middle school context

Throughout the year data were collected regarding Jessica’s adjustment to the middle school environment, including factors such as adapting to the physical

changes in school environment, her perceptions of how well she was adjusting, how she coped with increased academic demands and her attitude towards school. Jessica reported that it was “hard to remember” what she had been told about middle school and that she expected it to be “hard” and that “we’d get lots of homework, I don’t know, like three pages or something”. She reported that she had not found the work hard so far and that there had not been much homework “except our Math’s investigation, it was three pages, but we had two weeks to do it”. She commented that she was enjoying art “but like all the subjects I chose I don’t want to do, I want to do gymnastics and cooking and that stuff I’ve heard it’s really good”. When asked what hopes she had for the year, she reported “I don’t know ... I want to get better at spelling and math’s”.

In February Jessica described middle school as “good”.

“Because in the primary school me and my friends used to fight a lot but now we’re in here we don’t fight at all and it’s good being able to move around to different classrooms and that because you get to meet different teachers and learn about what’s in that classroom and everything”.

In March Jessica explained having difficulty using her locker and moving from class to class.

“Because you have to keep on cleaning your locker and everything `cause your books all fall and they’re too small ... I’ve got all my books up on the top shelf but then I need my art stuff on the bottom and I need to fit my bag in as well, so it’s hard sometimes. I wish we didn’t need them. I wish our books could like stay in the classrooms or the teachers, like you could keep all of your books in the one classroom and the teachers come around to you or something instead of having the timetable and seeing like G02 or something and you have to like go to that room and then go to that room and everything – it’s annoying. ... `cause like it’s hard to find your way around and you’ve got to keep going up and down, up and down and everything”.

She also reported an increase in teachers’ expectations for homework between junior and middle school and appeared to be investing more personal effort in homework.

“Well, I do an hour of reading and then I just do it until I’ve finished it ... about an hour. I hate reading but we have to choose our own novel to read in the classroom so we can do activities on it and that and I found out that

the book I got out of the library I have at home so I'm reading it at home instead of reading it here but I do read it here as well."

In May Jessica reported her term was "going good" because "it's just been good fun". She was unable to explain what was fun and when asked responded "a lot of subjects". Interestingly Jessica's explanation of what subjects were fun was in fact an explanation of the activities she disliked.

"Sometimes I don't like doing graphing in SOSE (Studies of Society and Environment) because it's really boring. And sometimes in Math's some things we don't even have to know unless we're going to be a Math's teacher or something and it's like. I don't know, that's what my dad said as well and my mum because you don't need them unless you are going to be a Math's teacher or a teacher or something".

Jessica seemed to experience difficulties concentrating during class and described how she was able to "block out" teacher explanations.

"Nothing goes through my mind. I just sit there. It's blocked out. If I don't think like we don't need it, it just blocks out and I'm just sitting there. It happens when what we're doing is like, because I know, because it's like not common. Because like we haven't done it before and usually you do stuff that you've done before and everything. A lot of stuff that we've done in Math's and in SOSE we've done before, but some things we haven't. I don't know. I don't say to myself okay this is boring I'm going to block it out. I sit there and it just happens. Like she's talking, like I can hear her talking but it's like just going on and on and I'm just sitting there. I can hear her talking though but like, it's hard to say".

Jessica commented she was able to understand what the teacher was talking about "not all the time, most of the time" and that during the 'block out' phase she was thinking about "what I'm going to do after school or something". She stated she got herself back in to the lesson "once she's finished talking I can just do it, I just go on with it". Classroom observation revealed that there were times when Jessica's lack of concentration during teacher explanation made it difficult for her to complete tasks. As such, her comments about being able to complete work, may have been an attempt to protect her ego in the interview situation.

In May Jessica described how she had prepared herself for a class activity that required an oral presentation to the class group.

“We had to do big talks on the Magna Carta, and I don’t like talking in front of a big crowd. I get really all hyped up and sweaty and everything. That’s hard. My parents think that I don’t study but sometimes I do when they’re not home or something. I have like two mirrors and they’re like the big door ones on your wardrobe and I stand there and I have what I’m going to say and I speak to myself, it’s like a big crowd”.

Jessica described her feelings when asked to talk in front of the class.

“I feel scared. Scared. Sort of happy because you’re getting it done and you want to like quickly finish it so you can find out what your mark is and everything. Because like we get it back the next day or the day that we’ve done it”.

She explained her anxiety about waiting for and receiving assessment results.

“I’m thinking ‘oh I wonder what I’m going to get’, and I get all nervous and I don’t stop getting nervous till I’ve gotten it back. If I get a bad one I just go, ‘oh well’. If I get a good one I get all excited. If I get a bad mark I just put it away in my file, but my parents say that I’ve got to start looking at it so I can learn from my mistakes, it might help me, I don’t know. If I get a good one I get all happy and that and I see what I’ve got right, but I don’t do that if I’ve got things wrong, I don’t check what I’ve got wrong. If I get a good mark and I’ve got like it was 100 and I got 50, or 90 or something, I will check all the answers that I got right. Like when you have tests sometimes they’re like, you’ve got your piece of paper and there will be columns of times tables. Sometimes you do see your mistakes because you’re going down and looking at all the things and it’s hard to miss if there’s a big cross”.

Jessica reported sharing her marks with others if they asked and that “if I get a bad mark and they get good marks I feel a bit upset that I haven’t studied properly or anything”. Jessica described how she felt about sharing her scores with other students.

“I don’t know, depending what you do. If it’s a spelling test I don’t really like showing people or comparing but say it was Religion or something and we had to write something down then I will check. If you’re writing something down in Religion and you want to know if you got that right or wrong you like compare it with two other people, or three”.

She also spoke of how she had received an E for Mathematics last term “because I didn’t study, I couldn’t be bothered”. She described how her grade expectations

differed due to the amount of effort she had invested. "If I don't study I expect to get a poor mark, if I do I expect to get a good one".

In May Jessica also described how during that term she hoped to "try and get higher than a C" for most of her subjects. She specifically stated "for my talk I'm hoping that I'll get either a C or a B". She commented that she knew what she had to do to get that grade and reported "it's got it written down on our sheet what we have to do". She described what she was going to speak about and how she would conclude.

In June Jessica described the most important things to her at that time.

"Getting good marks ... I don't know why. It's just important. Like I'm going away to the U.S. in September and Dad said if I don't start improving and all that I won't end up going because then I'll have to stay here and learn. But since I've gotten like the B's and all that he's starting to say that I can go. It's like it's important and just to learn. It's important to know things so when you grow up like when people are talking to you you're not just going like that. You have to know what they're talking about to really know what they're talking about".

In June Jessica reported that her term was "going good" because "I've been getting some B's in things that I've been doing so that's really good for me".

"Well my Art book was pretty good, I basically had everything in it and I got a B, I usually forget a lot of things. And I got a B for my talk and a lot of people like even if they made mistakes, like if they said this, oh I mean this, like it was the way that they said it. Like the way that it came out of their mouth like how they said it, like with expression and all that. I'm not sure why I got a B. I'm not sure. It was just on the sheet ... I didn't look at why, I was just too excited".

Jessica reported sharing her mark with "everyone that sits around me" and her parents who said it was "good".

In June Jessica reflected on the year thus far.

"I got into more trouble at the start of the year, so now, I think it's Term 2 now, so dad said like since it's Term 2 why don't you try your hardest and not get notes of concern, which I got 12 and no commendation".

She also acknowledged that “we’re doing much harder work now”. Jessica felt she had been receiving less notes of concern because she was making more of an effort to remember her books and arrive to class on time.

In July Jessica reported feeling “a bit better” about school.

“Because it’s a new term and because I’m going to the US on the 5th of September. And because I’ve got new subjects as well, like new electives and that because the others were like really boring. Like Art got a bit boring because you basically did the same stuff like painting or making stuff or something like that. But I’ve got Drama this term and that’s fun because you’re always doing different things but you’re acting them”.

In September Jessica was asked if she felt happy in her core class.

“Sometimes I’m not because like today we were marking homework from a few days ago, last week. Most kids in my class got a fail for it and so did I because we had to look up the months and what they meant and everything. I thought we just had to look up the names of what they were, I didn’t know that we had to look, I didn’t get the question. I thought we just had to look up their names. But we actually had to look up their names and find out what they were, so we got E’s for it, just straight away. So I’m pretty angry about that. It’s unfair because usually we have to do the work again but this time she said, well no, straight E ... probably because we had a few days to do it”.

Jessica described feeling most happy when she received “a B in my timeline, and getting a B in Art” and she stated she was happy “that I just got a high mark”. In these instances, Jessica’s perceptions of school affect appeared to be related to her perceived academic success.

In September Jessica described how at school it was important to her to “get good marks” and “to be nice to everyone like even if you don’t like the person, don’t be mean to them”. She explained that she had “been getting bad marks and everything, like Ds and Es and that” and so she felt she had not been doing well. She also spoke about how she felt about going to Year 8 next year.

“I’m worried about not understanding the work and everything and like having a new teacher and that, I don’t feel comfortable. In the primary school for Year 5 and for Year 6 I had the same teacher and so I knew her and I knew that she knew what I was like and everything. But every year the teacher has to find out, every different way. Like I’m not good at reading and the teacher asks you to read like in the SOSE book in front of

everyone and it's like you get words wrong and they (other students) crack up (laugh) and everything. It's really embarrassing".

Such data indicates Jessica's lack of confidence in her ability to understand academic tasks and fear of being perceived as lacking in ability in front of teachers and peers.

In November Jessica reflected on her year.

"It's been hard and pretty good. The reason why it was pretty good because Mrs. Kelly hardly gives us homework. And she doesn't give us homework on Fridays, only other teachers do. So that's pretty good. And it's hard because in the primary school all your books and everything are in the classroom and you don't need to worry about going anywhere else. And because we're not allowed out of the classroom and the stuff, if you need like a ruler or something you're not allowed to go down and get it. And that's the hard thing because then when she says well you should have everything in the classroom and make an effective plan. That really annoys me when she says that. And like if it's quiet work and she says make an effective plan, I quietly ask Brittany or someone if I can use their ruler, and she says, 'what are you talking for, you should have your own stuff and I told you to make an effective plan'. And I'm like, I am making an effective plan because I'm trying to ask them if I can use theirs as well."

Jessica described how she felt about being at the middle school for Year 7. "I'm glad that we came over here because then we know what to expect and everything in Year 8 and that is easier". Jessica stated that she felt she had done her best during the year with regard to her schoolwork.

Perceptions of school based system of rewards and penalties

During the year Jessica mentioned the school reward structure of notes of concern and notes of commendation. Her diary revealed that during the year she had received two notes of commendation and fourteen notes of concern. The notes of commendation were received in June for an excellent assignment in Italian and in November for good work in class during a golf course lesson.

Jessica's notes of concern were received for issues regarding homework and assignments not submitted (ten notes), not completing work and failure to ask for help (one note), poor organisation (two notes), being late to class (one note),

and going to her locker between classes (one note). She received one note of concern in February, three in March, one in April, one in May, three in June, one in July and four in August.

In March Jessica described how she had received three notes of concern.

“They were for forgetting a book, um ... I don’t know what the other two were for, oh yeah, being late because you have to get all your books and everything and ‘cause I’ve lost my timetable and mum keeps on photocopying it but I lose it so I’ve got to stick one in my locker and I’ve got to ask other people what subjects there are and I’ve got to quickly get them and find the books and then by the time I get there it’s the second bell, and ...”

Jessica explained how it was important to avoid getting in trouble at school.

“Because I think kids that get in trouble, like naughty kids in my class they get into trouble but they laugh about it but you know that they’re actually upset and really angry that they’ve done that but they don’t change at all. But with me I try not to get into trouble but sometimes I forget a book or something so I get a note of concern or something like that. I try not to get into trouble but sometimes I do. If we’re doing individual work and you haven’t got a sharpener and you only have one pencil and you can only use pencil and you’ve got to ask someone else if you can use their sharpener but then the teacher gets angry at you. Like because you don’t want to get behind in your schoolwork but you need to sharpen your pencil or something. I think it’s stupid because we shouldn’t get a note of concern if we just need to borrow something, that’s really dumb”.

Jessica spoke of how being in trouble at school would often lead to being in trouble at home.

“Because I’ve got an older sister, I’ve got my niece, I’ve got my parents and I’ve got my auntie and I’ve got my grandparents and all those people can tell me off. Like if my niece and I are playing, sometimes we play but we play rough. She’s only three but we still play rough. Like we tickle each other and everything on the bed and then she starts screaming and I start screaming and then mum comes in and she says be quiet, be quiet. Then my niece screams again and then I get into trouble for it.”

In addition, she expressed the view that she felt it worse to be in trouble at home than school.

"I think it's more embarrassing ... I don't know, I don't like crying in front of my grandparents or anything like that. My parents I don't mind but my sister, my grandparents and my auntie I don't really like crying in front of. At school I don't really mind because like I know a lot of these kids, like they've been with me some since Year 3 upwards and some since Year 4,5,6. So I already know them, that sounds weird."

Summary of perceptions of middle school context

Jessica perceived that she adapted fairly well to middle school although acknowledged organisational difficulties and difficulties concentrating during class time. Despite this she spoke of investing effort in academic activities (even those she disliked such as reading) and making an effort to improve her grades. Such behaviour may have been influenced by her parents' seemingly regular discussion about whether she had performed adequately enough at school to journey to the U.S. with her father, but even so it was evident that she experienced a high degree of personal satisfaction with some of her B grade results.

Jessica seemed to be lacking in confidence in her ability to understand some academic work and reported occasions where she was afraid of failure in front of teachers and peers. In addition, she reported anxiety about the level of grade she might receive for assessment tasks and having public attention drawn to levels of low ability. She appeared to lack understanding about how work was graded and was unable to explain why she had received particular grades.

The reward and penalty structures at the school caused some concern for Jessica and she explained feeling that some penalties were unfair and made her feel angry about school. She emphasised the importance of avoiding penalties at school and this sometimes seemed to lead her to pursue avoidance goals and attempt to protect her self-worth in front of parents, peers and teachers.

Perceptions of classroom context

During the course of the school year, Jessica was able to share her perceptions about a specific classroom context, namely, that directed by her core teacher, Mrs. Kelly. Within this classroom Mrs. Kelly taught Jessica's class

Mathematics, Integrated Studies (English and Studies of Society and Environment), Health, Computer Technology, and Religious Education.

Jessica reported wanting to do well in Integrated Studies when the work was easy.

“We had to trace this map in our book and then fill in where everything was, we had to name them and that. I did well because I did it fast, I didn’t like think of one question, I knew what I was doing. Because I’m not like that good at doing hard work and that so I prefer easy work so I can get it done quicker and I know what to do and everything instead of doing comprehensions and that. Sometimes mapping is easy but we had a test today where we had to use a compass, like in our book but sometimes I find that hard to do”.

These comments reveal Jessica’s perception that if she was able to do work quickly she would do it well, and that she perceived help seeking to be a sign of being unable to do well on her own.

Jessica described one of her main aims in the classroom as being “to get the work done and not get yelled at”. She explained it was important to “get the work done because then you have more home life” and that “if I get yelled at I get embarrassed and I get upset and start crying”. She explained she did not like teachers drawing attention to her in this way. “I don’t mind if we’re in a group but if it’s on my own and they yell at me in front of the whole class well then I get embarrassed”. Jessica described how this had happened to her “once or twice” early in her school experience and that the memory of how she had felt was still quite vivid for her.

Perceptions of class goal structure

In September the 26 students participating in the study were asked to complete the twelve item “Perceived Classroom Goal Structure” scales from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS: Midgley, Maehr, Hicks, Roeser, Urdan, Anderman & Kaplan, 1994, cited in Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin & Midgley, 2001, see Appendix B). The survey required students to rate a total of twelve items on a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Survey results indicated that Jessica perceived Mrs. Kelly’s

classroom to have a higher task mastery emphasis (4.5) than performance goal emphasis (3.0). As the sample of students surveyed was considerably small I interviewed Jessica in October to clarify her responses to survey items and explore why she had responded in particular ways. Throughout the interview Jessica was unable to support her rating for some items and it appeared that she was sometimes unable to distinguish between her beliefs and the beliefs she perceived the teacher to endorse.

Jessica generally agreed with most items indicative of a task mastery classroom goal structure. She agreed the teacher to promote working hard because “if we don’t want to learn and do our work and that, we’re not going to be like smart when we’re older and that and looking for jobs we won’t know what to do and everything”. She also agreed with the statement ‘our teacher tells us that making mistakes is okay as long as we are learning’.

“If you make a mistake it’s okay as long as they say why it was a mistake and you understand why it was a mistake and you can learn from them so you don’t do it again next time”.

Jessica reported the teacher to emphasise understanding rather than memorising of schoolwork “because if we just memorise it then it’s in there inside our head but we’re not really learning about it if we don’t understand it”. She explained the teacher wanted the students to enjoy their learning “because if you don’t enjoy learning sometimes you don’t want to hear about it and everything, like you just block it out and think about other stuff”. This explanation is particularly interesting in the light of Jessica’s earlier comments about ‘blocking out’ teacher talk during class time. She reported that Mrs. Kelly “sometimes” made learning enjoyable for the students.

“Like she said once that in Math’s or something it doesn’t always have to be numbers and that it can be like pictures of it and everything. Like maybe if you had two cats or something instead of writing two you could draw two cats or something”.

Jessica was unsure about some survey items associated with performance classroom goal emphasis. For example, she was unsure whether the teacher pointed out students who got good grades as an example.

“Sometimes she does. Like very few times. Sometimes she would say, if the person was the only one to get an A and everyone else got a C or something, she would say that that person was the only one”.

Jessica was also unsure about whether ‘our teacher makes it obvious when students are not doing well in their work’, but was unable to explain why she felt this way. She agreed the teacher called on smart students more than other students.

“Jordan gets asked a lot of questions and that, but if his hand is up and other people’s hands are up she looks around and then she looks at him, then looks back around and then sometimes she goes back to him and she chooses him”.

Perceptions of class groupings

For most of the year Jessica worked in mixed ability groups within her core class. As part of their academic programme the students were required to work in groups for a number of activities. In March Jessica stated that she preferred working in groups rather than on her own “because if you’re stuck on something they can all help you and it’s a better way to get more ideas and that”.

In March Jessica also spoke about being in elective classes with Year 8 and Year 9 students.

“In form it’s annoying ‘cause like they’re the loudest like the oldest kids and everything, and if the teacher want to talk they like bang all the desks and everything, they just do that all the time and it’s really frustrating and if the teacher says stop it takes a few times to get them to stop”.

Jessica indicated that she felt the students behaved in this way “to be cool”, but acknowledged that she did not perceive them to be “cool” by behaving in this way.

In October Jessica spoke about the new groupings for mathematics.

“They’re good because in every group there is at least one of your friends in it. They’re just good because she like get you to do all different stuff and everything, all different sheets. The last time I did it one group was writing something about a Math’s story, and my group was doing stuff off the Math’s sheet and the other group was cutting out magazines, like pictures and that and then they said something about it”.

When asked what group she was in, Jessica responded “Tamara’s one”. Jessica had been placed in the low ability group, but she seemed to be unaware of the different ability levels of the groups and reported that she was happy being in her group.

Summary of perceptions of classroom context

Jessica perceived her core class to have a substantially strong task mastery emphasis than performance emphasis and was able to explain more fully why Mrs. Kelly’s classroom had a task mastery focus rather than a performance focus. Even though Jessica’s behaviours did not necessarily indicate that she in turn approached academic tasks with the same degree of task mastery focus, she reflected some of the values promoted through the classroom context. Jessica acknowledged investing more effort in academic work and trying to understand her work. She perceived both her parents and Mrs. Kelly to recognise the learning potential in making mistakes, but seemed unsure about this idea herself. Jessica reported being afraid of being perceived to fail by teachers and/or peers and this perhaps contributed to her efforts with schoolwork.

Perceptions of teacher(s)

Throughout the year Jessica spoke about middle school teachers with particular reference to the perceptions she held of them and the degree to which she felt they cared about students. Jessica was able to speak about teachers in general and gave more specific information about her core teacher, Mrs. Kelly.

Generally, Jessica held fairly positive perceptions of teachers. At the beginning of the year Jessica described the middle school teachers as “nice, not all of them but most of them”. At the end of the year she stated that she felt the teachers had treated the Year 7s “pretty good, because they, I don’t know, I just think they treated us pretty good because we’re first time over in the high school”.

In March Jessica commented that she mostly preferred private praise from teachers and recalled an incident from the previous year.

"In Year 6, I'm a bit of a bad speller, and I got 20/20 in Year 6 and my teacher made everyone clap for me and I just went bright red ... I felt embarrassed, but I suppose it's better than getting an award card in front of the whole school".

Jessica also described how it was important to her to please her teachers.

"Because I don't want them thinking of me as a naughty student and someone that doesn't do well at school or anything like that. I want to be a good student so they think I'm a good student ... I don't know why ... it's what I want them to feel about me".

In September Jessica spoke of how she felt about teachers using a sense of humour in the classroom. She described teachers without a sense of humour as "boring, they're just dull". She explained "like you've got boring work to do but you don't want a boring teacher as well because you will just fall asleep." Jessica commented about Mrs. Kelly's sense of humour.

"I think it's good but sometimes I think it can hurt people's feelings. When kids ask questions like that she's already answered but they couldn't hear her because someone else was talking to them, they ask it again and then she puts her glasses on the back of her head like and she turns round the other way. Sometimes she goes, she did this once, she put her hands over her glasses and banged her head against the window. Like it's funny but like it's not funny".

Jessica's discussion of this episode also revealed reasons why she may have exhibited some reluctance to seek help from Mrs. Kelly during class time.

Jessica hoped Mrs. Kelly would describe her as a "good" student and as a student who was "nice to others". She reported that being "good" meant "not talking when she's talking and not doing stupid things when she's talking, and listening and all that". Jessica was unable to comment about how she felt Mrs. Kelly expected her to perform with regard to her academic work.

Perceived teacher support

In May Jessica commented that she felt Mrs. Kelly cared for the class and that she showed this "by sometimes yelling at us and being a bit more strict".

Jessica explained that this behaviour showed she cared.

“Because she wants us to learn, like she doesn’t want us to muck around. Like playtime is for playing and class time is for learning and that. Sometimes she will say ‘recess is over, it’s not time to play, it’s time to learn’, stuff like that”.

Jessica also commented that she felt Mrs. Kelly cared for her as an individual because “if we don’t get something she, well if I don’t get something she explains it to me”. Jessica reported that she felt Mrs. Kelly was concerned about how she was progressing “because I’m getting E’s which is F, but that was last term. But I’m getting like D’s and I got one C for something”. Interestingly Jessica perceived that her improved academic grades were related to teacher support.

In July Jessica also reported feeling that the teachers at the school cared about her “because they try to help you the best they can and not because they’re getting paid for it, they want to help you. They want to help you learn.” Jessica admitted that having caring teachers helped her feel better about school “probably, especially the way I feel about school because I don’t really like school”.

Summary of perceptions of teachers

Jessica generally held positive perceptions of teachers and reported believing that teachers genuinely cared about students, their involvement in the learning process and their progress. Interestingly Jessica linked teacher caring about her progress to the fact that she had improved her grades from Es to Ds and Cs. Her comments also suggest that she associated positive perceptions of teacher support with positive perceptions of school, especially as she reported disliking school. Jessica also seemed a little wary of Mrs. Kelly and expressed concern about being publicly embarrassed by the teacher. Such concern also extended to her reluctance to seek help from Mrs. Kelly. Such feelings may have been linked to Jessica’s desire to protect her ego and sense of self-worth in what she perceived to be potentially threatening situations.

Perceptions of peer context

Over the course of the year Jessica spoke openly about her relationships with her peers, particularly her friendship group. Jessica endeavoured to establish and maintain strong friendships over the year and felt this was an important aspect of school life.

Perceptions of peer relationships

In March Jessica described friendships as being the most important aspect of school life to her at that time.

“Like with my friends, like in the primary school we used to fight a lot but now we’re with the older kids we don’t fight as much and we’re working not to fight and all that, just name calling, not physical fighting. We’ve just decided because we get hurt all the time if we call each other names and all that and because we’re with older kids we can’t be as stupid. You can’t behave like you did in the other school ‘cause like you’re the youngest in this school and it feels like you’re starting all over again so you start like good but I suppose like when you get older you get used to it so you get a bit weird.”

This theme was continued in June when Jessica reported perceiving it was important to her to remain in a strong and stable friendship group.

“We play basketball together so that makes us closer, and some classes we’re in together and for dance, we’re in the same dance group and we have to make a dance up for our mark”.

Jessica acknowledged that having strong friendships was more important to her than academic success because “I reckon if you don’t have friends you don’t really have a life”. She described how for her, social events out of school took precedence over homework tasks and that she would often come to the library when she got to school in the morning to finish homework she had not finished the night before.

In November Jessica described how some friendships had been difficult over the year.

“I reckon it’s harder here because the reason why I was late for class just then is because people were writing on lockers with permanent markers. Some of them were my friends and I had to tell Mrs. Murray about that but

I didn't want them to get into trouble, and I also had to clean it off as well even though I didn't do it. And like that's the hard thing, if they write on lockers or someone sees them doing that they will go and tell. That's vandalism so that's bad, they've got a detention as well ... Brittany really told Mrs. Murray and I was there with her and I just said some of the names. I didn't tell Mrs. Murray that like these are the people that did it, I just said some names that did it".

Jessica explained how she had cleaned up. "Well, there was some on my locker and some on Brittany's and since I had the bottle I just cleaned the whole locker room. My hands stink now".

Jessica reported that she had made new friends over the year and that she was happy there were really two groups of friends she was now able to socialise with at recess and lunchtime. For Jessica, friendships were important at school for company, and emotional and academic support.

"Because if you're at school and you don't have any friends then you're pretty lonely, you just walk around and everything and you've got to study to get high marks and to know stuff so you can get a job in the future".

Classroom observation revealed that Jessica was fairly well accepted by her classmates and, while not regarded by her peers as a student of high academic achievement, Jessica appeared to hold positive relationships with most class members. Other students appeared to recognise her efforts during group work and offer her support and encouragement.

Jessica spoke of how she wished to be perceived academically by her classmates.

"I don't want to be like called a nerd or anything like that, like a book worm or anything, but I want to know a lot - you can be like good in the classroom, like good at subjects and all that you do, but you can be like with the others when you come outside the classroom. I think it's possible but sometimes no because like there's this boy in our class and he's really, well there's actually two or three and they're really smart but they don't act, like they act the same outside as well. When you go back to the lockers to get your books they're always talking about subjects and all that. We talk about if we've done our homework. We talk about our marks if we get good marks. Sometimes it will take one person to say that and then the others will come out and say what they've got. Like say my friend got a D or an E for her project and then all my other friends would open

up once someone else has said it so they don't feel like the only one that does".

Jessica admitted being worried about feeling rejected by her friends because of receiving lower grades.

"A lot of my friends get like really, really good marks and everything and in first Term I was getting E's and everything and I kind of felt like left out because all my other friends were getting good marks, but now we're even, like we're getting around the same now. I've gotten better in some things I think".

To gain insight into how Jessica presented herself to her classmates, in September she was asked how she thought her classmates might describe her.

"I hope they'd say that I'm nice. I don't know. I don't like talking about myself in that way because it's like bragging ... funny? Happy? I'm serious because sometimes I can be funny, like stupid and that but sometimes I can be really serious. I think that's about it".

In September Jessica explained her perceptions of classmates who attempted to gain popularity with the wider peer group.

"Some students are popular just because of the way they act, like they think they're so good and everything and they like act in certain ways. They act stupid ... you know they're dumb but they think they're so cool and everything and so like everyone else thinks that as well. This girl in the other Year 7 class she's popular and she's smart as well. She must study but still be popular".

She described how she felt that some students had to hide their intelligence in order to be popular.

"Because if you hang around other kids and they think oh, study is boring and all that and then they find out that you're studying and you're really popular they're going to think that you're a nerd, so that's why kids don't say that they're smart and that."

In November Jessica reflected on the year and commented that she felt she had changed during the year.

"I yell louder now. When people tick me off I yell at them. And Brett and all that and Sean and all that, they're just stupid. They're not very nice. Well Sean is but Brett is a bit of a ... he's mean. So if they say something

rude to me I just snap and say it back to them. I wasn't normally like that back in the primary school but now I am. I'm just sick of them teasing me, saying mean things about me. And they say stuff to my friends and that annoys me as well. I don't like some boys in my class, I hardly like any of them but they're mean to me so it doesn't matter".

Help seeking and giving in the peer context

Classroom observation revealed that Jessica often sought the help of her peers during classroom activities, and that her peers were happy to help her. As indicated previously some of her classmates regularly helped her and offered her support and encouragement. Jessica commented that she was quite happy to help other students if she was able.

In March Jessica reported wanting to do well at school "so others can learn things from me if they ask. Because if someone asks me how to spell a word or something I want to be able to know how to spell it so they don't tease me or anything and to help me learn it as well".

Summary of perceptions of peer context

During the year Jessica spoke of maintaining positive relationships with her friends and emphasised the importance of friendships in the school context. Jessica desired to be accepted by her friends academically and appeared to experience anxiety about how they might perceive her. In addition Jessica indicated concern regarding the potential impact of achieving substantially lower grades than her friends. She reported being able to improve her grades so as to receive grades of the same level as her immediate peers. Such data acknowledges the role the peer group may have taken in contributing to Jessica's improved academic performance. Jessica regularly sought the help of her friends during academic tasks and appeared to perceive them to have an impact on her achievement by stating that students without friends "have to study to get high marks". Such comments may also indicate that Jessica attributed her academic improvement to external factors, such as friends, rather than her own effort.

Advice to Year 7s of 2001

In November the 26 students participating in the study were asked to pretend they had been asked to offer some advice to the Year 7s of 2001 about how to have a successful year. The aim of this activity was to allow students the opportunity to discuss issues they perceived to be most important for Year 7s based on their experience.

Jessica reported :

"I said do all your homework because you don't get into trouble and you'll probably get a note of concern. And I wrote do not be bad because then you get a note of concern then you might have to go out of the classroom and everything. And hand in your homework on the due date because the teachers will get angry with you and if you have to have your homework in to do another activity then you won't be able to do that activity. Don't be late for class because then you can get into trouble but you will have to have a good reason why you are late. And be nice to everyone or you will not last long because then you will have no friends if you're not nice to people".

Jessica acknowledged that much of what she felt was important to school success was related to avoiding being in trouble and receiving notes of concern.

"It's very important because when you get into trouble you get a note of concern or a warning. If you get four notes of concern or more you get a detention and they're really boring because I've already had one".

Contextual perceptions and personal goal pursuit

The nature of the personal academic and social goals Jessica pursued during the year seemed to be influenced by perceptions she held of her family, the school, classroom and peers. In particular, Jessica sought to protect her sense of self-worth in both academic and social situations and derived goals based on this need.

In the school and classroom context Jessica appeared to mainly pursue performance avoidance goals. She demonstrated a preference for easy work that could be completed quickly and acknowledged use of some avoidance strategies such as a reluctance to seek help and procrastination about schoolwork. Although

Jessica recognised the task mastery focus of the classroom she appeared to be concerned about threats to her self-worth within the classroom, and thus appeared to be unable to fully benefit from a task mastery classroom emphasis.

Jessica pursued strong social relationship goals and these appeared to dominate much of the social agendas she followed throughout the year. Support from her immediate and wider peer group was important to Jessica and perceptions of such support seemed to influence her feelings about school and academic work through help seeking from peers. Jessica also pursued social responsibility goals that she saw as being linked to stable and supportive peer relationships and avoiding being in trouble at school.

Teacher perceptions of Jessica

During the year Mrs. Kelly only made reference to Jessica once, when in March she described Jessica as one of a group of students who were 'at risk' and "really struggling in the class".

Reliability of data

Throughout the year it became evident to the researcher that Jessica was speaking as honestly and as accurately as she could about her school experience and the priorities she had. At times it appeared that she had misunderstood questions by the nature of her responses and the clarification that was required and the researcher began to understand that this was more an indication that Jessica's ability to explain herself was often limited, rather than that she was reluctant to share her feelings.

In November Jessica commented on how she felt about participating in the research. She stated she had felt "good" about the interviews and that she had not felt concerned that she had been taken away from class work for them, in fact "quite the opposite". She did acknowledge that the interviews had prompted her to think about things she would not have otherwise considered "like I would never think about like how my friends changed and everything. I wouldn't think about that". He reported that nobody had asked her what the interview had been about

“they just say what did you do. Like if I did work or something, like I had to write something down or something”.

Jessica stated that she felt Mrs. Kelly had behaved differently when the researcher had been in the room and commented “I think with all teachers when another person, another teacher or someone comes in the room they say okay there’s another person in the room, oh change quickly. Because I don’t know why they just do.” She commented specifically “like when you walk in the room or someone walks in the room she’s more cheerful and that but when they walk out she just sits back down at her desk or something”.

Conclusion

Jessica was a fairly typical example of an Australian student who whilst not being a high achiever, struggled to do her best in adapting to the Middle School environment.

Throughout the series of nine interviews particular themes relevant to Jessica’s experience emerged and through these the types of goals she chose to pursue can be identified. Jessica sought to maintain good friendships throughout the year and began the year believing this to be a priority for her. Gradually she began to internalise some of the goals endorsed by the school context in which she participated and from May began to speak of the importance of achieving ‘good’ grades. In addition, she began to talk of the importance of avoiding being in trouble and described how she desired the approval of her parents and her teachers.

Jessica was approachable and appeared genuine as an interviewee. She spoke openly and described her experiences from her perspective. Jessica also seemed representative of low achieving students and for this reason made a suitable candidate for case study analysis.

CHAPTER X

Case Seven : Sophia

Introduction

Over the course of the academic year between February and December, seven interviews were conducted with Sophia. As described in the methodology chapter, the interviews conducted were semi-structured and focused around themes relevant to Sophia's school experience and current literature in this field.

The structure of this chapter has been generated from the conceptual framework for the study. Accordingly, the chapter follows the format of previous chapters and focuses around Sophia's perceptions of family, school and peer contexts. Within each section data are reported chronologically so as to illustrate how Sophia's perceptions change over the year. The chapter describes the relationship between Sophia's contextual perceptions and the personal goals she pursued over the course of the year. A summary of Sophia's case can be found in Appendix D. In concluding, some perceptions Mrs Kelly held of her are reported and reliability of data is discussed.

The data presented were gathered as a result of interviews with Sophia, interviews with Mrs Kelly, a student information sheet, classroom observation and information obtained from Sophia's student diary. A supplement to the case studies describing the classroom context according to the Observing Patterns of Adaptive Learning (OPAL: Patrick, Ryan, Hicks, Anderman, Middleton, Linnenbrink, Huda, Edelin, Kaplan & Midgley, 1997) categories of task, authority, autonomy, recognition, grouping, evaluation, time, social interactions and help seeking, can be found in Appendix C.

Family context and perceptions

Over the course of the year, Sophia spoke of her family and in particular how family situations influenced her attitudes and feelings about her school work and peer relationships over the year. The following section reports the data regarding her family Sophia chose to reveal in interviews during the year.

Family background

Sophia was born in Australia, although her mother was born in Malaysia and her father in Kenya. During the year data was collected she lived with both parents and an older brother who attended the same school and was in his final year. Sophia's father worked as a general hand and her mother was a homemaker. At the beginning of the year on her information sheet, Sophia described herself as a "fair" student and stated that she would like to go to university. She nominated her best subject as English and her worst subject as Mathematics. She indicated that she wished to have a career in fashion design. Some of Sophia's feelings about school at times appeared to be related to comments family members had made to her. In October, she described how her negative feelings about school uniform had been influenced by family members.

"They've become stronger since Sunday because last Sunday we had a picnic with my aunts and my uncles that are on my dad's side and my auntie she thinks it's wrong that schools have uniforms because then they can't express their uniqueness and it's wrong how they can only have two stud earrings, one in each ear. And they're not even allowed to have fancy socks or anything like the ones with fancy lace on them. I love those socks".

At the end of October Sophia described her parents' reaction to her schoolwork.

"If it's a bad piece of work we generally don't take it home. But if it's a good piece of work we'll take it home and we'll show our parents and they'll be like 'oh, you did that, you're so smart' and all that. I don't really take things home anymore like if it's a piece of work we have to take home to show our parents, I just tell them about it, I leave it in my locker because then I can say 'I didn't lose it, it's in my locker' ... sometimes they want to see my work but other times they'll say 'if you think that it's best to leave it in your locker so you don't leave it here'. Because my parents think I'm a scatter brain because I can't like keep track of

everything and I lose things half the time. My mum will usually say 'if you don't want to bring it home that's probably the best idea because you might lose it here'. But I cleaned my room yesterday and out of cleaning my room I managed to lose about five pieces of school work, so I just figured why don't I just leave my room alone now. So it's become a pigsty again".

Sophia commented that her parents did not ask her for comparative information regarding other students' scores, and stated "as long as I'm doing well then they'll think that's good".

Sophia reported that her parents were concerned about the amount of effort she put into her work.

"They'll say something like 'did you actually put any effort into this' if it's really bad and if it's really good they'll say 'how much effort did you put into this because it's really good and stuff'. But my parents just tell me that trying hard is the most important thing. They'll ask me if I tried hard on a piece of work if its bad but they'll know that I tried hard if it's good".

In November Sophia spoke of her father's involvement in her schoolwork, with particular regard to mathematics. She began by explaining her views about mathematics.

"I'm never going to use it so I just won't learn it. That applies to some things that I do but not all of them now because like I told that to my dad and he started giving me all these tests. Like stuff that he had to use algebra and stuff for. Like why did you invent letters to be used in Math's if you already had numbers – it just doesn't make sense."

She explained how her father responded.

"He started like in the back yard and he said because we have bricks covering half the back yard, he said 'I want you to draw a square on the bricks that is from here to here. And it was like a rectangle shape but I had to make it a square so I had to find out, make it a square. And I found out that you had to make it wider but not too wide or else it would become a rectangle again ... I don't know when I'm ever going to need to do that in my life but I think he just wanted to tell me that I'll need a bunch of knowledge".

Sophia reported that this episode had given her some incentive to learn "because like if I don't then he'll give me more tests". Sophia expressed her respect for her

father's intellect and explained "he does this volunteer work at the Environmental Centre of W.A. and he constructed a web site, someone said it was so good that they're going to put it on a CD that is for people that don't have the Internet. So he has to be really good if he does that."

In November Sophia described how her parents let her learn from her own mistakes. "They don't tell me how to do things and what to do and how to do it". She commented that she felt this was good "so that you can know never to do it again. But if you're just told what to do and how to do it then you'll never know why you shouldn't do the other thing and how not to do it, so that you just get all screwed up".

Summary of perceptions of family context

Sophia appeared to have a stable family life during the course of the year. It seemed at times that Sophia wished to keep her parents distanced from her schoolwork and school experiences. Although her father seemed concerned about mathematics, Sophia's comments suggested that her parents were not overly concerned about her schoolwork as long as she demonstrated effort. Sophia also appeared to reinforce her parents' image of her as 'scatterbrained' and used this as an excuse to distance them from her school experience. The data revealed over the year seem to indicate that Sophia's parents were not supportive of her school environment and this may have influenced Sophia's own feelings about school.

Perceptions of school context

Throughout the year Sophia was able to describe aspects of her school experience and how particular situations influenced her feelings about school. Sophia had attended the junior school adjoining this middle school and therefore the environment was somewhat familiar to her. This section discusses Sophia's adjustment to the middle school environment and focuses on contextual themes that emerged as being particularly relevant to her motivational behaviour.

Perceptions of middle school context

Throughout the year data were collected regarding Sophia's adjustment to the middle school environment, including factors such as adapting to the physical changes in school environment, her perceptions of how well she was adjusting, how she coped with increased academic demands and her attitude towards school.

Sophia spoke of her expectations of middle school in February. She reported to have been told that "they wouldn't have timetable charts on the wall and it was gonna be harder and the work was gonna be a lot more". She specifically described the mathematics work as being harder and commented "I don't think I'm ever going to use Math's, I don't know why". Jessica reported her older brother to have spoken to her about middle school. She commented "he said it's gonna be, when you get through it kinda gets easier but you know it's harder but it gets easier 'cause you've been there a lot". She added, "he doesn't know much about that stuff".

In February Sophia reported her hopes for the year were to "get good grades".

"Because we're not very rich at the moment, my family, so I'm trying to get a scholarship so that it can just be paid off by the school. So I'm really trying to work hard but that's very hard because I don't usually do all of my homework. I just leave it to the last minute and then I start worrying about it and stuff".

Sophia explained that she rarely set goals for herself.

"At the beginning of the year everybody was like 'set a goal for yourself' and I'm like 'I better make it low so that if I get low I won't be like, my high expectations have dropped' and so don't set high expectations for yourself because you might not achieve them. So that if I get a high I'll be like 'wow I never knew I could do that' and if I don't it'll be just like 'well that's what I knew was going to happen so it doesn't really matter'. But me and Amber both reckon that we're both average, we're not below average and we're not above average, we're just level."

In February Sophia reported positive perceptions of middle school.

"The new kids, they're really nice and sweet and everything and um the teachers are nice and everything and the way you get to choose what you

want to learn, like the electives. I love drama and I want to be an actress or fashion designer when I grow up.”

Even so, she described organisational difficulties she had been having.

“Well I’ve lost my locker key once and I left my locker key at home today ‘cause it was on my skirt and my mum took my skirt and put it in the wash and she took it off and she kept it and she forgot to give it to me today so I’m using one of my friends’ lockers.”

In March Sophia spoke of how much time she had been spending working on school projects. She indicated she had spent one day of her weekend working on her Japanese project and that she was “kind of” enjoying it. She commented “it’s a lot of work. And we’ve got a science project as well and one is due before the other one. I think it’s Japanese due first and then science is due the next day.”

At this early stage in the year, Sophia already began to express some concern about inequities that existed in relationships between teachers and students.

“Because like if adults are angry and they express it, they can get angry but if we get angry we’re a little less mature and we get in lots of trouble. Like if we know that we did something right and the teacher thinks that we did it wrong we’re not allowed to tell her or she might think that we’re back chatting her or something. That gets a lot of people frustrated. That happened to me a lot with my teacher in Year 6”.

In June Sophia reported that she had been having a good term, but that peer relationships and relationships with members of the opposite sex had begun to dominate her school experience.

“A lot of people are saying that I like Sean. When I first met him, yes I kind of liked him, and now I’ve got to know and my brother and his sister are really good friends so that’s all I want to be with him now. Because I reckon that’s really cool what they’re doing and I think I just want to be a really close friend of his. We talk about that all the time. But he considers me as a really close friend and I consider him as a really close friend. But that’s only what he says to me. He’s friends with Brett and he probably tells Brett something else because if he told Brett that Brett would probably make fun of him. I really don’t like Brett, he’s just so mean ... lately he’s been joining all these mean people that I’ve never really liked in my year and lately they’ve been teasing my figure, like really thin, and they’ve been doing that. And they’ve been teasing me that I like Sean as

well. Sometimes Sean likes Brett and sometimes he doesn't because like Brett can be very controlling over Sean ... he thinks that whatever he likes Sean should like and whatever he doesn't like Sean shouldn't like, like me".

In September Sophia also spoke of her feelings about the school and in particular the way she felt constrained by the rules and regulations she had to abide by.

"I reckon the school itself isn't good but it's got all my friends here ... I don't like the uniform. I hate it ... the skirt's supposed to be below your knees and everyone rolls it up. But I can't do that because I've had this skirt for the whole year and people know it's below my knee. I've tried to roll it up a few times and everybody is like 'it's shorter at the back than it is at the front'. I can't put up with it and so I stopped. Now everybody has it rolled up except a few girls and they're very brave to do that because when I rolled up my skirt and then took it back down everybody was like 'you should roll it up man, you're so not with the times'. But I don't care because you're going to get told off sooner or later and you're not allowed to have high heeled shoes and I wanted to have high heeled shoes and mum said 'you're going to get in trouble'. Liana's shoes are horrible, they're platform. I couldn't stand them. And then there's the hair. If it's like longer, I'm supposed to be tying up my hair now but I can't really be bothered. I've got tons of lackeys it's just that I don't want to. And earrings you're not allowed more than one earring and one girl had one up there and for the school photo she had to take it out and she was crying, she was bawling her eyes out because it really hurt when she took it out. There's just so much about this school that I really don't like ... it's so strict, I don't like it."

Sophia expressed her belief that she felt "school is like where you learn who you are because you've got all these friends and you can develop your sense of individuality". She explained that developing a sense of identity was one of the most important things for her at school and explained 'everybody says 'school isn't where you make friends, it's where you learn'. You know, we can do whatever we want, if we do, we'll just get told off for it later on, so just leave us be."

In October Sophia stated that the most important thing for her at school was socialising. She reported that at the beginning of the year she thought "grades were the most important thing". She explained why her views had changed.

"I thought I was going to get As and I got Bs and Cs and Ds and Es. I haven't got an A. oh, once I got an A but that was in English, but English is my best subject ... I suppose I just started feeling that way, well maybe after I got a bunch of Ds I just felt like, well there's other people that got Ds why don't I just go and talk to them about it instead of talking to the people who got Cs and Bs and As and making me feel bad about it. So and then I just felt like, oh this is good why don't I just hang out with a bunch of people that feel like this and then socialising because my main objective to do at school."

She continued to explain why socialising was important.

"So that people know who you are and that they have a lot of friends, so like, when I socialise in class it's usually not called upon I just do it for no reason, I might not like the subject or I might not like the class or something like that. It's become really important to me because (sighs) it's sort of what I do best. To get to know people and then start being their friends and stuff. It makes me feel good because then I know they're my friends. But it doesn't always mean that because you might think that someone's your best friend but they might have another best friend."

In October Sophia spoke of how her feelings about school uniform had become stronger since she had spoken with her auntie about the subject. She expressed her view that uniforms constrained students wishing to express their identity.

"We can't tell who people are. Well one way we can express ourselves is through our hair because I really think that all the people who have something different each day are really bubbly people".

She explained in detail how she had done her hair that day and what her plans were for her hair the following day. She stated "that's probably the only way people can express themselves. That and what they wear under their shirts" (pulls out two necklaces from under her shirt collar). She described how people who wanted to express their individuality always found a way and gave examples of how students would wear more earrings than the school allowed and how one student even wore different coloured brace bands on her teeth "because she wears braces and it's October and it's getting closer and closer to Halloween and so she's got black and orange in her mouth, the Halloween colours".

In October Sophia described mathematics as her most important subject.

"It's because I really suck at Math's. I'm really bad at Math's ... I'm probably worst at stuff like divisions and multiplication, I'm really bad at Math's. It's not important to be good at Math's but it's just that I need good grades so I don't fail everything and I'll be able to get a good job, but I don't really think there's a job where you need to use Math's regularly and the hard Math's ... I want to be a singer and an actress and I can't find any Math's in that ... I don't really want to do it and part of the fact is that I know I'm bad at it and everybody says if you think you're good you'll become good, but I know I'm bad and I'm not ashamed of it, its just that I know I'm really bad at it ... because I got a D in all my Math's test except for one where I got a C".

In November Sophia reflected on her year.

"It's been good. Academically I think I've done pretty well, I've got Ds and above, and socially, if Liana wasn't alive then yes I think I did pretty well. I just don't thing that Liana and me were very good friends to start off with. But Natalie says she's my friend ... yes I think I have had a pretty good year, I haven't got into very much trouble. I've only had two detentions".

Sophia reiterated her belief that doing well socially at school was more important than doing well academically because "you can still learn while worrying about your social life".

Sophia reported that she felt learning at middle school should be more fun.

"Classes should be made way more fun so that you'd actually be learning something and having fun at the same time so nobody gets put off. I think when teachers hear that they just think students are going to go off track and have too much fun instead of learning, so it's never going to happen."

Sophia described fun as "like we're doing some learning how to spell things and we play bingo with certain words. We have to spell the words and stuff like that, and that's fun. For English, Mrs Kelly just reads us stories. I reckon that's fun."

In September Sophia described successful school students as obedient students.

"It's something I'm lacking. I lack a lot of it and I'm always trying, like on the bus if it's an elder standing up and I've got a seat it doesn't matter if there's someone sitting next to me or if I'm on my own, I'm supposed to move over if I'm on my own or stand up, and I'm always really embarrassed to do it because like a lot of my friends catch the bus and they'll be like 'why did you do that?' it's a school rule you know and I'm

in uniform and if I don't and they see what I'm doing they could report me. I don't really do it willingly at all".

Sophia also explained that being a good student "means that you're nice a lot, you're helpful to the teachers". Sophia indicated that being a 'good' student had little to do with the grades achieved, but was more to do with an individual's behaviour toward and treatment of others. She commented "if you see a teacher doing something like carrying lots of boxes and dropping stuff all over the place and you go and help her, that's what a good student is. Sometimes I do it".

In the same interview Sophia described the difference she perceived between junior school and middle school.

"I think middle school is where you learn like all your manners. Like how to stand up when the teachers walk in the room and all that. Both junior and middle school teachers have the same view on how to punish children and stuff like that, because our rules are all the same. So it doesn't matter what we do, we just know we're going to get punished. The biggest difference between primary school and middle school is that middle school and senior school expects things and primary school teachers don't."

Perceptions of school based system of rewards and penalties

During the year Sophia often spoke of her feelings about the reward structures operating in the school, in particular the system of notes of concern and notes of commendation. Sophia's diary revealed that over the course of the school year she had received two notes of commendation and eight notes of concern. The notes of commendation were received in May for receiving 10/10 for a Katakana quiz in Japanese and in November for great effort snorkeling in Outdoor Education.

Sophia's notes of concern were received for issues regarding homework (3 notes), poor organisation (1 note), not having resources necessary to participate in class (1 note) and socialising during class time (3 notes). She received three notes in March, three notes in May, one note in June and one in July.

In September Sophia described how she had "a lot" of notes in her diary.

"I've got one note of commendation and I've got 12 or 16 notes of concern. And I still haven't shown Mrs Murray. Liana's had about two,

but I get most of mine from Mrs Kelly either for behaviour or homework. I got one for behaviour in Japanese because I was socialising. I was talking to my friend, I was wasting time and stuff and I reckon that's stupid. I reckon school is like where you learn who you are because you've got all these friends and you can develop your sense of individuality and yeah, but that's why I feel sorry for all the people who do home school because they just stay at home, they're isolated."

At the end of October Sophia spoke about her efforts to receive notes of commendation.

"What I don't get is that I try to get notes of commendation, I do all these things right and I never get a note of commendation and like other people have got tons of notes of commendations and I'm like 'how do you get them?' It doesn't make any sense to me".

On the contrary Sophia stated she could receive notes of concern "quite easily".

Summary of perceptions of middle school context

Sophia initially held positive perceptions of middle school and aimed to achieve good grades over the school year. As the year progressed Sophia expressed some negative views about middle school, particularly with regard to what she perceived to be the rigidity of the behavioural control system and the rules and regulations the school expected students to abide by. She perceived it easy for students to receive penalties but difficult to receive rewards. Sophia believed school should provide opportunities for students to learn who they are and develop a sense of identity and as such she struggled with endorsing and supporting school regulations.

Sophia's priorities at school changed as the year progressed and instead of being concerned with her learning and schoolwork, she became increasingly preoccupied with school social life and pursuit of relationship and friendship goals. In explaining why this happened Sophia seemed to indicate that lack of expected academic success had influenced her decision to focus on socialising at school.

Perceptions of classroom context

During the course of the school year, Sophia shared her perceptions about a specific classroom context, namely, that directed by her core teacher, Mrs Kelly. Within this classroom Mrs Kelly taught Sophia's class Mathematics, Integrated Studies (English and Studies of Society and Environment), Health, Computer Technology, and Religious Education.

Perceptions of class goal structure

In September the 26 students participating in the study were asked to complete the twelve item "Perceived Classroom Goal Structure" scales from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey" (PALS: Midgley, Maehr, Hicks, Roeser, Urdan, Anderman & Kaplan, 1994, cited in Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin & Midgley, 2001, see Appendix B). The survey required students to rate a total of twelve items on a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Survey results indicated that Sophia perceived Mrs Kelly's classroom to have a higher task mastery emphasis (3.17) than performance goal emphasis (2.67). As the sample of students surveyed was considerable small I interviewed Sophia in October to clarify her responses to survey items and explore why she had responded in particular ways to survey items.

Sophia described her responses to survey items representing a task mastery classroom goal structure and in so doing revealed being unsure about all but one item. She indicated being unsure about whether the teacher emphasised working hard and explained, "I'm not sure what that means and I don't really pay any attention to it. I don't think I've ever really heard her say that before. She might have." Sophia was also unsure whether the teacher believed making mistakes was okay.

"It depends what kind of thing we're doing. Like if it's something really simple and we get it wrong, because like our times tables I get really psyched up about them because I never used to learn them. I guess she'd think that we'd know them by now so if we get something like that wrong she'll think like that can't be and I guess she'll tell us off because we were supposed to learn them. But she never really mentions mistakes."

Sophia was unsure about whether the teacher wanted the students to enjoy learning and stated “she probably does but she doesn’t exactly express it”. She stated she felt Mrs Kelly enjoyed teaching the class “when we’re good. We try to keep appearances up. Sometimes we’ll go off task. I think she does like teaching us. I think we’re better than the other Year 7 class.” She was also unsure about whether the students were given time to explore and understand new ideas.

“Well she doesn’t exactly but sometimes she does. Like if we’ve got to figure a thing in the class, the whole group activity and people give suggestions and she’ll be like thing that over and see what would work. Sometimes she does and sometimes she doesn’t so that why I’m not sure.”

Sophia agreed that Mrs Kelly emphasised understanding rather than memorising work “because if you understand it you could probably get through the piece of work much more easier. Like memorising it isn’t really going to do very much”.

Sophia explained her responses to items indicative of a performance classroom goal emphasis. She disagreed with the statement ‘our teacher points out those students who get good grades as an example to all of us’.

“She doesn’t, sometimes she’ll get a really good piece of work that someone’s done really well and she’ll hold it and say none of yours was like this. But other than that she doesn’t exactly say ‘oh Anita and Jordan are really good why can’t you be more like them’ or something like that”.

Sophia disagreed that the teacher compared students “because she doesn’t really do that. She won’t say Sophia, you compared with ... in front of the whole class, that would just be mean. No, she doesn’t do that”. She also disagreed that the teacher called on smart students more than other students.

“Me and Sean both hate it when she goes, like you have to open up your Math’s book and we’re doing an oral lesson and you have to figure out the problems in your head. And she’ll be like ‘who is my next victim’ and me and Sean both hate that because like ‘please God, don’t pick me, don’t pick me’. She calls on everybody equally but that’s something we actually quite hate, why doesn’t she just call on the smart people and do all the work for us.”

Sophia indicated that she was not sure about whether the teacher recognised students for trying hard.

"Like me and Amber did this show bag book thing and all Amber did for the bag was buy a little bag with teddies on it and stuff. It had absolutely nothing to do with the book but we put all our book stuff in there and we marked ourselves 1 for that because we had to do a self-evaluation. We took it up to her and she said 'you gave yourselves one for the creativity of the bag, I'll give you 2'. So we were like oh, that's not creative, we bought that".

Sophia agreed that only a few students did well in Mrs Kelly's class.

"Well, we only know of about three people in the class that do extremely well and that's Anita, Evalina and Jordan. Other people do well I guess but we don't exactly hear about it and we don't exactly know. I think everybody knows that Evalina, Anita and Jordan are extremely smart but other people are just like nobody really cares. So it doesn't really matter."

Sophia strongly agreed that the teacher made it obvious when students did not do well on their work and explained her reasoning.

"She uses peer pressure to like make us work harder. She uses peer pressure for everything ... like if we've done something really wrong, she doesn't usually give names, but if she does she'll like hold their piece up in front of the class and if it's like an essay or something and we got something wrong, she'll read that part out. And the person will know that it's their piece of work and some people will actually know that it's them as well and people will start laughing. And they'll be like I don't think all of them know it's me but still some of them do and they're actually laughing at me not at the person. She uses that a lot. If it's a good piece of work then I guess you can show it, so like other people can acknowledge them. But if it's a bad piece of work you should just like write a little note saying you should study harder or something. Because that's really cruel to say that, it's almost as if you're saying that they're really stupid in front of the class because you're letting people laugh at them. When people laugh she doesn't even stop them. I think that's really cruel".

She reported this had happened to her "once or twice but she didn't say my name, but it still didn't make me feel that good". Sophia continued to explain that she experienced anxiety about this when handing work in.

"I worry that I've done something wrong and if it's like a big piece of work she'll say stuff like I'm going to read some out to see how you all did. And you'll be like praying 'oh God, don't let her pick me because she's probably going to say something bad about mine' and then she does. But that's why I don't exactly let people know what I've done in my pieces of work so they don't know she's making fun of me. But after that

we'll just go and snigger about her so it doesn't really matter, we get our revenge."

Perceptions of class groupings

For most of the year Sophia worked in mixed ability groups within her core class. As part of their academic programme the students were required to work in groups for a number of activities. In March Sophia stated that she sometimes liked working in groups, but changes in peer relationships had influenced her feelings about group work.

"It depends on who is in the group because a lot of people, like we used to be friends and then like there's this girl I used to know, she, can't say she matured but she just changed and nobody started to like her anymore."

At the end of October Sophia spoke about the new mathematics groups.

"There's three groups of Math's in the class and a bunch of people are in the smart Math's group, I'm in the moderate Math's group. I think I am anyway. The middle group is like the not really progressing type of group".

Sophia was asked how she felt about her placement in the mathematics groups.

"Not that bad because I know like I'm not exactly bad at Math's but I'm not exactly good, like I'm in the middle and I don't mind being in the middle. People don't expect you to get A's and B's, B+'s and people don't expect you to get E's and D's all the time. Just people expect you to get C's and C's are pretty easy to get".

When asked if she would like to be in the 'smart' Mathematics group, she responded, "I'd try but I don't think I will survive in there very long because like all those people are extremely smart." Sophia revealed that Mrs Kelly had acknowledged the arrangement of students in ability levels for the mathematics groups.

"She got really angry one time, I think she got angry at Liana, she just said 'because you're in the smart Math's group doesn't mean you can fool around'. And she said smart Math's group and that was over that side, and so we thought 'oh, we must be in the moderate Math's group'. You could hear a bunch of people go 'I knew this was like we were in the moderate Math's group and stuff like that'".

Sophia perceived her placement in the 'moderate' Mathematics group to be an indicator that Mrs Kelly expected her to achieve C's and B's in mathematics.

When asked about whether she thought she could move up to the higher group if she invested more effort, she responded:

"I guess if I put in a little more effort I probably would get into the A's and B's but at the moment I can't like, because I've got science things to do and science is like building up by the minute. And oh yes, we don't really get any more I.S. homework but stuff like the electives, they have a lot of homework and I've got to finish my theory book. So at the moment I can't really be bothered to like just suddenly put all that much more effort when I know that if I do it someday what goes up has to come down, so I'll just let my guard down and I'll get really bad marks one day and I'll get put back into the middle group. So I just want to stay in the middle group because you don't need to continuously work to keep your grades up when you know that you can go to bed at night when you want to instead of like staying up until 2a.m. trying to study for the test when you're trying to get A's and B's. So just stay in your own level."

She continued to explain.

"I can't really be bothered to like just suddenly put all that much more effort when I know that if I do it someday what goes up has to come down, so I'll just let my guard down and I'll get really bad marks one day and I'll get put back into the middle group. So I just want to stay in the middle group because you don't need to continuously work to keep your grades up ... so just stay in your own level."

Summary of perceptions of classroom context

Sophia perceived Mrs Kelly's class to have a stronger task mastery emphasis than performance goal emphasis. She perceived the teacher to emphasise student understanding and expressed the view that Mrs Kelly enjoyed teaching the class when they were well behaved. Sophia held the perceptions that only a few students did well, and that the teacher made it obvious when students did not do well in their work. Interestingly Sophia expressed some perceptions that differed from those held by other students and as such the data reflects how students interpret contextual information with regard to their own agendas, goals and priorities.

Perceptions of teacher(s)

During the year Sophia expressed mostly negative perceptions about teachers, including her core teacher, Mrs Kelly. In September Sophia reported that she felt Mrs Kelly would describe her as someone "who likes to talk in class rather than work". She added "and I wouldn't mind if she said that about me because it's true. I don't pay any attention to her when there's all my friends surrounding me".

In October, Sophia explained how she had spoken to her father about a situation that had occurred with Mrs Kelly. She commented that her father had emphasised to her the importance of working to please herself at school rather than to please the teacher.

"That's what my dad says to me all the time. Like if I say Mrs Kelly picks on me and Liana thinks that she picks on her and anybody who is her friend. And that happened in Year 6 as well, I had a teacher that hated me. But I wasn't exactly the best student in that class. My teacher called me a bad person and I'm like I'm emotionally scarred. My best friend was in school that year so it didn't really matter so we kept on being really mean to her. But Mrs Kelly doesn't hate me any more because I used her advice and I made an effective plan. I lost my rubric for the Odysseus task thingamajig. I drew out my own task rubric and I said 'I used your advice and I made a task rubric'. And she said 'you're such a darling'".

At the end of October Sophia described her perceptions of Mrs Kelly.

"I used to really hate Mrs Kelly because she used to give me all these notes of concern. Like every single note of concern I have except for about two are from her. But then I just started, I kept on telling mum and dad and they said 'you're not working for the teacher, you're working for yourself so you can get like a little diploma thing'. So I'm trying to work really hard, not for her but for me, so I can shove it in her face when I get older. Or something like that. I've always thought that if someone was really cruel to you when you were young, when you get older and you've made something of yourself, you go back to them and you shove it in their face or something like that. I've always wanted to do that".

Sophia was asked whether she felt Mrs Kelly had been cruel to her and she responded "not any more".

Perceived teacher support

Sophia commented about the degree to which she felt Mrs Kelly supported and cared for the class and herself as an individual. She reported perceiving that Mrs Kelly wanted her students to keep improving themselves.

“Because I mean she has to want us to make something of ourselves when we’re older. So I don’t think she want us to end up like bums when we grow up. I think she does want us to keep improving and work hard. I think she expects me to get average, maybe like D and average, C and D.”

She also described how her placement in the average ability mathematics group indicated to her that Mrs Kelly expected her to achieve C’s and B’s in her mathematics tests, “but I think I’ve only got one B in one of my Math’s tests and the rest have been like Cs and Ds”.

She explained that receiving recognition from Mrs Kelly was good “because then I know she doesn’t exactly hate me. She actually pays attention if we do something right and she’ll actually tell us”. Sophia indicated feeling that teachers ought to recognise students more.

“Because then it would be like, ‘oh, when I do something well then I’ll get acknowledged, why don’t I do that all the time’. But if they don’t give me praise I can’t really be bothered or they probably think I did really well, so that’s good enough for me, I’ll just do it again.”

Sophia acknowledged that being in trouble with a teacher affected her perceptions of the teacher and attitude towards learning.

“If Mrs Kelly has told me off or something I’ll be like ‘why should I have to learn off you. Sometimes we’ll be like we’ll never need to know this when we grow up. I feel like going up to the front of the class and saying ‘stop everybody, when are you going to use this, are you out of your mind’. That wouldn’t upset me if I had to do that one time. Like percentages, I’m like thinking so hard when am I going to need to know what percentage of what, so”.

Summary of perceptions of teacher(s)

Sophia expressed consistently negative perceptions of teachers over the course of the year. She seemed to have developed a negative view of teachers during her Year 6 school experience and used middle school experiences to build

on that image. Receipt of penalties from teachers and lack of recognition were acknowledged by Sophia to contribute to negative perceptions.

Perceptions of peer context

Over the course of the academic year, Sophia was quite open in discussing her peer relationships with regard to the immediate and wider peer group. In particular she revealed an intimate and complex web of peer relationships that appeared to have a significant influence over her school experience.

Perceptions of peer relationships

Sophia endeavoured to establish and maintain strong friendships over the year and felt this was one of the most important aspects of school life. In March she reported having "a lot of friends but I just hang out with Amber because her and me have a lot of stuff in common". She expressed concern about the power of the peer group and the people she was seen to be friendly with.

"There's this girl I used to know. She just changed and nobody started to like her anymore. Then if I was caught hanging out with her I was thought like I was a loser. But she and me are still friends."

In June Sophia reported having difficulties with some of her friends because she had established a friendship with Sean. She described how other students sometimes teased her because of this.

"A lot of people lately have been calling me and Amber like really rude words. But I handle that, so I just want to become more friends with the boys so that if I go hanging out with them I can just say 'we're just good friends', and 'what's wrong with you'. That's my main objective at the moment ... it's just their age I reckon, it's just age. You know that show 'Dawson's Creek', I don't think children our age should be watching it because its like mostly dealing with sex and the troubles that teens have to go through and we're not yet teens. Well the teens that they are because they're acting out 17 and 16 kind of teens and we're not that age at the moment. So I don't think we should be watching that show because a lot of people think that they get it but they don't really get it because they're not that age and stuff ... I tell my friends that all the time, I'm trying to get that through to people, that's like my little TV philosophy."

Sophia described how Amber had a friendship with a boy.

"He and her have been friends for a very long time, they're very close and a lot of people like can't handle that and they call her names and stuff. But I reckon she's very brave because she's been going through that very easily. Like she can handle it very well, I reckon that's very important, that's what I want to be like".

Sophia indicated it was important to her to be friends with the boys "so that people can know that I'm not their girlfriend, I'm not attracted to them I just like being friends with them, being around them".

Sophia spoke about the relationship between her brother and Sean's sister. She commented "they're really good friends and I always see her hanging out with my brother's friends and they're all boys. That's what I want to be like". She described Sean's sister as her "role model".

"I just totally adore her because she's pretty and stuff like that. I adore her and I just want to be like her because she's friends with all the boys and nobody ever teases her. Like they call each other names but that's just what friends do, like just be funny, and that's what I want to be like. That's my social life, that's what I want to be".

In September Sophia began to report a dispute that had occurred between herself and Liana.

"Well, Liana and me aren't friends any more because we had a fight ... and I think Amber likes Liana better now, but I'm not sure, but Liana's just, I don't really like her any more, she's changed. Sometimes she's nice and like when we, when the fight was just beginning, me and her were passing notes to each other even though we were having a fight and she kept on saying 'I still don't like you I'm just talking to you because there's no one else to talk to'. And I'm like, 'do I really care?' and then we just talked to each other. And then on Monday in form, she goes, there's a marching fly flying past her and I said and she said 'what's this big bee looking thing' and I said 'it's a marching fly'. And she said 'I wasn't asking you' and I'm like 'you might need that fact one day, you never know' and she just, it's annoying."

After the change in relationship with Liana Sophia indicated that she had had to change the students she spent lunchtime and recess with.

"I don't really feel comfortable with Liana any more and she hates me a bit ... she hangs round with Amber, and I can't remember who told me this, but Liana chose Sean and Steven for the Odyssey thing and I'm not

sure if this is true, but she just chose them to make me jealous. And I'm not very jealous. I think she thinks that I still like him but I don't. So it's not really working, but that's really childish, and I asked Amber for the ancient civilisation thing and she said that we wouldn't work well together".

Sophia reported that she felt Amber was no longer her friend because she liked Liana and spent time with her. Sophia described how this change in friendships had affected the way she worked in class "because I don't work with the same people any more and it's different". She explained feeling annoyed.

"I'm annoyed because like I thought Amber was one of my friends and then she's liking someone else better because she's taking sides and I think that she's going with Liana and stuff ... I can't talk to Amber when she's around Liana, because Liana gets territorial, she doesn't like me hanging around her".

Sophia was asked how she felt other class members had responded to this situation.

"They all think, like maybe if I stubbed my toe and I'm upset and I look like I'm about to cry because it really hurts, they all think it's Liana. Even if I say it's my toe, they still all go 'oh it's Liana'. And I'm like, 'it's not Liana, I don't really care any more'".

She reported that she felt other class members were "willing to help if I'm upset" and that they supported her "pretty much".

"I guess I'd be willing to be Liana's friend again if she asked me because, but it wouldn't really matter and I wouldn't really pay much attention to her because she's leaving next year ... and she'll be gone next year and I won't really have anything to do with her. So I'll just, I don't care; I don't care about her not. She's not like ... it's just that I know she doesn't like my company".

In October Sophia reported that "me and Liana are friends again, I don't know how that happened but we're just friends again".

"It just ended abruptly because she told me that she couldn't have a fight with a person for more than two weeks and we'd been fighting for three weeks, so she was starting to get less and less angry with me. I don't really know what I did though, I must have done something horrible but I can't remember what I did ... and she started to talk to me again and that was a

sign that she was my friend again. And we've been friends ever since, but it's not going to last I can tell you ... I just know because we've had too much fights this year."

Sophia explained "I trust her at the moment. Until one of us does something wrong again I trust her".

Sophia explained that she felt most comfortable forming friendships with students who received similar grades to her and gave an example of test scores she and Amber had received.

"I got a C and so did Amber. We were in computer tech. when we were all getting our Math's test back and Amber said 'I got a C' and I said 'I got a C as well' and she said 'can you show me your test' and I said 'sure'. And so we traded tests. And then we traded tests again. And then she said 'look at the ...' I think it was the sixth question and we both got exactly the same -45 and we got it right, 9 and we got it wrong, and 382 and we got it right. Amber's said not achieved and mine said partially achieved. And so we went up to the teacher and Amber kept saying 'oh, she'll tell us off'. She can't tell us off for being curious. So we went up and said 'we're curious about the test because this happened and that happened' ... we kept on thinking that we'd both get marked down to a not achieved and then we'd both go down to a D, so we were really scared and then she said 'no way. That's supposed to be a partially achieved' and so we both got that. And we were happy and she just started laughing. Amber always gets the same grades as me, we've always got the same grades and we're not even seated next to each other, she's on the other side of the room so there's no way I could copy her or she could copy me."

Sophia acknowledged that she felt receiving the same grades helped her and Amber be stronger friends "because that tells me that we're both as smart as each other and there's no need to compete with each other because we're as smart as each other." She felt that she was not judged by her classmates by the sorts of grades she received and explained "none of my friends or people who I don't consider friends have called me dumb after I got a D or something, 'cause very few people in our class are extremely smart and nobody's ever like degraded me because I got something that they didn't get in a test".

At the end of October Sophia acknowledged that she felt peer groups usually had leaders. She explained that Liana was a leader "because she pushes

everybody around". She continued "she's always got people around her, there's not one time or there might be a little about a split second where she's alone."

In November Sophia reported that she and Liana were no longer friends. She stated that she was a still friend with Amber, "but Amber isn't friends with Natalie. Natalie isn't friends with Liana. I'm friends with Natalie and Amber but not Liana. Kind of confusing." She added "so I don't know who to be friends with because if I'm friends with one person then I could upset the other person and like set off a chain reaction of hate." When asked how the boys felt about this, Sophia responded "well the boys just make fun of us, they think it's all a big joke ... I don't really think that boys fight, like have these little bitchy fights. They just don't do it because a fight is so girly".

During classroom observation Sophia appeared to be quite well accepted by her classmates. Sometimes her demeanour in the classroom indicated to the researcher that there were friendship disputes occurring. Sophia mostly was quite willing to contribute to classroom discussions.

To gain insight into how Sophia presented herself to her classmates, in September she was asked how she thought her classmates might describe her. She responded "I hope they would say if we're upset she'll help us, because I do. I hope they'd say I was a good friend and a good singer and actress. I love to sing and I like to act".

Sophia expressed her perceptions about popular students and described them as students who were "well known to most people" and "funny". She described Liana and Sean as the most popular students in her class. Sophia explained that popular students needed to be 'average with their schoolwork. If you do really well people tend to hate you. People tend to think that you're a goodie-goodie, a teacher's pet and stuff like that".

Summary of perceptions of peer context

Over the course of the year, Sophia endeavoured to establish and maintain strong and supportive peer relationships, as she perceived this to be one of the most important aspects of school life. Despite these intentions, she experienced

difficulties with friendships particularly through desire to maintain a relationship with a male student, and a series of disputes that occurred between Sophia and a powerful peer leader, Liana. The peer conflicts Sophia was involved in appeared to dominate her school experience for the latter half of the school year and as such had a significant influence on her school experience and desire to protect her sense of self-worth at school.

Advice to Year 7s of 2001

In November the researcher asked all class members to pretend they had been asked to offer some advice to the Year 7s of 2001 about how to have a successful year. The aim of this activity was to allow students the opportunity to discuss issues they perceived to be most important for Year 7s based on their experience.

Sophia gave advice to the year sevens of 2001. Her first piece was to :

“always try your hardest as you should already because most people expect that of you ... because well like all your family should not really care if you get As or Bs or Cs or Es or anything in your test, they should just accept that fact that you tried your hardest. That’s what they usually teach you here to do. My parents care if they know if I’m not giving it my all but they don’t care if I’ve given it my all and I’ve still got like not the best mark ... I guess you always have to try your hardest and do things to the full potential. If you know that you can’t do something you shouldn’t pressure yourself to be able to do it. Because if you can’t do it then you can’t do it.”

Sophia also advised students to “accept change, most things happen for a reason and will resolve themselves if they don’t they are just like lessons”. She explained “well me and Liana got in a fight and it never resolved itself so it’s just a lesson. I don’t know what for but I might need to use what I learn, like for something when I’m older.”

Sophia also advised others to “always be yourself, there’s no one better to be” and explained.

“Well my mum almost banned me from ever going out with my friends again because she’s so scared they will invent this stupid club and if you want to be in the club then you’ll have to shoplift or something. She keeps

on saying don't do it, be yourself, don't shoplift just to be in some stupid childish club."

Contextual perceptions and personal goal pursuit

Over the year Sophia was able to discuss her school experiences, relationships and perceptions and provide some insight into how the perceptions she held influenced that nature of the academic and social motivational goals she chose to pursue.

Sophia began the school year demonstrating concern about her academic performance. As the year progressed, she appeared to be unable to attain the grades she desired without substantial effort that may interfere with other agendas and perhaps confront her with disappointment and place her sense of self-worth at risk. These factors seemed to lead her to be concerned about avoiding demonstrating lower than average academic performance and focusing on performance avoidance goals. Sophia attempted to maintain an average level of academic performance and avoid demonstrations of low ability that might threaten her self-worth. Pursuit of avoidance goals were perhaps reinforced by low levels of perceived teacher support, the negative perceptions she held about the system of rewards and penalties operating at the school, and the rules and regulations regarding uniform and student behaviour.

Sophia's disappointment with her academic performance and her reluctance to take the risks necessary to improve performance, were influential in her decision to focus on social agendas within the school environment. To this extent she became absorbed by the peer social life and pursued strong social relationship goals. For most of the year social goals seemed to dominate Sophia's school experience and although she still spoke of the importance of achieving good grades, focused more on her social life for the duration of the year.

Reliability of data

Throughout the year Sophia seemed to speak both honestly and openly about her school experience and her personal life, in particular her friendships. The researcher was able to build a rapport with Sophia and felt that a degree of trust developed over the year.

In November Sophia commented that she felt "very good" about being part of the study because she "felt like there's been someone to talk to about stuff in school and that".

Conclusion

Sophia was a fairly typical example of an Australian student who began to focus heavily on the social aspects of schooling during her first year of middle school. Sophia encountered many issues at home and at school that other students her age encountered and responded to.

Throughout the series of seven interviews particular themes relevant to Sophia's experience emerged and through these the types of goals she chose to pursue can be identified. Sophia believed it important to achieve good grades at school, but as the year progressed began to believe that the social experiences of school were equal to and in some cases more important than the academic experiences. Sophia believed that school should be a place where students can develop their identity and make discoveries about themselves.

Sophia was extremely approachable and forthcoming as an interviewee. She spoke openly and was able to explain why she held particular views. She also seemed to be fairly representative of average achieving students and students for whom the social aspect of schooling became a significant feature in their school experience. As such Sophia made a suitable candidate for case study analysis.

CHAPTER XI

Discussion

Introduction

This chapter discusses the data reported in the seven case studies with particular focus on how individual students' contextual perceptions influenced pursuit of social and academic goals. The discussion follows the outline of the conceptual framework, attending to data relating to students' perceptions of family, schooling and peers. Where relevant the chapter also includes brief case summaries to illustrate themes emerging from the data. The chapter explores themes that emerge across cases and attempts to provide some insight into the multi-directional influence students' perceptions of family, school and peer contexts have on the goals individuals choose to pursue.

Personal and contextual goals

Research regarding the goal orientation theory of student motivation has traditionally considered goals as either personal or contextual (Ames 1992; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Newman, 1998; Urdan, Kneisel & Mason, 1999). In recent years researchers have begun to become increasingly interested in the interaction between personal and contextual goals and the impact this may have on student adjustment and academic outcomes (Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Newman, 1998). In addition, Turner (in press) argues that the 'situative' approach to student motivation considers motivation as an "interactive experience, depending on the influences of students and their environments on each other". The complexity of exploring the relationship between personal and contextual goals is increased by the fact that students pursue multiple goals in learning situations (Wentzel, 1992, 1993b). This discussion considers the personal goals pursued by seven students over the period of one academic year and focuses on the contextual perceptions that prompt students to accommodate and endorse particular goals.

Personal goals

The students in the seven cases reported in this thesis pursued personal academic goals of task mastery (Ames 1992; Meece, 1991; Meece, Blumenfeld & Hoyle, 1988; Nicholls, 1989), performance approach (Ames, 1992; Elliot, 1999; Meece, 1991; Nicholls, 1989) and performance avoidance (Elliot, 1999; Midgley & Urdan, 2001) during the year. In the social realm, students reported pursuit of social responsibility goals (Anderman 1999a; Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Wentzel, 1989, 1993a, 1993b) social relationship goals (Anderman, 1999a, 1999b) and social status goals (Anderman, 1999a, 1999b). Over the year it became evident that the personal academic and social goals students pursued underwent change as they encountered and experienced different school situations and became increasingly aware of the goal structures emerging from their main classroom context and the school in general. Such a notion supports Anderman and Anderman (1999) who suggest that student perceptions of goal structures in learning environments influence their adoption of personal goal orientations. The influence of the school environment on the motivational goals students reported in this thesis is best addressed by firstly summarizing the goals pursued by each student and then examining factors relevant to promotion, reinforcement and endorsement of particular student goals.

Summary of student personal goals

The following section gives a brief overview of the personal goals pursued by seven students during their first year of middle school. Throughout this discussion personal goals will be defined as those goals individuals bring to learning situations and goals that are pursued as a result of interactions and experiences occurring in the family, school and classroom, and peer group. The nature of students' personal academic and social goals has been established through interview data reporting individual's reasons for engaging in academic activities and social interactions during the year.

Anita

Anita strongly pursued academic performance approach goals for the duration of the year as she engaged in academic tasks with the desire to receive the highest marks and gain recognition (Meece, 1991; Meece, Blumenfeld & Hoyle, 1988). Her primary reason for engaging in learning activities in this manner was to meet parental approval and expectations and it appeared that both parental influences (Meece, 1994; Trusty & Pirtle, 1998) and cultural influences (Brophy, 1999; Fuligni & Tseng, 1999; Spencer, 1999) had a significant impact on her pursuit of performance approach goals. Performance approach goals were also reinforced by the system of extrinsic incentives operating at the school. Anita perceived she was not recognised nor rewarded enough and thus her desire for recognition through academic performance became emphasised. Interestingly, Anita's desire for teacher recognition and public acknowledgement of her performance lead her to endorse elements of the task mastery emphasis she perceived the classroom context to promote, particularly with regard to help seeking behaviour. The teacher verbally (and publicly) commended Anita for asking a pertinent question and demonstrating qualities necessary for being an "effective learner". Following this Anita regularly began to seek help from the teacher in the hope of receiving praise and recognition. Thus, Anita's endorsement of task mastery help seeking behaviours served to meet her desire to pursue performance approach goals.

Anita also pursued strong social responsibility goals through the way she conducted herself in the classroom with relation to the teacher and her classmates. Being socially responsible was also related to her perceptions of parental expectations and possibly cultural influences. Anita demonstrated pursuit of relationship goals through her desire for friendship, but when such goals were not realised, she appeared to become focused on attaining status with the classroom with regard to her academic performance. These behaviours were also strongly associated with her pursuit of performance approach goals.

The goals Anita pursued in the school environment therefore emerged from strong cultural influences and feelings of parental responsibility with regard

to academic performance and school conduct. In addition, Anita's goal pursuit was influenced by her perception of the classroom goal structure as task mastery, desire for friendship and a sense of belonging within the school context.

Jeremy

Jeremy was the only student who consistently reported pursuit of task mastery academic goals over the year. He expressed a desire to engage in learning activities because he was interested in what he was learning and experienced feelings of personal satisfaction with his work (Meece, 1991; Nicholls, 1989). These personal academic goals were reinforced by the task mastery goal emphasis he perceived the classroom context to promote and reinforce. Interestingly, Jeremy also reported an emergence in pursuit of performance approach goals as he began to develop an awareness of the financial sacrifice his parents made to send him to school in Australia. He also began to demonstrate an awareness of academic competition generated by his immediate peer group and this seemed to reinforce pursuit of performance approach goals. Jeremy demonstrated pursuit of performance avoidance goals and use of avoidance strategies (specifically with regard to help seeking behaviour) in order to protect his sense of self-worth. Such avoidance strategies emerged out of a fear of public failure and were linked to his beliefs about family responsibility.

Jeremy demonstrated pursuit of social responsibility goals through his classroom behaviour and desire to meet the social requirements of the classroom and school environment (Wentzel, 1993a, 1993b). Like Anita, such behaviours may have had connections to parental responsibility and cultural influences. Pursuit of relationship goals was also shown through Jeremy's desire to establish and maintain strong friendships throughout the year (Anderman, 1999a) and the anxiety he seemed to experience along with feelings of loneliness when encountering friendship difficulties.

The goals Jeremy pursued in the school environment were a result of his desire to meet familial and cultural expectations with regard to his academic achievement and school conduct, perceptions of a task mastery classroom goal

structure, and a desire for stable and supportive friendships along with a sense of belonging in a peer group.

Stephanie

Like Jeremy, Stephanie reported wanting to engage in academic activities because she was interested in what she was learning and as such began the year by engaging in learning tasks with a task mastery orientation. While this reason for engaging in learning appeared valid for the year, and was reinforced through her perception of a classroom task mastery goal structure, Stephanie reported an increasing pursuit of performance approach goals through her desire to demonstrate performance to please her teacher and through this receive the approval of her mother. The increased pursuit of performance approach goals was also influenced by her perceptions of the reward and penalty structures operating in the school and an increasing awareness of factors contributing to high academic performance, through her relationship with Anita.

Stephanie also demonstrated increased pursuit of social responsibility through her attempts to alter her classroom behaviour after an interview with her mother and the teacher. Relationship goals were particularly salient for Stephanie who expressed a strong desire to establish and maintain supportive and stable friendships and experienced anxiety when peer relationships became difficult. Of particular significance was the emphasis Stephanie placed on developing a strong and supportive relationship with her teacher as she believed this would have a direct impact on academic outcomes, receive recognition and approval from the teacher, and attain increased parental approval. Thus the development of such a relationship with the teacher served a desire for both academic performance and social relationships.

The goals Stephanie pursued at school were influenced by parental expectations, desire for recognition of academic performance, the nature of the relationship she held with her teacher, classroom task mastery goal structure and desire for supportive and stable peer relationships.

Natalie

Natalie reported engaging in learning activities with a performance avoidance goal orientation (Elliot, 1999; Midgley & Urdan, 2001). She described doing the work she needed to do to "get by ... it's not I don't do well or anything it's just that I'm not the best in the class, but I don't mind that I still get by".

Endorsement of avoidance goals appeared to be related to an inability to demonstrate the high academic performance her parents expected and could have been related to changing beliefs about ability and effort (Dweck, 1996; Dweck & Elliot, 1983). In addition, Natalie perceived low levels of pedagogical caring (compared with extremely high levels the previous year) which were influenced by school penalty structures and this also appeared to influence her pursuit of avoidance goals. Natalie described engaging in self-handicapping strategies (Midgley & Urdan, 2001) and avoidance strategies (Turner, Midgley, Meyer, Gheen, Anderman, Kang & Patrick, in press) and attempted to manipulate teacher and peer perceptions of her ability to protect her sense of self-worth (Covington, 1992).

Natalie also pursued social relationship goals through her desire to maintain supportive and stable friendships and feel a sense of belonging within the peer group. Pursuit of social relationship goals may have been emphasised through decreased sense of belonging within the school environment and inability to form the strong supportive relationship she desired with the teacher.

Natalie's goals appeared to be influenced by a desire to meet parental academic expectations, a desire to avoid negative parental, peer or teacher judgments, the level of care she perceived from the teacher and a desire for supportive and stable peer relationships.

Brett

Brett also pursued performance avoidance goals and reported a preference for easy work that could be done quickly and would not require help seeking behaviour. He also demonstrated avoidance strategies and used self-presentation tactics (Juvonen, 1996) to attempt to manipulate others' perceptions of his ability

with the ultimate aim of protecting his sense of self-worth. Brett expressed negative views about school, academic tasks and teachers and such views seemed to contribute to his pursuit of performance avoidance goals. As the year progressed Brett encountered difficulties in endorsing the school code of behaviour and received numerous penalties, the result of which was increased parental involvement in his schooling and increased perceived pedagogical support. These factors lead Brett to attempt to improve his academic outcomes and invest more effort in his schoolwork, and to this end he began to report increased support of performance approach, rather than avoidance goals.

Brett desired social status and attempted to achieve social prestige (Anderman, 1999b) through creation of a reputation as a 'mean' yet popular student. Part of the creation of such an image involved demonstration of socially irresponsible and non-compliant behaviour that he exhibited throughout most of the year. He desired to be perceived as an academically competent student, but not as a student who demonstrated social responsibility or compliance with regulations.

The goals Brett chose to pursue at school seemed to be influenced by the nature of the relationship he held with his parents and perceived parental support. In addition, Brett expressed a desire to demonstrate academic outcomes that would encourage others to perceive him as intelligent and to achieve a sense of belonging through popularity and status in the peer group.

Jessica

Jessica reported pursuit of performance avoidance goals through a preference for easy work that she felt confident could be completed easily and quickly. She demonstrated use of avoidance strategies including leaving work until the last minute and refraining from help seeking. Jessica expressed particular concern about others' perceptions of her ability and indicated instances where she felt her sense of self-worth was threatened.

Jessica pursued very strong social relationship goals and saw establishing and maintaining friendships to be a vital part of school life. For Jessica,

supportive peer relationships were important to her engagement and persistence with academic tasks as she regularly sought help from peers who supported her in her academic work. In addition, Jessica endorsed socially responsible behaviour partly to avoid teacher reprimands and minimise public attention being drawn to her.

The goals Jessica pursued at school emerged from a desire to protect self-worth in the school, peer and family situations. Establishing and maintaining stable and supportive peer relationships became for Jessica a way of enhancing feelings of self-worth and self-esteem (Harter, 1996).

Sophia

Sophia reported beginning the year being concerned about demonstration of academic performance, but when she became increasingly aware of the difficulties and implications of this, she began to pursue performance avoidance goals. Sophia expressed the view that demonstration of high academic performance was undesirable because of the effort and stress it would cause and such explanations served to indicate changing views of ability and effort (Dweck, 1996; Dweck & Elliot, 1983). Sophia also reported the belief that school situations should enable students to develop their identity and a sense of individuality. As such she began to report feeling frustrated by the uniform regulations and the behavioural code students were expected to endorse and expressed negative feelings about the system of rewards and penalties. Such feelings appeared to have a negative impact on school related affect and sense of belonging.

Interestingly Sophia's pursuit of social relationship goals became of prime importance to her. She accounted for such a change in priorities by commenting that she had not received the marks she had hoped and that she "might as well do something I'm good at". Thus Sophia began to allow social relationship goals to dominate her academic goals and this began to have a negative impact on her academic motivation, interest, engagement and learning (Anderman, 1999b).

The goals Sophia pursued were influenced by a desire to maintain an average level of academic performance and to avoid demonstrations of low ability and thus avoid parental disappointment and involvement in her schoolwork. Sophia perceived demonstrating low ability to be threatening to her self-worth and thus, like Jessica, began to focus on maintaining supportive and stable relationships to enhance her feelings of self-worth and self-esteem.

Conclusion

The personal academic and social goals students pursued in the school context over the course of the year seemed to be motivated by three underlying aspects of self-esteem enhancement (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1992), namely students strived for achievement, affiliation and influence. All students strived for achievement in the school setting, even though the levels and degrees to which achievement was sought varied. All students strived for affiliation through friendship, a sense of belongingness and support in the classroom, with peers and within the family. Students also strived for influence through their desire for power in the classroom, with peers and within the family. When students perceived threats to their needs for achievement, affiliation and influence they engaged in avoidance behaviours and strategies designed to protect their sense of self-worth in front of teachers, peers and parents. Such inherent human desires and strivings are at the heart of why individuals engage in activities, situations and relationships in particular ways. As such, students' desire for achievement, affiliation and influence has significant influence on the nature of personal social and academic goals they choose to pursue in the classroom.

Factors influencing personal goal pursuit

The summaries of the cases reported in this thesis reveal several key factors those students perceived to influence the types of personal academic and social goals pursued during the school year. These factors emerged from three main dimensions of the students' everyday experiences as reflected in the conceptual framework for the study, namely, the family, the school and the peer

group. Specifically, the factors emerging from the data include parental and cultural influences, general perceptions about middle school and in particular perceptions about school promotion of extrinsic incentives and disincentives (rewards and penalties), perceived pedagogical support and teacher student relationships, and perceptions of peer relationships. Through the perceptions students held about these factors the nature of the goals individuals chose to pursue began to evolve in both positive and negative ways. This chapter continues by addressing each of these factors with reference to current literature and the data reported in this thesis.

Parental influences

The role played by parents and families in influencing the academic and social goals students pursue within school contexts has received substantial attention from researchers. In particular parents have been found to influence their children's academic goals (Ames & Archer, 1987, cited in Meece, 1994; Meece 1994; Trusty & Pirtle, 1998) and social goals and associated behaviours (Wentzel, 1996; Wentzel, 1998).

The seven students reported in this thesis came from varying family backgrounds in terms of cultural considerations and family situations. Throughout the year it became evident that students' family backgrounds had a significant impact on how individuals related to schooling and the nature of academic and social goals they pursued in the school environment (Meece, 1994; Wentzel, 1998). In particular the data reveals that students were concerned about attaining parental approval and engaging in supportive parental relationships.

The majority of students expressed a desire to please their parents through academic success, effort, or demonstrating effective work practices, but the degree to which individuals sought parental approval varied. For some students, the desire for parental approval dominated the way they engaged with the social and academic aspects of schooling and the subsequent goals they pursued. For other students seeking parental approval became particularly relevant when the degree to which individuals perceived support from parents began to decline.

The desire for parental approval (and fear of parental disapproval) appeared to be particularly significant to students of non-Australian parentage who expressed views about the relationship between family responsibility and academic performance. In addition, these students held strong beliefs about the importance of education and school success and conveyed strong academic motivation (Fuligni & Tseng, 1999). For Anita, the desire for parental approval manifested itself in strong pursuit of personal academic performance goals. She believed that exemplary academic performance (on its own merit and in comparison to that of other students) would earn her parental approval and the intensity with which she pursued this goal had significant implications for how she interacted with the school environment. It appeared that Anita did not perceive high levels of parental emotional support and this perhaps enhanced her strong desire for parental approval through performance goals.

The views Jeremy expressed about school and learning indicated strong pursuit of personal task mastery goals. Jeremy's desire for parental approval and fear of disappointing his parents also required him to demonstrate a high degree of academic performance and thus he began to also pursue performance approach goals even though he reported being primarily motivated by an inherent interest in academic tasks. It appeared that Jeremy perceived his parents to be supportive emotionally and academically, but such perceptions were perhaps emphasised by fact that he saw them intermittently. Unlike Anita, Jeremy's desire for parental approval did not appear to override the way in which he sought to engage in academic tasks.

The strong academic motivation exhibited by these two non-Australian students supports research by Fuligni and Tseng (1999) who found that students of immigrant parents in the United States possess strong academic motivation resulting in part from family values and a strong sense of family responsibility and obligation with regard to academic outcomes. The data reported in this study suggest similar conditions may exist for students who attend school in Australia, but have non-Australian cultural and family backgrounds.

Students from Australian backgrounds also demonstrated concern about parental approval, but the degree to which parental approval was sought seemed to be related to the nature of individual students relationship with a significant parent. In particular family changes experienced by some students during the year seemed to increase their desire for approval from the parent with the same gender and desire for a more supportive parental relationship. Wentzel (1998) argues that perceived parental social and emotional support along with family cohesion can have a significant impact on students' "perceived competence, a sense of relatedness to peers, and academic effort and interest in school" (p. 203). The data reported in this longitudinal study support this association and perhaps suggest that changes in perceived parental support may influence the strength of individual's goals to please parents and through this academic and social goals pursued at school. This notion can be explored through the cases of Stephanie, Natalie and Brett.

Stephanie and Natalie, who experienced some family changes during the year, appeared to focus more intently on attaining maternal approval when they perceived a decline in maternal support. Stephanie reported pursuing personal academic task mastery goals, but to attain a more supportive relationship with her mother, felt she needed to demonstrate high academic performance. When she perceived being unable to improve her academic performance she resorted to demonstrating effective work habits and avoiding meeting parental disapproval through negative teacher reports and academic outcomes. In the period before and after her mother's wedding it is highly likely that Natalie perceived reduced maternal support and experienced anxiety about how the marriage might influence the relationship she held with her mother. Such changes appeared to heighten Natalie's desire for her mother's approval and this meant demonstrating similar academic and social outcomes to those she had attained the previous year. When unable to do this Natalie also resorted to avoiding parental (and in particular maternal) disapproval. In this situation, Natalie's inability to meet performance approach goals resulted in pursuit of performance avoidance goals that appeared to be inherently intertwined with the goal of avoiding parental disapproval.

For Brett, the desire for a supportive relationship with his father lead him firstly to appear to demonstrate anger about lack of paternal support through socially irresponsible behaviour, non-compliance with school regulations and lower academic outcomes than his parents expected. During this time Brett also reported low perceived competence, withdrawal of academic effort and lack of interest in school (Wentzel, 1998). These outcomes resulted in Brett's parents attending more closely to his school experience and through this Brett began to perceive increased parental, and particularly paternal, support. At this time Brett began to report a slight increase in his investment of academic effort and perceived competence through ability and effort beliefs (Wentzel, 1998).

Some students who sought parental approval also sought to protect their sense of self-worth and by doing so, engaged in behaviours designed to manipulate parental perceptions. Juvonen (1996) reports such self-presentation tactics to include excuses, public accounts and effort / ability explanations that emphasise factors external to the individual. Sophia in particular engaged in such behaviours by not taking work home and resisting parental involvement in her academic work. Jessica wished her parents to perceive her to be more academically able and reported she did not wish her parents to know the degree of effort she invested in her schoolwork.

The data reported in this thesis support research regarding parental influences on the motivational goals of early adolescents (Meece, 1994; Wentzel, 1996, 1998) and suggest the possibility that the intensity with which students seek parental approval reflects in part the degree of perceived support in student parent relationships. Perceived support and desired approval can result in a variety of outcomes including endorsement and active reinforcement of parental goals, endorsement of avoidance goals to protect self-worth, or intentional rebellion against parental expectations (academic and social) in an attempt to increase parental support. Future research may wish to consider how stable or fluctuating perceptions of parental support may impact on students' desire to seek parental approval and the implications this may have for their school experience and goal pursuit.

Cultural influences

Brophy (1999) suggests that student motivation in the classroom may also be influenced by western and eastern approaches to psychology. He argues that western motivational concepts have a tendency to focus on self, whereas eastern approaches focus on individual's relationship to groups, particularly the family. This argument is supported by data in this study that clearly reports the emphasis students of Asian cultural background placed on their responsibility toward family in academic pursuits.

The students with non-Australian backgrounds also demonstrated goal-setting behaviours involving proximal and distant goals (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1996). The students emphasised the belief that present life experiences (school related or otherwise) would have a strong bearing on future outcomes and were able to relate current events to their future aspirations. Jeremy spoke about wanting to do as well as he could so he would not hold regrets about his Year 7 experience in the future and using distal goals to help him attain proximal goals. Anita reported a belief that her experience in Year 7 would be of benefit to her future academic achievement and school adjustment. Both students also expressed a strong desire to attend university. In contrast Australian students reported a focus on the present that did not reflect the same understanding about the present and the future. Generally, students demonstrated that they had not given much consideration to future aspirations and career related goals. Such data indicate the possibility that students from non-Australian backgrounds hold stronger career related goals and possess a strong understanding about how such goals may be realised.

These findings perhaps indicate that a focus on career aspirations and opportunities may be bound with cultural beliefs and parental approval or may be merely the result of students' perceptions of parental sacrifice for their education. Interestingly, Anita expressed the belief that parental involvement in their children's schooling was positively linked to academic outcomes. This belief supports Wentzel's (1999) view that parental involvement in their children's

academic activities fosters cognitive development and academic achievement. Anita perceived degree of parental involvement in schooling to be one of the main reasons high academic achievers in Western Australia's Tertiary Entrance Examinations (T.E.E.) over the state were mostly from non-Australian family backgrounds.

The role of cultural influences in determining the nature of personal academic and social goals students pursue at school is significant for researchers and educators alike. Researchers (Brophy, 1999; Fuligni & Tseng, 1999; Spencer, 1999) have acknowledged the influence cultural background has on students' school engagement. As Australian society becomes increasingly multi-cultural it is important for researchers and educators to develop further understandings about the impact of culture(s) on student motivation in the classroom.

Perceptions of middle school context

The perceptions students hold of the school context in which they operate have been shown to have significant impact on the academic and social goals they choose to pursue (Anderman, 1999a; Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Midgley & Urdan, 2001; Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996). Roeser, Midgley and Urdan (1996) suggest that the perceptions early adolescents hold of their school psychological environment influences their pursuit of motivational goals. In addition, they suggest such perceptions also influence students' "personal achievement goals, feelings of academic efficacy, use of effective learning strategies and in-school behaviour" (p. 410). Of particular relevance to the data reported in this thesis is Roeser, Midgley and Urdan's suggestion that use of extrinsic incentives in school may negatively influence individual's feelings of being valued and cared for and sense of belonging at school.

The data reported in this study shows the emergence of factors students perceive to influence their feelings about school, school adjustment and academic engagement. Specifically the data suggest that school use of extrinsic incentives (Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996; Brophy, 1999) and disincentives, perceived classroom goal structure (Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Anderman, 1999a),

perceived pedagogical caring (Goodenow, 1993; Wentzel 1997, 1998) and the nature of student teacher relationships (Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996) contributed to positive and negative school affect. The data reported in this study adds to the current literature by suggesting that school-related affect and goals promoted by school environments may be related to the personal goals students pursue. The following sections focus on these themes.

Perceptions of extrinsic incentives and disincentives

Most students expressed significant concern about the system of extrinsic incentives and disincentives (rewards and penalties) that operated within the school. The system formed part of the school's behavioural code and individual teachers were expected to use and endorse the system in their classrooms. The main difficulty students encountered with the system was they perceived behaviours resulting in penalties to be explicit and numerous and behaviours resulting in rewards to be at the discretion of individual teachers and as such were mostly unpredictable and infrequent. In addition some students perceived rewards to be given for behaviours and outcomes they perceived to have little value. The students who held more negative than positive views about the system were able to describe how such views were related to other aspects of their school functioning. Specifically students linked receiving rewards and penalties to school affect (Anderman, 1999a), sense of belonging (Goodenow, 1993), perceived teacher support and care (Wentzel, 1997, 1998) anxiety and stress about school, and reduced ability and enthusiasm to engage in classroom activities. These perceptions in turn had an influence on the goals students pursued in the classroom and can be best illustrated through the cases of Stephanie, Natalie and Brett.

Stephanie linked receiving penalties to negative school affect and negative perceived pedagogical caring. She perceived rewards to be given randomly and infrequently and also expressed a lack of understanding about how rewards were attained. Stephanie described how her perceptions about penalties negatively influenced school affect and reported dreading attending school for fear of

receiving penalties. In addition, she described how penalties negatively influenced perceived pedagogical caring and increased stress and anxiety about school, making her feel “almost terrified of the teacher” involved. She reported her feelings about penalties to negatively influence her academic engagement and classroom participation and prompted a focus on avoiding penalties and striving for extrinsic rewards. As the number of penalties Stephanie received began to decline she reported more positive school affect and indicated that she perceived teachers to not be “angry” with her any more. Such a focus undermined the predominantly task mastery emphasis generated within the classroom and corroborates research suggesting that the goals espoused by a school have a significant impact on the goals students pursue (Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996; Anderman, 1999a). Receiving penalties at school also had implications for Stephanie’s desire for parental approval, which involved avoiding penalties and striving for rewards. Avoiding penalties also involved endorsing social responsibility through classroom behaviour and compliance with the discipline code which operated through fear of consequences.

Stephanie’s comments suggest the possibility of a relationship between student perceptions of school reward and discipline systems, school affect, perceived pedagogical caring and academic engagement. This relationship was also suggested by Natalie who expressed the view that receiving penalties had a negative impact on her feelings about school and ability to engage in academic tasks. Natalie also perceived receiving penalties to negatively influence her sense of belonging at school and reported that when she was rewarded she felt as though she could “fit in” to the school environment.

Brett reported his prime concern throughout the year to avoid penalties, but he did receive a range of penalties and these contributed to his negative feelings about school and teachers. Brett perhaps also saw receiving penalties as a way to ultimately encourage his father to demonstrate more support, and in fact he perceived that it was his father’s involvement that prompted a change in attitude and resulted in attempts to improve school behaviour and work. In addition, Mrs Kelly played a significant role in communicating with Brett’s parents and

encouraging him to improve. In this case a perceived increase in support from parents and teachers appeared to result in increased academic effort and perceived competence in school (Wentzel, 1997, 1998).

Students perceived receiving penalties as threatening to their sense of self-worth. Both Stephanie and Natalie in particular reported experiencing negative feelings about themselves when receiving penalties and Natalie reported using self-presentation tactics (Juvonen, 1996) and avoidance strategies (Turner et al., in press) to protect her sense of self worth. Such strategies included excuses (Juvonen, 1996) for levels of academic performance such as not being bothered and being distracted by family issues. Natalie also sought to manipulate peer and teacher perceptions of her ability by pretending to be distracted during class discussions so the teacher would ask her a question she could easily answer.

Students' experiences with rewards and penalties over the year and the perceptions they held of the system appeared to encourage and reinforce pursuit of performance approach and performance avoidance goals. For Stephanie the possibility of reward and recognition saw her striving to demonstrate high performance relative to other students and desiring an award at the end of the year. For other students who were unable to demonstrate high performance, performance approach goals rapidly became performance avoidance goals. This situation is particularly true of Sophia and Natalie who were unable to demonstrate the academic outcomes they hoped for and instead began to assume different priorities. Natalie became concerned about deflecting others' attention away from possible indications of low ability and Sophia decided to direct energy into establishing meaningful peer relationships.

Interestingly, while researchers have been able to develop understandings about the role of extrinsic rewards and teacher recognition in relation to student motivational goals (Anderman, Maehr, & Midgley, 1999; Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin & Midgley, 2001), little research has explored school-based discipline systems and the influence students' perceptions of such systems have on student motivation. The data from this research suggest that school discipline systems have the potential to negatively influence student motivation and for

some students reduce school affect, perceived pedagogical caring, academic engagement and effort. These data point to the need for further exploration of the role of extrinsic incentives and disincentives in the study of student motivation in school contexts.

Perceptions of classroom goal orientation

The way in which students perceive the goal structure of a particular classroom context has been shown to have a significant influence on the nature of goals individual students pursue (Anderman, 1999a) and classroom behaviours (Midgley & Urdan, 2001). This section focuses on how students perceived the goal structure of one classroom context, specifically that facilitated by their core teacher, Mrs Kelly.

All seven students reported perceiving Mrs Kelly's classroom to have a stronger task mastery emphasis than performance goal emphasis. While there are certain trends that emerge from the data it is also evident that as individuals the students had a tendency to filter classroom perceptions through their own concerns and priorities. Such a notion has been suggested by researchers (Newman, 1998; Urdan, Kneisel & Mason, 1999) who argue that even though contexts can promote goal structures and encourage students to pursue particular goals, contextual goals have meaning that is constructed and interpreted individually by each student. This section discusses students' interpretations of the classroom context as task mastery oriented and then performance oriented context using data obtained through interviewing students regarding their responses to the Perceived Classroom Goal Structure scales from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey (PALS; Midgley, Maehr, Hicks, Roeser, Urdan, Anderman & Kaplan, 1994, cited in Patrick et al., 2001).

Generally, students were able to describe features of the classroom context and behaviour of their core teacher in ways that have been traditionally indicative of a task mastery goal emphasis. Such features include a focus on effort and understanding, learning and skill development, opportunities to engage in challenging classroom tasks, and emphasis on the notion that investment of effort

results in positive academic outcomes (Ames, 1992; Anderman 1999a; Patrick et al., 2001). The students agreed that Mrs Kelly wanted them to understand rather than memorise their work and enjoy learning. They agreed the teacher believed making mistakes to be a part of the learning process, recognised and rewarded effort and provided opportunities for all students to do well. When exploring why students chose to make particular comments, it became apparent through the illustrations and explanations students provided, that some students interpreted features of the classroom context through issues that were of importance to them as individuals (Newman, 1998) and the personal goals they pursued. Such a notion supports Urdan (1997) who suggests that some researchers (Ames, 1990; Dweck, 1988; Harackiewicz & Elliot; Urdan, Kneisel & Mason, 1999) argue that school and classroom goals structures may affect students in different ways depending on their individual characteristics.

For example, most students agreed that Mrs Kelly believed making mistakes to be a part of the learning process and some students accounted for this by illustrating their own concerns and referring to parental beliefs. Brett believed Mrs Kelly would get angry if students continued to make the same mistakes, thus interpreting the notion of making mistakes through his own avoidance goals. Brett explained that Mrs Kelly wanted students to enjoy their learning because if students did not enjoy their work, they would not listen and consequently could receive penalties.

Anita demonstrated how she could endorse context generated goals in order to fulfil personal goals. She agreed that making mistakes was allowable within the classroom context, but reported that her parents expressed unfavourable attitudes toward mistake making. This instance demonstrated how she was able to negotiate performance goals promoted by her parents with those of the classroom context with the ultimate aim of attaining teacher approval which she felt would earn her parental approval through positive reports and academic achievement.

Some students also based their opinions on beliefs about teachers in general, rather than perceptions of the specific classroom context. Stephanie

reported that Mrs Kelly believed working hard to be important because “teachers always expect you to do your best”. Jeremy also perceived Mrs Kelly to emphasise working hard because “all teachers should” and he interpreted other classroom goal cues according to his own beliefs. Such comments indicate the difficulty some students may have in separating their perceptions of a particular classroom context from their beliefs about classrooms, schools, and teachers in general.

All students agreed that Mrs Kelly did not provide comparative feedback on class scores thus de-emphasizing classroom competition and comparison (Anderman, 1999a). Anita, with her strong personal preference for performance orientation, expressed her disappointment that this did not occur and described ways in which she sought to ascertain comparative information from others. Interestingly, Anita reported one instance where the teacher had indicated on test papers the top three scoring students in a test and Mrs Kelly acknowledged that she was more likely to offer comparative information to Anita on an individual level because of her perceived desire for performance. Anita’s apparent frustration with the task mastery oriented focus of the classroom, and her desire for competition, recognition and public displays of her academic achievement, corroborates Harackiewicz and Elliot (1993) who suggest that students who have high achievement motivation may benefit more from performance classroom goals structures than task mastery goal structures. The fact that Mrs Kelly chose to privately provide Anita with comparative information also supports Wentzel’s (1999) suggestion that the influence between teachers and students is bi-directional. The interactive nature of this association may have further implications for classroom goal structures and student personal goals.

The data highlight the complexity of student motivation in the classroom (Urdu, Kneisel & Mason, 1999). Many researchers have used surveys (PALS, Midgley, et al., 1996) and survey related data has made significant and valuable contributions to our understandings about student motivation within a goal orientation theory framework. The research reported in this thesis suggests that some students may interpret and respond to survey items with regard to their own

personal goals and concerns and their beliefs about school and teachers in general (Urdu, Kneisel & Mason, 1999). These data highlight possible misconceptions that may occur if researchers rely solely on quantitative data to enhance understandings of the relationship between students' personal goals and the goals generated by school contexts. Indeed these data support the call from other researchers for combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies to enhance and enrich understandings about student motivation in context (Turner & Meyer, 2000).

Perception of teachers

Researchers have explored student perceptions of teachers with regard to student motivation and pursuit of academic and social goals (Roeser, Midgley & Urdu, 1996; Wentzel, 1997, 1998, 1999). The data reported in this thesis seem to highlight two main factors that influenced the nature of the goals students pursued in the classroom, namely, the level of perceived teacher support (Goodenow, 1993; Roeser, Eccles & Sameroff, 2000; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Wentzel, 1997, 1998, 1999) and the nature of student teacher relationships (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Roeser, Midgley & Urdu, 1996; Wentzel, 1988). These two factors will be discussed with relation to the data and relevant current literature.

Perceived teacher support and teacher student relationships

The seven students reported perceiving varying degrees of teacher support during the year and these perceptions appeared to influence the nature of the relationship individual students developed with the teacher. Indeed the desire for a supportive relationship with Mrs Kelly was more significant for some students than for others. This section begins by providing a brief overview of how Anita and Jeremy, Natalie, and Stephanie, perceived teacher support and student teacher relationships and discusses themes emerging from the data with regard to current literature in this field.

Anita

The data reported in this thesis seem to indicate that students with non-Australian backgrounds were less concerned about developing supportive relationships with teachers for reasons other than those which would support their desire for academic outcomes and parental approval. At the beginning of the school year Anita reported middle school teachers to be less caring than junior school teachers (Eccles & Midgley, 1989) because they were not as accessible in terms of contact and informal feedback on her progress. As part of her focus on academic performance approach goals Anita sought to gain teacher approval and recognition with the view that these factors would translate to positive school reports and academic outcomes, which in turn would earn her parental approval. Anita reported perceiving that teacher support would lead to increased personal academic outcomes and commented that Mrs Kelly cared about her because she “gave” her “good marks”. For Anita, teacher support was crucial for her pursuit of personal performance approach goals and the importance she placed on family responsibility (Brophy, 1999; Fuligni & Tseng, 1999).

Interestingly, Anita appeared to use help seeking behaviours to attain teacher recognition and approval. Although Anita initially reported help seeking behaviours to indicate low ability she began to actively seek teacher help in a public forum after the teacher publicly praised her for asking questions and demonstrating the skills needed to be an “effective learner”. In this way Anita used help seeking to attain public recognition and thus satisfy her pursuit of performance goals.

Jeremy

Jeremy also gave priority to family responsibilities when discussing teacher support. He expressed the view that the perceptions the teacher may hold of him were unimportant and that he did not look to the teacher for encouragement, but rather provided that for himself and was encouraged by family members. Interestingly, Jeremy commented that he had no desire to form a relationship with Mrs Kelly and stated “I never really want to socialise with

teachers because they are not exactly your relatives or someone you know, they're just teachers". While Jeremy held fairly positive perceptions of teachers and the level of care shown for him, he did seem to view teachers and their role as external to his school functioning and academic outcomes.

The level of support Jeremy perceived from Mrs Kelly influenced his help-seeking behaviour. He reported feelings of being "terrified" of the teacher and thus also pursued performance avoidance goals and used avoidance strategies to protect his sense of self-worth, especially with regard to his help seeking behaviour (Turner, Midgley, Meyer, Gheen, Anderman, Kang & Patrick, *in press*). Specifically Jeremy reported trying to avoid asking questions of the teacher for fear of embarrassment, and for fear of using the incorrect English words which would cause him embarrassment in front of the teacher and his peers. To protect his self-worth he reported trying to avoid asking questions and this in turn demonstrated low levels of perceived teacher support.

The data reported by these two students suggest the possibility that the desire for supportive teacher relationships on a personal level may not be particularly relevant to students from non-Australian backgrounds. These students may be more likely to focus on their family responsibilities (Brophy, 1999; Fuligni & Tseng, 1999) in the school environment and may also perceive cultural differences to reduce the level of personal support and understanding expected from Australian teachers. As a consequence these students also appeared less likely to endorse academic goals promoted by the teacher, except when classroom goal related behaviours were aligned with personal goals or were manipulated in order to support personal academic goals.

Wentzel (1998) reports "perceived support from teachers has been related to student reports of pursuit of goals to behave prosocially and responsibly, educational aspirations and values, intrinsic values and self-concept" (p. 203). Certainly for the two students from non-Australian backgrounds prosocial and responsible behaviour, educational aspirations and values were endorsed by the family and to endorse such behaviours would be considered by the students to be

part of their responsibility toward the family. While the teacher was perceived to promote and support these behaviours it is unclear how much student endorsement of prosocial and responsibility goals was influenced by the teacher, family or cultural values. Such data raise questions about how students from non-Australian backgrounds would perceive and desire teacher support from a teacher with a shared cultural background.

Wentzel (1999) acknowledges the important role families play in children's socialization processes and reports that students engaging in prosocial and socially responsible behaviour are more likely to succeed at school than those who do not. The data reported in this thesis prompt questions about differences in socialization processes that may occur in Australian families and families of Asian cultural background.

Natalie

Natalie perceived a significant disparity in the level of care shown for her between junior and middle school (Eccles & Midgley, 1989) and related this to negative school affect (Anderman, 1999a) and sense of belonging (Goodenow, 1993). Natalie perceived that Mrs Kelly did not care about her and held a negative impression of her. She made particular reference to the strength of the relationship she had with her previous teacher who "trusted" her and thought she was "responsible". Natalie reported that receiving penalties from teachers made her feel less cared for in the school environment and induced negative feelings about school. Such feelings she perceived to have a negative impact on her sense of belonging, academic engagement, academic effort and subsequent academic outcomes.

Natalie's perceptions about teacher support and the influence it had on aspects of her school experience also may have prompted and reinforced her pursuit of personal performance avoidance goals and avoidance strategies in order to protect her sense of self-worth. Natalie appeared to wish to manipulate the teacher's perception of her through specific classroom behaviours. She reported pretending to be distracted during class discussion and teacher instruction so Mrs

Kelly would ask her questions (which she could confidently answer), assuming she was not paying attention. It was possibly of significance in Natalie's mind that she had to pretend to misbehave in order to receive teacher attention. This in turn reinforces the notion that perceived teacher support has been related to prosocial and responsible behaviour (Wentzel, 1998) and that students learn to engage in self-presentation tactics (Juvonen, 1996) in order to control and manipulate teacher and peer reactions.

Stephanie

Stephanie reported a change in the level of care she perceived from Mrs Kelly during the year. Although she reported sometimes being afraid of Mrs Kelly, she described surprise at the level of care demonstrated for her at a parent teacher interview in May and indicated that the teacher was concerned about her learning and her feelings in the classroom. She reported perceiving Mrs Kelly to think of her students as "friends she needed to care for". Stephanie perceived the teacher to hold high expectations of her as an individual and of the class and related perceived high teacher expectations to perceived high levels of care. As Stephanie began to perceive a higher level of care from Mrs Kelly she reported increased academic effort, persistence and engagement in classroom activities (Roeser, Sameroff & Eccles, 2000; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Wentzel, 1998). Interestingly, Stephanie perceived the level of teacher care she experienced to be directly related to academic outcomes (rather than changes in her classroom behaviour) and reported that when Mrs Kelly cared about her she received "good" marks and that receiving poor marks and penalties were an indication of lower levels of teacher caring. She believed that the strength of the relationship she held with Mrs Kelly had an impact on her academic results, and commented that as she felt she had become the teacher's 'friend' her grades had improved. Attributing improved academic outcomes to level of care shown by the teacher represents a belief on Stephanie's part that she was unable to control her academic outcomes on her own. Such beliefs may be an indication of changing beliefs about ability and effort that occur during early adolescence (Dweck & Elliot, 1983;

Dweck, 1996). Stephanie also sought teacher recognition and approval and like Anita expressed the view that the teacher did not reward her as much as she would like. She therefore, sought to attain teacher approval through developing a supportive relationship that would enhance feelings of being cared for on a personal level which in turn she perceived would have a positive impact on her academic results and perhaps increase chances of being formally rewarded. Such a reward she believed might also contribute to receiving the parental approval she also strived for.

Interestingly, even though Stephanie reported a high level of perceived teacher support she also expressed her reluctance to ask Mrs Kelly for help for fear of public ridicule. She described other strategies she used to avoid directly requesting teacher assistance and as such demonstrated performance approach goals. These data, while supporting the notion that students concerned with performance and public image are less likely to seek help (Newman, 1998) support Ryan, Gheen & Midgley (1998) who suggest that when perceiving "mutual affections with the teacher encouraged students to feel comfortable seeking help" (p. 529). Thus, the social relationship students have with the teacher is important to student help seeking.

In the light of Wentzel's (1998) report that perceived teacher support is related to prosocial and responsible behaviour, Stephanie is an interesting case. It was partly due to Stephanie's chatter during class that a meeting was held with Mrs Kelly, Stephanie and her mother. Subsequently Stephanie perceived higher levels of teacher support and improved her classroom behaviour. What is interesting about the pattern that then develops, is that although there is definitely a relationship between perceived teacher support and responsible behaviour it is unclear which factor prompts the other. As such, is it irresponsible behaviour, resulting in teacher reprimand that prompts lower levels of perceived teacher support, or is it lower levels of perceived teacher support that prompt irresponsible behaviour? The dynamic nature of this interaction and the bi-directionality of the relationship between these variables supports the notion that

the relationship between teachers and students is bi-directional and this needs to undergo consideration in the study of student motivation (Wentzel, 1999).

These data report the important connections students were able to make about the influence of perceived pedagogical caring. Specifically students related perceived teacher caring to school related affect, sense of belonging, academic engagement, academic effort, help seeking behaviour and academic outcomes. Such comments support Roeser, Midgley & Urdan (1996) who reported that positive student teacher relationships were linked to positive school affect mediated through feelings of school belonging which were related to final semester grades. The data from this research also add to the current literature by exploring how changes in perceived levels of teacher support and caring can influence the nature of academic and social goals students pursue in the school context.

Teachers have a substantial influence with regard to students school adjustment, interest and engagement, and ultimately their academic outcomes. Roeser, Eccles and Sameroff (2000) argue that “adolescents’ decisions to engage in learning or not in the classroom depend in some measure on whether they feel able to meet the challenges presented them, where they see purpose and value in classroom activities, and where they feel safe and cared for by others in the setting”. They suggest the challenge for teachers is “not really a question of getting students motivated or not but rather, in part, getting them to be motivated to learn rather than motivated to protect themselves from situations they perceive as threatening to the self, meaningless, or somehow, threatening to their social image”. (p. 454). This statement is particularly salient given these data, as a significant number of students sought to protect their self-worth in classroom situations rather than engage effectively in their learning.

Perceptions of peer context

Researchers have acknowledged the significant role students’ perceptions of the peer group in relation to individuals academic and social goal pursuit (Urdan, 1997; Wentzel, 1999; Anderman, 1999b; Ryan, 2000). Ryan (2000)

suggests that peer contexts in fact socialise motivation through engagement and achievement in school. The seven case studies reported in this thesis spoke of their peer relationships with regard to peer support, help seeking behaviour and sense of school belonging.

Perceived peer support

The degree to which students experience supportive relationships with peers has been shown to have a significant influence on students' academic outcomes (Wentzel, 1991b). Peer support has also been related positively to prosocial goal pursuit (Wentzel, 1998, 1999) and negatively to social responsibility goals (Wentzel, 1994). Peer support from the wider peer group has also been linked to self-esteem (Harter, 1996) and in this way can have an impact on individual's sense of self-worth.

All seven students acknowledged a desire for stable and supportive relationships with a particular peer group, but some students were more able to achieve this goal than others. In addition, for students who achieved peer support during the first half of the year, there were few guarantees that such support would remain strong for the duration of the year. Thus, the business of maintaining supportive relationships involved fluctuations in levels of perceived support for some, and declines in perceived support for others. Other students found difficulty establishing immediate peer support and continued feeling lack of immediate and wider peer support for the year. For those who reported a consistency in levels of perceived support from peers there appeared to be concern about peer rejection (Juvonen & Nishina, 1997).

The level of support students perceived from their peer group appeared to have outcomes that influenced academic and social goal pursuit. For example, Anita was unable to establish supportive and intimate peer relationships and so perceived low levels of peer support which lead her to become increasingly focused on academic performance approach goals and social status goals. In addition, Anita pursued strong social responsibility goals as demonstrated through compliance with classroom rules and routines, prosocial goals through

cooperating with others during classroom activities and regularly helping other class members with academic tasks (Wentzel, 1993b). It is possible Anita pursued such goals due to her cultural background, her desire to meet teacher approval, and also in the hope that prosocial and socially responsible behaviour would help her attain peer support. Such behaviour seemed to have a negative effect, and she reported feeling resentment towards peers who were ungrateful towards her and not willing to invest similar effort in academic tasks. This case illustrates the possible connections between perceived levels of peer support, social and academic goal pursuit, and academic outcomes. It also suggests a cyclical relationship between these factors as Anita's experience suggests a cycle that spirals towards continually lower levels of perceived peer support.

Brett perceived low levels of support from his wider peer group and this appeared to have a negative impact on his self-esteem and sense of self-worth within the school environment (Harter, 1996). It appeared that these perceptions seemed to enhance his desire for status within his immediate and class peer groups. Brett sought to achieve status by projecting a 'mean' image (which other students substantiated) and engaging in activities that he perceived would enhance his status and the reputation he wished to create. Such behaviour corroborates Berndt (1999) who argued that students, particularly adolescent boys, with relatively unstable peer relationships were more likely to exhibit anti-social behaviour. Brett expressed a desire for popularity and acknowledged that this did not mean being well liked (Anderman, 1999b) and perceived that popularity was related to peer status. Brett's reluctance to endorse social responsibility goals in the classroom was also related to the peer status he perceived he could attain through behaving in inappropriate ways. Such behaviour had implications for perceived parental and teacher support.

Sophia and Jeremy experienced supportive and non-supportive peer behaviour. Sophia initially experienced peer support, but friendship conflicts began to emerge and she consequently became absorbed by these and the personal relationships they disrupted. This may have contributed to her focus on social relationship goals rather than academic goals that began to take place at that time.

Sophia perceived friendship disputes to be threatening to her sense of self-worth (Harter, 1996) and this in turn may have impacted on her pursuit of academic performance avoidance goals. In addition she desired friendships with members of the opposite sex and this appeared to create more conflict between herself and some of her peers. Sophia also expressed concern about achieving at the same academic level as her peers and reported changing peer associations to meet this need. Sophia's new friendship group also endorsed academic performance avoidance goals (Urdan, 1997).

Jeremy expressed a strong desire for supportive peer relationships but experienced difficulties meeting this need. During the year he described both supportive and non-supportive peer experiences and toward the end of the year described feeling alone. Declines in perceived peer support had a negative impact on Jeremy's self-esteem (Harter, 1996) and he expressed concern about public failure and protecting his self-worth. To this extent he used avoidance strategies (Turner, et al., in press) such as refraining from peer help seeking and also described strategies such as self-praise, creating 'barriers' between himself and others and using an imaginary world in which to view himself. Simultaneously Jeremy began to report a desire for social status through academic achievements and behaviours that would enable him to feel important in front of peers. It is possible that like Anita, Jeremy's inability to affiliate to the extent he desired prompted the pursuit of peer social status goals.

The extent to which other students perceived their peer group to be supportive appeared to influence help-seeking behaviour. For example, Jeremy mentioned experiencing peer harassment for receiving lower than expected marks and his concern about peer rejection for being perceived as academically inferior lead him to refrain from help seeking behaviours in the classroom. In contrast, Jessica appeared to be well supported by her peers who regularly helped her with classroom academic tasks. Brett reported seeking help from peers, but found students reluctant to help him. Such reports support Juvonen and Nishina (1997) who suggest that peers were more willing to help individuals whom they perceived wanted to learn and understand (Jessica), and less willing to support

individuals who were perceived as lazy or unmotivated (Brett). These data support current literature that acknowledges social relationships to be important to help seeking behaviour (Ryan, Gheen & Midgley, 1998), but prompt further exploration about the relationship between perceived peer support and peer help seeking. In addition, as these students exhibited similar help seeking behaviour with the teacher, there may be a relationship between help seeking from the teacher and peers. Further research could focus on these issues.

Students associated their sense of belonging at school to perceived levels of peer support (Wentzel, 1999). Anita perceived the lack of academic support she experienced from the wider peer group negatively influenced her sense of belonging at school. A reduced sense of belonging may also be the result of low levels of personal support (linked to cultural understandings) she experienced at school. Sophia's sense of belonging at school appeared to be reduced by the altercations she experienced with other students. These disputes along with her self-reported focus on social goals negatively influenced her sense of belonging at school. The link between perceived peer support and sense of school belonging and the relationship between these two constructs could benefit from further consideration.

Contextual and personal goals

The interaction between personal and contextual goals and the impact such interaction has on student motivation has become a topic of interest for researchers (Newman, 1998; Anderman & Anderman, 1999). Wentzel (1999) suggests that students hold context beliefs and that in certain situations students develop beliefs regarding the relationship between their personal goals and the goals endorsed by others. Thus while contexts certainly generate goals that influence student adjustment, academic behaviours and ultimately academic outcomes, students as individuals play an important role choosing which goals to internalise and endorse. Such goals will involve negotiation between personal goals and contextual goals that support personal goals. Urdan (1997) who argues that goals may affect individuals in different ways depending on their personal characteristics, also supports such a notion.

The data reported in this thesis corroborate much research regarding the interaction between personal and contextual goals. In particular these data suggest that in fact students 'filter' contextual information and endorse behaviours and goals that correspond with their personal goals. This research also adds to current literature by providing a holistic view of the students' personal goals over an academic year. Such data serve to illustrate the associations students perceive between academic and social goal pursuit and domains of their everyday experience, namely at home, at school and with the peer group. Specifically, students' personal goals seemed to emerge from a series of negotiations that occurred between family goals, school goals, classroom goals and peer goals. Over time, the process of interaction and negotiation appeared consistent and as factors in one domain changed, repercussions were felt in other domains and personal goals adjusted to suit. The data in this naturalistic qualitative study provide insights into associations between domains of experience that occur in the everyday lives of middle school students.

Conclusion

The study of student motivation in classrooms seems complex and multifaceted. The majority of research in this field has been quantitative and sought to draw associations between motivational constructs to enhance understandings about motivational processes and inform educators about how to provide appropriate motivational climates for students, particularly early adolescents.

The data discussed in this chapter provide support for quantitative research in many areas and also demonstrate the value of qualitative research to reveal factors of concern to students with regard to their motivation. Specifically, the discussion focuses on themes students perceived to have significant impact on the academic and social goals pursued at school. Such themes include desire for parental approval, cultural influences, desire to protect self-worth enhanced by situations and interactions that may be threatening and perceived teacher, parental, and peer support. Of particular interest is the influence school based reward and penalty structures appear to have on students' perceived school support, sense of belonging, school related affect, emotional adjustment and subsequent pursuit of either avoidance or approach goals. This chapter demonstrates the bi-directional nature of interactions within the classroom and the data support the need for further exploration of this relationship.

This research contributes to the study of student motivation in context by providing qualitative evidence of the profound impact contexts and situations have on individuals and their motivation in school. The discussion suggests the need for further qualitative investigations and research combining qualitative and quantitative methods to enhance understandings about the influence of school based reward and penalty structures on motivational factors. The discussion highlights the complexity of exploring variables related to students' motivation and the multi-directional influence variables may have on one another.

CHAPTER XII

Conclusion

Introduction

In presenting the conclusions of the research the chapter gives a brief overview of the study and discusses research questions posed in light of the findings. Implications for theory and for teaching and learning are also discussed as are recommendations for further research.

Overview of the study

The purpose of this study was to inquire how the academic and social goals pursued by early adolescents in their first year of middle school are influenced by perceptions they hold about the school and classroom contexts in which they learn. The study was primarily qualitative and focused on a micro-analysis of the cases of seven students as they progressed through their first year of middle school. Data were obtained through student interviews, classroom observation, teacher interviews and the Perceived Classroom Goal Structure scales from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey (PALS; Midgley, Maehr, Hicks, Roeser, Urdan, Anderman & Kaplan, 1994, cited in Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin, Midgley, 2001). This inquiry attempted to ascertain how students' contextual perceptions influenced the nature of the academic and social goals they pursued in their first year of middle school.

Research questions

The study set out to answer the following questions :

1. What is the nature of motivation oriented goals pursued by early adolescent students in their first year of middle school?

2. What is the nature of students' contextual perceptions in their first year of middle school?
3. How do individual students' contextual perceptions influence the pursuit of social and academic goals in their first year of middle school?

Conclusions from the research questions

The data gathered throughout the research enables the research questions posed to be answered and for conclusions to be drawn from the study.

Research question one

Research question one inquired into the nature of motivation oriented goals pursued by early adolescent students in their first year of middle school and was informed by the literature focusing on the nature of academic and social goals pursued by students in school contexts (Ames, 1992; Anderman, 1999a; Meece, Blumenfeld & Hoyle, 1988; Nicholls, 1989, 1992; Wentzel, 1991a, 1992, 1993b, 1996). The data generated by this study indicate that the students pursued multiple academic and social goals within the school and classroom context(s) (Wentzel, 1992). Specifically, students engaged in classroom academic tasks using a combination of task mastery (Ames, 1992; Meece, 1991; Meece, Blumenfeld & Hoyle, 1988; Nicholls, 1989) and performance approach (Ames, 1992; Elliot, 1999; Meece, 1991; Nicholls, 1989) or avoidance (Elliot, 1999; Midgley & Urdan, 2001) goals. Students also reported pursuing social goals in the classroom, specifically social responsibility (Anderman, 1999a; Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Wentzel, 1989, 1993a, 1993b) and social relationship goals (Anderman, 1999a, 1999b), and in some instances pursuit of social status goals (Anderman, 1999a, 1999b).

At the beginning of the school year most students reported a desire to engage in learning activities in either a task mastery or performance approach manner. As the year progressed, it became evident that while students continued to report task mastery behaviours, there was a significant increase in student reports of behaviours related to pursuit of performance approach and particularly

performance avoidance goals. Some students increased their desire to demonstrate high levels of academic performance in order to receive parental approval and with the hope of receiving extrinsic rewards from the school and/or parents. Other students reported becoming more strongly oriented towards performance avoidance goals as they attempted to avoid demonstrating low achievement and reported engaging in avoidance strategies in order to protect their sense of self-worth in front of teachers, peers and parents. Students also reported pursuing performance approach and avoidance goals in order to receive extrinsic rewards or to avoid receiving extrinsic penalties from the school and/or parents.

During the first part of the academic year most students reported a desire to establish friendships and pursued social relationship goals, although most students were able to continue relationships with friendship groups established in junior school. Students were able to attain and pursue relationship goals to varying degrees, depending on the strength of the relationships they established and the common ground they perceived to share with other class members. For students who experienced difficulties establishing and maintaining strong peer relationships, other goals seemed to become more prominent, and these students reported an increase in the intensity with which they pursued performance approach goals and peer status goals.

Most students reported pursuing, or attempting to pursue, social responsibility goals which were largely demonstrated through student endorsement of school and classroom behavioural codes and expectations. Part of such compliance with school rules, seemed to stem from a desire to avoid penalties for inappropriate behaviour rather than a desire to behave in a socially responsible manner as part of everyday existence. Students who chose to behave in a socially irresponsible manner appeared to do so in order to seek status with an immediate or larger peer group, and to draw parental or teacher attention to their needs.

Of the seven cases reported in this thesis, two students reported pursuing social status goals as the result of what appeared to be a sense of disappointment with peer relationships. Thus, as students became less satisfied with their peer

relationships and experienced lower levels of perceived peer support, they seemed to begin to desire status within the wider peer group. The two students who began to pursue status goals in this research appeared to do so for different reasons; one through achieving high academic performance in the hope of peer respect, and the other through the creation of a specific social reputation in the hope of inspiring both respect and fear from peers.

The personal academic and social goals students pursued in the school context appeared to be significantly influenced by the goals held by their parents and cultural influences, and in particular individual students' desire to receive parental approval. Interestingly, for some students the desire for parental approval was still one of the most significant and powerful factors that appeared to influence their academic and social motivational goals within the school and classroom contexts. Desire for parental approval seemed to influence students' pursuit of performance approach goals, as parents appeared to be concerned about student grades and level of academic performance. For some students, desire for parental approval manifested itself in behaviours designed to avoid parental disapproval through pursuit of performance avoidance goals. Seeking parental approval and in particular avoiding parental disapproval for some students required attention to social responsibility goals and compliance goals to endorse the school's behavioural code to avoid penalties for inappropriate behaviour, work practices or uniform. Thus it appeared that during early adolescence the academic and social goals students pursued were still very much influenced by their desire for parental approval and to protect their sense of self-worth through avoiding parental disapproval.

The findings from this study show that in their first year of middle school, early adolescents pursue multiple social and academic goals. Such goals include academic goals of task mastery, performance approach and performance avoidance, and social goals of relationships, responsibility and status. For students of this age group, the desire for parental approval seemed to be a surprisingly significant influence with regard to students' motivational goals in classroom and school contexts.

Research question two

Research question two inquired into the nature of students' contextual perceptions in their first year of middle school. Research has shown that the perceptions students hold of contextual goals has important implications for the personal goals individuals choose to endorse and pursue (Anderman, 1999a; Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Midgley & Urdan, 2001; Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996). The data revealed that student perceptions related to academic and social goal pursuit focused most strongly on particular aspects of their school experience, namely, perceptions of school goal emphasis (Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996) and school reward and penalty structures (Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996; Brophy, 1999), perceptions of classroom goal emphasis (Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Anderman, 1999a; Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin, Midgley, 2001), perceived teacher support (Goodenow, 1993; Roeser, Midgley & Urdan, 1996; Wentzel, 1997, 1998) and perceived peer support (Harter, 1996; Wentzel, 1991b, 1994, 1998, 1999). Students' perceptions of these contextual factors had implications for their sense of belonging at school (Goodenow, 1993) and school affect (Anderman, 1999a) along with self-reported academic engagement and effort.

The students participating in this study reported the perception that the school environment emphasised performance goals mainly through the system of rewards and penalties which was viewed negatively by students. Specifically students reported perceiving that rewards were given infrequently and sometimes for trivial achievements rather than the achievements for which students strived. Students also expressed fear of receiving penalties along with the perception that penalties were often obtained for trivial matters but remained as a permanent written record of their misdemeanors throughout the year. These perceptions about the administration of extrinsic behavioural control methods appeared to have a significant and negative impact on students' sense of belonging at school, school affect, perceived levels of teacher care, teacher student relationships and ultimately academic engagement and effort. In addition, penalty notes required a

parental signature and thus also had an impact in the home environment as well as the school.

In considering the notion of school emphasis on behavioural control techniques, Brophy (1999) comments that such techniques are “incompatible with the strategies that have emerged from research on motivation in education” (p. 20). Furthermore, he suggests that behavioural control systems often impose temporary, situational and external control over student behaviour, whereas motivational approaches are “designed not just to induce situational compliance in students but to develop attitudes, values, beliefs, and self-regulated learning strategies that they will use in appropriate learning situations in and out of school throughout their lives” (p. 20). In the case of this study, it appeared that while the teacher seemed to focus on a motivational rather than a behavioural approach to her teaching, the larger school environment was governed by a behavioural control system that individual teachers were expected to endorse. Arguably, the contrast inherent in these two approaches may have provided a dilemma for students as they sought to pursue goals that would be appropriate in the school and classroom contexts. The school wide emphasis on behavioural control also had negative implications for students and in some cases appeared to override their perceptions of any positive outcomes of the classroom based motivational approach. Some students commented that receiving penalties made them angry with teachers and believe that teachers did not care about them, induced feelings of not wanting to belong at the school, and made them less able to focus on learning tasks and less inclined to invest effort in academic work. As such, the school wide behavioural control system had serious and negative implications for students’ motivation in the classroom.

The students perceived their main teacher to create a classroom environment focused more intently on task mastery goals than performance goals. Students perceived the classroom context to emphasise learning rather than achievement through a focus on effort, understanding, learning and skill development. They frequently reported the teacher’s emphasis on demonstrating effective learning skills and work practices. Such perceptions appeared to have

positive implications for how students engaged in learning activities. It was significant that although the teacher focused on creating a task mastery learning environment, there were other perceptions students held about the emotional environment of the classroom and teacher support that influenced whether they engaged in learning activities in a task mastery manner. Specifically, some students reported being afraid of the teacher and such feelings appeared to induce students to use strategies designed to protect their self-worth in front of the teacher and peers.

Perceptions of teacher support were of greater significance for some students than for others. Students from Australian family backgrounds seemed to be more concerned about whether the teacher cared about and supported them than students from non-Australian backgrounds. Students from Australian backgrounds perceived teacher support to have a significant impact on their school adjustment, school affect, sense of belonging, academic engagement and effort, and even academic outcomes. Students who perceived high levels of teacher support reported positive school affect, sense of belonging, academic engagement and effort, whereas students who perceived low levels of teacher support indicated negative school affect and sense of belonging along with reduced levels of academic engagement and effort. Interestingly students from non-Australian backgrounds seemed less concerned about perceived levels of personal care teachers demonstrated toward them, although they still demonstrated a desire for teacher approval which they perceived would impact on outcomes reported to their parents such as grades and school behaviour. Interestingly, the level of support students perceived from the teacher seemed to include perceptions held about particular aspects of the teacher's personality. Specifically, the teacher's sense of humour caused concern for some students who viewed her to be sarcastic on occasion and sometimes make fun of individual students in front of the class. These data indicate that perhaps the concepts of perceived teacher support and teacher student relationships are partly bound up in perceptions students hold about the personality of a teacher and idiosyncratic behaviours teachers may possess. To this extent perhaps students' desire for

teacher support is linked to whether or not they like the teacher and would wish he or she to support them.

Perceptions of peer support also influenced students' feelings of school affect, sense of belonging, and self-reported academic engagement and effort. The seven students reported in this thesis experienced varying degrees of peer support and it appeared that there was an association between student perceptions of peer support and sense of school belonging. Students who experienced low levels of peer support and were unable to establish and maintain strong peer relationships seemed to express reduced feelings of belonging in the school environment and even a reduced desire to belong.

The findings of this study indicate that the nature of early adolescents' contextual perceptions during the first year of middle school focus on four main areas of influence; namely, school goal emphasis, classroom goal emphasis, perceived teacher support and perceived peer support. In addition the contextual perceptions students held of these factors seemed to have an impact on students' sense of belonging, school affect, and self-reported academic engagement and effort. Of particular significance to this study is the influence students' contextual perceptions have on the social and academic motivational goals they pursue in school contexts.

Research question three

The third research question inquired into how individual students' contextual perceptions influenced their pursuit of social and academic goals in their first year of middle school. Research has begun to focus on the interaction between students' personal goals and contextual goals (Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Newman, 1998) specifically in the context of North American middle schools. There are no reasons to suggest that West Australian students may not also be influenced by the goals generated by particular contexts, but, to the researcher's knowledge, no such studies exist. In addition, the contexts that Western Australian school students encounter as part of

their school experience may differ from those encountered by students in North American middle schools.

Newman (1998) argues that even though contexts can encourage students to pursue particular goals, contextual goals have meaning that is constructed individually by students. Thus approaching the interaction between personal and contextual goals and the resulting impact on individuals' academic and social goal pursuit from the perspective of student perceptions becomes vital to develop understandings about how students' contextual perceptions influence their academic and social motivational patterns.

Overwhelmingly the data reported in this research support the notion that students' contextual perceptions do have a significant impact on the nature of social and academic goals individuals pursue, and that the extent to which students personal goals were influenced by their contextual perceptions varied. For example, students who desired a high degree of teacher approval and support were more inclined to endorse goals generated by the classroom context, whereas students who held concerns about protecting their self-worth were more likely to pursue avoidance goals. The data reveal certain trends between students' contextual perceptions about the school environment, the classroom context and teacher and peer support, and pursuit of particular academic and social motivational goals.

Students generally reported the perception that the school environment emphasised performance goals by rewarding academic achievement. Such a perception lead some students to pursue performance approach goals and strive for high academic results, and others to pursue performance avoidance goals to avoid demonstrating low academic results. Students also perceived the school environment to require socially responsible behaviour and compliance with school behavioural and uniform codes. These perceptions appeared to be significantly influenced by the extrinsic behavioural control system involving rewards and penalties operating at the school. As already mentioned students held quite negative perceptions about the system of rewards and penalties and these influenced their goal pursuit in a number of ways. For students who received

penalties early in the year it became important to pursue academic and social goals that would reduce their chances of receiving more penalties. Specifically, this prompted pursuit of performance avoidance goals and use of avoidance strategies and also involved endorsing the school's behavioural code that advocated socially responsible behaviour and compliance. To an extent, avoiding penalties also involved endorsing values and behaviours promoted by the teacher and seeking teacher approval. In this sense students began to perceive that pursuit of teacher promoted goals would enhance their chances of being rewarded and reduce their chances of receiving penalties. The students perceived the teacher to emphasise task mastery academic goals and reported endorsing task mastery behaviours in the classroom. For students who held strong performance approach personal goals, negative perceptions about the reward system appeared to strengthen pursuit of performance approach goals and the desire to endorse teacher values to receive teacher approval.

The perceptions students held about the goals emphasised in the classroom context appeared to influence students' personal goal pursuit. Students perceived the classroom to emphasise task mastery goals and reported engaging in learning tasks using behaviours that supported such a goal orientation. It was significant that students appeared to hold different reasons for supporting such a goal orientation including attempting to receive teacher approval and/or parental approval, or trying to avoid penalties and avoid parental disapproval. The data suggest that while students may pursue particular goals generated by a learning context, their reasons for doing so may be different and may appear to influence the intensity with which they pursue some goals.

The perceptions students held about the level of teacher support demonstrated for them also influenced the nature of the personal academic and social goals they pursued. Students who perceived relatively high levels of teacher support seemed to endorse goals promoted by the teacher such as task mastery learning goals and social responsibility goals. Students who were concerned about the level of care shown for them pursued avoidance goals in order to protect their

sense of self-worth, engaged in avoidance strategies and attempted to manipulate the teacher's perception of them.

The level of support students perceived from their peers also influenced the nature of the social and academic personal goals they pursued. Students who had supportive peer relationships generally appeared to pursue similar academic goals to those pursued by their peer group, demonstrated social responsibility and also pursued social relationship goals. Students who perceived low levels of peer support and who had difficulty pursuing social relationship goals seemed to begin to pursue social status goals as a way of protecting their sense of self-worth within the peer group.

The findings from this study strongly support the notion that students' contextual perceptions can have a significant influence on their personal goals during their school experience. This research shows that student social and academic goals are influenced by their perceptions about the general school environment, the classroom context, teacher support and peer support. In addition, the research suggests association between students contextual perceptions, school adjustment, school affect, sense of belonging, and self-reported academic engagement and effort.

Implications for theory

The findings from this study have some implications for theory in the field of student motivation. Firstly, many of our understandings about student motivation in educational contexts have been developed through research studies primarily involving quantitative data. The results of such studies are well documented in Chapter Two of this thesis and have been extremely valuable in exploring motivational constructs and developing understandings about the relationships that exist between particular motivational constructs. Even so, many of these studies seem to focus on specific contextual features and individuals' motivation, and, while significant in their own right, do not seem to enable the nature of student motivation and understandings about student motivation and contextual variables in naturalistic settings to be fully explored. This study

attempts to begin to develop such understandings through rich description of the experiences of a group of seven students and investigation into why students adopt particular academic and social motivational goals in their first year of middle school. As Turner and Meyer (2000) argue, “although the distance between theory and practice may be great, it is a central role of educational research to understand the gaps when they exist and to explain the complexities of classroom life” (p. 71).

A second theoretical implication of this study is that through its QUAL+quant mixed method design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998), it became possible to develop understandings about why students responded in particular ways to survey items in the ‘Perceived Classroom Goal Structure’ scales from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning survey (PALS: Midgley, Maehr, Hicks, Roeser, Urda, Anderman & Kaplan, 1994, cited in Patrick, Anderman, Ryan, Edelin & Midgley, 2001). The students’ responses to survey items and subsequent verbal explanations about responses revealed that some students interpreted messages related to the classroom goal structure according to their own concerns and own personal goals. In addition, some students revealed certain misunderstandings had occurred between what the survey item was intended to reveal and how they had interpreted items. Fortunately the qualitative data were able to clarify some students’ responses and provide some insights into how and why items had been interpreted in particular ways. The exploration of quantitative data through qualitative data support the use of mixed method studies in which qualitative and quantitative data can act in complementary ways. The use of qualitative data to enrich and extend quantitative data may be advantageous in the development of theories regarding student motivation in context.

Using interviews as a prime method of data collection in this thesis not only allowed for a rich picture of student experience over the course of an academic year to be developed, but also provided “opportunities to instantiate and enlighten our theories and empirical literature base as well as to inform theory and practice by giving us first-person accounts of the contexts that we study” (Turner & Meyer, 2000, p. 77). The interview data obtained were able to confirm and

support much current literature as discussed in Chapter Eleven of this thesis and also began to reveal other factors related to student motivation in contexts that to the knowledge of the researcher have not been explored in detail. Specifically, the data indicate that while students have definite motivational responses to perceptions they hold of contexts, the relationship between perceived contextual goals and personal goals appears to be extremely complex. The data in this study seem to suggest that students respond to contextual cues according to their own personal goals (including family and parental influences) and their feelings about self-worth in certain situations. In addition, the data indicate that the process of students adopting personal goals through the influence of contextual perceptions may be cyclical and bi-directional. In particular, the data suggest that the nature of student motivation in context is changeable, and relies on student perceptions and interpretations of contextual features to generate changes in students' goal pursuits. As such it appears that a gap may exist in research using motivational goal theory that begins to account for how students perceive, interpret, internalise and determine motivational responses to contextual cues.

The data in this study also indicate that a bi-directional relationship may exist between individuals and contexts and such a relationship may have implications for how motivational goals are established and pursued (Wentzel, 1999). As far as the researcher is aware most studies in the field of student motivation are focused at particular points in time. Longitudinal studies, such as this, are able to provide descriptive accounts of how motivational goals develop over a significant period of time and also explore the potential bi-directionality of relationships influencing students' motivational patterns. The data in this study suggest that students' motivational goals are influenced not only by the bi-directional nature of student teacher relationships, but also possibly influenced by the bi-directional nature of peer and parental relationships. The bi-directional nature of student motivation demonstrated by the data reported in this thesis should perhaps be considered in theories addressing motivation in context.

The data reported in this study indicate that some students at age 11 and 12 still have an intense desire for parental approval. The literature reviewed in

Chapter Two of this thesis indicates that researchers have investigated the nature of parent child relationships on educational outcomes and the influence of parental goal priorities on the goals pursued by their children in educational contexts. The data in this study suggest that from the perspective of student perceptions, students' desire to please parents may also have a significant impact on goal pursuit. Thus it may be appropriate for theories of student motivation in context to consider causal directions of influence from students to parents as well as vice versa.

To the knowledge of the researcher a theory of motivation in context has yet to be developed. While achievement goal theory has allowed many understandings about student motivation in context to be developed and explored, this research supports the need for a theory specifically addressing motivation in context. Development of such a theory may involve integration of existing theories of motivation (Turner & Meyer, 1999; Urdan, 2000). As Turner and Meyer note:

“We need motivational theories and research studies that combine teaching and learning within a contextual framework; that explain how context is developed and changes; and that describe how teachers and students contribute to context and respond to it” (Turner & Meyer, 1999, p. 118).

Implications for teaching practice

This research has a number of implications for educators and administrators working with early adolescents in middle schools, particularly those interested in creating school and classroom environments to more adequately meet the needs of early adolescents and enhance students' motivation.

The findings from this research indicate that teachers could benefit from a greater understanding about student motivation and how to create learning and emotional environments that encourage students to adopt positive motivational patterns. Even though the teacher who participated in this study, Mrs Kelly, was certainly perceived by the school administrators and staff as one of the most proactive and well informed teachers at the school, it appeared that her knowledge

about student motivation was fairly limited. It became apparent to the researcher that while educators exhibited concern about the motivation of students in general, teachers had not participated in professional development enabling them to develop more current understandings about motivational processes or current motivational theories including achievement goal theory. An important implication for teaching and learning therefore is that administrators and educators participate in professional development that would enable them to create more motivationally appropriate learning environments for early adolescents.

This study reinforces the importance of administrators and educators involved in middle schools being adequately informed about middle school philosophy and the implications such philosophy has for classroom practices. For teachers in the education system who have been trained to teach secondary school, the very nature of middle schooling requires a significantly different approach to curriculum and classroom practice. Without adequate inservicing these teachers could well work within a middle school structure but not adopt features of middle school practices. The teacher involved in this study had substantial knowledge about middle school philosophy and practices, and as a primary trained teacher who had worked predominantly in primary schools, was able to incorporate many features of middle school philosophy (particularly with emphasis on cooperative and student centred learning) into her everyday classroom activities. Even so, she acknowledged feeling that teachers had not been adequately trained in middle school philosophy and that a significant gap existed between theory and the types of practices that were being conducted by educators in the middle school. In addition, it appeared that the middle school structure had been largely the decision of a previous administration and it seemed that teachers exhibited some doubts about the effectiveness of the middle school, given its aims. This situation has implications for teaching practice in that it emphasises the need for adequate teacher training in middle school philosophy and practice, and also suggests that administrators advocating the implementation

of a middle school would benefit from teachers developing a sense of conviction and ownership about suggested school changes.

An important implication for educators and administrators that emerged from this particular study was the significant and negative influence that the enforcement of behavioural control systems had on the motivation of students. Although Mrs Kelly explained why she did not personally agree with the system, it seemed that administrators and other teachers were unaware of the negative influence it had on students' sense of school belonging, school affect, perceptions of teacher support, academic engagement and effort. As a result of the data revealed in this study, it is important that schools wanting to create a positive motivational environment re-consider use of behavioural control systems and, as Brophy (1999) suggests, consider focusing on the implementation of motivational systems.

Most students described in this study acknowledged a desire to protect their sense of self-worth in school contexts and this in turn influenced their pursuit of performance avoidance goals. Students were also able to describe characteristics of the school context that they felt threatened their self-worth and how they responded in such situations, some of which had the potential to be altered through teacher behaviour or contextual modifications. These data suggest that if teachers were able to develop a stronger awareness of situations some students may deem as threatening to their self-worth and the subsequent student behaviours, then possibly school contexts could become less threatening for some students and in turn encourage them to pursue more positive patterns of goal pursuit.

As the majority of Western Australian schools increasingly reflect the multi-cultural nature of Australian society it is becoming increasingly important for educators to develop understandings about the needs of particular students with consideration of their cultural backgrounds. Two cases reported in this thesis seem to experience difficulties at school owing to cultural differences and such difficulties impacted on their sense of belonging at school and the peer relationships they formed. Should educators and school administrators develop

stronger understandings about students' cultural needs within the school environment, Australian schools may be able to provide more supportive environments for students with non-Australian cultural backgrounds.

One notable finding of this study was the impact that 11 and 12-year-old students' desire for parental approval can have on the motivational goals they pursue at school. In particular, for some students desire for parental approval governs their academic related behaviour and goals. Such information could be of benefit to teachers and administrators who could take steps to work more closely with parents for the benefit of the students. Concern about some parents experiencing feelings of isolation from the school and teachers, particularly in comparison to junior school experiences, was voiced by Mrs Kelly and the influence this had on individual students became apparent during interviews. The school participating in this study had made a significant effort to involve parents more closely in the school, but it was evident from student interviews that some parents still experienced difficulties with children attending middle school.

Recommendations for future research

Given the findings of this research a number of areas where further research would be beneficial emerged. Future research would benefit from more qualitative studies to enrich and extend quantitative data and motivational theories. The findings from this study indicate the need for more research to be conducted in naturalistic settings in order to help 'unpack' the layers of perceptions, experiences and desires that contribute to the development of specific motivational behaviours and pursuit of certain academic and social goals. While this study is able to generate some insights into how motivational goals are formed and influenced by context, it appears that the process of establishment and development of motivational patterns is much more complex than can be accounted for by this study. Studies specifically focusing on factors influencing individuals' motivational goals would enable greater understandings to be developed in this area.

The data in this study reveal the significant impact school based systems of behavioural control can have over the motivation and school adjustment of early adolescents. Chapter Two of this thesis notes there are studies regarding the impact of school reward structures on student motivation, but there appear to be few studies specifically examining the impact of behavioural control systems on student motivation. The data in this study suggest that the influence of the implementation and enforcement of such systems could benefit from further research.

Certainly, as West Australian schools become increasingly multi-cultural, educators and school administrators should develop greater understandings about how to best meet the needs of students with non-Australian backgrounds within our schools. Such knowledge may be best obtained through research in West Australian schools from the perspective of students with non-Australian backgrounds. Future research in this area would help educators create school contexts that more adequately meet the needs of students with non-Australian backgrounds.

Currently, teachers in Western Australia are under considerable pressure to change classroom practices and evaluation procedures. In addition, the introduction of middle schooling is for some secondary trained teachers a difficult adjustment, as they are required to teach in double the number of subject areas and in some cases relinquish years of experience teaching tertiary entrance subjects in senior school (Years 10 – 12, 14 to 17-year-olds). Given these changes that are currently occurring, much professional development has focused on the implementation of Student Outcome Statements, as the main evaluative tool, in specific subject areas and tailoring curriculum to best suit the needs of early adolescents. In the midst of these changes, teachers exhibit genuine concern about student motivation. Future research could benefit from exploring how teachers can be best prepared to provide motivationally positive learning environments within a system that is also experiencing change. In this respect, future research could consider the impact of Student Outcome Statements as an evaluation tool on

the motivational patterns of students' within the Western Australian education system.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – letters of consent

Letter 1 – students and parents

(Date)

Dear (parent)

I am researching students' experiences during their first year of middle school (Year 7) at your child's school this year. The research will be used to complete a Doctor of Philosophy degree and has the approval of the school principal.

As part of this research students may be interviewed about their ideas about middle school and recorded on audio tape. Students will also be asked to complete three questionnaires. I request permission for your child to take part in the research.

I assure you that all interview and questionnaire information will be used for research purposes only and that your child's identity will always remain anonymous. Your child is free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you have any questions about the research you may contact me on *****.

I have talked with the class about participating in the research and would appreciate it if you also discuss participation in this research with your child. If you both agree that your child is willing to participate please complete and sign the slip below and return it to **** by the end of this week.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Caroline Mansfield
Ph.D Student
Edith Cowan University

Please indicate whether or not you give your permission, insert your child's name and sign in the space provided.

I have discussed participation in this research with my child. I do/do not give permission
for _____ to take part in the research.

Parent's signature: _____ Date : / /

Letter 2 - teachers

(Date)

Dear (teacher)

I am researching students' experiences during their first year of middle school (Year 7) at your school this year. The research will be used to complete a Doctor of Philosophy degree and has the approval of school administration. The aim of the research is to explore students' pursuit of academic and social goals in a middle school setting with a view to enabling educators and administrators to develop strategies to provide learning environments which may enhance student motivation.

As part of this research I wish to conduct some classroom observation sessions on a regular basis and wish to ask permission to observe some of your classes with a Year 7 group. The focus of the observation will be student behaviour with particular regard to student motivational behaviour. I will also be interviewing students and asking them to complete three questionnaires.

I assure you that all observation information will be used for research purposes only and that your identity will always remain anonymous. If you have any questions about the research you may contact me on *****.

Would you please complete and sign the slip below and return it to me by the end of this week.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Caroline Mansfield
Phd Student
Edith Cowan University

Dear Caroline

I do/not give permission for you to observe some of my Year 7 classes.
I do/do not wish to take part in this research.

Signature: _____ Date : / /

Appendix B

Perceived Classroom Goal Structure Survey

Name : _____

Instructions : Please circle the number that matches best your opinion about the statements.

	1 strongly disagree	2 disagree	3 not sure	4 agree	5 strongly agree
1. Our teacher tells us that really working hard is more important than anything else.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Our teacher points out those students who get good grades as an example to all of us.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Our teacher thinks mistakes are okay as long as we are learning.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Our teacher lets us know which students get the highest scores on a test.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Our teacher wants us to understand our work, not just memorize it.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Our teacher makes it obvious when students are not doing well on their work.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Our teacher really wants us to enjoy learning new things.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Our teacher tells us how we compare to other students.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Our teacher recognizes us for trying hard.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Our teacher calls on smart students more than other students.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Our teacher gives us time to really explore and understand new ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Only a few students do really well.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix C

Supplement to the case studies : classroom context

The purpose of this section is to supplement the case studies by describing the school and classroom contexts in which the students participated. The data reported was collected by way of written documentation describing school philosophy and practices, classroom student handouts, observations throughout the academic year, and interviews conducted with Mrs Kelly.

Over the course of the year observations of the classroom context were made on a regular basis. Observations were mainly conducted in the subjects of Mathematics and Integrated Studies (English and Studies of Society and Environment taught as an integrated curriculum). The reporting of these observations focused on a number of classroom episodes and situations which occurred within that context. Where relevant the report includes teacher and student comments to provide a richer account of the classroom context.

The structure of this chapter follows the categories in the Observing Patterns of Adaptive Learning (OPAL) protocol (Patrick, Ryan, Hicks Anderman, Middleton, Linnenbrink, Hruda, Edelin, Kaplan & Midgley, 1997). The guidelines provided in OPAL were used to help frame classroom observations during the year and accordingly the school and classroom context is described following the OPAL categories of task(s), authority, autonomy, recognition, grouping, evaluation, time, social interactions and help-seeking.

Task(s)

During observations in Mathematics and Integrated Studies (English and Studies of Society and Environment) a variety of task types were observed. To illustrate the different types of tasks the teacher set for the class, examples from each subject area will be discussed.

Integrated Studies

In Integrated Studies the students worked on individual, paired and cooperative learning group tasks related to the topics studied. Some lessons were teacher directed and involved students reading their texts and responding to the information. Students participated in skill developing activities such as mapping, note taking and summarising, collecting, synthesizing and organising information, developing arguments, comparing and contrasting, making informed judgements activities and developing effective research skills using the library and on-line resources. The students engaged in tasks that required them to study novels, poetry and other written genres, such as biographies while learning about ancient civilisations, countries of the world and basic geography.

During Integrated Studies the teacher set a variety of group tasks for the students. These tasks ranged in nature from small group discussions to large scale projects that the students worked on over a period of time. By way of example, in August and September the students were involved in a group project entitled “Webquest – Deserts of the world”. The task was given to the students as follows:

“The Chief Curator of the Australian Museum of Natural History and Science has selected your team to create an interactive exhibition comparing an Australian desert to other desert areas of the world for their Children’s Museum. Your task is to inform the public of the differences and similarities of the desert habitats. Your display will include information about the flora, fauna, people, and the environment.

- 1. Your team of experts will compare and contrast horticulture, anthropology, and animal life from an Australian desert and another desert around the world.*
- 2. Each team will consist of a minimum of: 2 Horticulturists, 2 Anthropologists, and 2 Zoologists. (Tip: One expert will research the*

Australian desert and the other the world desert.) A curator assigned to each group will coordinate the interactive display.

3. *Teams are to gather information from online and off line resources for their particular groups.*
4. *Bookmark additional online resources.*
5. *Teams are to decide what product they will create for their aspect of the interactive exhibit such as: maps, storytelling, games, media presentations and plays.*

In addition, students were provided with a list of points to consider for each of the given roles and online resources to follow up. Students were also provided with a marking rubric and guidelines for planning how the group task was to be accomplished.

The students were given approximately eight weeks to complete the task. Class time was given for students to work together and for the teacher to provide help and monitor group progress. As students each had particular roles to fulfil within the group task, a high degree of active student participation was required. Students worked individually, with their partner and with their group using the library and on-line resources. In addition, students participated in class-based workshops where they had the opportunity to present work to each other and offer each other feedback and suggestions.

When the task was near completion the teacher suggested the class present their "Webquest" to a larger audience. The "Webquest" was presented to their cluster (comprised of students in years 7, 8 and 9) at an assembly. Informal reports from students and the teacher regarding the presentation spoke of the experience as positive and successful in terms of helping students develop confidence to present work to larger audiences.

In Integrated Studies students also participated in other group activities and projects, such as "Ancient Civilisations – past present and future". This project required students to research and present information regarding the beliefs and values, food, environment and occupations of people living in ancient

civilisations in the past, the present, and then predict how they may be influenced in the future.

Students also took part in a reading programme that required them to read a minimum number of books and then respond in a manner of their choice. For example, students could respond by making maps, comic strips, explosion charts, designing alternative book covers, writing diary entries and book reviews, to name a few. In a paired activity for the reading programme students put together a “showbag” containing activities that responded to elements of the novel such as characterisation, plot, setting and so on. The showbag was evaluated by another pair of students, who read the book and completed the showbag activities. Many tasks required students to demonstrate skills relevant to both Society and Environment and English.

The teacher made particular comment about how she intentionally designed tasks that could be “open-ended” :

“Everything they are doing is open ended, everything is according to ... there's no limits to what they can do in here...and what I've done is raise my questioning levels and I've raised what my expectations are and the middle kids are rising accordingly, the top kids have flown way ahead of me...”

Mathematics

Mathematics lessons were usually teacher directed and the students were usually involved in individual or paired tasks. Generally the lessons began with teacher instruction and whole class discussion and then led into individual or paired work. Some problem solving in small groups was observed.

During whole class time the students mostly volunteered answers and during homework marking sessions the teacher used a class list to ask students to respond so that each student would contribute a response. If students had not completed their homework for any reason, the teacher encouraged them to work out the answer in class so they could participate more fully in classroom activities.

In October, the teacher changed the nature of the classroom environment in Mathematics by organising and seating the students in three ability-based groups. At times, the class would work on the same topic, but most observations

recorded students working on different small group based activities. The teacher described her justification for the change.

“I was not really happy about the way Mathematics was going for two reasons. One is because of the fact that I feel like I’m not giving that individual instruction, and secondly because they are so weak”.

The new format followed a programme outlined in Rigby Mathematics whereby each module was introduced to the whole class and then activities were designated to two groups while the teacher worked with the remaining group. This changed the nature of the tasks the students engaged in during Mathematics. Tasks became more focused at students’ level of ability and many involved students working with concrete materials to illustrate mathematical concepts. In addition, the teacher created mathematical games which the students played to develop their ‘mental’ Mathematics skills and reinforce concepts being taught (i.e. factorisation).

General comments

Classroom observations in Integrated Studies and Mathematics revealed certain trends in classroom practices that appeared to be part of the teacher’s teaching style. She frequently encouraged students to use higher order thinking skills in both subject areas and made regular connections between information current to the learning situation and prior learning. Students were regularly encouraged to make connections between current topics and past topics/other subjects/the “real” world. In February Mrs Kelly praised students for making such connections. She commented, “Very nice to see you’re linking it with something you’ve done” and “I love how you link this to your own situation. Fantastic.”

Mrs Kelly also linked skills the students were required to use with skills they had already developed. In May during a class discussion to introduce the process involved in an activity the teacher spoke of the skills required and how the students had already participated in activities using these skills, specifically that of negotiation in small groups. This was followed by a teacher-led discussion

about negotiation skills and where students might need to use them in school, family, and friendship situations and future workplace environments.

Students were actively encouraged to be responsible for their own learning through use and development of metacognitive skills. Frequent use was made of self-reflection about learning and students kept a learning journal where they evaluated their learning on a regular basis. The learning journal was used for students to reflect on what they had learnt during class activities and how this learning may be relevant to them in the future. Reflections ranged from teacher prompts to more personal student directed comments. Mrs Kelly collected the learning journals regularly and if the students wanted her to respond to something they had written they were able to write "response:" after their entry. She emphasised to the students that "thinking about your learning" was an important part of the learning process and would help them improve. In addition, she spoke of student self-evaluation as a way in which she would be able to help plan for lessons to suit student needs.

Mrs Kelly spent time helping students with their organisation, use of diary and homework planning. In May she stated to the class that "organisation is the only thing that stops students succeeding". Mrs Kelly also made regular use of the phrase "make an effective plan. An effective plan is one that works". She emphasised that making an effective plan was about acknowledging that something had not gone as planned and then working out strategies to firstly help you through the immediate situation and then secondly to ensure the likelihood of the situation occurring in the future would be reduced. She described it in an interview with the researcher.

"You forget something, you forget your homework. Don't come to me and tell me you forgot your homework. Come to me with a plan. 'I forgot my homework, is it OK if I do two lots tonight?' And I will never, ever say to them "no" because what they know I understand is that everybody's life has difficulties in it sometimes and sometimes problems arise when you can't do your homework. But don't come to me and say I'm not going to do it, come to me and tell me what your plan is. Because what I want them to see more than anything else is that there is never anything in their life that they will come up against that they can't effectively solve, in a way that allows them to take a step forward."

Authority

The rules of the classroom were determined by the teacher and largely followed the pattern of the expected code of conduct of the school. The school had an explicit discipline policy, the rationale of which states:

“The aim of the College community is to provide a positive learning environment that recognises and respects the rights and obligations of all its members. To that end, an understanding of those rights and obligations, and a commitment to honouring them, are central.”

The “Key Principles” of the College discipline policy were as follows.

1. All staff, students and parents have the right to be treated with respect.
2. All students and staff have a right to be free from harassment, intimidation and violence.
3. All students have the right to learn and all teachers have the right to teach without obstruction.
4. All students and staff have the right to work in an ordered, clean and safe environment.
5. All students, staff and parents have the right to pride in the College and its Catholic ethos and tradition.

Students were expected to be well behaved and attentive in class. Unless otherwise stated students raised their hands to respond during lessons. Prior to lessons, the class waited outside the room for the teacher and on entering teacher and students stood to greet each other. If visitors entered the room during a lesson, students would stand and greet them unless otherwise instructed.

Mrs Kelly established her expectations of students quite clearly at the beginning of the year and was firm in adhering to them. Allowances were made for students settling in at middle school and getting used to new procedures and routines. She was quick to acquaint the students with her “philosophy” and the expectations she held of them. Such expectations included arriving at class with the relevant equipment, completing homework, developing effective work habits

and developing skills to enable students to work independently and to be effective learners. During the year Mrs Kelly retained a strong sense of classroom authority and was consistent in reinforcing the classroom and work practices she asked of students and imposing sanctions where deemed necessary.

Non-compliance with classroom and/or school rules usually resulted in a verbal warning, an extended discussion with the teacher about the problem occurring, a note of concern, or in serious instances of non-compliance, being sent to the Cluster Leader or Head of Middle School. Should there be on-going problems with particular students, Mrs Kelly was able to contact the parents and request an interview. In addition, on-going problems could be addressed by putting the student concerned on a 'contract' whereby they would be required to obtain written evaluation on their classroom behaviour and work practices from each teacher in whose class they participated during the school day.

Autonomy

As the year progressed Mrs Kelly allowed students to develop more autonomy over the way in which they handled classroom tasks and assessed work. She reported "And what I tend to do towards the end of the year is let them go a little bit. I'll set them a task ... and I introduce it to them and I give them a certain amount of freedom to start."

In particular, some group work where students chose their own groups was permitted and students were also given the opportunity to choose the manner in which they responded to set tasks. In the Webquest example referred to earlier, students were allowed to choose suitable ways in which to present their information, for example, compare and contrast, report writing, role-plays, charts, essays, multi media presentations, etc. The teacher also negotiated some deadlines and due dates with students.

In term four the students were involved in the group project focusing on the study of an ancient civilisation – past, present and future. Using guidelines, students chose their groups and the civilisation they wanted to study. Before

beginning the project, the group was required to inform the teacher of their information sources. She reported:

“some of them had to change (civilisations) because they picked obscure ones and then found that it was too hard. And I said to them ‘that’s fine, that’s part of discovering whether or not you’re on the right track’. They had to negotiate within their group. When they’d chosen their groups some kids wanted to do this and other wanted to do that, and I just said to them ‘have your pros and cons, come up with a bit of an argument as to why the group should do such and such. Kids came with books piled up high to support their argument.”

Within the task the students were required to present a booklet for either past, present or future civilisation and they could choose their method of presentation for the remaining two topics.

Recognition

The procedures for recognition in the classroom included verbal praise, having work displayed in the room, teacher designed merit awards and a school-wide policy of ‘notes of concern’ and ‘notes of commendation’ which were written in the student’s school diary.

The teacher used verbal praise and reprimand where she deemed appropriate. Students were praised both publicly and privately. Praise usually reinforced the specific values she wished to communicate to the students including effort, demonstrating effective learning skills, asking “good” questions, help seeking where appropriate and demonstrating improvement in work and/or work skills. In praising students Mrs Kelly often made the praise personal by stating exactly what the student had done that was praise-worthy. She did not publicly compare students’ academic performance in any lessons observed. Good work was shown to the class, (and students were ‘pointed out’ in this manner) and the emphasis was on the qualities of the piece of work that made it good, rather than the reputation of the student. Toward the end of the year the teacher spoke to me about her own merit awards that she awarded to students, but I did not see any presented and no students spoke of them during interviews.

Students were reprimanded mostly for behaviour, inattentiveness, not bringing the correct equipment to class and for not asking for help if they needed

it. The teacher sometimes used sarcasm in her comments to individuals when reprimanding them. In February she brought a student, who was not focusing on the task at hand, to the attention of the class by remarking "What film did you watch last night? Didn't you go out to dinner?" Unfortunately the student concerned was not aware of what she was implying (possibly due to non-Australian background and English language difficulties) and other students looked on him with sympathy. Other comments included "Do you need an extra invitation to write your homework in your diary?" Such comments were fairly typical of the way in which students were reprimanded.

The school system of notes of concern and notes of commendation was used to praise and reprimand students also. These notes were written by teachers in students' diaries and parents were required to sign them by way of acknowledgement. In the student diary there were four pages for notes of concern: notes of concern – homework; notes of concern – behaviour; notes of concern – uniform; and notes of concern – attendance and punctuality. Data obtained from student diaries revealed that over the year students received notes of concern for behaviour not sanctioned by the school including: consistently arriving late to class and/or school; coming to class without the correct books/materials, inappropriate behaviour; being disruptive in class; not paying attention in class; going to locker between periods; being unable to complete class tasks due to poor organisation; failure to present homework/assignment; overdue work; and incorrect uniform (shirt hanging out, nail polish, incorrect shoes, being untidy, not bringing physical education uniform). When students received four notes of concern on a page they were required to meet with their Cluster Leader and at this point would receive a detention.

The student diary contained two pages for notes of commendation. Data obtained from student diaries showed that students had received notes of commendation for academic performance, improvement, effort, class participation, showing interest in studies, enthusiasm, help seeking, thoughtful writing and demonstrating independent work skills. Some students received notes of commendation following a note of concern as a way of showing and

recognising improvement. For example, a student received a note of concern for not completing homework, and then a note of commendation a week later for completing homework. Each time students received four notes of commendation they were required to meet with their Cluster Leader who would then present them with a certificate at assembly.

Grouping

At the start of the school year the students were seated in four groups of eight. The groups were two desks wide and four desks deep. The students had chosen their own seats.

At the beginning of term 2 (end of April) the students were seated in a U shape two desks wide, facing the front of the room. Under individual and small group working conditions students faced each other, but when the teacher was talking, or when there was class discussion, the students on the inner side were required to turn their chairs to face the centre of the class. Students did not remain in the same seat all year, but rotated (by moving two desks to the right) on a regular basis, maybe twice a week, or at a time negotiated by both students and teacher. Only two students in the class did not rotate, one because of a physical disability, the other whom Mrs Kelly described as having “a very low attention span”.

This seating arrangement was conducive to the general working atmosphere the teacher created in the classroom. Group or paired work was a regular part of the classroom routine and for small tasks students were able to pair/group with those who were seated around them. On a number of occasions students worked together comparing answers to problems before writing down an answer. Students were encouraged to discuss their work with those seated around them.

Mrs Kelly spent considerable time in the beginning of the year establishing a class protocol for group work and teaching students how to work in pairs and then groups. In March a lesson required the students to engage with a task individually and then with a partner. She spent time discussing with the class

the skills required to work in these two ways. The students were quick to suggest that individual work meant “silent time”, “keeping to yourself”, “staying focused” and “concentrating on your work”. Likewise work with a partner meant “discussing ideas”, “active listening”, “sharing ideas” and “one person speaking at a time”. Later on that lesson Mrs Kelly was allocating students to groups based on what responses they had given for an activity and the class was very noisy making it difficult for her to allocate some students to groups. The students were asked to sit down and a class discussion was conducted about what went wrong. Through teacher-directed questioning the students evaluated their behaviour. They were then asked to find their partners and arrange themselves to “look like a group – facing each other, knee to knee, eye to eye”.

In May the students were still being reminded of the expectations for individual and cooperative work. During a lesson the students’ group work was interrupted by the teacher who reminded them of group work protocol. She noted on the board how group work should look (students sharing, knee to knee – eye to eye, stay with the group) and sound (quiet voices, one person talking while the others listen, discussion). In August the students were still being reminded “Don’t forget what a good group looks like”.

Group work played a large role in the class, particularly in Integrated Studies. As already mentioned, in this subject students were involved cooperative learning group research projects. Sometimes the groups were determined by students and on other occasions Mrs Kelly used a ‘pinwheel’ to allocate students to groups. The pinwheel had four levels with students ranked in four different ability groups. Those who were of high ability had their names written on the innermost circle and those of lowest ability had their names on the outermost circle. By rotating the circles the teacher was able to make different groupings of students with mixed ability. Mrs Kelly reported that students knew about the pinwheel and “even if they don’t know they work it out. It helps them be aware of themselves.”

In term four the students were able to choose their own groups based on individual results from a survey the teacher used from “Seven Ways at Once”

(McGrath & Noble, 1995). The survey entitled MICA (Multiple Intelligences Checklist for Adults and years 11 to 12) was designed to help students identify their skills across seven intelligences, namely, linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, visual-spatial intelligence, bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence, musical intelligence, interpersonal intelligence and intrapersonal intelligence. The survey required students to respond to 49 items by indicating whether the statement was “always true of me, often true of me, sometimes true of me” or “rarely or never true of me”. Based on the rating they gave each item, students were able to use the scoring chart to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Mrs Kelly spoke of using the survey because :

“I am such a visual learner. I’m very aware of the way I learn. And what I try to get the kids to do is to be aware of how they learn as well. So what I like to give the kids is an opportunity to present their work in the manner in which they know they’re going to achieve better. ... And I’ve said to them, that doesn’t necessarily mean that that’s what you are all the time. You need to now work on those areas that you find are difficult for you. I don’t let them go off and say well I’m good at this, so that’s how I’m always going to present my work. What it means is that they are aware of the things that they need extra help with...and no matter who they are, they come out high on some things and they think ‘oh, wow, I’ve got this way of learning, that way of learning’ and it just gives them that extra boost.”

Having completed the survey their term four project required them to form groups with students who had different strengths. Each group was required to have four different strengths. Students chose group members with whom they felt they could work well.

In Mathematics, Mrs Kelly changed the class to ability groupings in September. When the change occurred she did not tell the students how the groups were structured.

“I just said ‘I’m going to put you in three groups and I’m going to be working with you individually so I can work more closely with you. I didn’t say who they were, I didn’t give them numbers, I didn’t say you’re the bottom group, I mean I’ve got that in my head. I just went about it that way and I said we’re going to rotate around activities every day. And basically that’s it. Two groups do homework one night and the other group does homework the next, that’s sort of how it worked out so that one night they’re not getting it.”

A student described the groupings to the researcher as “the people in the middle are not so good at Mathematics, the people on that side are OK, and this is the good group”. When asked if students were told of ability levels when the groups were established she replied “no, but it’s pretty obvious. He’s the class genius (points at a student in her group) and the boys in that group (the “not so good” group) muck around all the time”.

During a lesson Mrs Kelly accounted for the change in format by saying “right back to scratch with this lot. Back to basics. The three kids who need it most didn’t bring their sheets. They haven’t worked out that it’s not whether they can do Mathematics, it’s whether they can bring their sheets”. At this point there were two boys sitting at the front of the room with their desks under the whiteboard. They had been removed from their groups (one from the ‘middle’ and one from the ‘low’) because they forgot to bring their Mathematics sheets. The remaining student who did not bring her sheet was still sitting in the ‘low’ group. She accounted “I gave my sheet to ... because she’d lost hers, and she’s not here today”.

During observations of lessons in ability level groups, I observed Mrs Kelly working with the ‘low’ and ‘middle’ ability groups. I observed two lessons where the ‘top’ group was assigned work to complete on their own. During one lesson this group had been assigned an activity called ‘language skills’ from their textbook. They were required to copy out a paragraph and put in the missing mathematical words. After a short time they began to get off task and Mrs Kelly reprimanded them “You guys are getting the opportunity during these sessions to do more advanced work. I’m not going to stand here and tell you it’s good for you. Take the opportunity to do it.”

Evaluation

Student progress was evaluated by means of formal in-class tests and assignments marked by Mrs Kelly. At times, the students evaluated themselves and each other. In the case of group assignments, Mrs Kelly preferred to mark the

assignment with the group so she was able to ask questions, acknowledge individual effort, group working processes, and explain her marking to the group.

“And I really like marking the work with them, I don’t like sitting in here and marking because there’s too many things I want to say to them and I don’t want to write it down and there are also questions I want to ask them ... so the marking procedure becomes something that they’re involved in as well.”

Most formal evaluation in Integrated Studies used a “rubric” as a marking guide. The students had a copy of the rubric so they would know how they were being marked and so they would have a clear idea of the task requirements. Mrs Kelly regularly referred to the rubric as she led the students through the elements of the task. The rubrics were based on Student Outcome Statements, and students were rated as having thorough understanding, good understanding, satisfactory understanding or needs improvement for selected relevant criteria. For example, the rubric for the “Webquest” contained four sections:

- “habits of mind (works in an orderly manner and adheres to a timeline, reacts positively to feedback and incorporates appropriate suggestions, consistently demonstrates insight and sensitivity towards the feelings and knowledge base of others);
- complex thinking (demonstrates a clear understanding of the purpose of the activity and consistently strives towards that goal, demonstrates mastery of a variety of complex thinking processes);
- effective communication (uses a variety of means to clearly, effectively , and convincingly communicate main ideas, expresses the assigned perspective with clarity and conviction) and
- information processing (selects an option that clearly reflects the priorities of assigned perspective, provides convincing and accurate support for chosen option and evidence against all other options).”

For this project students’ assessment would be comprised of three aspects, namely, self-assessments, peer assessments, and teacher assessment based on the scoring rubric.

Mrs Kelly described how some of the rubrics were designed.

“I would negotiate with the kids on what they would want on a rubric, for example, we went through, one of the things they had to do was a brochure and they actually brought examples in so we could go through them and work out what we were looking for”.

From this the students were able to design a rubric suitable for the task of making a brochure. In addition the teacher spoke of the importance of including learning skills on her rubrics.

“I like to include in it things like being an effective worker, that can go beyond the sort of task that’s set there... so that it’s not a closed structure and that if kids are going off and finding other sources of information and they’re expanding the task to suit their own interest level as well ... to try and balance keeping to the task as well as being able to introduce stuff that they find that’s really interesting as well.”

Informal evaluation was conducted by teacher observations and monitoring of student progress. In addition the students regularly evaluated their own learning in their learning journals. These were collected by Mrs Kelly who used student evaluations to help her plan for the next series of lessons.

At various points in the year, students were encouraged to evaluate each others’ work and offer comments about the positive aspects of the work and how the work could be improved. During these sessions the teacher was also free to offer comments. These informal evaluative sessions were held prior to formal teacher evaluation.

At the beginning of August the students were involved in a session where they had to report to the class in their working groups. They had been working on the “Webquest” project and the session was designed so that each group would report their progress to the class. Individual group members were also to explain what they had contributed. Where possible, students demonstrated parts of their presentation for class feedback. Students were also encouraged to explain problems they had encountered and how they had solved them or ask for class

help. During this session students offered positive feedback, suggestions for how the presentation may be improved and where necessary, constructive criticism.

Time

The time allocated for each subject was determined by the school. The school timetable operated on a six day cycle with six periods each day. Each period was 50 minutes long. Students had 5 out of 36 periods allocated to Mathematics and 11/36 allocated to Integrated Studies. As the same teacher also taught the class for Religious Education and Health, the class spent 22 out of 36 periods with her. Even though the timetable allocated the subjects specific periods, Mrs Kelly sometimes combined subjects to maximise time and would allow students to work into another period if interest levels were high and the students were making significant gains during the lesson.

For some tasks students were given specific time limits, but for other tasks time limits were negotiated between teacher and students. For larger group projects time was negotiated depending on student genuine need.

“I don’t normally give them a deadline when I hand out a task. I usually wait and see how many periods I am able to devote to it in class and then as I can see I’ve given a reasonable amount of time, I’ll give them a week or something like that so that I know that I’m being fair.”

Social

During classroom activities Mrs Kelly encouraged students to interact with each other to help each other and to share ideas. She conducted lessons focusing specifically on interpersonal skills such as assertiveness, presenting and supporting an opinion, and in particular negotiation and reaching consensus within groups. Reference was made to using negotiation skills during group activities throughout the year. Students were encouraged to treat each other respectfully and to see the merit in other opinions apart from their own. Mrs Kelly communicated the importance of social responsibility by emphasizing the importance of following rules, helping classmates, sharing and behaving in a manner appropriate for particular situations.

The nature of teacher student interactions varied throughout the year. Mrs Kelly responded to some students in a consistently positive manner, but other students appeared to receive mixed messages through combinations of positive and negative comments.

Help-seeking

During classroom observations in Mathematics and Integrated Studies, the students sought help from their classmates and Mrs Kelly. Students were encouraged to seek help from each other before approaching her for help and in May she described a policy of “asking group questions”. This meant students had to ask other group members (or two people sitting close to them) for help before asking the teacher, thus asking a question that three or more people needed to know the answer.

Students who sought help were praised and their behaviour noted to the rest of the class. During an interview in September Mrs Kelly discussed students who asked a lot of questions and reported:

“I would use them as an example of how to be a good learner so I’ll often say things like ‘Student A has been up here three times to ask a question, does that mean that the rest of you have no questions at all?’ and then all of a sudden you’ll have five kids out here realizing that it’s OK to ask a question”.

This comment supported observations where some students regularly asked questions, yet others deliberately refrained from asking questions of Mrs Kelly, preferring to try and obtain the necessary information from classmates. In February two students were reprimanded for not completing a task in class. The reprimand was extended to not asking for help, as the students attributed their non-completion to not being sure what to do.

Appendix D

Student summary charts

	Anita	Jeremy
Family background and perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • born in India; parents immigrated to Australia 1995 • perceived many cultural differences between Australian and Indian culture and societal values • family placed high value on education and academic achievement • strongly desired parental approval • perceived a strong sense of responsibility to family with regard to school achievement • perceived there to be a strong link between the present and the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • born in Indonesia; parents resided in Indonesia while Jeremy and his sister lived with their grandparents in Australia and attended school • saw his parents intermittently throughout the year • learnt English in Indonesia prior to attending school in Australia • grandparents spoke Indonesian • strong desire for parental approval • perceived parents to respond positively to his achievements and encourage improvement • strong desire not to disappoint his parents - awareness of Indonesian and Australian currency rates; emphasised fear of failing parents • reported his mother saying that "even if he was not good at things he could still make himself good at them through hard work" • perceived effort to be related to parental desire for children to work hard to "uprise" the name of the family

	Anita	Jeremy
Perceptions of classroom context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> perceived Mrs Kelly's classroom to have a stronger emphasis on task mastery goals than performance goals perceived mistake making to be acceptable in the classroom environment (a notion not sanctioned by her parents) perceived the classroom environment to emphasise understanding perceived Mrs Kelly to want students to enjoy learning perceived she was not recognised as often as she would like for effort and achievement desired to meet teacher approval by endorsing goal related behaviours promoted by Mrs Kelly perceived teacher to not provide comparative information as she would desire experienced more challenging work when class was divided into three Mathematics groups – perceived increase in challenge increased her desire to do more work participation in group tasks impacted on peer relationships mostly in a negative manner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> perceived Mrs Kelly's class to have a stronger task mastery emphasis than performance goal emphasis – explanations strongly influenced by own personal beliefs rather than classroom experiences perceived mistake making to be acceptable in the classroom environment; strongly agreed on a personal level - "not everybody is perfect, so long as we are learning it's okay" perceived classroom environment to emphasise understanding – personal reasons why perceived teacher to have said "if you want to learn it and you're really determined to learn it then you will be very good at it one day" perceived Mrs Kelly to want students to enjoy learning because she prepared students to learn – right equipment – chance to express creativity perceived teacher to recognise effort by "pointing out" students who did well perceived the teacher to emphasise working hard because all teachers should perceived teacher to not give comparative information perceived every student to do well in their point of view

	Anita	Jeremy
Perceptions of teacher(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> generally held positive perceptions of teachers desired stronger contact with teachers for academic feedback strong desire for teacher recognition and approval perceived teacher to expect the class to do well perceived middle school teachers as less caring and accessible than junior school teachers perceived Mrs Kelly to care about her because she “gave” Anita “good marks” perceived degree of teacher caring to be subject dependent perceived teachers to have other concerns than knowing individual students sought help from the teacher in order to receive recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> held fairly positive perceptions of teachers reported not seeking help from Mrs Kelly if it could be avoided – “terrified” of her described being “petrified” of the teacher because he had seen other students shouted at reluctant to seek help for fear of embarrassment through using the incorrect English words unconcerned about teacher support/care perceived Mrs Kelly to care for class by helping them learn and encouraging students to link their learning to other areas reported not wishing to socialise with teachers because they were not relatives or known individuals - just teachers perceived teachers to be caring by virtue of the occupations they had chosen
Perceptions of peer context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> wished to establish new friendships during the year however was unable to strongly align herself with any particular friendship group perceived herself to be distant from peers because of cultural and family differences perceived Australian students to attend school to socialise rather than learn perceived peers to have little understanding of her culture and values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> perceived friendships to provide opportunities for associating with others and to practise associating skills perceived friendship to be extremely important to receive personal positive feedback desire to be liked and affirmed by peers reported being competitive with peers and enjoyed receiving a higher mark than the smartest person in the class

	Anita	Jeremy
Perceptions of peer context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • desired friendship an Indonesian girl due to some similarities in family and cultural values • perceived group tasks to have had a mostly negative impact on peer relationships ; perceived that others took advantage of her • desired more academic competition from peers • preferred not to seek help from peers for fear of perceptions of low ability – academic status 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • perceived friends to hold negative views about help seeking • fear of peer exclusion due to perceived academic level • reported peers to help him understand classroom tasks by explanations using English words he was familiar with • desired peer status – wish to feel important in front of school friends • reported feeling it was his destiny to be alone – imaginary friend – felt caught in the middle of friendship quarrels
Advice to Year 7s of 2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • don't hang around the lockers (avoid trouble) • make a lot of new friends • don't hesitate to ask the teachers any questions • make a good impression first because a first impression is always the last • always try out something even if you can't do it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (absent for final interview)

	Stephanie	Natalie
Family background and perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian – lived with mother, stepfather and sister • mother suffered from Multiple Sclerosis • had a strong relationship with grandparents that diminished over the year as grandparents took care of other grandchildren • expressed disappointment at perception that grandparents had less time for her • expressed desire to please her parents, particularly her mother with school results • perceived her mother to believe she was capable of higher grades /felt unable to meet her mother's expectations but tried to demonstrate improved work habits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian – lived with grandparents until 6 yrs old • Father absent – mother remarried – stepfather • strong desire for parental (maternal) praise and approval • desire to meet parental expectations • concerned about disappointing parents • perceived parents to believe she could do better • parents imposed penalties for poor work and behaviour • perceived herself to have been 'side-tracked' by changes in family situation throughout the year • described mother as her main role model • perceived parents to disagree with the changes in school structure - middle school and moving Year 7s to the 'high school' campus • perceived that mother felt she would benefit from the increased discipline of a middle school
Perceptions of middle school context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • initial positive perceptions of middle school • perceived she adapted well because she had maintained friendships, kept locker clean and received a good report • reported dreading attending school for fear of receiving penalties • reported more positive perceptions of school after interview with Mrs Kelly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • experienced difficulties adjusting to middle school environment - consistently expressed preference for junior school – blames inability to adjust well to desire for junior school • experienced physical difficulties with middle school environment • hoped to "make it without getting into trouble" and "have fun"

	Stephanie	Natalie
Perceptions of middle school context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • decrease in penalties resulted in positive school affect – perceived teachers to not be as angry with her any more • reported lack of activities for Year 7 students during break times • perceived Mrs Kelly to have a strong influence on her feelings toward school • perceived penalties to negatively influence her academic engagement and participation • perceived rewards to be given randomly and infrequently – lack of understanding about how to attain rewards / clear understanding of how to attain penalties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reported doing what she needed to get by – so she would not receive penalties for poor work • consistently perceived she could have done better with her school work • sharp contrast between junior school and middle school experience - received Principal's Award in Year 6, was a member of the sports council and the student representative council • nominated swimming and athletics captain for junior school when Year 7s joined them to compete at an inter-school level • aimed to 'fit in' by trying to get everything right and avoid penalties • perceived receiving penalties to negatively influence school affect, sense of belonging, academic engagement and effort • perceived rewards to positively influence school affect and sense of belonging • perceived there to be a substantially increased potential to be in trouble in middle school • perceived school to focus on the students who received As and A+ grades.

	Stephanie	Natalie
Perceptions of classroom context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> perceived Mrs Kelly's classroom to have a stronger emphasis on task mastery goals than performance goals perceived Mrs Kelly to believe working hard to be more important than anything else because teachers always expect you to do your best perceived Mrs Kelly to believe making mistakes to be part of the learning process although felt that she was unable to ask Mrs Kelly the same question more than once perceived Mrs Kelly to want students to understand their work perceived that in Mrs Kelly's class every student had the opportunity to do well in their own way perceived Mrs Kelly to recognise students for effort through verbal recognition perceived Mrs Kelly to publicly acknowledge students who received high grades perceived Mrs Kelly to not compare students nor provide comparative feedback regarding grades and scores 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> perceived the classroom to have a stronger task mastery emphasis than performance goal emphasis perceived Mrs Kelly to believe making mistakes to be a part of the learning process perceived Mrs Kelly to focus on understanding and working hard perceived Mrs Kelly to want students to enjoy learning new things because learning was easier if students were enjoying it perceived Mrs Kelly to recognise students who try hard, but only received one commendation perceived Mrs Kelly to give time to explore and understand new ideas reported being publicly acknowledged for good marks (once)

	Stephanie	Natalie
Perceptions of teacher(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • generally held positive perceptions of teachers • interview with Mrs Kelly in May resulted in increased perceptions of teacher support • reported sometimes being scared of Mrs Kelly • reported Mrs Kelly to sometimes be sarcastic and sometimes tease students publicly • reported trying to do well at school to please teachers – teacher praise made her feel special • perceived a link between her relationship with Mrs Kelly and her academic grades • perceived that she had become Mrs Kelly’s friend and thus academic scores had improved / perceived teacher personal care and attention • perceived teachers being angry with her resulted in penalties and negatively influenced school affect and sense of belonging • perceived teachers to be inconsistent with distribution of penalties and rewards • perceived Mrs Kelly to have high academic expectations of her and the class • perceived high teacher expectations to indicate high levels of teacher care • perceived Mrs Kelly to treat students with respect • described reluctance to seek teacher help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • perceived teachers to believe she had a poor attitude toward school • wanted Mrs Kelly to perceive her to be smarter – described pretending not to listen so she would be chosen to answer a question • desired more attention from Mrs Kelly • reported being a little afraid of Mrs Kelly • perceived Mrs Kelly to have a negative impression of her and not be interested in her personally • described her Year 6 teacher and how she was her “favourite” – reported Year 6 teacher to have trusted her and believed her to be responsible • perceived Mrs Kelly to expect her to achieve more • reported being uncomfortable asking Mrs Kelly for help – reported being comfortable asking Year 6 teacher for help because she had not been in trouble with her. • concerned about Mrs Kelly perceiving help seeking to indicate lack of ability

	Stephanie	Natalie
Perceptions of peer context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • endeavoured to establish and maintain strong friendships – an important aspect of school life • desired to meet the expectations of peer group • did her hair differently each day to meet peer expectations • reported friends to be primarily concerned about family, fun and boys; less concerned about school and academic levels • reported prioritising homework over friends and commented that this sometimes caused tension in friendships • appeared to be well accepted and respected by her classmates • liked to help others – made her feel special • reported seeking help from classmates regularly • toward the end of the year influenced by Anita and her strong desire for achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • placed value on peer relationships • concerned about being teased by friends • reported being competitive with friends • perceived that her friends valued being together • liked to keep her friends happy • liked to please friends • concerned about peers perceiving her to have low ability

	Stephanie	Natalie
Advice to Year 7s of 2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • survive in the locker room • avoid notes of concern because this can lead to detentions • keep your homework and uniform up to scratch and stay out of trouble • start collecting notes of commendations; make friends with all your teachers and you can pick up quite a few notes • learn to use the library to find information • presentations, steps to keep yourself and your work well presented, keep your shirt tucked in, use textas to colour your work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • try and get into your teacher's good books, especially at the beginning (positive image – teacher will look after you) • ask questions in class (create favourable impression – teachers will perceive you to be responsible, trust you) • forget about your friends at least for term 1 –focus on getting into school work • after you've got the hang of Middle School don't stress (own stress about not fitting in) • have lots of fun and take it easy on the weekend

	Brett	Jessica	Sophia
Family background and perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian - parents separated ; lived with mother and sister • conflict between Brett and his parents • desire for paternal attention ; reported behaving inappropriately to “spite” his father • reported ignoring parental ‘lectures’ • reported sometimes trying to meet mother’s expectations for his schoolwork • reported conflict between his maternal and paternal families; perceived himself to be caught between two families, however, sided with his father • perceived himself to respond more strongly to paternal requests for improved behaviour and schoolwork • perceived father to believe making mistakes to be part of the learning process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • parents not tertiary educated • perceived parents to believe Math’s was difficult / unnecessary knowledge • parents used holiday to U.S. as a incentive for school work • perceived parents emphasised importance of homework • perceived parents to value effort and trying her hardest • perceived parents to value learning from mistakes • enjoyed watching the same TV shows as mother 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • born in Australia – mother Malaysian, father Kenyan • lived with parents and older brother in final year of school • feelings about school influenced by opinions of other family members – uniform / aunt • perceived parents to think she was “scatter-brained” • neglected to show much of her school work to parents • perceived parents to value effort • perceived father to have emphasised the importance of working for herself rather than the teacher at school • perceived her father to be concerned about her Mathematics attitude – began giving her tests about Mathematical concepts • perceived her parents to not give her advice but to let her learn from her own mistakes – perceived this to be positive

	Brett	Jessica	Sophia
Perceptions of middle school context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • experienced difficulties adjusting to the expectations of middle school environment • sometimes enjoyed Outdoor Education / disliked subjects requiring written tasks • reported perceiving he could do better academically • perceived school reports to give a fair and accurate account of his progress and adjustment • increasingly negative about school / always hated school • enjoyed school social life • perceived middle school to be too strict; low levels of sense of belonging and school affect • changed attitude in September when parents (in particular father) and school find a way of working together for his benefit • perceived the Vice Principal to be one of his main influences ; indicated to him how he could stay out of trouble • had a “bad” year - in trouble regularly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expected middle school to be difficult in terms of quantity of work required • aimed to improve Spelling and Maths • enjoyed moving to different classes and having different teachers • experienced organisational difficulties – locker • experienced anxiety about marks and grades • did not look at work if received low marks • checked work she had correct • perceived grades received to be linked to effort • anxious about not understanding Year 8 work • anxious about having low reading skills exposed publicly • wanted school success to have high income and attend Uni. • expressed the importance of avoiding penalties at school – reported penalties to ultimately result in detention – boring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • initially held positive perceptions of middle school • aimed to achieve good grades • in June described friendships to be her priority • aimed to establish friendships with boys and not be teased • perceived school to be where students learn who they are and have the chance to develop a sense of individuality • perceived developing a sense of identity to be one of the most important things at school • reported by October socialising to be the most important aspect of school - changed views when failed to receive desired grades • described socialising as what she did best at school • negative perceptions about school uniform and regulations • perceived school to be strict - students regularly punished • perceived it easy to receive penalties but very difficult to receive rewards

	Brett	Jessica	Sophia
Perceptions of classroom context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> perceived the classroom to have a stronger task mastery than performance goal emphasis perceived Mrs Kelly to believe making mistakes to be part of the learning process, however, perceived if students repeated mistakes she would get angry perceived Mrs Kelly to want students to enjoy learning as otherwise they would not listen and thus receive penalties strongly perceived Mrs Kelly to value understanding work and not compare students perceived Mrs Kelly to recognise improvement perceived lots of students do well when they try perceived ability groupings in Mathematics to be an indication that some students were not doing well – did not try perceived the teacher to call on smart students and reported raising his hand when he felt he had a good chance of being asked for an answer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> perceived Mrs Kelly's class to have a stronger task mastery emphasis than performance goal emphasis perceived Mrs Kelly to emphasise effort and understanding expressed desire to learn so as to be smart when older perceived Mrs Kelly to believe making mistakes to be part of the learning process perceived Mrs Kelly to want students to enjoy learning so they listen and concentrate perceived Mrs Kelly to sometimes make learning fun – alternative ways to understand and express answers perceived Mrs Kelly to call on smart students regularly perceived the new Math's groupings to be good because the students did different things preference for easy work because she did it well perceived help seeking of teacher to be negative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> perceived Mrs Kelly's class to have a stronger task mastery emphasis than performance goal emphasis perceived Mrs Kelly to want students to understand their work because understanding enabled them to get through the work more easily perceived Mrs Kelly to enjoy teaching the class when they were good acknowledged sometimes Mrs Kelly gave time for students to understand and explore new ideas perceived Mrs Kelly to make it obvious when students did not do well in their work – reported teacher using peer pressure to make them work harder perceived that only a few students did well

	Brett	Jessica	Sophia
Perceptions of teacher(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> generally held negative perceptions of teachers and related these to receiving penalties perceived relating well to teachers to reduce potential for receiving penalties / blamed teachers for giving penalties perceived teachers to believe he had a "bad attitude" acknowledged he had a reputation as the class clown; reported behavioural changes reported not listening to teachers during class; changed behaviour toward end of year appreciated teacher sense of humour as perceived it to represent the teacher's mood perceived Mrs Kelly to be a good teacher as she explained tasks well and was strict perceived unfair treatment from some teachers perceived low levels of caring reported teachers to care about "smart" and "good" students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> generally held positive perceptions of teachers perceived Mrs Kelly to have a good sense of humour although reported it could sometimes be hurtful to students perceived Mrs Kelly to care about the class by yelling and being strict perceived Mrs Kelly to care for her - gave her individual explanations perceived Mrs Kelly to care about her because her marks had improved perceived teachers to be genuinely caring because they tried to help students as best they could perceived that having caring teachers created positive feelings for school – especially as she stated disliking school afraid of negative teacher responses when asking for help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> held fairly negative perceptions of teachers reported her Year 6 teacher to have told her she was a bad person; described herself as "emotionally scarred". perceived Mrs Kelly to not dislike her any more because she took her advice reported initially disliking Mrs Kelly because she received penalties perceived receiving penalties resulted in negative feelings about teachers and school work perceived Mrs Kelly to care about the class and want them to have positive futures perceived teacher recognition to be an indication that the teacher did not dislike her perceived her placement in the 'moderate ability' maths group to indicate Mrs Kelly expected her to achieve Bs and Cs

	Brett	Jessica	Sophia
Perceptions of peer context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> desired status within his immediate peer group reported feeling manipulated by his friends sometimes; used manipulation tactics in return didn't like girls at the school but interested in having a girlfriend competitive with friends desired friendship with high achieving students to enable him to easily seek help and 'copy' work not highly regarded academically by his classmates aimed to create an image of himself as "mean" desired popularity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> perceived friendships to be important concerned about peer perceptions of maturity experienced difficulties not wanting to get friends in trouble perceived students without friends to be lonely - have to study to get high marks appeared well accepted by peers desired to be perceived as knowledgeable but not a "nerd" concerned about being rejected by peers by lower grades sought regular help from peers made new friends during the year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> endeavoured to establish and maintain strong friendships – one of the most important aspects of school life experienced difficulties with friends due to establishing a friendship with a male student experienced particular conflict with another female student who held a substantial degree of peer power – concern over this relationship for most of the second half of the year wished to achieve the same level grades as friends reported being teased for being thin
Advice to Year 7s of 2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> listen to the teacher (avoid trouble) do your work (avoid having lots of homework) don't be bad in class (avoid trouble) don't throw things in class (avoid trouble / injuring a peer) don't eat in class (avoid trouble) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> do all your homework /(avoid trouble) do not be bad (avoid trouble) hand in your homework on the due date (avoid teacher anger / exclusion from next activity) don't be late for class (avoid trouble) be nice to everyone (have friends) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> always try your hardest as you should already because most people expect that of you accept change; most things happen for a reason and will resolve themselves if they don't they are just like lessons always be yourself; there's no-one better to be

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